Work and Life Quality
in New & Growing Jobs

Hard work. Job quality and organisation in European low-wage sectors

Synthesis report on company case studies for work package 6 of the walqing project

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This report constitutes **Deliverable 6.13**, 'Integrated report on organisational case studies' for Workpackage 6 of the walqing project, SSH-CT-2009-244597.

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Introduction: Research design and methodology

*The **walqing** research design*

The **walqing** project has investigated the linkages between new and expanding jobs, the conditions of work and employment in these jobs, and the more or less favourable outcomes for employees' quality of work and life. To focus the research effort, the project decided to concentrate on those sectors and functions within sectors in which problematic working conditions, low wages and discontinuous or precarious employment are found – aspects that tend to accumulate and enhance the social vulnerabilities of workers employed in these sectors.

First, **walqing** identified growing sectors and functions (between the years 2000 and 2007) in Europe with problematic working conditions and low quality of work and life through an analysis of the datasets of the EU Labour Force Survey (ELFS), the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) and the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS). To do this, new indexes were developed and findings from the various datasets compiled (see Holman/McClelland 2011; Vandekerckhove et al. 2010; Vandekerckhove/Ramioul 2011a, b; Poggi et al. 2011). Based on these results and on previous research and theoretical knowledge, we selected sectors and functions within these sectors that combine expansion, problematic quality of work and life, and variations in their gender composition. These sectors were **commercial cleaning, construction, waste disposal, elderly care** and **catering**. Each of these sectors was investigated in 4-5 countries that represent different employment regimes. In each country, partners investigated industrial relations in two sectors (for the results, see Kirov 2011 and the reports of the **walqing** social partnership series on the **walqing** website www.walqing.eu), conducted 2-3 company case studies in each of "their" sectors and investigated the work situations, careers and perspectives of individuals and vulnerable groups (see Hohnen 2012). In addition, **walqing** conducted 5 small-scale action research interventions to further dialogues and sector- or company-level initiatives to improve the quality of work in construction, cleaning and waste disposal (see Ravn et al. 2012). All findings are available at **www.walqing.eu**.

*Aims and research questions of the **walqing** case studies*

This report presents the findings of the **company case studies** conducted in Work Package 6 of the **walqing** project by all twelve partners in the eleven countries participating in **walqing**. Company case studies were used to investigate how companies are located and position themselves in the sectors and in their respective markets, how they compete and find their niches in changing environments, and how they enhance productivity by restructuring, changing work and creating new jobs. In line with the research focus, the key question the company case studies were supposed to provide an answer for was how these organisational characteristics impact the **quality of work** for employees. The assumption was that neither markets nor just the institutional environments and industrial relations in diverse employment regimes shape the quality of work, but that the quality of employees' work and life centrally results from managerial

strategies and decision-making in the company's respective environment. We aimed to look for examples of both negative and positive configurations of work and life quality in new and expanding jobs, and for the conditions of such configurations through first describing and analysing individual cases and then comparing the findings. Indeed, comparative case study research allows for an exploration of complex causal relationships and histories of such configurations.

To do this, the case studies first addressed the **structures and strategies** of the respective organisation and its position in its environment. An organisation was investigated as a strategic actor in a field that is circumscribed by its labour and product/service markets, its institutional environment (state regulations, social partners, regional players, industry associations), its functional requirements and technologies (of the products/services it provides), shared perceptions, expectations and cognitions. Both enabled and constrained by these environments, organisations pursue strategies and make choices. Ownership structures, changes of markets and strategies were explored.

Turning to quality of work, research questions followed the dimensions of quality of work aggregated from the literature in the **walqing** report of Holman and McClelland (2011). Conditions of **employment** encompassed the types of employment contracts, the use of atypical employment, the composition of the workforce along the lines of gender, age and ethnicity, and strategies of recruitment and human resource management. From this, the articulation of **flexibility and (in)security** was explored. **Wages** were investigated ranging from actual incomes to collective agreements, pay-scale groupings, payment systems, benefits, and performance-related elements. In some cases, workers reported they were discouraged from discussing their wages freely. Investigating **work organisation**, we looked at divisions of labour, relations of collaboration and control, the occurrence of teamwork and, not least, the role of clients and their demands in the organisation of work. The functions of foremen/-women and frontline managers also turned out to be interesting and varied. The organisation of working time, the use of technology and issues of health and safety were also addressed in the context of work organisation. **Skills** and possibilities for development and **careers** were explored along the questions of the availability of training, employees' qualifications, the role of tacit and misrecognised competencies, and workers' career perspectives and aspirations (cf. Hohnen 2012). The **working cultures** of collaboration, recognition and reciprocity (or their absence and frictions) were also found centrally to contribute to the quality of work in the case studies. We asked for workers' and managers' experience of the overall working atmosphere, the handling of feedback and the absence or presence of a sense of recognition at work. Finally, the presence of **worker voice** and interest representation in the case study was explored. We looked at forms and practices of both formal and informal interest representation, information and negotiation.

Case selection

As the sectors investigated were selected on the basis of European employment and quality of work and life data, the selection of companies was led both by theory and the findings of the institutional analysis (Kirov 2011) and also involved some pragmatic considerations. Two key results of the institutional analysis were the **role of customers** in general, and of **public procurement** in particular in shaping the quality of work in the service sectors investigated, and the expanding role of multinational companies in the sectors – but also, of nationally specific patterns in sectors that are regulated on several levels. Within the narrow range of two to three case studies per country and sector, we thus aimed to cover a certain variety of company types. Obviously, such sampling neither can nor needs to aim for representativeness in a statistical sense.

In a first step, **walqing** selected particular subsectors or functions within sectors in which jobs with problematic working conditions were likely to be found, which could be expected to have some societal and employment relevance beyond the economic crisis, and which had not been investigated extensively in previous research (for example, see Gautié/Schmitt 2009). In construction, for instance, we decided to focus on a segment that would be likely to expand beyond the economic crisis, to avoid just following up the results of a speculation bubble with limited value for future developments. In the hospitality sector, we looked at catering work, which, compared to restaurants and hotel room attendants, has been investigated less in recent years. In a second step, we decided on particular types of companies/organisations that should be represented (see Table 0.1). The national selection of cases was recurrently discussed in research meetings involving all international research teams.

However, the types of companies that are to be found in the sector also vary with each country and institutional environment. For example, the well-known multinationals in waste management that are known from Germany or France (cf. Kirov 2011) are not so present in the countries that investigated waste management in **walqing**, and the large, church-related non-profit organisations that are present in elderly care or catering in Germany are virtually unknown in other parts of Europe. Hence, the actual case selection also turned out to be embedded in each country's sector-specific environment. A rigorous matching of cases across countries thus was not attempted.

Table 0.1: Selection of cases from sectors

Sector	Sector segment	Intended cases
Construction	Insulation and passive house construction, lower-skilled construction workers	MNC vs. national Small vs. large Social dialogue/ no social dialogue
Hotels & Restaurants	Kitchen work, canteens catering to institutions	MNC 1 local or regional competitor
Health & Social Work	Domiciliary elderly care, personal care workers	Public sector (direct/subcontracted) Private sector (for-profit/non-profit) *Interview questions on informal sector*
Cleaning (Other Business Services)	Commercial workplace cleaning	MNC Local BE: company working with service voucher *Interview questions on informal sector*
Waste	Private household garbage collection	MNC Public sector Privatised public sector

In addition, empirical research obviously needs to obtain the collaborations of those who are supposed to be researched. In several countries, in Austria, Germany, Bulgaria and Lithuania in particular, research teams found it difficult to get companies to participate, with managers claiming lack of time, lack of resources and other priorities. It appears that companies working in generally highly competitive environments shaped by logics of cost-cutting are somewhat reluctant to invest their managers' and workers' time to have an empirical study conducted. Even more so in sectors that are less accustomed to social science research interest than, say, the automobile industry. It has to be kept in mind that indeed, despite the research teams' best efforts, the sample underrepresents the segment of "bad bad jobs" with the most precarious employment and problematic or irregular practices in the sector. Some glimpses are provided in catering and construction, but within the realm of professional social research based on informed consent, certain segments of the labour market remain are very difficult to access. With that reservation, in the authors' view, the sample that was eventually selected provides a satisfactory overview of typical relations and tensions structuring the field and can contribute to the identification of the likely conditions for more or less favourable configurations of market pressures, institutional environments and the strategies of actors in the field that shape the quality of work and life for workers. Table 0.2 depicts the final selection and allocation of sectors and case studies to countries.

Table 0.2: Cases by sectors and countries

Country	(Green) Construction	Hotels & Restaurants	Elderly Care	Cleaning	Waste	Case Studies
AT				2	2	4
BE	3			2		5
BU	3				2	5
DK			3		2	5
DE		2	3			5
HU	2	2				4
IT			2		3	5
LT		3	2			5
NO	2			3		5
ES		2		3		5
UK		3	2			5
All	10	12	12	10	9	53

Methodological approach and data collection

Both data collection and data analysis followed a **qualitative and interpretive research logic** that aimed for as much richness of individual case analyses as possible while still ensuring comparability. **Comparability** was achieved through the use of an overarching framework of **interview and analysis guidelines** in order to allow for cross-sector and cross-country comparative analyses. Interviews followed a guideline but left room for subjective and interactive setting of relevance and sense-making by interviewees. Similarly, the **case study analysis**, carried out by the national research teams, followed a guideline for the report and aimed to prepare findings in a comparable way while at the same time highlighting inductive findings grounded in the empirical data. The interview guidelines and the report and analysis guidelines were discussed among all research partners. They were provided in English and interview guidelines were translated to the respective languages by the national research teams. Thus, all teams worked from the same interview guidelines that were adapted to the national languages and particularities.

In total, **53 organisational case studies** were conducted within the **walqing** project, distributed over the **five sectors** and **eleven countries** involved as shown in Table 0.2. For every case study, research teams provided a case study report of 20-30 pages in length. These 53 case study reports build the empirical basis for this integrative report. As a rule, a **case study** would involve interviews with managers, HR managers and employee or union representatives (where applicable), as well as with several workers that represented the specific job or function selected for investigation. Partly, foremen/-women or front-line managers were also included. This amounted to typical numbers of **6-13 interviews per case study**, depending on the company size and the presence of the respective functions in the case. Details on interviewees are provided in each sectoral

chapter in this report. Like the selection of cases within sectors, the **selection of interviewees** within cases followed the idea of theoretical sampling with regard to a variation of aspects such as gender, ethnicity, age, tenure, position, etc., as far as organisations were large enough and/or workers available for an interview to provide for the preferred variations. **Analysis** took place by coding along the joint framework, but with openness for findings beyond this framework. Some research teams made use of software such as NVivo or MAXQDA that supports and helps to organise qualitative data analysis.

The 53 organisational case studies then received a round of **feedback** by the project team and were revised accordingly. Additionally, a **workshop** including all research partners was held aiming to identify, compare and discuss preliminary key findings first on the level of sectors and then comparing sectors along central research questions. This procedure ensured the discussion and validation of findings between teams, elicited further information on the cases and their contexts and was generally extremely helpful for the writing of this report. Not least, it kept discussion and collaboration going among the research teams beyond the delivery of the case studies. The final case study reports and the collectively developed results of this workshop were then used to undertake the comparative analysis of all cases per sector, whose results are presented in this report.

Most of the **interviews** were conducted as open-ended, semi-structured guideline-based interviews. In some cases, workers where interviewed as groups (e.g., in Norwegian cases), or several management members were interviewed together (e.g., in an Austrian case). In addition to the interviews, researchers collected and analysed **artefacts and complementary data** such as leaflets, company websites, company reports, etc. Some research teams (e.g., Belgian, Norwegian cases) included a feedback round with the organisation taking part in the case study by providing them with a preliminary draft of the case study report and obtaining feedback. Moreover, case studies were complemented by **observational data** collected upon visits at organisations and workplaces.

The **comparative analysis** then was conducted on the sectoral level through constant comparisons and minimal and maximal contrasting (cf. Eisenhardt 1989). A rough typology of cases was developed for each sector according to what was found. This could just sort cases along “small, medium or large” companies (in construction), or distinguish between multinationals, large national or regional and local providers (catering, cleaning). Elsewhere, the distinction of public and private sector providers appeared to structure the sample. Then, comparisons addressed the respective research questions, identifying a spectrum of configurations and possible or likely patterns of conditions and consequences.

The findings are presented in the following chapters of this report. They are organised in **sector-specific chapters**. Each of these five chapters provides the sectoral-level comparative findings (i.e., findings within sectors, between countries and cases) of the respective organisational case studies along the research questions. The final chapter provides **conclusions** and additional comparisons of key findings *between* sectors.

1 Routine and flexibility: The cleaning sector

1.1 The case studies: Selection criteria, case characteristics and sector contexts

1.1.1 Introduction: Office cleaning and beyond

In the **cleaning sector**, research in the **walqing** project focused on the formal labour market, the private sector and the area of **office cleaning** – with some excursions to other areas, such as the Belgian service voucher system, some public authority cleaning divisions and groups of cleaners beyond office cleaners. Research in the cleaning sector was carried out in **Austria**, **Belgium**, **Norway** and **Spain**, amounting to **nine case studies** in total that build the basis for the findings presented in this chapter.

The cleaning sector in Europe experienced significant growth in the last 20 years. **Office cleaning** is still the main subsector of the industry. However, other segments such as industrial cleaning (e.g., hygiene in the food industry), specialised cleaning services (e.g., hospital cleaning), façade and window cleaning, cleaning of public transport vehicles, cleaning of schools, etc. have grown in importance and, taken together, they account for almost half of the sector's turnover. In the recent past, the sector was characterised by continuing **outsourcing** of cleaning to specialists. Today, it is dominated by a number of **large companies**, among them multinational firms. A current trend in these large companies is a move towards **integrated services and facility management** (Kirov 2011).

The **walqing** research in the cleaning sector considered these broad trends in the selection of cases for the case studies. Furthermore, the countries that participated in the cleaning research are characterised by some crucial differences and national particularities as well as some cross-country similarities, which allows for interesting comparisons. The table below provides a summarising overview over main characteristics of the nine cases studies conducted as well as of the interviews carried out in each case. Interview data was in several cases complemented by secondary data such as corporate websites, annual reports, corporate brochures and leaflets.

Table 1.1: Overview of case studies in the cleaning sector

Country	Case study	Case characteristics	Size / workforce	Interviews conducted
Austria	CLEANCOMP	a medium-sized private sector cleaning and facility services company	1,000 employees; 200 in office cleaning	4 managers 1 first-line manager 8 cleaners Total: 13
	LARGECLEAN	a large private sector cleaning and facility services company	7,000 employees; 1,600 in investigated unit, 1,300 in cleaning	3 managers 1 works councillor 3 first-line managers 3 cleaners Total: 10
Belgium	CLEANHOUSE	a large cleaning and domestic services company applying the service-voucher system	1,800 employees	6 managers 5 cleaners Total: 11
	CENTIPEDE	the cleaning division of a large multinational facility service company	8,000 employees in investigated unit	7 managers 1 first-line manager 5 cleaners Total: 13
Norway	MUNICLEAN	the cleaning division of a Norwegian municipality	330 cleaners	4 managers 4 employee rep.s 27 cleaners Total: 35
	REGIOCLEAN	a medium-sized private company offering cleaning and other services	120 employees	4 managers 2 employee rep.s 5 cleaners Total: 11
	BIGCLEAN	a large multinational cleaning and facility services company	14,000 employees; 650 cleaners in investigated unit	1 manager 2 team leaders 2 employee rep.s 6 cleaners Total: 11
Spain	INTERCLEAN	a large multinational private sector facility services company	25,000 employees	5 managers 6 cleaners 1 works councillor Total: 12
	SERVICE-COMPANY	a large private sector company offering cleaning and other services	50,000 employees, half of them in cleaning; 6,400 in investigated unit	information not available

Source: Internal national partner reports for Work Package 6 of the walqing project.

1.1.2 The organisations investigated: Nine cases in four countries

In the following, we present the cases investigated including relevant context information. We will consider aspects such as the legal and ownership structures, important historical developments and changes, the organisation of the business function selected (i.e., office cleaning in most cases), and the situation with regard to market, competitors and customers. For one thing, these basic characteristics and contexts of the organisations included in the research are an important **background for the case study findings** to follow in the subsequent sections. For another, they allow us to draw some **initial conclusions**: As will become evident, some of these contexts are crucial in shaping the companies' specific "key issues" such as public tenders, the financial crisis or competition by "junk enterprises" (Torvatn 2011).

CLEANCOMP – Austria

CLEANCOMP (Sardadvar/Holtgrewe 2012) is a medium-sized company based in Austria, with some activity in neighbouring countries. Among its main activities are services in residential building cleaning and winter services. The case study focuses on the activity of office cleaning within the company. CLEANCOMP has registered considerable expansion in the last years. Growth was enhanced by a boom in the real estate market, and expansion also took place by means of buying other companies and taking over parts of their staff. In office cleaning, the main group of customers are private customers. Being medium-sized and thus having very large as well as very small competitors, CLEANCOMP is trying to distinguish itself from others in the market by restricting its activities to selected areas (e.g., not too large customer buildings) and by highlighting quality instead of low prices. Hence, CLEANCOMP invests heavily in quality control and training for the first-line management level and above. Public tenders account for only a small, but recently rising percentage of CLEANCOMP's turnover.

Office cleaning is organised with only few levels of hierarchy. Superior to the team leader are the next level of middle management and the general manager. The team leader is in charge of a small number of first-line managers, who are responsible for the everyday organisation and quality control of office cleaning. In larger buildings, there can be additional foremen or forewomen who take over some of the first-line managers' tasks (Sardadvar/Holtgrewe 2012).

LARGECLEAN – Austria

LARGECLEAN (Sardadvar 2012a) is among the biggest cleaning companies in Austria and active in a wide range of services. It has expanded considerably, constantly increasing the services on offer, expanding to other European countries and in size. Expansion took place by taking over employees from customer companies, by buying small companies and by recruiting own staff.

Among the wide range of services LARGECLEAN offers, the research focused on cleaning, and more specifically, on office cleaning as well as the neighbouring activity of

public transport cleaning. In spite of the continuous extension of facility services on offer, cleaning still accounts for about half of the financial turnover.

LARGECLEAN is one of 9,000 cleaning companies in Austria and 3,000 in Vienna only. To distinguish itself from competitors, LARGECLEAN adopts the allround-service approach mentioned. Large tenders often relate to more countries than only Austria or more regions than only Vienna, and this is where large, internationally active companies with a dense network and international partners have a substantial benefit. Overall, public procurement plays an important part for the company's activities. Usually, these tenders are long-term, for five to seven years, which makes it more feasible for the company to plan and calculate. From the management's point of view, the public procurement agency is involved in improving procurement standards in general by demanding certain amounts of qualified staff, etc. A problem in the market perceived by the management is the fact that very small companies, "*one-man shows or one-woman shows*" (HR manager) are able to offer services for lower prices. The market prices are thus constantly under pressure.

As for the company structure and business function organisation, a process of change on the level of first-line management was taking place at the time of the case study. While there used to be one supervisor for all first-line managers, this structure was reorganised to comprise three groups of first-line managers with one team supervisor each. The new system is accompanied by extending first-line managers' sales activities and by introducing additional aspects of performance-based pay. In public transport cleaning, the hierarchical structure consists of a manager directly subordinated to the management, two first-line managers, four place coordinators responsible for four groups, and three foremen for each group. About 10 to 30 workers work in each group. Public transport cleaning operates rather separately from other divisions, without much control by or contact to the company. In addition to LARGECLEAN's employees, there are a number of employees who are leased by the transport company whose vehicles the division cleans (Sardadvar 2012a).

CLEANHOUSE – Belgium

The Belgian research team selected one case that is located in the regular cleaning industry and one that represents the important subsector of domestic cleaning via service vouchers, which is CLEANHOUSE. The Belgian service voucher system was implemented in 2000. Its aims are to promote regular employment for groups at risk of social exclusion as well as to formalise undeclared work. Service vouchers are used as a payment system for cleaning services that organisations provide to individuals. Customers buy these vouchers to pay services that are delivered by a recognised company which employs people at risk, e.g., long-term unemployed persons. The service user pays EUR 5 to EUR 7.5 per hour and benefits from tax reduction; the service organisation receives EUR 21 per hour. The worker earns between EUR 9.5 and EUR 10.5 per hour worked. Currently, there are about 2,600 of these recognised organisations, including newly established ones and for-profit as well as non-profit organisations (Van Peteghem et al. 2011a, 2012a; Ramioul 2012).

CLEANHOUSE (Van Peteghem et al. 2012a) is one of them, and it was selected because of its tradition in domestic services with a focus on cleaning in non-urban regions. It is among the larger companies in the domestic services sector, has been working with the service voucher system for several years and experienced a “nearly explosive growth” (Van Peteghem et al. 2012a: 4). CLEANHOUSE is part of a larger social-cultural organisation with a network of several not-for-profit organisations and employs persons at risk, e.g., older, long-term unemployed or low-skilled unemployed individuals. While there are several similar kinds of organisations also active in the service voucher market, these are not perceived as major competitors. Rather, competition is mainly noticed on the level of recruitment of workers. CLEANHOUSE has several branches in Belgium and offers a variety of domestic services, with domestic cleaning being the main activity (Van Peteghem et al. 2012a).

CENTIPEDE – Belgium

CENTIPEDE (Van Peteghem et al. 2012b) is a subsidiary of a multinational enterprise with branches all over Belgium, characterised by a long tradition in cleaning. As other large companies, among them Austrian LARGECLEAN, it aims specifically for contracts with large, often multinational clients and is expanding towards offering integrated facility services. Its market share in the Belgian cleaning industry is high, but business has been stagnating since the onset of the economic crisis. Nevertheless, management expects further growth in the future relying on the strategies mentioned and currently focuses on consolidating its market position. In the case study, one of many units within CENTIPEDE in Belgium was investigated, namely the cleaning unit, which is legally a separate company. It is structured by three hierarchical management levels complemented by team managers for teams with a minimum of five workers (Van Peteghem et al. 2012b).

MUNICLEAN – Norway

MUNICLEAN (Torvatn/Lamvik 2011) is the cleaning division of the municipality of a large Norwegian city and in charge of all cleaning in municipalities’ buildings (such as schools, hospitals, etc.). It is a very specific case with a history of privatisation that was eventually reversed. This particular background shapes the current work organisation at MUNICLEAN, which is exceptional in the Norwegian context and even more so in international comparison. Until the mid-1990s, cleaners were employed by the municipality. They worked at the respective building, and their supervisors were employees of that building’s workforce. In the 1990s, the alliance of conservative parties governing the municipality decided to privatise the municipality’s cleaning function. All cleaners working in the various buildings were employed by a newly established enterprise. After some years and an election won by left-wing parties, this privatisation was reversed. Municipality-owned MUNICLEAN was established and now holds a monopoly position in cleaning municipal buildings.

Although eventually reversed, the privatisation started a process of professionalisation, which was continued in MUNICLEAN. The professionalisation process is characterised by up-skilling, technological progress, changes in working times and an increase of workers’ autonomy. Cleaners are now employees of the municipality. As such, regulations and

policies such as collective agreements, human resources management, wages, pensions, etc. are set on the municipal level. Nevertheless, the way MUNICLEAN operates is in many ways comparable to that of private companies, and it has contractual arrangements with the municipal institutions that are cleaned. The current status of MUNICLEAN is, however, under pressure. Re-privatisation is still an issue, as the local authorities are trying to cut costs. This translates into pressure on MUNICLEAN to improve its performance and reduce costs, which was managed in the past years but will have to be continued. MUNICLEAN is divided into several geographical areas, each of which has an area manager responsible for 25 to 30 cleaners. These are organised in teams of two to five cleaners who together are in charge of cleaning a pre-defined set of buildings. The teams are comparatively self-organised and do not have a team manager (Torvatn/Lamvik 2011).

REGIOCLEAN – Norway

In contrast to MUNICLEAN, REGIOCLEAN (Finnestrand 2011) is a private company. One regional branch of it was investigated in the case study. The company offers cleaning services to public and private customers such as office buildings, hotels or colleges. The provision of services for public institutions is subject to an invitation to tender. The management is critical with regard to public tendering, claiming that public organisations are even more focused on prices than private ones and that they lack knowledge of the cleaning sector resulting in unfeasible tenders. A case in point is organisations requiring contracts lasting four years without any revision:

> *"It is difficult for us to sign a contract that will not be regulated every time there is a new collective agreement when 80% of our expenses are connected to labour costs" (manager, Norway, quoted in Finnestrand 2011: 5).*[1]

Being small to medium-sized, some support services have been outsourced (e.g., accounting) and there are about ten administrative and management positions.

