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Work and Life Quality
in New & Growing Jobs

Capacities and vulnerabilities in precarious work

The perspective of employees in European low wage work

Synthesis report on employees' experiences and work trajectories for Workpackage 7 of the walqing project

Pernille Hohnen
Roskilde University

This report constitutes **Deliverable 7.14**, 'Integrated report on individual perspectives and agency of jobholders in critical sectors' for Workpackage 7 of the walqing project, SSH-CT-2009-244597.

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1 Capacities and vulnerabilities in precarious work – an outline of research focus, aims and perspectives

1.1 General introduction

The present report discusses work and life quality in new and growing jobs from an individual perspective. The empirical data on which the analysis is based consists of 22 country reports investigating elderly care, cleaning, catering, waste collection and construction in 11 different countries (4-5 countries per sector, see the matrix table below). Each country report is based on 20-25 individual semi-structured interviews with employees working in the selected sector and business functions.

1.2 The research process

The present project concerning work and life quality in new and growing jobs (**walqing**) is part of the EU's 7th framework programme and involves research institutes and universities in 11 countries. The overall purpose of Walqing is to explore the impact of 'new and growing jobs' on the working conditions and quality of life of employees. The project connects micro-level analysis with macro-level models and aims to identify 'good' as well as 'bad' organisational, managerial and institutional practices. The project consists of three main pillars: quantitative, qualitative and institutional. The first part focuses on an analysis of EU level data, the second analyses stakeholders' strategies and the third – primarily embodied in this report – focuses on organisational case studies and individual perceptions and agency. The results from the first quantitative pillar (Holman & McClelland 2011; Poggi, Bizzotto et al. 2011; Vandekerckhove & Ramioul 2011) as well as the results of the second pillar (Kirov 2011) can be found at: www.walging.eu.

The quantitative pillar identified salient sectors and functions in which both favourable and not so favourable work and life quality conditions could be found. The chosen sectors were **waste management, construction, cleaning, catering** and **elderly care**. In order to be able to investigate comparable areas of work, we identified specific business functions. These were: **waste collection, 'green' construction, domiciliary elderly care, office cleaning** and **catering**. These sectors were then investigated in pillar 2, analysing stakeholder strategies (Kirov 2011). In addition, 55 organisational case studies were made, focusing on illuminating good and bad synergies of organisation and individual work and life quality. In addition, 22 country reports were made based on 447 individual interviews with employees in the selected countries. It is these interviews and the 22 country reports that form the empirical basis of the present report.

1.3 The present report: Main objectives

The general aim is to investigate the role of individual agency and individual perspectives in shaping work quality and quality of life, by focusing on the interaction between objective working conditions and individual agency (Vallas 2006; Wrzesniewski & Dutton 2001).

The main objectives of the research into individual perspectives and agency are:

- To identify ‘quality of work’ and quality of life experiences for different groups of employees in new and growing jobs in Europe.
- To identify differences in work and life orientation among ‘low skilled workers’
- To illuminate positive and negative synergies between the particular institutional social, political and cultural contexts of work, and the work orientation, social mobility perspectives and quality of life experiences among groups of employees.
- To identify particularly vulnerable groups, e.g. groups with ‘weak’ or short-term aspirations and limited opportunities in particular organisational arrangements.

1.4 Theoretical perspectives and concepts

The empirical focus in both the country reports and in the present synthesis report is on individual employee perspectives, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable groups. The report prioritizes an individual perspective on quality of work and life by looking at how ‘the actor-in-society’ (Giddens 1987; Smelser & Swedberg 1994) experiences and constructs meaning in their work. Such an analytical framework includes an interpretive study of work and everyday work and life conditions where the aim is to ‘connect action to its sense rather than behaviour to its determinants’ (Geertz 1983; Singh 1997). In other words, the aim of the present report is to reveal and understand how individuals (understood as social actors) make sense of their current work and life situation and how their orientation and agency can be understood as a response to the specific social and cultural context in which they work. The overall aim is therefore to present and analyse work and life quality from such an employee’s perspective and to reveal positive and negative synergies between overall structural conditions and institutional features, and the experiences, sense-making and agency of social actors.

The present report in other words aims for a theoretical perspective focusing on subjective experiences and evaluation, yet emphasizing that individual experiences are shaped by objective conditions and options. This perspective is related to what is widely known as ‘capability’ research (Holman & McClelland 2011; Poggi, Bizzotto et al. 2011), emphasizing that ‘actual’ possibilities in life are based on individual acknowledgement of existing contextual opportunities. Individual perspectives and agency are, following this perspective, interpreted as expressions of an interaction between social and personal dispositions and more objective features of work and social life. However, the capability approach has been criticized for being individualistic (Lewis & Giullari 2005). In order to investigate social experiences and the collective knowledge of different social groups and vulnerable groups in particular, we combine the capability perspective with a sociological and cultural focus on social agency and collective cultural capacities (Giddens 1987; Appadurai 2004).

1.4.1 Collective capacities and bringing the future back in

The perspective focusing on ‘capacities to aspire’ developed by (Appadurai 2004) is characterized by a focus on the development of *collective horizons* in social life and how

these are being shaped in a particular social and cultural context. This approach highlights the cultural and social significance of expressing interests and dissent and the fact that collective horizons are linked to the prevailing options, assumptions and recognition characterizing the particular work context. In short, workers' capacities to aspire are shaped by *de facto* options, e.g. career options, as well as prevailing cultural assumptions about their potential and resources.

In addition to such an emphasis on collective horizons, the 'capacities to aspire' framework developed by Appadurai (2004) also highlights a concern with the role of the future in scientific perceptions of individual and collective capacities/capabilities. Many sociologists have tended to focus on the role of 'socialization' and 'past experiences' when analysing the social and cultural resources of various social groups e.g. 'habitus' and 'capital' (Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu 1990). In contrast, Appadurai, building on Hirschmann (1970), Taylor (1992), Fraser & Honneth (2003), emphasizes the significance of *present* conditions as well as *future* options in terms of acknowledging '*de facto*' career options, channels to 'voice' interests and dissent, and cultural and political recognition, as crucial for the promotion of the well-being and quality of life of vulnerable groups (Appadurai 2004). The report applies this perspective by giving a particular emphasis to the analysis of the interaction between the expression of future aspirations and workers perceptions of '*de facto*' future career options and 'recognition' in the examined new and growing jobs.

This analytical perspective also makes room for more explorative investigations. The present report therefore applies an abductive methodology (Bitsch Olsen & Pedersen 2008), combining a focused analysis of the issues noted above, while also being open empirically and analytically to new/emerging categories, problems and synergies.

The report consequently aims for a dynamic and processual view with explicit focus on new and emerging features of work and social life. New and growing jobs in this perspective require an eye for the quality and conditions of new work arrangements and new work/life combinations and experiences – but also for persistent structures and processes of inequality.

Similar organizational forms may be experienced differently by individuals and actual experience often differs from formal representations. (Actual experience may be more ambiguous and/or reflect disadvantages, inequalities or unacknowledged forms of discrimination). Subsequently, findings highlight ambiguities and complexity in work experiences rather than rigid or superficial black/white representations of work and life conditions.

1.4.2 Vulnerability: Vulnerable groups in vulnerable work

Following the objectives of research mentioned above, the report has a particular focus on vulnerable groups, aiming to identify synergies of work organization and individual agency, or dynamic processes of 'vulnerabilization' influencing work, employment and social perspectives for the most vulnerable employees (Ranci 2010; Hjort & Hohnen 2009).

'Vulnerability identifies a situation that is characterized by a state of weakness which exposes a person (or family) to suffering particularly negative or damaging consequences if a problematic situation arises' (Ranci 2010).

The focus on vulnerable groups is kept in mind across other research topics. 'Vulnerable groups' are analysed in two ways. First, by identifying the experiences and quality of work and life perspectives of 'known' vulnerable groups such as women, low skilled workers, young employees, older employees, disabled workers, ethnic minorities and migrants. Second, by exploring particular vulnerable groups in particular sectors, including categories of employees not usually seen as vulnerable. An example could be the identification of categories of employees who are exposed to particular policies or schemes, or are simply discriminated against. It could also be identification of types of vulnerability that are connected to particular positions, such as being a newcomer in the sector or being young.

1.5 The analysis: Operationalizing individual perspectives and agency

The report focuses on individual perceptions and experiences in the five sectors, selected as both growing and problematic across Europe. These are domiciliary elderly care, industrial cleaning, catering, waste collection and (green) construction.

The synthesis report analyses individual perspectives on quality of work and life, and focuses on gaining knowledge about individuals' experiences of work from different perspectives. Each chapter follows a similar structure and analyses each sector and the interviews of individual employees from these perspectives in turn.

First, empirical data is analysed in order to shed light on individual experiences and perceptions of work and life quality. This promotes knowledge about how individual employees conceptualize their position in the labour market, in the sector and in their present workplace, and what future options they feel they have in terms of social mobility, upskilling or job changes. The analysis provides information about the evaluation of work and life quality by employees themselves, and may therefore also provide ideas and suggestions for improvement. This part of the analysis 'takes the employees seriously' by collecting and analysing their own experiences and suggestions regarding their work and life situation.

Second, the analysis attempts to go beyond the subjective individual perspective by analysing the individual interviews in terms of the 'opportunity structures' (exogenous factors which limit or empower collective social actors), including the objective working conditions, that the individual experiences and work trajectories reflect. What do the regularities of social agency tell us about the specific structural and contextual conditions relevant for work and life quality? Or what do patterns in career trajectories tell us about the potential of employment in a given sector or at certain types of workplaces for social integration?

Third, the report has an explicit focus on identifying vulnerable groups and social processes of 'vulnerability' at work. Individual interviews are analysed to identify relevant social differences between employees occupying similar business functions. The focus is

therefore on identifying social patterns when analysing individual experiences and agency, and based on these to look for specific vulnerable social groups. Specific forms of ‘vulnerabilization’¹ are analysed by identifying social groups and processes through which vulnerability is being produced and reproduced at work, e.g. how changes in employment, work tasks or the organisation of work create a risk of labour market exclusion for different groups of employees. The report thus attempts to identify negative and positive synergies between features of employment and work, and the work and life situation of the most vulnerable groups.

Fourth, the report includes an analysis of workers’ future aspirations and the ways that structural conditions and cultural discourses enhance or constrain aspirations in different ways, both in terms of actual career opportunities and due to the expectations and acknowledgement that workers meet in their workplaces and in society at large.

1.6 Methods and material: Reports and interviews

Table 1: Country reports

Sectors	Countries	Number of interviews
Cleaning	Belgium (Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012a) Norway (Finnstrand 2012a) Spain (Moreno Colom 2011b) Austria (Sardadvar 2012)	99
Construction	Belgium (Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012b) Bulgaria (Markova 2012a) Hungary (Tóth & Hosszú 2012a) Norway (Finnstrand 2012b)	99
Waste	Austria (Holtgrewe 2012) Bulgaria (Markova 2012b) Denmark (Sørensen & Hasle 2011) Italy (Bizzotto, Ferraris et al. 2011)	77
Elderly Care	Denmark (Hohnen 2012) Germany (Kuemmerling 2012) Italy (Bizzotto & Villosio 2011) Lithuania (Naujaniene 2011) UK (McClelland & Holman 2012b)	89
Catering	Germany (Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. 2012) Hungary (Tóth & Hosszú 2012b) Lithuania (Kuznecovienė & Daukšas 2012) UK (McClelland & Holman 2012a) Spain (Moreno Colom 2011a)	89

¹ The concept of ‘vulnerabilisation’ was developed in an article by Sardadvar, K./Hohnen, P./Kuemmerling, A./McClelland, Ch./Naujaniene, R./Villosio, C. (2012): Underpaid, overworked, but happy? Ambiguous experiences and processes of vulnerabilisation in domiciliary elderly care. In: *E-journal of International and Comparative Labour Studies*, 1(3-4), October-December 2012, 139-168 (http://adapt.it/EJCLS/index.php/ejcls_adapt/article/view/40/46).

The analysis of the country reports focuses on similarities in types of configurations rather than on differences between countries. The analysis aims for *analytical generalization* which involves a reasoned judgement about the extent to which the findings from one study can be used as a guide to what might occur in another situation (Kvale 1996: 331). We have consequently focused on types of work organisation, cultural discourses, similarities in workers' perspectives and substantial differences between categories of employees.

1.7 The structure of the report

The report consists of this introduction, five chapters, each focusing on one sector, and a conclusion. The chapters follow the same structure by starting with a brief introduction of the main characteristics of work in the sector. The remaining part of each chapter is organized into four sections. The first concentrates on workers' perceptions of the main quality of work and life issues. Then follows a section on agency, career trajectories and career options. The next section examines vulnerability in work and processes of vulnerabilization in the sector. Finally, the last section discusses workers' aspirations and capacities to aspire, followed by a summary and conclusion. The last concluding chapter discusses cross-sector findings in terms of the impact of new and growing jobs on individual lives, and highlights some trends in the present labour market and their possible implications for vulnerability.

2 ‘Making the world a cleaner place’: Individual perspectives on work in cleaning

The following chapter presents findings on employee perspectives, primarily in contract cleaning, from four countries – Austria, Belgium, Norway and Spain. The chapter has been compiled using country reports based on individual interviews about central work and life issues in cleaning work, viewed from the perspective of employees. The country reports include an average of 25 interviews with cleaners (see methods and material below).

The first section in the chapter introduces the cleaning sector in Europe and provides an overview of the main developments and challenges. The country differences and country data will also be presented here.

The second section provides a presentation and analysis of employee perceptions and experiences of their **quality of life and work**. This section introduces the most significant quality of work and quality of life issues (good and bad) from the perspective of employees, and presents an overview of these perspectives in Table 2. The most significant quality of work and life issues are then analysed by identifying persistent features in cleaning that seem to be significant in determining experiences of work and life. These are: **working atypical hours; mobile work, fragmented work, and double hierarchies; and organizing heavy physical work – between professionalization and intensification**.

The third section consists of an analysis of the characteristics of employees’ agency by looking at **career trajectories, job crafting** and ‘**voice**’² (ways of expressing interests and dissent). The aim of this section is to identify career patterns in cleaning and the choices that cleaners make in order to identify the processes involved in creating job mobility and career options. In addition, the section analyses what kind of influence cleaners have in their everyday work tasks and in terms of being able to negotiate better work and employment conditions.

The fourth section in the chapter focuses on **vulnerable groups** and **vulnerable work**. The overall aim is to understand the social significance of having a job in cleaning for the most vulnerable groups in Europe. The section gives an overview of the different social categories of employees working in the sector (women, migrants/ethnic minorities, unskilled/low-skilled, older workers, young workers or ‘other’) and possible differences and difficulties specifically related to certain groups. In addition, the section analyses how specific work features expose these groups to additional social risks, e.g. fixed term jobs, unpredictable working hours or atypical working hours.

The final section provides an overview of the perception of future options for employees in the cleaning sector by analysing their future aspirations and how they reflect the structural conditions in the labour market. This part of the analysis will be conceptualized within the

² Cf. Hirschman 1970.

perspective of '**sociocultural capacities to aspire'** (Lewis & Giullari 2005; Appadurai 2004; Sen 1999). The chapter concludes by summarizing the main findings and identifying and discussing how quality of work and life as well as vulnerability develop in the interaction between specific ways of organizing cleaning work and prevailing cultural discourses, (e.g. assumptions about gendering of work and work tasks) and individual agency.

2.1 Introduction to cleaning

Industrial cleaning in Europe represents a very dynamic area in corporate services and the cleaning sector has been growing significantly during the last 20 years (EFCI 2008, quoted in Kirov 2011). In 2008, 3.75 million people were employed in the cleaning industry in the EU. The sector is dominated by large companies – some multinational. The development within the sector has hitherto been characterised by continuous outsourcing, however, a move towards greater diversification and specialization is now taking place. There are considerable differences in the cleaning sector across Europe (Kirov 2011). In central and Northern Europe market penetration is high, whereas in the New Member States and Southern Europe, more cleaning work is still performed in-house (not outsourced). Office cleaning is still the main subsector, but industrial cleaning, specialized cleaning (e.g. hospitals) and façade and window cleaning has gained in importance. According to Kirov (2011), these activities now count for almost half of the sector's turnover. Both men and women are employed in the sector, although women are in the majority (75%), and the labour market in cleaning is highly segregated according to gender. Men do specialized cleaning, such as façade and window cleaning, while women do office cleaning and domestic cleaning. Men more often work full time, while women work part time. Migrants and ethnic minorities are increasingly active in cleaning (in some countries more than others).

In spite of some variation across countries, work is generally low skilled and requires no previous training. Much cleaning takes place outside regular working hours, in the early morning or late afternoon, often organized as split shifts. In some countries there are more regular working hours (e.g. Norway).

The cleaning industry is very labour intensive and attempts to reduce costs therefore inevitably impact on employment and working conditions. The economic crisis in Europe and the attempts to cut costs have led to increasing rationalization, in particular in terms of work intensification. An additional characteristic of the European cleaning sector is the continuous contract awarding process and the fact that most work takes place at the premises of the customer. This creates a triangular relationship where the customer may act as the 'real' employer and where employees may develop closer relations to the customer. Much office cleaning is mobile and cleaners often work at several sites, commuting between them during the working day. However, some cleaners clean facilities which do not require commuting.

In all European countries, cleaning requires no formal education and functions as an ‘entrance sector’ for employees with low skills and/or with a weak or discontinuous attachment to the labour market. However, although cleaning has a low social status and is regarded as unskilled, the increased use of technology and a certain degree of professionalization in some countries (e.g. Norway and Belgium) is also taking place (Kirov 2011). This is increasingly due to some level of task differentiation (quite pronounced in major cleaning companies). Many activities such as outside window cleaning, emptying dust bins, and working with (relatively) heavy machinery to clean passageways have been detached from the ‘regular’ office cleaning. They are considered to be separate jobs at larger sites, to be executed by a separate category of workers – often working under different pay scales. This report focuses on office cleaning, with some consideration also given to cleaning facilities and domestic cleaning.

2.2 Methods and material

Four countries: **Austria**, **Belgium**, **Norway** and **Spain** have made country reports based on individual interviews. The country reports include a total of 99 interviews with cleaners in the four countries³.

The selection of interviewees has been made with the aim of covering the prevailing social variation in the workforce in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, employment conditions and cleaning work tasks in each country. There has also been a particular focus on identifying and interviewing the most vulnerable groups. Interviews in the cleaning sector have particularly focused on office cleaning, with some excursions to other areas such as cleaning facilities and household services. In all four countries, interviews with cleaners have been the main focus, while some additional interviews have also been held with managers.

2.2.1 The country reports and interviews

The **Belgian** report by Pauwels, Ramioul & Van Peteghem (2012a) is based on 15 interviews. Two of these are with men and the remaining 13 are with women. All of the interviewees have a Belgian ethnic background. The 15 cleaners that have been interviewed work in two different companies. One group works for a private multinational company cleaning offices and work spaces. The other group works in a government subsidized cleaning company which provides domestic cleaning via a voucher system. Pauwels, Ramioul & Van Peteghem note that there most probably is a bias in their selection of interviewed persons, because these were selected via their managers – and generally seem to have a very positive perception of their work.

In the **Austrian** report by Sardadvar (2012), 15 cleaners have been interviewed – 5 men and 10 women. Most interviewees were born in one of the countries that formerly belonged to Yugoslavia. Sardadvar notes several reasons for this. First, the sample was

³ Citations may slightly deviate from the original reports due to language revision.

preselected by the contact persons at the companies, limiting the researchers' selection of the sample and thus variation. Second, workers from Ex-Yugoslavia are actually among the biggest group of employees in the two companies selected for research. Out of the 15 cleaners interviewed for the study, one had an Austrian ethnic background, 13 were Ex-Yugoslavians and one had a Turkish ethnic background. Sardadvar further notes that the general level of formal education is rather high. Five out of 15 have university or college degrees and six have completed other vocational education. Only four out of the 15 have no tertiary education.

For the **Spanish** report by Moreno Colom (2011b), a total of 16 individual interviews were carried out. These interviews included both men and women and cleaners with a Spanish ethnic background as well as a number of immigrants. Twelve women and four men were interviewed for the report. Ten of these had a Spanish ethnic background and six were immigrants. The cleaners worked in two different private companies – one multinational, primarily focused on cleaning offices, the other specialized in the cleaning of facilities.

The **Norwegian** report by Finnestrand (2012a) is based on 53 interviews with both cleaners and managers. Most interviews were carried out as group interviews. Out of the 53 interviewees, 38 were women and 14 were men (one is not listed). In addition, 41 had a Norwegian ethnic background, whereas 12 had an ethnic minority background. The interviews were carried out in three different companies – one public and two private. Most of those interviewed cleaned office areas, although all three companies had other cleaning activities as well.

2.3 Cleaning workers' perceptions of quality of work and life in the job

Table 2: Perceptions of quality of work and life in cleaning⁴

QoW and QoL issues perceived by cleaners	Austria	Belgium	Norway	Spain
Quality of life: a job with a steady income	Perceive income as low but sufficient (mainly those who have a partner) ' <i>enough money to get by</i> '	Low wage but not regarded as very bad	Wages are considered reasonable and security is highly valued	A steady job providing stability and a steady income
General perception of work dominated by pragmatism and comparison with alternatives	Regular wages and payment on time are emphasized Work is good in comparison with alternatives and in spite of low status	Low status but acceptable because of working hours.	' <i>It's a decent job although we are only cleaners</i> ' Job is secure and wages and working hours are better than in other available jobs	An easy job, with low wages, but job security and flexible working hours
Part time work	Majority is part time	Majority work part time	Most have close to full time work	Most work part time
Work intensification	Work has intensified for some cleaners ' <i>you are under stress</i> '	Strict time regulation and lack of time to eat ' <i>you always have to win time</i> '	Work load has increased and time allocation decreased. Same work in less time.	More companies (more work) in fewer working hours
Professionalization and new techniques that make work less hazardous	A few new technologies e.g. cleaning machines	Work has become less hard because of new equipment and a gradual professionalization of cleaning	Cleaning work has completely changed and is now categorized as professional and different from 'home cleaning' (different concepts indicate the difference)	
Lack of contact with colleagues and with managers	High degree of autonomy but also lack of managerial support (Loose relationship to the main company and isolated work)	Experience of social isolation at work is a key issue among cleaners	Workers feel left 'on their own' – also expected to solve problems of absenteeism without calling managers ' <i>we are supposed to be autonomous</i> '	Because of subrogation some workers are employed in five different companies
Health risks – very hard and painful work	Some OHS problems Back problems, skin allergies and physical strain	Many have back problems and worry about not being able to work until retirement		Physical strain from lifting and mopping. Pain in arms/elbows, back and neck

⁴ The table shows the work and life issues that are perceived as the most significant and the various forms they take in the four countries, in order to show both prevalence and variation. Empty boxes mean that the topic is not mentioned in the reports as a significant issue for cleaning workers.

Unforeseen work tasks required by the customer at the site	Workers feel pressured by demands for extra work and because of absenteeism of colleagues	Not an issue. If the customer wants extra work they have to email the employer and ask		
Unsocial working hours	Atypical, early morning work makes it difficult to socialize in evenings ('getting up at 4.20 am, where can I go in the evening?')	Some work atypical hours and split shifts. Some have daytime work from 6 am.	Cleaners work during daytime (start at 6 am). No atypical working hours and no split shifts.	Atypical working hours and split shifts, but working hours are viewed positively, particularly by women
Risk of sexual harassment and abuse	Women experience risk related to deserted streets and working in isolated places			
Work/life balance	Because of atypical working hours, parents (women) need support from partner/family	Prevalence of daytime work makes work/life balance easier	Easy to reconcile work and life	It is difficult to organize work to be able to fulfil caring responsibilities (women in particular)
Experiences of lack of respect from society/public		'just cleaners' People keep working at their desks while the cleaner tries to clean.		Lack of respect, for example when people don't flush the toilet
Psychological work environment issues	Pressure to go to work in the case of absenteeism of others (Managers do not respect privacy)	Stress reported by some cleaners because of increasing work intensity	Fatigue after work and at the end of the working week	

2.3.1 Perception of cleaning: 'It is a decent job although we are only cleaners'⁵

Cleaners are well aware that their job has low status in society and that they are often regarded as 'only cleaners'. However, interviews with cleaners in the four countries revealed that most regard the job as reasonable – and often found it more agreeable than expected.

Though cleaning work is devalued and hidden, it is well considered by the people who do it. It is seen as an easy job that has advantages (mainly job security and flexible hours) and requires individual know-how. For the workers, this know-how and the immediacy of the results give meaning and importance to a job that is not appreciated by society. (Moreno Colom 2011b: 5)

⁵ Quoted in Finnestrand 2012a: 15.

On the whole, however, almost all interviewees display a pragmatic, yet professional view of their job, i.e. they take their tasks very seriously but see their job as something that needs to be done, that is okay, but not the most important thing in life either. (Sardadvar 2012: 16)

Most cleaning jobs are part time and often (though not always) work takes place at irregular hours, sometimes also including split shifts. Cleaning of offices and facilities is often subcontracted and jobs therefore often include working at several sites and travelling between different work places/premises.

In spite of these drawbacks, most cleaners express satisfaction with their job. They emphasize that it is secure and that it provides them with a steady income. While also stating that wages are low and work is hard, cleaners seem to view their work situation as relatively favourable compared with other low skilled jobs.

For the oldest cleaners we interviewed, it was not the cleaning job in itself that interested them, but rather supporting factors such as work conditions, works hours, wages, and the level of autonomy. Several of the cleaners (especially the younger employees) said they have friends in other sectors such as hairdressing, hospitality, and child care. These are sectors that often are perceived as having higher status than cleaning, but the cleaners emphasize that they as cleaners have better working conditions and higher wages than many of the more highly rated occupational groups. (Finnestrånd 2012a: 11)

As specified by Finnestrånd, cleaners value ‘supporting’ factors in the job, e.g. the working conditions as well as the fact that it is a steady job and a steady income. In addition to this, cleaners also express pride about their work and emphasize that they are ‘making the world a cleaner place’. Thus even in cases where irregular working hours, low wages and fragmentation of work detract from the working conditions, cleaners are reasonably satisfied with their work.

Cleaning is characterised by having a large majority of female employees and few male workers, while also having a high degree of gender segregation in work tasks and wages, working conditions and work times (Sardadvar 2012: 24). The relatively few men that work in cleaning are usually occupied in specific ‘niches’, e.g. window cleaning and residential building cleaning. They often work ‘outdoors’ and their wages are generally higher.

Most cleaners have not deliberately chosen cleaning as a career, but rather ‘ended’ up there by accident. Most have found the work reasonably favourable, and there are many stories about how surprised they were and how different cleaning turned out to be from what they had expected. These stories to some extent explicitly or implicitly challenge prevailing prejudices about cleaning, e.g. that professional cleaning is like ‘cleaning at home’ and thus that ‘everybody can do it’ (see Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012a) by emphasizing the differences between domestic cleaning and professional cleaning. In the Norwegian and Belgium cases in particular, cleaners give examples of how cleaning techniques are rapidly changing, underlining that professional cleaning increasingly

requires skills both in planning and in using products and tools. These examples also reflect pride in the work and in carrying it out well.

Finally, some cleaners mention the lack of responsibility in the job as a good thing – the fact that they are able to just do the job and then go home without having to think about it any more (Sardadvar 2012: 12).

In sum, it seems that cleaners take the negative aspects of the job almost for granted. Cleaners don't complain that wages are low and that work has low status. Instead of 'stating the obvious', most cleaners defend the job and emphasize satisfaction with having a steady job which provides a regular income.

2.3.2 'Do you want to be dusted too?': Lack of respect and recognition

Apart from emphasizing the positive sides of the job, cleaners also talk about the fact that cleaning is regarded as a low status job by others and pinpoint the difficulties of coping with this. Several cleaners mention that the lack of respect and acknowledgement of the sector lead to a lack of acknowledgement of the value of their work compared to other 'expenses' that companies may have:

It is a profession – with certificates! An electrician is paid 900 kroner [120 Euro] per hour, but when it comes to cleaning it is supposed to be as inexpensive as possible. (Union representative, Norway, quoted in Finnestrand 2012a: 15)

Lack of respect is also exemplified when users of the facilities/offices make the premises dirty or violate 'normal' behaviour by leaving premises exceptionally dirty. This type of behaviour is also experienced as degrading.

Good behaviour – people should be a little more civil. For example, when students, go to the toilet. It's not so difficult to flush the toilet. It's no effort to flush it. Do you understand? That's what I find most difficult here. They don't understand. They should flush the toilet after use. We're not in a backwater, are we? (Female cleaner, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011b: 4)

...you are made aware that the outside world really looks down on the profession. And if you do two jobs, you really experience it. (...) For instance, you are cleaning the stairs and they are wet, and they know: 'If we walk through them, they will get dirty again'. Or even worse, they remove the sign and walk through. Or they are busy at their desk and we still have to clean it. We have 5 minutes for a desk (...). Some people just keep sitting there. You have to not disturb them too much, 'Who do you think you are?' I do it differently... 'Do you want to be dusted too or can I just clean your office?' But not everyone dares to do that. (Female cleaner, Belgium, quoted in Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012a: 19)

In addition to these very obvious examples of lack of respect towards cleaners' work, cleaning is also characterized by 'lack of recognition' more indirectly. Cleaners seldom receive any explicit acknowledgement for the work that they do and there is a tendency to consider them as 'just cleaners' (Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012a: 9). Cleaning is 'invisible',

which shapes the way it is perceived. Cleaners' work is not acknowledged for being 'well done' or because they have managed to keep the premises clean. Rather, it is the lack of cleaning that is 'visible' – in other words when the job is not done well. Consequently, when talking about 'praise', cleaners speak about 'not receiving any complaints'.

I've worked here for almost two years and have had no complaints. They sit in the office when I arrive. I ask if I can come in – and I say hello before I come in – and clean. I smile. (Cleaner, Norway, quoted in Finnestrand 2012a: 17)

Another example of low recognition is the low level of wages. However, cleaners appear rather pragmatic about their wages – and do not express strong opinions about the wage level.

I don't really know [whether the wage is fair], but if it is like this, there's nothing you can do about it. (Female cleaner, Austria, quoted in Sardadvar 2012: 15)

2.3.3 'I am beat when I get home'⁶: Hard physical work and the risk of occupational hazards

As expressed for the Austrian cleaners by Sardadvar (2012), but equally reflected by cleaners in all reports, occupational hazards are considered to be the key problem area for cleaners when asked about their perception of the quality of work. Cleaning is a physically tiring job that exposes workers to risk of strain and work-related accidents.

It damages the joints. A 30-year-old may not feel it that much... If you look at my hands ... (...) I had been at Cleancomp for some months, and the nerve was pinched. I had to have an operation. (Female cleaner, Austria, quoted in Sardadvar 2012: 25)

So I move a lot of weight every day. And the mop is a killer. You end up having a carpal tunnel operation like me. Tennis elbow. It destroys your shoulder. (Female cleaner, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011b: 23)

The physically demands inherent in cleaning are further accentuated by the increasing time pressure which many cleaning workers experience. Cleaners in all four countries experience work as having become more intense and stressful.

For example, in the rector's office a person took early retirement. She wasn't replaced. They divided the work between us. Where you leave off, you start tomorrow. You have to leave things and clean them better the next day. It's cheating, but otherwise you can't manage. For example, I used to go up to my place at 5.00 in the morning and now I go at 5.50. Three quarters of an hour. In that time I have to organize things so my work is done at 9.30, whatever happens. (Female cleaner, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011b: 6)

⁶ Cleaner, Norway, quoted in Finnestrand 2012a: 13.

According to Pauwels, Ramioul & Van Peteghem (2012a), some workers hardly have time to eat because of the different shifts they are working at different places.

How he does that, I don't understand (...). Whether he eats something or not, I am not sure. (Female cleaner, Belgium, quoted in Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012a: 47)

If you manage 70 rooms in three hours, this can get your blood pressure up. You are under stress: Yes, I have to make it, I want to make it. And it is like this every day. (Female cleaner, Austria, quoted in Sardadvar 2012: 32)

Pauwels, Ramioul & Van Peteghem (2012a) further observe that in spite of programmes aimed at easing the physical strain, for example by introducing more ergonomic ways of working, the overall working pressure and strain seems to have increased rather than decreased over time. They therefore conclude that '*there are indeed indications that the ergonomic improvements do not compensate for the higher job demands and work intensification*' (Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012a: 9).

Some of the interviewees attribute this development to the constant competition for tenders in a market where cleaning may be losing out, because everybody expects to be able to save on their cleaning budgets.

They [the buyers] push down prices and it affects us on the floor negatively. We are supposed to use fewer hours to fulfil the tenders. (Cleaner, Norway, quoted in Finnestrand 2012a: 13)

I get tired. I am beat when I get home. We all feel it when we get to the weekends. (Cleaner, Norway, quoted in Finnestrand 2012a: 13)

Interviews with Belgian and Norwegian employees in particular suggest that technological developments are double edged. The development of new equipment has resulted in work becoming less heavy and workers less exposed to strain, yet there is also an expectation of increased efficiency from both managers and customers.

A final Occupational Health and Safety concern mentioned by Sardadvar (2012: 24-25) is that several of the interviewees reflect on the risk of sexual harassment and rape that women experience, both at the workplace and on their way to work (early or very late hours)

...according to interview statements, dark parts of buildings where cleaners work, such as dark waste bin rooms and basements are perceived as risk areas in this regard (Sardadvar 2012: 24)

Although this is not discussed in the other three reports, it is possible that such risk (and concern about the risk) may be more widespread.

2.3.4 Specific quality of work related features in cleaning

Cleaning is experienced as hard work. In addition to this, interviews with cleaners also suggest that difficulties are at least partially related to some specific organizational features. These are: '**working atypical hours**'; **mobile work, fragmented work and double hierarchies**; and **organizing heavy physical work – between professionalization and intensification**.

Working at atypical hours

Everybody wants to finish at 2 pm, but nobody wants to finish at 10 pm. This is something the office people don't understand. If they ask you to work evening hours then you have to work with the personnel that like to work in the evenings. Often these are not the easiest people to work around. (Female cleaner, Belgium, quoted in Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012a: 18)

Many cleaners have atypical working hours because cleaning of offices and facilities is placed outside the customers' main 'opening hours' or 'working hours'. Cleaners work in the early mornings or late evenings, and sometimes work in split shifts where they go home at noon, spend the afternoon at home and go back to work in the evening. The atypical working hours have a number of consequences for the social life of employees.

If I want to go out or do something, I can only do that on Saturdays. On Friday I am so dead tired. And knowing that I have to get up at 4.20 am, where would I go in the evening? [...] (Female cleaner, Austria, quoted in Sardadvar 2012: 30)

If we [visit family], we all sit together and have fun and talk. And you have to watch the time constantly. Oh my goodness, it's 10 pm already – now it's 10.30 pm. When will I get to bed? When do I have to get up? Back and forth. This is indeed a restriction. If it's the weekend, it's no problem. But during the week, it is. (Male cleaner, Austria, quoted in Sardadvar 2012: 30)

Atypical working hours are also perceived differently by different groups of employees and experiences seem related to gender and to social and civil status. In particular, women value atypical (early) hours (getting up at 3 or 4 am) which enable them to finish work at noon or in the early afternoon. This is regarded as positive because it leaves room for caring and household responsibilities in the afternoon. There are not many examples where women explicitly state that they wish to avoid the early working hours.

I like the working hours. At 1 pm I'm back home. I don't even have to prepare lunch beforehand. I have a little time to rest – to have a siesta as we call it. And then I do my housework ... I don't choose it for the pay. The working hours are good. After 23 years of getting up at four in the morning, it's not easy to get used to. I'm OK. (Female cleaner, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011b: 6)

Many women seem to prefer to keep the early working hours. They facilitate work-life balance, as part-time work and atypical working hours complement the work schedules of their partner or other close relatives (Moreno Colom 2011b: 17).

However, although many women prefer atypical working hours, they are problematic for those who do not have a social network, such as single parents and immigrants (who often don't have parents or parents-in-law living in the country). The combination of atypical working hours and no social network/family network makes reconciliation of work and caring responsibilities extremely difficult for this group:

I left him at school and he went home by himself. I used to take him at 7 am and then I had to leave him on his own. I said, 'You're going to go alone, because you're a big boy now'. 'Yes mum, I'm big,' he said. And he went on his own, but his father and I followed him without being seen, to see how he crossed the street. 'If you can't cross, ask any man or woman to help you.' Yes, he got back safely. And one morning I left him... Later I bought him two watches. One with the alarm set at 8:40 am, when he had to get up. I left his breakfast on the table. He ate it, and then had to leave. I set the alarm on the other watch for 2:40 pm. He had to come home for lunch. I left his lunch in a Tupperware container. He always had to have cold meals. I left him a piece of meat to eat. He came home for lunch and then switched on the TV. When the alarm went off, he had to go back to school. And then he came back alone. I left him a chocolate drink and he drank it when he came home from school. I made his lunch in the morning. I got up very early. I left him his lunch, everything. (Immigrant, female cleaner, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011b: 17-18)

Atypical working hours are also potentially problematic for single parents:

It can be assumed, even if there is no direct data for this case, that the problems of single parents in the sector are severe – or that they simply do not work in the sector. (Sardadvar 2012: 20)

In spite of women's preference for early working hours and an early return home from work, the interviews also suggest that atypical working hours require much planning and effort for parents in order to be able to reconcile work and family life. While cleaners who work during the day generally do not mention the reconciliation of work and family life as an issue, those who work atypical hours generally have more trouble and need to plan their work together with their partner.

Let's see, can I organize things? Well, my husband works two weeks in the morning and two weeks in the afternoon. When our child was born... at first my mother-in-law came. Of course, I work in the afternoon. For the two weeks where we both worked in the afternoon, my mother-in-law came. Fortunately, in my husband's company there's a night shift. So he asked to work nights, but the problem is that it's fixed. When my son was born, he soon started the night shift. So he has to work steadily on the night shift until the children are older... So I'm at home in the morning and he's there in the afternoon. When I arrive, he leaves. I'm free in the morning. In theory, while they're young, I'm free. And so I'm at home in the morning. If they're ill, or whatever, I call him when I go to work. (Female cleaner, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011b: 17)

Atypical working hours also create problems when a person's partner has poorly matched working hours. The result may be that couples may rarely meet.

Three times a week we see each other for one hour per day. If we were newly married that would be no good [laughs]. (Female cleaner, Austria, quoted in Sardadvar 2012: 29)

Atypical hours also cause another problem, primarily affecting female workers. In major cities (but even in rural areas), starting work in the early morning or coming home in the late evening has serious drawbacks. It makes it difficult to commute by public transport (migrant women rarely drive cars), and creates a sense of insecurity (being alone on the street or in an empty building in the dark).

In sum, although atypical working hours are preferred by many women, they require a lot of planning and may influence quality of life negatively by making it difficult to coordinate social life either with one's partner or with others. For workers without a social network, atypical working hours promote isolation. Although we lack information about single parents, interviews with immigrants suggest that this is a real problem which forces them to leave their children on their own.

'We're like chess pieces'⁷: Mobile work, fragmented work and double hierarchies

Cleaning work, whatever form it takes, is usually fragmented, as work is often spread across several different sites. The process of outsourcing also increases fragmentation. Finally, the fact that cleaning takes place at the premises of clients has many impacts on the work and creates specific challenges for cleaning workers.

First, continuous outsourcing and consequently changing companies in charge of the cleaning at specific sites result in employees often staying in the same job while frequently changing employer:

Every time a firm gets a contract, it is valid for five years, everywhere, on all buildings. Then after five years different cleaning companies can bid again, and again a choice is made as to who continues. I started in '88 with.... Before I became an official CENTIPEDE employee, I worked in a small independent cleaning enterprise that was taken over by CENTIPEDE. Then for a period (2003-2009 I think), I switched to RUB⁸, who took over the cleaning contract and allowed me to stay at this place. Because I wanted to stay here, I switched companies for a while. Then later the contract fell back to CENTIPEDE again. You see? (Female cleaner, Belgium, quoted in Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012a: 8-9)

Since cleaning work is fragmented and cleaners often work at several different sites (each work site may take only a few hours or less), the continual outsourcing eventually results in employees working for many different employers simultaneously. The subrogation

⁷ Cleaner, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011b: 7.

⁸ An independent small cleaning enterprise.

system⁹ prevalent in some countries does not solve this fragmentation, although the system does ensure continuous employment.

I worked for M-cleaning and P-cleaning. Then M-cleaning kept on giving me work. Later M-cleaning lost R-cleaning and I carried on with them in other things. E-cleaning merged with R-cleaning. So I was in M-cleaning, P-cleaning and E-cleaning. You know that even if the cleaning company in a workplace changes, you carry on working there. So I've ended up working for five companies right now. (Female cleaner, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011b: 5)

Not only do employees find it difficult to work for a number of different companies at the same time – all with different regulations, requirements and forms of control, the outsourcing process also results in them having to navigate within several organisational settings.

On this note, Pauwels, Ramioul & Van Peteghem (2012a: 8-9) mention the significance of the triangular relationships involving the cleaner, the customer and the employer, and Moreno Colom suggests that this makes the cleaners subject to 'double hierarchies' (Moreno Colom 2011b: 7).

In spite of continuously changing employers, many cleaners work on the same site for years, and often become more closely related to the employer at the site (e.g. the school or the office) where they work than to the company they work for. This strong relationship and loyalty towards the people and the management on the 'site' is sustained by continuous outsourcing. Social relations are thus shaped by the fact that employees may work at the same site and for the same customer (who is employer at the site) while their own formal employer continuously changes. Being subject to such a 'double hierarchy' may become a problem, however, if the 'site employer' starts acting as an employer, requiring certain cleaning tasks to be performed which have not been agreed with the formal employer. The fact that many cleaners mentioned the importance of cultivating a good relationship with the customer – by 'doing a little extra' as mentioned by Finnestrand (2012a: 17) – further underlines this risk.

Another consequence of fragmented work is that cleaners usually work alone and have little social contact with other cleaners:

The isolation of workers hinders their ability to organize and deal with industrial disputes collectively. The fact that they do not work on the same premises means that most of them do not know each other or they rarely meet. The physical solitude of the work helps to individualize industrial relations in a subsector with little fellow feeling and solidarity between workers. (Moreno Colom 2011b: 15)

One cleaner, quoted in Moreno Colom explains that it is forbidden for her to talk to other cleaners. A final issue experienced as problematic by cleaners is related to the

⁹ Spanish and Belgium law obliges companies that are awarded a cleaning contract to retain the workers employed by the former contactor.

fragmented nature of the work, particularly in office and facilities' cleaning, because a high degree of worker flexibility and mobility is expected. Even when workers are employed by only one company, they are frequently moved around between sites.

I have always moved from place to place. According to the company and the university we're mobile staff. We're like chess pieces... Their policy is to prevent us from establishing steady relationships with the staff... Depending on how cheerful you are, or how happy the supervisor sees you, they decide to change you. (Female cleaner, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011b: 7)

Organizing heavy physical work: Between professionalization and intensification

Although this is more evident in some interviews than in others, **a move towards the professionalization of cleaning** can be seen in the most advanced cases. In particular, the Norwegian interviews suggest that the cleaning sector has developed tremendously over the last few years. Finnestrand (2012a: 12) finds that not only has the introduction of machines made the job less physically demanding and made cleaning more efficient, but the cleaners also seem to have changed the way they talk about their job. Finnestrand notes that cleaners often use terminology from management (e.g. 'production' and 'standards'), and refer to professional procedures and use concepts that separate industrial cleaning from 'home cleaning'.¹⁰ For example, they would say: '*Our job is to produce indoor environment at level 4*'.¹¹ While this way of putting it is more managerial and production oriented than most cleaners formulated it, many cleaners showed signs of adopting managerial and professional language (see Finnestrand 2012a: 12).

The introduction of new production methods in industrial cleaning is experienced as making work less strenuous to some extent. Cleaning is hard work and cleaners complain about pain in their arms, elbows and backs, and of feeling fatigue at the end of their working day. Any developments that make work easier are therefore appreciated by cleaners.

