

2

walq  
ing

Work and Life Quality in  
New & Growing Jobs

The Construction Sector:  
'Green' Construction



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
European Research Area



SEVENTH FRAMEWORK  
PROGRAMME

Funded under Socio-economic Sciences & Humanities

## WALQING The Project

Funded by the EU's 7th Framework Programme, the **walqing** project (2009–2012) investigates selected sectors with potentially problematic working conditions, precarious employment and low wages. It explores the linkages between new and expanding jobs, the conditions of work and employment in these jobs and the more or less favourable outcomes for employees' quality of work and life. It does so by integrating several analytical levels and research paradigms:

- the analysis of **Europe-wide survey data** on the development of employment, the quality of work and life,
- the exploration of **sectoral and cross-sectoral stakeholder policies**,
- the **analysis of strategies of companies and public-sector work organisations** in selected industries,
- and the investigation of **individual jobholders' careers**, perspectives and aspirations.
- Specific attention is given to **vulnerable groups** on the labour market such as young people, older workers, migrants or women. ●

## Imprint

© FORBA 2012

Forschungs- und Beratungsstelle Arbeitswelt (Working Life Research Centre - FORBA) Aspernbrückengasse 4/5, 1020 Wien, Austria, Tel.: (+43 1) 21 24 700, Fax: DW-77, www.forba.at, ZVR: 611310543, DVR: 0710091

## Project coordinator walqing

Dr. Ursula Holtgrewe (holtgrewe@walqing.eu)

**Editors:** Ursula Holtgrewe, Karin Sardadvar (FORBA); Christine Wagner (FORBA) (assistant editing)

**Graphic design:** www.holzfeind.com

**Printing:** Riegelnik Ges.m.b.H, Vienna

## Sources (where not indicated otherwise)

Kirov, Vassil (2011): How many does it take to tango? Stakeholders' strategies to improve quality of work in Europe. Deliverable 5.7, Synthesis report on sector specifics in stakeholder policies and quality of work and life for WP 5 of the walqing project, SSH-CT-2009-244597. Available for download on: www.walqing.eu.

Holtgrewe, Ursula; Sardadvar, Karin (2012): Hard work. Job quality and organisation in European low-wage sectors. Synthesis report on company case studies for WP 6 of the walqing project, SSH-CT-2009-244597. Available for download from Dec. 2012 on: www.walqing.eu.

Hohnen, Pernille (2012): Capacities and vulnerabilities in precarious work. The perspective of employees in European low wage jobs. Synthesis report on employees' experience and work trajectories for WP 7 of the walqing project, SSH-CT-2009-244597. Available for download from Dec. 2012 on: www.walqing.eu.

The walqing research is funded by the European Commission's 7th Framework Programme (SSH-CT-2009-244597). However, this report only reflects the authors' views. The European Union is not liable for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

## Table of contents

The walqing research in construction	2	Skills and training	13
The sector	3	GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE: Social partner initiatives to enhance the qualification of construction workers at Bulgarian construction sites	13
Challenges in the sector: Greening, internationalisation, fragmentation	4	Workforce and vulnerability	15
Greening in construction: New legislation and green jobs	4	Social partners and social dialogue	16
GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE: Autonomy and learning in green construction: The high road is possible	5	Construction in Europe: Current trends and future challenges	16
Health and safety	7	The walqing consortium	17
GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE: Social partners in joint campaigns to improve health and safety at Bulgarian construction sites	7		
GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE: Features of the general Norwegian Safety Representative mechanism	8		
Working time, security and flexibility	10		
Combating informal employment	10		
GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE: Labour inspectorate approved identity cards in Norway	11		

## The walqing research in construction

In the construction sector, the **walqing** project set a focus on 'green' jobs or 'green' construction. This refers to the impact of 'greening' and sustainable building on work in the sector, an area which is particularly likely to continue growing. Green construction centrally aims at improving the energy efficiency of new and existing buildings and affects construction proper, but also the related trades and engineering disciplines.

