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Work and Life Quality in
New & Growing Jobs

The Hotels & Restaurants Sector:
Catering



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
European Research Area



SEVENTH FRAMEWORK
PROGRAMME

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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. ●

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Table of contents

	Social partners and social dialogue	15
	Conclusions	16
	The walqing consortium	17
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The walqing research in catering	2	
The sector and its challenges	3	
GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE: The European guide to procurement	5	
Quality of work	6	
Health and safety	6	
Working time, security and flexibility	7	
Public sector outsourcing and discontinuous work	9	
GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE: Stabilising employment over the year: ELDERCAT's school canteens	9	
GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE: Rationalisation with some benefits: Cold line preparation in hospital catering	11	
Skills and training	12	
GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE: It only takes a few days to feel competent to work independently in Lithuanian catering	13	
Workforce and vulnerable groups	14	

The walqing research in catering

The Hotels & Restaurants sector consists of diverse business functions and jobs. Research in the **walqing** project selected the area of contract catering for in-depth research. Contract catering can be defined as the provision of food services based on contractual arrangements with the customer for a specific period of time, that is the operation of canteens and cafeterias for companies, hospitals or schools on a concession basis. Research in contract catering was carried out in Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Spain and the United Kingdom.

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.

In addition, each country involved in the catering 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 12 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 catering sector

GERMANY	ELDERCAT, a subsidiary of a charity organisation
	CHILDCAT, a subsidiary of a private company active in various types of catering
HUNGARY	INTERFOOD, a large multinational company
	EDUFOOD, a catering firm concentrating on education institutions
LITHUANIA	PRIMA, a private sector catering company offering various services
	SECUNDA, a private sector catering company offering services for events and state institutions
	TERCA, a private sector catering company offering services for private customers
SPAIN	HEALTHYFOOD, a family business group focusing on services for hospitals
	MULTIFOOD, a multinational company
	TRANSFOOD, a subsidiary of a large catering service group
UK	The INHOUSE CATERING unit of CITYSIDE UNIVERSITY
	The CONTRACTOR managed catering unit of CENTRAL UNIVERSITY

The sector and its challenges

Contract catering, a subsector of the hospitality sector, includes the operation of canteens or cafeterias and the provision of meals (e.g. for factories, offices, hospitals or schools) on a concession basis. It is a sector developing in the context of the continuous externalisation of services that started some decades ago. Increasingly, companies, schools, hospitals and other places are outsourcing their food operations to specialists instead of running their own canteens. This process is well developed in part of the European countries while still continuing in others, where external companies co-exist with in-house solutions. Contract caterers includes large multinationals that may also provide other generic services, and small local companies. In addition, both for-profit and non-profit providers of health, care or education services outsource their own catering units to form new subsidiaries that may also offer their services on the external market.

Work in contract catering differs significantly from the work in hotels and restaurants. Working hours are more predictable, and working times during the day are favourable for certain types of employees. Seasonality is limited but occurs, for example, at school and university canteens, who may downsize or close down their services during the summer holidays. However, it is still a sector employing a low qualified and



low educated workforce, dominated by women and migrants.

Contract catering in Europe is expanding as both companies and public-sector institutions externalise non-core services (other examples are cleaning, private security, etc.). At present, around 33% of firms or collective organisations in Europe have a contract with a catering company. The sector has a positive economic development with a turnover of 24 billion EUR. Contract catering employs 600,000 persons all over Europe and delivers around 6 billion meals each year.¹ This represents 67 million consumers served every day, one in four meals taken outside the home, and more precisely one in every two meals taken at the workplace, more than one in four meals at school and more than one in 10 in healthcare or social sectors. While contract catering has high market saturation in countries like France, in

¹ www.ferco.org.

Southern Europe or the new Member States the sector is not covering all potential areas.

It is also affected by social and institutional changes such as the increasing participation of women in the labour market, the related expansion of childcare facilities or all-day schools in Continental European countries, and by changes in lifestyles and consumer behaviour, such as an emphasis on healthy or organic food. Catering appears to be less affected by the crisis than the tourism-related parts of the sector but is still suffering from decreasing or stagnating budgets of institutions and consumers.