BIGCLEAN – Norway

Like REGIOCLEAN, BIGCLEAN (Finnestrand/Ravn 2011) is a private company, but by contrast, it is a large and internationally active service provider. It is divided into six business units, one of which is cleaning. The case study conducted covers the business unit of daily cleaning (e.g., in offices, shopping malls) within a regional division of BIGCLEAN. The company has grown in line with other organisations (e.g., hotels, industry, public institutions, transport) outsourcing services. BIGCLEAN works for private as well as public sector customers. Public organisations, such as universities, are required to call for tenders. Like in REGIOCLEAN, public tendering is a vital issue for BIGCLEAN's management. They experience public tendering as having become tougher, as the public organisations are increasingly pushing prices downwards. Public customers are, according to BIGCLEAN, in fact now less interested in work-related issues than private

[1] Throughout the report, citations may slightly deviate from original reports due to language revision.

ones. Competitors who offer worse working conditions are thus sometimes favoured in public tenders. There are a total of 6,500 registered cleaning companies in Norway, many of them small ones, and many of them operating at the borders of regulations (Finnestrand/Ravn 2011). In BIGCLEAN, there are more than ten department managers responsible for staff and wage issues. Each of them works with one to three team leaders who are in charge of everyday work organisation and a team of 10 to 25 cleaners each (Finnestrand/Ravn 2011).

INTERCLEAN – Spain

INTERCLEAN (Antentas 2011) is a large multinational facility services company. Its fast expansion in Spain was driven by organic growth as well as takeovers. Out of several fields of activity, both for private and public customers, the case study looked at office cleaning, and, more specifically, the cleaning of savings banks. This activity is awarded by tender and often involves several (up to 200) branches of a bank. The financial crisis has had an impact on INTERCLEAN's situation in that customers have reduced their cleaning requirements in order to cut costs. Much of the current pressure is transferred to cleaners in the sense of increased workloads and cuts in working time – particularly in saving banks, which are among the most affected. The company's structure is decentralised, organised by business units that operate as small businesses led by a unit manager. Units becoming too large will be divided. Each unit manager has a team of five to ten service managers; each service manager is in charge of a team of 100 to 200 cleaners (Antentas 2011).

SERVICECOMPANY – Spain

SERVICECOMPANY (Recio 2011) is part of a large Spanish corporate group and offers a wide range of services. Cleaning is among the biggest activities in terms of employee numbers. SERVICECOMPANY's activities in cleaning focus primarily on public sector customers, such as hospitals or universities. Accordingly, the company's growth has mainly been due to winning tenders from public organisations. This case study is particularly interesting with regard to the practice of subrogation and its impacts on employment stability. The case study focuses on cleaning provided at a large public university. As in the other Spanish case, the economic crisis is an important issue for SERVICECOMPANY. Recent public budget cuts have particularly affected auxiliary services such as cleaning. The company is structured into several units, each of which is handled as an independent company. In the regional divisions, there are division managers who have several business managers reporting to them, who in turn supervise centre managers (Recio 2011).

In selecting its two cases, the Spanish team made efforts to include some variation in terms of different levels of precariousness. This is reflected in the selection not only of cases but also of the entities studied within the cases. The subrogation system, which will be looked at more closely in Section 1.2.6, is ensured by a clause in the sectoral collective agreement. However, it only applies to particular *sites*, rather than workers. This means it applies to the employees at the university investigated in SERVICECOMPANY, but not to the workers in INTERCLEAN's savings banks. This would only be the case if the trade

union had succeeded in establishing a specific bank as a site that the subrogation applies to. Differences between the two Spanish cases thus do not only reflect case differences, but also differences linked to the specific cleaning sites investigated.[2]

1.1.3 Summary: Key issues for countries and companies

The descriptions of cases selected for the case studies and the contexts in which they operate reveal a number of key issues that shape employment conditions and quality of work in the sector. A history of outsourcing cleaning services has allowed cleaning companies in the EU to **grow considerably** in the last years, which means the expansion of the sector is partly due to a shift of existing jobs from their original sectors rather than the creation of new ones. To do so, companies have taken over other firms and extended the services on offer towards **integrated facility management**, such as Belgium's CENTIPEDE or Austria's LARGECLEAN. Similarities can be found in the **market situation** in several countries: In Belgium, Norway and Austria, there is an imbalance between large companies aiming for **professionalisation** and numerous small **"junk enterprises"** (Torvatn 2011) that can offer services at low prices and sometimes operate in grey areas of regulations.

Public tenders account for a high share of some companies' financial turnover, and accordingly, **public tendering** is a key issue for several cases. This is particularly true for the Norwegian cases, where public customers are seen as being focused on low prices even more than private ones. By contrast, Austria's LARGECLEAN management claims that public tenders improve the overall situation, as they actually help to keep standards high.

The **economic crisis** hits the Spanish cases most clearly, but is an issue in other cases as well. Public organisations and private companies are trying to cut costs by lowering expenses for cleaning services, and this may translate to fewer or smaller contracts for cleaning companies. However, the pressure is also being transferred to the cleaners. To retain their customers, some cleaning companies are trying to sell cheaper services, and one way to do so is to make cleaners work more in less in time, as in Spanish INTERCLEAN.

As will be shown in more detail below, there are some major differences between countries as well: While Belgium and Austria face similar situations with regard to split shifts and work at unsocial hours in office cleaning, Norway has successfully rendered **daytime cleaning** common (again). In the following section, we will take a closer look at **employment conditions** in the case studies, and some typical problems linked to them.

[2] Thanks to Albert Recio for the additional input on this aspect.

1.2 Employment conditions: Part-time, split shifts – and some exceptions

1.2.1 Employment conditions and workforce composition

Typically, office cleaning is undertaken on a **part-time basis**. In some cases, this corresponds to workers' preferences, particularly some working mothers'. In many cases, however, we can speak about **involuntary part-time**, which is usually explained by **customers' preferences** and the **narrow time frames** in office cleaning. As a rule, customers want cleaning to be done before or after their own employees' working hours and this leads to typical peaks for office cleaners in the early morning and the late afternoon/evening. As a consequence, cleaning companies find it hard to offer full-time employment. Another result of these conditions is the prevalence of **split shifts**.

The picture is different in **Norway**, and in particular in MUNICLEAN, which is an exception in many respects. There, the majority of employees hold **full-time jobs**, while those who wish have the option to work part-time (Torvatn/Lamvik 2011). Furthermore, and this is true for all Norwegian cases, cleaners nowadays work **daytime** and hardly have split shifts anymore.

The **workforce** in cleaning is dominated by immigrants and, in office cleaning specifically, by women. Both groups are vulnerable in some respects, and as additional vulnerable groups we find older workers and, as far as they are present in the workforce at all, workers with disabilities (see also Hohnen 2012).

The table below provides an overview of some important aspects of employment conditions, followed by a table illustrating main characteristics of workforce composition.

Table 1.2: Employment conditions

Case/Country	Contracts	Amount of working time	Working hours
CLEANCOMP AT	open-ended contracts with short period of notice[3]	office cleaning: usually part-time; contracted hours regularly adapted to hours actually worked	office cleaning: peaks from 6-9 a.m. and 4-8 p.m.; often split shifts
LARGECLEAN AT	permanent contracts with short period of notice[3]	office cleaning: 23% full-time (= 40 hours), part-time on average 20 hours; public transport cleaning: majority full-time	public transport cleaning: alternating day and night shifts; office cleaning: often split shifts, mornings, evenings
CLEANHOUSE BE	blue-collar workers on permanent contracts	standard time 38 hours; 24 hours on average	flexible/daytime (employee-driven flexibility)
CENTIPEDE BE	blue-collar workers on permanent contracts	standard time 37 hours; majority works part-time	often split shifts
MUNICLEAN NO	majority on open-ended contracts	majority full-time; part-time on worker's demand	daytime
REGIOCLEAN NO	all on permanent contracts (after a 6-month probation period)	most cleaners work 80%-100% (37.5h/week)	daytime
BIGCLEAN NO	80% permanent employees	6 hours/day on average	daytime
INTERCLEAN ES	80% on open-ended contracts	majority part-time	6-9 a.m. and 6-9 p.m.
SERVICE-COMPANY ES	81% on open-ended contracts, 19% on temporary contracts	2,000 full-time; 5,800 part-time (average: 80% or 6 hours/day)	morning and afternoon shifts

Source: Internal national partner reports for Work Package 6 of the walqing project.

[3] This is common in Austrian blue-collar contracts and collective agreements.

Table 1.3: Workforce composition

Case/Country	Gender	Age	Ethnicity
CLEANCOMP AT	office cleaners: majority female; residential building cleaning: majority male	accurate figures not available	high share of immigrants, most from former Yugoslavian countries
LARGECLEAN AT	office cleaners: 75% female; public transport cleaners: minority female	accurate figures not available	90% non-Austrian origin; citizenship: 1/3 former Yugoslavia, 1/3 Turkey, 1/3 Austria
CLEANHOUSE BE	majority women	accurate figures not available	90% Belgian nationality, migrants from 45 countries (mainly: Netherlands and Poland)
CENTIPEDE BE	2/3 female workers	many middle-aged and older workers	70% Belgians (citizenship) 53% not born in Belgium (15% native Moroccans, 9% Turks)
MUNICLEAN NO	80% female	typically middle-aged (50 plus)	20-40% immigrants or with immigrant parents
REGIOCLEAN NO	80% female, 20% male	average 37 years (low compared to whole sector)	30% immigrants
BIGCLEAN NO	whole Norway: 59% female, 41% male	average age 40 years	75% Norwegian nationality, 25% 120 nationalities
INTERCLEAN ES	most cleaners women, most specialists men	middle-aged and older workers predominant	ca. 50% immigrants (Morocco, South America, Eastern Europe)
SERVICE-COMPANY ES	whole division investigated (incl. not only cleaning): 91% women	older: only 9% are under 30; 67% older than 50	16% non-Spanish, high shares from South America

Source: Internal national partner reports for Work Package 6 of the walqing project.

1.2.2 Vulnerable groups, segmentation and equal opportunities policies

Gender: Segmentation that disadvantages women

While being overall **female-dominated**, there is a pronounced **gender segmentation of labour** within the cleaning sector, accompanied by additional aspects of gendered **division of tasks** within subsectors. For example, **window cleaning** and other outside cleaning of façades or monuments is, as a rule, almost exclusively undertaken by men. Also, we find a tendency to have men working with machines also within office cleaning (e.g., for cleaning large areas of floors) and outdoors. Most often, both structural segmentation and division of tasks are explained by **physical demands** of the job or task. Other reasons provided in the interviews are the fact that men would not accept the wages and working conditions offered in the “female” parts of the sector, and the fact that customers tend to prefer female cleaners. As a rule, the patterns of segmentation position

women in the lower-paid segments with worse working conditions (see also Sardadvar et al. in progress).

In Austrian CLEANCOMP, for instance, men work predominantly in residential building cleaning, which offers full-time positions, more favourable working times and higher wages compared to office cleaning, which is dominated by women (Sardadvar/Holtgrewe 2012). In Spanish INTERCLEAN, it is particularly specialist tasks that are performed by men, while women usually do regular cleaning tasks. As opposed to other countries, e.g., Austria, where male cleaners are a small albeit stable part of the workforce, INTERCLEAN's male workers are typically young men who work in cleaning during the summer months or for substituting others (Antentas 2011).

Ethnicity: Language as the major issue

Ethnicity is foremost an issue with regard to skills in the respective national **language**. Language skills are considered in recruiting, they can work as a barrier for training participation and promotions, and there is some evidence that low language skills disadvantage workers when it comes to negotiations of everyday working conditions (Sardadvar/Holtgrewe 2012).

At the same time, the contact with different nationalities and cultures is noted as a **positive aspect of work** by several of the workers interviewed, e.g., in the Austrian cases. In addition, workers do not necessarily perceive low language skills of colleagues as a problem, as the interviews from Norway's BIGCLEAN and Austria's cases reveal. Some workers who speak the national language as a foreign language also claim it is important for them to work in an ethnically diverse team in order to improve their skills in the national language (LARGECLEAN, BIGCLEAN). There are reports of occasional difficulties in terms of nationality-related conflicts in working teams, but these do not appear to be a crucial problem. Some organisations' managements see the ethnic diversity as an asset and try to actively address it in their management policies (BIGCLEAN, LARGECLEAN).

Language is less of an issue in Spain, as many immigrant workers come from South America and thus speak Spanish as their mother tongue (Recio 2011). A general exception with regard to the high share of immigrant workers in cleaning is Belgium's CLEANHOUSE, the service voucher company. In contrast to the overall service voucher sector, but even more so compared to other parts of the cleaning sector, the share of non-Belgians is low, which is explained by a lack of language skills and a lack of knowledge of Western housekeeping styles (Van Peteghem et al. 2012a).

Another aspect of ethnic – and religious – diversity refers to **vacation planning** and its perceived fairness. Holiday preferences can be linked to the country of origin, the ties to it, and the religion practiced. For example, Muslim workers often would like to have days off during Ramadan. Workers with families living in a far-away country may prefer long vacations, while those with families closer to the country of residence wish to have several shorter holidays or longer weekends. This can be a challenge for first-line managers, who are usually in charge of vacation planning.

Finally, ethnicity is an issue with regard to **racist or xenophobic rejection or maltreatment** by customers, for example against women wearing a headscarf or black workers. As can be concluded from an Austrian works councillor's statement, this may lead to a dynamic of some groups of people not being hired in the sector:

> *"Well, I would say, basically black people, they just have a problem. Namely, the customer doesn't like to see them. And there, we have very few" (works councillor, Austria, quoted in Sardadvar 2012a).*

Age: Worries about the working future

As Table 1.3 shows, the average age and/or the share of middle-aged workers is comparatively high in cleaning. The physical strain linked to the job can imply problems for older workers, particularly when the general pattern of **increasing work intensity** is taken into account (see Section 1.4.8). In several cases, workers express worries and doubts regarding their ability to continue working in the sector until retirement age (see also Hohnen 2012). As opposed to the other cases, workload has not increased but decreased in Norwegian MUNICLEAN. Yet some cleaners doubted being capable of continuing working in the sector until retirement even there (Torvatn/Lamvik 2011).

There are some **managerial policies** aiming to improve the situation for older workers. In Austria's LARGECLEAN, for example, first-line and middle managers can attempt to move ageing workers to less demanding workplaces to some degree. In Spain, meanwhile, the high proportion of older workers is likely to be influenced by **government subsidies** that are paid for workers above the age of 45 with an open-ended contract matching certain eligibility criteria – a support that managements are keen to take advantage of (Antentas 2011; Recio 2011). Furthermore, the Spanish **subrogation system**, which is described in more detail in Section 1.2.6, is relevant in this context, as it enhances job stability and tenure (Recio 2011).

Equal opportunity policies and diversity management: A fragmented picture

In spite of the high diversity of the workforce and the gendered division of labour in the sector, equal opportunity measures and diversity management are only used in some of the cases, particularly in **large companies**, and in rather fragmented ways. An exception is Austria's LARGECLEAN, a company that is very active in corporate social responsibility (CSR) and **diversity management** initiatives. As such, LARGECLEAN facilitates several initiatives and takes part in funded programmes. Among them are the provision of language classes (not only in German), qualification projects, the provision of translations for security training, the participation in a publicly funded project in the field of social work for migrant women, and a project aiming to create workplaces for people with disabilities. Furthermore, the debated issue of women wearing a headscarf was approached when a new corporate identity uniform was designed that included a matching headscarf (Sardadvar 2012a). The gap could hardly be larger comparing LARGECLEAN to smaller CLEANCOMP. While CLEANCOMP's management is aware of the gender segmentation, they regard this pattern as neither being produced nor influenceable by management (Holtgrewe/Sardadvar 2012).

In Spanish INTERCLEAN, there is an **equal opportunities plan** aiming to raise the share of women in higher positions, developed jointly with the trade union. Furthermore, the company employs measures concerning the protection from **violence** against women at the workplace and the improvement of **work-life balance**. However, most of the policies adopted mainly address workers in higher positions than basic cleaning (Recio 2011). The third example of a company with active equal opportunity measures is Norway's BIGCLEAN, which aims to be "the most attractive employer for people of minority background in Norway" (Finnestrand/Ravn 2011: 7), sees it as a mission to **create jobs for minority workers** and regularly carries out job satisfaction surveys in a variety of languages (Finnestrand/Ravn 2011).

1.2.3 Flexibility and temporary contracts: High flexibility demands on all levels

Although the majority of cleaners across cases have **open-ended contracts**, as can be seen in Table 1.2, there are instances of **temporary contracts**. Norway's private sector REGIOCLEAN and public sector MUNICLEAN both use **temporary workers hired through a private agency** for shorter periods (e.g., in summer or in cases of long-term sickness) (Finnestrand 2011; Torvatn/Lamvik 2011). In MUNICLEAN, however, the situation of temporary workers is special. They have a chance to be hired as permanent workers – contingent on an evaluation done by the team (i.e., other permanent cleaners, not supervisors) they worked with:

> "The 'temp' then works with the team on the same sites for the duration of the contract. But the 'temp' is not automatically seen and treated as a team member, instead the 'temp' is on a sort of probationary period, in which the team of MUNICLEAN employees evaluates his/her performance. If the team recommends the 'temp', he/she might be offered a position within MUNICLEAN afterwards. If they do not, the 'temp' is simply returned to the temporary agency" (Torvatn/Lamvik 2011: 8).

This procedure is one of several implications of an exceptionally **high autonomy of teams** in MUNICLEAN (see also Section 1.4.5). Informally, but very directly, cleaners are thus involved in selecting staff and recruiting. For MUNICLEAN, the use of temporary workers is a means for flexibility, for training future staff and for recruitment.

Overall, **flexibility demands** are very high in cleaning, particularly in office cleaning – for managers and first-line managers as well for cleaners. This has several reasons. Staff turnover tends to be high, some companies face problems recruiting staff perceived as reliable, and some register high sickness absenteeism. Moreover, the specific way that office cleaning is organised in most countries requires high flexibility. Contracts typically state the amount of hours provided and the number of staff very precisely, and this means that absent staff will usually have to be replaced and lacking working hours covered. Taking care of this demand is, as a rule, a core task of front-line managers (see below and Section 1.4.1).

Meanwhile, **flexibility for meeting workers' needs** is very low in some cases, primarily in Spain's SERVICECOMPANY, where it is basically restricted to days off in case of

personal problems as stipulated by the collective agreement (Recio 2011). In contrast, workers at Norwegian REGIOCLEAN have particularly high flexibility in the sense that they can leave early if they finish ahead of schedule (Finnestrand 2011). Another interesting contrast is provided by the Belgian service voucher company, which organises domestic cleaning taking to a considerable extent account of the personal wishes and availability of the cleaners. The cleaners' supervisor mediates with the client to arrange the working schemes. This employee-driven flexibility can largely be explained by a) the continuing shortage of domestic cleaners and b) their typical profile, namely women re-entering the labour market but often still with child-care responsibilities.[4]

A further exceptional case is again Norwegian MUNICLEAN, where **teams** rather than supervisors are regarded as responsible for handling flexibility and solving absenteeism problems. Cleaners experience this unusually high autonomy – but also responsibility – in ambivalent ways:

> "(…) it must be mentioned here that the teams differed in how they reacted to the responsibility of handling sick leave, not all teams were comfortable with having to do what they considered management tasks" (Torvatn/Lamvik 2011: 10).

Not all companies or organisations make use of a temporary agency as REGIOCLEAN and MUNICLEAN, or other **institutionalised pools of replacement workers**, as INTERCLEAN and CENTIPEDE. Belgian CENTIPEDE deliberately hires several half-time workers rather than half the number of full-time workers, although many workers try to work more hours. The company does so in order to gain flexibility and be able to cover for absences (Van Peteghem et al. 2012b). In other cases, we find a pattern of the **flexibility demands being transferred to employees**. This is the case in Austrian CLEANCOMP, where the responsibility for organising replacements is entirely on the first-line managers, straining the personal relationship between first-line managers and cleaners. Cleaners are put under pressure to provide flexibility, and object managers adopt strategies such as "exchanging" fulfilling cleaners' vacation preferences against demanding flexibility, a recurring pattern in cleaning companies that we have referred to as the **"give-and-take principle"** elsewhere (Sardadvar/Holtgrewe 2012).

Flexibility is also demanded with regard to the **various work places** office cleaners do their job at. Constant changes in tasks, teams, supervisors and settings are seen as a problem particularly in Spain's SERVICECOMPANY, and to some degree also in Austria's LARGECLEAN. Moreover, **workload, physical strain and general quality of work can vary substantially between customers** and thus workplaces, as is stressed consistently in many of the case studies (BIGCLEAN, REGIOCLEAN, LARGECLEAN, SERVICE-COMPANY, INTERCLEAN).

Finally, there is good reason to regard **first-line managers** as a specifically **vulnerable group**. Similarities are high between countries. First-line managers usually take care of everyday work organisation. They need to be highly flexible and mobile, with some even

[4] Thanks to Monique Ramioul for the additional input on this aspect.

"*being available night and day, almost*" (first-line manager, Austria, quoted in Sardadvar 2012a), and they have huge and manifold responsibilities. Usually, they are in charge of several buildings (up to 100 and more). First-line managers are paid more than cleaners – but, as Van Peteghem et al. (2012b) point out, the difference is not as high as to compensate for the demands of the job.

1.2.4 Part-time work and split shifts: Cultures of invisible cleaning and their consequences

With the large-scale outsourcing of cleaning activities**, cleaning has also been moved out of regular office hours**. Today, and very similarly in Austria and Belgium, office cleaners typically work part-time and split shifts. Interestingly, this is criticised by trade unions, employer organisations and employers in unison, but seen as dependent on **customer requirements**. While there has been a successful **shift back to daytime cleaning in Norway** in the last twenty years, we can currently observe **initiatives and campaigns** to promote daytime cleaning in Belgium and Austria (see Holtgrewe/Sardadvar 2012; Kirov 2011). Another exception is work in the **Belgian service voucher** sector, which, in contrast to office cleaning in Belgium, takes place during office hours (Van Peteghem et al. 2012a). In **public transport cleaning**, as studied in Austria's LARGECLEAN, conditions are different, too: full-time contracts dominate and cleaners work alternating day and night shifts.

Yet, **split shifts** are common and perceived as being due to customer requirements to have cleaning done outside office hours in order not to disturb employees. They can imply working at different buildings or at the same building twice a day. In some countries, the way shifts are organised is highly influenced by **regulations regarding supplement payments** for night-time work. In Austria, for instance, a supplement has to be paid between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m., and working times are adapted accordingly for employers and clients to avoid that supplement. The time in between is cleaners' regular working time, with peaks between 6 and 9 a.m. as well as between 4 and 8 p.m. Similar patterns can be found in Spanish SERVICECOMPANY, where shifts are adapted to customers' workflows and night-time supplements, and in Belgian CENTIPEDE, where Van Peteghem et al. (2012b) mention that the night-time bonus strongly restricts flexibility (e.g., for workers who would be willing or prefer working outside the regular hours). Moreover, in Austria, other **working hours regulations** play an important part in this context. Flexibly changing between working hours and amending contracts accordingly on a short-term basis is a common strategy used by companies to avoid supplements that would have to be paid for overtime and surplus hours (Sardadvar/Holtgrewe 2012).

For workers, of course, avoiding split shifts would save considerable transport time, and work during office hours would allow them to have more social contact and render their work less invisible. Due to the split shifts, **travelling times and distances** can be an important issue, as these cleaners usually have to travel four times a day. One example representing many others:

> *"If maybe I had half an hour less time and effort. (…) Now I travel around four hours per day on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. (…) Yes, that's 12 hours, 15 hours per week, only travelling" (cleaner, Austria, quoted in Sardadvar/Holtgrewe 2012: 14).*[5]

Within the narrow frames set by customer requirements, available contracts and night-time supplement regulations, there is, however, evidence in several companies that first-line managers and personnel departments make big efforts to accommodate cleaners with regard to preferred changes towards more or less hours. At the same time, workers perceived as "good workers" appear to be favoured when it comes to this kind of accommodation. This way, the allocation of additional hours or contracts that are more favourable is treated as a reward for reliable work and workers are made dependent on their supervisors (Sardadvar/Holtgrewe 2012).