Research in the construction sector in the **walqing** project was carried out in Belgium, Bulgaria, Hungary and Norway. For each country, stakeholder interviews with relevant **social partners** and other **sector experts** and actors were carried out. The findings of this work package on stakeholder policies are collected in the **walqing** social partnership series available on the website [www.walqing.eu](http://www.walqing.eu).

In addition, each country involved in the construction sector research carried out **2–3 organisational case studies**, consisting of interviews with management, works councillors and workers, and a total of **10–20 employee interviews** per country and sector. In total the material from these work packages consists of 10 national organisational case-study reports and 4 national reports on employees' individual perspectives, agency and vulnerability.

The organisations, mostly companies, in which case studies were conducted are listed in the table below

(please note that all organisation names are pseudonyms). ●

### Overview of case studies in the construction sector

BELGIUM	TREEHOUSE, a medium-sized construction company applying eco-friendly methods
	MANOR, a small construction company active in green construction
	ECOHOUSE, a large construction company applying eco-friendly methods
BULGARIA	BULCONSTRUCTION, a medium-sized investment and construction company
	ECOCONSTRUCTION, a company focusing on the construction of energy-efficient buildings
	GREENCONSTRUCTION, a company involved in the construction and renovation of housing, administrative and commercial buildings
HUNGARY	TERRA AUSTRALIS, 4 small firms of a construction subcontractor network
	STONENETWORK, a medium-sized technical specialist contractor and one of the few remaining regular construction companies
NORWAY	SCANCON, a large company active in building contracting
	NORCON, a Norwegian construction company

## The sector

The construction sector is the biggest industrial employer in Europe<sup>1</sup>, contributing almost 10% of the EU's GDP. After a period of continuous growth, **construction was badly hit** during the financial and economic crisis and, despite national differences, has been in decline in Europe for four years in a row.<sup>2</sup> Hence, having identified construction as a sector with 'new and growing jobs', we cannot be sure how much of the growth noted between 2000 and 2007 was due to a 'bubble' and thus is unlikely to continue. And since **walqing** aims to draw conclusions that are relevant to the further development of employment and job quality, the project focus is on a segment of the sector that is likely to expand further, i.e. the impact of **greening and sustainable building on the quality of work**.

The sector is increasingly shaped by new national and European policies aimed at combating climate change. The

need for energy savings is not new in some European countries, but in recent years environmental regulations and policies have placed **increasing emphasis on green construction**. Making new and existing buildings more energy efficient represents a growing subsector in construction activities: In some European countries only the construction of energy efficient buildings will be allowed in the future, and all EU Member States will be obliged to adhere to **ever stricter environmental standards**.

On the other hand, construction is an old and rather **complex sector**, involving several subsectors, dozens of crafts and different traditions. Large construction sites can involve thousands of employees of the principal contractor(s) and all the subcontractors, and this is unlikely to change. Product and process innovations related to green building are likely to be implemented into the existing structures of the sector rather than fundamentally changing or disrupting them. ●

### Key figures for construction in Europe (EU 27)

- Estimated construction investment in 2011 is 1,208 billion EUR
- 9.6% of GDP
- 51.5% of gross fixed capital formation
- 3.1 million enterprises, of which 95% are small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with fewer than 20 operatives
- 14.6 million operatives, making up:
  - 7.% of Europe's total employment
  - 30.7% of industrial employment in Europe
- 43.8 million workers in the EU depend directly or indirectly on the construction sector

Source: European Construction Industry Federation (FIEC), <http://www.fiec.org/Content/Default.asp?PageID=5>.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fiec.org/Content/Default.asp?PageID=5>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.euroconstruct.org/pressinfo/pressinfo.php>.

## Challenges in the sector: Greening, internationalisation, fragmentation

The construction sector is becoming more and more impacted by a number of processes that influence practices and quality of work. **Internationalisation, greening and fragmentation** of employment are on the increase, customer influence is rising and coordination in the value chain is becoming more complex.