As in many other service sectors, the contracts in catering are awarded following a procedure of selection of providers. This procedure is based on public procurement in the case of public authorities. In the case of private-sector procurement, the contract awarding is also very often based on the selection of competing offers.

Multinational companies play a considerable part in the contract catering sector. In 2008, the three leading contract caterers in the EU represented 59% of the total market share, and the contract catering market is dominated by two company groups – *Compass* and *Sodexo* – with a combined market share of about 50%. In **Spain** large companies dominate. The large industrial groups include subsidiaries of multinationals: *Eurest* (a subsidiary of the British *Compass group*), *Sodexo*, *Serunió*n (a subsidiary of the French group *Elior*) and recently the Danish cleaning group *ISS*, which has bought several Spanish cater-

ing companies. In **Germany** leaders are companies as *Eurest* (Compass Group), *ARAMARK* and *Sodexo Germany*. In **Hungary**, the catering market is dominated by a large European group, led by *Sodexo*, whereas **Lithuania** has more local or national companies. This is the result of outsourcing and an ongoing concentration of enterprises through the takeover of smaller businesses or of competitors' contracts.

"A very important actor, particularly in the area of communal catering, is quite simply the customer [...]. You see, it's he who says how much money he's willing to make available for it."

trade unionist, Germany

The effect of the internationalisation on the quality of work is not unidirectional. On the one hand large companies are **extremely careful about their image**, and with their expertise and hierarchy may offer some workers increased options for skill upgrading, career and development and thus contribute to a **professionalisation** of the sector. On the other hand they promote increasing **rationalisation of work**, which can be accompanied by an increased **workload** but may also offer opportunities to improve working conditions.

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE

The European guide to procurement

Vassil Kirov, *Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences*

Situation

At the European level, social partners have developed the guide to the 'economically most advantageous' offer in contract catering.² This joint initiative by EFFAT & FERCO, the European social partners in the contract catering sector, intends to raise awareness among tendering authorities of the aspects of catering that go beyond price-based competition. It recommends contract catering companies that are eager to: promote respect for social values within their undertakings by means of working conditions and staff training, company agreements and social dialogue; develop quality-related programmes; take all measures possible to ensure the maximum level of food hygiene and safety. European social partners encourage their national affiliates to promote this guide and the general idea of widening the definition of 'most advantageous' offers. Annually social partners examine the development of the application of the principles in the guide.

Prerequisites

In this instance, social partners manage to collaborate and align their interests in relation to the client who increasingly influences working conditions. Using the guide, however, will require some political support also possibly involving end-customers who may directly or indirectly accept higher cost.

Limitations

Nevertheless, the long-term orientation of public and also private sector clients may be overridden by budget constraints.

Link

www.walqing.eu/webresource

² <http://www.contract-catering-guide.org/en/index.html>.

The large catering companies, like large service providers originating from the cleaning sector or other services, aim to expand their activities and become **generic providers of varied services**. ●

“What’s the point in getting stroppy and saying I would like 7.90 euros or whatever? People either accept it [or not], but I find that at my age I can’t make demands anymore.”

marginal part-time kitchen assistant
earning EUR 6.75/hour, Germany

“If the only purpose (of rationalisation) is optimisation of the work process, then the consequence can be that people have to work flat out all day [...]. And ultimately the pay is not high enough for the demands that are made of employees.”

trade unionist, Germany

Quality of work

Compared to other hospitality work, employment in catering is more stable and working times are more favourable because the **work is more regular and predictable**. Work is also typically **team-based** with the potential for offering high levels of social support – if the team has the time and the resources to organise work among themselves.