At other sites you have to carry buckets around and climb stairs. Here we have a trolley and elevator. That is point one. Secondly: we are not allowed to use buckets that are full. We work with a kind of product that requires less water and less product. Before we used whatever we wanted and would pour it into the water. It didn't matter how much you put in. Now you have this super concentrated product and you can only use a minimum, so you don't need a full bucket for a little bit of product. So the buckets are less full. It is less strenuous for the back and wrists. We also have special squeezers, so you don't need to squeeze constantly anymore. (...) It is a different way of cleaning, more agreeable to us and much faster. (Female cleaner, Belgium, quoted in Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012a: 15)

¹⁰ In the Norwegian language the distinction between 'renhold' (cleaning) and 'vaske' (to wash) is very distinct. 'Vasker' is a word we connect with the old fashioned way of cleaning, often done by women in part-time, unregulated jobs, while 'cleaner' is a very professional term and only used when describing the profession. Most people would use 'vasker' when describing their own cleaning at home.

¹¹ 'Level 4' is based on the INSTA-800 standard which describes how work should be carried out. INSTA-800 has 6 levels of cleanliness and the owner of the building decides which level the cleaning should adhere to. The price goes up with the level.

However, the development of new technology and the introduction of techniques that make work easier and more efficient also result in **increasing work intensification**. Thus the cleaner continues, explaining the downside of this development:

The downside of it is that the bosses abuse this. ‘Ah, you have half an hour and with our system you only need 20 minutes, so you have 10 minutes to do something else’. So we get given extra tasks. (...) We get paid for our job. So they expect us to do something extra. So that is quite smart. It all comes down to the same thing; you are cleaning for half an hour. Ok, the cleaning is better, because I work 6.5 hours a day and I can’t say I am exhausted when I get home. I am tired, but I can’t say I am exhausted. Whereas before I simply couldn’t go on anymore. Eventually I started to work part time, because I could not go on anymore. (Female cleaner, Belgium, quoted in Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012a: 15)

The increased time pressure is particularly mentioned by those who have worked in the sector for a longer period of time. They experience that they have to work much harder than before in order to perform similar work tasks in less time.

Now I have more companies and fewer hours. They’re cutting down. From 10 hours to 4. For the moment C is still daily, but we now do CC three days a week instead of the five we did before. At CL too, we go three days instead of five. On 1 June I’ll have to change company, I’ll no longer be in E... I’ll be in a company called I... Yes, of course, in R. Not in CA. I have some time there and I have to do cash dispensers, waste bins, toilets, offices and desks. If you go three days a week, you do it on rotation as best you can. Now they tell us they’re going to cut time in CC from the hour we have now. In B they’re also going to cut time. (Female cleaner, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011b: 6)

Finally, increasing standardization is also part of the increasing industrialization of cleaning. Increased competition on prices seems to go hand in hand with reductions in flexibility because of the precise standard levels to be performed. Cleaners have less opportunity to use their own judgement, as they are tied to their particular programme. It is difficult to evaluate to what extent this influences the cleaners’ work quality because few of them discuss this in the interviews. However, based on the interviews it seems that cleaners are more concerned with time limits than with standardization, and there are less complaints about standardization from cleaners than in other sectors where standardization is also an issue, such as elderly care.

2.4 Career trajectories, job crafting and ‘voice’ in cleaning

We now turn to the third section of the chapter – an analysis of the characteristics of employees’ agency – by looking at **career trajectories, job crafting** and **‘voice’**. The aim of this analysis is, as mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, to understand the kind of employment mobility and careers that cleaners pursue, in order to identify the processes involved in creating job mobility and career options. In addition to this, the section

analyses the kinds of influence cleaners have in their everyday work and what channels they perceive that they have for negotiating better conditions.

2.4.1 Career trajectories and career paths

Unplanned careers: Cleaning as an option among few¹²

Cleaning is usually not a deliberate career choice, and cleaners have usually worked in various other jobs/sectors before they ended up in cleaning. As explained by Sardadvar:

Not a single interviewee had ever planned to work in cleaning, and no cleaners but one were originally trained in the profession. Rather, unforeseeable developments in people's biographies, combined with personal contacts and a lack of alternative options, lead workers to the cleaning sector. (Sardadvar 2012: 8)

In addition to this there are differences in career paths between the different social groups in cleaning. Women, who are by far the largest group, have careers that intersect and to a large extent are secondary to the development of household and care responsibilities. Many women started cleaning after having raised children and either have a background and work experience from a different sector (e.g. retail), or have 'escaped' from the underground economy where they have worked as informal cleaners or care workers, as the following Spanish examples show:

When I was single I worked in a hairdresser's. Then I got married and stayed at home, taking care of my children. (Female cleaner, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011b: 8)

I was in a secondary school for three years, well three school years. Not cleaning, I was a waitress. In the cafeteria. And that's it, OK. In Cerdanyola. And before that I was a home help. I only did houses because of the timetable, because of my daughters. Because, of course, they were smaller, I had to be available at fixed times, because of the meals, because of what we said. And I cleaned houses because it fitted in with my timetable. (Female cleaner, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011b: 8)

Male cleaners seem to have a different career trajectory, however it should be noted that information about men's careers is limited. The Spanish report suggests that men have moved into cleaning, for example from construction, because of the economic crisis.

I've always worked in construction... Yes, I was unemployed. The company was sold. Little by little they dismissed everybody. The new owner of the company kept staff to a minimum. And from there I ended up here. (Male cleaner, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011b: 9)

¹² This heading is taken from Sardadvar 2012: 11 but expresses the situation for cleaners in the other cases as well.

Finally, there are many immigrants who find work in cleaning – and their career trajectories are closely related to their migration project and their considerations about where to live. One example is a large number of ex-Yugoslavian immigrants in Austria, who fled there during the civil war in the 90's. Many of them have formal qualifications and training in other fields, but have found it difficult to get work in their original professions in Austria. Using their ethnic network many of them entered the cleaning sector, and in some companies they constitute a majority of workers (Sardadvar 2012: 10).

I wanted to stay and only protect my family. I didn't want to stay [for good]. I thought the problems down there would only last about one year. Unfortunately, they lasted four or five years. I moved around a lot in Austria [...] to all the places where there was a refugee shelter. [...] I once went down to Bosnia to have a look, and it wasn't good for my children's future. And then I came back again. (Female cleaner, Austria, quoted in Sardadvar 2012: 10)

Finally, when looking at career trajectories it is important to note that although working in the sector is regarded to some extent as 'one of few options', the choice to do so cannot be regarded as a 'last resort'. In many ways the interviews reflect deliberate choices made by cleaning workers, balancing their options and wishes. For example, the most common reason for choosing a formal job in cleaning for women seems to be that it is possible to fit it in with a timetable which takes both their husband's working hours and caring responsibilities into account.

It was difficult to find someone who would look after the children on Saturday. That's why I thought: Well, then I'll do office cleaning, because that's only until Friday. That will leave me more time with the children on Saturday and Sunday. Because my husband also works Saturdays. (Female cleaner, Austria, quoted in Sardadvar 2012: 9)

Skill requirements and career options

In spite of changes, such as the development of new technologies and 'standards', cleaning is still a low skill occupation and there are few training opportunities. In none of the cases examined did cleaning require any formal skills or competencies. Training usually takes place on the job. However, it is worth mentioning that Norwegian cleaners now have the possibility to acquire a certificate of apprenticeship, which gives them a higher wage (Finnestrånd 2012a: 16). Generally, however, cleaning has a 'low entrance barrier' and this may contribute to the low status of the work and the assumption that 'everybody can do it'.

However, the interviews with cleaners reveal a rather different picture. Cleaners' narratives suggest that although the work is formally regarded as 'unskilled', a range of competencies are 'de facto' necessary in the job. Working alone makes it necessary to be able to organize work and make priorities. In addition to this, cleaners mention the ability to be flexible, efficient, service-minded and cooperative. Cleaners overall experiences are that these competencies are necessary in order to fulfil requirements in the job – even though they may be unrecognized by others.

None of the interviewees indicated that they were over or under qualified for the job, but many were quite specific on what kind of qualifications were needed in order to be a good cleaner. Some emphasized, for example, that it is important that cleaners are flexible, efficient, and independent (i.e. willing and able to see what they have to do) in order to do a good job. Some also argue that it helps to be cooperative and gentle, since they have to cooperate with customers, in addition to being able to speak the language. (Finnestrånd 2012a: 16)

Many cleaners also develop ‘tricks’, e.g. to prevent strain.

Career options are very limited in cleaning and the few options that are available, such as first line manager or team leader, are not regarded as desirable. Cleaners tend to regard first line managers as overworked and having a huge responsibility. In particular, the fact that first line managers in many companies are expected to be contactable by workers 24 hours a day makes such a promotion unattractive. The wage difference between ‘ordinary cleaners’ and managers is also seen as rather small.

I think she has had a lot of stress. She may not show it, but when she is home alone she must say: ‘what did I get myself into’? I would not want to do her job. (...)I have told her: ‘S., you have a hard job and I don’t want to make it any harder on you’. (...)I would not want to trade places with her and continuously get phone calls from people who are sick. ‘Can you come, can you do this’? People are flexible, but there are limits. (Female cleaner, Belgium, quoted in Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012a: 31)

The availability of promotion varies between cases and countries, but the perception of manager working conditions as being terrible, with limited benefits, was expressed by cleaners in all four countries. Promotion offers were sometimes turned down as a result:

I was offered the job of supervisor when one of them left. They asked if I knew how to use a computer and if I had a driving licence. I did, but I wasn’t interested because supervisors have to be available 24 hours a day. I have a company phone that I can switch off at 1 pm. The supervisor can’t. (Female cleaner, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011b: 11)

2.4.2 Job crafting in cleaning: ‘I organize my work’

According to Berg, Dutton & Wrzesniewski (2010) and Wrzesniewski & Dutton (2001), job crafting can be understood as the ways employees redesign their jobs. Such redesigning can take place in three different ways. First, by altering the boundaries of work, e.g. taking on additional tasks (or fewer tasks) or changing the ways tasks are performed. Second, employees can change the social relationships they are involved in at work, e.g. establishing or emphasizing social relationships. Third, employees may change their perception of the job (cognitive job crafting) emphasizing certain aspects rather than others. Positions may be regarded as either a job (in order to make a living), a career (as a stepping stone in one’s career) or as ‘a calling’ (a vocation).

For cleaners, work is first and foremost a ‘job’. They maintain a professional attitude but also a certain pragmatic distance, not seeing the work as the most important thing in their

life (Sardadvar 2012: 16). So work is not regarded in terms of a ‘career’ or a ‘calling’, but simply as a means to earn a living.

In addition, despite being highly standardized, with detailed procedures for tasks, cleaning does offer a certain degree of autonomy which makes job crafting possible¹³. Paraphrasing Moreno Colom (2011b: 12), cleaning is to some extent an individual task and as such allows for some freedom of organization. Sardadvar takes this point even further by arguing that making decisions and setting priorities are actually part of the job (Sardadvar 2012: 17). At any rate, cleaners seem to appreciate the autonomy of the job, and the possibility of organizing is emphasized when talking about the job.

You say ‘Today I will do this, tomorrow I will do that’. You organize things. You don’t always have to do the same thing. You have to alternate and be on your toes, because one day you do one thing, and another day you do another. (Cleaner, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011b: 14)

However, not all employees organize in the same way:

It depends on each person. There are people who are not very good cleaners, but who learn tactics. They learn their own personal tactics, and they’re great because they pick up all the tricks. They do the finger test, for example.... I’m not like that. I may work harder than others, but I don’t have as many tactics. Of course, these people have been working for many years. And they pick up the tricks. (Female cleaner, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011b: 14)

Similarly, Pauwels, Ramioul & Van Peteghem also find cleaning workers that ‘remake the work tasks in spite of standardization’:

To be honest, I don’t exactly follow what is on the plan. I know what is in the plan for a given week ... For example, phones, fire extinguishers, or cob webs... But I actually clean based on inspection. I pass by and clean what I think is necessary, end of story. If that is not in the plan for that week, well... I think the plan is good for someone who is not used to cleaning, to have a guideline, that is really good. But if you literally have to follow the plan, you will be short of time. (Female cleaner, Belgium, quoted in Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012a: 39-40)

A final example of job crafting (cognitive job crafting) in cleaning is ‘taking pride in the job’. This can either be in ‘doing a little extra’ in order to please a customer, or emphasizing the fact that one is ‘making a pleasant environment for others’.

The work itself is pleasant because... I really like it when the aisles are so clean and so beautiful. But when we arrive, it’s a real sight. (Female cleaner, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011b: 5)

¹³ There are some differences related to the different types of cleaning. Office cleaning (and domestic cleaning) is characterized by being solitary work, while cleaning of facilities is collective work that requires some division of labour.

Although job crafting is shaped by the labour process, there are also some noteworthy differences in job crafting between the various social groups in cleaning. Gender, in particular, but also to some extent age and ethnicity/migrant status seem to make a difference in job orientation. Differences in job orientation and agency are therefore not just related to individual habitus, but are being reproduced via gendering of expectations, career paths and identities within the workplace. For example, male window cleaners expect and are entitled to more flexibility than women office cleaners, and male workers also feel entitled to work independently. Cultural expectations in the workplace thus present men as being more entitled to autonomy and having greater authority in decision making than women. Specific work discourses evolve, combining expectations of gender, certain work tasks and entitlements.

2.4.3 Voice and influence

Table 3: Employee use of unions

Country	Austria	Belgium	Norway	Spain
Cleaners' use of and experiences with unions	Wages are regulated by collective agreements, but unions play a marginal role for most employees. Most work related issues are negotiated directly with managers.	Collective agreements exist, but unions appear invisible at work site level	Wage and rights agreements between the social partners are now general for all cleaners.	Office cleaners use unions more than facility cleaners. Individualization in the case of office cleaners may in some cases support an active use of unions.

Industrial cleaning is regulated by collective agreements in all the examined countries. However the influence of unions differs and the impact of continuous outsourcing on workers' influence is ambiguous.

Recent developments in office cleaning have resulted in work fragmentation as well as increased individualization of work and isolation of cleaners who often work alone at various sites. This development has made it more difficult for cleaners to act collectively in most cases. However, unions still seem to play a role in cleaning and their impact has increased in some cases as a result of this development. Moreno Colom (2011b: 16) finds based on the Spanish interviews that it seems that unions are playing an increasing role in the dialogue between workers' and employers in office cleaning, and that interviewees have strengthened their ties with and use of trade unions in response to increased individualization. Office cleaners are increasingly approaching union representatives in 'industrial disputes', and this relationship is then maintained and extended to cover other types of problems as well.

Since a colleague and I had a problem in a housing estate with Mullor, I've gone to [the union]. The supervisor we had there treated us badly. We had to go to the union because it was either her or us. Because of that we lost the site. We left there and they relocated us where they could. Thanks to the unions I learned that if I work at

three sites for the same company, for example Mullor, they have to give me a bonus. I went through three years of my life without receiving it. The same is true for leave for personal business. I had four years of my life without it. (Female cleaner, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011b: 16)

A rather different development is reported in the Belgium interviews with office cleaners, where Pauwels, Ramioul & Van Peteghem (2012a) likewise find increased fragmentation and individualization of office work, resulting in cleaning employees working in isolation at separate sites. However, instead of developing stronger individual relations between unions and cleaners, in this case fragmentation makes it more difficult for trade unions to get into contact with workers at the 'site level' – despite a well-developed social dialogue at the sector level. It appears that sector level agreements (and achievements) become invisible to workers 'at the site'. In the Belgian case, increased fragmentation therefore makes cleaners more reluctant to view trade unions as a possible way to achieve influence.

...they (cleaners) do not perceive the improved working and employment conditions as a merit of their own trade union representation. (Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012a: 28)

Although we have limited information on this, there are some examples suggesting that the development in cleaning of facilities is different altogether. Work and industrial relations are not individualized. The example of Spanish interviews with cleaners in facility cleaning (Moreno Colom 2011b), suggest that workers in facility cleaning communicate more with the company through the supervisor – and make less use of the unions. This does not imply that unions are not approached at all – in relation to disputes, but it does suggest that the closer personal relations between cleaners and supervisors makes it more common to go directly to one's manager with issues that are not industrial relations disputes.

Norwegian interviews with office cleaners show that although most cleaners are union members, 'almost none of the interviewees had ever contacted the shop steward in order to discuss problems' (Finnestrånd 2012a: 19). This may be related to the fact that there are open channels of communication between company management and cleaners in the form of regular meetings organized by the company. The Norwegian data provide examples where managers make an effort to ensure that all workers (including immigrant workers) participate in meetings, for example by sending personal invitations using text messages (cell phones). Finnestrånd also notes that in spite of the fact that employees are not very interested in trade unions, the managers interviewed for the project emphasized the cooperation with unions as a prerequisite for creating a stable workplace.

...the managers reported that the union was an important party for them to discuss with. One of the managers we interviewed argued, for example, that Norwegian working life is built on the concept of union-management relations, and that employment relations issues are much easier and clearer to deal with when the employees are organized through unions. He also argued that low employee turnover, a high degree of union membership among employees and returning customers are linked, which means that union membership brings positive aspects to the work organization. (Finnestrånd 2012a: 19)

Finally, unions may pursue policies that cleaners disagree with. In the Austrian case, cleaners seem critical of the fact that the flat hourly wage in the collective agreements does not honour seniority, and the prevailing wage differences between newcomers and seniors have become very small (Sardadvar 2012: 15). The Austrian interviews also suggest that cleaners approach their team leader or manager in the case of complaints or other attempts to get influence in the job. This suggests – in line with the Belgium and the Norwegian interviews – that the unions are not always seen as the most useful channels of influence.

In most cases it therefore seems that cleaners seek influence by using the communication channels within the company where they work. Although wages and employment conditions are paid according to collective agreements, in most cases, cleaners do not seem to approach unions actively. The general tendency towards fragmentation and individualization in cleaning, moreover, may either strengthen or weaken the unions. Fragmentation and individualization seem to weaken the bond between the individual worker and the union, for the Belgian cleaners mentioned above, while strengthening the tie in the Spanish case, probably due to the even weaker bond between employers and employees.

2.5 Vulnerability, vulnerable groups and vulnerable (precarious) work

The previous sections have focused on how employees experience their current job and on their agency in their work and in the labour market. This section deals with the latent social risks in cleaning. The focus is predominantly on the risk of social exclusion, including risk of exclusion from the labour market, material exclusion and lack of social participation (Poggi, Bizzotto et al. 2011). The section discusses vulnerability from different perspectives. First, we identify what kinds of vulnerable groups are employed in the sector and the different kinds of risks they face. Second, we look at work related vulnerability, focusing on features of employment conditions that may expose employees to poverty and or social exclusion. Finally, we discuss vulnerability as a process and the kinds of negative synergies between specific social groups and specific types of work. The aim is to identify work related vulnerability for the most socially vulnerable groups. Work-related vulnerability therefore refers to work-related processes characterised by uncertainty/weakness ‘which exposes a person (or a family) to suffering particularly negative or damaging consequences if a problematic situation arises’ (Ranci 2010). The term therefore refers not only to actual vulnerability, but also to those working conditions which expose workers to future risks of social exclusion¹⁴.

¹⁴ Vulnerability refers to a potentially social problematic situation in the zone between normal and excluded (Micheli 2008: 41-63).

Table 4: Workforce and vulnerable groups in the examined countries

Country	Austria	Belgium	Norway	Spain
Main social groups working in the sector ¹⁵	Immigrants (mainly former Yugoslavia), women, men	Older workers, immigrants, women (in domestic cleaning)	Women, middle aged (50+), immigrant workers, older workers	Women, men, migrants
Specifically vulnerable groups in the sector	Immigrants/ethnic minorities with poor language skills, older workers	Older workers, immigrants	Older workers (worried that they cannot work until retirement age)	Migrant women, older workers
Specifically precarious work issues	Part time work, atypical working hours, fragmented working times	Part time work, atypical working hours, work intensity	Part-time work, new work methods have lowered work related risks	Part time work, atypical working hours, low wage

2.5.1 Vulnerable groups in cleaning

The cleaning sector employs people from a range of different social groups. Employees in cleaning are mainly women, low skilled workers, migrants/ethnic minorities and older workers. The few men who are also active mainly work in outdoor cleaning, such as window and façade cleaning – men usually work full time and have higher wages. Young workers are generally less visible in the sector, which may be related to the employment patterns of cleaners, where cleaning is usually not the first career choice.

In cleaning, three groups in particular appear vulnerable: These are, women, immigrants and older workers.

Women are vulnerable because they work part time and generally have limited career options. Women frequently work in office cleaning, which has low pay and often involves atypical working hours. Many immigrant workers have also found work in cleaning, and in some of the investigated companies immigrants constitute the majority of the workforce. Most immigrants working in cleaning are also women and experience similar working conditions as women from the ethnic majority. Finally, older workers (50+) also appear vulnerable because of physical strain. Many older adult workers don't know if they will be able to 'last in the sector' until retirement age, in spite of new technologies in cleaning.

Employees in cleaning face a common set of working conditions which may lead to a risk of social exclusion/labour market exclusion. These are: low wages, health risks, low social

¹⁵ It should be noted that 'vulnerability' is relative and differs between countries. Within the four countries, Spanish cleaners are the most vulnerable, whereas it could be debated to what extent Norwegian cleaners can be regarded as a vulnerable group.

recognition and atypical working hours. However, different groups occupy different social positions and face different problems. The exposure to social risks and the degree and kind of vulnerability therefore depend on several factors, such as national origin, gender, family status, age and type of work. This combined with the fact that working conditions differ between countries results in some differences in terms of which groups are most vulnerable in the sector, as the following quotes from Spain and Norway illustrate:

The most vulnerable group is that of immigrant women working in office cleaning, whereas the least vulnerable group is that of men specialized in window cleaning. (Moreno Colom 2011b: 3)

Not much in our data material supported the idea that immigrants were more vulnerable than other groups in cleaning¹⁶. Everybody we interviewed in this group was generally happy with their situation and felt that they had a decent job and were respected among the other employees. (Finnestrand 2012a: 23)

Bearing these differences in mind, however, there are also some consistencies in vulnerable groups across countries¹⁷.

Women

Women cleaners may be considered vulnerable based on objective criteria, e.g. because they are low skilled and have few opportunities to get another job if they lose the one they have. In addition, they work part time and receive low wages.

In cleaning, men and women are segregated. The more ‘technical’ cleaning tasks and some residential building cleaning are mainly done by men, while office cleaning is dominated by women. In many respects (wages, working hours, full-time work, bonuses, etc.), office cleaners, and hence women, are worse off (Sardadvar 2012: 24).

These differences seem linked to a set of prevailing gendered work discourses which characterise certain work tasks as ‘female’, and others (usually more favourable) as ‘male’.

Single women with children constitute a particularly vulnerable group among women. They often work part time in order to reconcile care and work responsibilities. According to Moreno Colom (2011b: 20), the vulnerability of these women does not arise from their work situation but from their family responsibilities, which make it difficult to cope economically on a part time wage, without a partner.

¹⁶ We emphasize that we have studied the regulated part of the sector – the illegal part of the cleaning sector is a whole different story when it comes to minority workers.

¹⁷ A clear estimation of different degrees of precariousness is hard to make because of the ‘gap’ between objective working conditions and the subjective perception of work expressed by employees in cleaning. This may explain part of the difference between the estimation of vulnerability by immigrants in the two cases. Whereas the first quote is based on an interpretation of objective conditions in cleaning, the last quote seems to be primarily based on cleaners’ own perceptions of work.

Male workers

Male workers are generally not vulnerable if we look within the cleaning sector. Men have full time jobs more often than women. They also have more autonomy and are subject to less surveillance than women. They are also subject to the 'male' part of the segregated work discourses. These discourses seem to determine that some jobs are more suitable for men. Gendered discourses, for example, make it appear natural that men do window cleaning, which is better paid than office cleaning.

Older workers

Older workers appear vulnerable in interviews in all four countries. They are vulnerable because they started working in cleaning at a time when there was little consideration for and consequently no prevention of physical strain. After having worked with heavy physical tasks for many years, many older workers have health problems. They express doubts that they will be able to do the job until retirement. Notwithstanding this, the age distribution figures in one major Belgian cleaning company show a large proportion of older workers compared to the national average.

I: You say you will not be doing this job until you are 50, is that because of the physical aspect?

R: Yes. Physically, I don't see this as feasible. Cleaning is and will remain a heavy job. Here and there you can make it lighter, but you must mop, you must.... you walk several kilometres a day. (Female cleaner, Belgium, quoted in Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012a: 9)

Even interviews with the Norwegian cleaners, who have the best working conditions, revealed that older cleaners are worn down.

Cleaning is an occupation where the cleaner has to do a lot of physical work, and often under unfavourable ergonomic conditions. The introduction of new work methods and technology has changed this, but to what degree is an open question. Although the companies claim they have invested in new technology, like machines that will lighten the physical demands, the older women in this study report that it is too late for them to fix 20 years of hard physical work. These women claimed that they would have to quit their job when they reach 62. (Finnestrånd 2012a: 22)

In the Norwegian case, social partners have reached an agreement about early retirement which is valid in the collective agreements. There are no reports about similar agreements having been made in the other three countries.

Migrant workers and ethnic minorities

Migrants and/or ethnic minorities (these groups can be exclusive) form another vulnerable group in cleaning work. As a social category, they seem to have specific characteristics in terms of social life and the kinds of challenges they face at work. Their situation is particularly relevant to investigate, as the proportion of migrant workers in cleaning is increasing. In the Belgian commercial cleaning company studied within the **walqing**

project, more than half of the staff were immigrants – often even second or third generation. Furthermore, as newcomers in the sector they seem to be offered less favourable conditions than the ‘senior’ workers.

Immigrants form a vulnerable group in all countries except Norway. Immigrants are vulnerable in several ways. Because of language problems they are often forced to work in cleaning, but even here their limited language skills can be problematic because of their limited ability to bargain. Sardadvar suggests, based on the Austrian interviews, that Austrians are more likely to demand rights and express wishes than non-Austrians. Although other factors such as seniority also play a role, there seems to be a limit to what foreigners can demand:

I refused to accept that from the beginning. They do that with the foreigners – they have their mobile phone in their pocket and are always available. Not me. (Female, native Austrian cleaner, quoted in Sardadvar 2012: 23)

Sardadvar finds that different groups of workers (Austrians versus migrants) and different groups of migrants (with good or bad German skills) simply ‘have different chances when it comes to checking calculations of working hours, complaining about wrong calculations, expressing wishes for change or making demands’ (Sardadvar 2012: 23). Along the same lines, Moreno Colom reports that viewed from a social perspective, the most vulnerable group in cleaning is that of immigrant women, who have a weak position at work because of their lack of seniority and are socially weak because of their immigration status. She also suggests that because the career paths of this group are based on their migration project, where the priority is simply to have a job and the work quality is secondary, their bargaining power is limited. Moreno Colom, also highlights the fact that immigrant women are the newcomers in the sector and are therefore offered poorer employment and working conditions than the more senior workers.

Perhaps as a result of their dependency on the job, there seems to be an assumption among managers and co-workers that immigrants work harder and have less sickness than ‘native’ workers:

Especially migrant workers, but also immigrants, are popular employees among the managers in the companies where we did our study. According to the managers, they are willing to work hard, they have a positive attitude towards work, and often stay in the position for many years. (Finnestrand 2012a: 23)

Although we do not know, for example, to what extent immigrants are working harder in practice, the difference in expectations and the fact that immigrants are less inclined to complain or discuss working conditions may indirectly contribute to making their work situation stressful. It should be mentioned, however, that direct discrimination against immigrants has not been reported in the interviews.

Paradoxically, while immigrants occupy a disadvantaged position in cleaning, many of them appear to be overqualified for the job. In the Austrian sample of ex-Yugoslavian cleaners, all but one had formal qualifications, e.g. had studied at university or completed vocational training in other sectors.

Several interviewees, particularly those who fled from the war in Yugoslavia, are **overqualified**. One has an academic degree, two started to study at university but dropped out, four have completed business or other college courses, five have completed vocational training in other sectors (and one in cleaning), and only two have completed compulsory school only. (Sardadvar 2012: 23)¹⁸

Lastly, there are some indications that immigrants are also facing xenophobia or racism from customers. Sardadvar reports instances of racism where customers call the company to complain that they do not want to have a black cleaner, and offences towards cleaners at customer companies. These incidents suggest that although there are no examples of discrimination at the workplaces, some cleaners do seem to have experiences of discrimination from customers.

2.5.2 Vulnerable work in cleaning

There is a striking difference between objective evaluations of work quality in cleaning and the experiences in the job that are being expressed by cleaners themselves.

Cleaning is hidden, devalued and socially stigmatized work that illustrates the reality of horizontal segregation. The new jobs generated by the sector offer low wages and part-time contracts, with atypical working hours and a high employee turnover. (Moreno Colom 2011b: 3)

While sector experts and representatives are concerned about the low job image in cleaning, cleaners themselves have a more pragmatic and, indeed, appreciating perspective on their work. (Sardadvar 2012: 35)

Many jobs are part time, have atypical working hours and are fragmented (workers have to commute between workplaces). Jobs appear relatively secure, however, partly due to the recruitment problems in the sector. While employment is reasonably secure, it is not always possible to get enough working hours, or to get them without having to work in split shifts.

Working conditions vary across countries. In Norway there are many full time jobs, wages are reasonable and technological development seems to be contributing to preventing physical strain in the job. In Spain on the other hand, work is more precarious: employment is less secure, wages are low and work is physically hard. In all countries there is a prevalence of part time work (often with too few working hours), risk of physical strain, high work intensity and lack of promotion opportunities and training options.

As is the case with most sectors with low barriers of entry, cleaning seems to prevent as well as sustain social vulnerability. Because of low barriers of entry, cleaning offers an opportunity for a segment of workers who are otherwise confined to either informal (domestic) work or unemployment/social security. So cleaning offers an opportunity for low skilled women and migrants without language skills for the country of residence. However, atypical working hours and lack of training options and career prospects also

¹⁸ It should be noted that this refers to the specific sample, the selection of which has been influenced by a number of factors, and is not representative of the general cleaning population.

sustain a vulnerable position, since cleaners to a large extent become 'trapped' in the sector. The only career option is to become first line manager or team leader, which apart from a very limited pay rise seems to offer worse working conditions in terms of constant availability and huge responsibilities. In addition, while part time work provides an opportunity for people with care responsibilities to combine family life with work (which makes cleaning attractive to women), for those without a social network/partner, working atypical hours can have severe consequences, in particular for the possibility of caring for children.

In addition to this, the general developments in the sector are also ambiguous. Increased fragmentation and intensification of work add to the physical and psychological strain in cleaning. While new technologies and small steps toward professionalization may to some extent prevent physical strain and increase the social status and recognition of cleaning.

2.6 Future aspirations and perspectives

Good health for themselves and their loved ones is, very consistently, the workers' greatest wish for the future. (Sardadvar 2012: 28)

As mentioned above, most cleaners express satisfaction with their job because it is a steady job and it provides them with a regular income. The fact that there are very limited career options does not stimulate career aspirations within the sector. In addition to this, many cleaners have already worked in other sectors and jobs. Many have chosen cleaning in spite of the low status because of the reasonable pay, and because the job also offers an opportunity to reconcile family and work life. Furthermore, there seem to be some differences in aspirations between the various groups in cleaning. Finnestrand proposes (2012a: 24) dividing cleaners into two groups. The first group consists of older women who have been in this business for 20-30 years. They started as part time workers when they had young children and have ended up as full time cleaners. This group like the job and the colleagues, and they are not very interested in changing anything (*ibid.*). The interviews with women from this group suggest they are balancing the benefits of career options with concern for family life when they consider whether or not to try to become a manager:

I was looking to become a supervisor, but they told me there's never a set time for going home, you'll have to be out all day. The conditions looked so bad that I preferred to have time for my daughter. (Female cleaner, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011b: 9)

The second group of cleaners consists of younger people, men and migrant and immigrant workers. They have often taken the certificate or say that they plan to take the certificate (Finnestrand 2012a: 24). Most of them argue that they want to have the certificate because this will increase their wage. According to Sardadvar, Finnestrand and Moreno Colom, this group of young employees, male employees and immigrants have a different attitude to work and are more inclined to think about future aspirations and changes. Some of these aspirations seem to be aimed at 'small' short term improvements, such as getting a drivers' licence, doing a special course in façade cleaning or switching

to building cleaning and maintenance. However, some have long term future aspirations. For example, the discourse of Spanish men often contains expectations of getting out of cleaning and (back) into construction, etc. Low wages are the main reason given for the desire for change, although as suggested by Moreno Colom, the symbolic importance of a traditionally female job may also influence the decision.

I've been here since the crisis, which I wish would end tomorrow. I'd go back to my trade straight away... On a construction site you work much harder. It's heavier work. But here I get the pay slips and I don't even open them. It makes me sick. I earn €830 a month. (Male cleaner, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011b: 10)

The increased fragmentation and downsizing taking place in some 'contract cleaning' seem to result in too few and too fragmented working hours for part time cleaners, as well as an increase in fixed-term contracts. Future aspirations for this group of cleaners are particularly aimed at a more secure employment situation, as well as increasing their income by getting more working hours.

In connection with future aspirations, there is some basis to presume that men have higher aims and trust more in their competences, as the differences between women and men in the sample in this regard are striking. But this would need further evidence. (Sardadvar 2012: 34). There may be many reasons for this. However, Moreno Colom offers an interesting example, highlighting the fact that gendered discourses of work tasks play a role, and indirectly suggesting that women need more encouragement in order to pursue the more attractive positions. She quotes a female cleaner who says:

... at the meetings of Company B they tell us, 'if any women want to specialize in windows, let me know and we'll give them a course'. And we all say: 'We're going to volunteer and earn more,' but no-one does. I don't know. I haven't thought much about being a window cleaner. I'm happy with my work, because that's what there is. We were encouraged at first, but then it was left in the air. (Female cleaner, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011b: 12)

Moreno Colom wonders why women are not expressing any interest in getting access to the more specialized posts that are filled by men, when apparently there are no objective impediments to this. She discusses the lack of aspiration among women and highlights the importance of what she calls 'social imagery' in sustaining gender differences. This social imagery consists of several interrelated gendered social spaces:

The analysis of qualifications, skills and promotion highlights once again the importance of social imagery in workers' capacity for agency. First, the difficulty of distinguishing the public and private spheres of cleaning contributes largely to the low qualifications and skills that are recognized when cleaning work is done for payment. There is still a misconception that everyone knows how to clean because they do it at home. The gender division of labour within the private sphere and the difficulties of cleaning within the public sphere are not taken into account. Both aspects reveal the existence of a hidden curriculum in cleaning work. Second, the poor job prospects of women employed in the sector seem to be due to the strong internalization of the role of housewives, which forces them to combine family

responsibilities and work. On the other hand, breadwinners have a clearly male career path that is also expressed in the traditionally feminized cleaning sector. (Moreno Colom 2011b: 12)

It follows from this that aspirations are not only linked to the prevailing factual alternatives but also to the normative discourses of social roles, work roles and public/private divisions. In this case, the association of public cleaning with 'household cleaning' makes it harder for women to imagine cleaning as a professional role different from the private and gendered role at home. Following this line of thought, the capacity of both men and women to aspire (see also the introduction above) is closely related to prevailing cultural discourses about private and public cleaning and female and male work tasks.

2.7 Summary and conclusion

For now I have a steady job, which, the way things are, is a great blessing. Second, I have good people around me. I've been working for many years. I get on really well with all of them. Third, the company pays me well. My personal life is fine, my kids are grown-up and I haven't got a mortgage. What more can I ask for? You're the ones who are going to suffer. Not me. I've already been through it. That's the way it is now. (Female cleaner, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011b: 21)

Cleaning has low status and wages are low. However, the cleaners interviewed are generally rather satisfied with their work – not because they necessarily enjoy cleaning, but because it is a steady job that gives them a regular income. Cleaning is 'a job' not a 'calling'. For most employees, working in cleaning is 'unplanned' and most have worked in other sectors earlier, but for various reasons have found themselves in a situation with few alternatives.

Cleaning is dominated by women, but there are also men working in the sector – partly as a response to the economic crisis in Europe. Work in cleaning is highly segregated according to gender. Women work in office cleaning and cleaning of facilities while men are occupied in 'niches', often working outside (e.g. window cleaning or façade cleaning). Men usually work full-time, while most women work part time and atypical hours. Men's wages are also higher than women's, and they are subject to less surveillance and control. In spite of the fact that men's cleaning niches, objectively speaking, are 'better' than women's, few women enter the male niches.

Although cleaning does not require any formal training and is regarded as 'unskilled', interviews reflect that cleaners have (and are expected to have) a range of 'hidden' skills in the job. These are related to the fact that they usually work alone and have to organize their own work and to represent the cleaning company at the site of the customer (e.g. need to be able to cultivate customer relations). In addition, cleaners are expected to be mobile, to coordinate their work between sites and be flexible, e.g. accept being moved around between sites.

Although, the interviews with cleaners indicate that they are quite satisfied with their work, work in cleaning is vulnerable because of low wages, lack of recognition, Occupational Health and Safety risks and increasingly insecure employment. In addition, viewing

vulnerability as a process highlights some groups as vulnerable and at risk of social exclusion or 'downdrift'. These are women (particularly single women), immigrants/ethnic minorities and older workers. Women, particularly single women with children, work part time and have a lower income than men, and single mothers also have problems reconciling work and caring responsibilities because of atypical working hours. The atypical working hours are also a problem for immigrants without family networks. Immigrants/ethnic minorities are also often 'overqualified', but have problems getting work in other sectors due to insufficient language skills. Immigrants are also 'newcomers' in cleaning, and because of a trend toward more insecure working conditions in contract cleaning (e.g. fixed term contracts with no guaranteed working hours) they end up with the most precarious jobs. Their inadequate language skills also make it difficult to negotiate better conditions. Finally, older workers are worried that they may not be able to stay in the job until retirement due to physical strain, as well as increasing work intensity and speed. The problem of physical strain and increasing intensity is regarded as problematic by older workers in all countries. Norway is the only country investigated that has managed to include special conditions for senior workers in CLAs.

The above quote covers the experiences of most cleaners very well. For many, cleaning is an option among few, but an option that secures a regular income and prevents social exclusion. It is experienced as a 'blessing' to have a steady job and nice colleagues. Consequently, only few cleaners have ideas about 'moving out' of cleaning – which seems related to the fact that cleaning is already regarded as a solution to 'blocked' opportunities elsewhere, related to either work or family life. Future aspirations for most cleaners are aimed at 'staying in the job' including finding a way of being able to work until retirement age. However, a small group of young cleaners, immigrants and men (not exclusive) have ideas about moving out of the sector. Only very few interviewees wish to pursue a career in cleaning, and the few options for promotion, such as first line manager, were not regarded as interesting by most cleaners. First line managers were seen as overworked, with huge responsibilities and constant availability, while only being paid slightly more than cleaners on the floor. The reluctance to pursue a career in cleaning seems closely related to the fact that available careers are not considered attractive, and becoming a first line manager will only add responsibility and working hours without significantly increasing wages.

3 ‘Craftsmanship and hard work’: Individual perspectives on work in construction

The following chapter presents findings on employee perspectives in construction from four countries, Belgium, Bulgaria, Hungary and Norway. The chapter has been compiled using country reports based on individual interviews about central work and life issues in construction work, viewed from the perspective of employees.

The first section in the chapter introduces construction as a sector and gives a basic overview of development trends in construction in Europe, as well as the positions of the four countries.

This will be followed in the second section by a presentation and analysis of employee experiences of their **quality of life and work**. This section introduces the most significant quality of work and quality of life issues (good and bad) from the perspective of employees, and presents an overview of these perspectives in Table 5. The most significant quality of work and life issues are then analysed by identifying persistent features in construction work that seem to be significant in determining experiences of work and life. These are: **economic crisis and deregulation; seasonal work, long working hours and commuting** and finally, **the impact of new technologies, work intensification and greening**.

The third section consists of an analysis of the characteristics of employees' agency by looking at **career trajectories, job crafting** and '**voice**'¹⁹ (ways of expressing interests and dissent). The aim of this section is to identify career patterns in construction and the choices that construction workers make, in order to identify the processes involved in creating job mobility and career options. The section also analyses what kind of influence construction workers have in their everyday work tasks and in terms of being able to negotiate better work and employment conditions.

The fourth section in the chapter focuses on **vulnerable groups** and **vulnerable work**. The overall aim is to understand the social significance of having a job in construction for the most vulnerable groups in Europe. The section gives an overview of the different social categories of employees working in the sector (women, migrants/ethnic minorities, unskilled/low-skilled, older workers, young workers or 'other') and possible differences and difficulties specifically related to certain groups. In addition, the section analyses how specific work features expose these groups to additional social risks, e.g. fixed term jobs, zero hour contracts, atypical working hours.

The final section provides an overview of the perception of future options for employees in construction by analysing their future aspirations and how they reflect the structural conditions in the labour market. This part of the analysis is conceptualized within the perspective of **sociocultural capacities to aspire** (Lewis & Giullari 2005; Appadurai 2004; Sen 1999). The chapter concludes by summarizing the main findings and identifying

¹⁹ Cf. Hirschman 1970.

and discussing how quality of work and life, and vulnerability, develop in the interaction between specific ways of organising work in construction, the prevailing cultural discourses (e.g. assumptions about gendering of work and work tasks) and individual agency.

3.1 Introduction to construction

According to Kirov (2011), construction is one of the most important sectors in Europe in terms of employment and the biggest industrial employer. However, the construction sector has been severely hit by the economic crisis and construction has been in decline for four years. There are large country differences in terms of the national level of growth. The decline is continuing in some countries, such as the UK, Belgium, Spain and Portugal, as well as most of the New Member States (e.g. Hungary and Bulgaria). Construction seems to be recovering in other countries, such as Germany, the Nordic countries and Poland. The **walqing** project has a particular focus on 'new and growing jobs' and has consequently focused on segments of the construction sector that are most likely to expand in the future. The main focus is on the impact of greening, e.g. sustainable buildings, energy saving design, etc. According to Kirov (2011), there has been a particular emphasis on green construction in Europe. Following this, we ask the question – to what extent does greening change individual experiences of quality of life and work?

However, green construction sites are based on existing structures and the prevailing quality of work and life issues therefore remain. In the construction sector (green as well as 'non-green') the main quality of work issues are within OHS, in particular issues of safety and the risk of accidents related to outdoor work, seasonal work and time pressure (Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012b; Markova 2012a). Employment is usually full time and mostly fixed-term due to seasonal work on the construction sites, where production and employment decrease during the winter (Kirov 2011). In a few countries, such as Hungary, contracts are open-ended in the formal economy (but a large proportion of construction work here is not registered at all) (Tóth & Hosszú 2012a).

Construction is a male dominated industry employing both skilled and unskilled workers. In some countries, e.g. Norway and to a lesser extent Belgium, there has been an increase in the employment of migrant workers, mainly from EU countries. Migrant workers and unskilled workers are reported to be more at risk to injury than skilled workers and workers belonging to the ethnic (and language) majority (Torvatn 2011). There are very few women employed in the construction sector and those that are mainly work in administrative jobs.

In the present report there is a particular focus on the individual experiences of quality of work and life in green construction, although other types of construction work are also included.

3.2 Method and material

Four countries: **Bulgaria**, **Belgium**, **Norway** and **Hungary** have made country reports based on individual interviews. The country reports include a total of 99 interviews with construction workers in the four countries.

The selection of interview persons has been made with the aim of covering the prevailing variation in the workforce in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, employment conditions and construction work tasks in each country. The selection also had a particular focus on identifying and interviewing the most vulnerable groups. Interviews in the construction sector have particularly focused on green construction sites, but have also included interviews with workers in more ‘traditional’ construction. In all four countries, interviews with construction workers are the primary focus in the analysis. However, some additional interviews have been held with managers, and these have been used to provide insight into the working environment, employment policies and expectations towards different social groups.

3.2.1 The country reports and interviews

The **Norwegian** report by Finnestrand (2012b) includes interviews with 30 construction workers. The interviews represent mainly male workers of Norwegian ethnicity. The majority are skilled and hold an apprentice certificate. Of the 30 interviewees, 28 are men and 2 are women. In addition, 25 of the interviewees had a Norwegian ethnic background, one a Swedish background, two a German background and two a Polish ethnic background. Most workers are full-time permanent employees. The interviews were carried out in two different companies, both private. Some workers from sub-contracting companies who worked on one of the sites were also interviewed. Some of the interviews were done in groups, with typically about 2-4 construction workers in each group. The groups were designed to mirror the general characteristics of the company (the distribution of gender, national origin and age).