**Internationalisation** in construction concerns both capital (large multinational companies) and labour (migrants, posted workers). It is centrally related to lengthening value chains, with larger companies employing increasing numbers and levels of subcontractors across borders, thus externalising flexibility requirements. This may lead to **social dumping**, the exploitation of pay differentials and employment rights and their enforcement becoming less accessible for workers. It may also increase occupational **health and safety risks**, due to cultural and language gaps as well as uneven training, procedures and information. On the other hand, the risks in this sector are somewhat familiar and visible to policymakers and stakeholders. In many countries governments and social partners have already begun to react to these developments. There are rules and regulations aiming to ensure that collective agreements and national standards are applied to transnationally operating companies and workers.

Increasing **competition on price** is due to client requirements and tender-

ing processes in the sector and may also negatively affect occupational health and safety and quality of work in general. Especially smaller businesses in crisis-affected environments suffer when clients go bankrupt or delay payments. ●

“There are firms that do not care about tomorrow. They are winning at a cost which is not enough to cover all work. [...] They grab the money, then they declare bankruptcy and leave the subcontractors in trouble.”

company CEO, Hungary

## Greening in construction: New legislation and green jobs

The construction sector is one of the largest sectors in Europe. It also contributes 42% of the EU's energy consumption and 35% of all greenhouse gas emissions. Green construction activity concerns new buildings, but also the renovation of existing buildings. The growing importance of **energy-efficient construction** is particularly driven by **European policy**. Thus, the **EU Directive 2002/91/EC on the energy performance of buildings**<sup>3</sup> requires Member

States to apply minimum standards for the energy performance of new and existing buildings. This includes a certification of their energy performance; a regular inspection of boilers and air conditioning systems; and a common methodology for calculating the inte-

grated energy performance of buildings, including not just insulation but also aspects such as heating and cooling installations, lighting installations, the position and orientation of the building or heat recovery. ●

### GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE

#### Autonomy and learning in green construction: The high road is possible *Monique Ramioul, Jan Van Peteghem, HIVA*

##### New production requirements generate new ways of organising work

The greening of construction has far-reaching impacts on the way the construction of private dwellings is organised. Most importantly, accuracy, quality and a sense of detail are paramount in all process stages. Matching building elements; finishing off corners, doors, sockets and ducts; taping insulation mats in between cavity walls; mounting standard triple glazed windows: all this has to be done with extreme caution, otherwise cold bridges are inevitable and air-tightness tests fail without mercy.

This generates a number of changes in the organisation of the construction process:

- Detailed work preparation is increasingly done by technicians at central departments.
- There is a growing standardisation of construction modules such as roofs and walls.
- More of these are prefabricated in central workshops to be assembled as building blocks on the spot in a just-in-time schedule.
- There is a growing number of small and independent subcontractors specialising in one aspect (such as heat pumps).

As a result, the construction value chain is becoming increasingly long and complex, with a growing number of firms and people involved. This leads to strong coordination and logistics requirements (just-in-time delivery, short lead-times) and a banning of 'dead time' as much as possible. Such a process, however, becomes also much more susceptible to disturbances and problems with materials, tools, traffic, etc., and there is little freedom to resolve these on site.

<sup>3</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2003:001:0065:0065:EN:PDF>.

### Autonomy and craftsmanship at risk?

In such an organisational environment, the tempting managerial response seems to be to maximise control and minimise risks, which would lead to **more centralisation**, standardisation and bureaucratised top-down process coordination. These, in turn, may lead to higher levels of division of labour, standardised and short-cycled off-site production, continued strategies of productivity increases and rationalisations. In such work organisations, a decent job quality with sufficient opportunities for learning and minimal stress risks is not easy to achieve.