Among the downsides of catering work is first and foremost the **low pay** without the extra compensation of tips. Some companies pay bonuses for extra work but often workers perceive these as somewhat arbitrary. Across Europe, workers agree that their pay is among ‘the lowest of the low’. In addition, they

frequently face some **intensification** of work as companies try to cut cost by reducing staffing levels or manage extended services with the same amount of personnel. ●

Health and safety

While the hotels and restaurants sector generally is not known for particular health hazards, the risks concentrate in kitchen work. Here, heavy workloads occur and workers are exposed to physically demanding conditions (e.g., hot and noisy environment, heavy equipment) and high-risk tasks (e.g., through the use of dangerous machinery). This

may be exacerbated by the time pressures at peak working times. While some companies invest in more ergonomic equipment, others tend to neglect these improvements especially under more dire cost pressures. In one instance, an elderly-care facility offers workers some training to prevent back problems and musculoskeletal disorders to which employees of the catering subsidiary are invited. However, the training collides with the caterers’ peak working time and thus cannot be used. ●

Working time, security and flexibility

Catering has more regular and **predictable working times** than other segments of the hospitality sector. In many cases, for example in school or company canteens, residential elderly care or hospitals, standard working hours are observed and employees have free time in the afternoons and at weekends. Most contract catering services offer a limited range of meals that are normally prepared beforehand. The flow of service is also often predictable because the clients have known habits. There is always some variability, such as special menus for hospitals or children, or a choice of meals in company canteens, but it is more easily manageable than in conventional restaurants. Where meals are only served at midday, **part-time**

“We are investing increasingly in facilitating movement. We try to make sure that everything is moved on wheels so the employees don’t have to do any lifting. Nevertheless, people are sometimes careless: ‘No, no, it’s all right, I’m OK, it’s only a moment,’ and crack! They’ve put their back out.”

operations manager, Spain

work is frequently used. In other workplaces, such as hospitals or residential care homes, workers are employed full-time and the main concern is the socially undesirable working times, especially **weekend work**. Nevertheless, some workers may find these hours handy for their other activities.

“I think [working on different sites] is just an alien thing, especially for some of the people who’ve been here for a number of years... So all the people we’ve recruited in the last 18 months, 2 years, are fully flexible. Most of them have actually gone and worked on other sites.”

catering manager, UK

Nevertheless there is a demand for short-term and ad-hoc flexible arrangements, especially when catering companies extend their business into other areas such as event catering or take on other locations. This may be addressed by overtime but also by even more precarious contracts in line with each country's labour market possibilities, such as zero-guaranteed-hours contracts, agency work (although this may be more expensive) or informal-sector employment. Changing contracts thus may lead companies to offer increasingly casual employment in order to store up on 'more flexible' workers.

Seasonal work is also more limited than in the tourism-related parts of the sector – but affects school or university canteens. Again, for some workers this may be practical, for example if they have school-age children themselves and do not depend on a regular income. Elsewhere, mobile and younger catering workers may find complementary seasonal employment in tourist regions during the summer months. For example, catering workers from Hungary or other Eastern European countries are known to commute to Austria during the summer season. An alternative is to stabilise employment through working time banks which appears to be a common practice in Finland.³

A newer type of employment discontinuity emerges when employment contracts are aligned with the period of a service contract. Here, risk is transferred

onto employees. In Spain, the collective agreement regulates certain guarantees for workers in cases of transfer, i.e. when a new company takes over a workplace. The agreement stipulates that the staff in a workplace must be maintained if the contracted company changes, thus ensuring employment stability in the sector. However, this stability has a downside. When companies have to cut labour costs and are unable to dismiss workers, they tend to place them on part-time contracts.

In addition to work intensification, other functions may be added to the workloads. Kitchen assistants may have to take over cleaning work if companies save on cleaning services – which workers regard as a different domain altogether although it often may command the same wages. ●

"In contract catering in general they are suggesting that people who worked eight hours change to a six-hour day. And do the same work."

trade unionist, Spain

EXAMPLE

Public sector outsourcing and discontinuous work

In the city of Barcelona, the meals service of public nurseries was outsourced. The former public employees had the same holidays as the other workers of the service (seven weeks holiday in summer, from 15th July to 7 September, when the service was closed) whereas the employees of the outsourced service now have a fixed-discontinuous contract. During the seven weeks they receive unemployment benefit corresponding to 70% of their base rate and they take their holidays during the other periods of closure of the facilities, at Christmas and Easter. Effectively, they are discriminated against in comparison with the other workers in their workplace, who as municipal workers receive 100% of their pay when the facilities close.⁴