Furthermore, some workers who would like to work more hours are reluctant to accept offers implying additional split shifts. In this sense, split shifts may contribute to **involuntary part-time work**. However, part-time work is also a **management strategy**. Cases in point are Belgian CENTIPEDE, where part-time is used to increase flexibility, and Spanish SERVICECOMPANY, where part-time hiring allows to skip the compulsory break of 20 minutes that applies to longer work days and is used to intensify work (Recio 2011). A cleaner illustrates:

> *"They gave me four hours directly. It was a job opening for an eight-hour job. For a woman who retired. ... Yes, it was eight hours, but ... in other words, they got rid of the eight-hour shift to replace it with someone who works four. And that was me. I did the same job, but in four hours. They told me 'You have to do all this' and that's that. But then I found out my post used to be held by a woman who worked eight hours and retired" (cleaner, Spain, quoted in Recio 2011: 16).*

In CLEANHOUSE, finally, cleaning is explicitly perceived as such a hard job that cleaners are even advised to start on part-time and increase working hours as they become accustomed to this "*tough and tiring job*" (spokesperson, Belgium, quoted in Van Peteghem et al. 2012a: 13).

1.2.5 Human resources management: Recruiting problems and word of mouth

Across countries as well as cases, we find **word of mouth** as one of the most important recruitment strategies for cleaning companies (CENTIPEDE, CLEANCOMP, LARGE-CLEAN, INTERCLEAN, SERVICECOMPANY, and CLEANHOUSE, related to the local embeddedness of the wider organisation of which it is part). Faced with difficulties finding workers who prove reliable and are willing to work under the conditions available, personal recommendations have a clear **advantage for companies**. The more so, as several companies cooperate with unemployment agencies and report being confronted with workers who only take part in job interviews in order to cover their unemployment requirements, but who are not interested in actually working there (strikingly similar:

[5] Please note that this cleaner works part-time only; the transportation times she mentions thus accumulate within a part-time job.

Belgian's CENTIPEDE and Austria's CLEANCOMP). Indirectly, the word-of-mouth strategy may have **positive effects for workers**, too. In both Austrian cases, for instance, management tries to build up a reputation of being a decent employer, hoping for its employees to spread the massage (Sardadvar/Holtgrewe 2012; Sardadvar 2012a).

Thus, some cases have difficulties finding adequate cleaners, and these are found particularly in Belgium and Austria, in both cases each. The situation is somewhat reversed in one of the Norwegian cases. MUNICLEAN is a very attractive employer and counted more than 200 applications for six vacant cleaning positions in the previous recruiting phase – a high rate in the light of Norway's generally low unemployment rate of below four percent (Torvatn/Lamvik 2011).

In the Belgian cases, the recruitment situation **varies by region**. CENTIPEDE faces an oversupply of applicants in large cities, while there are recruitment difficulties in rural areas (Van Peteghem et al. 2012b). For the **service voucher company** CLEANHOUSE, hiring of adequate staff is a major challenge, with many vacancies and a high demand for services particularly in some areas. Competition between regular cleaning companies and the service voucher sector in terms of recruitment is low, as the two sectors attract different parts of the workforce and demand different skills (e.g., language and autonomy are very important for service voucher work, but not in the same way for office cleaning) (Van Peteghem et al. 2012a).

The lack of appropriate workers is so high in some organisations that both Belgian CLEANHOUSE and Austrian CLEANCOMP give **rewards to workers** who have successfully recommended other applicants (Van Peteghem et al. 2012a; Sardadvar/Holtgrewe 2012). Another similarity between the Austrian and the Belgian cases is the fact that CLEANCOMP as well as CENTIPEDE face particular **problems finding first-line managers**, which is not surprising in light of the high demands and comparatively low remuneration. However, this is not the case in Austrian LARGECLEAN, where first-line managers have higher income possibilities.

In **Spain**, the situation is altered by the economic crisis and high unemployment rate, but also by the subrogation system. As this system enhances stability of employment and long tenure, new hiring is only necessary to a lesser extent (Recio 2011).

1.2.6 Turnover and subrogation, leaves and absences

The difficulties faced by some organisations in recruiting continue in **staff turnover**. Accordingly, turnover can be as high as one third (CLEANCOMP) or 40 percent per year (CLEANHOUSE). In spite of high turnover, the same companies tend to have a very stable group of long-term employees at the same time (CLEANCOMP, LARGECLEAN, CENTIPEDE).

A specific situation is found in Spanish SERVICECOMPANY, with the **subrogation system** applied in the university investigated. This system implies that when the company takes on a new customer, it takes over the employees already working there (with some exceptions, e.g., window cleaners). Workers' right to subrogation is stipulated in the

collective agreement. As noted, it is, however, related to *sites* rather than employees. From the workers' point of view, this system is beneficial in that it enhances job stability and allows them to continue working at the same place, usually close to where they live. However, from the company's point of view, the system is linked to **problems**, too. For one thing, the stability generated, combined with a repetitive job, tends to impact workers' motivation negatively after a while. Management believes that workers' rights, such as staying away from work in case of sickness or personal problems, are overly used. Furthermore, reductions in services bought by customers, which are currently specifically pronounced in the public sector, can lead to an oversupply of workforce at the building, which the company has to deal with. The subrogation system also contributes to the comparatively high age of the workforce, particularly in combination with the permanent employment contracts enforced by the **public subsidies** for older, permanently employed workers (Recio 2011). There are instances of subrogation, i.e., the taking over of staff with a new contract in other companies too, for example in Austria's LARGECLEAN and in Belgian CENTIPEDE. However, these are managerial decisions rather than a rule fixed in the collective agreement as in Spain.

In the other Spanish company, INTERCLEAN, workers also tend to stay with the company for a long time, though for different reasons. As the sector offers **easy access for low-skilled women**, many of the young women who started working there stayed on for lack of alternatives (Antentas 2011). In Belgian's CLEANHOUSE – in contrast to the approach originally adopted by the legislator with regard to the service voucher – workers do not perceive the job as a transition between unemployment and employment, but as "a stable formula for women wanting to work outdoors at not too big a distance from home and on a part-time basis" (Van Peteghem et al. 2012a: 20).

Similar to staff turnover, **sickness absenteeism** is regarded as a major problem in some companies (e.g., CLEANCOMP, CLEANHOUSE). Percentages of absenteeism on a given day range from, e.g., 10% in Spanish INTERCLEAN, Norwegian BIGCLEAN and Spanish CENTIPEDE to 13% in Belgian CLEANHOUSE. The shares are usually considerably higher than the national average. Managers observe positive correlations of sickness absenteeism with the unionisation rate (INTERCLEAN) or with the skills of the first-line manager (CLEANCOMP, CENTIPEDE). In some cases, there is evidence for cleaners being under pressure to come back to work when sick (CLEANCOMP). In several cases (CLEANCOMP, SERVICECOMPANY), we can observe distrust by the management in terms of workers' being absent for legitimate reasons.

Maternal leave appears to be a comparatively unproblematic issue. As for all workers, however, working times after returning are usually contingent on available contracts with customers.

1.3 Low but reliable: Wages and payment system

Cleaning is **low-wage work**, but de facto wages are even lower due to the prevalence of **part-time contracts**. Nevertheless, workers across cases perceive wages as very **stable**, appreciating very much when they are **paid reliably,** regularly and on time. In all investigated cases, wages are set in **collective agreements**, and for office cleaners,

employers stick to these. Hence, for office cleaners, possibilities to negotiate wages are actually inexistent, and **bonus payments** are scarce. Where they exist, they include anniversary or seniority bonuses (CLEANCOMP, LARGECLEAN, SERVICECOMPANY), rewards for not staying away sick (CLEANCOMP, although illegal in Austria, and SERVICECOMPANY). As stipulated in the collective agreement, workers in Austria receive compensation for **travel expenses** if they work split shifts. In the Austrian, Spanish and Belgian cases, **women indirectly earn less** than men as a consequence of the gender segmentation in the sector which tends to place women in the lower-paid subsectors within the cleaning sector.

As it is hard or impossible to get by on a low-wage part-time income, workers use different strategies in order to **complement or increase their income**. For one thing, some can volunteer to work **overtime** or better-paid **night or weekend shifts**, which is reported in Austria's LARGECLEAN's public transport cleaning division and in Norway's REGIOCLEAN. For another, it is not unusual for cleaners to have **additional jobs**, both in the formal and undeclared labour market (Austrian cases, Spanish cases).

In **Norway**, achieving the **cleaning certificate** (see Section 1.5) allows cleaners to rise to a higher wage category. At MUNICLEAN, an unskilled worker without any experience earns EUR 2,500 gross per month and can earn up to EUR 3,240 after 20 years. For workers holding the cleaning certificate, the figures are EUR 2,908 and EUR 3,493, respectively. Thus, raising the skill level translates into a wage increase of about EUR 400 gross per month. In REGIOCLEAN and BIGCLEAN, wages are higher at the beginning, with EUR 3,080 for unskilled workers at entry level, but about the same after more than ten years of experience (EUR 3,280). There, the certificate will raise wages by only EUR 200. By comparison: Average full-time monthly gross wages in Norway as a whole are EUR 3,175 for unskilled workers, EUR 3,800 for craftsmen, EUR 3,250 in retail. Torvatn and Lamvik conclude:

> "While the cleaners earn at the bottom of the salaries in Norway the wage level is high enough to make a living of. The cleaners did not need, and nobody claimed to have, a second job for making a living. The cleaners themselves were clearly satisfied with the wage level. There were absolutely no complaints, some had even increased their wage when they started to clean" (Torvatn/Lamvik 2011: 12).

The difference is most pronounced compared to **Spain**, where **even full-time wages are very low** compared to other low-skilled jobs. A cleaner earns EUR 13,720 gross per year, which would amount to a monthly EUR 1,160 if working full-time.

> "But the predominance of part-time wages makes this situation even worse and largely explains why these jobs are only accepted by people whose earnings are considered as extra wages for the family unit. Or they make efforts to complement them with 'under-the-table' activities for the rest of the 20-hour week" (Recio 2011: 17).

The attitude of the wage being only an extra wage for the family, also found among women working in Austria (see Sardadvar 2012b; Markova et al. in progress), obviously

implies financial dependence on partners, and this can be particularly problematic in times of crises:

> "In any case, the current financial crisis also affects the more established workers when their husbands end up losing their jobs. This generates a significant reduction in family income and a real plummeting and worry in their conditions" (Recio 2011: 21).

In **Austria**, office cleaners are usually categorised as wage group 4 in the Austrian collective agreement and as such had an hourly wage of EUR 7.52 in 2011. This is a low wage, but it is not too low compared with other low-wage sectors and also higher qualified occupations such as hairdressers or kindergarten teachers (Holtgrewe/Sardadvar 2011). Cleaners in public transport cleaning have the same collective agreement as office cleaners. However, their wages are de facto higher, as they usually work night and weekend shifts and the majority hold full-time contracts. As such, they can earn up to EUR 2,000 gross per month. In **Belgium**, different collective agreements apply for office cleaning and domestic work performed within the service voucher system. With about EUR 10 per hour worked, workers at CLEANHOUSE have slightly higher wages than cleaners at CENTIPEDE.

The picture is more diverse with regard to **first-line managers**. In Belgian CENTIPEDE, their wages adhere to the collective agreements, amounting to an additional EUR 0.5 only per hour. In the Austrian companies, particularly in LARGECLEAN, there are elements of performance-based pay and bonuses, allowing object managers to earn more than just the regular wage – however, the price paid are all-in contracts and unpaid overtime. Both in the Belgian and Austrian cases, first-line managers receive **equipment** such as company cars, mobile phones and laptops. Some inconsistencies in payment can be observed in Austria's CLEANCOMP case with regard to forewomen/-men, who are not always compensated for their position.

1.4 Work organisation: Intensifying work in the service triangle

1.4.1 Content of work: All sorts of cleaning and getting around

Among office cleaners' **typical work tasks** are vacuum cleaning, dusting and mopping; they clean offices, toilets, bathrooms, desks, windowsills and aisles. In buildings' kitchens, they are usually responsible for keeping the kitchen tidy, including turning on and emptying the dishwasher. Further tasks include carrying garbage from rooms to the buildings' waste containers. Tasks, and particularly demands, **vary considerably** between customers' buildings; thus, people employed at the same company may have differing everyday work lives. There are some particularly challenging surfaces as well as contracts implying high work intensity.

The Belgian **service voucher system** prescribes which tasks workers are allowed to carry out in the houses. They include cleaning, ironing, mending, running errands, and smaller cooking activities, but exclude e.g., dangerous window-cleaning, child minding and other caring activities (Van Peteghem et al. 2012a).

In this respect, there is a sharp contrast between office cleaning and domestic cleaning, illustrated most clearly in the Belgian cases. While in domestic cleaning, workers are advised to clean exactly as they would do at home, office cleaners are told that if there is anything they should not do, it is to clean in the same way as they would do at home. This pattern of setting commercial office cleaning apart from unskilled, unpaid cleaning done in households is part of the up-skilling, professionalisation and image-raising tendencies in the sector. However, the idea of office cleaning basically requiring the skills that are needed to keep a private home tidy also prevails in some cases (e.g., CLEANCOMP, see Sardadvar/Holtgrewe 2012; Sardadvar 2012b).[6]

In the case of mobile work and split shifts, **transportation** is part of everyday work life. In the Austrian cases, which are all based in Vienna, workers usually travel to their work places independently by using public transport. In Spanish INTERCLEAN, driving a car contributes to work stress, and this stress increases in the context of the general downsizing tendency:

> *"The truth is that it's very hectic. My stress comes from the car. I have to go to hundreds of places, I don't get there on time, I can't find a place to park... Until recently I was okay, with my timetable and all that. When I started having more trouble was when they began to reduce time" (cleaner, Spain, quoted in Antentas 2011: 14).*

The same is true for BIGCLEAN, where mobile workers use so-called team cars to get from site to site:

> "They had to finish off the work as fast as possible in order to drive to the next place. Sometimes the cleaners were expected to stop at as much as 14 different places during a work day which again could mean that they had to clean as much as 40-50 toilets" (Finnestrand/Ravn 2011: 10).

Norwegian MUNICLEAN is characterised by a strong adherence to **cleaning standards** agreed upon in the contracts of the organisation with its clients. These cleaning standards describe both visual inspection and objective measurements. Notably, cleaners are very aware of the cleaning standards to be provided in each building. This strengthens their position, as they know very well what they have to do and what not (Torvatn/Lamvik 2011). Hence, this kind of standards for outcomes rather than processes supports cleaners in their day-to-day negotiations with clients and provides some protection against an accumulation of ad-hoc demands. In Belgian CENTIPEDE, by contrast, cleaners' tasks depend entirely on commands of their direct supervisors, which in turn reflect customer requests (Van Peteghem et al. 2012b).

First-line managers' job content and responsibilities are manifold. They include organising short-term replacements and vacations, administrating working hours of cleaners, training new cleaners and replacements, standing in for absent first-line

[6] Thanks to Monique Ramioul for the additional input on this aspect.

managers, exerting quality control, being available as contact person for the company, the customers and the cleaners, travelling from building to building, delivering material and equipment, moving from site to site by car, doing paperwork in the head office, communicating with customers, etc. It has been mentioned before that first-line managers can be seen as a specifically vulnerable group in office cleaning, characterised by an imbalance of responsibilities and demands on the one hand and wage level on the other. This is probably most pronounced in Belgian CENTIPEDE and Austrian CLEANCOMP. But we also find this tendency in Norwegian BIGCLEAN and other cases. As Finnestrand/Ravn (2011) add, the widespread requirement to be available outside the actual working times is not compensated either.

1.4.2 Quality control and standardisation

Quality control is usually provided by first-line managers, and occasionally complemented by higher hierarchy levels as well as by customers. Often, cleaners will only receive **positive feedback** by supervisors in the sense of an **absence of complaints** (Sardadvar 2012b).

An unusual case in this context, too, is Norway's MUNICLEAN. The strong team autonomy implies that teams of **cleaners are largely responsible for quality control** as well. Complaints by customers, too, are first dealt with by cleaners themselves (Torvatn/Lamvik 2011). In the other two Norwegian cases, parts of the everyday quality control are also left to the cleaners as part of their job, but they are complemented by additional quality control measures agreed upon in the contract of the employers with clients (Finnestrand 2011; Finnestrand/Ravn 2011). Again, CLEANHOUSE is a special case, too. Any **on-site control is impossible** because the supervisor cannot enter the private dwellings of the customers. Thus, complaints or appraisals can only be expressed by the customer. In case of complaints of either the customer or the cleaner, the supervisor acts as an important mediator (Van Peteghem et al. 2012a).

Some companies use more **standardised ways of quality control**. For instance, CLEANCOMP uses software that first-line managers can work with on their blackberries to evaluate the quality in a building. Additionally, there are white-collar employees responsible for random controls in the context of ISO certifications (Sardadvar/Holtgrewe 2012). In INTERCLEAN, quality control tests are carried out by the customer and the service manager on a monthly basis. This procedure serves, however, rather as a means of assessing customers' satisfaction than the objective quality of services (Antentas 2011). In Belgian's CENTIPEDE, discretion has been reduced by the increase of standardisation as well as control. Evaluation methods have been standardised and are consistently reported, and this clearly leads to more pressure for workers. Overall, CENTIPEDE is currently undergoing substantial changes, characterised by increasing standardisation in different countries. One of the new policies includes strong rationalisation, close monitoring of flaws, control by the team managers and intensified training. For some, this implies that they do one task and nothing else, and that some have only little discretion left (Van Peteghem et al. 2012b).

Standardisation aspects in Norwegian MUNICLEAN have had different contents and consequences and have, overall, improved quality of work. As noted, clearly defined **cleaning standards**, agreed between company and customer in the contract, change the position of cleaners in positive ways, i.e., their status, their options to assess work quality themselves and their option to draw boundaries to customers' cleaning requests.

> "All cleaners knew about the standard, the level they should clean on and it was always mentioned by them immediately when asking what their job was. One of them put it like this when asked what the job consisted of: '*Our job is to produce in-door environment at level 4"* (Torvatn/Lamvik 2011: 13).

1.4.3 Technology use: Microfibre and mobile phones

In all countries, the use of **microfibre** has become common in recent years and has made work easier. Cleaning technologies have particularly changed in **Norway**, with many, mainly positive effects for workers. Torvatn and Lamvik (2011) list the following important changes: different cleaning machines were introduced, cleaning with water was replaced by dry-cleaning methods, detergents were replaced by mechanical clothing systems (microfibre), and there have been architectural changes in the design of new buildings (changing rooms, space for equipment, areas for changing shoes from outdoor to indoor, changes in surface materials). The latter aspect, the lack of considering "cleanability" of buildings in their **architectural planning**, is also mentioned as a problem in Belgium's CENTIPEDE. Overall, the noted changes at MUNICLEAN are seen as positive by workers and regarded as **improving productivity** by management. Moreover, they have contributed to an **increase in status and competence** of cleaners (Torvatn/Lamvik 2011).

In other countries and cases, some bits and pieces of these developments can be observed, but not at the same pace and not as comprehensive as in Norway's MUNICLEAN. While the **microfibre** materials have reached cases in all four countries, the **dry-cleaning method** that has become popular in Norway does not appear to have been adopted in any other country's cases. Nevertheless, cleaning work has overall become **less physically demanding** in the last decade. This progress is, however, **"compensated" by an increase in work intensity** in many of the cases (see Section 1.4.8). The question thus is how the productivity gains achieved by technology use are effectively distributed.

Another important technology for managing flexibility is the **mobile phone**. It changes work organisation and flexibility demands considerably. First-line managers in several cases report a reluctance to ever turn it off (cases from Belgium, Norway, Austria), and workers are put under pressure to return to work during an absence or replace absent colleagues by means of calls on their (private) phones. The use of the mobile phone thus **blurs boundaries between work and private life** and extends the pressure to be available outside working hours known from high-skill jobs to low-skill jobs, too.

1.4.4 The role of customers and the service triangle

The influence of customers is crucial for employment conditions, work organisation and quality of work in office cleaning. For one thing, customers are, as noted, involved in **shaping the typical working times** in the early mornings and evenings by preferring cleaning to be done "invisibly" – with the exception of the Norwegian cases. For another, customers are influential in that they **provide the actual workplaces** of cleaners. Cleaning is carried out in the **service triangle** involving employer, customer and workers. This leads to complex relationships between the three, and to an important typical aspect of cleaning work: Cleaners are employed by one organisation, but they work at another. The working atmosphere and working culture, the relations to teams and contact persons, some aspects of control, and the feeling of belonging may thus be shaped by both types of organisations to different extents.

In the Austrian CLEANCOMP case, for example, this becomes manifest in problems of the employer to reach and commit employees, as cleaners' contacts with the employing company are loose. When workers have close contact to the customers' companies and employees, this may make them feel like workers of that company rather than the employing one. At the same time, it can also lead to making working time arrangements or solving problems directly with the customer company – which can be a crucial problem for the management of the employing company (Sardadvar/Holtgrewe 2011).

The **amount of contact** and **degree of integration** that cleaners experience with regard to the customer company varies a lot even within case studies. Some workers feel they have two employers, some do not feel integrated in either company and work in a rather isolated way, some feel more close to one or the other company. This appears to depend most on how much time they spend at the customer company and on the working culture there – more than on the management strategies of the employing company. This variability of contact and sense of belonging holds true even for the Norwegian cases where work is done during daytime. Part of this picture is also a strong variation with regard to events such as Christmas parties, which cleaners may be invited to at both, at one or at none of the companies. The situation is further complicated when cleaners work at several different sites, which is most usual in the Belgian and Austrian cases investigated.

While the situation is different in Spain due to the subrogation system, losing one's workplace can be problematic in cases where this system is not in place, as in the following Norwegian example:

> "As one of the cleaners said when talking about a work relationship to a customer that was about to end: 'It is after all my main workplace!' This particular cleaner did not know what customer she would be sent to after the present contract expired, and she didn't look forward to the day when she had to leave her 'colleagues' for another customer" (Finnestrand/Ravn 2011: 10f).

By contrast, in Austrian LARGECLEAN, where subrogation is sometimes adopted, a case in point is a first-line manager who was offered to stay on at the customer company but

refused to do so because she wanted to stay with LARGECLEAN (Sardadvar 2012a).

Another area in which customer requests have a high impact is linked to **vulnerability**. In many instances, **customers reject particular cleaners** because of their gender, their ethnicity, their religion, their skin colour, or other aspects (see also Hohnen 2012). In most cases, management, even if they disapprove of these requests, do not see a way *not* to adapt to their customers' preferences. Thus, they will usually place the rejected cleaner somewhere else – if there is a place available. Partly an exception to this dominant attitude is found in Belgian's CLEANHOUSE with its social background, indicating that a different approach is possible:

> "When frictions arise, the wellbeing of the worker is seen as the first matter of importance: clients that repeatedly create havoc, even after the worker was exchanged by someone having another profile, are occasionally disposed of" (Van Peteghem et al. 2012a: 14).

However, even in this case, the situation has recently been changing towards a more customer-centred approach (Van Peteghem et al. 2012a).

Finally, the **infrastructure** available at the customer company is influential for quality of work. At LARGECLEAN, for instance, the works councillor mentions that decent changing rooms as well as sufficient and appropriate space for cleaners are important issues that should be considered in contracts and tenders (Sardadvar 2012a).

Norwegian MUNICLEAN is an interesting example with regard to a considerable **change in the relation to customers** having taken place in the context of **professionalisation.** Part of the privatisation of MUNICLEAN, kept after the reversal of the privatisation, was that although the organisation is still part of the local authority, it now has contractual arrangements with the different municipal institutions where it provides cleaning. The influence of employees of customers was reduced, and the **relationship changed from a hierarchical to a contractual one.** The change included not only the specification of tasks contracted, but also transferred some of the tasks previously done by cleaners to the customer (such as emptying waste bins). Furthermore, the increasing visibility enhanced by daytime cleaning allows for **more informal dialogue** between cleaners and service users and thus enhances cleaners' integration and visibility. At the same time, the contractually set cleaning standards prevent ad-hoc requests to cleaners. In addition, there are **formal meetings** between the groups. In these settings, cleaners are even involved when a new building is planned in order to participate in the planning process and contribute cleaning expertise (Torvatn/Lamvik 2011). In summary, this unusual example provides insights into how contracts and daytime cleaning can change the relationship between cleaners and customers, benefitting cleaners' status, participation and autonomy.

1.4.5 Between teamwork and isolation

The prevalence of **teamworking** could hardly vary more. Not least, it depends on the **size of the customers' buildings** and the **size of staff** working there. In the savings banks in INTERCLEAN for instance, cleaning is described as **solitary work** (Antentas 2011). Some of the cleaners in CLEANCOMP report working on their own, too – but it should be noted that they do not necessarily see this as a disadvantage or problem (Sardadvar/Holtgrewe 2012).