### But the high road is possible

Nevertheless, some companies understand that under such production conditions precisely the opposite strategy leads to more success and, in addition, fosters better job quality and more learning opportunities for the workers. In the **walqing** study, we encountered one such company which bases its strategy on systematic participatory policies and practices. Here, the work organisation combines the **centralised design** and off-site prefabrication of some components with an **on-site team-based work organisation** with ample decentralised discretion. The management is convinced of the benefits and even the necessity of the active involvement and participation of all present at the construction site. Subcontractors are included as partners in on-site construction teams on the basis of their specific competences and high quality delivery. Workers are closely and timely informed about production schedules, changes to plan, adaptations of work preparations, technical details, new tools and materials, etc. The company invests in **skill development** of all staff. At regular intervals, they receive both on-the-job and off-the-job training aimed at raising their awareness and knowledge of ecological construction methods, materials and tools. Additional human resources management practices, such as **evaluation talks** and staff events, further underpin this employee-centred corporate strategy.

#### Link

[www.walqing.eu/webresource](http://www.walqing.eu/webresource)

## Health and safety

Across Europe, the sector has traditionally been affected by **high accident and injury figures**. Partly, this is due to the nature of the work, i.e. working outdoors, working at considerable heights and working in adverse weather conditions. Partly, mounting work intensity, a growing division of labour across companies and increasingly diverse and multilingual work environments exacerbate the problem. However, the sector and its stakeholders have long experience in setting and maintaining standards for health and safety – also in the interest of fair competition. They need to

give increasing attention to the universal application of these standards and their enforcement across company and national boundaries. ●

*“Occupational health and safety is not an area where we compete or fight. It is something we share.”*

employer representative, Norway

### GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE

#### Social partners in joint campaigns to improve health and safety at Bulgarian construction sites

*Darina Peycheva, Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences*

#### Situation

Construction sector social partners in Bulgaria are actively involved in the development and promotion of initiatives and campaigns (sometimes jointly) aiming to improve working conditions, mainly focused on health and safety in the workplace. Examples are organised joint inspections of construction sites by representatives of the social partners, the General Labour Inspectorate, the Directorate for National Construction Control, the police and the media. Other initiatives include the development of information material, both in printed and TV formats, aiming to improve workers' awareness of occupational health and safety and distributed to the Construction Chamber structures.

One European project is notable: the 'Health, Safety and Environment in the Work Place' project was initiated by the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) and the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria

(CITUB). It aims to enhance social dialogue in the workplace and introduce innovative measures for improvement and monitoring of working conditions in the Bulgarian industry, including the construction sector.

### Prerequisites

According to the General Labour Inspectorate report, there is a steady trend in construction towards improvement in working conditions, but this happens very slowly. An assessment of safety at work showed that construction remains an economic activity with a high proportion of jobs that do not conform to health and safety rules. This fact is supported by the high incidence of both fatal accidents and invalidity in the sector.

### Limitations

However, the real benefit of these initiatives to companies and workers has not been validated with the company case studies conducted in **walqing**, as none of the respondents (both at the level of the company or employee level) reported benefits from the above listed programmes or campaigns.

#### Link

[www.walqing.eu/webresource](http://www.walqing.eu/webresource)

### GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE

#### Features of the general Norwegian Safety Representative mechanism

*Hans Torvatn, SINTEF*

### Situation

The Norwegian Work Environment Act of 1977 required all enterprises in all industries with more than 10 employees to elect at least one safety representative. The law defined a safety representative mechanism covering all of working life with several important features:

- 1 Universal coverage: Safety representatives became mandatory in all industries and sectors for undertakings with more than 10 employees to ensure diffusion in all areas of working life.
- 2 Safety representatives are to safeguard employee interests in matters relating to the work environment and to represent workers on issues related to health, safety and welfare.