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE

Stabilising employment over the year: ELDERCAT's school canteens

Leila Mesaros, Karen Jaehrling, Institut Arbeit und Qualifikation, Universität Duisburg Essen

Situation

German ELDERCAT is the outsourced company running mostly the canteens of homes for the elderly and some school canteens nearby. Employees who work in the school canteens have a special working time arrangement that takes account of school holidays. During school times, they work longer hours than those stipulated in their contracts. These extra hours are offset by the twelve weeks of school holidays when the canteens are closed. The two canteen managers have a contractual 19.5-hour working week, but actually work 27.5 hours per week. Overtime above that is paid and cannot be taken as holiday. The employees say they are happy with these working time arrangements because they have so much time off at once.

The mini-jobbers in the canteens are contracted to work a 13.5-hour week. They too work excess hours in some months above the 400 EUR limit. The annual bonus would also exceed this limit. The excess is accumulated and paid out during the school holiday months. However, the amount is not sufficient to give them a constant wage throughout the year, so their pay in the holidays can be significantly less than 400 EUR.

³ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2012): Employment and industrial relations in the hotels and restaurants sector, Dublin, <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/docs/eiro/tn1109011s/tn1109011s.pdf>, p.20.

⁴ Recio, A.; Godino, A. (2011): Stability and competition: Quality of employment in contract catering sector in Spain. walqing social partnership series 2011.20. http://www.walqing.eu/fileadmin/download/external_website/publications/WALQING_social-partnershipseries_2011.20_Catering_Spain.pdf.

Prerequisites

This mode of working is contingent upon a fairly long-term commitment of employers and workers in order to be able to handle the working time accounts. Companies need to have the necessary reserves to cover payment – and small businesses may need provisions for payment defaults. Collective agreements need to cover the respective period for averaging earnings, generally a year rather than shorter periods.

Limitations

This model thus will either be limited to larger companies or non-profits or would need to be established as a general standard. On the other hand, more short-term flexibility needs by employers and workers may be difficult to handle in this context.

Link

www.walqing.eu/webresource

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE

Rationalisation with some benefits: Cold line preparation in hospital catering

Josep Maria Antentas, Centre d'Estudis Sociològics Sobre La Vida Quotidiana / El Treball, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Situation

Spanish hospital caterer HEALTHYFOOD in one hospital kitchen changed its operations from 'hot line' to 'cold line' food preparation. This means, meals are precooked three days before, put on plates and stored, and only reheated when needed. This involves comprehensive changes in the work organisation and working conditions. The cold line involves the increasing use of pre-cooked ingredients and industrial products. It reduces peak workloads, the number of tasks and the professional requirements necessary to carry out the work. It therefore reinforces the Taylorist mechanisms in the organisation of work and increases the company's ability to control the work process. It also involves new IT equipment (touchscreens next to the stoves) and training to use it – the effects of which are somewhat unclear.

“Kitchen staff have always been difficult, above all cooks. They're highly unionised and it's difficult to manage them, you know? In European [cold line] kitchens the staff don't have to be specifically qualified for cooking.”

quality manager, Spain

However, it also improves the organisation of working time for workers because it reduces the amount of work that has to be done at difficult times, such as weekends and evenings and teases out work peaks and 'just-in-time' demands. In addition, weekends are now free for all workers in the kitchen area and they only do one shift. The night cleaning shift has been eliminated. The change was negotiated by the management and the workers' committee starting a year earlier, particularly with regard to the distribution of working time and with the aim to conserve the jobs along with the new design and new work schedule.

Prerequisites and Limitations

The example shows the ambiguity of rationalisation: Standardisation and some deskilling, in a process negotiated with the unions at the company, also allow for considerable improvements in working time and also the elimination of some health and safety risks when working under pressure.