In contrast, in the **Norwegian cases**, we find a strong **organisation in teams and pairs**. Cleaners in temporary cleaning at REGIOCLEAN work in pairs because work is usually physically heavy (Finnestrand 2011). At BIGCLEAN, most cleaners are organised in teams at fixed places. Others travel from building to building in teams using cars, working two and two (Finnestrand/Ravn 2011). At MUNICLEAN, teams have an exceptional amount of autonomy and responsibility. They work according to the standards fixed in the contracts, divide tasks between team members, exert quality control, assess temporal workers, make adjustments in case of illness, make working time arrangements within the team, and take care of contact to the customers. However, some workers think, as noted, that some of this responsibility is too high (Torvatn/Lamvik 2011).

In LARGECLEAN's **public transport cleaning**, tasks are divided between workers in exceptionally strict ways. Each worker does **one task only in the workflow** of train cleaning for the entire working day. For example, the so-called "short-sweepers" (exclusively women) only sweep dust and waste from under the seats in the train to the train's aisle. The so-called "long-sweepers" (exclusively men) then gather this dust and waste, put it into large waste baskets and carry them away (Sardadvar 2012a).

1.4.6 Discretion: Leeway accompanied by responsibility

Most office cleaners have a reasonable, sometimes even surprising amount of **discretion** – even within the rigid structural frameworks of the job. In Spanish SERVICECOMPANY, for instance, the overall workload is well known to be too high. Within this workload, however, workers have some independency with regard to how they do their job (Recio 2011). This also means that they have to keep an eye on time and are themselves responsible for managing their workload. Accordingly, and similar to the Austrian case studies, many workers interviewed point out the **skills in self-organisation**, setting priorities and assessing cleaning needs that they need and have in their jobs (Recio 2011; Sardadvar/Holtgrewe 2012; Sardadvar 2012b).

INTERCLEAN, being a multinational company with strong tendencies towards standardisation, sets a strong focus on **training cleaners according to the company's specific rules** – a pattern that we also find in Austria's LARGECLEAN and smaller CLEANCOMP. Nevertheless, even within these company-specific cleaning styles and rules, there is room for doing cleaning in one's own way:

> *"They gave me a booklet, they said this, that and the other. I read the booklet because I always like to keep informed. But it's just the same as always. And maybe sometimes you say, 'I'll do it this way', you get the idea and you do it as you wish, or as the client wishes. So it's something you can vary, you can add your own touch" (cleaner, Spain, quoted in Antentas 2011: 18).*

> *"Of course, if I dust this room today, then I don't need to do that tomorrow. But if I arrive tomorrow and it is dirty again, then I have to vacuum clean. And if it is okay, then I don't have to do anything. And then, the dishes, you have to do them every day. And if you have a plan in your head, then it will work. I have to know myself: What is important? What is not SO important? And what can wait?" (cleaner, Austria, quoted in Sardadvar/Holtgrewe 2012: 22).*

Cleaners also have some discretion with regard to the **pace and attitude**. For example, several cleaners in Austria's CLEANCOMP report how they prefer to work taking their time, working without stress. However, this may imply that they arrive early, and some of them do so although they do not document the time and thus do not get paid for it (Sardadvar/Holtgrewe 2012).

In the Belgian **service voucher** system, job content as well as discretion depend strongly on the **customers**:

> "Some families restrict the tasks to a minimum and closely inspect performance, others grant the worker considerable freedom and permit the worker to evolve into some kind of domestic manager" (Van Peteghem et al. 2012a: 10).

1.4.7 Organisation of working hours and temporal flexibility

Flexibility with regard to working hours is per se strongly limited due to the **detailed contents of contracts** between company and customer including the hours during which cleaning has to be carried out. Contingent on the extent to which there is **institutionalised provision of replacements**, cleaners in some cases need to be very flexible with regard to staying on longer or helping out at short notice. In most companies investigated, cleaners also report a reasonable amount of **flexibility for their own needs**, such as leaving early for an appointment or for care duties. However, the general picture is that this kind of flexibility, although conceded in practice in most cases, depends on **informal negotiations**. This implies that cleaners depend on their individual supervisors and that there is more room for unequal treatment.

In Spanish INTERCLEAN, as in other cases (CLEANCOMP, LARGECLEAN), some minor adaptations of working times can be agreed upon with the supervisor. Work in the savings banks is in this regard comparatively favourable, which is yet another example of the relevance of a cleaner's actual workplace:

> *"In the savings banks I work really hard but, for example, if I have to see the doctor, it's easy and I have advantages. For example, when I work in the afternoon, I don't come at 3 p.m. I come at 4. I do my time and that's it. Instead of finishing at 10, I finish at 11" (cleaner, Spain, quoted in Antentas 2011: 13).*

At Norwegian REGIOCLAN, cleaners even have the possibility to leave when they have achieved their workload, something that is a rare exception in this sector (but common in others, see Chapter 2 on waste management). At MUNICLEAN, teams decide themselves when exactly to work between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. (Torvatn/Lamvik 2011). In most other cases, we see a contrasting pattern, with cleaners **having to stay longer at short notice** to replace absent colleagues, especially when there is no replacement pool:

"No, then you stay longer. It has to be finished today. Yes. It has to be finished. You stay. (...) But you have to finish this place, as though the lady was here. Yes" (cleaner, Austria, quoted in Sardadvar/Holtgrewe 2012: 23).

First-line managers usually have high flexibility and autonomy with regard to their working hours. In principle, they are free to work whenever they like. In practice, however, they need to adapt to availability times of customers and cleaners. They do not have to document hours worked, but the other side of this is often that they have all-inclusive contracts that do not necessarily pay off (Sardadvar 2012a).

Norway has undergone a successful transformation from the fragmented and unsocial working time patterns we find in other countries today towards full-time employment or long part-time and **daytime cleaning** being the rule in the professional part of the sector. The **reasons** for the successful implementation of this change are not entirely clear, but strong social partnership involvement, initiative taken by employers, a general change in attitude, including that of customers, the scarcity of labour supply, the low unemployment rate in Norway and more general changes in the labour market, all play a part.

> *"15 years ago, cleaners were not supposed to be seen. But during the late 90s, we decided that we were the main employer and that the work should therefore be carried out during day-time. Then we turned work over to day-time" (manager, Norway, quoted in Finnestrand/Ravn 2011: 9).*
>
> "Today 70 per cent of the cleaners in Norway work daytime, at the same level as the overall Norwegian work life. Thus it is probably part of a larger transformation taking place in the Norwegian work life from the eighties and up till today, women enter work life. While some hours' cleaning work in the afternoon might be a nice additional income for a one-income family, it is not enough for a two-income family. So if you want cleaners, you have to offer enough work for them to live on" (Torvatn/Lamvik 2011: 15).

Ongoing negotiations between employer and customers are still necessary in the case of customers who need cleaning done before office hours, as in shopping malls or in the food industry. There is even some leeway for employers rejecting some of these customers, albeit reluctantly in the light of economic performance (Finnestrand 2011).

1.4.8 Workload and work intensification: Less time for more work

A widespread tendency towards **increasing workloads** has to be emphasised as one of the clearest and, with regard to quality of work, most problematic developments. There are **various reasons** for work intensification and increasing workloads. One is found in the current **attempts to cut costs** in the public as well as the private sector, which are further tightened by the **economic crisis**, particularly in the Spanish cases. Linked to it, another reason is the downwards spiral with regard to prices set in contracts and tenders that has to be seen in the context of the **tight competitive situation** in all countries. In this situation, contracts include increasing workloads in less time, and companies, such as Spanish SERVICECOMPANY, transform former full-time positions to half-time jobs and do not replace workers who leave or retire (Recio 2011).

In Norwegian BIGCLEAN, the capital turnover has doubled over the last eight years, while the number of employees has stayed the same. However, not only the **work pace** appears to have increased, but also **efficiency** due to improved technologies (Finnestrand/Ravn 2011). Thus, there appears to be a "race" between technological change and work intensification, sometimes providing a balance. In Belgian CENTIPEDE, by contrast, workers are convinced that workload has increased considerably, and Van Peteghem et al. conclude that "the acceleration of work pace is apparently not being counterbalanced by the ergonomic improvements" (Van Peteghem et al. 2012: 22).

These trends have **further negative impacts** on working conditions. A case in point is LARGECLEAN, where some workers find it has become more difficult to get a workplace close to one's area of living, and that cleaners need to accept more workplaces and split shifts to eventually get to the amount of hours they prefer to work.

> *"Everywhere, (...) they save money, and in order to have your eight hours per day or 40 per week, you need to go to three different places or locations somewhere. (…) This has become worse. Before, it was more hours and less work, and now it's the other way around" (cleaner, Austria, quoted in Sardadvar 2012a).*

Work intensification is most convincingly illustrated by workers who have been working in the sector for ten or twenty years and who have witnessed the development. At the same time, it is obviously the **older workers** who are most vulnerable in this regard.

The problem of work intensification can be clearly found in all of the cases except for two: One is Norwegian MUNICLEAN, where the diverse and profound changes have actually decreased workload. The other one is Belgian CLEANHOUSE, where work is done in private households and perceived as more relaxed, due to the absence of the "continuous pressure to boost productivity" (Van Peteghem et al. 2012a: 9) that we see in office cleaning.

1.4.9 Health aspects: Injuries, strains, and policies

The **most frequent injuries** in cleaning are related to sharp or dangerous items such as broken glass or injection needles (REGIOCLEAN, LARGECLEAN). CLEANHOUSE provides detailed **accident reports**: Half of the accidents are due to falls, followed by lifting loads, bumping into something and cuts. A problem mentioned in both Austrian cases is having to **switch between indoors and outdoors** without being able to change clothes. Otherwise, cleaners suffer mainly from **backache** and **allergies**. Having to **carry heavy things** (such as waste bags) and **cleaning large areas with the mop** are perceived as particularly heavy tasks (Sardadvar/Holtgrewe 2012).

However, health risks and job demands depend very much on the building. Not least, this is relevant for **older workers**. In some cases, there appear to be opportunities for older workers to be relocated to less demanding workplaces (LARGECLEAN).

An extraordinary case is **public transport cleaning** as investigated in Austria's LARGECLEAN case. Workers need to be very careful as trains may move; they are trained to be very attentive and careful when working on the rail tracks, as well as when jumping off the train.

> *"Yes, but when the trains go and then to jump? That's ... then you're dead" (public transport cleaner, Austria, quoted in Sardadvar 2012a).*

At the rail tracks, workers are required to wear reflective vests and safety shoes, which are provided by the company. Furthermore, the **night shifts** usual in public transport cleaning are linked to sleeping disorders for some workers. Public transport cleaners at LARGECLEAN have one day shift (7 a.m. – 5 p.m.), followed by one night shift (5 p.m. – 3.30 a.m.), then two days off, and so on.

Another unusual case is Belgium's CLEANHOUSE, where cleaners work at **private homes**. Customers are handed a list stating the equipment they have to provide, safety and ergonomic issues and activities that workers are not allowed to do, such as cleaning windows from the outside. But, comparable to domiciliary elderly care (see Chapter 4), work in private households has specific features:

> "Nevertheless, as workers mostly work individually and gradually build up a close relationship with the customer, the pressure for taking on additional and sometimes not permitted activities can be considerable" (Van Peteghem et al. 2012a: 10).

At CLEANHOUSE, workers exposed to work-related risks have to undergo periodical medical examinations. If the physician detects a health problem, the worker may be classified as not able to work in the job. In many cases, this is followed by dismissal:

> "8.9% were forced to leave the job after negative advice on behalf of the occupational physician, which clearly highlights the precarious nature of the job" (Van Peteghem et al. 2012a: 11).

Improvements have been made in line with the change of technologies. With the move towards microfibre and the use of less chemicals and cleaning agents, work has become

less unhealthy. Some companies have managed to **reduce sickness absenteeism** (REGIOCLEAN, BIGCLEAN) and launched **initiatives and projects** focusing on health, safety and wellbeing. Initiatives include exercise programmes and provision of physiotherapist visits paid by the company (REGIOCLAN). The umbrella organisation of Belgian CLEANHOUSE employs full-time health professionals who also work for CLEANHOUSE. CLEANCOMP offers medical check-ups, which are, however, hardly used by office cleaners due to their loose relationship to the employing company. LARGECLEAN takes part in specific programmes aiming to improve migrant women's access to medical advice. A group of risks mentioned by few, but apparently very relevant in the cleaning sector (see Sardadvar 2012b; Hohnen 2012), includes **sexual harassment, violence and bullying**. There are **prevention measures** in parts of this field in Belgian CENTIPEDE and Spanish SERVICEOMPANY.

1.5 Skills and development, careers and perspectives

1.5.1 Formal skill structure: A typical unskilled job – and tendencies towards up-skilling

In all countries included in the research, jobs in cleaning can be carried out **without formal skills** either within or outside cleaning. However, contingent on the general labour market situation and the patterns of immigration in the respective countries, cleaners often have vocational training in other fields or sometimes even higher education completed in the countries they grew up in. For the most part, cleaning is a profession that people do not choose, but rather "end up in" (see Hohnen 2012). Social partners and employers see the lack of formal skills linked to a **lack of image and recognition**, and are therefore involved in initiatives to raise image and skills (see Kirov 2011; Holtgrewe/Sardadvar 2012). On the national level in Norway and on company level in other countries, we can observe **attempts to increase skills and training**, and a more general trend towards **professionalisation**.

In **Austria**, there is **formal vocational training** in cleaning, but it is hardly ever chosen by teenagers at the normal age to start vocational training. However, the training is facilitated for adult people already working in the sector. Particularly LARGECLEAN encourages employees perceived as "good workers" to undergo this type of training, pays for it and enables employees' participation, as part of a general strategy to up-skill the workforce and as a step towards a higher position such as first-line manager. However, even if the company takes initiative and is generous in this regard, vocational training is time-consuming and therefore sometimes difficult to attend for employees, particularly when they have children. On the one hand, formal skills are seen as an increasing demand by clients for better qualified first-line management, on the other, for cleaners below that level, sector representatives are concerned that cleaners might price themselves out of the market.

In **Norway**, too, there is a **certificate of apprenticeship**. To qualify for the training, cleaners need a minimum of five years of experience in the sector. Taking part in the training is encouraged and invested in in MUNICLEAN and REGIOCLEAN, as part of a general professionalisation policy. REGIOCLEAN additionally received **public funding** in

order to improve workers' skills and general education. Holding the certificate is reflected in **higher wages** (as we have seen in Section 1.3). However, workers' opinions regarding the usefulness of the training are ambivalent. This has partly to do with the fact that getting the certificate does not necessarily change work tasks and positions. About 20% percent of workers in REGIOCLEAN, more than a third in MUNICLEAN and 8% in BIGCLEAN now hold certificates (Torvatn/Lamvik 2011; Finnestrand 2011; Finnestrand/Ravn 2011).

In some cases, there is additional **institutionalised initial training** for new workers (e.g., INTERCLEAN, CLEANHOUSE), usually lasting for a couple of days. For some cleaning jobs, including residential building cleaning as well as the job of mobile front-line managers, it is a prerequisite to have a **driving licence** and being willing to drive a car on a regular basis (e.g., CLEANCOMP, LARGECLEAN). In some cases, **health and safety training** is obligatory (SERVICECOMPANY, public transport cleaning in LARGECLEAN). Otherwise, training is done **on the job**, and it takes workers from just a few days to several months to know everything well. Several companies offer regular **training sessions**, e.g., to inform about new cleaning techniques (SERVICECOMPANY, CLEANCOMP, BIGCLEAN, LARGECLEAN). CLEANCOMP is currently also investing heavily in training, covering basic cleaning knowledge and safety issues as well as "polite behaviour" and other contents. The same is true for CENTIPEDE, which, in the frame of an intense pursuit of professionalisation, is increasing training and even employs several in-house trainers. Both in CLEANCOMP and SERVICECOMPANY, there is however some inconsistency between the managements' reports regarding training and the workers', with workers reporting no or less training in the interviews than claimed by the management.

1.5.2 Informal knowledge and the ideal worker

While there are thus clear developments towards up-skilling and professionalisation, having formal skills is not a prerequisite for becoming a cleaner in any of the cases. At the same time, cleaners need different aspects of **informal knowledge and personal skills,** according to the worker interviews as well as to management expectations. Among them are flexibility, efficiency, being well-organised, being on time and reliable, and being friendly. Some managers add that the ideal cleaner is not absent too often. The importance attributed to **language skills** differs between and within cases.

According to their own accounts, cleaners need and have a lot of knowledge about customer companies' employees' routines and know **how to schedule their work** in order to disturb the other employees as little as possible (Sardadvar 2012b). In some cases, it is very important that cleaners see what needs to be done and are able to **set priorities** (CLEANCOMP, LARGECLEAN, BIGCLEAN). A clear exception in this regard is Belgian CENTIPEDE, which is undergoing a process towards rigid standardisation of processes and thus leaves little room for workers' own assessment of what needs to be done or with what priority (Van Peteghem 2012b). An exception to the contrary is Norway's MUNICLEAN, where cleaning teams have a high amount of autonomy and responsibility.

As for **first-line managers,** expectations, demands and actually needed skills are diverse. From their own point of view, they need social skills in particular, as they are the main interface between the customers, the employer and the cleaners. Furthermore, they need a high degree of flexibility, mobility, and an ability to organise work on their own. They need to have good knowledge of the buildings they are responsible for, and sometimes be prepared to clean, too, if they do not find a replacement (CLEANCOMP, LARGECLEAN, SERVICECOMPANY). Managers additionally stress good language skills, basic computer skills, in some cases experience in the same or comparable fields, good communication skills, good leadership skills and the ability to work under stress as important skills of first-line managers. While several companies aim to have a high share of first-line managers with formal qualifications but do not make it a prerequisite, demands are more formalised in Norwegian cases. In BIGCLEAN, e.g., team leaders have to attend a team leader course and are preferred to have or achieve the cleaning certificate.

1.5.3 Careers and perspectives: A matter of availability and attractiveness

First-line managers are recruited partly internally, partly externally. There are thus cases of cleaners who became first-line managers (CLEANCOMP, LARGECLEAN). However, as this step is hardly formalised, promotion depends either on the initiative of the management (SERVICECOMPANY, LARGECLEAN) or of the cleaner and the impression the management has (CLEANCOMP). With the flat hierarchies in many cleaning companies, **first-line manager positions are scarce** and vacancies usually only become available when people leave, retire or are dismissed (SERVICECOMPANY, CLEANCOMP). While in some cases thus, there is training, but hardly any chance to actually be promoted to a higher position, as in Spanish INTERCLEAN, in other large and expanding companies with several hierarchy levels chances are more realistic, as in Austrian LARGECLEAN and Belgian CENTIPEDE.

> *"I used to work here as a cleaning woman, but I should have made a good impression because, after only six months, I was invited to respond to a vacancy. Now I manage a team of 24 cleaners, all of them working in various premises of a local branch of one major customer" (team manager, Belgium, quoted in Van Peteghem et al. 2012b: 8).*

Meanwhile, an important finding in this context is the fact that **many workers do not want to become first-line managers** or team leaders because they are aware of the job's high demands and stress with limited compensation. This pattern can be found in Austrian CLEANCOMP, in Spain's SERVICECOMPANY, and in Norwegian BIGCLEAN (see also Hohnen 2012). A further restriction with regard to promotion is that it may be possible for some selected workers to reach a first-line management position, and perhaps even, where available, the next level. But even in these rare cases, options usually end there.

1.6 Working cultures and norms

Due to the specific character of office cleaning being carried out in the **service triangle**, workers are exposed to the customer company's culture and the employing company's culture to different extents. Moreover, teamwork, staff turnover, having breaks together and having rooms where to spend breaks all are aspects influencing atmosphere and social exchange.

There is some evidence that companies being managed by owners or **"family companies"**, even if they are large, can enhance workers' identification with the company and make management appear more accessible for cleaners. On the other hand, large companies can have the disadvantage of making cleaners "*feel like a number*" (cleaner, Austria, quoted in Sardadvar 2012a) and being linked to a lack of recognition for workers.

Among **means of expressing recognition and establishing contact to the company** we find employer of the month or year awards (CLEANCOMP, BIGCLEAN), anniversaries and awards at company events and parties (CLEANCOMP, BIGCLEAN), bowling or skiing trips for employees and their families (BIGCLEAN), and regular job-related meetings with cleaners at the company (BIGCLEAN, REGIOCLEAN). However, while initiatives to maintain contact and provide symbolic recognition by the employer certainly are important particularly in distributed work, they cannot compensate for a lack of **material recognition**, which is what workers who have worked at a company for a long time criticise (Sardadvar 2012b).

An important aspect of working culture is the **"give-and-take principle"** (Sardadvar/Holtgrewe 2012), implying that workers and first-line managers expect an exchange of mutual accommodation as well as mutual respect for each other (Sardadvar/Holtgrewe 2012; Sardadvar 2012a). In line with the generally high expectations towards **first-line managers**, managers see working atmosphere as their responsibility, too (Sardadvar 2012a).

Belgian CLEANHOUSE is exceptional in that it employs a caring company culture, which is linked to the charity character of its umbrella organisation (Van Peteghem et al. 2012a). In Norway, there is high evidence that cleaners' professional pride and image is increasing as a result of the up-skilling and professionalisation developments (Finnestrand/Ravn 2011). Meanwhile, Recio (2011) points out an important aspect that is relevant in other contexts as well: Knowing that conditions are worse at other workplaces or other employers strengthens workers' positive evaluation of their actual job (Recio 2011).

1.7 Union membership and employee representation: A matter of tradition

In all cases, wages are set by **collective agreements**, although workers are informed about and interested in this fact to varying degrees (Finnestrand 2011). **Union membership** is highest in the **Norwegian cases**. Additionally, it is mandatory for all companies with more than ten employees to have a **safety representative** in Norway, an elected spokeswoman or -man for occupational health and safety questions. As there are not too many injuries, the safety representatives are, however, not seen as a very important or active position in any of the three cases. Trade union membership is as high as 70% to 80% in BIGCLEAN and an estimated 90% in MUNICLEAN, and it is obviously linked to **tradition**:

> "The cleaners were members, but did not always know why. Some were members because 'we have always been'. Some of the older ones also had strong feelings for the workers' movement and symbolic events like the 1st of May" (Torvatn/Lamvik 2011: 19f).

Trade union membership rate is 40% in REGIOCLEAN, which is low for the Norwegian context, where the general organisation rate is at 50%. There are works councillors represented by the companies' union representative and the management in all three of the Norwegian cases.

In both two **Spanish cases**, there are employee representatives, and collective agreements have to be applied.[7] As collective bargaining is done on sector level, SERVICECOMPANY's employee representatives' tasks focus on **company-related issues** such as "disputes about the application of the collective bargaining agreement, negotiating the work schedule, internal mobility, resolving individual workers' complaints, etc." (Recio 2011: 26). In INTERCLEAN, the multinational company, management perceives to have a stronger social conscience and better dialogue than other enterprises due to the traditions in the country the company was founded in. A focus of the trade union here is to try to relocate workers who have been made redundant to other places – for example in the case of the reduction of the workforce needed for saving banks because of the closure of branches.

In the **Austrian** cases, employee representation is low. Most cleaners interviewed do not have anything to do with the trade unions or other representations. Only in LARGECLEAN there is a **works council**, and only for blue-collar workers. Although the works councillor reports many activities in the interview, interviewed workers do not perceive the works council as very present. Additionally, an important contact point both for management and for some workers is the **chamber of labour**, in particular with regard to wage calculation issues. According to the works councillor, the management is keen to avoid legal cases, which makes it easier to solve problems quickly. Typical problems to be solved are errors

[7] This is facilitated by legal prerequisites requiring the application of collective agreements to all companies in the sector as well as the right to employee representation in companies above a certain size.

in wage calculations, the amount of working hours during summertime, or finding a new place when an object is not allocated to a cleaner anymore (Sardadvar 2012a).

Traditionally, there is very high trade union affiliation in the **Belgian** cleaning sector. In the Belgian **service voucher sector**, however, it is hard for trade unions to get access to the workers (Van Peteghem et al. 2012a). At CENTIPEDE, there is both a **works council** and a **safety and health committee**. The unions were involved in addressing problems during the economic crisis: At the beginning of the crisis, CENTIPEDE concluded an agreement with the trade unions that no one would be made redundant for economic reasons. In exchange, the two parties agreed on high flexibility that allowed for shifting blue-collar workers to understaffed work entities (Van Peteghem et al. 2012b).

While there were instances of **strikes** in Spanish and Norwegian cases, strikes happen seldom in Austria in general and no strikes were reported in the Belgian cases studies. In all cases with employee representation, both sides of the involved parties report **good relations** and **few conflicts**. However, this has to do with the fact that some vital problems can hardly be solved by employee representatives on company level, such as the high workload and low-price competition or the change from full-time to part-time contracts in Spanish SERVICECOMPANY (Recio 2011).