- 3 Safety representatives are entitled to training in occupational health and safety.
- 4 Safety representatives are to be consulted throughout the planning and implementation of measures of significance for the work environment and occupational health and safety issues – to ensure that they can influence decisions affecting health and safety before the decisions are made.
- 5 Safety representatives have the right to halt dangerous work on his/her initiative – a right that is generally used carefully. Work may be halted until the Labour Inspection Authority has decided whether work may continue. The safety representative is not liable for any loss suffered by the undertaking.

### Overcoming a limitation: Regional safety representatives

The safety representative mechanism was meant to be universal, but it was limited to enterprises with more than 10 employees. Especially in construction with its high number of accidents and many small enterprises, this was a problem from the very beginning. Thus, in the early 1980s, social partners agreed on the introduction of regional representatives, financed through a duty levied on all enterprises. This mechanism has been in place since 1981 for those companies who have no safety representative. Within their industry, regional safety representatives have the same authority in enterprises without safety representative as if they were the company's safety representatives. The regional safety representatives in construction are employed by the trade union.

### Results

There has been surprisingly little research on both the general and the regional safety representative mechanism. However, the social partners as well as the government are quite satisfied with the mechanism, and various additional schemes have been put in place in addition to the basic idea. Also, the mechanism has been 'exported' to other industries, cleaning being one of the most prominent.

In construction, however, there is an underlying unresolved conflict. The employers' side is very unhappy with the fact that the regional safety delegates are employed by the trade union. They feel that the trade union has been given too much authority, authority that should really be held by the government.

#### Link

[www.walqing.eu/webresource](http://www.walqing.eu/webresource)

## Working time, security and flexibility

Construction mostly uses full-time employment, and flexibility is achieved through subcontracting (also involving agency workers) and long working hours. Fixed-term contracts are an issue particularly in the Central and Eastern European countries, but traditionally seasonal work and recurring unemployment are characteristics of the sector. In addition to **long working hours**, workers often face long commuting times (or improvised accommodation) since their work depends on the location of building sites – resulting in extensive work-related hours that reduce time for other activities, family obligations and recreation. Often, piece rates and bonuses for performance in time-critical situations ensure workers' interests in this mode of working. However, they may cause conflict within and between work teams and shift the risks of bad planning onto workers.

The risk of **seasonal unemployment** results in discontinuous income (increasing the pressure to work longer hours when employment is available),

loss of skills and employability. Stakeholders, workers and researchers observe an increasing segmentation that distributes these risks unevenly. Indeed, during the crisis, downsizing to a small group of generally well-skilled and versatile core workers and subcontracting the simpler or more specialised tasks has been one of the strategies most companies report in the **walqing** case studies.

In the countries most affected by the crisis, in our sample Hungary and Bulgaria, this has led to a comprehensive fragmentation of employment. ●

“Employ people?  
I am not crazy. [...] What do I do if there is no work? Or if there is a need for a special skill at the next job? You see. This is why one should not employ a worker directly. You are better off with a subcontractor.”  
owner of a small firm, Hungary

violations of the rights of migrant workers are common features in the construction industry in Europe. There have been different initiatives by social partners in order to address these challenges.

Thus, **Norway** introduced identity cards for construction workers that are

approved by the Labour Inspectorate (also see Good Practice Example below). In addition, Norway has begun to fight tax evasion and undeclared work under the assumption that enterprises avoiding tax payments are also likely to not respect health and safety regulations and have no collective agreements. From this perspective, the successful persecution of tax evasion will obviously remove some of the worst offenders and improve the competitive situation for law abiding enterprises.

The informal sector within construction is also a major problem in **Bulgaria and Hungary**. Illegally operating companies proliferate in construction, employing workers without labour contracts to

guarantee their social protection and personal protective equipment. ●

“Widespread use of unregistered employment is a real issue. A real problem. Frequently we are faced with unrealistically low prices in tendering processes.”  
company CEO, Hungary

### GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE

#### Labour inspectorate approved identity cards in Norway

*Hans Torvatn, SINTEF*

##### Situation

On January 1st 2008, the Norwegian authorities introduced requirements for ID cards to be carried by everyone working on building and construction sites, including short-term assignments. Even construction staff operating alone should have ID cards. The ID card is not limited to construction sites but also applies to those who perform support functions such as cleaning, catering or transport if they regularly work on construction premises. Businesses (craftsmen) who only offer their services in the private market (e.g. renovating homes) are also obliged to provide their employees (and/or themselves) with ID cards. The ID card is valid for two years; it is personal and non-transferrable.