The **Belgian** report by Pauwels, Ramioul & Van Peteghem (2012b) includes interviews with 14 workers, all male and all skilled. The majority of the interviewed workers have a Belgian ethnic background. The interviewees are employed in three private companies, all of which focus on green ecology and low energy solutions. The authors state that they do not view the chosen companies as representative for the construction sector, or even the green construction sector. The companies chosen should rather be considered ‘best practice companies’. However, the sector as a whole is less characterized by deregulation than in most other European countries. This means that some quality of work issues in construction, such as subcontracting and workers from Eastern Europe are not very prevalent issues in the Belgian interviews. Finally, since the interviews were held with employees working in ‘best practice’ work places in the green construction sector, Pauwels, Ramioul & Van Peteghem state that the most vulnerable workers (who often work in small, less regulated companies) are not represented in the study.

The **Bulgarian** report by Markova (2012a) is based on 16 interviews with construction workers working in four different construction companies. All the interviewees were men,

the majority of whom are ethnically Bulgarian. The position of general worker in construction does not require any specific qualifications, but among the people working in that position there are some ethnic Bulgarians with tertiary education, and some of them even have additional qualifications and skills from other sectors. The interviewees can be categorised as follows: four general workers with no formal skills; five workers specialised in basic construction works, two workers specialised in plumbing, one mechanic, and four workers specialized in finishing and decoration activities. Regarding ethnicity, 12 men with a Bulgarian ethnic background, three with a Roma background and one with a Turkish background were interviewed.

The **Hungarian** report by Tóth & Hosszú (2012b) is based on 20 interviews with construction workers. No specific information about the selection of interview persons is provided in the report.

3.3 Construction workers' perceptions of work and life: Divided by the crisis

Table 5: Perceptions of quality of work and life in construction²⁰

QoW and QoL issues perceived by construction workers	Belgium	Bulgaria	Hungary	Norway
QoL	Sufficient wages and income security	Irregular incomes and work	Very long working hours and insecure work and income <i>'We are deeply underpaid'</i>	Satisfaction with wages and working hours ²¹
Crisis and Deregulation of employment and work	Not seriously affecting the green construction sites investigated	Lack of compliance with and enforcement of labour market regulation, e.g. lack of social payments by employer	Increasing self-employment and/or informal employment	Increasing use of temp agencies and migrant workers on fixed-term contracts
Employment security	Full time employment and a high degree of employment security. (Temp agencies are not active in this part of the sector) ²²	Very insecure employment	Very insecure employment. Few options for permanent employment	Full time employment. Jobs perceived as secure by core workers – but as insecure by migrant workers

²⁰ The table shows the work and life issues that are perceived as the most significant and the various forms they take in the four countries, in order to show both prevalence and variation. Empty boxes mean that the topic is not mentioned in the reports as a significant issue for construction workers.

²¹ We only have very limited information about how migrant workers experience their work situation and how they perceive their work and life quality.

²² It should be noted that the cases chosen offer 'better' employment contracts than those prevailing in the Belgian construction sector as a whole.

Commuting	Some commuting. Not long distances, but time-consuming due to traffic jams	Some workers commute very long distances to the big cities	Workers travel far to get work	
Deskilling and multiskilling	Some degree of deskilling because of increased standardization	Skilled workers in unskilled employment <i>'I am specialised in shuttering and casing but right now I am doing terracotta and faience'</i>	Workers are expected to perform multiple functions	
Stress and increasing intensity and time pressure	More intense and stressful work			Increasing experience of work being stressful <i>you have to finish before you start</i>
Greening and sustainability – impact on work	Greening has impacts, but the main changes in quality of work are due to general changes, e.g. prefabrication	Greening is not influencing working conditions significantly	Greening is not very influential	Does not have a significant impact on work
Irregular /unknown working hours	Most have regular working hours	Very irregular employment and work	Very irregular employment (informal)	Regular working hours
Increasing standardization	Some workers find work more monotonous and boring	Very high degree of standardization		Work has become more standardized
Physical work environment	Hard physical work	Very hard work	Hard physical work	Some workers try to find jobs in other sectors because of their health
Length of working day	Long working days due to commuting time and frequent overtime	Long working hours	Sometimes very long periods and days of work without rest	Occasional long working days
Psychological work environment problems			Job and income insecurity is stressful	Subcontractors have stressful work and job insecurity is stressful

3.3.1 Perceptions of construction work: Craftsmanship and hard work

Firstly, it must be noted that there are huge differences in both the perceptions of work and in de facto work and employment conditions between the four countries. The majority of Norwegian and Belgian construction workers have a reasonably secure job, they perceive their income as reasonable and although they note that work has intensified and that they may not be able to keep it up until retirement age, they are more or less satisfied with their work. (The exception is the increasing number of migrant workers in Norway, who are hired via temp agencies and employed on fixed term contracts.) In contrast, Hungarian and Bulgarian construction workers have a much more difficult work situation,

partly due to the ‘decentralization’ and ‘deregulation’ of the sector since the 1990’s and partly to the present economic crisis, which has led to dismissals and bankruptcies and a general decline in construction. The workers interviewed from Bulgaria and Hungary struggle for survival, either by working very long hours for long periods without breaks and holidays in their home countries – or by travelling abroad for longer periods to work on construction sites in Austria, Germany or elsewhere in Europe. Whereas Belgians and Norwegians worry about physically being able to handle the job until retirement age, Bulgarians and Hungarians worry about earning enough money to get through the winter. In addition, because a large share of construction work in Bulgaria and Hungary is unregistered, construction workers also expect very low retirement pensions.

As a consequence of these different conditions, workers in the two country groups have rather different work and employment concerns. Hungarians and Bulgarians focus on finding and keeping work as well as securing sufficient income. Belgians in particular, but also Norwegian construction workers, are more concerned with changes in the production process, e.g. work becoming less varied because of prefabrication and standardization and resultant ‘deskilling’, as well as work becoming more stressful. In sum, Hungarians and Bulgarians are concerned with getting enough work and a sufficient income, while Norwegians and Belgians have permanent jobs and are therefore more concerned with the current trends in the job. The following quotes from Norway and Hungary illustrate the difference:

Generally, construction work in Norway is perceived as secure work by the construction workers, meaning that skilled workers within the sector don’t worry they will lose their job. Even during the financial crisis in 2008-2009, construction work was still perceived as quite safe. However, workers hired through employment agencies – usually migrant workers – are the first to go when the market is tough, leaving the permanent employees – usually Norwegian workers – in a quite safe position. (Finnestrand 2012b: 14)

According to Tóth & Hosszú (2012b) employment in Hungary is very different from this. Most workers interviewed have experienced a shift from permanent employment to unemployment, casual employment or self-employment:

They (construction workers) work completely informally without any registration and written contract and/or they may have a fixed term part-time contract, sometimes 4 hours a day...and are paid social contributions accordingly... and/or they are self-employed (have their own small undertakings, micro-enterprises) and they are ‘employed’ as subcontractors based on civil rights and not as employees based on the labour code. They are typically at the end of the subcontractor chain: the last one, who actually does the work (Tóth & Hosszú 2012b: 3)

3.3.2 Quality of life in construction: A heterogeneous picture

The majority of Norwegian and Belgian construction workers are relatively satisfied with their jobs and life. They are reasonably satisfied with wages and they are not very concerned about the risk of unemployment. The core workers in Norway are also

reasonably satisfied with their income. The interviewees were generally satisfied with the wage level in the sector (Finnestrånd 2012b: 4).

Migrant workers in Norway also express a certain degree of satisfaction in spite of their more insecure employment situation, which may be related to the relatively favourable situation in Norway compared with the situation in their home countries (Poland or other NMS).

The migrant workers in this study often had other reasons to work in this sector. Generally, migrant workers were satisfied with the work situation, and often compared it with the work situation they used to have in their country of origin. They claim that particularly the wages and working hours are much better in Norwegian construction than for instance in Polish or German construction (where they have experience), and most of them have chosen to eventually bring their family to live in Norway permanently. (Finnestrånd 2012b: 33)

However, the long working days in the Belgian construction business are generally seen as one of the major drawbacks of the sector.

In contrast, workers in Hungarian and Bulgarian construction are facing very difficult times, including a high risk of unemployment. It is difficult for companies to find investors, and if they fail all workers will be dismissed. Both the Bulgarian and Hungarian interviews point towards a general insecurity, not only in retaining employment but also in getting paid for the work done, since payments are frequently delayed and sometimes defaulted on.

This year I left my job, and I have since had five different jobs. But they did not always pay me. They still owe me money. And I could not do too much. What I can I do? Beat them up? Kill them? That does not help me. I end up in worse situation. (Construction worker, Hungary, quoted in Tóth & Hosszú 2012a: 16)

In our sector this is one of the utmost priorities of all workers and employees in building and construction. We want a certain degree of security. ... Construction workers do not feel secure; they do not have the necessary level of certainty. We do not know what is going to happen to us once we finish at a given site, and we also lack security with regard to what is going to happen when we retire. This is because the unpaid leave that we frequently take does not count towards retirement benefits. (Casing and shuttering worker, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova 2012a: 15)

As noted in the quote above, undeclared work also puts workers at risk of poverty in old age, because of the failure to make social security and pension payments. Finally, it should be mentioned that both in Bulgaria and in Hungary, wages are experienced as quite low, leading to poverty for some:

The money that I make is just enough so that we do not starve, but that is it. We live in poverty. I try to do everything possible for the family, you know. (General worker, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova 2012a: 41)

3.3.3 Quality of work: Craftsmanship, hard work and team work

Construction workers are satisfied with working in the sector and they cannot imagine working in any other kind of job. They appreciate the collective character of the work, the fact that it is outdoors, and the craftsmanship involved. However, the work is also presented as hard, and older workers in particular are worried about being able to last in the sector until retirement age. Although workers generally do not worry about safety risks (which are high in the sector), their stories reveal the strenuous side of the job, e.g. long working hours and fatigue.

Construction is still a very physical job with important health risks. Most (construction workers) talk about lower back problems as one of the downsides that can hardly be avoided in this line of work. (Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012b: 47)

Generally, the role of the safety representative has become the most important form of representative participation in the construction sector. In Norway, safety representatives are mandatory for all enterprises with more than ten employees. (Finnstrand 2012b: 25)

Both quotes indicate that health and safety issues play a central role in the organization of construction sites. Safety issues did not seem to worry individual employees greatly and were scarcely mentioned in the interviews, although they do acknowledge that work is hard and that they are sometimes exhausted when they get home. Workers usually meet at the site early in the morning and work full time – sometimes much more than normal full time hours.

In terms of work/life balance, we notice how long working days with little flexibility also seem to be common in green construction. Full time work seems to be the standard in the construction industry, with part time workers being the exception. Workers in the construction industry can legally work extra time and be paid for it. There is a beneficial rule that makes it possible for them to work overtime. On average these workers work up to 9 hours a day. (Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012b: 54)

Finally, many construction workers had to commute to distant locations to get work. This is characteristic of construction work in all four countries. In Hungary and Bulgaria in particular, the commuting is expensive and construction workers try to reduce the cost by forming 2-4 person teams that work and commute together and share the cost of commuting (Tóth & Hosszú 2012a: 10). The collective aspect of the work is also highly valued in Norway and Belgium, and workers often meet up with their colleagues after work and/or arrive very early in the morning to play cards and drink coffee with colleagues (Finnstrand 2012b).

3.4 Special quality of work related features of construction work

3.4.1 Economic crisis and deregulation of construction work

As mentioned above, the crisis has hit hard in Bulgaria and Hungary.

These days there are so many people I know who have higher education and very good qualifications and still cannot find a job, and do whatever work they can find. ... They are unable to find the jobs they have studied for – sometimes for four or five years – so they put up with whatever employment they can get at the moment. For the last several years it is not only our country that has been in deep crisis, the entire global economy has been in a recession. (General worker, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova 2012a: 11-12)

Construction workers in Bulgaria and Hungary have experienced a significant change in employment and working conditions, in particular related to deregulation of the sector, including decreasing employment opportunities and the increasing use of subcontractors and 'self-employment'. Much of the work also remains informal and a large proportion of 'salaries' therefore do not contribute to social security and/or old age pensions.

The reduced volumes of construction work resulting from the economic crisis are leading to changes in work organisation patterns depending on the number and complexity of the construction sites. These processes influence the activities performed by the various categories of workers and generally lead to multiskilling, multifunctioning and broad specialisation. The specialised groups of construction workers performing concrete operations and tasks are replaced more and more often by complex groups of workers that perform a wide variety of activities. (Markova 2012a: 12)

Tóth & Hosszú (2012b) suggest the following changes in work organisation for Hungary following the crisis:

- Workers work informally without a written contract
- Workers get a fixed term contract for a few hours a day, which includes social payments and then work the rest of their working hours 'informally'
- Workers are self-employed, e.g. have micro-enterprises and work as subcontractors, which also means that the workplace is not responsible for working conditions, employment contracts, pensions, etc.

The insecurity of employment and in particular its informal character make workers exposed to the risk of not getting paid, and several construction workers in Hungary had experienced working for various periods of time without eventually being paid. This insecurity makes social networks very important, and workers prefer to work for employers/contractors with whom they have some prior knowledge or social relationship (Tóth & Hosszú 2012a: 3). Those who have their own micro-enterprises and try to get work as subcontractors face competition from workers entirely within the black economy who do not declare their wages and can subsequently afford to work for a lower price.

However, it is not only in Hungary and Bulgaria that a process of deregulation is taking place. In Norway there is also a tendency to hire temp (migrant) workers either as a supplement too or even in place of permanent full time (native Norwegian) construction workers. Although the Norwegian workers are not yet worried about losing their work, they do realize that many employers prefer to hire temp workers, and at most construction sites there are a large proportion of migrant temp workers.

Researcher: 'Are many people afraid of losing their jobs?'

F: 'Yes, that's the situation. There is no use in denying it. You do not feel safe anymore, no'.

Researcher: 'Is it the sector as a whole, or just the company which is like this right now?'

F: 'It is the company that is like this right now. They want the Poles in order to save money'. (Construction worker, Norway, quoted in Finnestrand 2012b: 30)

The Belgian construction workers seem to be less influenced by the economic crisis and feel quite secure in their jobs. The workers interviewed were specialized in green construction, and contrary to the other three countries, they were experiencing recruitment problems rather than unemployment, and consequently did not worry about losing their jobs.

Finally, in particular in Bulgaria and Hungary, the crisis and employers' reluctance to employ workers on permanent contracts (or even on full time fixed-term employment) have resulted in two significant trends. First, construction sites are increasingly operated by a small group of 'core workers' who are expected to perform a range of different work tasks in addition to their original area of apprenticeship. Second, the unskilled work is increasingly being performed by skilled workers who cannot find 'skilled' work.

With the demise of big firms, and the crumbling of job demarcation based on skill, the nature of labour market has profoundly changed. Save a few dedicated skills, the key condition of acquiring work became the condition of being multi-skilled and able to do various types of work. The ability to learn more than one work process, and to be multi-skilled and carry out a variety of tasks, is one of the key conditions for finding work in the industry. (Tóth & Hosszú 2012a: 14)

These days, lots of people, including friends and acquaintances of mine, do whatever work they can lay their hands on. ... So many people cannot find the jobs they have studied for. Some of them have studied four or five years to obtain a high degree and yet there is no suitable employment for them, so they do whatever work they can find. For the last several years, not only Bulgaria, but the entire world has been in economic crises. (General worker, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova 2012a: 4)

3.4.2 Work organization in construction: Seasonal work, long working hours and commuting

Construction work is hard work. It is also seasonal work, as construction sites are usually not operational during the winter.

I have to put away savings every month. In this trade, you need to have savings. When there is work, you can make money, but then the [winter] months follow where you do not have work. (...) There is no [summer] holiday in construction. But one has to endure December, January, February and even March, when there is no work or very little. If there is work, there is work. But unfortunately during the winter months we have to wait for orders. (Construction worker, Hungary, quoted in Tóth & Hosszú 2012a: 9)

These features result in periods of rather intensive work with long working hours, and sometimes long periods of work without holidays. This 'imbalance' in work load has furthermore been accentuated due to the economic crisis:

Sometimes they ask us to work on Saturdays and Sundays and do not pay the proper rates for that (50 % or 100% loading). We have certain performance goals. It is like that everywhere, we are not the only ones. ... Some of us are due certain amounts that the employer owes. ... But people feel insecure. They are afraid that if they insist, they might lose their jobs. That is why they prefer to remain silent. I do not judge them though. If they start demanding their rights they may lose their jobs. (Construction worker, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova 2012a: 46-47)

I got work for a half year in Budapest, in the construction of an office building. I had to work 15 hours a day. (Construction worker, Hungary, quoted in Tóth & Hosszú 2012a: 7)

We had to rush. Only after 45 days' continuous work did they allow me to rest for 2 days. [...] I did make 300,000 HUF a month net, as they provided meals and accommodation as well. I did like that work, because I did not have time to spend my salary, and they paid me well. But it was very hard work, 350-380 hours per a month. I don't know how I was able to work through this period. At the end I was so tired. Both physically and mentally. My mind was completely numb. (Construction worker, Hungary, quoted in Tóth & Hosszú 2012a: 7).

Finally, commuting to the construction sites should be mentioned as a significant factor influencing both quality of work and life for construction workers. In all countries there is some commuting to and from construction sites. In Belgium and Norway this seems to be experienced as reasonable by construction workers (although in Belgium, traffic jams are an increasing problem), whereas in Hungary and Bulgaria commuting adds additional strain because of expense, as well as prolonging working hours.

3.4.3 'You have to finish before you start': New trends in green construction: standardization, intensification of work and the implication of 'greening'

Whereas the economic crisis, employment and income insecurity and generally hard work (e.g. long periods of work) characterize the situation in Bulgaria and Hungary, a set of different features seem to influence work and life for construction workers in Norway and Belgium. In these two countries new technologies such as pre-fabrication of roofs, are resulting in increased standardization of work. In addition, new work processes and new

piece rates are leading to work intensification and stress. Finally, greening seems to be inspiring some new work processes, but does not significantly alter work organisation or experiences of work and life quality.

In the Belgian interviews workers cited the increasing use of prefabricated building blocks and a general standardization of work as making work more monotonous and boring. The use of prefabricated roofs, for example, transforms work from skilled manual labour to assembling work:

R: In the beginning we received many complaints about that, from the workers. I prefer that too. Well, you are a carpenter and you want to use a hammer.
(Construction worker, Belgium, quoted in Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012b: 20)

Although prefabrication does not appear to be very prevalent in the other three countries, the tendency to standardize work is in accordance with the experiences of Bulgarian and Hungarian workers, as mentioned above. However, the Norwegian interviews contrast this by emphasizing the great variety of work in construction. Standardization is therefore not the only development trend.

Norwegian and Belgian construction workers are also experiencing a clear development towards increased intensification of work. This is not only a small increase. Intensification is experienced as significant and as contributing to stress and fatigue.

Earlier, you had a bit more time, now you have to finish before you start.
(Construction worker, Norway, quoted in Finnestrand 2012b: 16)

The problem to me is that we don't have the time anymore. It is so busy that they don't take the time to do this training. Before, it was different. In the winter period, when the weather was bad, we did some training. But that is no longer the case.
(Construction worker, Belgium, quoted in Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012b: 10)

Researcher: 'How has carpentry changed during the years you have worked as carpenters?'

W: 'More stress'.

Researcher: 'Can you elaborate on that?'

W: 'It's the time issue. These are crazy times. I'm extremely stressed when I get home. Both of us work in relatively good teams, and we have a piece rate wage system. Our wages are based on how well we perform. We are running around'.

Æ: 'We have to – there will not be any money otherwise'.

W: 'If I have to go to the toilet I think; I can take this piece with me upstairs instead of having to walk upstairs and downstairs again'. (Construction workers, Norway, quoted in Finnestrand 2012b: 16)

Increased intensification of work also characterizes work in Hungary and Bulgaria, where workers are forced to work for long periods and have very long working days in order to finish work in time. However, in Norway and Belgium intensification is usually confined to the scheduled working hours.

Finally, the interviewed workers all work in 'green' construction. The question is to what extent this changes or shapes work in significant ways. The great variety in working conditions and experiences between the countries makes it difficult to see a clear picture. However, none of the interviewees explicitly or implicitly points towards greening in itself as a significant factor in shaping employment and work. As indicated in the following Belgian interview:

I: Does it make a difference for you as a carpenter compared to the non-green sector?

R: In terms of material choice for insulation materials, it does... it is a different way of working. But in and of itself...

I: You don't need specific competences?

R: No, not really. But it is different materials and applications. Every type of material is used in a different way. (Construction worker, Belgium, quoted in Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012b: 11)

Pauwels, Ramioul & Van Peteghem conclude based on the Belgium interviews that although techniques in green construction do differ because of the materials used, there are only incremental innovations and they do not require different qualifications and work processes compared to more traditional construction work. This finding fits the patterns of work processes in the other three countries as well, viewed from the interviews with workers. The driving factors in terms of employment conditions, work organisation and work environment are crisis/deregulation (Hungary, Bulgaria), technological developments (pre-fabrication, Belgium) and increased focus on efficiency, for example via the piece rate system, which pressures work performance (Norway).

3.5 Career trajectories, job crafting and 'voice' in construction work

We now turn to the third section of the chapter – an analysis of the characteristics of employees' agency by looking at **career trajectories**, **job crafting** and '**voice**'. The aim of this analysis is, as mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, to understand the kind of employment mobility and careers that construction workers pursue in order to identify the processes involved in creating job mobility and career options. The section also analyses the kinds of influence construction workers have in their everyday work and what channels they perceive that they have for negotiating better conditions.

3.5.1 Career trajectories and career paths

'I will die as a painter': Skilled workers' commitment – and unskilled workers' opportunities

Construction workers' career trajectories differ between countries and according to whether workers are skilled or unskilled. However, most construction workers do regard construction as their labour market, have worked in construction in many years and do not contemplate shifting to other sectors.

Very few of the interviewees have worked other places than in the construction sector. The older generation started typically as site labourers, and ended up in permanent positions as construction workers. Some of them have later completed a certificate of apprenticeship...The younger generation often started as apprentices and have later been offered a permanent position in the company. (Finnestrand 2012b: 18)

Most of the workers we spoke to have had previous working experience in construction. They started out either as masons or as carpenters. Especially those who worked at the level of team leaders had made a career within the industry. (Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012b: 21)

In particular, the skilled workers have always worked in construction and they have also developed their work identity as closely related to working in construction and being a 'craftsman'.

I do like the work – it is nice to see the finished result. And it is good to feel that customers appreciate your work. We have a lot of responsibility, since we are the final stage. We have to correct the work of everybody else before us, to make the walls look nice. (...) I don't like it if the workers after me destroy my work²³. Even worse if they don't pay me after finishing the work²⁴. But I love this work. I have been raised in this. I could not do anything else, and I will die as a painter. (Skilled construction worker, Hungary, quoted in Tóth & Hosszú 2012a: 34)

The unskilled workers, in particular in countries hit by the economic crisis, have more varied career trajectories, and some of them have turned to construction because of a lack of opportunities in other sectors.

I used to work as a bartender and as a waiter. I also worked in a truck repair station because I have graduated from a technical school and my profile is internal combustion engines. I worked in a small company that produced ice-cream. I was responsible for marketing and delivery – I supplied ice-cream to shops, cafes, and restaurants with a special van. ... Since March 2008 I have worked for my present employer. I am here thanks to my father... My father worked for this company and he brought me here in 2008 and I am still employed here. (Unskilled construction worker, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova 2012a: 21)

The Bulgarian and Hungarian workers' career trajectories reflect, furthermore, the system change from state-owned to private construction companies and the recent economic crisis and deregulation of the sector.

²³ According to Tóth & Hosszú (2012a), this is a typical complaint which is the consequence using a network of subcontractors by a general contractor. It frequently occurs that one subcontractor does not pay attention to the work of the other subcontractor.

²⁴ According to Tóth & Hosszú (2012a), this is a reference to fraudulent default by the general contractor or an excessive delay in payment.

I have worked up until the system-change at one construction firm, part of an agriculture cooperative, as a painter. The main task was painting pharmacies in the county. I thought I would stay there until retirement. But when the system-change came, the cooperative was dissolved and I was fired. I was unemployed for one year. Since then I have been working for various firms. I have been working in foreign countries, for example in Austria. Then I returned and set up my own firm. I became a self-employed entrepreneur in the construction industry. But I gave it up and am now trying to get work. (Construction worker, Hungary, quoted in Tóth & Hosszú 2012a: 5)

Migrant workers constitute a third group of employees and have different career trajectories. We do not have specific information about migrants' career trajectories before they entered their present employment in construction, but according to Finnestrand, they started their career at the Norwegian building sites by working as temporary workers hired via a temp agency, and some were then eventually offered a more permanent position by the construction company (see Finnestrand 2012b: 18).

Summing up, these trajectories not surprisingly reflect the general changes within the construction industry. Some are 'craftsmen' and have always worked in the industry, but the accounts also reflect the increasing inflow of unskilled workers from other sectors, primarily employed in temporary jobs. Finally, the trajectories reveal the changing nature of employment, whereby it is increasingly difficult to get a permanent position within one's area of specialization and where in Hungary and Bulgaria in particular, skilled workers have to work in temporary positions and/or develop more general skills.

3.5.2 Skills requirements and career options

Skills requirements – tendencies in green construction

The skills requirements in constructions vary. Skilled workers obviously need to have an apprenticeship in the particular area of specialization, whereas unskilled workers (called general workers in Bulgaria) can start working without any formal training. Some unskilled workers later get an apprenticeship.

Recent development trends have influenced skills requirements in various ways. The Belgian interviews reveal an increased focus on 'on the job' training, because many of the skills required in green construction cannot be learned during formal training/at schools.

The techniques and skills they require are sometimes quite specific to the company, meaning they cannot be acquired elsewhere outside of the company. They are developed in-house and thus need to be acquired within the company. For specific jobs, such as wood frame construction, there is no training in school in the techniques they use on the work floor. Modern carpenters that finish school know how to work with sophisticated CNC machines, but it does not prepare them for this specific job. The specific knowledge concerning the materials used is not taught in schools either. (Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012b: 10)

Training on the job therefore ‘overrules’ formal qualifications/apprenticeships to some extent. A similar trend can be seen in Hungary, but for different reasons. Here a shift in formal requirements seems to be related to the disintegration of larger companies and the ‘marketization’ of construction (Tóth & Hosszú 2012a: 10). Formal education and continuous training courses are being replaced by an evaluation of workers’ competencies based on the knowledge of their practical skills via social networks and practical work experience.

In addition, the increasing standardization and the increased use of prefabricated building units in the Belgian examples also sustains ‘deskilling’ by changing ‘craftsmanship’ into ‘assembling’. Furthermore, this work can be performed by unskilled workers instead of carpenters, etc.

However, the Bulgarian and Hungarian interviews reveal a development towards ‘over qualification’, due to unemployment and insecure employment, with a number of skilled workers being forced to work in unskilled positions. Because of the crisis, there is a tendency in some countries to employ skilled workers in unskilled positions, and to seek ‘multi-skilled’ workers who can perform a range of different work tasks:

The transfer of workers from one stage of construction to another is a common practice in the investigated companies, in order to provide better workforce flexibility and to compensate for the reduced numbers of employees. Among the workers we interviewed there are rough construction specialists who after finalising this stage of the construction and building process start working on finishing operations. Two of the interviewed workers are specialised in water and sewage systems and installations, but they also work on roof construction and internal and external insulation, and do some of the finishing construction works. (Markova 2012a: 6)

Following the crisis, experience and knowledge of being able to carry out the work have to some extent replaced the formal adherence to certification of skills.

There are less and less skilled workers. There is no state-owned company which cares about training any more. And the private entrepreneurs do not care about training their employees. There is no time and no money for training. I do not know how the future will be. Maybe one will have to pay entrepreneurs to provide training for youth. (Construction worker, Hungary, quoted in Tóth & Hosszú 2012a: 12)

However, interviewees in Hungary and Bulgaria also point to an increased requirement for ‘multi-skills’ rather than specialization. Because of a general shrinking of the labour force at construction sites, workers are required to have several skills.

There is no strict demarcation of work [based on skill or training]. One needs to do all kinds of work that arises. Of course, we know who is better at what, and it is sometimes possible to specialise in what I know best, and the same for my colleagues. However, I have to do all kinds of work if nobody else is there. (Construction worker, Hungary, quoted in Tóth & Hosszú 2012a: 14)

This development has led to new career paths for those without formal apprenticeship certificates, but also to fierce competition among skilled and ‘unskilled’²⁵ workers and lower wages.

Career options in construction

The career options in construction differ considerably between Norway and Belgium, and Bulgaria and Hungary. The more stable situation in Norway and Belgium also offers more career opportunities both vertically and horizontally. Job changes in Bulgaria and Hungary seem to be less predictable, and in a deregulated market it is difficult to think in terms of anything like a planned career path.

However, career opportunities are rather limited in all countries. The Belgian and Norwegian interviews reveal that it is possible to become a team leader, but that the number of such positions is limited. In addition, as indicated below, vertical career moves and the possibility of pursuing a career outside the company are not seen as purely positive by the workers:

Not everyone in the construction industry wants to make a career move. Some even regret moving from a blue-collar job to a white-collar job. They miss the manual labour aspect of the job. Some even explicitly say they are happy to be able to work with their hands and would love to return to the blue-collar job. (Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012b: 29)

How I see my career options? Well, I am very happy with the way the manager treats me. He has given me many opportunities. I have followed two training programmes up until now. He has allowed me to work in the workshop – that is training in and of itself. I don't know what the future will bring. I don't know to what degree I will stay here in the years to come, but I want to stay for a long time. If only out of loyalty towards P. (Construction worker, Belgium, quoted in Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012b: 31)

Both the Norwegian and the Belgian interviews also suggest, perhaps not surprisingly, that the availability of career paths partly depends on the size of the company, where larger companies offer more career opportunities than small construction companies. But even in these larger companies, career prospects for blue-collar workers are limited to the job of team leader. The level above (project manager) used to be accessible as well in the past, but due to the introduction of new (green) technologies and the necessity of managerial and communicative skills, this hierarchical level is now reserved for high level technicians.

In Bulgaria and Hungary it is more difficult to talk about job changes as part of ‘a career’, because of the high degree of fragmentation and deregulation as well as the high level of

²⁵ Workers in unskilled positions are not without skills and hence are not unskilled. In order to distinguish them from workers with formal certificates of apprenticeship, however, we use the term unskilled in brackets.

unemployment. In these two countries, workers seem to pursue work rather than a career, and both skilled and ‘unskilled’ workers simply try to survive in a very uncertain labour market.

One way of illustrating the difference is by looking at the role and status of ‘self-employment’. Whereas starting one’s own company is viewed as a vertical career move by Belgian construction workers, Bulgarian and Hungarian workers are forced to work as ‘self-employed’ in order to get any work at all, and thus regard this as ‘second best’ compared with being employed in a company.

A possible career move in construction for experienced workers is becoming self-employed and working for themselves. Especially team leaders who have practical working experience in working with people below them are in a good position to make this transition. (Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012b: 29)

I would immediately end my small business if there was a normal workplace available. I have worked in Germany – we went home on Friday at 1 pm and returned to work on Monday at 7 am. In between we had a good rest. There was a normal workplace, without hassle. I envy this [...] If I could work for around 300,000 HUF in salary I would return immediately. (Construction worker, Hungary, quoted in Tóth & Hosszú 2012a: 5)

3.5.3 Job crafting

According to Berg, Dutton & Wrzesniewski (2010) and Wrzesniewski & Dutton (2001), job crafting can be understood as the ways employees redesign their jobs, either by altering the boundaries of work (e.g. taking on additional tasks or fewer tasks), changing the ways of performing tasks, changing the social relationships they are involved in at work or changing their perception of the job (cognitive job crafting) to emphasize certain aspects rather than others.

In all four countries, employees in construction experience rather limited scope for agency and discretion in work, although there is some variation.

There is an established pattern or algorithm that we need to follow – first you do that, second that and third that. You cannot start at the middle and move on. For example, you might feel that it would be better to start with the third floor and then come back to the second, and then go to the fourth. You cannot do that, do you understand what I am saying? There is a strict sequence that you need to follow – first, second, third and so on ... (Plumber, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova 2012a: 31)

Job crafting is not particularly evident among construction workers in Norway. When construction workers talk about their job and job tasks, they emphasize that the working day is varied. They do many different tasks during the working day. However, all the tasks are directly connected to construction itself and don’t indicate any job crafting beyond tasks you would expect in construction work. (Finnestrånd 2012b: 25)

Markova, moreover, mentions what she terms a kind of paradox related to the development of more 'green' construction sites, because these sites seem to offer the most standardized work processes and hence allow for very little job crafting and discretion. Traditional construction sites seem to leave more room for workers' own judgement and initiative (Markova 2012a: 30). Pauwels, Ramioul & Van Peteghem (2012b) also find that 'green' construction does not in itself promote more varied work processes or a more scope for worker discretion.

Despite the rather limited scope for job crafting, the interviews do reveal different attempts from workers to shape their own work. These attempts seem to centre around the fact that construction workers need to make judgements based on their skills, and the fact that unforeseen things may happen:

Well, it depends on the type of job. You can always be creative about your job and craft it, but it also depends on the concrete situation, on the parameters of the concrete task. Very often you have a task you need to complete, but as you go about it something occurs that you need to resolve as you go. Sometimes you simply cannot wait for additional instructions... (Construction worker, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova 2012a: 31)

Another rather visible example of job crafting was found among the Norwegian construction workers, who all mentioned that they needed to do a lot of planning ahead in their work – thus that organizing and planning was an important work task:

All the Norwegian construction workers who had permanent employment in a construction company emphasized that they did a lot of planning on the construction site. As part of being a good carpenter, the carpenters claimed that they had to be 'ahead' of all tasks in order to be efficient. (Finnestrand 2012b: 26)

Finally, although this can be regarded as an exit from rather than agency on the site, a number of Hungarian and Bulgarian workers opt to migrate and work in other European countries. This can also be viewed in a broader sense as crafting one's working life (see Tóth & Hosszú 2012a: 35).

3.5.4 Voice and influence in construction: A heterogeneous picture

Table 6: Employee use of unions

Countries	Belgium	Bulgaria	Hungary	Norway
Construction workers' use of and experiences with unions	Wages and job security are well covered by (cross)-sector collective bargaining. (Limited joint consultation within construction companies).	There were no trade union organisations in the companies even if CLA exists at branch level	None of the interviewees were members of a union and unions were not visible at the work sites	The majority of workers were union members and union representatives were visible. Workers did not use unions actively.

Construction is regulated by collective agreements in Belgium and Norway, but not in Bulgaria and Hungary.

In Belgium and Norway, the influence of unions has resulted in a highly regulated labour market with a high degree of full time work, with open ended contracts and reasonable wages. In Norway in particular, safety representatives are very visible and have the authority to stop work if they identify safety risks. However, unions do not appear to be very active in resolving what Finnestrand calls the 'great divide' between migrants and native Norwegian workers.

A completely different situation in terms of collective representation is to be found in Hungary and Bulgaria, where unions are completely absent from the construction sites.

There are no trade union organisations in the investigated companies; and there is no other formal channel of 'voice' or representation for the employees. All issues that arise are resolved by personal interaction, most often by employees addressing their line managers. (Markova 2012a: 32)

Tóth & Hosszú explain that none of the interviewees were union members. In addition, none of the interviewees had any knowledge about unions. Despite the fact that many of them were very critical towards their employers (e.g. felt that they were underpaid and overworked), they did not venture any ideas about seeking influence politically via unions:

Nonetheless, despite the telling statements about the difficult life, hard and underpaid work, the bitter opinions and the prospect of a bleak future, none of the interviewed workers had any intention of changing their situation through political action or organised representation. Each of our interviewees hoped for an 'individual' solution to the pressing problems of life. They trusted themselves to be able to work well, or at least hoped that their employer would be correct, or their firms would stay afloat despite adverse conditions in the industry. (Tóth & Hosszú 2012a: 27)

Another channel of influence is the direct contact with managers based on more individual contact. For some workers this seems to be the preferred way to gain influence, as for

example the Belgian interviews suggest. However, in the countries where working conditions are more problematic (Hungary and Bulgaria), contact with managers is often not regarded by the workers as a possible way to get more influence. The picture is not homogeneous, however, as there are also workers who report that they managed to negotiate specific arrangements, at least on an ad hoc basis (e.g. getting time off for medical treatments).

Finally, it should be mentioned that the use of temporary workers may also be a strategic management tool. Some Norwegian workers experience increasing use of temp workers by management as an attempt to gain more control of the workforce –particularly at sites where Norwegian workers have strong collective representation and thereby significant bargaining power.

At the time when we conducted this study, the top management at one of the companies considered whether they should increase the use of temporary staff agencies at the expense of employing their own construction workers. The management primarily used two arguments for dismantling their own organization in this area: 1) that outsourcing of construction workers to subcontractors or even temporary staff recruitment agencies gives the company more control and sanction opportunities. It is basically easier to put pressure on subcontractors and staff recruitment agencies when the workers are behind schedule, by referring to the contract, than to put pressure on their own workers, where the management has relatively limited sanction opportunities, and 2) that the relationship between the management and particularly the carpenters have been quite problematic for some years, which has led to quite high absenteeism, ‘go-slow’ among the carpenters, and lack of trust both among the workers and their managers, in addition to poor quality of the job that is actually done. (Finnestrand 2012b: 29)

3.6 Vulnerability, vulnerable groups and vulnerable (precarious) work

This section discusses vulnerability from different perspectives. First, we identify what kind of vulnerable groups are employed in the sector and the different kinds of risks that they face. Second, we look at work related vulnerability, focusing on features of employment conditions that may expose employees to poverty and/or social exclusion. Finally, we discuss vulnerability as a process, and the kinds of negative synergies between specific social groups and specific types of work. The aim is to identify work related vulnerability for the most socially vulnerable groups. Work-related vulnerability refers here to work-related processes characterised by uncertainty/weakness ‘which exposes a person (or a family) to suffering particularly negative or damaging consequences if a problematic situation arises’ (Ranci 2010).

Table 7: Workforce and vulnerable groups in the examined countries

Country	Norway	Belgium	Bulgaria	Hungary
Main social groups working in the cases	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)
Particularly vulnerable groups	Migrant workers (often employed as temporary workers) Older workers	Migrants Older workers	Most workers (except a small core group) (very insecure and irregular work) Older workers Workers in unskilled positions Workers who commute Roma	All workers (insecure work – no social security contributions, etc.) Older workers Workers who commute
Precarious employment and/or work issues	Hard, physically demanding work, risk of accidents Increasing job insecurity (tendency towards outsourcing)	Hard physical work, risk of occupational hazards Full time High job security ²⁶	Hard physical work. Risk of physical strain and safety risks Very low job security, e.g. fixed-term contracts Irregular work hours Seasonal work	Hard physical work Bad working conditions Fixed-term contracts Informal or partly informal work Irregular work hours Seasonal work

3.6.1 Vulnerable groups in construction

The construction sector in Europe employs a large proportion of men who are either skilled or without formal education, working as general workers. Regarding both vulnerable groups and vulnerable work, conditions in construction differ between countries. In Bulgaria and Hungary, all construction workers are vulnerable due to very irregular employment conditions, low wages and a generally deregulated/black labour market. However, although employment security is higher in Norway and Belgium, increasing outsourcing and the current financial crisis have resulted in more fixed-term contracts and less employment and income security, if not for all then at least for part of the workforce (temp workers).

Two groups appear particularly vulnerable: migrants and older workers. The growing group of migrants occupy a vulnerable position in construction because they are at risk of

²⁶ This is partly related to the fact that most interviewees work in a 'green' construction company, which seems to be less affected by the crisis.

discrimination from native workers (especially if they do not have adequate language skills), they occupy temporary positions and they commute. To some extent, their working conditions can be viewed as a consequence of the rise in subcontracting taking place within the sector. Older workers also appear to be particularly vulnerable because of the high physical strain. Few construction workers believe they will be able to work in the sector until retirement age. In some cases they manage to switch to 'lighter' jobs, either as administrative workers or carrying out other less physically demanding work, such as painting. In addition to these two groups, workers who commute also constitute a particularly vulnerable group – especially those who are also in a precarious situation in other respects (e.g. low wages and/or insecure employment). Due to the economic crisis and the shrinking construction sector, many workers are concerned about the future.

Finally, in some countries, and in Bulgaria and Hungary in particular, all workers are to some extent vulnerable. Employment is insecure, work is frequently not declared and/or workers have to compete with informal workers who are prepared to work for a lower salary. The seasonal character of the work makes workers dependent on savings for the winter, and with lower wages and irregular employment this has become very difficult.

The complete disintegration of the traditional construction industry only allowed a small minority of workers to maintain full time employment status with proper, or at least some social security contributions. Most construction workers have a highly precarious 'underworld' worker status, whether they are casual employees or micro-entrepreneurs. They feel that they are under pressure from enormous forces, against which they can do anything but save their skin. One of the most frequently used words during interview responses was: 'survival' – 'ensure survival', 'hope I can survive these years'. The frequent use of 'survival' sums up the desperate situation of casual workers in the construction industry in 21st century Hungary. (Tóth & Hosszú 2012a: 29)

Migrant workers

Migrant workers, from Poland and other countries, appear to be the most vulnerable group in construction in Norway and Belgium. In Norway, migrants are vulnerable in at least two ways. First, they are usually employed through temp agencies and therefore do not have permanent positions. Although some seem to manage to get employed by the construction companies after a period of working as temporary workers, their overall employment situation is more insecure, and according to Finnestrand 'they are the first to go' if the company needs to decrease its labour force (Finnestrand 2012b: 14). Second, interviews with Norwegian workers also point towards discrimination against migrant workers, who are usually asked to perform the most basic and heavy work tasks. Finnestrand reports how one of the migrant workers found that some of their Norwegian colleagues patronized Polish workers and reported comments such as '*They [the Polish workers] do a good job, but they are for crap jobs and heavy work*' or '*that's a job for the Poles!*' (Finnestrand 2012b: 28). Finally, there are examples of migrant workers in Norway struggling financially due to very expensive housing conditions.

The Bulgarian interviews also emphasize migrants, as well as the special position of Roma workers in construction. Markova (2012a) suggests that although the situation may be difficult for both these groups, Turkish workers seem to be less discriminated against than the Roma workers in construction.

We do not hire Roma people in that company. ... We have many Turks, but they are a different story. ... They are reliable, disciplined; you can always count on them. They are among the best workers in this company. We work in different shifts, but what is done by them is well done. (Manager, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova 2012a: 37)

Markova emphasizes, however, that although there are incidents of discrimination against Roma workers, there are also many Roma workers who do not occupy a more vulnerable position at the construction sites than ethnic Bulgarians (see also Markova 2012a: 37).

The country reports also offer some limited information about the educational background of migrants, and there are some examples of migrant workers being highly qualified, e.g. having university degrees (Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012b: 53).

Older workers

Working in construction is heavy work and construction workers are often exposed to difficult and strenuous working conditions. At the same time, there seems to be an expectation that workers can work hard and for long hours. These conditions make older workers a specific vulnerable group in construction.

There are some like us, but most of the workers here are young people. You simply cannot do the job if you are too old. For example in five years I will not be able to get up there. Once you are over 55 years of age, you are not fit for that profession any more. To climb up high and do metalwork and so on... (Construction worker, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova 2012a: 37)

It is heavy work ... Will I be able to keep it up until I am 65, now that I am 45 years old? It is a heavy job, I don't know. (Construction worker, Belgium, quoted in Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012b: 50)

Older workers also have other concerns, beyond being able to stay in the job until retirement age. In particular in Hungary and Bulgaria they also worry about their financial situation when they reach retirement age, because of the irregular payments to pensions and social security.

3.6.2 Vulnerable work in construction

Construction work is vulnerable in different ways. First, jobs in construction are hard and physically demanding, and health is therefore an issue for construction workers, although there is also a tendency to downplay the health and safety risks. The interviews reflect that many construction workers have experienced accidents and that many also have health problems (e.g. problems with arms and lower back). One result of this is that older construction workers worry about being able to stay in the sector until retirement age.