1.8 Conclusions

Cleaning is labour-intensive work with low profit margins, and therefore quality of work in the cleaning sector is particularly sensitive to changes in resources and work intensity. In the broader context of **cutting costs** in the public as well as in the private sector, which has been observable for about a decade and was further aggravated with the **economic crisis**, considerable changes have been taking place in the cleaning sector.

The most pronounced problematic change, widespread across countries and cases, is the **increase of work intensity**. It becomes manifest in cleaners being offered only part-time contracts for what was previous full-time work and implies particular vulnerability for the high share of **older workers** present in the sector. Work intensification is to some extent compensated by **technological progress**, but, as we can conclude, by no means counterbalanced.

Nevertheless, **technological improvements** play an important part in reducing physical strain and raising efficiency, as primarily the Norwegian examples show. However, technological progress is taking place at a different pace and to different extents in the various countries and cases. The Norwegian cases are exceptional and instructive in many other respects too, since they pursue the most consistent “high road” of skill upgrading, team autonomy and full-time employment observed in the sector. They prove that a large-scale change towards **daytime cleaning**, as envisaged by stakeholders in other countries but perceived as difficult to implement, is possible. They also illustrate that **professionalisation** and **up-skilling** developments can indeed benefit workers – in terms of status as well as wages. The same is true for the type of “enabling” **standardisation** seen in the introduction of clear and measurable cleaning standards agreed upon in

contracts, which have strengthened the position of Norwegian workers. In contrast, process-oriented standardisation in terms of more control and less discretion as in the Belgian case is likely to lower quality of work. At the same time, as Finnestrand and Ravn (2011) mention, professionalisation may improve quality of work, but at the same time render the **access** of low-skilled and otherwise vulnerable labour force to the sector more difficult.

Meanwhile, the cleaning sector is telling with regard to the fact that it is not necessarily the workforce at the lowest levels of hierarchy that is most vulnerable. In cleaning, there is profound evidence suggesting that with regard to the relation of demands and remuneration, **first-line managers** are a particularly vulnerable group. Not least, the lack of attractiveness of this position further reduces the **few career options** for cleaners.

Cleaning is a sector with **many facets**. While there are many similarities in the Austrian and Belgian cases, the situation is different in crucial ways in the context of the **Spanish subrogation system**, and cleaning in **Norway** differs from all other countries – and has undergone considerable change in the last two decades. Furthermore, there is strong segmentation within the sector, and **women** are overrepresented in the less favourable parts of it.

A lot of change is going on in the cleaning sector. Some of these changes point towards possible improvements, as the efforts to increase daytime work, the technological progress and the up-skilling tendencies and training options. Others give reason for concern about workers' future in the sector, among them work intensification and the impacts of the economic crisis. Another crucial aspect is the **tight competition,** reflected in low prices that put pressure on workers and provide especially **public tendering** with an influential role and high responsibility for the future of quality of work in cleaning.

2 Dirty work and masculine pride[8] revisited: The waste sector

2.1 The case studies: Selection criteria and case characteristics

In the sewage & refuse disposal sector, often referred to as the waste sector, there are different types of jobs such as waste collection, street sweeping, waste sorting, dumping, and recycling. Waste collection is also still located partly within the public sector. Research in the **walqing** project focused on **waste collection** and on the variations between public institutions, private companies, and public-private partnerships in the sector. In Italy and Bulgaria, data on workers active in other important fields of the sector, such as street sweepers, were also included in the research. The waste sector was investigated in **Austria**, **Bulgaria**, **Denmark** and **Italy**. Each country team involved in the waste sector research carried out 2-3 organisational case studies, consisting of interviews with management, works councillors and workers, and a total of 10-20 employee interviews per country and sector. In total, the material from these work packages consists of **9 national organisational case-study reports** and 4 national reports on employees' individual perspectives, agency and vulnerability.

The organisations in which case studies were conducted are listed in the table below (please note that all organisation names are pseudonyms).

[8] Cf. Billerbeck 1998.

Table 2.1: Overview of case studies in the waste sector

Country	Case study	Interviews conducted
Austria	HILLTOWN, the waste disposal unit of a municipality	1 town mayor (male) 3 managers (male) 1 works councillor (male) 1 waste counsellor (female) 2 drivers (male) 4 garbage collectors (male)
	WASTESOLUTIONS, a private sector waste collection and recycling business	1 general manager (male) 1 dispatcher (male) 8 garbage collectors (male)
Bulgaria	CITYCLEAN, a municipal company operating in waste collection	3 managers (2 male, 1 female – HR!) 3 supervisors (1 male, 2 female) 1 truck driver (male) 3 garbage collectors (male) 3 street sweepers (female)
	INTERWASTE, the subsidiary of a multinational company offering different activities in waste management	3 managers (2 male, 1 female – H&S) 1 organisation expert (female) 2 regional coordinators 1 trade union leader (male) 1 dispatcher (male) 2 truck drivers (male) 3 garbage collectors (male) 4 street sweepers (2 male, 2 female) 1 unskilled worker (male)
Denmark	CGC, a family-owned, medium-sized regional waste management firm	1 owner-manager (male) 2 managers (1 female – HR!, 1 male) 1 shop steward (male) 1 H&S representative (male) 5 garbage collectors / drivers (male)
	FGC, a regional waste management firm owned by a transnational corporation	3 managers (male) 1 supervisor (male) 1 shop steward (male) 7 employees (drivers/collectors, 2 female, 5 male)
Italy	ARCASA, a municipal company operating in waste collection in the South of Italy	4 managers (male) 1 works councillor (male) 4 drivers (male) 4 waste collectors (1 female, 3 male) 1 street sweeper (male)
	APORRIMATA, a municipal company operating in waste collection in the North-West of Italy	3 managers (male) 1 workers' representative & street sweeper (female) 1 supervisor (female) 3 waste collectors (2 male, 1 female) 4 street sweepers (3 male, 1 female)
	GREENSMELL, a municipal company operating in waste collection in the North of Italy	3 managers (male) 1 workers' representative (male) 8 workers (4 male, 4 female, street cleaners, waste collectors, green area operators)

Source: Internal national partner reports for Work Package 6 of the walqing project.

Household waste collection services across Europe are generally treated as a “natural monopoly” that is either provided by the municipality in question or contracted out (see Section 2.2). The cases can be subdivided into **municipal garbage collectors** that may be a separate, municipally-owned company or part of the municipal administration (Austrian HILLTOWN, Bulgarian CITYCLEAN and all the Italian cases), **medium-sized regional contractors** (Austrian WASTESOLUTIONS and Danish CGC) and **subsidiaries of multinational companies** (Bulgarian INTERWASTE and Danish FGC).

2.1.1 Municipal cases

Austrian HILLTOWN is the waste disposal unit of a municipality in Western Austria with slightly less than 50,000 inhabitants. Waste disposal is located in the town’s maintenance unit that also looks after public buildings, streets, parks and public facilities. It involves seven full-time workers and another two in a part-time capacity. Two workers are drivers and the rest collectors (Krenn 2012).

Bulgarian CITYCLEAN is a municipal waste collection unit in a big Bulgarian city. It employed over 1,600 people until 1989 and now runs the entire urban sanitation with 763 people of which only 14 are administrative personnel. This is a result of a previous outsourcing initiative that was reversed in 2007. From 1993 until then, urban sanitation and waste collection in all but one city district were outsourced to a private company, and in 2007, the mayor terminated this contract, returned the task to CITYCLEAN and in 2010 reintegrated the former limited company into the municipality (Peycheva et al. 2012c).

Italian ARCASA is a municipality-owned waste collection company in a regional capital in Southern Italy, a region that is still burdened by the notorious waste and landfill crisis since the 1990s. It was only established in 1999 and started door-to-door collection in 2002. It currently has 3,000 employees, which is a comparative high figure but explained by ARCASA’s additional mission to provide legal, formal-sector employment in a region characterised by high poverty and unemployment. However, in recent years there has been a hiring freeze, and workers on average are in their 50s (Bizzotto et al. 2012a).

Italian APORRIMATA is the municipally-owned waste collection company of a regional capital with some 900,000 inhabitants in the North-West of Italy. It covers all types of waste collection, street sweeping and maintenance in the city and also runs several waste treatment and recycling plants that provide the revenue to subsidise waste collection. It has ca. 2,000 employees (Bizzotto et al. 2012b).

Italian GREENSMELL is the waste collection company of a large city in Northern Italy and part of a multi-utility company that also provides energy and environmental services in another city in the region. It is owned by both municipalities (with 27.5% of shares each) and private shareholders. In the city, GREENSMELL has ca. 3,500 employees in four districts, who are responsible for both garbage collecting and street sweeping. It also manages incinerators, recycling facilities and landfill sites and develops its own technologies (such as street sweeping devices) to patent and sell around the world (Bizzotto et al. 2012c).

2.1.2 Regional contractors

Austrian WASTESOLUTIONS is a family-owned provider of waste removal and treatment/recycling services in a mountainous region of West Austria (no immediate competitor of HILLTOWN). It collects household, organic and bulky waste from municipalities, hazardous and industrial waste from companies, and packaging for the Austrian collection system ARA. It also runs waste treatment plants and offers sewer cleaning service. It has some 150 employees (Holtgrewe 2012a).

Danish CGC (= City Garbage Collection) is a regional family firm owned and managed by the grandson of the founder. The focus is on garbage collection with a few other transport side activities. The case study was carried out in the City depot whose operations had recently been taken over from a semi-public fund-owned holding company. It thus marks a transition from a strongly unionised public sector workplace culture to that of a family firm "with strong social capital based on an informal organisation, respectful treatment of workers and easy access to the owner-manager who is known to take action on worker worries" (Hasle/Sørensen 2012: 22). The firm has approximately 390 employees including 360 blue-collar workers, mainly garbage collectors, and 30 white-collar workers. The City depot has 93 garbage collectors and four administrative staff members (Hasle/Sørensen 2012).

2.1.3 Multinationals' subsidies

Bulgarian INTERWASTE is an autonomous subsidiary of a multinational company that performs waste collection and transportation, winter cleaning and public sanitation in two districts of a big regional city with a population of approximately 200,000 people. It was established in 2010 by its manager who had left another company in the same sector together with some managerial staff. It employs 150 people of whom 70 are street sweepers and 50 waste collectors. In the city in question, four competing companies operate in other districts (Markova et al. 2012).

Danish FGC is a transnational corporation that focuses almost exclusively on the collection of household waste in the Nordic countries and is owned by a holding that in 2010 was taken over by a London-based private equity firm. It entered Denmark in 2011 by acquiring two medium-sized Danish waste companies with ca. 20% of market share. In 2011, FGC Denmark employed 244 people of which 20 are administrative personnel.

2.2 Public, private and everything in between: Clients, markets and sector trends

Waste management is partly a service in the general interest such as postal services, water supply, public transport or telecommunications – but it has its distinct features. Waste is by definition situated at the **end of most value chains**; it involves the handling of goods that are no longer wanted by their owners and that are to be thrown "away". Urbanisation, industrialisation and modern consumption patterns have all required technical and social innovation, collective action and regulation to build infrastructures that can handle waste and avoid health and hygiene risks. For this reason, waste

management has been a **thoroughly regulated sector** from its inception. First large cities and then states set the framework, established waste collection services and obliged producers of waste to deliver their refuse and pay for these services. National and European environmental policies, the technological possibilities of recycling and re-use, and rising commodity prices have contributed to the establishment of markets for secondary materials in the sector. During the last decades, attention in Europe shifted **from waste collection to disposal**, and later to **recycling**. The EU Directive 2008/98/EG mostly aims to implement a hierarchy of waste management preferences (with prevention of waste ranging highest, followed by recycling through secondary materials markets, then incineration and landfilling).

All the countries investigated have experienced an **increase in privatisation and outsourcing**. Patterns of liberalisation vary widely: from downright outsourcing to a wide range of public-private partnerships (PPP) and divisions of labour, in which the public sector as a central client still plays a weighty part. The liberalisation and outsourcing tendency has increased concentration and the possibility for multinationals to enter the market. With the decline of landfilling, other modes of waste collection and treatment, from separate collection to recycling and energy recovery, require more capital investment.

However, there are still plenty of **small and medium-sized businesses** in the sector, some of which, such as Austrian WASTESOLUTIONS, also in a pioneering role in waste treatment. Within the last decade, the largest companies in the sector have emerged in the large EU countries – France, Germany, Spain and the UK. In the smaller countries, we also see active medium-sized multinationals, often subsidiaries of larger construction or logistics companies. In Southern and Eastern Europe especially, boundaries to the **informal and illegal sector** are permeable, a permeability that may increase with the tendency to consider waste a traded, recycled commodity.

In **Austria**, privatisation of public sector activities is limited with considerable variation among federal states (Holtgrewe/Sardadvar 2011). Most municipalities retain a controlling interest in waste disposal, which they may outsource to separate companies, sometimes in PPPs. In the private sector, state-owned or partly state-owned utility companies also play a part. We find public and private ownership, small regional and large multinational companies, parts and subsidiaries of companies, interdependent ownerships, and mixed funding of waste management services. The public sector still is a central actor as both provider and client of waste management services.

In **Bulgaria,** the waste sector used to be public until the end of communism. Every municipality had its own municipal service(s) or companies. Until 1989, the sector of waste collection in Bulgaria was public and operated by municipal companies. After the fall of the communist regime, public provision of the service continued for some years. However, from the second part of the 1990s onwards, many Bulgarian municipalities started to introduce private actors in this field. There is a large belief that many of these local enterprises are close to the organised crime groups and they are used as a source of financing of the political parties or of political pressure against local governments. The move to privatisation was not universal and still there are a few municipalities that have

retained urban sanitation in-house. Foreign companies have tried to enter the sector, but still their presence is rare. All this makes different models of companies co-exist in the current Bulgarian situation – there are a local sector, dominating tenders, few subsidiaries of multinationals and some municipal companies or departments within municipalities

In **Denmark**, the ownership of waste collection was mixed between public, private, and public-private ownership with a dominance of public ownership in the large municipal areas. From 1992 to 2002, the Danish waste sector had a "golden age", where stakeholders such as the state institutions, unions, employers' associations, employers, and various network interest organisations had a closely networked collaboration to improve environmental standards and solve working environment problems. According to experts interviewed, from 2002, the focus has changed to improving efficiency of the sector, and New Public Management practices and outsourcing have transformed the sector from having a majority of public workplaces to being dominated by private contractors. In addition, the national government exerts some political pressure on municipalities to outsource public services to private contractors. Still, municipalities retain a large influence on the business conditions of waste collection through the tendering process. According to CGC's owner-manager, there are "quite different approaches between municipalities – some focus a lot on economy, some focus on citizen service, some focus on the environmental standard, and yet some focus a lot on working conditions" (Hasle/Sørensen 2012: 8).

In **Italy**, the taxonomy of the organisational and management conditions in the waste sector is quite complex. The reform introduced by Decree 267 of 18/08/2000 provides that public utilities have to be managed either through a municipally-owned in-house provider, a mixed capital company in which the private partnership is competitively bid for, or a corporation with equity capital, selected by competitive tendering (Bizzotto et al. 2012c: 13). In-house providers are mostly used by municipalities with less than 5,000 inhabitants. Cities with less than 100,000 inhabitants tend to use private providers that mostly operate on a national level. The larger ones have established public limited companies or companies with public-private partnerships that operate at a local level.

The strategies of the different case study companies are obviously embedded in these varied contexts in diverse ways. **Municipally-owned providers** in Bulgaria and Austria are continuously faced with the alternative of outsourcing the service. For this reason, HILLTOWN had responded to a bid by a private sector provider (not WASTESOLUTIONS) by downsizing from three to two trucks and reorganising routes. Indeed, the mayor is so far committed to the municipality's mission of providing jobs to the low-skilled – but for several years, there have been no new hires. Bulgarian CITYCLEAN took the city's waste collection back from a private sector competitor – an instance of municipal insourcing of services. Compared to socialist times, it now runs its service with half the staff and less than 1/10 of administrative staff. However, it is strapped for capital and thus, for example, leases its trucks (with drivers) from a private company. On the other hand, it distinguishes itself from other Bulgarian cities by its responsiveness to the city's needs:

> *"In a number of municipalities the concessionaires are asked and required to purchase the garbage containers and once they lose the concession or it simply ends we see a graveyard of metal containers left to rot. And then again the municipality presses the new concessor to buy these broken, smashed and rusting containers. The concessionary refuses because in the contract it says that only once in five years they need to replace the bins and containers. So what happens with these broken containers anyway? Well – the contract does not say anything about it. In other words the municipality has no tools to monitor the situation in garbage collection and disposal" (manager, CITYCLEAN, Bulgaria, quoted in Peycheva et al. 2012c: 10).*

Italian municipal providers apparently also pursue a mission of providing employment, especially ARCASA in the south, where it also has to contend with the consequences of the waste crisis. However, in Northern Italy they agree that to be economically viable, they need to extend their activities into waste treatment, recycling and energy recovery – and GREENSMELL also invests into some technological innovation.

Hence, in the countries investigated, the large and well-known **multinationals** play less of a part than in the larger European countries. So far, INTERWASTE's involvement appears somewhat tentative, manifested in its nickname within its mother company, "the project". FGC has a distinctly focused strategy, concentrating on household waste collection and aiming to increase its market share in Denmark.

The **smaller regional providers** have very distinct modes of competing. Austrian WASTESOLUTIONS is well embedded in its region and there, it offers comprehensive waste management services to both municipalities and company clients. The company has been expanding gradually, following the new requirements of separate collection, recycling of materials and so on, often taking a pioneering role. It observes a shortening of contract durations, from 5-8 years at the start to currently 2-3 years and sometimes extension on a yearly basis. However, the manager does not regard the duration of contracts or the presence of competitors as much of a problem since municipalities are generally regarded as "faithful" clients and negotiations are generally amicable.

Danish CGC is fighting a constant battle against the requirements of tendering.

> "According to the owner-manager, contracts were about 20 pages long twenty years ago and now they are around 150 pages for the same type of garbage collection assignment" (Hasle/Sørensen 2012: 7).

He spends an estimated half of his working time on proposal writing and nearly fully employs an external consultant on the same task. Danish contract periods of 3-5 years have a considerable impact on the company's capital requirements: standards for trucks (such as environment, working environment, noise) are usually specified in the municipal invitation for tenders, which means regular renewal of its equipment with a short period for depreciation. This burden can of course be carried more easily by larger and better-capitalised companies.

2.3 "There'll always be waste": Employment structures and conditions

2.3.1 Employment conditions

In waste collection, **full-time work** and **open-ended contracts** prevail in both municipalities and at private sector employers. It is, however, not uncommon to hire new workers on a temporary or fixed-term contract first or take them on as day labourers and stand-ins until a regular position becomes vacant. This is the practice at WASTESOLUTIONS and APORRIMATA.

When waste is collected and managed by **municipalities**, employment security traditionally has been well above that in the private sector and often after a certain period, jobs become tenured. This (and the strong union presence in the public sector) should set incentives for municipalities to invest in health and safety measures, skills and the general employability of their workers – but we do not observe a uniform tendency within public sector waste management since these efforts are increasingly limited by financial constraints. However, for workers with health problems, organisations in the public sector have been found to provide continuous employment by finding other work, possibly with some income reductions.

In Austria's HILLTOWN municipality, waste collection is attached to the town's maintenance centre, which also takes care of public parks and gardening, repairs and building maintenance. This has allowed managers to reassign workers with health problems. Consequently, workers, who are mostly in their late 40s and 50s due to hiring freezes in recent years, are confident of keeping their employment even in cases of health problems or injuries. Northern Italian APPORRIMATA uses the differentiation of material and recycling flows to better adapt jobs to workers according to their physical abilities. For example, collecting plastic is easier work than collecting glass. Every month each team is examined and jobs may be changed accordingly. Private, family-run Danish CGC also aims to assign older or health-impaired workers to the "cardboard routes", that is, tasks that are less challenging physically.

However, the municipal companies HILLTOWN, ARCASA or APORRIMATA have had **hiring freezes** during the last few years and are aiming for some downsizing. This may limit the availability of alternative jobs and make informal divisions of work and mutual help between younger and older employees more difficult.

When waste services are **outsourced or privatised**, employment becomes generally more flexible. Changing contracts become a new source of employment insecurity if transfer of undertakings does not apply and service providers do not take over workers. At Bulgarian INTERWASTE, workers are given fixed-term contracts that cover the duration of the contract with the municipality.

At CGC, the use of temp workers depends on the contract with the municipality. In one large Danish city, replacement workers are also permanent employees of CGC, which is stipulated in the contract with the city. In other districts, a maximum of 20% of workers (in

areas characterised by a prevalence of summer houses) are hired as temps, that is as on-call day labourers to cover absences (Hasle/Sørensen 2012). In addition, there are permanent temps who work every day. In the large city noted, partly with the pressure of the contract with the city, the problem of replacement workers has been solved in a different way, in effect stabilising employment: work is organised in teams of seven. Three trucks with one driver and one collector each and a permanent temporary worker form a team. The temp knows all three routes and works as a stand-in if someone is on vacation or is sick. The 7-man teams organise vacations by themselves on a running schedule where the seventh man replaces each one of the six permanent workers when they are on vacation. In addition, a pool of permanent temps who are not assigned to a team step in cases of other unplanned absences or emergencies.

The other Danish case, FGC, employs a small group of semi-permanent temporary workers at each garage. This group of workers normally meets up at seven in the morning. If a worker calls in sick, a substitute can be sent to the team already at seven and holidays are also covered by the pool of semi-permanent temps. If no substitutes are needed on a day, the semi-permanent workers perform tasks at the garage such as cleaning, getting spare parts, distributing bins to citizens, etc. Their pay is about 10-15% lower when they work at the garage.

2.3.2 Recruiting, staff turnover and human resources management

For operative jobs, recruitment in waste collection mostly occurs through employees' **networks** of families and friends, which works to everybody's satisfaction. An experienced CGC worker says:

> *"I wouldn't come up with someone I don't really know and say: Here, [manager's name], he is a good man, and then risk that it is an idiot you showed up with" (worker, Denmark, quoted in Hasle/Sørensen 2012: 12).*

This also applies to the women garbage sorters at WASTESOLUTIONS:

> *"If one of our workers gets pregnant, you can be 100% sure that the next day there is someone there from her acquaintances who already knows what the job is like, knows that she wants to do it, because, it's also something you need to want to do" (general manager, Austria, quoted in Holtgrewe 2012a).*

This is the case in both municipal and private sector companies. In cases of **changing contractors**, mostly the new contractor hires the previous workforce. The Italian municipal providers are an exception: Here, the very formalised recruitment procedure of the public sector is used with competitive entry examinations and preferential recruitment of workers who have been made redundant elsewhere and receive benefits. At GREENSMELL, they also take an attitudinal test. Often, entry positions are temporary and/or need to start in stand-by position (with the benefit of getting to know all the routes in the municipality or region).

The waste companies and the smaller municipal units have **little professionalised HR structures** and procedures. In WASTESOLUTIONS, the general manager handles

recruitment and salaries, and Danish CGC has only recently hired an HR manager. In INTERWASTE, HR is handled by the general manager and Danish FGC has one HR person without a dedicated HR qualification. Italian GREENSMELL is an exception. It has an elaborate personnel database to match job requirements (for instance, of different waste collecting routes) and their staff's needs (for working time or health constraints).

Staff turnover obviously varies with the wage level, and the premium on tenure. There is little turnover in municipal companies and the Danish private sector companies that also ensure some employment continuity. More is found in WASTESOLUTIONS, where job changes and some terminations for disciplinary reasons have occurred a few years ago. One interviewee who had worked in the company's storehouse before had been dismissed a few years ago for lack of work. He had been offered and had declined a job in waste sorting, and was re-hired as a waste collector when a vacancy came up again. Turnover is also higher in both Bulgarian companies. At CITYCLEAN, turnover among street sweepers and garbage collectors has been reduced from 37% to 29.6% of workers who left and were replaced from 2009 to 2010. The reason for that is perceived to be the very low wages the company pays and that used to be well below the possibilities of alternative employment even for unskilled and poorly educated workers. The crisis, with the massive employment losses in construction in particular, ended that turnover and increased the demand for work with the municipality – who also increased the wages on offer. At INTERWASTE, there is some seasonal fluctuation since there is less work in winter, although the company aims to find ways of retaining workers over the cold season. In addition, there is some movement of workers between companies cleaning the different districts of the city, following higher wages, better conditions or more regular payment of wages. Among workers in the Bulgarian companies, bank indebtedness leading to 100% distraint of wages is often a problem. Some workers hence would like their wages paid in cash (to avoid the distraint), which INTERWASTE does not do – and which is pointed out as another reason for those concerned to change jobs.