Link

www.walqing.eu/webresource

Skills and training

The catering sector is seen as one of the sectors in Europe where upward mobility is still possible for people that do not have high qualification levels, although there is a gap between the skilled cook and chef positions and the mostly unskilled kitchen positions. Often, training and human resource management efforts are concentrated on skilled workers and management – reproducing the gendered hierarchy of occupations in the sector.

On the other hand, like the entire hospitality sector, the sector faces problems attracting workers. Kitchen assistants often are women aged 40+ who may have held different types of (low-skilled) jobs before or are returning to work – and both employers and workers themselves may be sceptical about their capacities for learning and skill upgrading. While some training in food handling and hygiene is often obligatory and may be implemented in more or less committed ways, food and nutrition are subjects that may be inherently interesting enough to motivate workers to improve their skills and knowledge. ●

“So can an immigrant woman do it? Yes, but they have to work hard, they have to show their interest, know how to take risks... the companies create opportunities and then it depends on what each person wants to do.”

catering human resource manager, Spain

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLE

It only takes a few days to feel competent to work independently in Lithuanian catering

Jolanta Kuznecoviene, Vytautas Magnus University

Situation

It takes no more than three to four days for cooks newly employed in the Lithuanian catering company PRIMA to feel fully competent to work independently. The adaptation process in PRIMA is short and smooth because of the mentorship programme applied by the company for the integration of new employees. Cooks are introduced to the production process by a mentor working with him/her for several days. An experienced cook is assigned to act as a mentor by the kitchen supervisor or a head of the department. The main task of the mentor is to explain the rules of work organisation at the company and in the kitchen as well as some technological requirements of meal preparation.

Prerequisites

PRIMA is a joint-stock company rendering catering services for schools, hospitals, private companies and events. In food delivery companies, production is a continuous, cyclical, fast-paced process. Disruption in one link causes disorder to the entire process and there is a risk that food will not be produced in time. Therefore when a cook leaves the company s/he has to be replaced immediately. Until a new employee is found and starts to work independently, the department reorganises the workload, which inevitably increases the burden on other employees. So the head of the department and the cooks are interested in having a full team member as soon as possible.

Limitations

Usually there is no possibility to reduce a mentor's workload related to their cooking duties in the kitchen. This means extra work for the cook who is acting as a mentor. Neither does this form of informal skill transfer contribute to a recognition and certification of skills in a low-skilled sector. However, it makes a start in an environment where larger training investments are unlikely.

Link

www.walqing.eu/webresource

Workforce and vulnerable groups

The workforce in contract catering across Europe comprises different social categories of employees including **women, men, ethnic minorities and migrants** as well as **students**. Catering work offers a range of **different employment contracts** and there is a great variety between countries. The sector

involves a **hierarchy of occupations**: chefs, cooks, assistant cooks, kitchen and catering assistants. In the case studies conducted by **walqing**, most unskilled jobs were found to be fixed-term and part-time (unskilled). Full-time is mainly offered for cooks and chefs. In the examined countries, caterers in outsourced services are increasingly using fixed-term contracts that align the duration of employment with the respective service contract.

Workforce and vulnerable groups in the examined countries

COUNTRY	GERMANY	LITHUANIA	HUNGARY	SPAIN	UK
MAIN SOCIAL GROUPS WORKING IN THE CASES	Young male cooks, (45+) female kitchen assistants	Women, few men, ethnic minorities	Female cooks and assistants 2/3	Young male cooks and (+45) female kitchen assistants	Women, low skilled, few low skilled men
	Migrants and students		Male cooks	Migrants	Migrants, students and older workers
PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE GROUPS	Older workers women	No particular group	Not very vulnerable in general	Unskilled workers	Male employees and those on casual contracts
	Young workers		Older workers		Students

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.