Second, employment in construction is becoming increasingly insecure. In some countries which have been hit hard by the crisis and therefore face shrinkage and deregulation of the sector (Bulgaria and Hungary), this development affects the whole labour force, all of whom are in very insecure employment. In these countries very few workers have permanent employment and even those who do constantly worry about the future prospects of their company staying in business. For Belgian and Norwegian workers, who have not been so hard hit by the crisis, this development has so far resulted in a division of workers between those working on open ended full time contracts and temporary workers and/or subcontractors. However, as mentioned above, there is an increasing tendency to use temporary workers and subcontractors, putting pressure on wages and working conditions for native workers.

Finally, the increasing use of black market labour, particularly in Hungary and Bulgaria, contributes to future vulnerability as pensions and social security savings shrink. Workers in these countries may not be able to afford retirement – and there are some examples from the interviews of pensioners who supplement their income by working at the construction sites in these two countries.

3.7 Future aspirations and future perspectives

Construction workers' aspirations as well as their capacities to develop aspirations for the future (see also introduction above) are heavily influenced by the conditions in the sector and therefore differ considerably between countries. 'Capacities to aspire' for construction workers in particular appear to be constrained by the anomie and employment insecurity in the current crisis. However, even in countries that are less affected by the crisis, work and employment conditions do not promote construction workers' capacities to aspire.

In Hungary and Bulgaria, where the construction sector appears fragmented, deregulated and unpredictable, the main concern of construction workers is to 'survive' the crisis. Their aspirations are consequently short term. According to Tóth & Hosszú (2012a), Hungarian construction workers gave very materialistic answers to the question about their aspirations for the future, reflecting the insecurity and precariousness of their present situation. For many of them, the typical answer was that their main aspiration was to be able to work, to earn money, and to maintain their family. Survival is the key word in most narratives about future aspirations among Hungarian and Bulgarian construction workers.

We all live day by day. I cannot make any long term plans for the future. The prospects I have are very limited. We never know what is going to happen, and there is no predictability... I am quite pessimistic about the near future... (Construction worker, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova 2012a: 38)

My goal is to stay at this workplace. I hope it will be possible. I only work for survival. I do not have any more dreams. I do not dream about starting my own business, and I do not have enough money for that. Nor do I want to go to abroad. I am happy that I have my job; I can go to work every day... Nobody can trust anybody... (Construction worker, Hungary, quoted in Tóth & Hosszú 2012a: 30)

The general sense of anomie and unpredictability in Hungary is also reflected in workers' concerns about raising a family:

Until November I have work, and after that... Who knows? Everything is collapsing around us. There is lot of fraudulent default, non-payment. Many firms are going under... I would like to have a house, children, and everything else, but now it is only survival. I will see. I would like to launch my own computer business, but without money it is impossible. (Construction worker, Hungary, quoted in Tóth & Hosszú 2012a: 31)

In spite of this preoccupation with survival, some construction workers also express wishes about their long-term future. Older workers hope that they will have pensions large enough to be able to retire eventually, and some of the younger workers have ideas about setting up their own company:

To become the boss of the company. To be successful in the business and make a lot of money, although I am aware that this is not at all easy. Yet I would like to work for myself not somebody else. This is the ideal life/work situation in my opinion. (Plumber, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova 2012a: 45)

Turning to the more stable labour markets in Norway and Belgium, the situation is different and so are worker aspirations. However, even in these countries, the workers' main aspiration is for employment security. Based on the information from the Belgian and Norwegian interviews, all workers agree that it is better to have a permanent position than to work as a temporary worker, and temporary workers therefore aspire to get employed by the construction company instead of by the temp agency (Finnestrand 2012b: 20). In addition, despite the fact that the heavy work is less heavy in these countries due to the aid of technological equipment, older workers also express concern (and aspirations) about staying in the job until retirement age. Finally, some of the Belgian construction workers also aspire to become project leaders, which is possible in some of the companies. Aspirations are, however, also aimed at having a life outside work. The possibility of stopping work when the work day is over, and choosing not to work weekends is greatly appreciated by construction workers, and is sometimes put forward as a reason for not making a vertical career move (e.g. becoming self-employed) (Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012b: 30).

3.8 Summary and conclusion

An analysis of individual perspectives and the agency of workers in construction reflects a rather heterogeneous picture of experiences in green construction. Firstly, there is a great divide between conditions and hence experiences in those countries that are most influenced by the crisis, Bulgaria and Hungary, and those that are less directly affected, namely Belgium and Norway. Workers in Bulgaria and Hungary are experiencing deregulation and fragmentation of the construction labour market. They perceive working in the sector as highly insecure and a struggle for survival. Deregulation is accompanied by the black economy/undeclared work, and often working hours are only partly registered. Workers also risk being cheated by employers and many have experienced not getting part or all of their salary. In contrast to this, employees in Belgium and Norway have not been influenced directly by the economic crisis. However, they too are experiencing changes in employment security, mainly because of the increasing use of migrant workers, who are usually employed as temporary workers, via temp agencies or employed by small subcontractors. In both cases, the temporary workers challenge prevailing employment contracts. However, construction workers in Belgium and Norway do not appear to have experienced changes in employment so far, although some of them mention the risk that their jobs will be transferred to temporary jobs. Finally, the implications of 'green construction' for the quality of work and life is worth mentioning (although it should be noted that there is also great variety within the 'green' part of the sector), since this is a 'growth area' in the European construction sector. The individual interviews with workers in green construction (in Belgium in particular) indicate that the introduction of 'green' construction procedures seems to change the nature of work organization in construction. The interviews indicate that 'greening' does not significantly alter the processes already taking place, but speeds up existing developments – in particular standardisation, subcontracting and a renewed focus on quality control.

Secondly, interviews with construction workers in all countries reveal that they perceive the work as physically hard and sometimes stressful, but also take pride in their craftsmanship and value the collective character of the work (e.g. social relations within teams). It is common practice to meet up at work early in order to play cards and drink coffee with the other team members before work begins. Bulgarian and Hungarian workers also mention that socializing with their colleagues after work has become more difficult because of the crisis and lack of stable relations – and that they regret this very much. The double-sided experiences of work in construction are particularly clearly expressed in the Hungarian interviews. The work is terribly hard and includes long working hours and long working periods without rest. Often workers spend hours commuting to the site and/or working as migrant workers in Austria or Germany. In addition, they face a series of OHS risks, low employment security and a lack of pension savings. Yet they also express great pride in their work and a great sense of satisfaction with work well done. Jobs in construction are therefore not easily substituted by any other job, and although work cannot be considered a 'vocation' or 'calling', it seems to be regarded as more than just a 'job'.

Thirdly, some workers are more vulnerable than the rest. Those who work in the deregulated economies in Bulgaria and Hungary can all be regarded as vulnerable and their position in the labour market and their incomes are highly insecure. In addition to this, migrant workers and older workers are vulnerable everywhere. Migrant workers usually work as temps and have less secure positions than the native workers, and there seems to be a more general tendency for older workers to worry about lasting in the job until retirement age.

Many workers therefore have insecure employment, and in combination with the seasonal nature of construction work and the necessity of earning enough in the summer months to save for the winter, this makes quality of life difficult for many construction workers. Being in a highly insecure employment situation and having to operate in an unpredictable labour market also makes it difficult for workers to plan and even formulate aspirations for the future. The core workers in Belgium and Norway seem more inclined to have ideas about their future, e.g. pursuing a career as a team leader or project leader in the companies where these career paths are available. However, many workers also value their leisure time and do not want to seek a promotion or position that forces them to extend their working hours.

The construction sector has been investigated as a 'growing' sector in spite of the fact that in many European countries the sector is declining because of the economic crisis. There has therefore been a particular focus on green construction sites because of the expectation that this subsector within construction is likely to continue growing. It has been particularly interesting to analyse to what extent green jobs are 'better', and what issues of quality and work and life can be particularly related to green jobs. Based on interviews with workers, greening in itself seems to offer few alterations in work. Some workers express a particular interest and see green construction as more meaningful than traditional construction, but most workers are not very concerned with the particularities of their work being green. Other factors such as new technologies (e.g. prefabricated roofs) and a general expectation of increasing efficiency seem to alter work processes more significantly. However, such processes are also prevalent in green construction and contribute to more problematic work and employment conditions, such as processes of deskilling and intensification of work. Finally, there is also a tendency towards increasing use of fixed term contracts and subcontracting in green construction – and there were no significant indications of a trend of more sustainable jobs in green construction.

4 ‘A safeguard against exclusion’: Individual perspectives on work in waste

The following chapter presents findings on employee perspectives in waste collection from four countries, **Austria, Denmark, Italy and Bulgaria**. The chapter has been compiled using country reports based on individual interviews about central work and life issues in waste, viewed from the perspective of employees. The country reports include an average of 20 individual interviews with garbage collectors, amounting to a total of 77 interviews.

The structure of the chapter follows the structure from previous chapters. The first section introduces the waste sector in Europe and gives an overview of the main developments and challenges. The country differences and country data will also be presented here. This will be followed in the second section by a presentation and analysis of employee perceptions and experiences of **quality of life and work**. This section introduces the most significant quality of work and quality of life issues (good and bad) from the perspective of employees, and presents an overview of these perspectives in Table 8. The most significant quality of work and life issues are then analysed by identifying persistent features in waste that seem to be significant in determining experiences of work and life. These are: **new technology, increasing intensification of work and relationships to customers**.

The third section consists of an analysis of the characteristics of employees’ agency by looking at **career trajectories, job crafting** and ‘**voice**’²⁷ (ways of expressing interests and dissent). The aim of this section is to identify career patterns in waste and the choices that waste collectors make in order to identify the processes involved in creating job mobility and career options. In addition, the section analyses what kind of influence waste collectors have in their everyday work tasks and in terms of being able to negotiate better work and employment conditions.

The fourth section in the chapter focuses on **vulnerable groups** and **vulnerable work**. The overall aim is to understand the social significance of having a job in waste for the most vulnerable groups in Europe. The section gives an overview of the different social categories of employees working in the sector (women, migrants/ethnic minorities, ‘unskilled’/low-skilled, older workers, young workers or ‘other’) and possible differences and difficulties specifically related to certain groups. In addition, the section analyses how specific work features expose these groups to additional social risks e.g., fixed term jobs, zero hour contracts and atypical working hours.

The final section provides an overview of the perception of future options for employees in the sector by analysing their future aspirations and how they reflect the structural conditions in the labour market. This part of the analysis will be conceptualized within the perspective of **sociocultural capacities to aspire** (Lewis & Giullari 2005; Appadurai 2004; Sen 1999). The chapter concludes by summarizing the main findings and by identifying and discussing how quality of work and life and vulnerability develop in the

²⁷ Cf. Hirschman 1970.

interaction between specific ways of organizing waste collection, prevailing cultural discourses (e.g. assumptions about gendering of work and work tasks) and individual agency.

4.1 Introduction to waste

The waste sector in Europe can be characterized by rapid growth, a major trend towards outsourcing and continuous privatization and an increasing concern with environmental issues. Finally, the sector taken as a whole is becoming dominated by large multinational companies (Kirov 2011). The waste sector is complex because of national differences (e.g. differences in legislation) and the development of new work tasks in addition to waste collection, namely waste disposal and recycling. The development of 'additional' work tasks directly and indirectly influences waste collection, e.g. by collecting smaller bins with different types of sorted waste and/or by altered relationships to customers. The waste sector can therefore be characterised by changing structures and actors, involving new divisions of private/public responsibilities. In addition, the development of new technologies and the larger environmental concern has led to new ways of organizing and separating work tasks (e.g. increasing work intensity), but also in some cases the development of less physically demanding jobs.

Waste collection is traditionally male dominated, and in most countries the workforce consists of men with an ethnic majority background – except in Bulgaria, where the majority of waste collectors belong to the Roma ethnic minority. There are few women and few migrants, although this picture seems to be slowly changing (Kirov 2011). However, in spite of technological development, waste collection in most cases still involves heavy physical labour and a major quality of work risk is physical strain, as well as the risk of infections, diseases and increasingly also the risk of traffic accidents.

Following Kirov (2011), the sector can therefore be characterised as dynamic, and significant changes in employment and working conditions are taking place (Kirov 2011). The question is how work is experienced by individual workers in waste in light of these changes, how prevailing and new conditions influence work and life quality of workers, and to what extent working as a waste collector prevents precariousness and vulnerability.

4.2 Methods and material

Research in the waste sector focuses on three different work tasks: truck driving, waste collection and street sweeping. Street sweeping is included in the cases where companies perform sweeping along with waste collection. Most truck drivers and waste collectors work in teams and have a high degree of autonomy in organizing work and meeting daily challenges. Sweepers generally work alone.

Waste collection takes place in a similar way in all countries. Teams consisting of a driver and one or more garbage collectors drive out and pick up garbage bins or sacks from private houses and apartment buildings. They then carry or roll them back to the truck empty them into the truck container, usually using a lift installed on the truck. In some cases (e.g. Denmark) the teams are flexible and take turns driving the truck, while in

others, 'driver' and 'collector' are different occupations. In most countries – as a result of 'greening' and a renewed interest in recycling, there are also trucks that empty glass, paper or other segregated waste containers. Waste collection in the country side and the container truck is typically operated by one employee. Once the truck is fully loaded it is driven to the recycling or incinerating facility and unloaded. These 'unloading' runs are usually made by the truck driver alone (see for example Holtgrewe 2012: 6). In most cases, waste collectors start in the early morning (at 6 or 7 am) and finish early in the afternoon. In some countries/cases the remaining working hours (in a full time contract) are expected to be filled by working extra during weekends. In other cases, workers 'gain' the extra hours if they manage to finish early.

Four countries have provided national reports on individual perspectives and agency in waste collection: **Denmark, Bulgaria, Italy and Austria**.

There are many similarities in the organization of waste collection in Austria, Denmark and to a large extent Italy, while Bulgarian experiences are somewhat different. In Bulgaria, most waste collectors belong to the Roma ethnic minority, and their experiences in waste collection are closely connected to their situation as a stigmatized ethnic minority, as well as to their own cultural traditions (e.g. early marriages for women, with the result that most Roma women do not get a formal education).

Bulgaria and Italy have also interviewed 'sweepers'. 'Sweeping' consists of cleaning the streets and removing waste from public spaces, e.g. streets and public transport stops. Most sweepers are women. Waste collectors and sweepers both have an 8-hour working day, although waste collectors sometimes finish early. The sweepers also have similar working times (6:30 am – 3:00 pm) (Markova 2012b: 4).

4.2.1 The country reports and interviews

The **Austrian** report by Holtgrewe (2012) is based on 15 interviews with waste collectors – 14 men and 1 woman. All interviewees except one have an Austrian ethnic background. Holtgrewe further notes that the interviewed garbage collectors are less unskilled than one might expect. The majority have completed trade apprenticeships as carpenters, electricians, painters, plumbers or mechanics. One has graduated from business college. Waste collection was the first job after training for only three interviewees. The interviews were carried out in one municipal and one commercial waste company. The workers in the municipal workplace are older on average than those working in the private sector.

The **Danish** report by Sørensen & Hasle (2011) is based on 17 interviews – 15 men and 2 women. Thirteen worked as waste collectors and four as administrative personnel. All interviewees except one had a Danish ethnic background. The interviewees worked in two different companies, a medium-sized local Danish firm, and a transnational corporation which had acquired several smaller Danish firms. One interviewee was employed within a separate company. The majority of waste collectors did not have vocational training.

The **Italian** report by Bizzotto, Ferraris & Poggi (2011) is based on 26 interviews with waste collectors and sweepers employed in three different companies – two municipalities

and one private multinational company. Two of the companies are located in Northern Italy and the third in the South. Of the 26 interview persons, 18 were men and 8 women. The majority had an Italian ethnic background – three had an ethnic minority background and one was immigrant. Seven waste collectors had completed intermediate or advanced tertiary education.

The **Bulgarian** report by Markova (2012b) is based on individual interviews with waste collectors and sweepers. 21 people were interviewed – three drivers and a dispatcher and 17 workers (eight waste collectors, eight sweepers, and one manual worker). Two had an ethnic Bulgarian background, 17 had a Roma ethnic background. All waste collectors were men. And in addition, three men worked as sweepers. None of the interviewees had any formal qualifications or vocational training. Most did not have a school leaving certificate. The interviewees worked in three different sanitary companies. Most waste collectors were Roma men, whereas Roma women mainly worked as sweepers.

4.3 Waste workers' experiences of quality of work and life in the job

Table 8: Perceptions of quality of work and life in waste collection²⁸

QoW and QoL issues perceived by waste workers	Austria	Bulgaria ²⁹	Denmark	Italy
QoL	Job security is valued (real and perceived) and low wages accepted as satisfactory Leisure time appreciated	Security because of regular payments and open ended contracts in some companies. Many workers have debts ' <i>we are always short of money</i> ' Leisure time	Salary is perceived as sufficient and relatively high in comparison with working hours High level of security (real and perceived) Leisure time is appreciated	Income security (real and perceived) Permanent jobs, access to mortgages and 'recognized social status' Differences North/South
General perception of work	High degree of job satisfaction ' <i>I like to do my job</i> '	Monotonous and routine work – but steady income	High degree of job satisfaction related to piece rate system where workers go home when they have finished.	The work is satisfactory because it leads to satisfactory lives Experience that work is not recognized
Working outside and 'driving out on one's own'.	Preference for working outside and 'using one's strength'	Work is not perceived as 'free' ' <i>we follow a strict schedule</i> '	'Free work' is appreciated meaning the independence to 'drive out'	Outdoor work is perceived as positive Autonomy in work regarded as positive
Getting extra income by taking items from garbage home	Not talked about but done	Done – even one of the waste collectors does that during weekends – takes paper or plastic, or other waste	illegal (hints by management that this is done by some)	
Employment	All employees have full time open ended contracts	Full time – municipal company; full time fixed term in private	Most employees have full time open ended contracts	Most employees have open ended contracts
'Compression' of work	Work hard in order to finish early	Work is completed in a shorter time than the official working time	Full-time work done part time. 'Self-taylorization' in order to finish early	

²⁸ The table shows the work and life issues that are perceived as the most significant and the various forms they take in the four countries, in order to show both prevalence and variation. Empty boxes mean that the topic is not mentioned in the reports as a significant issue for waste workers.

²⁹ The Bulgarian and Italian interviews cover waste collectors as well as sweepers. The focus in the chapter is on the waste collectors, although sweepers will be discussed when relevant for understanding the way the sector is organised and perceived.

Working times	Day shift starts early (6:30 am)	Work in shifts in some companies	Day shift starts early (5:30-6am)	Work in shifts: 6am-12 noon, 1pm-7pm, 11pm-5am
New Technology	Some investment but with mixed results	Some technological improvements noted – e.g. better trucks	Improvements have decreased physical strain	Green waste collectors are less likely to be exposed to dangerous/dirty materials
Social relations at work*	Friendly relations 'looking out for each other'	Informal support of workers by managers	Good relations to colleagues. Relations to managers important (shields from customers)	Waste collectors do not like working in teams Drivers work alone or in a team
Heavy work/intensification of work	Work has become more intense and workers more tired	Physically demanding and OHS risks	Heavy work, risk of physical strain, as well as traffic hazards and biochemical hazards	Physically demanding and OHS risks
Work/life balance	Doing other activities, e.g. work on their houses, having a small farm and generally having leisure time	Men have a lot of leisure activities, e.g. playing football or chess. Women (sweepers) do household tasks and take care of children	'Other life' is important, includes 'second job' or 'repairing house or boat', etc.	Working shifts does not support work/life balance
Low social recognition	Low social recognition is acknowledged but downplayed	Both sweepers and waste collectors are ashamed of starting to work in the waste sector. The job is okay, but the low status is a problem	Not very low	Ashamed of working in the waste sector, particularly in the south

4.4 Perception of waste: A safeguard against labour market exclusion

Waste collectors generally express satisfaction with their work, their lives and their wages. Waste collection is usually not the first career choice, and waste collectors have worked in a range of other jobs before starting in the waste sector. They therefore evaluate their work in waste in relation to 'what could have happened', e.g. as a 'solution' to downdrift rather than as a sign of it. Waste collectors consequently value the fact that the job gives them a regular income.

I have worked here for three years already and I am very glad to be in this company. I am really happy with the job. I am always paid on time. On the right day, sometimes even one day early. (Waste collector, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova 2012b: 13)

Although work in waste has low status and low social recognition in most countries, this is not much referred to in the interviews and social stigmatization is not explicitly commented upon by waste workers (except in the Italian interviews³⁰). Waste collectors seem to focus on the working conditions and the advantages of the job rather than on its low reputation or status.

We live here, I have my job. The company is good. The boss is okay. The money is adequate... (Waste collector, Austria, quoted in Holtgrewe 2012: 25)

Experiences of working in waste are also closely related to the fact that the occupation supports other aspects of life:

I like my job. I do home renovation, I raise my children, I have vacations. I always have free time. (Street sweeper operator, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto, Ferraris et al. 2011: 19)

In addition to the perception of quality of work as being expressed by what it contributes to the quality of life, the work itself is also appreciated, particularly in some countries, because it is regarded as independent:

The freedom – I check-in in the morning. I drive out and take care of my district and collect the garbage which needs to be collected and drive back home again. I have the freedom to take a shower and go back to my home. That's the freedom of not having someone sitting there and telling you: Well, now you are standing there doing nothing, so you'd better get over there and work. Of course you have to take care of things... You need to be in control of things so that you don't just rush through without doing a proper job in order to get home early. (Waste collector, Denmark, quoted in Sørensen & Hasle 2011: 8)

There are also disadvantages in the job, but they are not emphasized by waste workers and are played down instead (see also below).

4.4.1 Securing quality of life

A job as a waste collector seems to sustain quality of life in several ways. First, waste collectors regard the job as secure and this seems to balance the fact that wages are low:

The idea was that it's a more secure job. The basic starting wage was lower than before. But I didn't care [...] Since I don't have any training. And that bore fruit, because I don't want to know what would have happened if I had been in the private sector. I was off sick for eight months. I've only been back to work for two weeks now. In the private sector that would've been more difficult, most likely. (Waste collector, Austria, quoted in Holtgrewe 2012: 10)

³⁰ Italian waste collectors mention lack of recognition from employers and customers. However, they balance this by perceiving the outdoor work and autonomy as very positive, and by the fact that they are not afraid of losing their jobs.

Most employees have open-ended contracts which of course provide better employment security than fixed term employment. However, even in the private companies, where workers have fixed term contracts, they do not feel insecure in the job. Either because of subrogation or because of common practice (in Bulgaria), when another company wins a public tender, employees often continue working with the new employer. In addition, waste workers express confidence in their employment due to a conviction that 'there will always be garbage'.

In summary, many waste collectors have worked in other sectors and have experienced problems or dissatisfaction with earlier jobs for some reason. Working as waste collectors is evaluated as a safeguard against social exclusion. Apart from employment security, the regular wage that the job gives is clearly valued in the Bulgarian interviews, where many families have huge debts (Markova 2012b: 20).

A second aspect of life quality is the fact that wages are generally regarded as satisfactory, although low. For workers in Austria, Denmark and Italy, wages are perceived as sufficient to live a normal life, although also a life with constraints, where budgets may be tight (e.g. young Austrian workers live with their parents). The prevalence of open-ended contracts provides access to mortgages, enabling workers to buy their own apartments or houses. In Austria, Denmark and Italy, waste workers therefore seem to get by on the wages that they receive, and even regard their wages as relatively favourable compared with the working hours. In Bulgaria, however, wages are regarded as very low and most workers have financial problems. Markova (2012b) describes how the material wellbeing of waste workers can be summed up by the quote:

The money is not enough. Every one of us needs more money; we are always short of money. (Waste collector, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova 2012b: 43)

In Bulgaria, many respondents take care of sick relatives or are the only ones who have a job in their families, and salaries are not sufficient to cover the needs of a large family household.

A final contribution to quality of life in waste work seems to be 'leisure time' – the availability (and enjoyment) of 'free time' outside work is evident in all four countries. This 'free time' is related to the fact that working hours are quite short and often much shorter than stipulated in the contract.

[Working as a waste collector] gives me freedom to do so many things. I pick up my kids in the kindergarten already at 1 pm ... then we go to the swimming pool or the zoo on weekdays, which many families can't do. (Waste collector, Denmark, quoted in Sørensen & Hasle 2011: 27)

After finishing your daily tasks you are free and can go home. No one expects you to stay, everyone has his/her schedule and everything is clear... (Waste collector, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova 2012b: 17)

Sørensen and Hasle underline the fact that the 'male, 'unskilled' workers seemed quite content with the quality of their lives'. (Sørensen & Hasle 2011: 27). Waste workers

appreciate having time to be with their partners and children, and for hobbies such as football refereeing, boat repairing, building model trains for resale, etc. Some waste workers have a second job or their own company that they spend time on after work. In spite of the other problems (e.g. low salaries and financial problems), waste collectors in Bulgaria also enjoy the fact that the work creates options for leisure activities. Some report playing football, fishing or playing cards or chess with friends after work.

4.4.2 Quality of work: Outdoor and ‘free’ but also hard physical work and risk of occupational hazards

While their positive evaluation of employment in waste is largely related to benefits of the job outside work, waste collectors are also relatively content with the character of the work itself. There are drawbacks, but they are played down. In particular, many waste collectors appreciate what they term ‘freedom in work’ where they drive out and generally handle the job on their own (without constant surveillance or supervision).

Although the work is sometimes tough and cold, there also seems to be a preference for working ‘outside’. For the predominantly male waste collectors there seems to be a certain satisfaction in using one’s body and strength:

It can be summer or winter, it doesn’t matter – I have my own enthusiasm for the job. I like doing it. I can exert my strength. I can move about. I’m out in the open all day – that’s very pleasant. You don’t have a lot of stress either. You can take your time and do the job. (Waste collector, Austria, quoted in Holtgrewe 2012: 9)

Outdoor work and the perception of a certain degree of autonomy at work are seen positively. (Bizzotto, Ferraris et al. 2011: 11)

However, waste collection is not just a ‘walk in the park’, although some waste collectors present it as such. It is hard work, and a range of health risks are also mentioned in the interviews. In particular, the older workers talk about how they feel physical strain.

[My advice to younger colleagues] is that they should take care of their body. It is a hard job ... In one of our municipalities, they collect larger bags, and they are really heavy. If you get on one of those trucks, it is a really, really hard job. (Waste collector, Denmark, quoted in Sørensen & Hasle 2011: 28)

Apart from the heavy lifting and the risk of physical strain, the risk of infection from being in contact with contaminated waste is also mentioned as a health risk in waste collection. The risk of infection is mentioned in all countries, but is particularly problematic in Bulgaria and in Italy.

In the South, a further issue emerges. Drivers spend many hours at the landfills [...] breathing in large concentrations of bioaerosols (microbes suspended in the air by dust particles). This can lead to infections and breathing problems. Good practices in waste management could help in avoiding these risks. (Bizzotto, Ferraris et al. 2011: 20)

Finally, moving around in heavy traffic is raised as a problem by waste collectors. The truck is difficult to manoeuvre when it is icy or in dense traffic and there is a risk of accidents. As noted by Markova (2012b), waste collection trucks sometimes block the traffic and 'employees are exposed to aggressive behaviour from drivers and/or pedestrians' (Markova 2012b: 46).

Waste workers tend to play down these negative aspects of the job, and most waste workers take the strenuous character of the work for granted. Holtgrewe suggests –this may be because they have got used to it, as the following excerpt from an interview reflects:

I. What is particularly stressful or strenuous in your work?

Strenuous? I wouldn't know.

I: Well, the heavy lifting for example.

Oh that. Yes, the sacks are heavy, that's strenuous all right. (Waste collector, Austria, quoted in Holtgrewe 2012: 10)

Holtgrewe notes that workers are generally not very vocal about such aspects and that she sensed a general acceptance of things, possibly in the light of limited alternatives. (Holtgrewe 2012: 10)

4.4.3 Negotiating masculine work identities

The collection of waste is almost entirely done by men and is considered to be a male job. The 'male character' is reflected in the way that waste collectors emphasize the practical and physical dimension of the job, as well as appreciating 'working outside' and being independent, as mentioned above. Based on this waste collectors negotiate a work identity epitomizing traditional masculine identities.

Although waste collection is a low status job, the lack of social recognition does not seem to be regarded as a problem by most waste collectors. The interviews suggest that male waste collectors base their view of the job on a 'realistic evaluation' of the 'pros and cons'. They acknowledge that the work is dirty, but this does not seem to affect them substantially. Rather it is the advantages such as working outdoors and leaving work early that constitute their work identity.

Workers are not greatly bothered by the status and image of their work. Nobody introduces the subject of misrecognition by themselves, but interviewer questions are answered in various ways. (Holtgrewe 2012: 19)

In addition, male waste collectors (in contrast, for example, to women care workers) manage to 'do a lot' with the leisure time that they have. Not only do most mention a range of hobbies, many also have activities that provide an additional income.

Some workers had other jobs or business activities such as working as independent haulage contractors. One even produced model trains that he sold on eBay in his spare time. Such additional work activities may be more frequent than we found in

the interviews, because the workers who talked about other work activities withheld this information until late in the interview (or afterwards). This may be caused by concerns that knowledge of side activities are not fully acceptable by the workplace or that the activities may partially illegal (tax evasion). (Sørensen & Hasle 2011: 21)

Although waste collectors with children mention that they spend time with their children in the afternoon – their ‘male’ reconciliation of work and life goes far beyond reconciling work and family responsibilities. They do not spend all their free time on household and care tasks. They have hobbies, see their friends, play football and chess and/or have an additional job or business on the side. The interviews reflect obvious benefits of the job, which are clearly part of the perception of the ‘good life’ of male jobs and life.

Indeed, being able to combine jobs and other activities appears to be one of the most favourable ways of compensating for the limited challenges of waste collecting, both with regard to income and general satisfaction. (Holtgrewe 2012: 27)

It therefore seems that ‘leisure time’ and freedom in the job contribute significantly to the work identity of waste collectors. Workers are well aware of the arduous side of the job and the low status, although this is not explicitly discussed in the interviews. The fact that they make a great effort to retain the short working hours, in spite of the fact that they have to work very hard and risk physical strain, suggests that early hours are more than just nice in themselves. As suggested by Sørensen and Hasle below, the struggle to maintain early working hours may also be seen as a reaction to and a way of coming to terms with the low recognition and status of the job.

The interviews clearly show that the short working hours are central to the workers’ perception of quality of work. However, we are not quite sure why it is so important for them. As we showed in the section about quality of life, part of the explanation may be that the workers find significant meaning in activities outside of work, such as hobbies, family life, a second job, etc., and this is possible because they are working in the waste sector. We have also heard that the perception that the wage is decent is associated with the short working hours. Had the hours been longer, the arduous sides of work may be less acceptable. This may be one of the reasons why many workers put a lot of pride in working hard and finishing early. (Sørensen & Hasle 2011: 29)

Viewed in this light, waste collection is experienced as a good job partly because it is socially being reproduced as a ‘good deal’. In this way, the ‘self-taylorization’ which is reflected in the interviews can be related to the social stigmatization of the job, as well as to masculinity in the form of securing independence and creating satisfaction in the job.

4.4.4 Specific quality of work related features shaping work in waste

In addition to these more persistent features of work in waste collection, quality of work for employees seems to be related to three organizational features: **New technology including ‘sorting and recycling’; Increasing intensification of work** and finally **Relationships to customers**.

New technology including ‘sorting and recycling’

There are some examples of the impact of new technology which suggest that this may make work less heavy, e.g. transporting waste containers and sacks on trolley carts is less strenuous and trucks with emptying devices reduce heavy lifting (Sørensen & Hasle 2011: 28). In addition to this, Bizzotto, Ferraris & Poggi (2011: 20) find that green waste collectors in Italy are less likely to be exposed to dangerous and dirty materials and that ‘greening’ has therefore reduced the risk of infections. They also point out that waste collection in systems dominated by recycling is less physically demanding because of smaller and lighter bins.

There were bags. You entered the gardens and put the bags on the barrow. Then they introduced the bins, made of steel. A little bit heavy, but much better [than before]. Now there are different vehicles, more comfortable... Now recycling bins are on the street. You do not enter the gardens. The bins are smaller and collection is easy. (Waste collector, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto, Ferraris et al. 2011: 21)

In some cases, new technology has therefore made waste collection easier. However, the development of new technology does not always mean constant improvement. For example, Sørensen and Hasle give an example from Denmark where a municipality decided to discard modern (lighter) waste bins and go back to earlier, more strenuous technology because the new and lighter bins turned out to be more expensive for the municipality (Sørensen & Hasle 2011: 12).

Increasing intensification of work (including self-taylorization)

Waste collection has changed in all countries and work has intensified.

It used to be nice being a garbage collector 20 years ago. People would say, would you like a coffee, or would you like a drink. You could stop and have a beer or a soft drink. [...] It wasn’t a problem, it was easy to finish the job. If you stop somewhere for 15 minutes now, time just rushes away and you have to catch up. You have to run at the back and the driver has to step on it so you get back on schedule. (Waste collector, Austria, quoted in Holtgrewe 2012: 11)

...work has changed. It has become a bit more difficult. Time has become tighter. (Waste worker, Austria, quoted in Holtgrewe 2012: 10)

In addition, the introduction of new technology may have mixed consequences for quality of work by resulting in higher work intensity. For example, new and larger trucks may reduce heavy lifting and make work more efficient by requiring less frequent emptying, but this also results in less frequent breaks for waste collectors, who used to rest when the driver emptied the truck. Systems of collection and payment also have an impact on workers’ health and safety. Citizens may get sacks which are too big, allowing them to overfill them and make them too heavy (Sørensen & Hasle 2011: 28). Sacks sold to citizens are also getting more expensive. This makes citizens more inclined to ‘overfill’ them, which makes them heavy and likely to break, as reported by Holtgrewe for the Austrian interviews.

Factors for intensification result from the entire socio-technical system of waste collection, involving systems for paying fees, the shape of containers and consumers' behaviour (e.g. when citizens in some municipalities pay collection fees through the purchase of garbage sacks). (Holtgrewe 2012: 10)

Nevertheless, waste workers appear to be strongly invested in their ability to cope with the challenges.

Well, in a private company there might be more pressure than in the municipality. But in the municipal company there's a lot of pressure as well, like with our rounds. It is quite tough, really. But the three of us work together and that works well. These little sacks, we just throw them in. (Waste collector, Austria, quoted in Holtgrewe 2012: 11)

Finally, both Sørensen and Hasle and Holtgrewe suggest that 'masculine pride' plays a role in the intensification and self-taylorization of work. Bizzotto et al. suggest that waste collectors must be made more aware of the risks they take when working so hard (Bizzotto, Ferraris et al. 2011: 20).

Relations with customers

Although waste collectors do not usually have face-to-face contact with customers, the relationship to customers is regarded as problematic by many waste collectors:

Relations with the citizens are controversial... Sometimes conflicts between waste operators and citizens emerge. In these cases, workers feel that their work is not valued as it should be. (Bizzotto, Ferraris et al. 2011: 11)

Problematic relations with citizens occur because of the low recognition of waste and of waste collection, as mentioned above, and over disputes about whether or not citizens have put out the garbage before the collection time:

There are always complaints like, 'This garbage bag hasn't been taken away' and so on. The boss generally says [to the customer], 'So, you put it out too late'. 'No, it has been out since the day before.' 'Okay, I'll send them to collect it.' And then he radios us, right? We have a radio in the truck. So we say, 'We've collected everything that was outside, we've collected that. It must have been put out late'. 'They said they've put it out the day before.' 'Okay, we'll go there.' And then we go back, when we are finished. That's for the citizen, isn't it? (Waste collector, Austria, quoted in Holtgrewe 2012: 7)

Conflicts with citizens also arise when driving around in large trucks which are difficult to manoeuvre and drive slowly, and sometimes block the road.

Waste collectors acknowledge that they experience difficulties with disgruntled, rude drivers, citizens and passers-by. Problems also occur with the daily waste collection and the temporary blocking of street traffic – car drivers get annoyed and speak rudely to waste collectors. Some waste collectors have even felt menaced by the actions of some aggressive drivers. (Markova 2012b: 32)

Finally, as mentioned above, 'greening' and the renewed focus on recycling require the active involvement of citizens in sorting garbage. Citizens' conduct therefore needs to be taken into account as a factor in shaping the work and working environment of waste collectors.

Paraphrasing Holtgrewe, in order to understand the impact of these developments on the quality of work it is necessary to look at the whole 'socio-technical' system of waste collection, which along with new technologies and customer orientation also includes increased intensification of work (see Holtgrewe 2012: 10).

4.5 Career trajectories, job crafting and 'voice' in waste collection

We now turn to the third section of the chapter, an analysis of the characteristics of employees' agency by looking at **career trajectories, job crafting** and '**voice**'. The aim of this analysis is to understand the kind of employment mobility and careers that care workers pursue in order to identify the processes involved in creating job mobility and career options. This section also analyses the kinds of influence waste collectors have on their everyday work, and the channels they perceive that they have for negotiating better conditions.

4.5.1 Career trajectories and career options

In spite of differences between countries there are some clear similarities in waste collectors' career trajectories. Apart from a small group of waste collectors in Bulgaria, where working in waste is a family tradition, waste is usually not the first career choice, and most waste collectors have worked in a range of other jobs before entering the sector.

I dropped out of school and I was supposed to start at technical college... I have changed jobs a lot. What else I have tried? I have been a hospital orderly, a bricklayer's and a plumber's assistant, a removalist ... (Waste collector, Denmark, quoted in Sørensen & Hasle 2011: 15)

When I started this job, I was 36. In this town, it is difficult to start early. Before I was a shop assistant but I didn't have enough money to take care of my family. I wanted more but I needed a contract... I finished compulsory education and when I was 36 I registered with the employment agency. I was called in for a job in waste collection. (Waste collector, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto, Ferraris et al. 2011: 12)

From skilled to 'unskilled'

Most waste collectors do not have any formal education beyond the school leaving certificate. However, there are a number of exceptions where waste collectors appear 'overqualified' for the job.

I worked in the building and construction sector before. I worked mainly as a welder ... from 1986-1987. I worked as an arc welder, oxygen welder, etc. ... Initially I worked for a state owned construction company, then I moved to a private firm... then they simply laid us off. (Waste collector, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova 2012b: 21)

One worker had a shipping education and worked within shipping for 10 years before he took over his father's butcher's shop as a self-taught butcher, where he worked for 20 years. However, he had to close the shop for economic reasons. It was not possible for him to return to shipping, so when he got the chance to become a waste worker, he took it. (Waste collector, Denmark, quoted in Sørensen & Hasle 2011: 14)

The issue of over-qualification is particularly apparent among the Austrian waste collectors:

Waste workers in Austria, from their training and careers, are less unskilled than one might expect... The majority have completed trade apprenticeships as carpenters, electricians, painters, plumbers or mechanics. (Holtgrewe 2012: 11)

In the Austrian case, waste collectors' trajectories are characterised by previously having worked in jobs in other sectors that required vocational training. In addition, a number of the remaining workers have actually tried to complete vocational training, but had their training disrupted due to the employer's lack of funds or accidents. Holtgrewe notes that apprenticeships in small businesses render workers vulnerable to employers' economic risk (Holtgrewe 2012: 12).

It follows that working in waste is not a first choice, but rather an option that is chosen in light of limited alternatives – not only in waste, but in the 'male labour market'. Working in waste collection has often been chosen as a solution to a difficult situation (e.g. unemployment or a stressful former job) or as an opportunity to get a more secure job. However, most waste workers eventually become very satisfied with this choice for various reasons, e.g. being able to work closer to home.

For the group of waste workers with vocational training certificates who have worked in other sectors, the choice to become a waste collector is made because of a crisis in the work situation for their previous job and/or because of dissatisfaction with working conditions, e.g. having to commute long distances.

The first employment trajectory is related to a change of occupations, where the previous job is lost because of company closure or redundancies. To illustrate this – in many cases people who worked as craftsmen, shoe-makers, furriers, welders, miners and so on are 'forced' to seek employment in the waste collection sector. (Markova 2012b: 21)

It didn't suit me anymore. The atmosphere got worse and worse – the working atmosphere. [...] The pressure kept getting greater and then I had to drive [diggers] for subcontractors a lot, all across the country. [...] It started with a week in [the neighbouring country], and then they said, three months, and then I said, stop. I want to work in the region. (Waste collector, Austria, quoted in Holtgrewe 2012: 12)

From ‘unskilled’ in other sectors to ‘unskilled’ in waste

The career trajectories of waste collectors without formal training certificates are also driven by a disruption to or dissatisfaction with their work situation. However, their career paths usually cover many different positions within the semi-skilled or ‘unskilled’ male labour market:

One worker dropped out of elementary school one year before time. He started to train as a plumber when he was 14 years old, but had a problem with drugs. He subsequently tried several unskilled jobs. He got a commercial driver’s licence and worked as a removalist for three years. After a traffic accident he had problems with his back, which made it impossible to work for 1½ years. The union paid for truck driver training and a licence, and he worked as a truck driver for some time. A friend recommended him to the local FGC foreman, and he started a trial period. He has now been there for four years. (Waste collector, Denmark, quoted in Sørensen & Hasle 2011: 14)

I’m not Italian; things are more difficult for me. I studied until I was 20. I specialized in technical administration... I changed jobs 12 times in one year: [I also worked in a company where] the boss decided on Friday whether you had work on [the following] Monday! I sent my CV [to the company] and after one and half years of temping agency work I got a permanent contract.... Thanks to this secure job I was able to get a mortgage. (Waste truck driver, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto, Ferraris et al. 2011: 12)

Waste as an entrance into the labour market

Finally, a group of waste collectors come from more insecure positions or unemployment. This group have aimed for a more secure position – in particular a permanent job. As noted by Bizzotto, Ferraris et al. (2011), temporary workers are glad to get a chance to work. Many waste collectors have experiences from unemployment/informal work/fixed-term contracts, and have chosen waste collection because they see it as an opportunity to get an income and to eventually get a permanent job.

[I have] a part-time fixed term contract. It has been my first employment agreement and I willingly accepted it because I was unemployed before... I changed jobs many times... Fortunately, I got this opportunity. I’m enjoying it very much because I felt excluded from society. Even if I had a job, until two years ago, I felt excluded from society. I’m living this experience intensively... even if it lasts only 3 months, I’m happy to have this small contract. For me it is a big contract. (Sweeper, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto, Ferraris et al. 2011: 13)

For this group of workers, who find themselves at the very fringe of labour market, job and income security is the main goal and the choice of sector is not seen as important.

Upskilling and career options

Waste collection does not require any formal qualifications and at first glance appears simple. Some waste collectors even state that they would like more challenges and ‘brainwork’ in their jobs.

You could wish for more work content, mentally. Popularly speaking, we can ‘leave our brain at home’, and then go out on the route, because we are driving the same way every day, so we don’t need to think. ... So one could perhaps wish for a bit more to think about once and a while. (Waste collector, Denmark, quoted in Sørensen & Hasle 2011: 16)

However, interviews with waste collectors about their jobs suggest several personal and professional skills are necessary in the job. One needs to be able to work ‘smart’ in order not to work too hard, and one needs to be able to communicate with citizens/customers.

A certain willingness to communicate with the citizen, that’s essential, and patience [...] because it’s also a complaints office – about waste not collected, and citizens can be a bit unreasonable. That takes tact. Especially when it’s two parties – a neighbourhood quarrel to sort out. What’s the right thing to do? Where do you have to apply the legal regulations, without offending one side or the other? [...] That can be a bit difficult, but it can be done. (Waste collector, Austria, quoted in Holtgrewe 2012: 15)

In spite of the need for social and personal competencies, only few employers offer training. Some employers offer limited upskilling however, such as skilled waste collector certificates, driving licences or professional haulage driver courses.

The limited options for upskilling can be related to the fact that career options are also very limited in the waste sector.

In both companies, career options are in reality almost non-existent. You may be promoted to local manager/foreman, but as there is often one manager for more than 30 workers, the chance is very low. It is also almost impossible to plan for such a career. Neither of the companies offer management training courses, and new foremen are handpicked among experienced garbage collectors without prior training (Sørensen & Hasle 2011: 18)

Sørensen & Hasle conclude by quoting an older waste worker who was asked what he would recommend to a young worker who wanted to advance:

Q: What would your advice be for a young worker who wanted a career? A: Find something else, I think. That’s what I think. (Waste collector, Denmark, quoted in Sørensen & Hasle 2011: 18)

In countries where waste collection includes a hierarchy of occupations – ‘sweeper’, ‘waste collector’ and ‘driver’ – it may be possible to move ‘up’. However, working as a ‘driver’ is also regarded as stressful, and many waste workers are not interested in doing this. To what extent career paths are open for everyone is also a question. In particular, the Italian female sweepers do not find that career options are open to them.