2.3.3 Gender, ethnicity and vulnerability: Labour market access for the vulnerable

Overall, like construction, garbage collection is a nearly exclusive **male domain**. In some case studies, women collectors are mentioned, but the consensus appears to be that the work will be too heavy and smelly for them. A foreman of Danish FGC puts it like this, with an implicit, somewhat idyllic notion of femininity implied that abstracts from the working realities of many women in cleaning or care (where "dirt" incidentally is not mentioned at all as a subject in interviews):

> *"It is kind of dirty work… it can be smelly. Especially a good summer. The garbage may have been standing 14 days with leftovers. It is not always delicate to empty. I think this is the greatest problem for dames or women" (foreman, Denmark, quoted in Sørensen/Hasle 2012: 13).*

WASTESOLUTIONS has one woman truck driver of East German origin. In Italy and Bulgaria, **street sweeping** has been included in the case studies, and this is a female domain (nearly exclusively in Bulgaria, partly in Italy). In the Northern Italian companies, there are a very few women collectors as well. Women are favoured for street sweeping

since managers ascribe more politeness and cleanliness to them. At South Italian ARCASA, women street sweepers are concentrated in the city centre where there is a separate changing room and the area is deemed safer. In addition, the presence of women as municipal employees in the public space is regarded as a contribution to the city's image. However, with the crisis, men are slowly moving into that segment. In both Bulgarian cases, waste collection and street sweeping are done mostly by members of the Roma minority. At INTERWASTE, the service organiser ascribes the division of labour to the Roma's cultural concepts of gender:

> *"Yes, in principle this is a female job – sweeping. The Roma people have their established rules and patterns and if a man works as a sweeper he is not accepted well in their community. They would usually regard such a person as a homosexual or some kind of psychic problems and twisted identity. The crisis is changing these perceptions though. The impact of the crises on the labour market is severe and with the loss of jobs more men are taking female occupations" (service organiser, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova et al. 2012: 14).*

In Denmark, Austria and Southern Italy, waste collection is done mostly by **autochthonous men**. In the private sector, a few migrants are found. In Northern Italy, there are also some immigrant employees. However, Austrian WASTESOLUTIONS hires (almost exclusively) Turkish women[9] for sorting garbage in its plastics and electronics sorting and recycling facilities and offers them 5-to-6-hour part-time shift contracts. Danish garbage collectors think that ethnic minorities consider the work to have too low status and for that reason would prefer jobs in cleaning even though the wages there are lower. But in all countries, **recruitment through personal networks** contributes to the ethnic homogeneity of different segments of the workforce, either autochthonous majority men, minorities or the resident migrant communities.

In Bulgaria, waste collection and street sweeping are often done by members of the Roma minority who mostly have low skills and education and live in partly segregated city districts or villages. Thus, their labour market possibilities are very limited, and the case study companies provide entry into the formal sector and some access to social security. Both companies provide employment to entire Roma families/households on a long-term basis. According to the case studies, a particular problem of the Roma workers appears to be bank indebtedness, especially when banks seize workers' entire wages by court order. Here, the company provides some support by hiring another member of the family to provide the families with an income.

Workers with some **disabilities** are also found in the sector, in particular those with slight mental handicaps or learning disabilities (CGC, WASTESOLUTIONS). Sometimes, they have been placed through the labour market service, and companies may make use of some wage subsidies for them. Italian municipal companies directly outsource work to **social cooperatives** to provide labour market access to particular groups of unemployed. GREENSMELL has subcontracted cleaning services in some cemeteries of the city to a

[9] In the region, there is a high proportion of Turkish immigrants.

social cooperative employing young people. APORRIMATA externalises 25% of its services (well above the legal requirement of 5%) to social cooperatives employing vulnerable groups such as former drug addicts or ex-convicts. This concerns activities such as paper collection, flea markets, burial services, cleaning of riversides, toner collection and so on. They currently provide employment for more than 250 workers of external cooperatives. Companies managing contracted-out services have to apply employment contracts with the same characteristics and guarantees as the national collective agreements applied in the environmental sector. Clearly, this constraint makes subcontracting less profitable, as labour costs are the same, but provides members of vulnerable groups with better employment conditions. However, outsourcing work to social cooperatives limits the overtime of company workers, and they may miss the additional income.

2.3.4 Flexibility

Generally in waste collection, routes and collection or street sweeping areas are **pre-planned and predictable**. Exact times may vary with road conditions and other contingencies, but mostly this does not generate coordination problems. Indeed, a general flexibility is built in, when routes are calculated to be completed in a time below the regular working time, either through piece-rates or a general factoring in of possible frictions. This generally leaves some time margins that are in favour of workers. An extreme instance of flexibility that gave workers de-facto autonomy over working schedules is reported retrospectively from HILLTOWN but has been abolished for a few years:

> *"Years ago, they had a piece rate. When they were finished, pfff. Then they overdid it and then that was abolished. If it was a day with less work to do, only one guy used to come in to work" (HILLTOWN collector, Austria, quoted in Holtgrewe 2012b: 18).*

The key flexibility issue is **unpredictable absences** of workers and the situation of their replacements, and there is a range of solutions. As we have seen, collection companies generally have stand-in positions that may have a more precarious contract as temps or day labourers, or may be permanently assigned to teams as in Danish CGC. Municipalities with their wider tasks are able to draw on workers in maintenance, gardening, etc. to replace collectors if necessary, and companies also offer "mixed" jobs in collection and storage yards or treatment facilities. In these cases, there is generally a pay supplement for garbage collection over the wages for general labour. Taking time off is generally negotiable. Vice versa, when there is little to do, workers may be allowed to stay home, leave early or come in late.

2.4 Both ends of the spectrum: Wages and payment system

Wage levels in waste collection are probably the **most unequal** in the **walqing** sample in international comparison. A street sweeper in Bulgarian CITYCLEAN receives EUR 175 a month, while a Danish waste collector starts with EUR 16.6 per hour. Here, the variations in collective agreement coverage, the national income levels, pay systems of the public sector and gender pay gaps overlap.

In **Austria**, workers are generally covered by collective agreements (CA), but the waste sector has no dedicated CA in spite of negotiations having been going on for six years (Holtgrewe/Sardadvar 2011). Waste companies thus use varied collective agreements, in the caste of WASTESOLUTIONS it is the logistics CA. HILLTOWN employees are covered by the municipal pay scheme with low basic wages but a wide range of supplements for dirty work, otherwise difficult work and so on. The collectors earn a take-home income of ca. EUR 1,200, depending on seniority. They and their managers report that this wage is higher than earnings in the private waste disposal companies active on the regional market. However, collectors in WASTESOLUTIONS report take-home earnings of EUR 1,300-1,400. Their basic wage is at ca. EUR 1,100, and they receive expense allowances for each day spent on the road that are exempt from tax and social security contributions and amount to ca EUR 300-400 extra per month. Indeed, this makes the difference lifting them above an actual poverty wage. However, it generates an extra risk of income losses above the normal gap between wages and unemployment benefits in the case of job loss, since these allowances are not covered by unemployment benefits.

In **Bulgarian** CITYCLEAN, wages were increased from a very low level in 2010:

> *"These women were paid some miserable 180 leva [= EUR 90 a month]. Right now they make about 350 leva [= EUR 175], which is double of what they used to get. Wages of garbage collectors were 250 leva [= EUR 125]. Now they are paid 400 leva [= EUR 200]. In other words the serious increase in pay in a situation of rising unemployment in the country gave us a lot of advantages because right now we are in a position to select who is going to work for us" (manager, Bulgaria, quoted in Peycheva et al. 2012c: 15f).*

At INTERWASTE, the wages are a little higher, with sweepers earning Leva 380 (EUR 190) and collectors Leva 580 (EUR 290). Here, truck drivers make ca. Leva 800 (EUR 400), which management think is very competitive and workers think is sufficient. At the low level, a street sweeper comments:

> *"And at the end of the day what is left from your salary? Nothing. Pay this and that, electricity bills, expenses for the children, clothes, and etc. The money disappears within a day or two and then you are left with nothing. We work just to cover our debts – nothing stays with us" (Markova et al. 2012: 21).*

With these low wages, **expenses for getting to work** can be a considerable challenge in Bulgaria. CITYCLEAN provides bus transport for its Roma workers who live in two distinct

suburbs, which saves them Leva 44 (EUR 22) a month. At INTERWASTE, there is a group of Roma street sweepers who live in a small town at about 50 km from the city. They were recruited through a programme called “From Social Benefits to Employment” and have very few alternatives of employment. Public transport from there would cost them some Leva 200 (EUR 100) per month out of the Leva 380 (EUR 190) they earn, and the first train only runs at 5.40 in the morning, too late to be at work at 6 or 6.30, with additional delays in winter. The company does not see its way to providing or subsidising transport. Workers find ways of coping: they often enough do not pay for their tickets, the working schedule is adapted to the delays, and the remaining workers who live close by pick up the slack. Researchers comment:

> “Probably this could provoke outrage or discontent amongst those who live in the city, but within the context of the research we felt solely and only solidarity and a wish that the payment of the commuters should be increased to compensate the expenses for commuting” (Markova et al. 2012: 35).

In **Denmark**, wages are stipulated by the collective agreement. The salary system consists of a basic hourly salary of ca. EUR 16.6 which is raised by EUR 1.1 after nine months. Skilled workers receive an extra EUR 0.6 per hour, and workers with a certificate for a truck crane EUR 0.5. The maximum ordinary salary is thus EUR 18.7 per hour. Wages in garbage collection in Denmark are effectively piece-rate systems. Workers in private companies can leave their work as soon as they have collected the expected number of containers: the collectively agreed salary covers the collection of 800 containers in a week. Working teams can make an agreement about additional collections, which can give an extra EUR 0.75-1.5 per hour. In the CGC City District, thus, wages are higher and based on local agreements between the former municipal company and the local union, which have been transferred to the new outsourced contract. Collectors here earn a fixed salary of EUR 20.5 per hour for which they are expected to collect 2,100 containers in two weeks. In addition to the hourly salary, workers in the sector have 12% paid into a sectoral pension scheme. In the previous City company, this arrangement was more generous and indeed, this is the only area where working conditions have deteriorated.

In the **Italian** cases, workers are employed under the nationally negotiated employment contract, which defines employment levels and wages on each level. The lowest level provides a gross hourly wage of ca. EUR 10, then progression is up to EUR 16, through either skill upgrading (especially achieving a truck driving licence) or seniority. The contract stipulates 14 monthly payments, family allowances, night and overtime supplements and seniority increases every three years. It also provides for a yearly productivity bonus conditional on the worker's presence at work and on road accidents. The maximum amount (up to EUR 600 a year) is paid if the employee works more than 271 days per year, and it decreases progressively according to the number of days of sick leave exceeding seven days. Road accidents also contribute to decrease the premium (Bizzotto et al. 2012c). Interestingly, this kind of collectively agreed incentive would be illegal in Austria, but a bonus for presence at work and avoidance of accidents appears to be in use somewhat informally at WASTESOLUTIONS.

With privatisation or municipal restructuring, in our cases we do not see massive decreases of wages. We do observe **slow-motion effects**: wage schemes honouring seniority and offering pay supplements and allowances for heavy, dirty or mobile work come under pressure or may not be applied to new hires in either the public or the private sector. At HILLTOWN, the wage scheme for municipal employees has been reshaped so that new hires would miss out on some pay supplements and seniority provisions, but this has not been used due to the lack of new hires. In Denmark, after a contract has been taken over by another company, the collective agreement allows workers to start on a new tenure with the hourly salary reduced by EUR 1.1 for the first nine months. This has been agreed as a consequence of the EU judication of takeovers where material equipment is not transferred and the transfer of undertakings regulation does not apply. The social partners intend to renegotiate this in future collective agreements with an aim to calculate tenure based on time in the sector and not in the specific company (Sørensen/Hasle 2012: 12). Stories in the sector say that this possibility sometimes provides companies with the competitive edge sufficient to win a contract over the incumbent. However, at both CGC and FGC this is not practiced and the company policy is to honour tenure in the sector. On the other hand, in Bulgarian CITYCLEAN, wages have been nearly doubled (see above), albeit from an extremely low level.

2.5 The freedom of the road (?): Work organisation

2.5.1 Job content

Garbage collection work organisation is generally **fairly simple**: Teams of a driver and one or two workers start from a depot and drive pre-planned routes that vary day by day, pick up garbage bins (or sacks) from private homes and apartment buildings, carry or roll them to the truck, which has a lift that automatically empties them into the truck. Other types of work involve emptying larger containers from collection points for glass, metals or plastics (depending on the federal state's or municipal policy of separate collection and recycling) for which specially equipped trucks may be used. When the truck is loaded, it is driven to a recycling or incinerating facility and unloaded. At the end of the working day, it is mostly the driver on his or her own who does this. If unloading is necessary during the day, driving to the incinerator or landfill may provide a welcome break for collectors, but this is becoming more infrequent as larger trucks are used. It is more of a hardship in ARCASA, Southern Italy, where long delays at landfill sites are common which means long workdays spent partly in unpleasant and unhealthy surroundings. Responsibility for that is assigned by the district manager:

> *"In principle this task should be attributed on a rotational basis, however workers have different preferences and different needs and the district team leaders try to take them into account. Some drivers are willing to go to a landfill in order to have some overtime hours and to improve their income. Others have health problems and cannot do it" (manager, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto et al. 2012a: 25).*

Still, those waiting times can be so extreme that the company has had to provide a shuttle service to relieve drivers after waiting times of more than 18 hours (!) (Bizzotto et al. 2012a: 27).

Street sweepers are assigned particular areas to sweep, collect litter and empty litter baskets. They pick up hand carts or other equipment from area depots or bring them to their area by three-wheeler vehicles.

Garbage collecting teams' responsibility entails collecting all the waste that has been put in the street at a given time by households – and municipalities generally require garbage to be put out at a certain time in the morning, usually 7 a.m. However, the real service is not so clearly circumscribed. Nearly all garbage collectors everywhere describe an emblematic and often annoying situation:

> *"There are always these complaints, like, this garbage bag hasn't been taken away and so on. Then, the boss generally says [to the customer], 'so, you put it out too late'. 'No, has been out the day before.' 'Okay, I'll send them to collect it.' And then he radios us, right? We have radio in the car. So we say, 'what's been outside, we've collected that. Must've been put out late.' ,'Yes, they said they've put it out the day before.' 'Okay, we go there.' And then we go back, finished. That's a bit of service for the citizen, isn't it" (HILLTOWN collector, Austria, quoted in Holtgrewe 2012b: 7).*

At FGC, this familiar situation escalated shortly after the company had taken over a contract from a municipal organisation:

> "After a short period, the management had a confrontation with workers because there had been complaints that a number of bins had not been emptied. The manager told the workers that they had to empty the bins today. The workers said that their workday was over, and someone else had to empty the bins they had forgotten. The managers explained that in the new organisation there were no extra employees to collect waste that had been forgotten on the regular route – as there had been when the operation was public. The workers did not collect the bin and went home. The next week all workers who had left work got a warning stating that if the same incident happened again it would be reason for dismissal" (Sørensen/Hasle 2012: 27).

The **division of labour** varies. Depots generally have flat hierarchies, with one of a few foremen and a site manager, who organises the daily operation of people and trucks. There may be some stand-in or storehouse and maintenance workers. In the Danish cases, where collectors generally have truck driver licences, they take driving and collecting in turns. In the Austrian cases, the division of labour and the teams are fixed. In Southern European cases, drivers may even take over supervisory functions towards collectors. Generally, control appears to be more intensive in the Italian and Bulgarian cases, for instance at GREENSMELL:

> "The quality of the supplied service is monitored and controlled in three ways. First, each night the company's inspectors control how a sample of workers performed their tasks. Second, the municipality verifies whether the service contract is respected. Third, not only is the work of the environmental operators controlled, but also the public's behaviour. Indeed the company also randomly controls how households differentiate wastes. A team of inspectors of the company cut the bin liners and open the garbage bins of sample households. If they find that separate waste collection is not correctly done, they can impose a sanction on guilty households" (Bizzotto et al. 2012c: 23).

In Bulgarian CITYCLEAN, the truck drivers (most of whom are leased together with the trucks from a private company) in effect operate as a first level of supervision. Most of the interviewees (waste collectors) perceive them as the "bosses" of the truck and controller of their work. Drivers' wages also depend on the quality of the garbage collection work, so drivers are interested in the better implementation of work activities through the continuous monitoring and control of garbage collectors' work. In INTERWASTE, the work of street sweepers in particular is tightly monitored, and their whole work organisation is more reminiscent of cleaning work (see Chapter 1):

> "The inspectors shall be directly responsible for the work of the cleaners. They shall collect the cleaners at 7 o'clock in the morning, organise instructions and distribution of the tasks, they shall respectively check up the attendees according to a list and in event that any of them did not come, they shall update the working schedule, after which they shall commence to check how the work is executed within the framework of the area" (Markova et al. 2012: 22).

Otherwise, for a routinised job, waste collection has considerable **discretion**. Workers in case studies from Denmark and Austria in particular agree that they like the "freedom of the road". This responsible autonomy is emphasised most in the Danish cases and apparently, the North/South divide here is more visible than the divide between public and private sector employees. However, it may be contingent less on the country but the fact that in Denmark and Austria, we have investigated more cases or depots in suburban, smalltown and rural areas whereas Italian and Bulgarian case studies all are located in large cities.

> "They can alter the routes, make agreements with caretakers and decide on the working speed in order to decide how early they want to finish the working day as they are allowed to leave work when they have collected all the garbage on their route" (Hasle/Sørensen 2012: 16).

> *"The freedom – I check in the morning, I drive out and take care of my district and collect the garbage which is there to be collected and I 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 to sit there and tell you: Well, now you are standing there doing nothing so better over there and get working. 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" (worker, CGC, Denmark, quoted in Hasle/Sørensen 2012: 16).*

> *"I have discovered that it is the best job in the world. We have freedom with responsibility. It can't get any better. Yes, I would say, yes, people should simply try it" (waste collector at FGC, Denmark, quoted in Sørensen/Hasle 2012: 21).*

2.5.2 Working hours

Since waste collecting routes and also weather and traffic conditions vary, working time is somewhat variable, but garbage collectors generally start in between 5 and 7 in the morning and return in the early to mid-afternoon. The practice of actual or de-facto piece-rates with the possibility to go home after the tour is completed is found in the Danish cases and Bulgarian INTERWASTE. In Denmark, the collectively agreed working time is 37 hours/week, but in fact collectors are able to finish work in 4.5-5 hours on a normal day. Indeed, this gives workers a central interest in organising work efficiently:

> "The owner-manager told [interviewers] that he was visited by an expert in logistics who proposed to computerise the routes to make them more efficient. The owner suggested to him to drive with the garbage collectors and afterwards the expert realized that he could not rationalise the work" (Hasle/Sørensen 2012: 17).

However, unions and health and safety (H&S) experts in Denmark are concerned about the intensity of work and discussing ways to limit the self-imposed pressure where it encourages workers to take risks over health and accidents.

In Austria, the "open" working hours may be filled with some Saturday collections if necessary, collecting waste at special events, or work at the storehouse at WASTESOLUTIONS, or the maintenance centre at HILLTOWN. Generally, waste collectors agree that their working hours are favourable, leaving sufficient time for leisure activities, family, hobbies or other work.

In Italy, by collective agreement the weekly working time is 36 hours, distributed over five or six days, with a maximum amount of 50 hours per week and ten per day. At APORRIMATA, this is implemented in a six-day working week with six-hour workdays. This is a controversial arrangement. Some workers and union representatives would prefer a five-day working week with more hours per day. Others prefer the six-hour day.

In Italian GREENSMELL and Danish CGC, two-shift systems are in operation. ARCASA and APORRIMATA have a three-shift system with shifts of six hours. Shifts at ARCASA alternate every two weeks, which for workers leads to sleeping problems and tiredness especially during shift changes. APORRIMATA gives workers choice over preferred shifts, tasks or districts according to their personal needs or preferences. Obviously, they may have to accept task changes in order to obtain a change in their shift or in their working zone. In this way, the company also finds volunteers for night shifts who prefer the wage supplement of 33% or the free time during the day for household/family needs or study.

At GREENSMELL, the morning shift begins at 6 a.m., the afternoon shift at 1.30 p.m. After some agreements between trade unions and the company, in order to favour working mothers, an exceptional shift from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. has been provided. CGC has working times in the early morning from approximately 5.30 to 10.30 a.m. and then from 10.30 a.m.

to 3.30 p.m. This afternoon shift is uncommon in the sector, and first, workers were sceptical. However, for some workers it contributes to work-life balance:

> "Especially fathers with smaller children explain that they have the possibility of a quiet morning with the children, then time to bring them to day care or school and subsequently to pick them up again in the afternoon" (Hasle/Sørensen 2012: 18).

2.5.3 Health risks and technology

Waste collection, in a varying sense that is contingent on the technologies in use, is still hard work. Collectors move **heavy garbage bins** and have to work in all kinds of **climatic and environmental conditions**. At landfill sites or treatment plants, these may even be toxic. In addition, they are exposed to **accidents** when working in traffic. Health risks, specifically muscle or back problems are thus prevalent, and workers with health problems or disabilities are vulnerable. New health risks emerge in sorting and recycling jobs, which often face unpredictable or hazardous materials and are located in dusty and unhygienic environments. However, the **investment in the working environment** makes considerable differences. Trucks with hydraulic lifting devices are common everywhere in the sample and so are protective clothing and shoes paid for by the employer, as well as regular safety instructions. Beyond that, Danish waste collectors appear to have the newest trucks with several ergonomic and security features such as low entrance height and wide front screens that improve traffic safety and lessen strain on legs and knees.

Containers to move and lift also vary. In Bulgaria, broken bins and old bins not returned to previous service providers add to the strain. In Denmark, most containers are on wheels although some municipalities served by FGC still use sacks of which the recommended maximum weight is now 20 kg. Workers are supposed to use trolleys but do not always do so in the interest of working faster. Some older workers find the sacks too heavy:

> *"We have to collect up to 20 kg, and I am old and worn out, so I think that 20 kg is too much. The colleagues in the sector say the same. In some municipalities, the max limit is 10 kg. At the same time, the max access way is 25 m. Before, we had 20 m here, but when the tender was written with other municipalities, it was 'harmonized' to 25 m. So, we got 5 m more, just like that" (worker, Denmark, 60+, quoted in Sørensen/Hasle 2012: 23).*

In HILLTOWN, citizens pay collection fees through buying garbage sacks, with a negative impact on workloads that results from end-customers' behaviour:

> *"The sacks are getting ever more expensive. And smaller. And then, people fill them and really stuff them, right? Logical, isn't it" (collector, Austria, quoted in Holtgrewe 2012b: 10).*

Otherwise, the municipality still has bins without wheels and appears to be slow to invest in more ergonomic equipment. This appears to be a risky and somewhat illogical strategy with a good part of the HILLTOWN workforce in their 50s and virtually tenured. We do not know if there is a tacit "devil-may-care"-logic involved here, with municipal actors

expecting inevitable outsourcing when the current workers will have retired, but the lack of investment into sustainable working conditions may undermine the long-term employment security.

Another health and safety problem involving customers is **access to garbage containers**. Depending on the local situation, there can be long access trails, holes, uneven ground, level differences and similar. Poor access increases the workload and the risk of accidents. Winter is a special problem, accidents due to slippery ice are common and an issue of continuous discussion and conflict with municipalities and house owners. Generally, municipalities oblige end-customers to provide access or move bins to the street by themselves, but customers do not always comply, and collectors may find the procedures of sanctioning customers too cumbersome. Especially when they want to finish work early as with the Danish piece-rates, they may prefer a smooth workflow over seeking redress:

> *"So, we carry the sack … when it is too heavy according to the directive … we have learned to live with it. It will not change. We would have to write notes to the citizens. And it is only when we have written three notes that the municipality takes action. We would like a quicker response from the municipality" (garbage collector, Denmark, quoted in Sørensen/Hasle 2012: 10).*

Workers, even in reasonably ergonomic environments, thus report some strains:

> *"Yes, one can feel it in the legs when you have finished such a Monday route [the busiest day] that you don't have those breaks up in the cabin – you really can. I have always been in a fairly good shape and such. I have been a football trainer and I never had any disabilities – of course one has had some pain in the back" (collector, Denmark, 60+, quoted in Hasle/Sørensen 2012: 18).*

> *"It is knees, shoulder, elbows. You should be aware that it is 1050 bins a week, so you do carry a lot of sacks on your shoulder" (collector of domestic waste, Denmark, quoted in Sørensen/Hasle 2012: 23).*

In Italy and Bulgaria, exposed working situations in the street are also mentioned as a health and safety risk. At ARCASA and APORRIMATA some violence against women street sweepers has been reported and "the trade unions stated that in some known districts women should not work alone" (Bizzotto et al. 2012b: 29). Workers and managers at ARCASA and the Bulgarian companies say that in some city districts, both garbage trucks and workers may be attacked by residents. At INTERWASTE,

> *"we have only [in the Roma area] two trucks, which go out during day-time, at eight o'clock in the morning, since there ... Well, they slaughter each other, fight and if a truck goes in, it may never come out" (project manager, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova et al. 2012: 23).*

The provision of basic facilities to change, shower or use the toilet contributes to a healthy working environment. In Bulgaria especially the workers have to contend with some improvised spaces, and the company is aiming to improve the situation.