##### Why

While health and safety, including security, is improved by knowing who works on a site, the main reason for introducing the cards has been to fight social

dumping and 'junk enterprises' that systematically and repeatedly operate on the fringes of legality and do not comply with good business practice. This allows 'junk enterprises' to illegally outcompete the professional enterprises and, of course, opens up space for social dumping. Combating these enterprises is a major concern for the business confederation and trade unions as well as the government.

### How

The purpose of the ID card is twofold: As it identifies the employee as well as the employer, both the worker and the enterprise must be legally registered within the various Norwegian registers of businesses, residency, tax authorities, etc. The various registers are linked electronically. This allows the Labour Inspectorate to check that both the worker and the company he/she works for is part of the legal Norwegian labour market, i.e. that the enterprise pays taxes, VAT, social security, etc. and that the employee is a legal worker and pays taxes as well.

### Results

A total of approximately 280,000 ID cards were issued in 2011. The statistics derived from the card is probably the most accurate description of the Norwegian construction industry. It shows that 95% of card holders are male and 24% are not Norwegian citizens.

Labour Inspectors report that the introduction of the scheme has made it easier to keep track of the players on the building sites because the employer is listed on the cards. Previously it was often a problem to identify the formal employer of workers. Such identification is of course crucial for improving occupational health and safety, for knowing which enterprise to approach in order to ask for improvements or which enterprise is involved in an accident.

### Limitations

Experience shows that the system is certainly not foolproof. For instance, it creates a black market for such cards. And if there is no one to check the cards, e.g. in situations with night work or unscrupulous clients, there is little value in it. However, the scheme is one more hurdle to clear for the junk enterprises. Overall, it is regarded as a success and was also introduced in the cleaning sector in 2012.

#### Link

[www.walqing.eu/webresource](http://www.walqing.eu/webresource)

## Skills and training

In many countries, construction has traditionally had quite established schemes of vocational training and apprenticeships that are being continuously developed and adapted. Nevertheless, sector experts observe a **variety of challenges**: a skills shortage due to the sector's limited attractiveness for skilled young people while older ones retire, a mismatch of training content and practical needs, balancing general skills and specialisms, introducing new content in a sector described as conservative and, most importantly, the distribution of cost and responsibility for training in the face

of lengthening value chains and fragmented careers of builders. Since green jobs require implementing new building techniques, questions arise of how to develop the right set of competences or skills to carry out these new jobs. For example, insulation workers have to refine their techniques, learn new techniques and work with new materials. For other occupations going green in the construction industry, the demand for education and training is similar. Improving training in construction thus is high on the agenda of social partners and the EU, for example in the EU2020 Strategy, 'An agenda for new skills and jobs'<sup>4</sup>. ●

### GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE

#### Social partner initiatives to enhance the qualification of construction workers at Bulgarian construction sites

*Darina Peycheva, Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences*

#### Situation

In Bulgaria, social partners, in collaboration with training institutions and some international and EU projects, have implemented several initiatives:

The "*I can build*" project oriented towards students in secondary schools in construction; the "*Euro En Eff*" project, aiming to develop guidance for the energy-efficient renovation of residential buildings; the development of online guidance for managers of SME, oriented to the construction sector; *COSM-E-TRAIN*; the *EUROCONSTRUCT* project, aiming to improve qualifications and to assimilate European experience in teaching modern technologies in construction; the *WasteTrain* project trying to support vocational training and qualification in the sphere of management of construction waste; the project for *Sustainable partnership in the education of specialists in construction*,

<sup>4</sup> European Commission (2012): Strategy for the sustainable competitiveness of the construction sector and its enterprises. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council. Brussels: European Commission.



a project oriented towards secondary school students (Bulgarian Construction Chamber initiatives).