Although predictable, it does not seem that working with recycling and more 'green' waste solutions promotes training/upskilling or additional career opportunities for waste collectors.

4.5.2 Job crafting in waste

According to Berg, Dutton & Wrzesniewski (2010) and Wrzesniewski & Dutton (2001), job crafting can be understood as the ways employees redesign their jobs. Such redesigning takes place in three different ways. First, by altering the boundaries of work e.g. taking on additional tasks (or fewer tasks) or changing the ways tasks are performed. Second, employees can change the social relationships they are involved in at work, e.g. establishing or emphasizing social relations. Third, employees may change their perception of the job (cognitive job crafting), emphasizing certain aspects rather than others. Finally, work may be regarded as either a job (in order to make a living), a career (as a stepping stone in one's career) or as 'a calling' (a vocation).

Most waste collectors emphasize the independence and freedom that are considered to be part of the job. They start in the morning and they organise much of the work themselves.

There is no doubt that the ones who know the town the best – that is certainly us. We do things the way we want to. The result may be that on part of residential street we end up collecting on Thursdays twice, rather than on Wednesday as expected. It's bits and pieces like that. It is down to the smallest detail. It is kind of funny that we may end up using three days for collecting on one street because that fits the way we want to do the street in question.

Q: How can it pay to visit a residential road three times, rather than once a week?

Because it can be a long street with crossroads you are collecting on anyway. But one crossroad may be on Wednesday, and the next on Thursday. Then it fits better to take each side of the crossing rather than to drive all the way through. You save some double driving down the same streets. That makes it more efficient and time-saving. (Waste collector, Denmark, quoted in Sørensen & Hasle 2011: 20)

However, the 'freedom' to organize and 'craft' work happens mainly at an individual level, e.g. by being able to organize the day's work, finding the right route, etc., whereas it is more difficult for waste collectors to influence the way work is organized.

Independently from the individual incentive to craft, workers basically have no possibilities to influence their current jobs. There is some degree of autonomy at work, but no job crafting is really allowed. Autonomy at work is related to the discretion and independence to schedule the work and determine how it is to be done. Employees in waste collection can partially decide the task orders. (Bizzotto, Ferraris et al. 2011: 14-15)

Waste collectors have very limited ability to influence or control their current job. (Markova 2012b: 30)

If we look at the more cognitive ways of crafting work, waste collectors have not deliberately chosen to work in the sector and they do not regard their work as 'a calling'. Rather, they struggle with the bad image of the job and attempt (in subtle ways) to reshape it. This is done in various ways. Some workers experience the work as more interesting than they expected and present it as more interesting than the low social recognition would suggest:

I never planned – I never thought in my life I'd collect waste. But it's very interesting. The view from outside – people see dirt, dirt, dirt. Of course it's dirty, but I find it interesting. (Waste collector, Austria, quoted in Holtgrewe 2012: 19)

A second way of shaping work cognitively is by taking pride in the work you do:

There's a sense of pride that you are doing something for a clean city. If we didn't exist, there would be waste and dirt everywhere, like in Italy, right? [...] We also take care to do the job as well as possible. (Waste collector, Austria, quoted in Holtgrewe 2012: 19)

After we have swept the streets and revisit these streets we feel happy because it is nice and clean. I often say, 'it is so clean'. People also admire our work. They say – 'you are doing a great job, look how clean it is'. (Sweeper, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova 2012b: 32)

Another example of job crafting is the preoccupation with 'compressing work' in order to finish early.

The principal goal is to finish all work tasks for the day and get home as quickly as possible. (Markova 2012b: 31)

Finally, although the autonomy is limited for all waste collectors, there are differences. In companies employing both drivers and waste collectors (who do not drive), the drivers have more autonomy and opportunities to reorganize work tasks than collectors.

Voice in waste?

Table 9: Employee use of unions

Countries	Austria	Bulgaria	Denmark	Italy
Waste collectors' use of and experiences with unions	Employees of municipality work according to a CLA, but do not actively seek influence via unions	The municipality enterprise has a CLA. Employees do not use unions to get influence	All providers are organised according to the CLA – but many workers do not use unions actively	CLA regulated at National level. However, workers do not report high levels of trust in trade unions

Waste collectors basically have access to two paths of influence: using the union representative or approaching first line managers. However, worker influence over the more structural/organisational features and conditions of the job seems to be rather low in most of the examined countries. This appears to be due to two factors. Although unions

are available, they are not really used in practice by workers. In Italy and Bulgaria, furthermore, the communication between managers and waste collectors appear to be problematic.

The waste sector is traditionally a sector with a high degree of unionization in many countries (less so, however in the new member states). In the countries with a high degree of unionization, however, union membership is decreasing. In the examined countries, Denmark is the only country where employers in both cases had signed a collective agreement. In Austria and Bulgaria, only the municipalities had a collective agreement (although Austria also has a works council) whereas the private employers did not. In Italy, collective bargaining defines minimum wages at a national level and also stipulates some basic working conditions (i.e. shifts, career paths, absence from work) at the company level. (Bizzotto, Ferraris et al. 2011: 6)

Neither management nor collective representation, however, seem to secure workers' voice. There appear to be different reasons for this. Bizzotto, Ferraris & Poggi (2011) suggest that the workers' main concerns are closely related to everyday work issues, which are the responsibility of managers and therefore not regarded as issues for union representatives. However, in Bulgaria and Italy, such issues are not discussed with managers either.

In Bulgaria and Italy there are several examples of workers being afraid of approaching a manager – or just finding it unthinkable to discuss personal work related matters with a manager.

On Saturday we don't really work, I shouldn't say this. If we have to do 50 or 100 doors a week, on Saturday we do 2 or 3 doors. If you send me to the centre on Saturday afternoon, what should I do? I just walk around and come back... The boss told me that you have to work 6 days a week, that's all. He could increase the weekly hours, from Monday to Friday... with one more hour per day we could do more bins, we could finish our duties. A district supervisor shouldn't be like the boss. He should be a mediator. An employee shouldn't be afraid to speak with the supervisor. (Waste collector, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto, Ferraris et al. 2011: 15)

In Bulgaria, approaching managers does not seem to offer any alternative 'channel of influence'. Markova even shows that negotiating financial benefits with managers is unthinkable for some waste collectors:

Did you have the chance to negotiate your salary with your employer? – Oh, no I don't dare! (Waste collector, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova 2012b: 34)

Even in cases where it would be appropriate to approach the shop steward or the Union directly, workers seem reluctant to do so. Holtgrewe (2012) notes for Austria that in spite of an active union and a favourable opinion about unions among waste collectors, their influence is largely preventive. Workers do not mention active use of union representatives, however, the awareness of the unions and the fact that there is a works council may help workers' negotiations, in spite of the fact that there are not many

concrete examples mentioned by workers. Contact and dialogue with the unions is even worse in Bulgaria, where most workers are not entirely certain about the role and activities of a union. Many workers here associate unions with a kind of charity institution:

In reality, the interviewed waste collectors and sweepers are not capable of understanding the benefits of their membership. For them the functions of trade unions are to give bonuses and gifts to its members. (Markova 2012b: 33)

In summary, unions appear to provide a general framework for negotiations (as In Austria) rather than being directly approached by waste collectors, although this varies between countries. The availability to negotiate working conditions with managers also differs. Danish waste collectors seem to experience a very direct access to managers which is not the case in Italy and Bulgaria.

4.6 Vulnerability, vulnerable groups and vulnerable (precarious) work

The previous sections have focused on how employees experience their current job and on their agency in their everyday work and in the labour market. This section deals with the latent social risks in the waste sector. The focus is predominantly on the risk of social exclusion, including the risk of exclusion from the labour market and/or risk of social exclusion both materially and in terms of social participation (Poggi, Bizzotto et al. 2011). The section discusses vulnerability from different perspectives. First, we identify what kind of vulnerable groups are employed in the sector and the different kinds of risks they face. Second, we look at work related vulnerability, focusing on features of employment conditions that may expose employees to poverty and/or social exclusion. Finally, we discuss vulnerability as a process, and the kinds of negative synergies between specific social groups and specific types of work. The aim is to identify work related vulnerability for the most socially vulnerable groups. Work-related vulnerability refers here to work-related processes characterised by uncertainty/weakness ‘which exposes a person (or a family) to suffering particularly negative or damaging consequences if a problematic situation arises’ (Ranci 2010). The term therefore not only refers to actual vulnerability, but also to those working conditions which exposes workers to future risks of social exclusion.

The waste sector in Europe employs a large proportion of native men as waste collectors. However, in Bulgaria waste collection is almost entirely carried out by members of the Roma community. Women work as sweepers in Italy and Bulgaria, but are generally not employed in waste collection.

Table 10: Workforce and vulnerable groups in the examined countries³¹

Country	Austria	Denmark	Bulgaria	Italy
Main social groups working in the sector	Native men (low skilled)	Native men (low skilled)	Roma men as garbage collectors (low skilled) Roma women as sweepers (no primary education)	Native men as garbage collectors (low skilled) Native women as sweepers Migrants
Specific vulnerable groups	Older workers Workers with physical strain	Older workers Workers with disabilities Women (very few) Temporary workers	All garbage collectors and sweepers In particular: Women sweepers. Commuting workers	Older workers Single mothers Migrants Temporary workers
Specific precarious work issues	Health risks (physical strain and traffic)	Health risks (physical strain and traffic) Atypical working hours	OHS risks (traffic, assault) Low wage/poverty Lack of other job options	Health risks (infection risks) Atypical working hours Low wage

4.6.1 Particularly vulnerable groups in the examined countries

Apart from Bulgaria, vulnerable groups in the ascriptive sense of migrants/ethnic minorities, young workers and women were few among the interviewed persons working in waste collection. Waste collection is ‘a man’s job’, and the fact that many waste collectors have had a previous career in another sector also results in an ‘older labour force’. Women are by and large only employed as sweepers (Italy and Bulgaria).

There are differences between countries regarding the type of ‘vulnerability’ that is at stake. Waste collectors in Austria, Denmark and Italy (in particular Northern Italy) do not appear very vulnerable in terms of their income and work situation. However, continuous outsourcing exposes them (in particular the most vulnerable – older workers and workers with disabilities) to a larger degree of employment insecurity. Incomes are limited, but waste workers in these countries do not consider themselves to be poor. In all countries, **older workers** and **workers with disabilities** are vulnerable because of physical strain and less certain to keep their jobs if a new company wins the tender (due to public procurement). Although few in number, **women** and **migrants/ethnic minorities** experience particular problems in waste collection. In Italy and Bulgaria, **workers with large households** to support have trouble making ends meet (Bizzotto, Ferraris et al. 2011). Despite a generally high degree of job security, there is a group of waste collectors/sweepers working as **temps** – and their employment is more insecure. Finally,

³¹ It should be noted that ‘vulnerability’ is relative and differs between countries. Within the four countries, Bulgarian (Roma) waste collectors are the most vulnerable, whereas it is debatable to what extent Danish and Austrian waste collectors as a group can be regarded as vulnerable.

in Bulgaria the **Roma employees** are particularly vulnerable due to limited alternative employment opportunities, poverty and poor living conditions.

Older workers and disabled workers

The interviews suggest that older workers experience physical strain and some are worried that they may not be able to work until retirement age.

Workers are worried about retirement. Their work is physically demanding. They could start to have health problems and not be able to continue to work until retirement age, losing their only income source. If this happens, they will be at risk of unemployment and likely poverty. The reforming of the Italian retirement system is also creating some concerns about the future. (Bizzotto, Ferraris et al. 2011: 18)

Hilltown workers generally feel exhaustion, and while work has been intensified, their own resilience has not improved. (Holtgrewe 2012: 27)

Holtgrewe (2012), in line with Bizzotto, Ferraris & Poggi (2011), also finds that while waste collectors regard their job as secure, they are not too sure about the longer-term future. Older waste collectors experience an ongoing intensification of work due to the growth of the city and the ongoing need to rationalise work. The combination of increasing intensity and the widely publicised Austrian policy initiatives to curb early retirement are contributing to a sense of vulnerability.

Finally, being older or having work impairments also make workers more vulnerable when contracts change.

As long as [workers with work impairments] are on good terms with the manager and the team they are working in, they are relatively safe in their jobs. However, if the contract changes to another employer after a tender process or if the manager changes, they risk losing their job. (Sørensen & Hasle 2011: 22)

Ethnic minorities and Roma workers

There are only few migrants/ethnic minorities working in waste collection, with the exception of Bulgaria, where the majority of waste collectors belong to the Roma ethnic minority. In Italy, Austria and Denmark, it is difficult to draw a clear picture because of the small sample of interviews. However, based on the interviews, the migrants working in the sector do not appear to experience their work differently from the majority of workers. Some accounts indicate that it might take some time to be accepted, because the native workers may be a bit prejudiced against foreigners. It may therefore be more difficult for migrants and ethnic minorities to get access to the waste sector in some cases, especially since new recruitment often happens through networks of acquaintances (although some interviews suggest that waste collection is not very sought after by these groups). However, the general picture is that migrants and ethnic minorities working in the sector are reasonably satisfied with their jobs.

The picture is different when we look at the Roma workers in Bulgaria. Waste collection is regarded as a low status occupation – even within the Roma population. However,

interviews with Roma waste collectors suggest that these workers have very few alternatives. This group of workers also reports that they live in poverty. Many have debts and are struggling to pay them back. They also live in large households and often have many dependents because of high levels of unemployment. Most of those interviewed live in Roma suburbs with very poor sanitation conditions (Markova 2012b: 37).

In these times of crisis we do not know how to make ends meet. We buy only food, that's all we buy, nothing else. When I get my money – like now when I receive 380 leva – I go home and buy what is most necessary, and tomorrow I have no money, I am penniless. (Sweeper, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova 2012b: 38)

Finally, the group of commuting Roma workers should be mentioned as particularly vulnerable, because they spend a large share of what they earn on transportation (Markova 2012b: 51).

Women

There are very few women working in waste collection, but those that are there seem to be more vulnerable than the rest of the workforce. There seem to be two reasons for this. First, because the work is very strenuous, women seem to have more difficulty physically coping with it, and second, the idea that it is 'a man's job' and the masculine values connected to it makes it harder for women to be accepted in the job:

Another vulnerable group is women. As the job is dominated by masculine values of strength and dexterity, the women are at risk of social exclusion and of losing their job. The women have to prove their value, and the interviews show that they find it hard to live up to the physical requirements in the long run. (Sørensen & Hasle 2011: 22)

In addition, Sørensen & Hasle suggest that the masculine values attached to the job keep women from entering the sector. However, they also argue that an influx of women might have a positive effect on working conditions – as it would force employers to focus more on the physical strain in the job (Sørensen & Hasle 2011: 24).

Although almost absent from waste collection, women do work as sweepers and cleaners (mainly in Italy and Bulgaria). There seems to be a prevailing gendered work discourse that assumes women are better suited to sweeping. This is both related to sweeping being lighter work and the fact that women are ascribed better social skills:

Often women enter the collection activities, but are subsequently downgraded to sweeping activities, even by their own will. Sweeping is as widespread an activity as collection, but is lighter work. (Employee representative, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto, Ferraris et al. 2011: 17)

Women are asked to be district street sweepers for public image reasons, as street sweeping has the most contact with the public and women are perceived as more polite and clean than men (Bizzotto, Ferraris et al. 2011: 17)

In Bulgaria, women also tend to work as sweepers while men work as waste collectors. Roma women have very limited formal education and even fewer options in the labour market than the Roma men, because of the tradition of women marrying young (Markova 2012b).

Temporary workers

Finally, temporary workers can be regarded as particularly vulnerable. They represent a small group of workers facing the same health related risks as permanent workers, but without the same economic security. Most temporary workers aspire to get a permanent position and working as a temp is viewed as an 'entrance' job in the sector.

Skilled or 'unskilled'? The role of formal education

Waste collection is formally an unskilled job with no formal educational requirements. To a certain extent, waste collectors discuss their own lack of formal education as a way to explain their lack of alternative options. For example in Denmark, several workers are dyslexic or have other reading difficulties (Sørensen & Hasle 2011: 17). So education/skills partly explain the limited labour market opportunities. However, the interviews also reveal that a large number of waste collectors are in fact skilled in other professions, e.g. as carpenters, welders, blacksmiths, etc. It is therefore important to note that their vulnerable position in the labour market cannot solely be attributed to 'lack of education', but rather to the fact that they have found their options restricted in the sectors in which they are trained, and have therefore decided to get a job in the waste sector.

4.6.2 Vulnerable work

Working in the waste sector generally seems to create a high degree of employment security, but at the expense of higher Occupational Health and Safety risks. In spite of recent developments in the sector related to environmental concerns and the development of new technology, waste collection is still hard physical work and workers exposed to a number of OHS risks.

In Italy, the dilemma of social security at the cost of physical risk is particularly evident. Following Bizzotto, Ferraris & Poggi, the main risks in Italy are also health related, e.g. risk of infection, risk of physical strain and traffic risks. But Italian waste collectors also consider their job a way to escape poverty and social exclusion (particularly in the south where unemployment is high). This leads Bizzotto, Ferraris et al. to conclude that work in waste collection reduces income risks, but also leads to an increase in health and safety risks (Bizzotto, Ferraris et al. 2011).

Recent developments in the sector may furthermore upset the balance between income security and OHS risks. Many, though not all, waste collectors are employed on open ended contracts and enjoy a high degree of employment security. However, in all countries (except in Italy) there is continuous outsourcing, resulting in regular tenders and renewal of contracts. The result is that more workers are employed on fixed term contracts (some on one year contracts) and this tends to increase insecurity, particularly for the most vulnerable groups.

The particular health related and economic risks in waste collection are summed up by Sørensen & Hasle:

In conclusion, we observe four types of vulnerable work resulting from how the work is organized: 1) The workers are exposed to **accidents** because waste has to be collected at times where there is snow and in daytime traffic; 2) Work outside of CGC City is organised in a way that **temporary workers are employed on unsecure terms**; 3) Outsourcing and privatisation has created a **returning insecurity for certain vulnerable work groups** when ownership changes; 4) Some **parts of the work are still so heavy** that certain vulnerable groups have difficulty performing it in the long run. In the current political and economic climate, there is little chance that these types of vulnerable work will diminish in the future, although all of the types can be improved through better contracts with the municipalities. (Sørensen & Hasle 2011: 20)

Both Holtgrewe (2012) and Sørensen & Hasle (2011) emphasize the need to develop ways of organizing work, including technological solutions that can reduce OHS related risks in waste collection.

4.7 Future aspirations and future perspectives

Workers in waste collection have to a large extent already tried other career alternatives, and this combined with the limited career options in waste constrain rather than sustain waste workers' 'capacities to aspire' (see also the introduction above).

Most waste collectors (and sweepers) have limited visions and aspirations for the future. However, there seems to be a general divide between Austria and Denmark, and Bulgaria and Italy concerning the reasons for reluctance in expressing hopes for the long term future.

Austrian and Danish waste collectors seem to feel they have a satisfactory position, reasonable wages and early finishing times. Their job satisfaction is related to the fact that they have actually tried a range of different jobs in various sectors of the male low skilled job market. Waste collection may be hard work – but it is also reasonably well paid and secure. The majority of waste collectors express satisfaction about staying in the job and are not attempting to change careers.

However, younger workers express some ideas about getting an education. These ideas are generally related to abstract stories about the risk of not having an education than to actual experiences or wishes (e.g. a father-in-law who says that education is more secure, or that it is 'common sense' that it is a good idea to have something to 'fall back on'). Few express concrete plans about getting an education/vocational training.

Austrian waste collectors form a particularly interesting group because most of them actually have completed an apprenticeship, although they do not use it in their jobs. Their limited wishes and visions seem also related to the fact that they have experienced hard times, e.g. dismissals in these other sectors. This group do not see further education as a

step towards a better situation. In fact, they see their present situation as a solution to the worse situation they had found themselves in earlier.

The older workers have a particular set of aspirations that are closely related to simply staying in the job until retirement, and still having some energy left for an active retirement (Holtgrewe 2012, Sørensen & Hasle 2011). This group is also worried that they will not be able to work until retirement, and about national policies aimed at delaying retirement age.

The Italian waste collectors can be divided between North and South. ‘Northern’ experiences tend to resemble the Austrian and Danish experiences, whereas ‘southern’ waste collectors’ stories tend to resemble the Bulgarian interviews. These Southern Italian and Bulgarian interviews suggest that waste collectors are happy to have a job at all and a steady income – and that they do not intend to risk losing it by trying something else. These interviews also reflect the fact that there are not many other options for this group of workers because of high unemployment/lack of education/discrimination (Roma).

Ashamed or not – I simply don’t have a choice. (Sweeper, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova 2012b: 50).

In these Bulgarian and Italian interviews, lack of education is raised more often as an obstacle, and younger workers in particular have some (although vague) ideas about pursuing further education. There is also a difference between younger and older workers in these interviews, with older workers mostly concerned about ‘lasting’ in the labour market until retirement age. This sometimes leads them to reflect on changing to ‘lighter’ work, but such work is equally difficult to find.

Finally, the interviews with male waste collectors reflect surprisingly little concern with addressing or opposing prevailing attitudes surrounding ‘dirty’ and low status work. Aspirations in this regard seem to be aimed at ‘creating the good life’ outside work and emphasizing the advantages, rather than openly challenging ‘dirty work’ discourses.

4.8 Summary and conclusion

Waste collection is viewed as a ‘man’s’ job. There is an overwhelming majority of male workers, and work is associated with masculinity, e.g. being physically hard, being ‘dirty’ and outdoors, as well as being associated with independence and autonomy. Waste collection also has low social status and is considered a job that ‘anyone can do’ because it does not require any particular skills. However, most waste collectors are quite satisfied with their work. This is generally because it was a ‘solution’ at a point in the worker’s career where they were either not satisfied with the job they had, were at risk of becoming unemployed or chose waste collection as an opportunity to enter the labour market.

In most cases, working as a waste collector has turned out to be a better job than most had expected. The problematic status of the job is outweighed by the possibility of finishing early, working outside, being independent and having a steady and in most cases (Austria, Denmark and Italy) reasonable income. For many waste collectors the job is a solution to a former problematic working situation and the job is therefore viewed

positively. For the primarily Roma employees in the Bulgarian waste sector, working in the waste sector is seen as being the only employment option, due to a low level of education and a high level of unemployment. This is to some extent also the case for the Italian waste collectors, particularly in southern Italy.

However, although working in waste secures an income, it also exposes workers to health risks, in terms of physical strain, risk of infections and the risk of traffic accidents or abuse from other drivers. Some employers use new technology (e.g. bins on wheels) to avoid heavy lifting. However, most workers are still exposed to high health and safety risks. New technologies are not always beneficial to working conditions, as they usually go together with expectations of higher work intensity. In addition, workers themselves are not always careful – and there seems to be a high degree of ‘self-taylorization’ because one of the main aims of work is to finish early. This aspect of the job seems furthermore to be related to the low level of recognition and the ‘masculine’ identity. Working fewer hours and finishing early in the job gives more leisure time and turns the low status work into ‘a good deal’.

Waste collection is not a job that is associated with upskilling or social mobility, and indeed there are very few career options. Even the recent ‘wave’ of recycling and waste sorting does not seem to have provided new opportunities for workers. When asked about their future plans and aspirations, most waste workers consider their work to be ‘a good job’. They prefer to stay where they are and have few ideas for their future. This is partly related to the fact that many of them are already in their ‘second’ career, having worked in other sectors before this, and partly to the actual situation which gives them few opportunities. Employers do not in any substantial way attempt to change this picture, and there are therefore not many places to seek inspiration.

5 ‘Underpaid, overworked but happy’³² Individual perspectives on work in domiciliary elderly care

The following chapter presents findings on employee perspectives in domiciliary elderly care from five countries, Lithuania, Germany, Italy, Denmark and UK. The chapter has been compiled using country reports based on individual interviews about central work and life issues in care work, viewed from the perspective of the employees. Each country report includes an average of 20 individual interviews with care workers.

The first section in the chapter introduces the care sector and gives a basic overview of the prevailing care regimes in Europe, as well as the position of the five countries. The country differences and data will also be presented here. This will be followed in the second section by a presentation and analysis of employee experiences of their **quality of life and work**. This section introduces the most significant quality of work and quality of life issues (good and bad) from the perspective of employees, and presents an overview of these perspectives in Table 12. The most significant quality of work and life issues are then analysed by identifying persistent features in domiciliary elderly care work that seem to be significant in determining experiences of work and life. These are, ‘**working in the homes of customers**’, ‘**regulation in terms of control as well as protection**’ and ‘**downsizing and time pressure**’.

The third section consists of an analysis of the characteristics of employees’ agency by looking at **career trajectories**, **job crafting** and ‘**voice**’³³ (ways of expressing interests and dissent). The aim of this section is to identify career patterns in elderly care and the choices that care workers make in order to identify the processes involved in creating job mobility and career options. The section also analyses what kind of influence care workers have in their everyday work tasks and in terms of being able to negotiate better work and employment conditions.

The fourth section in the chapter focuses on **vulnerable groups** and **vulnerable work**. The overall aim is to understand the social significance of having a job in elderly care for the most vulnerable groups in Europe. The section gives an overview of the different social categories of employees working in the sector (women, migrants/ethnic minorities, unskilled/low-skilled, elderly workers, young workers or ‘other’) and possible differences and difficulties specifically related to certain groups. In addition, the section analyses how specific work features expose these groups to additional social risks, e.g. fixed term jobs, zero hour contracts, atypical working hours.

The final section provides an overview of the perception of future options for employees in the care sector by analysing their future aspirations and how these reflect the structural conditions in the labour market. This part of the analysis will be conceptualized within the perspective of ‘**sociocultural capacities to aspire**’ (Lewis & Giullari 2005; Appadurai 2004; Sen 1999). The chapter concludes by summarizing the main findings and identifying

³² Cf. Kuemmerling 2012.

³³ Cf. Hirschman 1970.

and discussing how quality of work and life and vulnerability develop in the interaction between specific ways of organizing elderly care work, prevailing cultural discourses (e.g. assumptions about gendering of work and work tasks) and individual agency.

5.1 Introduction to domiciliary elderly care

Domiciliary elderly care services, or mobile elderly care services, can be defined as 'assistance to elderly who live in private households, but who need assistance with self-care (e.g. washing, dressing, eating, taking medication) or domestic tasks such as cleaning and cooking' (cf. Anxo & Fagan 2005). Employees in the sector consist mainly of female care workers. Migrants and ethnic minorities have recently become active in care work (in some countries more than others), and male care workers are also slowly beginning to enter the sector. Although differences exist between countries, work is considered low skilled and only a few countries require mandatory training for employees (Simonazzi 2008). In most European countries, elderly care is a low wage sector with low status, where work is often located in the informal or private sector (Kamp & Hvid 2012). However, there are differences in the organisation and provision of care work which can be related to differences in welfare state models (Esping-Andersen 1990). In Southern Europe, families are legally bound to take care of elderly people. The same holds for many countries in Central-Eastern Europe. In central Europe, family responsibilities are regulated more implicitly and care is provided via universal insurance schemes, whereas in Scandinavia and the UK there are no family obligations and care is universal and funded from general taxation (Simonazzi 2008). Due to population ageing and the need to reduce costs in all European countries, there is a general shift from residential care towards home care and private provision. In domiciliary elderly care there is also a general tendency in most European countries to reducing entitlements in order to control care costs (Simonazzi 2008). This process of cost and entitlement reduction has furthermore increased as a consequence of post-crisis public sector management.

5.2 Method and material

Five countries have provided national reports on individual perspectives and agency in elderly care: Italy, Germany, Lithuania, UK and Denmark. These countries represent different care regimes, as can be seen in Table 11 below. The country group characteristics are based on a model of the different elderly care regimes in Europe developed by Simonazzi (2008) and adapted to fit the present selection of countries.

Table 11: Elderly care regimes in Europe

Country groups	Northern Europe/ Denmark/UK ³⁴	Continental Europe/ Germany	Mediterranean/ Italy	Central-Eastern Europe/ Lithuania
Characteristics	State responsibility for dependency. Financed through general taxation	Dependency to be covered through a form of insurance cover and large involvement of families	Family based and principle of social assistance	Families legally or implicitly bound to care

Differences in elderly care regimes not only concern different types of financing and different forms of care provision, but also cover huge differences in coverage. In Italy and Lithuania, 1-2% of the aged are provided with public elderly care, whereas in Denmark, with the highest coverage, 25% of those above 65 years of age receive domiciliary care (Rostgaard 2009).

Domiciliary care work is usually termed low skilled work, but there are significant differences between educational levels and requirements in the five countries. In Denmark and Germany the majority of care workers have vocational qualifications, whereas in the UK it is mandatory for workers to complete brief training courses in providing basic care, as well as courses in Health and Safety. In Lithuania and Italy there are no formal requirements for training. However, in both countries care workers are overqualified either due to general unemployment (Lithuania) or because care work is a part of an overall migration strategy (Italy). In all five countries, care work is performed by various categories of employees, according to the degree of health and medical knowledge required. Medical tasks are generally performed by trained personnel such as nurses, (Italy), or care assistants (Denmark), whereas personal and practical care work is performed by non-skilled or low skilled employees. However, the categorization of skilled and unskilled work tasks varies across countries and is continuously changing within countries as well. The changes in skill requirements, moreover, do not seem to follow any clear pattern of either 'professionalization' or 'deskilling', since both processes seem to be at work in the sector.

5.2.1 The country reports and interviews

The 16 interview persons in the **Italian** report by Bizzotto & Villoso (2011) consist of 9 personal assistants and seven social care 'operators'. The interviewees consist of 14 women and two men. Two thirds of participants are migrants (11). The average level of education is quite high since the majority of interviewed workers have finished secondary school. Personal assistants do not have any vocational training, whereas the social care operators have a vocational training of 1000 hours. Most social care 'operators' have an

³⁴ The UK and Scandinavia are usually categorized as belonging to different welfare state regimes, however, following Simonazzi (2008), they are grouped here along the lines of informal/formal care responsibilities.

Italian background, while most personal assistants are immigrants. The interviewees are employed in four different work 'environments' defined by the intersection of two different axes: (a) private vs. public and (b) a territorial axis. The workers are in fact employed in private and publicly funded elderly home care in two different areas of Italy: the north-east and north-west. In both cases workers are managed by social cooperatives. The personal assistants interviewed belong to the 'regular' and 'legal' part of domiciliary elderly care and all have a formal employment contract. However, a large proportion of personal assistant jobs are informally regulated between employers and workers, and mainly cover foreign workers forced to accept demanding working conditions, under-protection and low wages because of a lack of alternatives, and because their immigration status limits their opportunity to look for a different occupation. It follows that the most vulnerable care workers, who work in the informal care sector, are not represented in the study.

The **UK** report by McClelland & Holman (2012b) is based on 19 interviews, of which 17 participants were female, and two were male, employed by three different types of providers, one public (8), one private (7) and one third sector (4). The average age of care workers was 42 years. Most stated that they had a school or college level education, with a few exceptions who had either no or university-level qualifications. All had completed mandatory introductory training courses. The majority of those in the public and third sectors had either completed, or were working towards, higher-level vocational qualifications. Ethnic minorities and non-native English speakers were also represented in the sample.

The **Lithuanian** report by Naujaniene (2011) is based on 13 interviews, all women and all Lithuanian, carried out in two different sectors –public (7) and NGO (6) (Naujaniene 2011). The participants are generally over qualified for their job, and many hold a higher or university degree. An explanation of this could be the high level of unemployment in the country. The fact that many participants are overqualified might explain the dominant theme of dissatisfaction about the job situation.

The **German** study by Kuemmerling (2012) consists of 21 interviews of which 17 participants are women and four are men, carried out in three different companies (one non-profit, two private). There are no employees from migrant backgrounds among the interviewees. This is due to the fact that although a few of the employees were foreigners (from Russia and Turkey in particular), they do not account for a significant proportion of the workforce. The German interviews broadly reflect the social groups employed in the three companies.

The **Danish** report by Hohnen (2012) is based on 20 interviews. The majority of the interviewees (11) have completed vocational training as a care helper, whilst the remainder are either vocationally trained as care assistants (3), or have non-vocational training (6). The interviews represent workers from both sexes and from both Danish and ethnic minorities, although the vast majority are women with a Danish ethnic background. The interviewees were employed by three different providers – two public and one private. Care workers with an ethnic minority background and care workers on fixed term contracts have been difficult to contact. Consequently, the representation of different

social groups is not as diverse as hoped, and there is an underrepresentation of the most vulnerable groups.

From the above it should be noted that vulnerable groups are probably underrepresented in the interviews. It is therefore probable that the negative aspects and problematic areas discussed in the report can also be found in larger parts of the domiciliary care sector in the five countries.

5.3 Care workers' perceptions of quality of work and life

Table 12: Perceptions of quality of work and life in domiciliary elderly care³⁵

QoW and QoL issues perceived by care workers	Germany	Lithuania	UK	Italy	Denmark
QoL Poverty	Insufficient income, some have too few working hours and low wages.	Constant lack of money (nobody had enough money)	Insufficient income, but not in poverty. Some choose to work many hours to earn enough money	Insufficient income: ' <i>We always need to rely on social welfare</i> '	Wages considered low but very few experience poverty
Meaning in work	Vocation/calling ' <i>you get so much back, sometimes it is just a smile</i> '	Good relations with customers make work meaningful (bad relations the opposite)	Work is meaningful: ' <i>you get satisfaction out of it...making [clients] lives better</i> '	Vocation/calling Attachment to the job due to ' <i>human enrichment</i> '.	Vocation/calling ' <i>It feels like I have been made for this job</i> '
Lack of social recognition	Dissatisfaction with wages but also resignation	Lack of recognition from relatives/children. Regarded as ' <i>a cleaning lady's job</i> '		Lack of formal recognition, e.g. wages	Lack of recognition: ' <i>I don't think what we do is appreciated</i> '
Increasing intensity and time pressure	Time deficiency. ' <i>you have to have a short conversation too</i> '	Clients' growing need with no adjustment of time.	New monitoring system in private sector case resulted in inadequate pay and time to do job		Constant reduction in time allocation and citizens' entitlements
Insufficient and unknown working hours			Zero hour contracts and variable shift patterns commonplace	Too few working hours/insecure income	

³⁵ The table shows the work and life issues that are perceived as the most significant and the various forms they take in the five countries in order to show both prevalence and variation. Empty boxes mean that the topic is not mentioned in the reports as a significant issue for care workers.

Working with clients (e.g. conflicts, violence)	Some clients refuse lifting equipment	Clients have power over care worker (threaten to report care worker)	Clients' needs are more important than care workers'. Some examples of aggression and racism directed towards care workers.	Discrimination and abuse. Care by non-relatives clashes with social norm. Relatives problematic	Clients do not have power to decide work, but also stories of violence
Unclear work tasks		Decrease in citizens' entitlements: 'cleaning the living space' instead of 'apartment'			Decrease in citizens' entitlements. Not always clear work tasks
Physical work environment	Perception of work as strenuous and worries about how to last until retirement age	Physical and psychological exhaustion, worry about being able to keep working until retirement	Risky to work alone at night. Physical strains of job partly overcome by use of equipment	Risk of contagious illness, backache and musculoskeletal injuries.	Physical strain partly overcome by the use of technological equipment
Work/life balance	Some employees use leisure time for work; because of atypical working hours, some face problems staying in contact with friends	Perform all 'housewife duties' at home	Those with fixed working hours were able to plan their lives; those without were not	Co-habitation blurs private/work boundaries	Work/life is ok except for weekends
Lack of social support	Well regulated/minimum wage	Lack of regulation, lack of support in homes: ' <i>no one is defending us</i> '	Well regulated and feel protected. But poor consideration for care workers' private lives and holidays	Lack of regulation and support: ' <i>In the end we are alone</i> '	
Psychological work environment problems	Mentally demanding (not specified)	Experiences of fatigue. Need to be alone after work/conflicts with elderly	Fatigue common at the end of shifts or after a long periods of working	Fatigue. Need to be alone after work	Hard emotionally: ' <i>They tell you about their worries</i> '
Other	Time is allocated on the basis of work tasks – but no time for care and communication		Reablement is considered positive, e.g. changing care roles from <i>supporter</i> to <i>facilitator</i>		Public work is regarded as more protected and secure

5.3.1 Underpaid overworked but happy?³⁶ Ambiguous experiences in care work

Interviews with care workers in all five countries suggest that care workers' perceptions of their work are characterized by ambiguity. Care workers generally emphasize their work as meaningful but materially unrewarding – and they point to clear inconsistencies between the importance of the work that they do and the lack of reward and recognition that they receive. Moreover, there seems to be a striking resemblance in this overall perception of work which transcends national differences and differences in care regimes:

Generally speaking, home elderly care (in **Italy**) is described by workers as a low-pay and low-status job. Workers face problems concerning pay, hours, training, status and social recognition. However they are highly motivated and have chosen this job out of a sense of vocation. (Bizzotto & Villoso 2011: 11)

In **Germany** working in the home care sector means working in a low-pay sector, with high responsibility, inconvenient and atypical working hours, low status and poor career options. Nearly all interviewed employees report that they were often told by friends and relatives that 'they could not do it'. (Kuemmerling 2012: 15)

A main impression about elderly care at home (in **Lithuania**) is that it is a low-paid and low-status job in society. While care workers who participated in the study advocated the need for such a service and presented it as a mission to help others, they often expressed concern about low status and low salary for their job. (Naujaniene 2011: 8)

Employees in **Danish** domiciliary elderly care are generally satisfied with their work, which they regard as meaningful, socially significant and emotionally rewarding. At the same time, interviewees experience a general lack recognition from surrounding society, both in terms of wages and recognition of the significant contribution that they make. (Hohnen 2012: 6)

Some (care workers in **the UK**) felt that they provided a valuable social role... [However] remuneration for their work efforts was a considerable concern. (McClelland & Holman 2012b: 8)

Almost all care workers express a high degree of satisfaction in their work and are surprisingly positive about the value, usefulness and significance of the work that they are providing, and about the fact that they are helping other people and often receive gratitude and acknowledgement from the elderly citizens. They experience a high degree of autonomy, responsibility and pride in their daily work and relations with the elderly.

I like the work... because I feel good, when I arrive at Mrs Jensen to see if she has remembered her pills. You immediately see how happy she is to see you... then I think about how happy I am that I have chosen this kind of work... (Care helper, Denmark, quoted in Hohnen 2012: 10)

³⁶ This heading is taken from the German elderly care report (Kuemmerling 2012), which seems to cover the perception of work in all five countries.

You get so much back. Sometimes, it is just a smile... (Care assistant, Germany, quoted in Kuemmerling 2012: 15)

Employees' mixed perceptions of care work are common to all five countries, despite differences in wages and working conditions. Care workers value the daily contact with the elderly but find employment and working conditions, and in particular wages, problematic.

In some countries care workers have problems in general making ends meet with their wages (Lithuania and Italy), and in all countries some care workers find that their financial situation has negative consequences for their life quality, e.g. their ability to choose a safe area to live in. Many see themselves as poor, although this is not always easy for them to talk about (Kuemmerling 2012; Naujaniene 2011).

At the end of the month I get 300 euros of net salary. I don't go anywhere with that amount. But I always say, better 300 euros than nothing. We always need to rely on social welfare, and fortunately in this city we have it. (Personal assistant, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto & Villoso 2011: 22)

None of the research participants mentioned that they have enough money. (Naujaniene 2011: 26)

The prevalence of poverty among care workers can be related both to low hourly wages and the fact that many care workers work part time and have problems getting sufficient working hours. The low level of remuneration may lead to very long working hours and the violation of working time directives:

I need to work more... because I need to pay bills. And I'm not bringing in enough money at the moment to [meet] my basic needs. (Care worker, UK, quoted in McClelland & Holman 2012b: 19)

McClelland & Holman state that some care workers have opted out of the Working Time Directive 2003³⁷ and now work up 80-hours per week for this reason (McClelland & Holman 2012b: 19). Part time work also creates financial problems in other countries, as the quote from a single mother in Denmark shows:

I have asked if I can get some extra work. It is difficult for me to make ends meet with only one salary... (Care worker, Denmark, quoted in Hohnen 2012: 12)

The problem of insufficient income is reported in several cases to be related to insufficient working hours and not being able to get a guaranteed number of working hours. In all countries part time work prevails in the sector, and the increasing use of fixed term contracts and increased privatization seems to have resulted in more employment contracts guaranteeing few or even no working hours.

³⁷ This EU regulation gives employees the right to work no more than 48 hours per week unless they choose to do so.

Workers pointed out the low level of hourly wages and, in some cases the insecurity of their hours of work with the implications for their pay. Depending on the agreement with the cooperative they work for, hours could change from month to month, with no guarantee of a fixed number of hours each week. (Bizzotto & Villoso 2011: 12)

McClelland & Holman (2012b) discuss how having low income is experienced as very stressful by care workers in the UK – yet the ‘care market’ continues to employ care workers on ‘zero-hour contracts’, where they have no guaranteed working hours or income at all.

5.3.2 Lack of social recognition

In addition to the financial problems that many have as a result of a low income, care workers also find the low wage level inconsistent with the hard work and responsibility that they feel they have.

Almost all social care ‘operators’ we interviewed highlighted the low social recognition of their work (Bizzotto & Villoso 2011: 16):

I don't think what we do is appreciated. I don't mean by the citizens. It is the whole perception of it... in terms of wages in particular. What we do is of great value! (Care helper, Denmark, quoted in Hohnen 2012: 10)

I earn a pittance, just 6 euros per hour. But the responsibilities we have in our job are huge. We need to have one hundred eyes. (Personal assistant, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto & Villoso 2011: 12)

Even old people who we go to say we're worth our weight in gold. Without us, they wouldn't live at home and we don't get paid enough for what we do. (Care worker, UK, quoted in McClelland & Holman 2012b: 8)

The low wages are interpreted as a lack of societal recognition and care workers see the level of wages as offensive. This lack of social recognition is also related to a more general lack of appreciation, by surrounding society, and in some cases by the relatives of the elderly. Care workers experience that their contribution is not appreciated, despite the fact that they and most of their elderly clients see their work is necessary, useful and hard. However, there seems to be a general sense of resignation by many care workers, and few expect either wages or general social recognition to get better in the future.

5.3.3 Hard work: Physical exhaustion, emotional exhaustion and fatigue

Care workers emphasize that care work is hard work, both physically and emotionally. In most countries care workers are aware of the risk of musculoskeletal issues. The physical aspect of work quality is particularly emphasized in the countries where care work is less regulated (Italy and Lithuania). In Lithuania, care workers walk between clients’ homes and often carry heavy groceries. The municipalities have made a directive not to lift more than five kilograms. However, due to time limits and reductions in the frequency of visits,

care workers find the limit ridiculous, since they need to supply goods for several days every time they come. In addition care workers express concern that they will not be able to keep working until retirement age:

In the talk about care workers' possibilities to remain in their jobs until retirement age, research participants were not highly optimistic... when talking about risk of accidents, R mentions slippery roads, because 'we walk and carry heavy loads' (Naujaniene 2011: 24)

Care workers in Italy and Germany also worry about their physical health:

In the long run there is the risk of physical strain. Often you have to work in difficult situations, in narrow places; you have to find the best solutions. (Social care operator, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto & Villoso 2011: 22)

There are situations in which you really experience backache. It doesn't happen because you have to lift the patient, but because you have to walk with him and you cannot stand erect. (Social care operator, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto & Villoso 2011: 22)

Some of the German care workers interviewed report that they lack lifting equipment and professional sick beds, in spite of the fact that they are expected to move people between beds. Either they do not have access to lifting equipment or they are not allowed to use it because the clients refuse.

Our patients are not all slim. Some of them weigh 140-150 kg and you have to support them entirely on your own. They lie in bed and do nothing at all, even though they could. (Care assistant, Germany, quoted in Kuemmerling 2012: 16)

According to the interviews from UK and Denmark, care workers experience that this risk has been minimized due to the use of equipment, e.g. protective clothing and hoist machinery.

For all care workers, the physical demands of work (e.g. lifting and moving service users) had been partly overcome through the use of hoist machinery, specific training, and the requirement to work in pairs in such situations. (McClelland & Holman 2012b: 21)

The Danish report also highlights the significance of using the right equipment and suggests that the main issues of quality of work are emotional rather than physical. Care worker accounts point to some degree of variation in this area, and interviews suggest that the public employers are more concerned about the Occupational Health and Safety of employees than private employers.