Beyond ergonomic improvements that obviously relieve some strains and pressures, the **use of technology** is also varied. The use of mobile phones is generally common to coordinate with the office. In addition, WASTESOLUTIONS use GPS tracking of trucks. This provides some control and transparency for the office and also some opportunities to save time especially to collect commercial waste that is less predictable. This company also invests in state-of-the art waste treatment technology.

Italian APORRIMATA has developed a mechanical device to collect refuse in the streets and dump it into the vehicles, a sort of spoon-shaped loading system that reduces workers' efforts during the collection operation. In the last decade, street cleaning has also been mechanised. The new global street cleaning service has replaced the old manual work. This type of mechanism was invented and patented by the company itself in order to avoid the problem of cars parked along the streets and to facilitate the job of the operators. The new vehicle is called *sweepy-jet*. With regard to efficiency, this mechanism has also improved the quality of work for this task since workers need less effort. Technological innovation thus contributes to reducing workload and the physical attrition of the environmental operators.

2.5.4 Intensification of work

Work intensification in waste is **less of an issue** than in the other sectors investigated. At CITYCLEAN, GREENSMELL and CGC's depots in the metropolitan areas, new technologies such as bins on wheels, newer trucks and lifting devices, and also the new street sweeping carts invented by GREENSMELL, have made work easier rather than harder. A 51-year old CGC collector is asked if his job is heavy work:

> *"No, it is an old empty phrase. That's from the time when garbage collectors walked around with bins on the back – zinc bins. That was hard work and I am not envious of the workers at that time. They had a leather apron on their back because that's where the zink bins should hang. Today we just push the containers out and if stairs there is a lift to lift the containers. I am not doing any heavy lifting on my job. It is more tough to be in the garden at home than being on the job. Everything is on wheels nowadays" (collector, Denmark, quoted in Hasle/Sørensen 2012: 18).*

However, this experience applies to the city area where indeed, bins of wheels are in use everywhere and show the benefits of this. Workers report a **coherent intensification** of work only in the municipal service providers of HILLTOWN and APORRIMATA. At APORRIMATA, door-to-door service has only been introduced in recent years and collectors now work on their own, and need to drive, get out of their vehicle, collect sacks of 5-10 kilos and get back to driving. This is apparently a step back from the use of larger, highly automated trucks that served collection points. Street sweepers also have to clean wider areas:

> *"Work has tripled! How do we maintain the same rhythm of working?" (street sweeper, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto et al. 2012b: 28).*

These changes meet a workforce that in both APORRIMATA and HILLTOWN is ageing since neither company has hired any younger workers in recent years. In HILLTOWN, all workers agree that work has been intensified considerably over the years. The reason for that is the growth of the town with more work being done with the same amount of staff under the latent threat of possible outsourcing. Here, collectors experience technological improvements as ambiguous: New collection trucks require less heavy lifting but since they are larger, the drives to the disposal site to unload during the day have been eliminated – which means fewer breaks for collectors.

> *"We said, work has changed. It has become more, it has become a bit more difficult, time has become tighter" (collector, Austria, quoted in Holtgrewe 2012b: 10).*

Austrian drivers and collectors also report tight supervision by citizens. They are aware that the public take their part in monitoring their performance and making sure they get value for their ratepayers' money. While waste collectors remember fondly how customers used to invite them in for a drink years ago, a HILLTOWN driver says:

> *"These days, I wouldn't dare drive to the icecream parlour and buy an icecream then get into the car and drive off. 15 minutes later the boss would know, for sure. So, you are watched, especially if it says HILLTOWN on our car. Because they are all taxpayers. (…) That's become extreme, you are being watched" (HILLTOWN driver, Austria, quoted in Holtgrewe 2012b: 18).*

2.6 Limited requirements and options: Skills and development

2.6.1 Skills in the waste sector

The waste sector is generally regarded as a low-skill sector with **very limited requirements and learning opportunities**. This limits workers' labour market alternatives and exacerbates their vulnerability – although often, workers also expect little improvement from training, have negative educational experiences and thus have little interest. Most collectors agree that strength and some stamina are essential for the job, and also a certain speediness to get the job done. This also concerns the hardiness it takes to be able to work outside in nearly all weather conditions, and the ability to handle smelly work. Driving a waste truck is generally regarded as more demanding of skills: Beyond obtaining a driving licence, good drivers must be able to deftly manoeuvre a truck in small streets and dead ends and also in adverse weather conditions. This also entails a responsibility for the collectors at the back of the truck, and for the equipment.

In **Denmark**, the social partners have created a **vocational training programme** for a skilled garbage collector that also qualifies workers for other logistics work. It consists of a number of individual shorts courses on various transport-related subjects such as crane and lift operation, fork-lift driving, dangerous goods and first aid and takes three years with practical work in between. The collective agreement stipulates a pay increase of EUR 0.60 per hour for those who have completed the training. In the CGC case, the municipal predecessor company used to offer an opportunity for all garbage collectors to

accomplish this education and the majority of collectors in the City depot have done so. CGC has announced its plan to continue this policy, and two of the interviewees without the skilled education expressed an interest but had so far not been informed about concrete possibilities after the takeover (Hasle/Sørensen 2012: 20). Multinational FGC is not willing to give the employees the vocational training as a skilled waste worker, unless it is required by the municipality – and, preferably, paid for. Here, ca. 10% of the permanent employees have this education. Most of the employees do not have a formal vocational education, except the most fundamental such as a truck license. Still, even in training-conscious Denmark, an FGC collector and his shop steward summarise a common feeling:

> *"What kind of education could one need? Look, I have to drive a truck, I have to get to some addresses and empty some bins" (collector of domestic waste, Denmark, quoted in Sørensen/Hasle 2012: 26).*

> *"No, they don't bother. They do not bother to get more education, unless they get their arms twisted" (shop steward, Denmark, quoted in Sørensen/Hasle 2012: 25).*

In the other countries, training is mostly limited to the **compulsory health and safety instructions**. Some companies (such as Austrian WASTESOLUTIONS or Bulgarian INTERWASTE) support workers in achieving truck driving, hazardous materials transport or forklift licences. Otherwise, Bulgarian workers are mostly unskilled and very poorly educated.

In Austria and Italy, there is evidence of some **overqualification** of workers. The majority of Austrian waste collectors and drivers have completed trade apprenticeships as carpenters, electricians, painters, plumbers or mechanics. One WASTESOLUTIONS employee has graduated from commercial college and is working as a garbage collector while waiting for an office position to become vacant at the company. They report some discontinuities or hardships following vocational training: dismissals shortly after training due to the employer's lack of work or funds, accidents or diseases that necessitated a change of occupation, or voluntary changes due to working conditions or other troubles at work. These changes then led them into the semi- or unskilled segment of the regional male labour market, working in construction and related trades or driving trucks. In these sectors, the typical hardships such as long commutes to work or work away from home then had them look for some improvement in their work situation (Holtgrewe 2012b). The security of the job and the working times especially then made waste collection the most favourable option. In Northern Italy, researchers encountered some workers with vocational training and even degrees who had taken these jobs after a period of unemployment or were migrants. Here, the employment certainty, the wage levels (especially the improvements with seniority) and the social guarantees of the national employment contract apparently compensate the low demands of the job. Such issues seem to concern the sector in general: in all the three case studies, we met persons with medium-high educational level or with high professional experience.

2.6.2 Careers and perspectives

In the case studies, there is evidence of foreman and lower management **positions being filled internally** in nearly all cases. At Austrian WASTESOLUTIONS, the dispatcher's colleague had started as a collector in spite of his clerical training and then was offered an office position as it became vacant. One of the collectors is expecting to take the same route. Another collector aims to take a truck driver's licence and become a driver, for which there is some uncertainty whether the company will contribute to the cost. The facility managers of the electronics and composting plants also started out as waste collectors. At Danish CGC, several managers also started as garbage collectors and they do not receive any formal managerial education. Some have participated in shorter courses mainly of technical issues such as IT systems (Hasle/Sørensen 2012). In the larger Italian and Bulgarian companies, there are also promotions: Street sweeping appears to be a starting position for men as well, but they can be promoted to become street washers and garbage collectors which for women does not happen. With the higher intensity of control and supervision in these countries, there are also more opportunities for promotion. In CITYCLEAN and INTERWASTE, Roma workers are also promoted, both women and men:

> *"We have people from the suburb [Roma suburb] who became controllers and are responsible for the entire sanitation activities of certain sections of town" (manager, Bulgaria, quoted in Peycheva et al. 2012c: 19).*

Roma have also become truck drivers in both companies, and at CITYCLEAN were reported to have left the country seeking jobs abroad.

In the Italian companies, workers suggest that opportunities for promotion are somewhat unequally distributed. Workers with better education have better chances and at GREENSMELL and APORRIMATA, management and workers notice a formalisation of skill requirements for promotion.

> *"Until a short time ago, career opportunities were high: garbage collectors could also become managers. Now it is more difficult, more education is required to reach some roles in the company. However, there are still good opportunities, since the company is big and there are several services and tasks in which to grow" (general manager, GREENSMELL, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto et al. 2012c: 21).*

> *"Today it is not like in the past. Now things are changing: you have to study and go in an office, because to stay outside for 40 years is very hard (waste collector, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto et al. 2012c: 21).*

Some workers say that women have less of a chance of promotion than men, and this is supported by the figures on promotions.

> *"Inequalities? Yes, if you are a man, you can go on, if you are a woman, you can't" (green areas operator, female, Italy, quoted ibid.).*

At APORRIMATA, the introduction of door-to-door waste collection service decreased the demand for truck drivers and increased the need for collectors and mono-operators, that is, workers collecting garbage and driving small vehicles on their own. In addition, the pay increases for seniority have been cut:

> *"Moreover there were career automatisms: people hired at the first employment level got the second one only after three working months and the third after nine working months. Now instead, many people are working with the first employment level for years. And the company does not increase their contractual position until they specialise, that is, until they get a level C driving license. There are workers who have been at the first employment level since 2003!" (workers' representative at APORRIMATA, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto et al. 2012b: 21).*

2.7 Working cultures

Working cultures in the sector appear to be shaped by specific kinds of community spirit or the lack of it. In the smaller units with roots in the public sector and strong union traditions such as HILLTOWN or CGC, there is a general friendliness and collegiality that has grown from long collaboration and, partly, "growing old together". Sociality and collectivity are obvious in HILLTOWN, where workers also share some leisure activities and have an informal meeting on the day the municipal newsletter is published to discuss the news (Krenn 2012). Indeed, they share a history of successfully asserting voice and protecting their jobs, and this meshes with the stable employment and sense of security in the public sector. The workers at Danish CGC's City depot are still rooted in the strong culture of the predecessor municipal company, although that company had been divided up with the last round of outsourcing.

> "It is a proud culture which values the garbage collectors as important workers in the society and also values the culture of the workers' collective which during a long development has achieved good conditions for the workers such as salaries above average, good physical facilities, possibilities for training and education and co-determination on a number of issues. They are quite active trying to maintain the culture even though the workers are separated in four different companies. They still work from the same depot and they organise regular social activities for all four firms. A senior shop steward acted in many ways as a symbol of the strong culture. He had been active as a shop steward for decades and been active in both industrial conflicts and in close collaboration with management" (Hasle/Sørensen 2012: 20).

Apparently, the CGC culture of a family-run firm with flat hierarchies and accessible management fits well with this tradition. The atmosphere in the company and the tone between the manager and employees are informal and relaxed, and garbage collectors are invited into the office to talk to office staff (Hasle/Sørensen 2012: 6).

A different sense of community is found in both Bulgarian companies. Here, the Roma operatives cultivate a solidarity of hard work and sharing the limited resources they have:

> *"To tell you the truth, here in [city cleaning] there are no younger and older people, it is more important how you do your job. The important is if you don't hear, if you don't look out, this is an obstacle for you because you are in the traffic. And we work so – our age or if I am younger and you are older – this is no obstacle for us. Because there is with us an elderly woman, I would lie to you saying her age, I think she works more than the young people. And I look at her seeing that we are younger, she is older and she does more things than we do. I watch the woman, how she does her job and this is amongst us the difference between us doesn't matter. The important thing is that you do your job and not that I should go and do it for you" (female sweeper, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova et al. 2012: 33).*

There is mutual assistance amongst the workers themselves.

> *"We gather together and now – you have no money, don't worry – she has, we buy soda (Schweppes), we buy something, we sit down. For example, it's your shift, and that woman has no money and we look out for each other, it is not as if we did not. Don't worry, if not today, tomorrow you will buy something for me" (female sweeper, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova et al. 2012: 33f).*

Supervisors and managers in both companies also have close relations with this group of workers. These relations are shaped by a form of empathy and indeed, gratefulness, which appears peculiar and a bit paternalistic to more North/Western European notions of equality but conveys a sense of mutual responsibility and solidarity. They appreciate the work that they do and the uncomfortable fact that the Roma "are the only people who would do such type of work":

> *"This is a problem, to work with them is very difficult, but I have said it many times – thank God they are here with us. Just look at district [Name], it was so difficult to find a Bulgarian woman sweeper. We could not recruit any single garbage collector in that district because no one from the people living there would like to do that job. So I'll say once again – I am so thankful that they are here. Thanks to them we are capable of performing our functions" (organiser, Bulgaria, quoted in Peycheva et al. 2012c: 35).*

Working with this group of very poor and mostly uneducated employees entails some social responsibility and informal help that may amount to social work: sorting out indebtedness and lawyers' letters, providing employment for families and being flexible with regard to absences and working time requirements.

> *"And in general they share everything with us, absolutely everything. Whatever comes their way, a note for liabilities, they cannot read, we read to them what the matter is about on the spot. We live with them" (services organiser, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova et al. 2012: 27).*

Workers again appreciate this caring and generalised offer of support:

> *"We do our job and to tell you the truth, they are very pleased with us. We are very pleased by ... [the area organiser], because when you have problems – you tell him so... We always turn to him... He is not insolent, shouting at you, why don't you sweep here, and so on. He does his job as he should. ... We have full confidence in each other. You go, do the job and when he passes by – well, he may rely on us. We are pleased, of course" (sweeper, woman, Bulgaria, quoted ibid).*

In companies with more of a private sector identity and less continuous employment, such as WASTESOLUTIONS and FGC, a more instrumental culture prevails. The day-to-day informality between management and operatives is similar in WASTESOLUTIONS, also a family-run company, but there is little evidence of shared activities beyond a quick cup of coffee in the morning. Teams here consist of just the driver and a collector and the time spent with the whole group is very limited. Some workers mention individual relationships and friendships but there is less of a collective sense of the work or a shared "mission". In FGC, workers resist managers' desire for them to take over more tasks of looking after the trucks, and managers feel "the full time workers were mainly occupied with completing the routes and getting home early, and if they ask permanent workers to do more, the workers often ask for overtime payment" (Sørensen/Hasle 2012: 26). The researchers "got the impression that some of the workers have an 'individual/self-employed' attitude to work (an entrepreneur with his own truck) rather than a 'collective/wage owner' worker attitude" (ibid.: 28).

In the large municipal companies in Italy, working cultures oscillate between instrumentalism and a sense of misrecognition. The distance between workers and management is considerably higher, which already manifests itself in separate and distant office buildings with security, managers wearing business suits and so on. At APORRIMATA, a steet sweeper says:

> *"The company does not know what it means to give recognition to workers!" (street sweeper, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto et al. 2012b: 35).*

At GREENSMELL, management make an effort to provide some recognition and enter into a dialogue with workers, in line with the company's innovative ambitions:

> *"Environmental operators are able to give us organizational suggestions (...). Sometimes, I speak with operators because important ideas can come out. For example, yesterday I went to see this new system of cleaning with the Sweepy-jet and I called the operator that was testing it and I said him 'Listen to me, how do you feel with it? How is the work different?' However, workers exchange ideas more with their direct chiefs than with managers. Obviously, relationships with workers are important, but I have to say that they mainly occur within the departments" (general manager, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto et al. 2012c: 32).*

There are also bonus payments based on formalised evaluation procedures in order to avoid an impression of arbitrariness. So far, this does not appear to be much noted by workers, and they take different views on the kind of recognition they miss:

> *"No, I never obtained a sign of acknowledgement. Nothing. I would like even only a pat on the back" (green area operator, Italy, quoted ibid.).*

> *"I received some appreciation letters. But only letters. I have never seen one lira. (...) Productivity premium is generic. However I increased my employment level in two years" (another green area operator, Italy, quoted ibid.).*

Hence, overall, it is not necessarily private sector companies that see a lack of community or team spirit. Solidaristic working cultures appear to be the results of shared struggles, either with management or the institutional environment, or against poverty and a difficult environment. Management informality and accessibility is generally appreciated in the various cultural contexts, whereas the bureaucratic angle of Italian municipal companies apparently does not overcome workers' sense of misrecognition.

It should not be overlooked either that the job of waste collection in those countries and environments where workers have some discretion and a sense of the "freedom of the road" has some intrinsic benefits. Indeed, workers in the country in Denmark and Austria see aspects positively that might be considered problematic such as working outside or doing physically hard labour:

> *"I enjoy [my work]. I am outside, I see nature grow and woods turn yellow. I see animals, which is fun" (FGC worker, Denmark, quoted in Sørensen/Hasle 2012: 21).*

> *"Yeah, what I just like, it can be summer or winter, 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" (WASTESOLUTIONS collector, Austria, quoted in Holtgrewe 2012a: 9).*

2.8 Industrial relations and representation

As we have seen, the union and social partnership traditions structure the quality of work not just in the country context but also in the history of each company or municipal unit. In **Austria**, otherwise known for its comprehensive collective agreements, the establishment of a sector-specific agreement has so far been hindered mostly by the heterogeneity of both the employer organisations and the unions involved. In **Bulgaria,** there is no employers' association in the waste sector, just an association for companies involved in recycling. The explanation provided by one of the interviewees is that the majority of the players in the sector are connected with different grey practices and interests and there are few companies that would like to commonly defend their interests. **Danish** social partners managed to develop networked collaboration, improved environmental standards and solutions to working environment problems (e.g., heavy lifting, chemical components, and accidents) in the 1990s and are currently struggling to maintain these achievements

in a changing environment of increased private sector activity and changing contractual relations between municipalities and service providers. In **Italy**, a national collective agreement protects workers from the negative effects of outsourcing because whenever a new company is awarded a contract, it has to ensure the continuity of employment, wages and other employment conditions (see Kirov 2011).

The **Austrian cases** share working cultures of mutual consideration in which workers say problems are discussed and sorted out with the people concerned and there are no obstacles in talking to the boss if necessary. In WASTESOLUTIONS, there is no interest representation beyond that. In HILLTOWN, the union (of municipal employees) is present and routinely referred to (*"We have a union, and problems can be sorted out"*, says one collector), but there are no current instances where the union or works council has played a part. Workers themselves report that 15 years ago they have taken a large part in securing their jobs with the municipality when privatisation first became an option and a private company put in an offer for collecting and composting organic waste:

> *"And then we had a good driver who thought ahead a bit. And that guy said, listen, we'll go – we make an appointment with the mayor. (...) And then, during working hours, we went to the town hall, to the mayor and said that we didn't want that [the collection of organic waste] to go away. Because, that's only the beginning. If he gets that, the other things will go away, too. (…) So, this was about our jobs, our wages and everything, and we fought for that" (waste collector, HILLTOWN, Austria, quoted in Krenn 2012: 20).*

In **Bulgaria**, both companies have a presence of unions, and in both cases, this was established upon the initiative of management. In INTERWASTE, this is located in the mother company but not the subsidiary. In CITYCLEAN, the manager says

> *"We did that for the simple reason to ease the tension in the company. We believe the unions could do that. We are very respectful for the two nationally representative trade union organizations in the country – CITUB and Podkrepa – so we decided to have union organizations in CITYCLEAN because it is the biggest municipal company in the city employing lots of local people. (…) In the past we had lots of spontaneous protest. Sixty to seventy people get on the company bus and come to the headquarters to protest against something. When we asked them: 'What are you doing here?', the answer was: 'We are on a protest!' 'What are you protesting against?' We received lots of strange answers like: 'Our wages are very low.' or 'It is damn cold outside'. In other words we were every day on alert whether someone from the districts would not come to us with all sorts of weird demands that are not so groundless" (manager, Bulgaria, quoted in Peycheva et al. 2012c: 38).*

In CITYCLEAN, a union organisation was established in 2009 and a collective agreement concluded with CITUB (Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria) and the Confederation of Labour "Podkrepa". In February 2011 (the period when the interviews were held), more than half of the company workers and employees were members of trade unions (approximately 400 people). In INTERWASTE, the multinational, the European holding has a European works council and the union is also well established in

the Bulgarian mother company. Hence, managers aim to establish it in their subsidiary for the same reasons, but feel that they should keep their hands in:

> *"At the moment we select the people for the Working Conditions Committee as for us these should really be reliable representatives of all the groups – both of the employers and of the workers. Now, agree, that if half of the workers cannot write and read ..." (health & safety manager, Bulgaria, quoted in Markova et al. 2012: 37).*

In **Denmark**, coverage by the collective agreement is comprehensive. At the City depot of CGC, all workers are organised in the local union belonging to the federation of unskilled and semiskilled workers with a shop steward, a substitute shop steward, two organisational health and safety (OHS) representatives and an accountant. They have an office at the depot next to the management and administration office. Local management talk to the shop steward almost every day but there are no organised meetings.

At FGC, relations are more formal and dialogue mostly takes place in the health and safety committee and in the collaborative committee. Indeed, they hover between collaboration and conflict, and

> "the last conflict in the Copenhagen area was caused by a situation where the health and safety representatives were not consulted: *'This caused a lot of troubles. You can't do that, you have to listen. You have hired people who are all above 18 [has come of age], and you have to take them seriously, so you have to listen to what they say. If you do that, you will achieve a lot.'* (safety manager)" (Sørensen/Hasle 2012: 28).

Indeed, information and mutual respect have been achieved, and the shop steward is very aware that many everyday problems involve not just workers and management but also the municipal clients:

> *"We are told everything. (…) the information level is good. The only thing is that the distance to headquarter is long [about 125 km]. The challenges we face are associated with the work we do every day: at the customer sites, access ways, too heavy sacks, and more… But that isn't the problem of FGC, it is [the municipal garbage administration]. And they are also far away [in a city about 60 km away] … We have meetings at [the headquarters] 3-4 times a year, and they listen to us every time. And I always have a lot to say" (shop steward in rural area, Denmark, quoted ibid.).*

He emphasises that changes of contract are of major importance for the working conditions, and union representatives need to get involved in that. So far, he has not been that successful:

> *"I participated in the reference group at the time when the tender for this contract period was initiated, and you could just as well have been talking to a door. I said that to [the municipal director] and he turned damn angry" (shop steward, Denmark, quoted ibid.).*

Researchers comment that

> "although the trade union 3F is strong on the national level, we got an impression that they were not strongly embedded in the depots, with the possible exception of RURAL, who had a strong shop steward who were active in the board of the waste workers' industrial club at national union level" (Sørensen/Hasle 2012: 28f).