The *Qualification Centre in Construction* is a joint initiative of the Bulgarian Construction Chamber and the Construction, Industry and Water Supply Federation (PODKREPA). While not directly connected to improving qualifications, the centre was established with the aim to monitor specialists in construction from an early stage of their career and link them up with particular companies to give them the opportunity to enhance their qualifications. *The Centre for information, consultation and analysis* of the workforce in construction, with the aim to both provide a link between businesses – i.e. the construction companies – on the one hand and to establish contact with the education institutions on the other hand, is another successful collaborative project of PODKREPA and the Bulgarian Construction Chamber. The *European Qualification Framework* project aims at harmonising educational programmes and practices in construction within Europe (joint initiatives of the Bulgarian Construction Chamber and PODKREPA).

### Prerequisites

Social partner activities in improving the quality of employment by improving qualifications are sparked by the fact that the sector needs more local experts and narrow specialists rather than experts in everything. In addition, stakeholders realise that there is a 'gap' in professional training. They point out that engineers graduating from technical universities are reluctant to work at construction sites while graduates of specialised technical schools do not have the required training.

### Limitations

However, the real impact of these initiatives on workers and companies has not been validated within the **walqing** case studies, as the interviewed companies and (in particular) workers have not benefited from the above listed initiatives.

Link  
[www.walqing.eu/webresource](http://www.walqing.eu/webresource)

## Workforce and vulnerability

The construction sector in Europe employs large shares of men who are either skilled or without formal education but working as general workers. Conditions in construction work differ be-

tween countries. Although employment security is higher in some countries, increasing outsourcing and the current financial crisis have resulted overall in more fixed-term contracts and less employment and income security. In addition, working at building sites usually also includes travelling long distances.

### Workforce and vulnerable groups in the examined countries

COUNTRY	NORWAY	BELGIUM	BULGARIA	HUNGARY
<b>MAIN SOCIAL GROUPS WORKING IN THE CASES</b>	Men Young (due to hard physical demands)	Men (skilled and without formal skills)	Men (skilled and without formal skills)	Men (skilled and without formal skills)
<b>PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE GROUPS</b>	Migrant workers (often employed as temporary workers) Older workers Workers employed by subcontractors or agencies	Migrants Older workers Workers employed by subcontractors or agencies	All workers (very insecure and irregular work) Older workers Unskilled workers Workers who commute Roma	All workers (insecure work – no social security contributions, etc.) Older workers Workers who commute

Source: Hohnen, P. (2012): Capacities and vulnerabilities in precarious work. The perspective of employees in European low wage jobs. Synthesis report on employees' experience and work trajectories for work package 7 of the walqing project, SSH-CT-2009-244597.

Two groups appear particularly vulnerable: **migrants** and **older workers**. For the growing group of migrants vulnerabilities accumulate: discrimination by native workers, inadequate language skills, temporary positions and long commutes or improvised accommodation. Their working conditions can be viewed as a consequence of the rise in subcontracting within the sector. Espe-

cially in Norway, inclusive union strategies address these vulnerabilities. Older workers also appear to be particularly vulnerable because of the high **physical strain**. ●

## Social partners and social dialogue

---

Social dialogue in the construction sector is traditionally well developed in many European countries. At the EU level, the sectoral social dialogue committee was set up in 1999 by the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW) and the European Construction Industry Federation (FIEC). FIEC and EFBWW have joint initiatives and projects in different fields (health and safety, trainings, posting of workers, migration, nanotechnologies, etc.).

Union density is traditionally higher than elsewhere, and, in general, regular employers also have an interest in sectoral bargaining and the establishment of standards that level the playing field. This is supported by legal minimum wages and/or the generalisation of collective agreements to establish uniform minimum levels of wages and rights within a sector and to thus combat social dumping.