What really gets you down is to have to wash floors with only a floor scrubber and a floor cloth... and if you have four such tasks in one day with only a floor scrubber and floor cloth... then it is really hard... I have tried to ask about the rules, but on this point [the company] have not been very fast... However, I know that for the municipality they have to have it. They are more firm on this point. (Practical care worker, Denmark, quoted in Hohnen 2012: 23)

In addition to the physical strain, elderly care work is also emotionally exhausting. Care workers see themselves as emotionally responsible for clients. This includes listening to them, cheering them up and talking to them. The close contact and feeling of responsibility is one side of the emotional labour involved in care work. Another type of strain is the confrontation with death, illness and diseases, which also places considerable emotional strain on care workers. Several care workers suggest that it is better not to become too close with clients, and many interviewees explicitly or implicitly touch upon the necessity of keeping boundaries between private life and working life, both in terms of working hours, and keeping a professional distance from work. In spite of these considerations, however, fatigue and exhaustion are common among care workers.

Emotional and physical fatigue was dominant in [care workers'] talk about how the job influences their private life. R noted that she comes back home 'exhausted' and 'doesn't want to communicate' ... During the interview M revealed that some days after work she feels exhausted and doesn't want to communicate with her son and husband... (Naujaniene 2011: 23)

Indeed such examples of emotional fatigue were common in all five country reports.

5.3.4 Specific quality of work related features in care work

Domiciliary elderly care work is hard work, both physically and emotionally. Interviews with care workers also suggest that difficulties are at least partially related to some specific organizational features. These are, '**working in the homes of customers**' and '**regulation in terms of control as well as protection**' and '**downsizing and time pressure**'.

Working in the homes of customers

The fact that domiciliary care work is usually carried out by care workers, working alone in the private homes of the elderly, means that workers' relationships with their clients are often a critical determinant of quality of work.

From interviews with care workers it became evident that a relationship with customers becomes crucial for a care worker. If these relationships are defined as 'good', work conditions are also seen as good. And conversely, 'bad' relations correlate to displeasure at work. (Naujaniene 2011: 10)

One aspect of working in the homes of customers is therefore to maintain a good relationship with customers. However, customers generally have considerable 'bargaining' power in this relationship, and this may influence the work situation for care workers in various ways:

Some clients do not accept our visits before 3 pm. This means we are forced to have a longer lunch break than desired, and delay the end of the working day. (Social care operator, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto & Villoso 2011: 18)

Some patients explicitly refuse the use of lifting devices because they don't trust them. (Kuemmerling 2012: 16)

Some elderly citizens do not want male workers and specifically ask for a woman instead. (Hohnen 2012: 18)

All these quotes pinpoint the different ways in which citizens' opinions about how work should be done have significant consequences for the organisation of care work, in terms of when and how work is carried out, and by whom.

Clients seem to have gained the most power over care work and care workers in the least regulated care markets (Lithuania and Italy). The Lithuanian report states that care workers are at risk of being accused by clients, for example of theft, because 'no one is defending them' (Naujaniene 2011: 25)

When she eats a banana, she throws the skin right there... When she eats fish – she throws the leftovers on the floor. She tells me, 'I fell down because you didn't clean'. I say, 'you will really slip on it', and then she threatens to call and report my bad services. (Care worker, Lithuania, quoted in Naujaniene 2011: 25)

The situation is similar in Italy, where care workers are paid directly by the clients, although hired via the cooperatives:

We have the supervision of the coordinator, but in the end we are alone... (Social care operator, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto & Villoso 2011: 23)

Lastly, working in the homes of elderly, often alone, exposes care workers to sexual harassment or violence from elderly customers or their relatives:

*He told me that I should learn to speak properly on the phone... He called me a pig and then I said 'same to you' and then he hit me with a stick. When I tried to take it he hit me with his fist and I grabbed his arm... this is something that goes with the job... Clearly it is not very nice... I reported *this to the police*... So be it.* (Care helper, Denmark, quoted in Hohnen 2012: 18)

It is difficult to estimate the extent and type of harassment and violence against care workers because some feel this is something that 'goes with the job' do not always report it or even to regard it as a legal violation.

There are different 'solutions' to the demands of elderly clients and different care providers have different policies.

According to McClelland & Holman (2012b) it is difficult for managers to balance the views and needs of the clients, between what the care provider thinks is reasonable to offer and what is considered a 'right' from their perspective:

It's really, really difficult. Whilst you don't want to go down that route of prejudice... as much as you would [like to] say, 'We can't accept you, as a [client] because what you're doing is discrimination', where do you draw the line? We're going into somebody's home and they also have a right to say who goes over their threshold, so that is really, really difficult. (Care worker, UK, quoted in McClelland & Holman 2012b: 18)

Summing up, working in the homes of clients raises a specific set of quality of work issues. ‘Closeness’ and a good relationship to clients is considered necessary by care workers in order to be able to provide good care, and care workers often develop a very close relationship with the elderly care receivers. In all country reports there were examples of care workers who would provide care that went beyond their formal duties (e.g. visit care receivers in their spare time to take them to church, bring home-made cookies or stay after work if the client was ill). Several interviews also revealed that care workers often worried about how their clients would manage on their own after working hours. However, most care workers acknowledged the need for a certain professional distance, although evidently struggling to strike a reasonable balance.

The fact that clients inevitably have a considerable influence over what goes on in their homes exposes care workers to the risk of rigid, unreasonable demands. There are also frequent reports of violence and abuse from the elderly or their relatives. Based on the individual interviews it therefore seems that a specific issue in terms of quality of work in domiciliary elderly care is the establishment of *boundaries* between the rights and wishes of clients, and the working life and protection of care workers. Furthermore, the *boundaries* between care workers’ own private lives and their ‘professional’ role are continuously challenged. Establishing rules of behaviour and work (by employers or agencies) may help protect care workers, and indeed the form and extent of regulation seems to have a significant impact on the quality of work for care workers.

Regulation in terms of control as well as protection

In spite of the fact that care workers usually work alone and have a certain degree of flexibility in the organisation of care tasks in the homes, the organisation of care work and the allocation of resources and forms of care provision depend on regulation. Although the focus of this report is on individual perspectives and agency, the impact of regulation (too much or too little or the wrong kind) is acknowledged and commented upon by care workers in all five countries.

In two of the countries studied (Lithuania and Italy) a large proportion of the work is informally regulated between employers (care receivers) and workers and the enforcement of legal regulations is weak. This, among other things, results in a lack of protection (Bizzotto & Villoso 2011: 26). In these cases therefore, a lack of formal regulation, control and social support result in a working situation where care workers are essentially on their own. Working in the homes of clients inevitably exposes care workers to risk. ‘Under regulation’ is problematic and further exposes care workers to the risk of abuse and violence. Some degree of regulation of work tasks and working hours simply help to maintain their private life/working life boundaries. Thus too little regulation exposes workers to higher risks. Conversely, care workers across countries also complain about too rigid, too tight and too detailed regulation of domiciliary care work, and continuous changes in regulation also seem to have a significant impact on care workers’ work and life experiences. We shall briefly mention three tendencies below that seem to affect care work: **standardization, privatization and reablement/rehabilitation schemes**.

In Denmark, Germany and the UK, domiciliary elderly care has become standardized to a large extent, which has made the 'space for professional judgement' rather small for care workers. In a way this is paradoxical since the increased standardization has also been accompanied by a tendency towards a larger degree of professionalization (in Denmark and Germany at least), which supposedly empowers care workers to make their own professional judgements.

... the allocation of care tasks is now done by an independent assessment unit. Care workers carry out their work in citizens' homes according to specified tasks allocated by this independent unit. Contemporary research often focuses on issues related to the purchaser/provider model and New Public Management – in particular the fact that a range of decisions around work such as the quality of care, type of care, amount of care and time allocated to provide the care have become standardized. (Sejlbaek, Clausen et al. 2010).

However, the detailed specification of care tasks and time allocation is perceived to be difficult by care workers, who regard care work as unpredictable.

I get there and there's this situation and I do something. That's normal. Even if it's not part of my job. But if it has to be done, I do it. That's normal. That's what our work is like. (Paramedic, Germany, quoted in Kuemmerling 2012: 22)

This leads Kuemmerling to conclude that:

Care work is characterised by two rather contradictory forces. On the one hand, laws and regulations define exactly who can provide what type of care and also often specify how long they can spend on it. On the other hand, employees report that they are usually confronted with unforeseen situations that require fast decisions and independent action. (Kuemmerling 2012: 21-22)

Care workers experience their ability to deal with these situations as a confirmation of their competencies and professional judgement. However, the unpredictability of care work is also regarded as being to some extent incompatible with the very high degree of standardization which is being pursued.

Privatization is another prevailing development trend which seems to have direct consequences for care workers' quality of work and quality of life.

The growing demand for care in the UK coupled with reductions in public spending (traditionally a main source of funding) has resulted in an increase in private provision with associated decreases in unionisation, very low pay, poor job contracts (e.g., zero-hours), and a lack of investment in basic and ongoing training and development. (McClelland & Holman 2012b: 18)

Another factor influencing job security mentioned by Hohnen (2012) for the Danish care workers is that permanent contracts are gradually becoming more scarce. Private providers are more reluctant to offer permanent contracts, and increased privatization therefore contributes to making employment in the sector more precarious.

Care workers prefer tenured positions with predictable working hours and income security. Private providers are more reluctant to offer permanent contracts and frequently offer zero hour contracts, where there are no guaranteed minimum working hours. Publicly employed care workers were generally the most satisfied with their working conditions and wages, and seemed to work under less time pressure compared to private employees (see Hohnen 2012; McClelland & Holman 2012b).

Finally, **reablement** is a recent but consistent trend in domiciliary elderly care that seems to be gaining ground across Europe. Reablement refers to short-term, targeted care arrangements that aim to rehabilitate service users back to independence, and is an approach being adopted by public sector organizations who wish to continue to provide home care services and generate savings (Glendinning & Kemp 2006). In Denmark and the UK reablement is mentioned as a particular feature that alters work roles and relationships to clients:

Care workers' interpretation of their broader roles and responsibilities and approach to tasks differed depending on whether they were involved in reablement or traditional domiciliary care. Reablement's care workers therefore viewed themselves as **facilitators**, setting goals and encouraging and motivating [clients] to complete them... Care workers involved with traditional care provided more direct assistance, and viewed themselves as **supporters**. The extent of their involvement depended on the abilities of the service users, some requiring very little intervention and others requiring full and ongoing support. (McClelland & Holman 2012b: 6)

Reablement is also increasingly being applied in Denmark as a strategy to reduce care demand by training elderly citizens to perform care tasks themselves and thus to continue living in their homes without receiving home care – or with reduced care. The impact of reablement on employment and working conditions is difficult to evaluate. Care workers are worried about reablement eventually leading to downsizing and reductions in the workforce (Hohnen & Hasle 2011). On the other hand, they find their position in relation to the elderly strengthened because they no longer have to comply with all demands, but can require active participation from the elderly. The trend towards a more facilitating work role as opposed to a helping or supporting role is appreciated, although these changes may also potentially lead to conflicts with the elderly.

Downsizing and time pressure

The final theme that care workers emphasize as significant for their work and life situation is the time pressure in their daily work. Employees' complaints about time can be divided into two types: a general feeling of having insufficient time to do their work properly and problems arising due to continual changes (decreases in the amount of time and/or in citizens' entitlements).

Regarding the amount of time at their disposal, many care workers complain about **having insufficient time** to carry out the care tasks that they are supposed to perform:

If you have two hours for one person and need to buy food, one hour is spent taking the order and buying food... So either you buy food, or you do something else; but then you must visit this person more often... In summer, you need to substitute for colleagues and have no time for that person. You are forced to take off from the time of others. (Care worker, Lithuania, quoted in Naujaniene 2011: 9)

For instance, people may have paid for a certain service package. I have 20 minutes for it. But I need 10 minutes just to get them out of bed and accompany them to the bathroom. So, then I have to wash them quickly, dress them quickly and then quickly tidy up. Twenty minutes is not enough (...). (Care assistant, Germany, quoted in Kuemmerling 2012: 15)

Kuemmerling goes on to describe how care workers often feel that they solely provide 'tasks', but not real 'care' anymore:

You want to do your work, but you have to have a short conversation, too. I do feel very, very restricted by [the time pressure]. (Care assistant, Germany, quoted in Kuemmerling 2012: 15)

The above quote highlights a significant feature in care workers' stories about time use and the experience of insufficient time allocation. Individual care tasks cannot be separated from the social relationship that they need to establish in order to carry out care work ('you need to have a short conversation too'). When time allocations are calculated on the basis of the time that it takes to carry out the sum of single work tasks, care workers inevitably fall behind schedule, because they are not able to carry out these tasks without spending time on 'social work' as well.

An additional aspect of understanding care workers' perception of time scarcity is the fact that the unpredictable character of work simply makes it stressful to find that the time is already 'filled'.

I have one (citizen) and she is really nice... She just needed me to sit down and talk to her, but I didn't have the time. I did it anyway and ran late for the next one... But it irritates me that I had to look at my watch all the time and say: well, I really have to go now. That really bothers me. (Care helper, Denmark, quoted in Hohnen 2012: 15)

In addition to these prevalent experiences of not having enough time, **the continuous cuts** in time and/or in citizens' entitlements in order to restrain public spending are also problematic for care workers. They find it difficult to explain to elderly citizens that instead of one hour they now only have 20 minutes to clean – or that as a consequence of changes in entitlements, it is no longer possible to clean '*the apartment*' but only the '*living area*' (Naujaniene 2011: 4).

It is not only the experience of time pressure, care workers also emphasize the constant reductions in time allocation as problematic. Each time there is a new reduction in time/entitlement, care workers face the problem of having to explain and defend this decision to the elderly clients:

The most dramatic change was last year when I came back from [vocational training] and some citizens had moved from one and a half hours to half an hour... You have a rhythm and when you suddenly have an hour less – that's a problem. It is not as bad with the new citizens when they get half an hour, because with them it has been like that from the beginning. (Practical care worker, Denmark, quoted in Hohnen 2012: 25)

Similarly, Naujaniene explains how the physical space that the care workers are allowed to clean in Lithuania is constantly shrinking, e.g. from cleaning all the rooms to only cleaning the living area. Clients do not always understand or agree with these changes and sometimes get angry. Naujaniene (2011) suggests that this may lead to conflicts with the elderly, and that many care workers therefore just continue performing the same tasks as before, in spite of the fact that they are not included in the time scheduled.

If you start arguing with that elderly man, the conflict escalates; in order to avoid this – you simply sweep the floor [of the hall]. (Care worker, Lithuania, quoted in Naujaniene 2011: 9)

The continuous changes and cuts to the 'help' care workers are 'allowed' to provide is usually left up to care workers to explain to the elderly citizen, who cannot understand why work tasks are suddenly not performed anymore. As the last quote suggests, many care workers continue to perform such tasks in spite of the fact that time is no longer allocated for them and hence have to work faster or stay after hours.

5.4 Career trajectories, job crafting and 'voice' in domiciliary care work

We now turn to the third section of the chapter, an analysis of the characteristics of employees' agency by looking at **career trajectories, job crafting** and '**voice**'. The aim of this analysis is to understand the kind of employment mobility and careers that care workers pursue in order to identify the processes involved in creating job mobility and career options. In addition to this, the section analyses the kinds of influence care workers have in their everyday work and the channels they perceive they have for negotiating better conditions.

5.4.1 Career trajectories: Many routes lead to care work, but few lead out of it

This section focuses on career trajectories in care work. The aim is to get an understanding of care workers' past career paths and choices.

There are a few distinctive features in care workers' career stories. First, care work is not a first choice and care workers seem to end up in care work as a result of 'other things happening' in their life, rather than because of a specific preference for working in the sector. As described by Hohnen (2012: 11-12):

The career histories of care workers have several characteristics. Very few have actually pursued their career as a conscious choice. Rather care work has turned up as an option

at some point and has ‘fitted’ their work/life situation, competencies and interests. Many have started reluctantly and have found it more interesting than they expected. Their career trajectories are consequently characterised by ‘coincidence’ and many have had work experience from other sectors before beginning the vocational training programme.

Interviewer: ‘Why did you choose this line of work?’ Care helper: ‘God knows why... I hardly know myself!’ (Care helper, Denmark, quoted in Hohnen 2012: 12)

This ‘coincidence’ is prevalent in other stories as well, as a German care worker explained:

I fell into care work through a job creation scheme. (Care assistant, Germany, quoted in Kuemmerling 2012: 18)

Kuemmerling notes that the normal career path in other sectors, namely choosing a sector and completing training, seems to be atypical in care work, where career paths are much longer and often start elsewhere.

Likewise, McClelland & Holman (2012b) comment:

Care workers had a wide range of employment histories, and trends were difficult to identify. Apart from for one individual for which care work was her first job, previous employment amongst the care workers often included low-paid and low to medium-skilled roles in services (e.g. retail; hospitality; cleaning) and manufacturing, as well as a multitude of roles in care provision (e.g. residential homes; day centres; schools; nurseries)... Employment trajectories were frequently interspersed with periods of non-employment when individuals were starting a family or caring for relatives. Quite often, such events were the motivation for moving into care work. Common reasons for changing jobs were redundancy, new personal circumstances, dissatisfaction, and opportunity. (McClelland & Holman 2012b: 10-11)

Similar to the British care workers, interviewees in the other countries had also tried several other low skilled jobs before they ended up as care helpers. In addition, most decisions in their working careers were intertwined with developments in their family, such as childbirth or their husband changing job, etc. Several had tried many jobs and some had unfinished training or studies in other fields (electrician, car mechanic, physics degree, hairdresser, etc.). Motives are often expressed in terms of a reaction to experiencing barriers in other fields, such as not being able to afford living on social security, not being able to continue as private day-care mother, finding it too hard to work as a cleaner, redundancy or family considerations, as the following career story reflects:

I started at a clothes factory where I worked four years at the warehouse. Then I stopped because I got pregnant. After a year I started working in mail delivery... We drove out and collected the mail from the trains. However, it became difficult because of the shifts – we worked both evening and night. At that time my husband worked at a cheese factory and sometimes he had to begin really early... So I became a municipal day-care worker for two years. However, being at home looking after children was not right for me. I think it was after that I attended a business

school, but I could not get a trainee position.... After that I felt I needed to do something and this [vocational care helper training] was one year and two months and I thought that would be possible to do... and I like working with people. It was an opportunity. (Care helper, Denmark, quoted in Hohnen 2012: 11-12)

The fact that care work is usually not the first career choice also means that care workers are generally not very young when they begin working in the sector, and that they have experience and/or education from other areas. Many care workers report that they draw on such experience, e.g. former hairdressers suggest that they are trained in communicating with people. The result is that care workers may appear 'overqualified' in cases where they do not have any formal training in the sector.

The issue of '**over qualification**' is also relevant for those care workers who have chosen care work because of 'blocked career paths' in their original line of work. This is particularly the case for migrant care workers, who have often completed quite advanced education in their home countries. It can also reflect difficult conditions in some of the European labour markets, as is the case for Lithuanian care workers, who often have university degrees or have completed other advanced education.

The career paths and career choices of **migrant workers** are also closely linked to their status as migrants:

The situation is different for personal assistants who are largely foreign immigrants. For most of them care work is strictly linked to their migration project. In fact, many personal assistants come from work experience in their home country in very different fields and have found elderly care work to be the only possible employment in Italy. Frequently they started to work as caregivers thanks to their informal networks of relatives or friends. 'I've arrived in this city because here there are three friends of mine who are sisters. It is important to have someone here'. (Foreign personal assistant, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto & Villoso 2011: 13)

Past career trajectories for care workers are characteristic by the many paths leading into care work, and the fact that care work is usually not the result of a deliberate choice or ambition but has been chosen 'accidentally' as the option arose, often as a reaction to a blocked options in the original line of work, or in order to reconcile family life and work.

Looking at the career options in care work – fewer paths appear. In a few cases, vocational training schemes make educational mobility possible. However, that seems mainly to be the case in one country (Denmark), whereas in most others care work does not open up many further **career options**. This is partly due to a lack of formal or practical options for pursuing further education and partly because qualified personnel are not used in the sector.

The opportunities for professional growth for both social care ‘operators’ and personal assistants within the sector are quite rare. There is little vertical or horizontal mobility once workers are in the profession, which can turn care work into a dead-end occupation. Broadly speaking, the only career option they have is to improve their competencies and skills by learning on the job, client after client. (Bizzotto & Villoso 2011: 14)

The financial difficulties and focus on cost reduction, often resulting in the outsourcing/privatization of care work, seem to have reduced the number of skilled jobs in the sector. This is particularly clear in the Italian case, where the (few) skilled social care ‘operators’ experience how working hours are ‘transferred’ to the non-skilled personal assistants in order for the municipalities to save costs. This tendency is also partly visible in Denmark, where private providers use employees without vocational training for personal care tasks, unlike the municipalities. The tendency to outsource domiciliary elderly care to private care providers may therefore have the unintended consequence of reducing the share of skilled care workers, by reducing their career options.

We have seen a tendency towards privatization, which is expected to impact negatively on working conditions in the sector and reduce the employment prospects of more trained care givers. (Bizzotto & Villoso 2011: 25)

5.4.2 Job crafting

According to Berg, Dutton & Wrzesniewski (2010) and Wrzesniewski & Dutton (2001) job crafting can be understood as the ways employees redesign their jobs. Such redesigning can take place in three different ways. First, by altering the boundaries of work, e.g. taking on additional tasks (or fewer tasks) or changing the ways tasks are performed. Second, employees can change the social relationships they are involved in at work, e.g. establishing or emphasizing social relations. Third, employees may change their perception of the job (cognitive job crafting), emphasizing certain aspects rather than others. Finally, work may be regarded as either a job (in order to make a living), a career (as a stepping stone in one’s career) or as ‘a calling’ (vocation).

In general, work may be regarded as either a job (in order to make a living), a career (as a stepping stone in one’s career) or as a ‘calling’ (as a kind of vocation). Care work is not generally considered ‘a career’ by care workers and few of them have made plans for future upskilling/education or job changes. However, job orientation is a curious mixture of ‘calling’ and ‘job’. As shown above, working in elderly care is initially motivated by simply being a way to make a living. However, there is a clear tendency for care workers to change it into a ‘calling’ by emphasizing the meaningful aspects of work³⁸.

³⁸ The Lithuanian care workers seem to some degree to deviate from this picture and generally described their reasons for being in the job in more prosaic terms, e.g. earning their old age pensions or having no other choice.

Workers seem not to be attracted by the economic aspects or career opportunities of this job, but rather by the ‘human’ enrichment they get in being in contact with elderly people. It is the willingness to be useful and helpful to others that drives their choices... (Bizzotto & Villoso 2011: 25)

Regarding the three different ways of ‘crafting jobs’ (physically, socially or cognitively), the overall picture for elderly care points towards limited possibilities for physically influencing general employment and working conditions, but a high degree of micro level flexibility in all three respects. First, care workers perceive their work as meaningful and try to strengthen the social relationships to clients, e.g. by reducing conflicts and performing essential work tasks despite formal regulations. Across national and care regime differences, care workers’ practices show that they reconcile shortcomings in formal regulations by developing a high degree of micro level flexibility.

A housekeeper with Privatecare reports that she now arranges all her appointments with customers herself and even sometimes changes the visiting round schedule if it suits her. There was no formal consultation with her supervisors; she simply took over the organisation ‘bit by bit’. (Kuemmerling 2012: 22)

Care workers acknowledge that in spite of often tight formal regulation and standardization of work tasks, work is unpredictable and care tasks cannot always be performed according to such standards. Therefore, care workers regularly deviate from formal regulations and perform additional work tasks.

I might get asked to change a light bulb. I’m not really supposed to do that. The caretaker or relatives are supposed to do that, or they should buy a new service package, but of course I do it if I can. I’m not going to leave them, sitting in the dark... (Care assistant, Germany, quoted in Kuemmerling 2012: 22)

Or care workers may use their spare time to fulfil clients’ needs:

Milda’s story also revealed that work duties overlap with her family life. For example, on Sundays she takes one old lady to church together with her family. She says her son and husband see that as ‘normal’, because they know ‘that is my job’. (Naujaniene 2011: 23)

Performing such extra duties and spending one’s own leisure time taking care of issues related to an elderly client appears to be common for care workers in all countries.

Other ways of ‘crafting’ that could be mentioned are ‘good housekeeping’, aiming to make the appearance of the elderly and their homes ‘respectable’ (Skeggs 1997) and assuming a ‘medical’ role and work identity.

They call me doctor... If I notice something wrong I have to call the nurse to make sure that he won’t have a heart attack the minute I am out of the door. Not everything is written down and we have to think a lot and about many things. But it is also because I know I am good at it... (Care helper, Denmark, quoted in Hohnen 2012: 15-16)

The scope of agency and job crafting in domiciliary elderly care is therefore limited by overall requirements, time and entitlement allocations, but in spite of this, care workers experience (and develop) a certain degree of autonomy in their work. They seek to reconcile apparent contradictions in formal regulations and they attribute meaning and identity to their work in various ways. The ability to 'craft' work, through cognitive/meaning making, developing and sustaining social relationships to the elderly and physically altering and reconciling work tasks, seems crucial to care workers' estimation of the quality of work.

5.4.3 Lack of voice in care work

The following table shows care workers' use of and experiences with unions.

Table 13: Employee use of unions

Country	Germany	Lithuania	UK	Italy	Denmark
Care workers' use of and experiences with unions	Low degree of employee representation	No employee representation	Some employee representation amongst the minority of public sector care workers. No employee representation among the privately employed care workers	Low degree of representation among social 'operators' and none among personal assistants.	High degree of representation and influence in municipalities but not in private providers

I wonder what power we have. What types of action can unions pursue? We can strike, but striking harms vulnerable people, thus we strike reluctantly. On the other hand, municipal social services look unfavourably on strike action and thus may decide to choose another cooperative to run the service, or may decide to use only personal assistants (unskilled care workers) for elderly home care. (Social care operator, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto & Villoso 2011: 16)

The above quotation highlights the lack of influence and 'voice' that many care workers' stories explicitly or implicitly convey. The experience of having no channels of 'voice' was partly related to the lack of representation in the sector. Only in one country (Denmark) were union representatives and work councils regarded as the general rule and the majority of employees had compulsory union membership.

Interviews with care workers also reveal that this is a category of workers that are reluctant to speak up for themselves and pursue their interests.

The employees do not think that their own negotiating position is very strong – despite the perceived shortage of carers. This is due partly to ignorance – 'Is there actually a trade

union that's responsible for us?³⁹ (qualified care professional with Welfarecare) – and partly to the patients' needs: the carers cannot imagine demonstrating or going on strike for their own interests, knowing that no one is caring for their patients. (Kuemmerling 2012: 25)

This does not mean that care workers are not aware of their working conditions, but they find it difficult to voice their opinions. As the quote above suggests, this is related to the fact that they are afraid that this will harm their clients.

5.5 Vulnerability, vulnerable groups and vulnerable (precarious) work

The previous sections have focused on how employees experience their current job and on their agency in their everyday work and the labour market. This section deals with the latent social risks in mobile elderly care. The focus is predominantly on the risk of social exclusion, including risk of exclusion from the labour market and/or risk of social exclusion, both materially and in terms of social participation (Poggi, Bizzotto et al. 2011). The section discusses vulnerability from different perspectives. First, we identify what kind of vulnerable groups are employed in the sector and the different kinds of risks that they face. Second, we look at work related vulnerability, focusing on features of employment conditions that may expose employees to poverty or social exclusion. Finally, we discuss vulnerability as a process, and the kinds of negative synergies between specific social groups and specific types of work. The aim is to identify work related vulnerability for the most socially vulnerable groups. Work-related vulnerability refers here to work-related processes characterised by uncertainty/weakness 'which exposes a person (or a family) to suffering particularly negative or damaging consequences if a problematic situation arises' (Ranci 2010). The term therefore refers not only to actual vulnerability, but also to those working conditions which expose workers to future risks of social exclusion.

³⁹ None of the 20 interviewees was a trade union member.

Table 14: Workforce and vulnerable groups in examined countries

Country	Germany	Lithuania	UK	Italy	Denmark
Main Social groups working in the sector	Women Migrants/Ethnic minorities Older	Women	Women Migrant Low educated Older Ethnic minorities	Migrant women ('unskilled') Italian Women (skilled)	Women Ethnic minorities Men
Specified vulnerable groups	Part time workers Older 'Unskilled' (migrants)	All Women Single mothers Older	Male Ethnic minorities Poor language skills	All Migrant women	Ethnic minorities Single women
Specific precarious work	Low wage Part time 'poverty wages'	Low wage/poverty	Low wage Zero hour contracts Job insecurity	Low wage Co-habiting	(Most in permanent jobs), small increase in fixed term jobs

5.5.1 Vulnerable groups working in elderly care

Employees in elderly care are to some extent vulnerable. They have limited income, in some cases close to poverty. Many have limited prospects of finding jobs in other sectors and they are at high risk of work related health problems.

In Lithuania and Italy in particular, all care workers are in a vulnerable position – financially and in terms of future employment security.

The entire category of [Italian] home care workers can be considered at risk of social exclusion because of the low societal recognition for their job and the low wages in the sector (Bizzotto & Villoso 2011: 18)

The sector also employs a large contingent of vulnerable workers (Barrett & Sargeant 2011). Employees are mainly women, low skilled⁴⁰, migrants/ethnic minorities and older people. Young workers are generally absent from the sector, which seems to be related to the employment patterns whereby elderly care is usually not the first career choice. Young employees are most prevalent in care regimes where vocational training is required (e.g. Denmark).

All groups of employees face the same formal working conditions in the sector. In most cases they face low wages, health risks, low social recognition and risk of abuse and violence. In addition, the various groups occupy different social positions and face different problems and exposure to social risks.

⁴⁰ Migrants and some native care workers are in fact 'overqualified', because they have completed education in other fields which does not 'count' in care work.

Women

The majority of care workers are women, which in various ways influences both the sector as a whole and work and life conditions. First, at an individual level, women's stories reflect concern for their family and additional household/family responsibilities. In view of the career trajectories above, women often seem to choose care work because it presents an option for reconciling work and life responsibilities, in spite of the often atypical working hours. However, this concern for the family also involves extensive household responsibilities, where care workers not only have to balance work and family commitments, but also have large additional workloads after work.

I could spend more time with my son, stay at home more... because I must cook for my family... (Care worker, Lithuania, quoted in Naujaniene 2011: 20)

Second, there seems to be some degree of gender segregation at the work place level. This is most visible in the contexts where men are also employed.

Gender does play a role in care, however – firstly, in the actual provision of care: some patients refuse to be cared for by a man. This is particularly the case for women, but also for men who see care itself as a 'woman's job' and have problems letting men touch them in intimate places... Secondly, although the employees do not perceive any differences in the treatment of men and women, there are differences in terms of the gender balance at different levels of the hierarchy, particularly at the two larger organisations. (Kuemmerling 2012: 16)

Kuemmerling goes on to note that care managers are disproportionately often men, in spite of the overall majority of care workers being women.

Finally, it can be argued that the whole sector is perceived as 'women's work' and that this plays a role in the low level of social recognition. This is visible in terms of the low remuneration – but also in terms of the apparent apathy towards incidents of abuse and violence which are also frequent in the sector.

Male workers

The very few male workers occupy a special position and sometimes face rejection from elderly clients. In some cases social stigma is attached to being a male care worker in 'women's work'. Some report that their (male) friends have difficulties accepting what they are doing, especially if they used to work in a typical male profession before they turned to care work. However, male workers have advantages too:

Male employees are another vulnerable group – although in a different sense. They too experience resistance from the elderly – but they are also respected and are sometimes used strategically in difficult homes (see Hohnen 2012). Male workers therefore seem to some extent to occupy both positions – highly valued and discriminated against. (Hohnen 2012: 18)

Men, therefore, may be stigmatized, but they also seem to get career opportunities which women do not have.

Older workers

The average age level among care workers seems to be rather high (above 40) if we look at the interviewees in the present report. This means that many care workers are concerned about their options – as senior workers – in the care labour market.

People often doubt whether they will be able to continue until the legal retirement age and are resigned to the fact that they will have to accept (further) pension reductions. In summary, one can make a case that the most vulnerable group are the care assistants aged over 50. Their low qualification level makes it harder for them to find a job outside the care sector where they could work until they retire. And even within the care sector there are hardly any alternatives for this group. Their lack of qualifications means they cannot work in the office, e.g. planning visiting rounds or as care advisers. (Kuemmerling 2012: 29)

I don't know anyone who has worked here until they were 65, and only one who made it to 63. They all go before then. (Care worker, Germany, quoted in Kuemmerling 2012: 29)

Many care workers are therefore not able to stay in the job until the ordinary retirement age and find themselves forced to choose early (and lower paid) retirement.

Migrant workers and ethnic minorities

Migrants and/or ethnic minorities (these groups can be exclusive) form another vulnerable group in care work. As a social category, they seem to have specific characteristics in terms of social life and the kinds of challenges that they face at work. Their situation is particularly relevant to investigate since the share of migrant workers in elderly care has been increasing during recent years (Rostgaard, Bjerre et al. 2011).

Apart from co-habiting migrants who often migrate alone, ethnic minorities may have a strong social network and hence a high degree of social support:

Those [migrants and/or ethnic minority care workers] identified in the study had strong, socially supportive, networks that included family (i.e., older children; husbands) and religious groups. They tended to share the responsibility of income generation with their partner, and had a higher level of education and skills than average. It was at work where they were potentially vulnerable. (McClelland & Holman 2012b: 17)

Migrant care workers from Italy, the UK and Denmark all reported issues of discrimination and/or racism at the workplace. Several stories revealed incidents of physically violent physical attacks, as well as abusive language from clients or refusal to allow entry into their homes. Ethnic minority workers were potentially disadvantaged at work, with the central problem being exposure to racism from service users.

We've got one customer, she's not nice... well in the beginning she wasn't nice to me, but maybe she is now, since I stopped going there. But in the beginning I was asking myself, is it because I'm black? (Care worker, UK, quoted in McClelland & Holman 2012b: 18)

McClelland & Holman (2012b) furthermore suggest that although such situations were partially resolved by relocating affected care workers to other clients, these initiatives did not remove the risk of future problems.

Having insufficient language skills is also considered a problem by migrants/ethnic minorities. It makes them reluctant to 'speak up' for themselves, as they are afraid of not being able to express themselves clearly, and 'traps' them in a low skilled position by preventing them from pursuing further education.

Finally, it adds to the vulnerability of migrant workers that their legal status as immigrants is connected to them having a job. Job insecurity for this group, therefore involves legal position and social inclusion as well.

Loss of their job may represent for those who are foreigners also the loss of the status of a regular immigrant, which is connected with being employed. (Bizzotto & Villoso 2011: 18)

5.5.2 Vulnerable work in elderly care

McClelland & Holman (2012b: 18-20) suggest that care work both prevents and sustains social vulnerability. On the one hand, because of its low barriers of entry, care work opens up the labour market to those without high education and skills, by offering employment and basic training. In this way elderly care work is inclusive of vulnerable people. In addition, atypical working hours, part time work and flexible hours provide an opportunity for people with external care responsibilities to combine family life with work. It is therefore inclusive of women. On the other hand, however, the kind of employment and work in domiciliary elderly care also sustains or leads to vulnerability, mainly due to low wages, poor contracts and job insecurity. The general developments in the sector also seem to sustain rather than counter such tendencies of work related vulnerability. These developments are: reductions in the amount of working hours; privatization; and increasing deprofessionalization of the sector by reclassifying care work as practical work and transferring care tasks formerly carried out by skilled care workers to employees who do not have vocational training. These features are to a large extent interrelated. The following statement by Bizzotto & Villoso (2011) exemplifies a development that is taking place all over Europe:

The progressive disinvestments from the public sector in care provision and the tendency toward privatisation of the service is leading to an increase in the vulnerability of both groups of workers. Municipalities have less and less money to spend on social services in general due to local budget constraints. Most Municipalities are externalising the elderly care service in order to reduce costs. The degree of control and organization of the service under the responsibility of the Municipalities has a large variability across the country, with consequences for the quality of the service and working conditions of the employees involved. When budgets are reducing, to minimize the reduction in the number of users and/or in the number of hours of the service, service providers tend to substitute as much as possible hours of social care 'operators' (skilled) (more costly) with hours of

personal assistants (unskilled). As a consequence social care 'operators' face a depreciation of their employment prospects... In fact when households have to bear all the cost with no public subsidy, they generally ask for services provided by personal assistants only. More qualified care services would mean a higher cost that households are not willing to pay. (Bizzotto & Villoso 2011: 19-20)

Deterioration in working conditions following privatization is also taking place in the UK, where McClelland & Holman report increases in vulnerable conditions through '*...a decrease in unionization, very low pay, poor job contracts (e.g. zero hours) with a lack of investment in basic and ongoing training and development*' (McClelland & Holman 2012b: 18).

Privatisation, although still in its 'infancy' in Danish elderly care, shows similar tendencies in terms of vulnerable employment and working conditions:

A larger number of employees at the private providers are temporarily employed, either on fixed term contracts or 'on call' employment. Private providers have a longer 'screening' period before they offer permanent contracts. In particular, employees complain that those private providers who do not have a CLA offer very limited job security... (Hohnen 2012: 20)

In addition, Hohnen (2012: 27) concludes:

Traditionally care work in the (Danish) municipalities has been tenured and as mentioned to a large degree professionalized. The most recent developments related to increased competition from private providers and to austerity in the municipalities seem to indicate an increasing share of care work is offered as fixed term contracts. Although the majority of Danish domiciliary elderly care is still carried out by tenured employees, private providers are more reluctant in offering permanent positions and furthermore, municipalities have started offering part time tenures (28 hours). Some care workers then work extra hours at internal temp units or at private temp agencies. Employees on fixed term contracts and employees with few tenured working hours are more vulnerable, even if they supplement their income. They are poorly protected in terms of illness or unemployment as well as employee paid old age pension schemes, because their contribution is based on very few hours. All the care workers we spoke to prefer tenured positions. (Hohnen 2012: 27)

For skilled care workers, public budget cuts and increased privatization in elderly care seem to reduce their employment security, with the paradoxical result that it may in future be more secure to stay 'unskilled' than to pursue vocational training in elderly care. For 'unskilled' workers, this may increase employment opportunities in the short run, but may also tip the balance in elderly care more towards sustaining than preventing vulnerability.

5.6 Future aspirations and future perspectives

Generally the interviews provided limited information about employee aspirations for the future. To some extent this seems related to the fact that it is difficult to answer questions about the future, and perhaps also difficult to establish the type and level of ‘aspiration’ that such questions refer to. Are we talking about concrete career plans or old dreams? However, care workers ‘capacities to aspire’ (see the introduction above for an elaboration of ‘capacities to aspire’) are also constrained by their experience of a general lack of recognition of their work as well as by the fact that career options are limited in most although not in all countries. In spite of these constraints, there are some interesting features among employees’ future aspirations.

First, there are some characteristics in the aspirations of various categories of employees. Older workers have more concrete plans than younger employees, who have difficulty formulating a clear idea of their future prospects. Older employees are also more aware of (and list) obstacles to their wishes, e.g. the difficulty of starting an architecture course while raising kids or studying to become a nurse at age 50. Interestingly, migrant workers, who already have a high level of education, are the group that seems to voice the most explicit plans for the future. Several migrant workers in the study are contemplating pursuing further vocational training in order to become trained care workers or nurses. And several were working in order to secure their social position in their home country. Employees with zero-hour contracts or no contracts were all aspiring to get a tenured position or more working hours.

I would give anything to get a permanent position as part of the mobile night shift... I have to get a permanent job in order to get access to courses, to get some colleagues and to get permanent working hours... (Care helper, Denmark, quoted in Hohnen 2012: 27)

Second, it is noteworthy that the vocation and social relationship that care workers experience in their work is also an obstacle to them ‘moving on’.

I would like to continue my university course, but I have too many things to do. I take care of an old lady of 98 years. I will be sorry if I have to put her aside to study. When I'm substituted by someone else she misses me. (Personal assistant, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto & Villoso 2011: 24)

Third, some aspirations reveal a lot about the emotional strain of care work and the desire to do something less demanding.

As I get older myself – the more I contemplate if I should continue with this work... It is old people and illness and all... one gets worn down by it... I would like to open a flower shop. I do so like plants, trees and flowers and things like that. Things that do not talk and that stay right where you put them – something entirely different – more positive. Or maybe it's just that when you have been so many years in the industry you get a little tired of it, I think. (Care assistant, Denmark, quoted in Ajslev, Møller et al. 2011)

5.7 Summary and conclusion

In summary, elderly care work is characterized by a strongly felt ambiguity where employees experience a high degree of emotional satisfaction in their daily work, but as also feel poorly remunerated. In addition, care work is hard work, physically as well as emotionally. Care workers are often exhausted, which affects their life quality. Care workers also have a higher than average risk of work related health problems. These potential work related risks are accentuated by the fact that care work is performed in clients' homes, where social protection regulations are less likely to be enforced. Working in clients' homes exposes care workers to risk of abuse and violence and generally makes it more difficult to establish clear boundaries between their private and personal lives (and leisure time) and professional work and tasks. In sum, care work has contradictory implications for care workers' quality of work and quality of life. It offers a (meaningful) job, while also 'trapping' care workers in a low wage, low skill and low status position. The recent wave of privatization fuelled by public austerity seems to limit training and career options and reduce job security by increasing employment on fixed term and zero hour contracts. It also leads to the increasing use of care workers without professional training at the expense of those with vocational training certificates.

Care workers seem to find it difficult to answer direct questions about their own future aspirations. However, looking broadly at the narratives and perceptions of work and life situation presented above, some tendencies do appear. Two different types of aspirations appear. One set is short term and concrete, and closely linked to care workers' perceptions of their career options, and is based on past work trajectories. These 'realistic' aspirations are tied to the particular situation of specific groups of employees and directly address concrete problems in their work situation and/or particular backgrounds. Issues such as job security, getting sufficient working hours and being able to work until retirement are all examples of such specific aspirations.

In addition to this, a broader set of issues are also addressed and appear generic to the 'societal imagery' of the sector as a whole. These are not expressed in terms of individual future aspirations, but rather as implications of the perceptions of the social position of care work (and care workers) in society at large.

These broader narratives reflect a 'mismatch' between care workers' identity and understanding of the significance of their work, and the lack of society's concern and acknowledgement. Care workers express warm sentiments about their work and criticise and confront what they regard as prevailing 'degrading' attitudes towards their work. Their narratives thereby articulate a more favourable work identity and a feeling of pride about their work, which can be viewed as an 'aspiring' alternative/competing discourse of care work. In this way, although workers also connect lack of recognition to concrete working conditions and in particular low wages, their complaints about the low status of the work reflect a much broader critique of prevailing assumptions about care work.

In spite of the fact that these alternative discourses of care work can be found in interviews in all five countries, there are no real examples of a successful way of changing the stigmatization and low recognition of the work, and care workers generally experience having a 'lack of voice'. '*I wonder what power we have*'... is a reflection from one of the Italian care workers, covering the difficulty of being 'squeezed' between loyalty towards the clients and the need to address the low recognition and reward.

6 ‘Better than average for the sector’: Individual perspectives on work in catering

The following chapter presents findings on employee perspectives in catering with a particular focus on contract catering. Catering is analysed in five countries: Lithuania, Germany, Hungary, Spain and the UK. The chapter has been compiled using country reports based on individual interviews about central work and life issues in catering work, viewed from the perspective of employees.

The first section in the chapter introduces the catering sector and gives a basic overview of contract catering in Europe, as well as an overview of the main developments and challenges. The country differences and data will also be presented here. This will be followed in the second section by a presentation and analysis of employee experiences of their **quality of life and work**. This section introduces the most significant quality of work and quality of life issues (good and bad) from the perspective of employees and presents an overview of these perspectives in Table 15. The most significant quality of work and life issues are then analysed by identifying persistent features in contract catering that seem to be significant in determining experiences of work and life. These are: **working in kitchens; features of contracting: public procurement, customer orientation and site-dependency; and increasing work intensity**.