Not all employees in contract catering can be categorised as vulnerable⁵. Many skilled cooks and chefs have full-time jobs and open-ended contracts. Men dominate these position, whereas

women concentrate in low-skilled work as kitchen assistants. Almost all employees work regular working hours which distinguishes catering from other segments of the hospitality sector. However,

⁵ Vulnerability refers to a potentially problematic social situation in the zone between normal and excluded (Micheli, G. A. (2008): Downdrift: Provoking Agents and Symptom-Formation Factors in the Process of Impoverishment, in Mingione, E. (ed.), Urban Poverty and the Underclass: A Reader. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 41-63.). It concerns work situations characterised by uncertainty/weakness that expose a person or family to suffering particularly negative or damaging consequences if a problematic situation arises (Ranci, C. (2010): Social vulnerability in Europe, in Ranci, C. (ed.), Social vulnerability in Europe: the new configuration of social risk. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 3-24.).

unskilled women, older workers and young workers/students are particularly vulnerable. Women more often work part-time and/or on fixed-term contracts as do young workers/students, who often work long hours and have little job security. Since women enter the sector later in life, whereas men tend to start young, **inequalities along gender and age lines** intersect. Middle-aged wom-

en consequently appear particularly vulnerable and without career options. In addition, their late entry and frequent part-time work put them at risk of poverty in old age because of the lower level of pension payments they can expect. Finally, many older workers have health problems and worry about being able to work in the sector until retirement. ●

Social partners and social dialogue

Generally, with its **small establishments, vulnerable workers** and the frequency of **part-time and marginal work**, the hotels and restaurants sector is not a favourable environment for unions or employer organisations. The catering subsector has **larger establishments** some of which also have works councils, but also precarious employment. Coverage rates by **collective agreements** vary widely in the sector: Hungary and Spain have an extension mechanism of collective bargaining to cover all employees in the sector, Germany has collective bargaining on both the sectoral and the company level but no extension mechanism (with the exception of recently, Nether Saxony⁶) and Lithuania so far has no collective bargaining in the hospitality sector at all.

Coverage rate of collective bargaining in the Hotels and Restaurants sector

100%	> 50%	< 50%
Austria	Denmark	Germany
Belgium	Norway	Ireland
Finland	Sweden	UK
France	Slovenia	
Hungary	Italy	
Ireland		
Netherlands		
Portugal		
Spain		

Source: http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/studies/tn1109011s/tn1109011s_6.htm.

The European Federation of Contract Catering Organisations (FERCO) on the employer side as well as the European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions (EFFAT) on the employee side participate in the sector's European social dialogue. At the European level, the European Commission established a **sectoral social dialogue committee** for the contract catering sec-

⁶ <http://www.ahgz.de/unternehmen/in-niedersachsen-gelten-nun-mindestloehne-fuers-gastgewerbe,200012191576.html>.

tor in 2007. However, in the framework of the dialogue and the cooperation for many years some agreements were concluded already in the late 1990s. The first is on training and stipulates that training has to be provided not only at management level but to all levels of workers. It should be transferrable between companies, to allow for labour market mobility and ongoing employability in cases of changes in contracts. The main topics of the sectoral social dialogue concern CSR, food hygiene, the most advantageous offer within the public tenders, etc. With this, social partners address the 'service triangle' configurations in the sector where clients and their demands and resources have an immediate impact on working conditions. ●

Conclusions

The catering sector, similar to cleaning and other expanding low-wage services, is characterised by increasing specialisation and new configurations. Companies and institutions are contracting these activities out to specialists. This may offer some possibilities for professionalisation and wider occupational perspectives in larger companies but, mostly, secure and full-time employment and efforts to retain good staff are restricted to the skilled positions of cooks and chefs. In addition, such initiatives and investments into an adequate and ergonomic work environment are limited by both clients' and employers' focus on cost-cutting.

While both large multinationals and regional providers pursue some initiatives to exert social responsibility and improve working conditions, often workers are faced with increasing workloads and demands for flexibility, cuts in (paid) working time and fragmentation of jobs, with employers utilising all the possibilities that labour markets provide for flexible and precarious work.

Still, where there is a presence of social partners, they tackle these issues, aiming to develop alliances that address clients as well as end customers. Indeed, with its associations of health, culture and quality of life, food is an issue where this appears feasible. ●

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www.mbs.ac.uk

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