The social partners in construction have long developed joint bodies, the so-called paritarian funds. These are established, funded and managed by the social partners themselves and often fulfil a complementary role to existing governmental structures, mainly in the area of vocational training, health and safety, sectoral pensions and paid holiday schemes.<sup>5</sup> ●

<sup>5</sup> www.paritarian-funds-construction.eu.

## Construction in Europe: Current trends and future challenges

---

Construction is one of the most important sectors in Europe in terms of employment. Overall we see a disparate picture of fragmentation of employment and cost-driven competition on the one hand, efforts at high quality, sustainability and professionalism on the other. Quality of work in the sector is influenced by its **'natural' characteristics** (e.g., working outside, physical effort) but also current trends such as the **greening of construction, internationalisation, cost pressure** and the shifting power relations in **changing value chains**. It remains to be seen how the downsizing of the sector in the countries worst hit by the crisis will allow space for improvement.

The effects of greening on the quality of work are not uniformly positive but require ongoing attention to the quality of resulting jobs and ways of working.

Current issues for social partnership in the sector are the **generalisation of collective bargaining**, efforts to improve the **acquisition of skills**, the **establishment and further development of joint institutions and initiatives** with other actors, **health and safety actions** and **combating the informal economy**.



## The walqing consortium

---

### FORBA (Coordinator)

Forschungs- und Beratungsstelle Arbeitswelt  
www.forba.at

Key researchers: Ursula Holtgrewe, Karin Sardadvar

### Research Institute for Work and Society (HIVA)

KU Leuven  
www.hiva.be

Key researchers: Monique Ramioul,  
Sem Vandekerckhove, Fernando Pauwels,  
Jan Van Peteghem

### Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge (ISSK)

Bulgarian Academy of Sciences  
http://issk-bas.org/en

Key researchers: Vassil Kirov, Ekaterina Markova,  
Darina Peycheva

### Det Nationale Forskningscenter for Arbejdsmiljø (NRCWE)

www.arbejdsmiljoforskning.dk  
Key researchers: Peter Hasle, Ole H. Sørensen

### Roskilde Universitet (RUC)

www.ruc.dk  
Key researchers: Pernille Hohnen

### Institut Arbeit und Qualifikation Universität Duisburg Essen (UDE)

www.iaq.uni-due.de  
Key researchers: Karen Jaehrling, Steffen Lehdorff  
Claudia Weinkopf, Angelika Kümmerling

### Centre for Social Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences (IPS HAS)

www.mtapti.hu  
Key researchers: András Tóth

### Laboratorio Riccardo Revelli (LABOR) Centre for Employment Studies Collegio Carlo Alberto Centro di ricerca e alta formazione

www.laboratoriorevelli.it  
Key researchers: Ambra Poggi, Claudia Villosio

### Sociology Department Vytautas Magnus University (VMU)

www.vdu.lt  
Key researchers: Jolanta Kuznecoviene,  
Vytyis Ciubrinskas

### Centre d'Estudis Sociològics Sobre La Vida Quotidiana I El Treball (QUIT)

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona  
http://quit.uab.es  
Key researchers: Albert Recio, Fausto Miguélez,  
Sara Moreno

### SINTEF Technology and Society

www.sintef.no  
Key researchers: Johan Ravn, Hans Torvatn,  
Lisbeth Øyum, Hanne O. Finnestrand

### Manchester Business School The University of Manchester

www.mbs.ac.uk  
Key researchers: David Holman,  
Charlotte McClelland

## The walqing sector brochures

- 1 The Cleaning Sector: Office Cleaning
- 2 The Construction Sector: Green Construction
- 3 The Sewage & Refuse Disposal Sector: Waste Collection
- 4 The Health & Social Work Sector: Elderly Care
- 5 The Hotels & Restaurants Sector: Catering