The third section consists of an analysis of the characteristics of employees’ agency by looking at **career trajectories, job crafting** and ‘**voice**’⁴¹ (ways of expressing interests and dissent). The aim of this section is to identify career patterns in contract catering and the choices that workers make in order to identify the processes involved in creating job mobility and career options. In addition, the section analyses what kind of influence employees in catering have in their everyday work tasks and in terms of being able to negotiate better work and employment conditions.

The fourth section in the chapter focuses on **vulnerable groups** and **vulnerable work**. The overall aim is to understand the social significance of having a job in contract catering for the most vulnerable groups in Europe. The section gives an overview of the different social categories of employees working in the sector (women, migrants/ethnic minorities, low-skilled, older workers, young workers or ‘other’) and possible differences and difficulties specifically related to certain groups. In addition, the section analyses how specific work features expose these groups to additional social risks, e.g. permanent employment versus fixed term zero hour contracts. The section also includes a discussion about atypical working hours and the reconciliation of work and life.

The final section provides an overview of the perception of future options for employees in the catering sector by analysing their future aspirations and how they reflect the structural conditions in the labour market. This part of the analysis will be conceptualized within the perspective of **sociocultural capacities to aspire** (Lewis & Giullari 2005; Appadurai 2004; Sen 1999). The chapter concludes by summarizing the main findings and identifying

⁴¹ Cf. Hirschman 1970.

and discussing how quality of work and life and vulnerability develop in the interaction between specific ways of organizing catering work, prevailing cultural discourses (e.g. assumptions about gendering of work and work tasks) and individual agency.

6.1 Introduction to contract catering

Contract catering can be defined as 'the provision of food services based on contractual arrangements with the customer, for a specific period of time' (Kirov 2011). The subsector includes canteens or cafeterias and the chosen business functions include preparing and serving meals, operating from a central kitchen, and/or preparing food at the premises (e.g. schools or hospitals). The catering sector in Europe can be seen as one example of the continuous distinctive process of restructuring in the European labour market, in particular in the form of externalization / outsourcing of public services (Flecker & Meil 2010).

Catering is carried out by large multinationals as well as small local companies, and takes place in various combinations of in-house and external companies (Kirov 2011). Catering involves a hierarchy of occupations: chefs, cooks, assistant cooks and kitchen assistants. Working conditions are to some extent different for these groups. In the following chapter the focus is on cooks and assistant cooks, and kitchen assistants who may work as cooks without having any formal vocational training. However, work is flexible, and preparing food is often combined with serving and selling if the food is prepared on the premises.

It is important to note that contract catering represents a subsector within the hotel and restaurant sector, and that working conditions are different from the sector as a whole. Of particular importance for employees is the fact that working hours are more regular. On the other hand, work seems to be less varied as menus are more standardized compared to restaurants.

6.2 Methods and material

Five countries: Lithuania, Germany, Hungary, Spain and the UK, have made country reports based on individual interviews in catering. The country reports are based on between 13-21 individual interviews with catering workers, amounting to a total of 89 interviews.

The selection of interviewees was made with the aim of covering the prevailing social variation of the workforce, age, gender, ethnicity, and employment terms and work tasks in catering in each country, as well as having a focus on particularly vulnerable groups. Both cooks and kitchen/canteen assistants were interviewed in order to grasp possible variation and work segregation related to gender, ethnicity and age, as well as to investigate possible differences in experiences between groups. Working in contract catering involves multifunctional work tasks, which include cooking and preparing meals, serving customers, assisting in the kitchen and cleaning up after meals. Because of differences in the division of labour in different countries, the distribution of work tasks among cooks and kitchen or catering assistants differs, and there are therefore differences in occupations and education between countries. The German, Hungarian and

Spanish interviews cover cooks and assistants. The UK sample covers kitchen assistants who perform a variety of catering activities, including basic food preparation and serving, while the Lithuanian country report focuses on interviews with cooks who perform all kitchen tasks, whereas kitchen assistants are only cleaners and do not participate in food preparation and serving. These differences have been taken into consideration when analysing the material.

It should also be mentioned that contract catering has been the most difficult sector to get access to, and most researchers had to contact many catering companies before they got permission to carry out research. The UK, Lithuanian and German researchers, in particular, stated that they had had difficulties. We therefore have reason to believe that the total sample in catering reflects working conditions that are better than the average working conditions in the sector – a point that is also explicitly made in some country reports. I have consequently analysed the cases as ‘critical (best) cases’ (Flyvbjerg 2006) and based on this assumed that issues/problems found in these cases also prevail in the sector as a whole.

6.2.1 The country reports and interviews

In the **UK report** by McClelland & Holman (2012a), 13 catering workers, three men and 10 women, were interviewed. All worked as catering assistants and most stated that they had school-level qualifications. Eight of the catering assistants in the sample could be characterised as vulnerable according to traditional classifications (Holman & McClelland 2011). The study was completed as two case studies: the first at an in-house unit within a university, and the second at a contractor managed unit within another university. Although there was no direct evidence to support the claim, it was expected (due to better employee organisation and representation in the public sector in the UK) that the conditions in the cases would be better than those on average in the private sector-dominated catering industry. It was not possible to include private catering companies in the study.

In the **German report** (Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. 2012), 17 interviews were held – six with men and eleven with women. Three interviewees were immigrants. Five of the interview persons worked as cooks and the remainder as kitchen assistants or catering assistants. The participants worked in two different companies; the first provides catering for a nursing home and the second focuses on catering for schools and nurseries. The interview persons worked either in one of the central kitchens or in school canteens, with direct contact with the clients. The interviewees held positions as either cooks, assistants or servers.

In the **Hungarian report** (Tóth & Hosszú 2012b) a total of 20 persons working in catering were interviewed; seven men and 13 women. Eleven worked as cooks and the rest were either without formal education or had a background in another field of work. The study was carried out in two different companies; the subsidiary of a multinational company and a private Hungarian company.

In the **Lithuanian report** made by Kuznecovienė & Daukšas (2012), 14 employees in catering were interviewed – 12 women and two men. All interviewees work as cooks and have completed vocational training as cooks. Formal credentials are a requirement for obtaining a position as a cook in Lithuania. Nine interviewees were Lithuanian, three belonged to the Russian ethnic minority and two were originally from Poland. They worked in two different companies. The first primarily caters to state institutions and the second caters for events.

Finally, the **Spanish report** (Moreno Colom 2011a), was based on 24 interviews with employees in three different companies, catering to schools and hospitals. Employees with different social backgrounds were interviewed for the study and the interviewees consisted of 10 men, 14 women. 20 interviewees were Spanish and four were immigrants.

6.3 Catering workers' perceptions of quality of work and life issues

6.3.1 The main work and life issues in contract catering – an overview

Table 15: Perceptions of quality of work and life in catering⁴²

Perception of work by cooks and kitchen assistants	Germany	Lithuania (cooks only)	Hungary	Spain	UK (kitchen assistants only)
General perception: the best option in the sector	Better than the sector as a whole	A reasonable job <i>'Not too good not too bad'</i>	Hard, stressful work and low pay, but best alternative	Low wages, high workloads. But best available alternative	A reasonable job – better than average for the sector
Quality of life (material wellbeing)	Employees see wages as low, but justify the low wage level	Wages are not good and too low in light of the workload	Wages are perceived as very low and difficult to live on: <i>'it is impossible to live on this salary'</i>	Low wages for women/ assistants	Wages good but low Material well-being due to part-time work
Work time/ working hours	Regular working hours and appreciated by both male and female employees	Depends on the company. Some have regular working hours, some (event catering) do not.	Regular working hours (workers sometimes work additional hours unpaid to get the work done)	Continuous (regular) working hours	Working hours differ; regular hours preferred Many part time or zero hour contracts

⁴² The table shows the work and life issues that are perceived as the most significant and the various forms they take in the five countries, in order to show both prevalence and variation. Empty boxes mean that the topic is not mentioned in the reports as a significant issue for employees in catering.

Physically hard work/physical strain	Stressful work during peak hours and heavy lifting	Fatigue and exhaustion: ' <i>Everyone here is exhausted</i> '	Standing up all the time Humid and not always nice. Heavy physical work (lifting)	Fatigue. Very physically demanding/pain in arms, etc. Kitchen is hot/damp	Risk of injury but OHS training Heat and fatigue are a problem
Standardization versus creativity	Cooks experience work as standardized/kitchen assistants experience responsibility	Standardization in most, but not all catering: ' <i>...here you know, you can improvise</i> '	Standardization because of cost limits: ' <i>it is like running with your feet tied together</i> '	Highly standardized	Highly standardized and limited autonomy
High work intensity	In particular during peak hours	High work load is problematic	On the rise (example of starting an hour before schedule to manage the workload)	Work during 'peaks' stressful/high level of work in a very short time	Reasonable work load
Employment security	Fixed-term as a rule in the first two years of employment (cooks and kitchen assistants) Mini-jobs (part time) nearly always fixed-term High turnover	Fixed term contracts but perception of high job security because of market demand	Permanent contracts and high job security	Fixed discontinuous contracts	Part time and open-ended, but increasing use of fixed term/zero-hour contracts
Poor or lack of Management		Managements' attitude is problematic. ' <i>everyone shouts and scolds... that you are absolutely worthless</i> '	No problem High degree of social recognition: ' <i>they treat us as human beings</i> '	Lack of management. Promotes social conflicts and poor working environment	Communication with catering assistants could be improved
Reciprocity: Working in teams/helping each other out	Employees mention that 'helping each other out' is part of the job.	Helping each other out is regarded as self-evident	Informal cooperation (teamwork) in the kitchen (like a family)	Relations with workmates are perceived as a quality	Catering assistants value support from their co-workers

6.3.2 A reasonable job – balancing the good and the bad

Employees working in catering do not express very strong feelings about their job and are not devoted to catering work. Their reflections about work in the sector are pragmatic rather than emotional. When asked about their general perception of working in catering, employees tend to balance the advantages and drawbacks in the job.

Based on such pragmatism there is a tendency to regard the work as reasonably good – but with some drawbacks. In the words of a Lithuanian cook '*It's a normal job- not too good and not too bad*' (Kuznecovienė & Daukšas 2012: 5).

In some cases, particularly in the UK interviews, the perception of work as reasonable seems to be based on the fact that objective working conditions are relatively good in terms of reasonable salaries, job security and reasonable working hours.

Most catering assistants involved in the study had better work and employment conditions than those offered in the broader sector...This was something they were aware of, and is reflected in the generally positive evaluations that they made of their work. (McClelland & Holman 2012a: 7)

In most other cases, however, work is seen as being 'reasonable' in spite of the fact that objective working conditions are not very good or even poor (see Holman & McClelland 2011).

Despite the job insecurity, low wages and poor professional recognition, employment in the sector is valued positively. It is formal work with predictable working times. These two features are perceived as factors of life quality in the current situation. (Moreno Colom 2011a: 20)

Finally, catering work covers both preparing and serving food; however there seems to be a difference in the quality of work and perception of work between working in the kitchen and 'serving'. Working in the kitchen is heavier, involves much lifting, has longer hours and is more stressful. Serving and selling food is often part time, 'lighter' work and less stressful. Although catering work is often multifunctional, covering both tasks, this is not always the case and employees who only or mostly work in the kitchen seem to experience a very heavy workload.

6.3.3 Hard work, but better than average for the sector

When asked to evaluate their work in catering, most employees explicitly emphasize a number of specific qualities of catering work compared to the HORECA sector as a whole – and specifically compared to work in restaurants. Although catering work is regarded as physically hard, stressful and not very materially rewarding and is sometimes accompanied by a high conflict level in the kitchen, it is also seen as favourable because of regular working hours, being less stressful than working in a restaurant (less stressful peak hours) and having reasonably secure employment conditions. Both skilled employees (cooks) and kitchen assistants in unskilled positions justify their evaluation of catering work by referring to poor working conditions in the sector as a whole, and the

kitchen assistants also evaluate their working conditions in relation to other prevailing unskilled job options. In particular, employees emphasize the regular working hours.

Working conditions in the contract catering sector are distinct from other segments of the hotel and restaurant sector in several respects and this distinction is an important point of reference for the employees' subjective perception and appraisal of their working conditions. Most importantly, the more regular and social working hours (no evening/night work, no weekend shifts for many) are regarded favourably, and this is not restricted to female employees with children. Male 'breadwinners' and even male employees in childless couples also appreciate the fact that they can combine work with a 'normal' social life. (Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. 2012: 5)

In the private restaurant, where I was working before this workplace, the hours were endless. You went there in the morning and never knew when you would finish. Sometimes worked until midnight. And even on weekends. Here you have predictable working hours between 7AM and 3.30 PM and no overtime. No more. But the salary is low. However, the previous salary was low as well. At the end they offered only the minimum wage. But I would not want work 10-12 hours a day for a minimum wage. At least I work only 8 hours now. (Female cook, Hungary, quoted in Tóth & Hosszú 2012b: 31)

I used to work in a restaurant but the split shift... the truth is that I didn't have a social life or anything. And if you work in one of those catering firms, at least you have continuous working hours. (Male cook, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011a: 5)

One of the key reasons for accepting low wages in catering is good working hours. Employees in catering kitchens typically work between 6AM and 3PM, depending on the kitchen. No afternoon shift, no night work. Pure and simple, 8 hours working time (plus 30 minutes rest time for meals, which is not part of the 8 hours). There are a few employees, typically deputy head-cooks, head cooks and facility managers who do work more hours, but other employees are not expected to work more. There is no overtime. Catering is a kind of business where the work ends on time every day. (Tóth & Hosszú 2012b: 30)

Finally, it is noteworthy that skilled cooks and low skilled kitchen/catering assistants differ in their evaluation of their work in catering. Skilled cooks are very aware that the professional challenges in catering are lower than in private restaurants, where menus are perceived as more creative and food preparation as more 'artistic'. Kitchen assistants are less concerned with the professional level of cooking and tend rather to compare their work with low skilled work elsewhere, in and outside the sector.

In particular the cooks perceive the choice of working in catering as a trade-off between the higher wages and higher degree of professional creativity offered in restaurants and the regular working hours and less physical and psychological strain in catering. Catering is seen as the more family-friendly choice, as well as (in most cases) steady and secure employment.

6.3.4 Quality of life: Low wages and low material well-being – but justified by catering workers

Wage satisfaction and living conditions vary among interviewees, but most view wages as low, although this is regarded as a trade-off in exchange for regular working hours. Moreover, there seems to be a tendency among catering workers to justify wages and other drawbacks in various ways.

Wage satisfaction differs quite a lot. Wages are seen as only just sufficient in Lithuania (but regarded as unreasonable because of the high workload) and reasonable in the UK, but as very low in Hungary, where employees have problems making ends meet. Wages are also perceived as low in Germany, where even skilled cooks are around the low-wage threshold. Furthermore, the wage difference between kitchen assistants and skilled cooks is small in four out of the five countries, and upskilling is therefore not seen as a way to increase one's standard of living.

Perhaps, I have enough [money] for basic things. I can't say that I'm unable to buy shampoo. But if I want to save something – I can't. I receive my salary and I live on it until the next one. But I want to put something aside... I would really like to renovate the bathroom and toilet, but I can't. (Female cook, Lithuania, quoted in Kuznecovienė & Daukšas 2012: 18)

The wages are a joke. An 'unskilled' worker gets the minimum wage, a skilled worker gets the minimum wage plus 10%. But this is the industry standard, nowhere offers better wages. (Male cook, Hungary, quoted in Tóth & Hosszú 2012b: 29)

Too little (wages) because the work is too hard, physically too hard. (Kitchen assistant, Germany, quoted in Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. 2012: 15)

In Spain remuneration likewise seems to be very low, but the perception of it by workers is favourable because of the regular working hours, and in comparison with the wages in the sector as a whole.

I like the timetable. I like what I do. It's not that I'd like to do this all my life, but well... Within what I've got, I like what I'm doing. And the pay is good. There are many places where they earn less than we do. (Female assistant cook, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011a: 21)

Interestingly, Spanish employees see their wages as reasonable even in cases where wages objectively speaking can be considered very low. In particular, low skilled kitchen assistants compare their wages to what they can get in other low wage jobs, and justify their low wages by referring to their lack of vocational training.

Yes (wages are low) because I'm not a skilled kitchen worker, I'm really just an unskilled worker. It's actually pretty normal these days. (...) I find that at my age I can't make demands any more. I am happy to get something at all. (Kitchen assistant, Germany, quoted in Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. 2012: 14)

Skilled cooks also differ in their opinion about wages. Some justify their wages by comparing not only wages but also differences in working conditions in the restaurants. Both cooks and kitchen assistants are very aware that catering to the public sector is a very tight market, and this is also used as a justification for low wages.

But because it's a school and people always think you have to economize on meals, the prices are under such enormous pressure that the caterers aren't able to pay more. (Kitchen assistant, Germany, quoted in Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. 2012: 15)

Finally, contract catering seems in some cases to offer the possibility to supplement one's income by taking left over food home. Most interviewees do not mention this, so it is difficult to assess how widespread this is. However, in the one case where this is mentioned (Hungary), the opportunity to bring home large amounts of food is acknowledged as a valuable supplement to the low wages.

6.3.5 Hard physical work: occupational health and safety risks

If working hours signify the favourable part of the work, the hard physical labour and occupational health and safety risks signify the drawbacks.

When I came here I was 40. I did the work easily then. But now, as I am getting older, each year is more difficult. I hope I can do it [for a few more years]. My other son has a mortgage and my salary is also necessary to support him. (...) I cannot save a penny. I have so much to pay, but the work is really hard. In the past it was easier. I do not know how much longer I can do it, but I hope I will be able to stay here. I will do it as long as I can. But I need the help of my colleagues for certain tasks, lifting things. (...) It is said that this is male work. Yes, I have to work a lot, washing up all the dishes after two o'clock. I never left one unwashed, and if the working time is over, I stay until I have done all the washing up. (Female, 'unskilled' employee, Hungary, quoted in Tóth & Hosszú 2012b: 8-9)

Both cooks and kitchen assistants emphasize that working in catering is very hard work. It requires a lot of heavy lifting and standing up all day (the above quote also suggests that sometimes kitchen assistants stay after hours in order to be able to finish their work). A number of interviewees report injuries and musculoskeletal problems.

I have already had two operations on my knees. It's a few years ago now and depending on what I'm carrying, and on the weather, it can be extremely painful (...) That's physical strain from all the carrying.... I grit my teeth and carry on (...) If I stop, then the others will have to do my work. So you don't do that. You think of your colleagues. (Sous chef, Germany, quoted in Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. 2012: 24-25)

Furthermore, although peak hours are seen as less pronounced in catering compared to restaurant work, there is still an obligation to finish work at a certain hour. Hence the workload is often high, especially if colleagues are absent, and during peak hours there is no time for breaks or even to sit down. Several catering workers expressed concern that they would not be able to work in kitchens until retirement age and many also reported fatigue and exhaustion when returning home from work. There is thus an intense time

pressure at certain peak times during the day, resulting in stress, as well as a general perception of catering as physically demanding work, due to the large number of meals and carrying large quantities of food.

... because we have to finish work on time, that is really difficult. Here timing is the key. We do not have the option to work until 8PM. At 11AM the meal has to be ready. Every minute counts. There is no room for overtime, or to finish at home and take it back the next morning, as in an office. At 11 AM everything has to be ready. We cannot afford not to be ready. This is when we have nervousness and conflicts arise about who does what – who does more, and who does less. (Female cook, Hungary, quoted in Tóth & Hosszú 2012b: 11)

Furthermore, working in kitchens means working in a particularly problematic environment. Many employees complain about the humid atmosphere and highlight heat as a particular problem when working in kitchens. The common complaints about this aspect of the physical working environment in the interviews suggest that companies/management do not pay much attention to solving this problem.

In the kitchen it's very hot, we all suffer from the heat... not only the kitchen... they made a very nice dining room, all new, but the ventilation doesn't work... they've put walls that enclose us in the little machine room and it hasn't got enough ventilation and it's very hot there... between the machine and the service line it's very hot. (Female cleaning assistant, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011a: 22)

Finally, kitchen work is regarded as hazardous and kitchen workers are aware that they are exposed to risk of accidents by working with sharp knives, boiling food, etc.

6.4 Special quality of work related features of catering work

In addition to these more persistent features of work in contract catering, quality of work for employees seems to be related to three particular organizational features: **organizing and managing work in the kitchen; features of contracting: procurement, customer orientation and site-dependency; and increasing work intensity.**

6.4.1 Organizing and managing work in the kitchen

In most cases kitchen work is hard and the poor physical working conditions are difficult to cope with (heat and humidity). Interviewees also mention heavy lifting and the stressful peak hours. Some of these problems seem to be related to a lack of managerial concern with the physical working environment, e.g. equipment and sufficient time to prepare meals. However, quality of work in catering is also related to the organisation of kitchen work as 'team work'. Kitchen work is collective work, and even though there is a high degree of specialization and hierarchisation, employees are expected to assist each other in order to finish meals on time. The close cooperation in the kitchen is generally seen as an advantage of the job and the social relations and reciprocity in 'helping each other out' is perceived as a distinctive and 'nice' feature by employees.

I come to work in the morning and start cooking everything immediately. But if there is someone who cannot finish on time, when the food should be ready to be taken away, then we all come – sometimes even cooks from other departments join us and we finish it together. We are used to that here – if you see that someone is not going to make it, you just help. Sometimes it is impossible to make it alone. (Cook, Lithuania, quoted in Kuznecovienė & Daukšas 2012: 21)

When it gets too much [workload in the washing up area] then we do it together (...)
I: ‘And does someone tell you that you have to do the washing up?’ R: ‘I just do it. If I see it, I just go there. I don’t ask. I know what I have to do – or don’t have to... what I can do, so to speak (...) I can’t stand around while the others are working.’
(Assistant cook, Germany, quoted in Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. 2012: 20)

The informal atmosphere characterised by helping each other out is highlighted by catering workers in all countries. Not only does this contribute to reducing the stress level, but as Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. (2012) suggest, it is also an important aspect of catering workers’ work identity.

However, the often stressful situation around meals is also regarded as potentially loaded with conflicts, especially when combined with fatigue due to an overload of work. The organisation and management of kitchen work therefore seems to be crucial to the perception of working conditions – and for the prevention of social conflicts, accidents and physical strain. However, several kitchen workers complain of a lack of management, emphasizing that the often stressful work needs regulation because it may potentially lead to social conflicts. Management’s attitude towards failures or problems in the kitchen may in some cases contribute to the stress of employees instead of being of any support:

There is a lack of humanity, understanding. If something happens, everyone shouts and scolds and say you are absolutely worthless, and that there isn’t a worse cook than you are. And they won’t forget that. They don’t remember what was good. (Cook, Lithuania, quoted in Kuznecovienė & Daukšas 2012: 22)

The UK research found that there was room for improvement in terms of the relationships and communication between catering staff and management (Holman & McClelland 2011, McClelland & Holman 2012b, McClelland & Holman 2012a).

The attitudes and role of management in terms of taking responsibility for (and securing a reasonable) work load, investing in improvements of physical work environment, creating a decent way of communicating, creating clear work tasks and balancing catering workers’ interests vis-à-vis customers seems to be crucial for catering workers’ experience of work quality.

6.4.2 Features of contracting: Procurement, customer orientation and site-dependency

Contract catering creates particular working conditions for employees by being based on contracts and subject to specific regulation, e.g. public procurement law. First, contracting involves competing on price in a competitive market and second, contract catering may also result in rapid changes in providers. Both these conditions influence working

conditions in catering. Finally, contract catering involves working with customers and balancing customer and employee needs. Catering work is therefore also shaped by the different sites that are being catered to, e.g. schools, hospitals or universities.

Contracting for a fixed period of time

The Public Procurement law provides that a catering service contract is concluded for a period of three years. After winning a contract, the company employs new cooks and kitchen staff. However, workers are employed under a fix-term contract of three years, i.e. for the same period of time the contract is consulted with the customer. Employment under the fixed-term contract is not regarded by the informants as a work element that influences their insecurity, because the cook's position has high demand on the labour market. However, the temporary contract of employment has negative consequences for the material wellbeing of cooks – they cannot obtain any loan for renovation or purchase of an apartment or any other bigger investment. Some interviewees mentioned this situation as being very problematic. (Kuznecovienė & Daukšas 2012: 20)

As the quote above suggests, the fixed term element in catering can have consequences for working conditions because employment follows the catering contract period. Although there are also examples of open ended employment contracts, the insecurity of continuing contracts tend to influence employment security and only well-established catering companies employ their personnel on permanent contracts.

Competing on marginal price differences

Price competition and the fear of losing contracts seems to make employees more reluctant in demanding better wages and more secure working conditions.

Management policies accentuate social vulnerability in a growing sector driven by price competition. Work in this sector is based on a persistent segmentation of the labour market and sexual division of labour. (Moreno Colom 2011a: 3)

Both managers and employees are very aware of the particularities of the catering market. The fact that this market is perceived as very price sensitive has an impact not only on the objective working conditions (e.g. wages) and the strategic use of labour, but also on the employees' own reflections on their present and future employment situation.

Regulating subrogation: Continuous clients but changing employers

Continuous subcontracting tend to result in frequent changes of customers/contracts which may also lead to increased employment insecurity (not knowing if the 'new' employer will hire 'old' catering workers) In some countries therefore workers' employment is secured by national regulation in the form of subrogation. This makes it possible for workers to stay in the job when customers shift contractor, but it can also result in a situation where employees are working for changing companies, while remaining working on the same site.

I've been subrogated by three companies now... First I was with A-food. Then we changed to B-food, which was a subsidiary of A-food. A-food created another subsidiary because it was so big... It was one of the largest collective catering firms here in Catalonia... And I've been with C-food for the seven or eight years since they took on D-food. And I was subrogated in D-food. And previously I'd been in D-food with B-food, later with F-food and later with G-food and before G-food I was with A-food... And before D-food, I was in other places, but mostly in D-food. (Male cook, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011a: 7)

Moreno Colom (2011a: 7) suggests that in spite of the fact that subrogation protects workers against unemployment, it may have the more unintended result that catering workers identify more with the client than with the catering company. This process may be accelerated if the 'client employer' begins to treat the 'foreign worker' as an employee, thereby creating a new symbolic employer/employee relationship.

As we'd been working with them, it wasn't subrogation, but they told us they'd give us the same conditions as if we were workers at the school. They give us a discount in the school, in the restaurant... my daughter's doing the summer school now and they give me a discount... At Christmas they give us a ham like all the workers in the school... On Saint George's Day they give us a rose... It sounds very tough to say it, but for me my workmates are the ones in the school I see every day... the teachers, the meal supervisors... rather than those at X-Food where I don't know anyone... I mean, I've been here 25 years and I haven't gone anywhere else... (Female assistant cook, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011a: 7)

In sum, therefore, although subrogation protects workers' employment, it may result in the weakening of the relationship between the 'real' employer and the catering worker. This employer/employee relationship is already to some extent under pressure because of the customer orientation inherent in contract catering.

Customer orientation

Finally, the degree of customer orientation also shapes working conditions for catering workers, and often catering companies appear to bend their services to fit the client's needs. Indirectly, therefore customers may regulate employment and working conditions for the employees in the catering firm.

The quality of work of cooks employed by different companies differs according to the sort of services that company is providing (e.g. whether the company is catering events or serves public institutions). The nature of services determines content of work, principles of work organisation and employment conditions. (Kuznecovienė & Daukšas 2012: 23)

One example of such customer orientation is the adaption of employment contracts to suit the schedule of clients' operations. McClelland & Holman (2012a) report that the catering providers to universities in the UK tend to use permanent part-time contracts that require employees to work during term-times only, approximately 30 weeks per year. Moreno Colom (2011a) also reports how catering to hospitals results in irregular working hours for

Spanish catering workers. Although there are also differences, the overall tendency is that catering companies seem to favour customers' wishes at the cost of their employees and furthermore often lack the means to persuade customers to use employee friendly strategies or technologies.

One of the companies (CHILDCAT) supplies some customers using the Cook & Chill system (meals are delivered cold and are heated up again on site at meal times). This system seems favourable with respect to working conditions as it reduces time pressure, but an extension of this system has so far been possible only in isolated cases because of resistance from the customers (partly because of the greater technical requirements on the client's premises). (Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. 2012: 6)

In summary, quality of work in contract catering seems to be determined by customer orientation in various ways, related to company policies towards their employees and to the types of services the company is providing and the kind of customer being catered to.

6.4.3 Increasing work intensity (nature of work, combined with reduction in number of employees)

A final feature that catering workers are concerned about is increasing work intensity and the resulting heavy workload.

They should employ more people, I mean, cooks. There's a lack of cooks here. There's a lot of work. You basically work until night from seven o'clock in the morning, sometimes – from six. So if you are already at work at 6 am, you need to wake up at five, and then you work until twelve. You get really tired. There are too few people, lots of work, and nobody to do the work, so you get tired, really tired. (Male cook, Lithuania, quoted in Kuznecovienė & Daukšas 2012: 22)

Any increase in workload is stressful for employees in catering because they already experience peaks of high work intensity, as their work has to be finished before meals. Increased workloads therefore result in stressful working conditions.

There is an intensification of work. We are less than the necessary staff. And if somebody is missing for whatever reason, we really have to step up our work. Then one really has to do more than one's normal duties. And because we have to finish the work on time, that is really difficult. Here timing is the key. We do not have the option to work until 8PM. At 11AM the meal has to be ready. Every minute counts. There is no room for overtime, or to finish at home and take it back the next morning, as in an office. At 11 AM everything has to be ready. We cannot afford not to be ready. This is when we have nervousness and conflicts arise about who does what – who does more, and who does less. (Female cook, Hungary, quoted in Tóth & Hosszú 2012b: 11)

In addition to a general tendency to cut costs by working with fewer employees, the larger companies also tend to move people between sites, in particular in the case of absenteeism. This also increases the workload for the remaining personnel.

If they take someone away, for example... they need one person here, one person there and another in another place... Well, if three people leave, the rest have to do their work. It's not that I'm going to do it, but I see my colleagues working their skin to the bone and it's a shame... And I've been through that too. Yes, they say you have to collaborate and this and that... and we do 'collaborate'. I always collaborate with everyone. If I have to go I don't mind... (Male cook, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011a: 5)

6.5 Career trajectories, job crafting and 'voice' in catering

We now turn to the third section of the chapter, which is an analysis of the characteristics of employee agency by looking at career trajectories, job crafting and 'voice'. The aim is to understand the processes involved in creating job mobility and career options in contract catering, the ways that catering workers shape their work in different ways and the kind of influence that employees in catering experience that they have on employment and work.

6.5.1 Career trajectories in catering: a gendered labour market

Career trajectories and reasons for working in catering vary both within companies and between countries. However, some prevailing career trends can be identified.

In Germany, Spain and the UK, catering is characterized by marked gender segregation in work tasks, perceptions of jobs and career paths. Skilled cooks are very often men and both head cooks and assistant cooks tend to be perceived as male jobs. Low skilled kitchen or catering assistants are usually women and their roles are perceived to be female roles. Neither the gendering and hierarchical distribution of jobs nor the gendered career patterns seem to be questioned or much reflected upon by interviewees. Rather it seems that gendered work roles reflect (and reproduce) cultural discourses stipulating that female and male employees are expected to occupy different work roles.

There is a considerable split between the sexes: whereas the majority of men have a full-time job, the overwhelming majority of women work in part-time jobs. This is due in particular to the horizontal gender-specific distribution of duties (men cook, women carry out auxiliary activities) and the relationship between these duties and hours (cooks work full-time, auxiliary workers part-time). (Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. 2012: 6)

The types of career paths are also gendered and this has consequences for the positions that men and women can get in the catering labour market. The overall basic difference seems to be that men who work in catering have started their career at an early age, either by pursuing formal education as cooks or as 'trainees' working their way up in the kitchens.

The career paths also show a gender difference in the life cycle. Men tend to start their career paths in the catering sector as assistant cooks. Though they have no training for this job, the lack of professional recognition in the sector allows them to find work when they give up their education at an early age. They start out in the

worst jobs of the sector in terms of working time and pay. After a few years they gain experience, promotion and change their subsector to improve their working conditions. In time, their job expectations adapt to the social opportunities and what started as an easy solution to earn money becomes a ‘vocation’ (Moreno Colom 2011a: 8)

The career paths of women, on the other hand, do not tend to start at an early age in the sector but in other formal or informal jobs related to personal services. Employment in the collective catering sector mainly helps women to return to work after a period of unemployment or inactivity due to childcare. (Moreno Colom 2011a: 8)

Moreno Colom suggests that these differences, in combination with a cultural discourse of gendered work tasks, make it very difficult for middle aged women to get access to the informal training patterns that prevail in Spanish kitchens. Female kitchen assistants are not considered as ‘trainees’ and positions as assistant cooks are regarded as ‘male’ and usually filled with younger male trainees. Consequently, the combination of women entering the sector after raising children and the fact that the position of cook is culturally perceived as male make employers reluctant to employ women as assistant cooks and female employees reluctant to seek these positions.

The gendered work tasks also make occupational mobility more difficult for women than for men in German catering, where cultural discourses are also suggested as a possible explanation for gender segregation, since gender differences tend to be regarded as ‘normal’.

Whereas a lack of formal qualifications does not seem to be an obstacle when it comes to male employees receiving the same job titles and pay as qualified employees when they take on equivalent roles, the lack of formal qualifications does appear to hinder a rise in status for women in such cases to a certain extent. Although they are *better paid* than other ‘kitchen helpers’, they are still assigned to the group of semi-skilled occupations in terms of pay and/or job title. It should be borne in mind that this comparison is based only on the job descriptions provided by the interviewees themselves. However, the examples given create the impression that management’s scope for discretion in classifying jobs is influenced by gender-specific employment trajectories and employee career aspirations, and not only by the actual tasks performed by the employees. (Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. 2012: 11)

Gendered work discourses are also invoked by Jaehrling, Mesaros & Schwarzkopf when discussing the apparent paradox that male employees are more often employed in full time jobs and get higher wages and higher pensions than women, yet women tend to be more satisfied with their wages than men. Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. (2012) explain this by referring to traditional perceptions of women’s income as ‘additional’ in contrast to perceptions of men’s wages as ‘breadwinner’ income. The gendered cultural discourse of work and income creates a different basis of comparison. Another explanation by Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. links the gendered wage expectation of the employees to the gender segmentation in the labour market. Whereas the male cooks compare their wages with other better paid jobs that are available to them (and which some of them already

held during their earlier career or which they aspire to move on to in the future), women compare their with jobs that are worse paid or equally poorly paid because that is the jobs that are available to them. In short, women's de facto lack of alternatives makes them more inclined to accept the jobs and wages that are offered to them in catering (Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. 2012: 15).

Interestingly, gender segregation seems to be much less prevalent in Hungary and Lithuania. There may be several explanations for this, but one could be that vocational training is more common in these countries in order to be employed as a cook. The more formalized career paths may promote employment based on qualifications rather than gender. The Lithuanian and Hungarian interviews suggest that female cooks are rather common and that career opportunities are less related to gender (or ethnicity), although gender differences do exist:

Perhaps it's easier for a man to move up the career ladder, I don't know. Perhaps he is smarter... (Female cook, Lithuania, quoted in Kuznecovienė & Daukšas 2012: 10)

6.5.2 Career paths and prospects in catering: 1st career choice, second career choice and re-entering.

In the analysis of career paths in catering, it is necessary to distinguish between employees with formal education and those working as 'unskilled' kitchen assistants.

Skilled cooks, in particular those who have formal vocational training, have generally always worked as cooks and this has been their first career choice. Some, in particular the younger cooks, further aim for a career as head chef or cook in a private restaurant, while others – in particular the more experienced and older workers (often women) – intend to stay where they are.

In contrast, kitchen assistants without formal education have different career trajectories, reflecting that catering is not their first choice. Many from this group (particularly women) start by working in catering as a second career choice either after having been away from the labour market for some years because of child raising, or because they have worked in other areas often not related to food preparation. Some manage to do a training course and eventually end up working as cooks, but most simply continue as low skilled kitchen assistants after having worked as 'unskilled' workers in retail or other service areas. Many start their careers in catering by working part time and/or in zero hour contracts or with no contracts at all, and gradually manage to get more permanent employment.

Career options

The main career option for kitchen assistants is to become cooks or assistant cooks (which in some countries is easier and more likely for young (male) employees than for older or middle aged (female) employees). For the latter group, career trajectories therefore are characterized by changing workplaces (horizontal careers) in pursuit of higher wages, but without changing work tasks or moving 'up' the career path (Kuznecovienė & Daukšas 2012: 7).

In some catering companies there is also a possibility of becoming a middle manager. However, this does not appear to be regarded as very attractive by catering assistants because of the substantial responsibility that goes with the job, which is not reflected in a corresponding rise in wages.

Finally, it should be mentioned that training to a large extent takes place via informal training or 'apprenticeships'. When one has entered the sector at whatever level, the general pattern is to stay at that level or to advance via informal training. Vocational training does not seem to be an option for most catering workers after they have started working.

6.5.3 Job crafting

According to Berg, Dutton & Wrzesniewski (2010) and Wrzesniewski & Dutton (2001), job crafting can be understood as the ways employees redesign their jobs. Such redesigning can take place in three different ways. First, by altering the boundaries of work e.g. taking on additional tasks (or fewer tasks) or changing the ways tasks are performed. Second, employees can change the social relationships they are involved in at work, e.g. establishing or emphasizing social relations. Third, employees may change their perception of the job (cognitive job crafting), emphasizing certain aspects rather than others. Finally, work may be regarded as either 'a job' (in order to make a living), 'a career' (as a stepping stone in one's career) or as 'a calling' (vocation).

It is a general characteristic of catering work that is rather standardized and much of the work is decided and organized by managers. Although there seems to be more room for creativity in some work places, it is to a rather limited extent. Small workplaces seem to offer more options for job crafting than larger workplaces.

Catering assistants had limited discretion over how they completed their work as they would mostly be allocated to work on specific tasks by managers, and most tasks were fixed and prescribed. Where choices were made they reflected personal preferences (e.g. preparing a drink in a certain way) or adaptation to changing work demands (e.g. delaying a set break to serve customers). The potential to exert job autonomy appeared to be greater when working within the smaller units because these were mainly unsupervised. (McClelland & Holman 2012a: 13)

A 'job' rather than a 'calling'

Employees in catering have a rather pragmatic attitude to their work and few regard their job as a 'calling'. However, employees tend to develop a greater sense of 'vocation' after some time in the sector.

Given the relatively low wages, the high physical strain and stress, and the fact that both the skilled and the 'unskilled' occupations consist of a set of comparatively standardized and routine tasks, it could be expected that employees would share a rather pragmatic attitude to their jobs. And indeed, most of the female employees did in fact take up their jobs 'by chance' and primarily with the aim of earning money in a setting that allows them to combine work and care commitments. However, over

time, the employees, including the kitchen assistants, seem to have developed a stronger commitment to their jobs, which adds something to (rather than replaces) the purely instrumental job orientation. (Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. 2012: 18)

For cooks, catering is often regarded as less creative than working in private restaurants. Food preparation in catering is perceived as rather standardized and although some companies encourage cooks to develop new recipes, the majority do not, and cooks in catering also work with a very tight budget.

The food quality is also a key issue. As far as quality is concerned, our hands are tied. Quality is money and we have strict cost limits. In a restaurant, where there is different price level with a different profit margin, I could use better ingredients, more imagination. Here, the task is different – less creativity, less imagination. It is like running with your feet tied together. Our cost level is set, and I cannot choose freely. We do not have quality meals, or better meals. Just the basics. (Male cook, Hungary, quoted in Tóth & Hosszú 2012b: 20)

For many cooks, the possibility of being able to work more creatively is highly appreciated and most cooks aim for a certain degree of discretion. There is more room for creativity in some forms of catering than others. For example, catering to events (weddings, funerals, etc.) seems to leave greater room for choice for the cooks.

In comparison to X [a café], it seemed more interesting here. They pay more and the work itself is more interesting. Here, you know you can improvise; while in a café you prepare the same plate the same way every single day. Of course you must do this – so you do, but it is so monotonous. And here, for some clients you do it like this, for others, like that. Every time we prepare things differently. We travel throughout the whole of Lithuania, and this is what's interesting. Such a variegated job. They change the courses. In a café, a certain amount of time must pass and then all the courses are changed. But here we are fast –somebody gets an idea, then that's it, we make a new dish. This work is therefore more interesting, much more interesting. (Female cook, Lithuania, quoted in Kuznecovienė & Daukšas 2012: 5)

For the formally unskilled kitchen assistants, the picture is a bit different. To some extent they seem to experience a larger degree of discretion and responsibility in their work in catering than they initially expected.

Social relationships and reciprocity at work

A very characteristic type of job crafting in catering is what Tóth & Hosszú (2012b: 21) term informal team-work. A term that they contrast to the more formally organized management initiated team work.

An internalised team spirit to help each other out, thus avoiding mistakes has been developed among employees in the kitchens. Informal team formation and informal team work is the key of job-crafting for the whole kitchen and for each employee within the team. We use the 'informal' adjective to characterise this team-work, as it

is not based on the concept of ‘Japanese’ style team work widely used in manufacturing industries, which copies the work organisation techniques pioneered in Japanese car manufacturing companies, most notably Toyota. Informal team work has developed in these kitchens based on a combination of set hierarchies, a set ‘main’ profile of work combined with flexible work-arrangements to respond to changing work tasks. (Tóth & Hosszú 2012b: 21)

An example of this informal team spirit is reflected in the following quote:

This is like a big family. My second family. After all, I spend more time here than with my family, this is my second home. There is no ‘I do not help you’ culture here. People don’t try to get ahead by stepping on you. This is why it is so good to be here. There is a lot of joking and fun. We tease each other, but we know where the limit is and we do not cross that. (Male cook, Hungary, quoted in Tóth & Hosszú 2012b: 22)

Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. (2012: 20) support this conceptualization of teamwork in kitchens as being something different from a formally rational way of organizing work. Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. (2012) show how the process of creating and maintaining social relationships and reciprocity by employees, although partly functional (a way of coping with a high work load at peak times), is developed further by employees who seem to embrace such requirements for social cooperation. Interviews with the German catering workers reflect the employees’ tendency to ascribe additional meanings to teamwork by invoking the concepts of solidarity, altruism, reciprocity and equality (the lack of status differences between cooks and kitchen assistants).

I take over this task [collecting the dirty dishes in the kitchen] from the cooks from time to time (...) it’s not part of my job ... I think that I help them out with it so that maybe they will help me out with something else. (Kitchen assistant, Germany, quoted in Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. 2012: 19)

We help each other (...) That goes without saying, because we go back a long way. When I was doing the cleaning here [as an employee for the cleaning subcontractor], (...) I had a coffee with them once in a while. I took the time to do so. We always had a talk, and that’s why. (Kitchen assistant, Germany, quoted in Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. 2012: 20)

The need to work together as a group is reframed by employees as reciprocal relationships and friendships which develop when working together in larger kitchens, and is echoed across companies and countries as a significant feature of kitchen work.

Caring for customers

A final example of job crafting is connected to the development of relationships with customers and the meaning that can be attributed to helping customers. This is particularly prevalent amongst catering workers who work in close contact with particular groups of customers, e.g. within hospitals or educational institutions.

So what does it offer? Well, I like to go to work... what satisfies me is that I like what I do... I feel useful... and I value myself better because I've seen that... in some way you're helping sick people. You sometimes see something that's not right and you think: Oh no, that's for a sick person! It has to be nicely presented because it's for a sick person. Because they're ill, poor things. And that makes you feel a better person, you know? (Female cleaning assistant, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011a: 16)

When I was in [my previous catering job], students would go – because their mum and dad weren't about – they'd go and speak [to us], because they didn't want to speak to other students. [I was] a mother figure. Even with the coffee shop, where I am now, some little girl comes in, and she's so quiet. I say to her, 'Speak up', you know... When she comes in now she's gotten louder. (Catering assistant, UK, quoted in McClelland & Holman 2012a: 14)

6.5.4 Voice in contract catering

Table 16: Employee use of unions

Country	Germany	Lithuania	Hungary ⁴³	Spain	UK
Catering workers' use of and experiences with unions	Collective agreements are influential because they are being observed in the workplaces. But there is no active workers' representation at workplace level	No trade unions. Work council not influential at workplace	Two types of 'voice', via managers and via unions	Two types of 'voice', via personal relations and via unions.	Trade union representation and opportunities for 'voice'

Workers in catering seek influence in two different ways: by direct communication with managers and via unions. Both of these channels differ in significance between workplaces, however, the direct communication via managers, either individually or collectively, seems to be the most preferred.

The channels of influence via managers moreover depend on the kind of atmosphere, form of management and social relationships in the particular kitchen. It seems that small entities provide a better basis for influence than larger kitchens.

The possibilities for action and decision making depend on the hierarchy of professional categories in kitchens. Kitchens tend to include a small group of people of different professional categories and the small size of the premises makes the differences more evident. The chefs are constantly giving orders to the other staff in

⁴³ In Hungary the unions have a very different tradition and role than in the other countries. Unions provide welfare/social security, but they do not negotiate on behalf of employees with the management.

a small space under the pressure of service time. These factors personalize working relations between the lower and middle professional categories. Good personal relations are a key aspect of teamwork, whereas poor personal relations are conducive to conflict. (Moreno Colom 2011a: 13-14)

All countries except Lithuania have a certain degree of industrial relations influence on general working conditions and wages (via CLAs). However, in Lithuania, trade unions are not accepted in the catering companies.

...cooks do not deny the necessity of institutions representing employees' interests; however, their general attitude towards such institutions can be described as indifferent... According to interviewees, someone who was interested in establishing a trade union in the company would soon be asked by the employer to search for another job. (Kuznecovienė & Daukšas 2012: 13)

Based on the interviews from Germany, the UK and Spain, unions are present but not very active at the workplace and employees seem to address their manager and/or informal interest groups at the work place when they seek influence.

Catering assistants were provided voice via a number of channels including, for example, through regular meetings, having discussions directly with managers, performance appraisals, focus groups, and through written forms. Whilst their success at instigating change was variable, catering assistants did seem to value the opportunities they had to express themselves. (McClelland & Holman 2012a: 14)

Finally, Hungary is exceptional and unions here seem to be part of a specific tradition and have a significant social role for catering workers. Unions provide welfare/social security, but do not really occupy the role of negotiating with management on behalf of employees.

Unions provide holiday opportunities, help families with children. The company has holiday houses where employees can go to vacation cheaply. The union manages who can go there. There is social assistance, and various welfare schemes. If an employee is in trouble, she can ask for help. This is important. For example, if somebody's washing machine breaks down and she has to buy a new one, or if there is a burglary. [...] And 99% of employees have a need for such welfare assistance. ... For me it is a valuable thing to be a union member. I can go on holiday every year. I could not afford this alone out of my wage. (Female cook, Hungary, quoted in Tóth & Hosszú 2012b: 25-26)

6.6 Vulnerability, vulnerable groups and vulnerable (precarious) work

The previous sections have focused on how employees experience their current job and on their agency in their everyday work and in the labour market. This section deals with the latent social risks in contract catering. The focus is on the risk of social exclusion, including risk of exclusion from the labour market and/or risk of social exclusion, both materially and in terms of social participation (Poggi, Bizzotto et al. 2011). The section

discusses vulnerability from different perspectives. First, we identify **what kind of vulnerable groups** are employed in the sector and the different kinds of risks they face. Second, we look at **work related vulnerability**, focusing on features of employment conditions that may expose employees to poverty and or social exclusion. Finally, we discuss **vulnerability as a process and the kinds of negative synergies between specific social groups and specific types of work**. The aim is to identify work related vulnerability for the most socially vulnerable groups. Work-related vulnerability here refers to work-related processes characterised by uncertainty/weakness ‘which exposes a person (or a family) to suffering particularly negative or damaging consequences if a problematic situation arises’ (Ranci 2010). The term therefore does not only refer to actual vulnerability but also to those working conditions which expose workers to future risks of social exclusion.

The table below shows the workforce composition, the most vulnerable groups and the particular precariousness of work in catering.

Table 17: Workforce and vulnerable groups in examined countries

Country	Germany	Lithuania	Hungary	Spain	UK
Main social groups working in the cases	Young male cooks and (45+) female kitchen assistants Migrants and students	Women, few men, ethnic minorities	Female cooks and assistants 2/3 Male cooks	Young male cooks and (+45) female kitchen assistants. Migrants	Mainly low-skilled females Migrants, students and older workers
Particularly vulnerable groups	Older workers and women	No particular group appears to be vulnerable. Cooks in catering are not considered vulnerable.	Not very vulnerable in general Older workers	Young men with no formal education Women with children and without formal education Older women without formal education	Males Casual Part-time Casual contracts
Specifically precarious work issues	Part time/low pensions Fixed term and marginal employment (mini-jobs)	Full time and regular working hours (secure but low wages) Fixed-term contracts (disadvantages for life quality)	Full time and regular working hours (very low wages) Permanent contracts, high job security	Fixed-discontinuous contracts	Part-time fixed term contracts Zero-hour contracts

6.6.1 Vulnerable groups in catering

Catering is perceived by employees as the best available work alternative within HORECA, mainly because of the regular working hours that are being offered and which make it possible to reconcile work and family life. The main categories of employees in catering are women (low skilled kitchen assistants, but also skilled cooks), men (skilled cooks), ethnic minorities and migrants and students (part time and fixed term employment).

The interviews point towards a rather heterogeneous picture of the extent or type of vulnerability in catering. The **Hungarian** and **Lithuanian** interviews suggest that employees have a high level of job security, but low wages; however they are not particularly vulnerable (this may to some extent reflect the choice of large, former state-run enterprises as cases in these countries). As explained by Tóth and Hosszú:

Given the security and life time employment policy of these companies, it is very difficult to find vulnerable groups of employees within these workplaces ... (Tóth & Hosszú 2012b: 35)

However, Tóth & Hosszú (2012b) mention two areas of concern: low wages and the fact that the large catering companies in which these catering workers are employed may not in the long run be able to maintain competitiveness against smaller companies who offer lower prices but more insecure employment. In short, the reasonably favourable working conditions in the Hungarian companies may not prevail in the longer term. In Lithuania, where most catering work is carried out by skilled cooks and where there are therefore relatively few low skilled kitchen assistants, catering workers do not regard themselves as vulnerable:

I think that we, the cooks, live better than others ... as far as I know from other cooks, I don't think our (wage) level is very low. For cooks it's quite good. (Cook, Lithuania, quoted in Kuznecovienė & Daukšas 2012: 16-17)

As noted above, in addition to this, gender segregation (male cooks, female kitchen assistants) does not appear to be a significant factor, and in both Lithuania and Hungary there are many interviews with women working as cooks.

UK catering assistants are presented as not specifically vulnerable. However, a range of groups traditionally seen as vulnerable are represented in the workforce, e.g. female, migrant, low educated, younger, older and ethnic minorities. Some groups are also seen to be more at risk, including migrants, a few male catering workers (who were facing difficult personal and social situations), and women in fixed term or zero hour contracts.

In contrast to the relatively favourable picture presented above, working conditions and possibilities in catering in **Spain** and **Germany** are more problematic and reveal clear patterns of gender segregation and a risk of social 'downdrift' for women (older women in particular).

Young men have successful career paths with upward mobility, whereas women have career paths of survival and fail to escape from the precariousness of female employment. (Moreno Colom 2011a: 26)

In addition, older workers are specifically vulnerable and young workers are in some cases also vulnerable. With regard to migrants and ethnic minorities, these groups are mentioned, but only briefly, and the very limited number of interviews with these employees (characteristic of all reports) makes it difficult to distinguish clear social patterns.

Women

Women dominate catering. One reason for this seems to be that women in particular choose to work in catering rather than in restaurants, because the working hours are regular and family-friendly. Women are generally employed as ‘unskilled’ kitchen or catering assistants – although this varies, and there are also women working as cooks. Women often have different career trajectories than men, because they enter the sector later and catering is often not their first career choice. Women work part time and/or on fixed term contracts more often than men.

In Hungary and Lithuania, gender seems to play a rather small role in the division of work tasks in catering, and in the workplace women do not appear more at risk than men.

In contrast, women occupy a rather different position in catering in Spain and Germany, where work is highly gender segregated. In Spain, women enter the labour market later than men, they work as ‘unskilled’ kitchen assistants, and they have few career options. This is partly related to prevailing gender discourses, where employment as cooks or chefs and related careers and training apprenticeship positions are assumed to be ‘male’. Similarly, in Germany, women perform low skilled activities while men work as cooks. In addition, in both countries men work full time, while women work part time. In these cases therefore, work tasks, wages and careers are gendered. An example of this is the prevailing assumptions that kitchen work is ‘heavy’ and therefore must be carried out by men. However, in practice there are several examples of female cooks who manage their ‘heavy’ work in spite of this, but these examples do not challenge the dominant perception that ‘women cannot work as cooks’ (see Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. 2012).

Finally, the group of single women with children seems to be particularly vulnerable because of the combination of part time work and low salary.

Older workers

Older workers constitute a specifically vulnerable group in catering, because of the risk of physical strain, leading to health problems for those who have worked in the sector for many years. As a consequence, older employees are often worried that they will not be able to stay in the job until retirement age.

(Interviewer asks if employee envisages herself remaining in the same job 5 to 10 years from now): '*Well, in this occupation, yes – although I believe that it is difficult to really work in this occupation until retirement. Physically it is simply [difficult].*' (Sous chef, Germany, quoted in Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. 2012: 25)

Health problems are a real concern for many older workers and their worries are furthermore related to their general experiences of increasing work pace and the fact that it is less and less possible to find 'easy' work or to make arrangements with employers about reduced working hours or reductions in performance requirements.

Migrants and/or ethnic minorities

Neither Migrants nor ethnic minorities are very visible as a social group in catering. In spite of the fact that these groups are employed, we do not have information about them occupying a particular position. In Lithuania, where Poles and Russians constitute a rather large minority, these groups do not occupy any separate position in the kitchen – nor does there seem to be any segregation of work tasks related to ethnicity (Kuznecovienė & Daukšas 2012). For Spain, Moreno Colom explicitly states that ethnic origin does not seem to play any significant role and that immigrant women are employed in feminized work and immigrant men in masculinized work. However, this suggests that immigrant women also constitute a vulnerable group in catering. It should be emphasized that since we have very few interviews with migrants and ethnic minorities in catering it is difficult to estimate the position of these groups in the sector.

Men

Men generally occupy the skilled positions as cooks and work full time. This group of men can only be considered vulnerable in the case of general employment insecurity, e.g. where there is a more general risk of the company not winning enough contracts/having contracts extended. In the UK, a small group of men working part-time or on zero hour contracts in low-skilled roles are considered to be particularly vulnerable, both in terms of employment security and earning enough money. In the other examined countries, such groups of low skilled men are not mentioned. However, vulnerability may also depend on the household situation. Since wages for cooks are often quite close to the low wage threshold (or even below) their income is far from being a 'breadwinner' wage covering the needs of a family. In couple households, particularly those with children, a second income from the partner is important. But if the second income in the household is lost for some reason, the precariousness of the low wage level for cooks becomes apparent. Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. (2012) quote the example of a cook with two children on a fixed-term contract who decided to stop looking for a better paid job for a while:

Especially because the situation at home was that my wife gave up a job (...) she was unemployed for two months and now she has a new job. So we made sure first that we got back on track again. No support, no benefits or anything. Staying independent and not owing anyone anything. (Cook, Germany, quoted in Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. 2012: 16)

Young workers

In the UK examples, young workers are reported as particularly vulnerable mainly because they work very long hours, however, the young workers in the present study are mostly students, who are not generally regarded as vulnerable.

6.6.2 Vulnerable work and employment in contract catering

Catering work offers a range of different employment contracts depending on the company, type of customers, and prevalent national/institutional differences. Spanish, German, and (some) UK jobs are predominantly part time with a large share of fixed term contracts.

In most UK jobs, and in all Hungarian jobs, employment contracts are open ended. (i.e. permanent).

There seem to be two 'idealtypes' of employment in catering: one with high job security, low wages and a high degree of standardization, and one with flexible and less secure contracts which may or may not be combined with other benefits. The first of these, exemplified by the Hungarian case, offers greater security but less professional challenges and low wages, while the second one operates in a competitive segment of the catering market, exemplified by most of the Spanish interviewees.

An overall characteristic seems to be that employees, in spite of a prevalence of fixed term contracts, are not afraid of losing their jobs. This may be related to rules of subrogation, but it can also (as in the Lithuanian case) be explained by a favourable labour market where cooks are in high demand. Neither cooks nor kitchen assistants particularly fear dismissals or downsizing.

They (the catering assistants) generally considered their jobs to be secure in the short to medium term. (McClelland & Holman 2012a: 8)

Although employees did not fear losing their jobs in catering, the trend towards a more widespread use of fixed-term contracts suggests that catering work is gradually becoming more risky.

Newly recruited catering assistants on permanent zero-hour contracts that were introduced to increase workforce flexibility and increase efficiency at [the company] likely experience poorer conditions than their co-workers, something that would also apply to any future newcomers. (McClelland & Holman 2012a: 9)

Finally, as pointed out by Tóth and Hosszú above, market competition may result in changes in the market, including an increase in companies that are not offering regular employment.

6.6.3 Vulnerability as a process and the kinds of negative synergies between specific social groups and specific types of work

The fact that catering requires few qualifications (for kitchen and catering assistants) makes the sector a point of labour market re-entry and a possible sector to move to from other sectors or from unemployment. Although this prevents vulnerability in the short term, there are also more subtle and indirect social processes at stake in catering which may eventually lead to labour market exclusion and/or social exclusion, in particular for women who enter catering at an older age than men (because they come from other sectors or start working only after having been home with children). This group of mature or middle aged women seems to be a particularly vulnerable group in catering due to gendered work tasks, the prevalence of part time and/or fixed term or zero hour contracts for newcomers, and because of constraints related to their older age (actual and perceived). Below we give three examples of what can be termed risk of downdrift (Micheli 2008: 41-63). These processes are based on the interviews from Spain and Germany and to a lesser extent from the UK, whereas it is more difficult to say to what extent similar processes prevail in Hungary and Lithuania. The first example concerns women's limited career options and the second raises concern about women risking poverty in old-age.

'Unskilled' work as a kitchen or catering assistant, offers possibilities to re-enter the labour market for women who have been away, raising children. This group of women, however, have no career prospects in catering. Positions as assistant cooks (the 'trainee' job in the kitchen) are given to men, who have entered the sector at a very young age. Although these 'late starting' women may also develop new competencies, they have more problems getting these acknowledged, and usually end up doing qualified work, but without being recognized or paid as cooks. The result is that in particular in contexts with a lack of formal vocational training options, young men get the chance for upward career mobility, while women's careers horizontal. They may pursue different work, but usually at the same hierarchical level. Women may also stay in fixed-term types of jobs as a result of this.

The other example of a downdrift process is related to the fact that women's careers often involves fewer years in the labour market and more gaps in pension payments. This, combined with increased individualization of welfare schemes (in particular pension schemes), disfavours women's career types and exposes them to social and material vulnerability in old age (Jaehrling & Lehndorff 2012).

... the jobs in the catering industry do offer some advantages in exchange for the disadvantages (low remuneration and high physical demands). But while the advantages are felt only as long as employees are working in this occupation, the disadvantages show greater persistence since they entail risks of downdrift processes in the later stage of the life course, including retirement. Even though the industry offers female employees the possibility to work more than just a few hours per week in a marginal part-time job (unlike the cleaning industry, for example, where marginal part-time employment is the norm rather than the exception), the segment of 'auxiliary' mini-jobs is still considerable and seems to be a rather obligatory gateway for 'regular' part-time jobs covered by social insurance. (Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. 2012: 27)

Because women's careers differ from those of men (e.g. women have discontinuous careers due to caring responsibilities), women's pension savings are much smaller than those of men. As emphasized by Jaehrling, Mesaros et al., the difference is becoming even more significant for the risk women face of not having a sufficient income in old age because of the breakdown of the traditional male breadwinner family model.

The remuneration of the female dominated jobs in particular rests on the assumption that wages and resulting pension entitlements will be supplemented by a second (principal) income of the partner. However, the large share of 'failed' sole breadwinner families in our sample (i.e. employees not living with the father or mother of their children any longer) clearly demonstrates that many employees are at risk that this assumption won't correspond to their situation once they have reached retirement age. (Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. 2012: 27)

In both these cases, gender intersects with age and middle-aged and older women occupy a specifically vulnerable position. Many also express doubts that they will be able to continue working in catering until retirement age.

6.7 Future aspirations and perspectives

Catering workers rarely express any inclination to change their present work situation, either by pursuing promotion or by exiting the sector or changing job.

Most of the catering assistants in the study lacked the motivation to change or improve their current work situation instead choosing to accept it for what it was. Few aspired towards a dream job, and even fewer were making active steps towards achieving such things. Instead, the majority of the catering assistants preferred to stay in the same role, whilst a few aimed to progress up to middle management roles or to make sideways moves to different roles within the universities (e.g. administration). (McClelland & Holman 2012a: 21)

The perception of work in contract catering seems to a large degree to be based on satisfaction with some aspects of the job, and seeing limited alternatives. The positive features, such as more social working hours and the social relations between colleagues, are explicitly emphasized as outweighing the more unfavourable aspects of the job (which are also acknowledged), mainly low wages. However, in catering, 'capacities to aspire' (see also the introduction above) are also shaped by gender and age discourses which disencourage older women but encourage younger men to develop career visions.

Age and gender related future aspirations

Middle-aged workers have particular difficulties imagining their future role in catering. Catering is hard physical work, involving lifting heavy pots of food, standing up for many hours and moving between chilled rooms and hot kitchens, as well as safety risks (e.g. the risk of burns and physical strain) and most employees are very aware of the work related health risks in the job. Awareness of these health and safety risks is particularly reflected

in interviews with the older workers who express concern that they will not be able to 'last' in the sector until retirement age.

The age-related vulnerability becomes particularly prevalent because most workers find that they have to work until retirement age. However, not all employers are interested in this and sometimes seem to try to force middle aged workers into early retirement:

... they've already asked me if I wanted to retire but I said: 'no... you must be crazy!' They offered it to me... well... they said: 'Do you want to reach an agreement? Or something?' and I said: 'No... I don't want to reach an agreement with anyone... I'm 53 years old and I won't be retiring for many years...' Firstly, I want to work. But I want to work with dignity... like anyone else, right? (Cook, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011a: 24)

The above quote shows that 'age' is contested and that even in cases where older catering workers express strong inclinations to stay in the job, this is made more difficult by prevailing ideas of age as associated with 'decline' and lack of productivity. The 53 year old catering worker is alarmed by the prospect of not being able to work, and experiences a lack of recognition and ability to work with 'dignity'. The 'age' problem, therefore, is not solely a 'factual' problem e.g. related to the fact that older workers are less able to perform heavy lifting and hard physical work. Prevailing discourses of age-roles also seem to make it harder for older employees to develop their aspirations and identities as 'older workers' in catering. Following Kuznecovienė & Daukšas, therefore, differences in aspirations between age groups can be related to different social discourses of age and career. They find a close relationship between the dominant age-role discourses in society, implying that it is too late to study or change anything in one's career after reaching middle age, and the reluctance in developing new ideas for the future by this group of workers. They conclude that stereotypes about old and middle-age constrain the content of most middle-aged cooks' narratives on career prospects (Kuznecovienė & Daukšas 2012: 23-24).

Young (male) employees on the other hand are more inclined to want to either pursue a career within the sector or to exit it altogether – and they are also often encouraged to do so.

Young cooks have clearly outlined plans and visions for the future. They intend to advance their career by raising their professional qualifications, becoming chefs or migrating to foreign countries. (Kuznecovienė & Daukšas 2012: 24)

Women seem generally less inclined to envision improvements in their current work situation than men. However, women's lack of ambition can also be related to prevailing gender discourses constraining expectations towards women, and prevalent ideas about women's careers.

Moreno Colom suggests that while masculinized jobs are conducive to promotion, feminized jobs form part of the '*sticky floor of horizontal segregation from which it is difficult to escape*' (Moreno Colom 2011a: 10). When the professional categories in kitchens form a gendered hierarchy where female workers are not regarded as 'promotion

potential', it becomes difficult for women to develop ideas of their own future that counter this. Part of women's reluctance to seek promotion in the Spanish case, therefore, can be related to the fact that the only career path which is really open to them is to become the supervisors of the cleaning assistants, which basically means taking on more responsibility without changing their professional category or significantly raising their income. The limited options of promotion from cleaning assistant to assistant cook are directly and indirectly reserved for men.

You show that you can do it. And once you've shown that, they validate your knowledge, say, with the category... because I knew I was going to work and I didn't have any problems with that type of thing, I gradually moved up... until I became assistant chef in the Sagrat Cor... I was there from '92 to 2001... (Male chef, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011a: 11)

The truth is I'm content washing dishes. Because after this I know there's nothing else, so I don't have any aspirations. Of course I'd like to aspire to something better, but because there's nothing else here, well... (Female cleaning assistant, Spain, quoted in Moreno Colom 2011a: 11)

Finally, according to the (limited) interviews with migrants in catering, some migrant workers seem to have an elaborate set of ideas about their future, including aspirations towards upwards career mobility. However, we have no information from the interviews about prevailing assumptions and/or managers' encouragement of migrants' career aspirations.

6.8 Summary and conclusion

Employees in catering regard their work as reasonably good, particularly compared to other work in the HORECA sector – although there are differences between the examined countries. Low wages and (for cooks) a high degree of standardization are balanced by regular working hours, reasonably secure employment and social relations and teamwork in the kitchen. A main quality of work issue is the physically hard and potentially harmful heavy work in the kitchen and the stressful work of getting meals ready in time. Increasing work intensity related to hard competition in a tight market, contributes to these risks. Although many catering workers have relatively secure employment (either open ended contracts or a high degree of security 'in practice'), a number of employees work part time and/or do not have varying working hours and income. In addition, increased customer orientation in tight markets seems to result in both working hours and working time being increasingly adapted to the needs of customers, leading to part time or seasonal employment. One example of this is UK university catering personnel, who are only contracted to work during the 30 weeks when universities are open. In addition, increased customer orientation combined with tight budgets can result in catering assistants being 'squeezed' between the demands of customers (to increase quality and amount of food) and the demands of their employers (to save, e.g. serve small portions). In addition, there are a number of temporary workers in fixed term and/or zero hour contracts, in particular students and 'newcomers' in the sector.

Occupations in catering are hierarchical and gendered, although this seems to be less apparent in Hungary and Lithuania than it is in Spain, Germany and the UK. In Germany and Spain in particular, gender intersects with age, making middle-aged women a particularly vulnerable group, both in terms of social mobility and of being able to secure a sufficient income and pension. Women's vulnerability is further exacerbated by the fact that they experience their alternatives as very limited. However, the physically strenuous work makes all older workers vulnerable because of physical strain and the risk of not being able to stay in the job until retirement. The interviews also point towards conflicting age discourses. Older workers experience lack of encouragement to stay in the job and/or to develop new competencies, while public policies across Europe focus on prolonging the working life of citizens. In addition, age and gender discourses intersect, leading to few career possibilities for those women (including migrant women) who enter the sector later than men.

Workers in catering do not express many aspirations aimed at changing their working situation. Some of the younger men, however, have ambitions to become head cooks or chefs. In addition, the few interviews with migrants suggest that they are also inclined to pursue a career either within or outside catering. The group of older low-skilled women, who form the major segment in catering work, have fewer options and express fewer ambitions. Occupations and career paths in catering appear (in some countries though not in all) highly gendered, and the intersection of dominant age and gender discourses suggest that employers are less inclined to encourage these women to pursue social promotion in spite of the fact that they are most at risk of social and labour market exclusion, both physically and economically.

7 Conclusion: The impact of new and growing jobs on individual lives and work

The analysis of individual perspectives and agency in domiciliary elderly care, cleaning, catering, waste collection and (green) construction has had the general aim of identifying how employment in these five sectors, which can be classified as 'new and growing jobs', influences quality of work and life at an individual level. In this concluding chapter, some of the overall tendencies will be discussed. The chapter starts with a brief recap of the analytical framework of the report. This is followed by an outline of the main cross-sector findings aimed at illuminating work and life quality in the new and growing jobs based on individual perception and agency.

The focus in the analysis of the five sectors has been on individuals' perceptions of their work and life situation, their scope for agency and how individual agency intersects with objective working conditions in shaping quality of work and life. The analysis of the individual interviews has combined different theoretical perspectives.

First, the analysis of individual perspectives and the agency of employees in the five sectors has aimed to 'take people seriously' by analysing their own perceptions of work and life. This has been necessary in order to understand individual sense-making as significant for capturing the impact of work on individuals' everyday lives. The aim has been to 'connect action to its sense rather than behaviour to its determinants' (Geertz 1983; Singh 1997). Such an analysis sheds light on the impact of individuals' understanding and reflection on their present situation and the alternatives that they find are available to them. One example of how this level of analysis contributes to the understanding of quality of work and life is the meaning that elderly care workers generally seem to attribute to their work. The feeling of being important to someone and creating meaningful social relations to elderly clients contributes both positively and negatively to their quality of work. Positively, because it creates pride, meaning and significance in work, but negatively because the emotional investment may lead to fatigue and 'burn out' and because care workers experience a discrepancy between their own perception of their work contribution and the (lack of) recognition from surrounding society. This is partly related to low wages but also to a more general lack of recognition of the significance of their contribution.

Second, individuals do not act in a social vacuum but their perceptions of reality are shaped by social reality. Individual agency and subjective reflections must therefore be understood in relation to a particular social, economic and cultural context (Bourdieu 1990; Giddens 1984). Following this, individual interviews do not just provide information about subjective perception, but shed light on social relations, cultural discourses as well as prevailing positions in particular labour markets, companies and sectors. Both the subjective perceptions and the social context need to be included in order to understand social agency. The analysis has therefore aimed to identify how subjective perceptions of reality interacts with structural conditions and context and how this interaction shapes the scope of agency for people working in the new and growing jobs. We have discussed how workers in their reflections reveal as well as reproduce or resist the social structure. Such

a focus in the analysis of interviews shows how individual agency is shaped by organisational and institutional arrangements, as well as by prevailing cultural understandings related to the specific work tasks (e.g. cleaners being treated as ‘invisible’). Such discourses also position different social groups differently, e.g. connoting gendered expectations or different assumptions about different age groups. It follows that individual perspectives and agency, although taking place at a micro-level, need to be analysed in light of meso- and macro-level social processes as well (Wrzesniewski & Dutton 2001; Giddens 1984).

Finally, the aim of the analysis of individual perspectives and agency has been to identify the impact of work for individuals in the new and growing jobs, with a particular emphasis on the most vulnerable groups. Throughout the analysis, therefore, there has been a focus on the social impact of work for vulnerable groups in terms of how work constrains or promotes social vulnerability as well as workers’ competencies and capacities for future aspiration.

Capacities have been analysed in terms of the kind competencies that workers have, and in terms of capacities to develop aspirations for the future. Capacities are viewed as a cultural ‘meta-competence’ in contrast to the more specific ‘capability’ approach (Appadurai 2004; Sen 1999). The concept of capacities builds on the notion of ‘voice’ (expressions of interest and dissent) (Hirschman 1970). This approach has been chosen because it highlights the social and cultural significance of expressing interests and dissent, and the fact that the perceived options and expectations are linked to the prevailing recognition that workers face in their jobs. In short, workers’ capacities to aspire are shaped by their ‘de facto’ options, e.g. career options and alternative job options, as well as by prevailing social and cultural assumptions about their potential and abilities.

Vulnerabilities have been analysed in terms of the extent to which work constrains or sustains future risk of social exclusion. Vulnerabilities and in particular processes of ‘vulnerabilization’ focus on social risk. In the report, the concept of ‘vulnerability’ has been used as a dynamic concept and hence work-related vulnerability refers to work-related processes characterised by uncertainty/weakness ‘which exposes a person (or a family) to suffering particularly negative or damaging consequences if a problematic situation arises’ (Ranci 2010). The term consequently not only refers to actual vulnerable groups but rather to those working conditions which expose workers to future risks of social exclusion.

The analyses of interviews with domiciliary elderly care workers, cleaners, catering workers, waste collectors and construction workers show great variety in work and employment conditions, as well as in individual perceptions, experiences and options. However, in spite of these differences, there are also similarities in terms of the kinds of experiences that employees emphasize and value or devalue when expressing their views on quality of work and life. There are also similarities at a more analytical level, e.g. in types of reactions, types of career path and types of constraints or available options. The concluding remarks concentrate on revealing cross-sector trends and tendencies.

In the following, the cross-sector findings are presented in three sections: 'Employees' perceptions of work and their main quality of work and life issues!', 'Capacities, options and aspirations' and 'Does work in new and growing jobs sustain or prevent social vulnerability?'

7.1 Employees' perceptions of work and the main quality of work and life issues!

Employees' subjective perceptions of their work show several consistent tendencies across sectors. First, employees identify with and attempt to make sense of their work and the choice they have made to work in the sector. This is particularly striking in elderly care, where workers regard their job not only as an occupation or profession, but rather as a vocation. In all sectors, moreover, workers' perceptions are characterized by reflections on the benefits of the job relative to available alternatives, either within the sector or in the surrounding (available) labour market. As a result there is an overall tendency to emphasize the positive aspects of the work. In catering, for example, regular working hours are emphasized as positive and put forward as the main argument for working in the sector, although they are also aware that other features (e.g. wages) are less attractive in catering compared to the HORECA sector as a whole. Similarly in waste collection, the outdoor work and being able to work 'independently' is emphasized, while the low status of the job is played down. Finally, construction workers favour the 'craftsmanship' while downplaying the long working hours and/or the long time spent commuting to and from work.

Second, some of the sectors are generally acknowledged as being low status jobs and workers in these jobs have generally not selected them as their first choice. This is the case in cleaning, waste collection and elderly care and for kitchen assistants in catering. However, workers in these jobs have been surprised about the jobs and have found work tasks and the social relationships that they build more interesting than they had expected. In addition, work in these jobs is often viewed as a solution to a problematic social situation, e.g. losing one's job in another sector, and is valued simply because it generates an income.

Third, viewing the five sectors together, however, it should be mentioned that the gender segregation is significant and workers' perceptions of their work to a certain extent follow stereotypical gender lines. Women value regular working hours (catering), meaning in the work (elderly care) and having the option to reconcile work and family life (all sectors), while men tend to emphasize independence, wages and leisure time. Women (and some of the few men working in 'female' sectors) found it difficult to accept the lack of social recognition that they perceive their work received. In particular, women working in elderly care explicitly raised the lack of social recognition, while men who work in waste were less concerned with the reputation of the work and more concerned with the 'actual' employment and working conditions. The concern with lack of recognition was also related to wage levels. Particularly in elderly care, wages were regarded as both low and unfair in comparison with the importance of the work.

Finally, regarding employees' perceptions of work it should be mentioned that within all sectors there are differences in opinions which to some extent can be explained by differences in life situation. Single parents with part time jobs expressed concern about their income, while part time workers with a partner were less concerned. Workers on fixed term contracts were less secure and less satisfied with their situation than those on open ended contacts.

7.1.1 Specific problem areas and future tendencies

Employee perceptions of the main problems of work and the main work and life quality issues are also to some extent related to the sector they work in. Many elderly care workers and cleaners are specifically concerned with the lack of social recognition that they get from society, catering workers are concerned with wages and the hard physical labour and workload. Construction workers in the new member states experience very insecure employment and are consequently concerned with finding ways of securing an income. However, some employment and work issues appear problematic across sectors.

First, although the actual experience of employment security differs between sectors, countries and companies investigated, *employment security* is regarded as crucial by employees. Job security seems not only significant because it secures income but also for other reasons, e.g. getting a mortgage for a house may require an open-ended contract. Second, *fatigue* and the *risk of physical strain* appear as problematic quality of work areas across sectors. Even in sectors where new technology is implemented this does not seem to significantly diminish the experience of work being heavy that many workers have, nor their concerns about not being able to work in the sector until retirement. Although the introduction of new technologies may make part of the work easier (e.g. the introduction of lifting equipment in elderly care or cleaning techniques requiring very little water and less bending down), these techniques are also seen as increasing work intensity and pace (see for example Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012a: 15). Finally, the *lack of social recognition* experienced by cleaners, care workers and waste collectors, and occasionally catering workers, also drives quality of work down.

Workers also mention several significant *new features* in organizing work across sectors that contribute negatively to individual experiences. First, across sectors employees are experiencing an *increased intensification of work*. This seems related to public downsizing (e.g. elderly care), increased competition (catering) and the introduction of new technologies in combination with increased competition (cleaning). The increased intensification experienced by workers is related to the fact that less time is allocated to each work task. In particular, a gradual reduction of time without a similar decrease in work tasks is experienced as stressful. In addition, a very detailed time schedule is also problematic. If time is allocated in too much detail, there is no flexibility in case of unexpected incidents and this also creates stress.

A second problematic tendency that can be inferred from the individual interviews is the *increased public sector outsourcing*. Employees working for service contractors are increasingly exposed to 'double hierarchies' where they essentially have two employers

who may not have the same requirements. For example, employers in catering want to save money by serving smaller portions, while customers complain about the small size of meals, and consequently the employee has to reconcile opposing demands.

Increased contracting out appears to have at least two additional consequences for workers. One is *increased fragmentation* of work (e.g. employees working for several employers at a time because of continuous changes in 'bid winners') and the other is an *increased customer orientation*, where employment contracts are constructed in order to fit customers rather than employees. One example is catering workers who are only employed during the school or university term.

A final cross-sector tendency that has negative influence on workers is the *continuous change in employment contracts from open ended to fixed term* which is at least partially related to privatization. In the feminised sectors this is supplemented by a general trend towards part time work and more insecure or precarious employment. As mentioned above, employment security is greatly valued across sectors. However, privatisation and continuous public procurement makes the use of fixed term contracts, including contracts with no minimum hours guaranteed, more widespread.

7.2 Capacities, options and aspirations

The interviews with individual workers have also focused on how new and growing jobs influence the competencies, career options and 'capacities to aspire' of workers.

7.2.1 Competent workers in low skilled jobs

The occupations that have been analysed in the project are formally regarded as 'unskilled' or 'low skilled'. However, employee interviews suggest that a range of competencies are de facto needed in the jobs. Cleaning workers need to be able to organize their work, 'unskilled' construction workers have a range of technical skills and waste collectors, caterers and construction workers are also to a large degree managing and planning work. In addition to this, many workers actually do have vocational training or even higher education even though they are working in 'unskilled' jobs. This is particularly the case for migrant workers and workers with an ethnic minority background, many of whom have university degrees or other advanced education qualifications from their home countries. There are also examples of 'over qualification' among other groups of employees, e.g. among the interview persons in the Austrian waste collection sample, the majority turned out to have completed formal education or a certificate of apprenticeship (see also the chapter on waste collection above). Although these interviews cannot be regarded as representative of those working in the sector as a whole, the interviews suggest that a considerable number of 'unskilled' positions are filled by skilled employees, and that even those who do not have formal vocational training have a range of social, organisational and personal competencies.

7.2.2 Limited vertical and horizontal career options

In spite of the fact that workers have more competences than the job formally requires, there are very few vertical or horizontal career opportunities. In most cases, becoming a first line manager or a team leader is the only option, and this is often regarded as an unattractive position because of a combination of high workload and responsibility and an insignificant pay raise. In some countries, elderly care and catering offer upskilling that promotes a vertical career move, e.g. from care worker to care assistant or nurse and from kitchen assistant to cook. There are clear examples of care workers pursuing these options (Denmark, see Hohnen 2012). However, in most cases such upskilling, if available, takes place on the job and options are limited (see for example Spanish catering, Moreno Colom 2011a).

Finally, it is noteworthy that new technologies and ‘greening’ do not seem to offer additional career opportunities. In construction for example, ‘greening’ rather seems to be ‘speeding up’ existing developments such as standardisation, subcontracting and a renewed focus on quality control (see Pauwels, Ramioul et al. 2012b).

7.2.3 What characterizes workers’ aspirations?

Workers in the five sectors have also been asked about their future aspirations and these also reveal some consistent tendencies. First, most workers were more concerned with short term aspirations than long term visions. Examples include:

- To get a steady job and a regular income
- To get more working hours
- To get regular working hours
- To prevent health problems and physical strain
- To be able to stay in the job or to get a similar better paid job
- To be paid on time

There seems to be a relationship between the kind of employment situation employees have and their future aspirations. Those in a fixed-term position often try to get a permanent position and those who work part time or (in cleaning) in split shifts try to get additional and/or more regular working hours. In addition, workers who feel that they have a ‘steady job’ (often but not always referring to an open-ended contract) are more interested in upskilling and in future career options than those who have more insecure employment (see also the chapter on elderly care above).

Aspirations are not only shaped by employment situation and/or de facto career opportunities but also by prevailing cultural discourses and ‘sense of entitlement’ (Lewis & Giullari 2005). Cultural discourses seem to shape workers’ aspirations in various ways. The first one relates to prevailing expectations and assumptions about different categories of workers’ abilities and resources. As mentioned above, there are very limited career options and there is also a striking lack of discussion about such options at the workplaces. This compared with the fact that many workers are overqualified for the job,

seems to suggest limited recognition of workers' competencies, with workers in 'unskilled' positions not being regarded as having further potential.

In addition, there are some particular discourses shaped around 'gender' and 'age'. In sectors where both men and women are active, there is a considerable degree of gender segregation both in work tasks and in career prospects. In catering, most cooks are men and most kitchen assistants are women. In cleaning, women work in office cleaning, which is lower paid than the more 'technical areas' where mostly men work (e.g. window cleaning, cleaning of facilities). These differences are not accidental, but seem to be rooted in cultural discourses of 'office work' being female or 'kitchen assistants being female'.

Another such discourse centres on 'age'. There are several examples of prevailing 'common sense' assumptions about 'age' suggesting that middle aged employees in particular, are no longer considered 'training potential' or as having the potential for a vertical career move (see the chapter on cleaning, i.e. Moreno Colom 2011b, Sardadvar 2012, and the chapter on catering, i.e. Jaehrling, Mesaros et al. 2012, Moreno Colom 2011a).

Finally, it should be mentioned that workers' aspirations do challenge some of these prevailing social discourses, in particular those about of 'dirty work' or 'invisible work'. The individual interviews give several examples of workers' attempting to question such prevailing assumptions and stigmatization. For example, when a cleaner says to an office worker that does not leave the office when she arrives to clean it: 'Do you want to be dusted too'? And at a more general level when care workers criticize their wages with reference to 'the fact that they have a huge responsibility in their work'.

In sum, the analysis of workers' aspirations highlights the prevalence of both structural and cultural constraints and also suggests a more general lack of 'career encouragement' in low skilled work.

7.3 Does work in new and growing jobs sustain or prevent social vulnerability?

The overall aim of the analysis of individual perspectives and agency has been to investigate how work in the investigated sectors influences social inclusion and vulnerability, and to identify negative synergies and threats to quality of work and life. Finally, the analysis has had a particular focus on the most vulnerable groups. The table below shows the prevalence and kinds of vulnerable work in the five sectors and highlights some differences between vulnerable groups.

7.3.1 Work as a safeguard against poverty

Although wages are low and some workers have difficulty securing a regular and sufficient income, workers' experiences imply that work in the 'new and growing sectors' is a safeguard against poverty. In all five sectors there are examples of workers who regard their job as a 'solution' to a former precarious situation. In addition work is regarded as

important, useful and meaningful. However there is great variation between sectors. In waste collection, workers in all the investigated countries, except for the Roma waste collectors in Bulgaria, do not seem to be vulnerable. Waste collection is usually full time work and although wages are not high they seem to be sufficient for workers to keep up a reasonable standard of living (again, except for the Roma workers in Bulgaria). Cleaning on the other hand is characterised by part time work, irregular and atypical working hours, sometimes in split shifts. Many cleaning workers have trouble getting enough working hours to secure sufficient income, and the atypical working hours influence work/family reconciliation and social life in general.

While work is to some extent a safeguard against poverty for employees, there are trends in all five sectors that point towards positioning workers at risk of social exclusion and increasing vulnerability at work in the future.

7.3.2 New forms of risk in new and growing jobs

Table 18: Specific vulnerable groups and vulnerable work in the five sectors

	Waste collection	Catering	Cleaning	Elderly care	Construction
Vulnerability	Not all are vulnerable: Country differences	Not all are vulnerable: Country and occupational differences	Most are vulnerable in terms of income	All care workers are vulnerable in terms of income	Not all workers are vulnerable Country differences
Particularly vulnerable groups	Older workers Workers with disabilities Temp workers (Roma workers)	Older workers, Women without formal education Young workers/students	Older workers Women, Immigrants/ethnic minorities	Older workers Women, Immigrants/Ethnic minorities	Older workers and migrant workers
Particularly problematic work and employment issues	Health risks (low income) (Atypical working hours)	Health risks (part time work) Low income (Fixed-discontinuous contracts)	Health risks Part time Low income Atypical hours Fragmented Split shifts Fixed-term	Health risks Unpredictable working hours and income Low income/poverty Part time Working alone (Fixed-term contracts)	Health risks Crisis and Subcontracting Insecure income Fixed-term and discontinuous employment

The table above shows prevailing forms of vulnerability in work and the most vulnerable groups in each of the five sectors.

First, the development towards more fixed term and even zero hour contracts that prevail as a cross-sector tendency exposes future workers to greater social risk. There are

several examples from cleaning, waste, elderly care and construction of increased use of fixed term contracts, either offered to all or offered to migrant workers.

Second, occupational health and safety risks in the form of physical strain seem to be a consistent area of concern in all five sectors. This is particularly significant since four of the five sectors are also characterized by a large proportion of middle-aged employees, who report health problems or worry about being able to last in the sector.

Third, increasing privatization and public sector outsourcing exposes older workers in particular – but also disabled workers or workers that have health problems – to the risk of not being employed in the case of a new owner/winner of tender. The rule of subrogation prevailing in some European countries to some extent prevents this risk because it offers employment security in a continuously changing labour market. However, subrogation may also lead to increased fragmentation as tenders make employers change. The interviews have given examples of workers who end up working at many for five different employers.

Finally, the increased fragmentation and individualization that accompanies public procurement and privatization also have an impact on workers' voice. Not only is there an overall lack of knowledge of and interest in unions among workers, work fragmentation also makes it harder to maintain a collective social identity and close relations between workers and union or work council representatives. The interviews show many examples of de facto experiences of 'lack of voice'.

7.4 New and persisting vulnerable groups and synergies of 'vulnerabilization'⁴⁴

The following groups of workers seem to be particularly vulnerable in the 'new' work situation where employment changes, where increased flexibility and customer orientation is expected and where continuous relationships are hard to maintain.

- Older workers (45+)
- Migrants/ethnic minorities
- Women
- Temporary workers/seasonal workers
- Single parents

The present labour market, characterized by increasing privatization, outsourcing, use of fixed term contracts and increasing customer orientation, exposes new groups (e.g. older workers, migrant workers and temporary workers) to vulnerability in terms of social risk (Ranci 2010).

⁴⁴ The concept of 'vulnerabilisation' was first developed in the article by Sardadvar et al. (2012).

This type of labour market entails new processes of ‘vulnerabilization’ at various levels which are different for different social groups. Occupational health and safety risks are particularly problematic for older workers because of a general delay in pension age, as is the prevalence to some extent of age discrimination in the labour market. The increasing use of atypical working hours also renders single parents and migrants particularly vulnerable as care givers, since they do not have social networks that can substitute when institutions are not available. Fixed-term employment in combination with low wages makes women particularly vulnerable, since they often have long periods outside the labour market. The individualization of pension savings taking place in many European countries puts women at further risk of poverty in old age, particularly in light of the fragmentation of households (divorce). Finally, continuous outsourcing and subcontracting renders older and disabled workers vulnerable, since they are not regarded as the most efficient workers. However, subcontracting also renders migrants vulnerable, as they are employed in less secure and less well paid positions. They are also exposed to the risk of discrimination and abuse by both co-workers (see Finnestrand 2012b) and clients, e.g. Italian and Danish examples from elderly care (see Hohnen 2012 and Bizzotto & Villosio 2011). Finally, outsourcing and continuous fragmentation and individualization weakens workers’ representation and contact with unions.

Employment in these new and growing jobs prevents poverty but promotes social risk and exposure to new forms of vulnerability in the form of social risk. This is due to increasing use of fixed-term employment that is less secure and more stressful. New technologies and ‘greening’ does not seem to be able to offer more sustainable jobs, either in terms of preventing physical strain and securing the health of workers or offering more opportunities for upskilling or vertical or horizontal job changes. Finally, women (particularly single women) continue to be a social group at particular risk of social exclusion/poverty, while ‘new’ groups at risk are older workers, immigrants and temporary workers.

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