In **Italy**, there are union representatives in all companies, but workers generally do not set much store by them. At both ARCASA and APORRIMATA, union representatives are known often to be relatives of management:

> *"In this company, managers, administrative employees, workers and workers' representatives are all a big family: wives, husbands, aunts ... You have to be careful about to who you speak to. I am friend of everyone, but I do not trust in anybody" (APORRIMATA mono-operator, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto et al. 2012b: 32).*

Workers at ARCASA express general mistrust:

> *"Who steals here, who steals there… They are all thieves" (worker, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto et al. 2012a: 33).*
>
> *"Who knows the language, can speak. I prefer to speak for myself" (worker, Italy, quoted ibid.).*

At APORRIMATA they are more ambiguous. 75% of employees are union members and some would like a more effective, militant and better educated interest representation. Managers, on the other hand, see the union representatives as overly inflexible:

> *"Now, the more urgent issue is internal mobility. Mobility processes are very limited by the trade unions' defence of the employment contract. But limiting internal mobility does not have much to do with the defence of rights. When the company needs to change workers' tasks, they call the trade unions and the trade unions force us to grant the workers their preferred task. Trade unions do not support the company in this re-organization phase because they are afraid of losing members. (...) When the company asks a bit more than normal, workers always expect something in return" (president, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto et al. 2012b: 37f).*

At GREENSMELL, in line with the company's divided working culture of bureaucratic professionalism and some detachment form the operative level, union representatives play the part of bridging that division. Workers entrust the relationships with management in their representatives and in this case, there is no talk about family ties:

> *"Up to now, I never had to deal with trade unions. I joined it because people have to be represented, because workers cannot go directly to speak to the chief" (mono-operator, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto et al. 2012c: 34).*

Between management and trade unions there is mutual respect and dialogue:

> *"The relationships with the trade unions are in line with a modern vision of the social dialogue: there is no hostility but respect and civil exchange of ideas with the aim to find a balance in common interests for the development of the company" (human resource manager, Italy, quoted ibid.).*

> *"There is a sort of comprehension between trade unions and the company. Even having many opposite interests, we also have a common interest, that is the protection of workers and of the company" (workers' representative, Italy, quoted ibid.).*

2.9 Conclusions

Embedded with national and municipal environments as it is, the picture of waste sector companies is the most varied in this report. The work situations of a skilled, well-paid and well-represented garbage collector in Denmark and a Bulgarian street sweeper who commutes from 50 kilometres away and cannot afford her train ticket could hardly be further apart. Indeed, the sector that is somewhat far from the traditional industrial core sectors, to some extent is quite emblematic of the varieties of employment regimes (Gallie 2007) and also public administration regimes (Tepe et al. 2010). Especially the different control spans and variations in team-based autonomy are striking between Northern/Continental and Southern and Eastern Europe.

Public sector traditions play a central part. They are associated with strong union representation, secure employment and some functional flexibility in Denmark and Austria, and also secure and comparatively well-paid employment but some nepotism and distrustful relations between management and workers in Italy. In Bulgaria, we are seeing a case of insourcing the function back to the municipality. However, with the differentiation of clients and contractors, municipalities could still influence working conditions and maintain standards and in the case of the Danish tenders they certainly do. However, in between citizens' interest, political commitments to privatisation and limited resources for investment, it requires a deliberate effort of collaboration between social partners and clients to put the quality of work on the agenda.

On the other hand, the private sector represents a strikingly heterogeneous picture of company types and strategies that establish continuity or discontinuity, with very different workforces. It is worth mentioning that committed managers and company owners apparently have some capabilities of extending their innovative ambitions into the area of social responsibility, from day-to-day support of potentially vulnerable workforces to the recognition of unions. Nevertheless, the traditional role of waste collection as a provider of secure employment to low-skilled men is clearly under pressure. "New jobs" have more insecurity and more fixed-term employment, and employment continuity (an important achievement in existing waste workers' careers) is no longer a matter of course.

3 Fragmenting employment: The construction sector

The construction sector is the biggest industrial employer in Europe[10], contributing almost 10% of the EU's gross domestic product (GDP). After a period of growth, construction in many countries was badly hit during the **financial and economic crisis** and, despite national differences, has been in decline in Europe for four years in a row.[11] Hence, having identified construction as a sector with "new and growing jobs", we cannot be sure how much of the growth noted between 2000 and 2007 was due to a "bubble" and thus is unlikely to continue. Since **walqing** aims to draw conclusions that are relevant to the further development of employment and job quality, we decided to focus on a segment of the sector that is likely to expand further, i.e., the impact of **greening and sustainable building** on the quality of work. **Green construction** centrally aims at improving the energy efficiency of new and existing buildings and affects construction proper, but also the related trades and engineering disciplines.

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

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

3.1 The case studies: Selection criteria and case characteristics

In construction in particular, the sampling by each country team mirrors the national particularities of the sector. We focused on national companies – which, however, often have experience internationally. The focus on **green construction** could not consistently guide case selection since specialist companies could only be identified and enrolled in Belgium and Bulgaria.

Research in the construction sector in the **walqing** project was carried out in **Belgium**, **Bulgaria**, **Hungary** and **Norway**. For each country, stakeholder interviews with relevant social partners and other sector experts and actors were carried out. The findings of this

[10] http://www.fiec.org/Content/Default.asp?PageID=5.

[11] http://www.euroconstruct.org/pressinfo/pressinfo.php.

work package on stakeholder policies are collected in the **walqing** social partnership series available on the website www.walqing.eu. In addition, each country involved in the construction sector research carried out 2-3 organisational case studies, consisting of interviews with management, works councillors and workers, and a total of 10-20 employee interviews per country and sector. In total, the material from these work packages consists of 10 national organisational case-study reports and 4 national reports on employees' individual perspectives, agency and vulnerability.
The companies in which case studies were conducted are listed in the table below (please note that all organisation names are pseudonyms).

Table 3.1: Overview of case studies in the construction sector

Country	Case study pseudonym	Interviews conducted
Belgium	TREEHOUSE, a small construction company applying eco-friendly methods	2 managers (1 male, 1 female – HR!) 2 project managers (male) 1 team leader (male) 5 workers (male)
	MANOR, a small construction company active in green construction	2 managers (male) 2 team leaders (male)
	ECOHOUSE, a large construction company applying eco-friendly methods	6 managers (male) 1 architect (male) 1 junior engineer (male) 4 workers (male)
Bulgaria	BULCONSTRUCTION, a medium-sized investment and construction company	3 managers (2 male, 1 female – HR!) 2 site managers (1 male, 1 female) 4 workers (male)
	ECOCONSTRUCTION, a company focusing on the construction of energy-efficient buildings	2 managers (1 male, 1 female – HR!) 1 technical manager (male) 1 dispatcher & mechanic (male) 9 workers (male)
	GREENCONSTRUCTION, a company involved in the construction and renovation of housing, administrative and commercial buildings	1 manager (male) 1 site manager (male) 1 documentation specialist (female) 3 workers (male)
Hungary	STONEWORK, a medium-sized technical specialist contractor and one of the few remaining regular construction companies	2 managers 2 engineers 1 brigade leader 1 union representative
	TERRA AUSTRALIS, 4 small firms of a construction subcontractor network	2 company owners 1 site manager 2 engineers
Norway	SCANCON, a large Scandinavian company active in building contracting	2 managers 8 workers (4 migrants from Poland or Germany) 1 union representative 1 health & safety representative
	NORSCON, a Norwegian construction company	2 managers 1 subcontractor's construction manager 5 workers 1 health & safety representative 2 subcontractors' project leaders

Source: Internal national partner reports for Work Package 6 of the walqing project.

Among case study companies, we find varying sizes and varied positions in construction value chains that are characterised by deepening divisions of labour and segmentation of labour markets that are increasingly transnational. On the other hand, regional companies, often with particular expertise, still find their places in the market. Although companies are positioned in different types of networks and inter-firm relationships (see Section 3.2) that range from the craft-based and relational to transactional and interchangeable, for the purpose of this report in a first step we distinguish between **small, medium-sized and large companies**.

3.1.1 Small contractors

Two **Belgian "green" companies** fall into the category of small contractors. **TREEHOUSE** specialises in wooden buildings in particular and (like the other Belgian green builders) focuses on single-family dwellings for end customers with a dedicated focus on high-quality and craft orientation. In 2011, it employed 31 people of whom 23 were blue-collar builders, the majority of them carpenters. It was established in 1978 by three self-employed carpenters with roots in the "alternative" and green scene and started with small refurbishments and use of fair-trade materials (Van Peteghem et al. 2011a).

Belgian MANOR is a small company that now specialises in the refurbishment and insulation of existing buildings, generally responding to architects' tenders. It employs 17 people and has no ambition to grow further. MANOR was established in 1991 and first specialised in wooden skeleton constructions – at the time, more for commercial than ecological reasons. It later switched its strategy to more traditional construction (Van Peteghem et al. 2011b).

Bulgarian ECOCONSTRUCTION is a small company also focusing on the construction of energy-efficient housing and industrial buildings and is located in a regional centre of Bulgaria. It invests, then builds and sells its buildings. It employs 22 construction workers and was established in 2003.

Hungarian TERRA AUSTRALIS is not a company but consists of four small firms, two in engineering and two building contractors. Under this heading, two one-person firms (one of which, a building contractor, had several predecessor firms with up to 50 employees), one contractor with a few employed site managers and one 12-person design company were investigated. They represent the fragmented side of the construction sector, firms without operative workers that subcontract actual construction work to a variety of partners in more or less transactional relationships.

3.1.2 Medium-sized building companies

Hungarian STONEWORK is now a medium-sized construction company specialising in stonework, historical reconstruction and preservation of monuments. From 2008, it cut staff numbers from 150 employees to 80 in 2011. It was originally part of a vertically integrated state-owned Socialist company that held the monopoly on stone construction in Hungary. It was bought by management after first being privatised to a Canadian company.

BULCONSTRUCTION Ltd is a family-owned company that specialises in the construction of housing complexes, administrative and trade centres and industrial sites. When the research was conducted it had 83 employees. It is located in a municipal town in Bulgaria, was established in the beginning of the 1990es, operated in the Middle East first and, now that the market in its hometown collapsed, is currently seeking opportunities in Western Europe.

Bulgarian GREENCONSTRUCTION is involved in the design and in construction and renovation of residential and administrative buildings as well as industrial complexes. After some decline during the crisis, it now employs a "core" of ca. 50-60 people. It was established in 1993 and gradually began to specialise in "green" construction.

3.1.3 Large construction companies

Relative to the average size of construction companies in Belgium, **Belgian ECOHOUSE** is large: a family-owned construction company that specialises in energy-efficient single-family dwellings and also builds apartment housing (Van Peteghem et al. 2011d), aiming to render passive houses affordable. It employs ca. 200 staff, but the actual figure in that case was impossible to get since the company itself had difficulties distinguishing its employees from its long-term subcontractors. ECOHOUSE was established in 1982; from 2007, it redirected its strategy towards building passive houses for private customers, hiring an architect to develop its products and construction technologies into that direction. It aims to continue its market leadership in that segment by increasingly standardising processes and expanding its use of subcontractors further.

Norwegian SCANCON is one of the largest Scandinavian contractors. It employs some 4,500 people in Norway and 330 in the district investigated, about half of whom are construction workers.

Norwegian NORSCON is another of the major construction companies in Norway with over 2,100 employees in Norway and around 360 employees in the contractor company approximately 300 of whom are construction workers. The case study focused on one building site and also included interviews with project managers of two subcontractors on that site.

3.2 Markets, clients and the crisis

The construction sector in Europe is characterised by **lengthening value chains**, with larger companies employing increasing numbers and levels of subcontractors across borders, thus **externalising flexibility requirements**. From the 1990s onwards, smaller companies and subcontractors also started working internationally, and the Bulgarian and Hungarian case study companies all have international experience in Europe or the Middle East. **Internationalisation** in construction thus concerns both **capital** (large multinational companies) and **labour** (migrants, posted workers). Even among our ten case studies, we find diverse patterns of subcontracting or insourcing that are contingent on their respective strategy regarding cost and quality and on the respective regional labour markets.

The companies investigated in **Belgium** all specialise in private housing in a regional to national market. However, the market for new houses has downsized considerably there. TREEHOUSE and ECOHOUSE cater to end-customers directly and manage entire sites whereas MANOR's clients are architects who also act as general contractors. Belgian ECOHOUSE now delivers some 300-350 buildings per year whereas a few years earlier it could deliver 500 houses. The workforce was downsized through natural turnover and the company increasingly uses subcontractors. In addition, it explores new areas of business, solar panel installation using self-employed professionals, and refurbishment of existing houses to become more energy-efficient.

TREEHOUSE specialises in woodwork and subcontracts other crafts such as brickwork or heating installations. Working for well-to-do private customers, it has hardly been affected by the crisis and aims for some growth, which, however, is limited by the unavailability of suitable workers. It is a flexibly specialised company working in close collaboration with subcontractors and customers and rejecting the more transactional kind of subcontracting:

> *"For major constructions, you always have to submit a tender, and it mostly is the company that quotes the lowest price that gets the best of it. What follows then, is a battle between the principal contractor and his subcontractors. There is no common interest between all these parties involved, and I do not believe you can realise a decent building that way. Certainly not in our sector, where quality and accuracy of the finishing are paramount. After all, it is a general principle: the more a given product gets complicated, the more a smooth co-operation between the partners is important" (business manager, Belgium, quoted in Van Peteghem et al. 2011c: 4f).*

In **Eastern Europe**, we apparently observe two related modes of companies' responding to the crisis: **Mode 1** consists in a **consolidation of core workforces** who mostly comprise highly skilled, experienced generalists, for whom companies make an effort to provide continuous work (as much as possible). **Mode 2** entails **increasing fragmentation at the periphery**, which is partly segmented according to different types of projects and partly carried to extremes. Bulgarian ECOCONSTRUCTION is an exception with its small size and its high quality focus. It has so far been able to maintain employment at the same levels of payment and availability of overtime – but there have been no new hires for a while. The company prides itself on this continuity and managers say they are about the only company in Bulgaria that maintains that standard.

Hungarian STONEWORK and Bulgarian BULCONSTRUCTION follow Mode 1: managers and engineers at Hungarian STONEWORK report a general increase of somewhat irregular competition through means such as unrealistically low tenders by competitors using informal employment or going for bankruptcy. In addition, clients delay payments – which is increasingly common in the public sector in particular:

> *"There are firms that do not care about tomorrow. They are winning at a cost that is not enough to cover all work. (…) They grab the money, then they declare bankruptcy and leave the subcontractors in trouble" (company CEO, Hungary, quoted in Tóth/Hosszú 2012d: 8).*

In Bulgaria, the construction sector in 2011 is described like this:

> "The output of the companies is significantly reduced, the construction works on many sites are put on hold, lots of workers are made redundant and the companies are basically waiting for the crisis to pass by. [BULCONSTRUCTION's] management is aware that now is the most appropriate moment to build and construct, but at the same time the high levels of debt between companies and the lack of fresh money discourages them from venturing any new construction works or even continuing sites that are already under construction with the respective construction permits" (Peycheva et al. 2012a: 6).

The company is responding to the crisis by consolidating its workforce (from ca. 350 to currently 83 employed workers). It has reduced the use of subcontractors:

> *"Some time ago ... my company would build everything from A to Z ... but later we found out how convenient it is to use subcontractors. (…) In contrast to the past – right now we perform everything by ourselves, only very rarely do we use subcontractors simply because there is not enough work even for our people, or even when we start some construction work at a given site the money is not there" (manager, Bulgaria, quoted in Peycheva et al. 2012a: 6).*

Nevertheless, if subcontractors can offer considerably cheaper and faster work they are still considered. Similarly, Hungarian STONEWORK from 2007 lost some two thirds of turnover and half of its employees, and has kept work for only 80 people. Both companies have also put workers on paid or mostly unpaid leave, and BULCONSTRUCTION has halved the working times of its administrative staff for six weeks – a measure that was considered at STONEWORK but rejected by the union.

Mode 2, the fragmentation of value chains and employment from the "bottom end" of the value chain, shows in the companies of the Hungarian TERRA AUSTRALIS case. The career of one entrepreneur and subcontractor in TERRA AUSTRALIS is symptomatic:

> "The owner of Firm3 has been in the construction industry since 1990. In 1991, he established his first firm, which was active in building construction. This firm got permission to be able to work as subcontractor in Germany in 1992 (…) where the firm carried out, as subcontractor, a number of major projects. In 1996, the permission to work in Germany expired [and] was not renewed by the Hungarian authorities, and the activities of the firm were [taken back] into Hungary. Between 1996 and 2006, the firm had about 50 employees and carried out large office building projects. In 2006, the main general contractor of a major industrial complex building project defaulted before paying subcontractors. The predecessor firm of Firm3 also defaulted as the last instalment, 95 million HUF out of the 250 million HUF project, was not paid. After default, the owner established a new firm, which had a much smaller capital and employed only a few employees, out of the ruins of the earlier firm. This new firm of the owner of Firm3 was caught by the credit crunch in 2008. (…) The firm, due to the lack of capital, could not continue the construction [of a large apartment block]. The owner of the firm sold the firm and two-third ready

> building [… and] established a new firm. This time, the owner entered into the road construction subsector. This firm also defaulted in 2009 due to the fact that a local government did not pay for a road claiming that there had been quality issues. The firm was sold to a new owner, and the entrepreneur has established a new firm, Firm3" (Tóth/Hosszú 2012c: 6).

The person mentioned in the citation also explains how a small subcontractor operates in an environment of increased competition, utilising the combination of cost and time pressure:

> *"You have to be smart to make money. For example, let's see, if I am a subcontractor. Normally, I have to win on competitive tender to get the work. I calculate first the real price of the work. But with that price you could not win any competitive tender. So I underprice my work by 20-30%. I win. At a price which is unrealistic. Now, the task now is to correct the price to a realistic level. What is important here [is] to do the minimum possible, which is required by the master plan. Any other work has to be noted in the construction calendar as an extra work and has to be signed by the site engineer as a real and requested work. And that work you can price at normal level. And if I don't do that work, then the whole project stops and the time is very expensive for the general contractor. So you have a bargaining position. So you gain here some more money and with this I try to get back what I did not ask in the competitive tender. If I am smart, I could make money through everyday bargaining with the site manager" (contractor, Hungary, quoted in Tóth/Hosszú 2012c: 8).*

While this experienced and indefatigable subcontractor aptly describes the ways of coping with a fragmented and transactional environment, Mode 1 apparently still allows for a professionally cultivated idea of cooperative competition and innovation:

> *"Almost all of them [competitors] are my friends, with few exceptions probably. It does not matter whether they are big or small players in the market. I don't compete with them because we together perform similar work and build sites often in cooperation. That is why I view competition as something positive, it can only help us. Very often someone from the competition invents something very useful, you take it in your work and improve it further that is how it goes and brings about innovation and progress" (manager of BULCONSTRUCTION, Bulgaria, quoted in Peycheva et al 2012a: 8).*

The large **Norwegian** contractors, NORSCON and SCANCON, have noticed the crisis mostly through lowered earnings in 2009 and 2010 than previously. Consequently, they also outsource a larger proportion of what they used to consider their core competencies, and also increase their use of fixed-term employment and staffing agencies, who often provide immigrant workers (Finnestrand 2012b: 4). However, SCANCON uses its comparative strength to retain workers in order to be prepared for an upturn:

> *"We were standing there also in the 80s without a single person who could take on the jobs when the jobs started to appear again. I guess top management learned something from that" (manager, District 1, quoted in Finnestrand 2012a: 5).*

The case studies thus reflect various configurations of contracting and value chains that generally follow transaction cost, but this calculation is tempered with the specific histories and traditions of actors' social and institutional environments.

3.3 Employment structures and conditions: Varieties of dual and fragmented labour markets

3.3.1 Flexible firms: The continuum of employees and subcontractors

As became evident from Section 3.2, construction companies have **permeable employment boundaries** and may alternatively insource and outsource particular tasks. In construction, the deployment of agency workers, one-person enterprises, foreign brigades and/or informal labour (depending on each country's labour market regulation) still serves to ensure numerical flexibility and to some extent "buffers" a company's own core employees from discontinuous employment (cf. Meardi et al. 2012). Nevertheless, construction value chains can be more or less relational or transactional, ranging from close collaborations with a selected group of specialist subcontractors to transactions with the lowest-cost labour force available. This depends on the cost structure of the project and the technical requirements and mostly follows a logic of transaction cost. The further down a value chain a contractor operates, the more likely it is that he relies on further fragmentation. It appears that **green builders in Belgium** prefer more relational contracts due to the higher demands of standards for energy-efficiency and insulations, which require some training of subcontractors.

> "ECOHOUSE prefers larger companies that, in the eyes of the Business Manager, display tokens of a solid management structure. *'We have to train our subcontractors themselves: however competent they may be in a given craft, keeping a structure air-tight requires a number of skills. It is not that difficult, but you have to take your time when making clear what is expected'*, says the Operations Director" (Van Peteghem et al. 2011d: 13).

TREEHOUSE sees the future of subcontracting in its segment of the market as generally more egalitarian than hierarchical:

> "TREEHOUSE calls this *working in construction teams*, implying that the various partners at a given site continuously communicate, if only to agree on the way the budget will be respected" (Van Peteghem et al. 2011c: 22).

This company also reports ongoing networks with ex-employees that allow for continuing the collaboration and shared experience:

> "When a high potential chooses to leave the company, he mostly opts for creating his own company as a self-employed. '*This last group always left in friendship: they sometimes even come back working for TREEHOUSE as a subcontractor. Or they purchase eco-friendly building materials from our subsidiary',* says the interviewed Project Manager" (Van Peteghem et al. 2011c: 13).

Similarly, Belgian MANOR managers talk about "side-contracting" work to other companies. With plastering, a central competency in green construction, the boundary of in-house work and outsourcing becomes clear:

> "MANOR's two own stucco-workers are preferably allocated to refurbishment jobs, (…) '*These are a rather delicate jobs that require considerable technical (finding solution to unforeseeable problems) and communicative (being able to speak with the customer) skills,'* says the Office Manager. *'Stucco-work in new constructions is rather straightforward: the quality standards are lower and the plasterers can work faster. Therefore, it often makes sense to subcontract these kinds of assignments'"* (Van Peteghem et al. 2011b: 8).

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

> *"Employ people? I am not crazy. (…) What do I do if there is no work? Or if there is a need for a special skill at the next job? You see. This is why one should not employ a worker directly. You are better off with a subcontractor" (owner of a small TERRA AUSTRALIS firm, Hungary, quoted in Tóth/Hosszú 2012c: 4).*

Two Hungarian comments illustrate firstly the transaction-cost-based alternative of hiring contractors versus "own" workers and then the spiral of social dumping this entails. A TERRA AUSTRALIS engineer sees the distinction mostly with regard to time pressures versus functional flexibility:

> *"One can get different types of work from a subcontractor and from an ordinary employee. If we are unable to pay a premium above the regular pay, employees are taking their time. They don't rush to work as hard as could be. They are living in a safety net, they don't have to rush for the next construction to maximise their income. But you need them also, because anytime there emerges a situation, when the customer asks a new thing, or there emerges an unforeseen problem and I can tell my people that they should do and that's it. If we would only use subcontractors, then every small change would require endless renegotiations of prices and coordination. With our employees we don't have to do this. I order them, and they do it. But a subcontractor rushes with the work. He knows that the earlier he finishes, the more contracts he could get. He could go on to the next construction site. I like this. Easier to keep the deadlines with subcontractors. What I like is the mixture of ordinary employees and subcontractors. You then get the advantages of both worlds. The good mixture is when you have half-half of your workforce of direct employees and subcontracted ones" (supervisor-engineer, Hungary, quoted in Tóth/Hosszú 2012c: 17).*

A similar pattern is reported in Norwegian NORSCON (Finnestrand 2012b: 7). In addition, TERRA AUSTRALIS' owner of Firm3 emphasises the cost versus quality trade-off. Squeezed by price-based competition, he has switched from a trust and quality based collaboration to transactions with a more desperate pool of candidates:

> *"Look, I have a circle of subcontractors, with whom I have been working for decades. The same guys with whom I worked in Germany. They are first class skilled workers. ... Normally I work with them. ... But if I won a competitive tender with an underpriced work, I could not turn to them. I could not pay them. (…) Then I subcontract the work for a brigade from East Hungary. You know, the further away they come, the cheaper they are. They are coming in the early morning in a car and they are happy to get any work to be able to feed their family. I don't like to work with workers from Budapest. They are so aware of their rights and they are not cheap. I do tend to like to work with guys coming from faraway villages and they don't know about anything. ... We agree at the beginning, if they do not do something well I will do not pay them a forint until they repair it. ... If I have more parallel construction works, I may need only to contract additionally a trustworthy good skilled worker to oversee and to instruct them" (owner of a TERRA AUSTRALIS firm, Hungary, quoted in Tóth/Hosszú 2012c: 8).*

In this way, employment strategies of some companies go well beyond the traditional distinction of a "high" or "low road" but need to navigate between different types of contracting.

3.3.2 Employment conditions

Construction mostly uses **full-time employment**, and flexibility is achieved through subcontracting (also involving agency workers in those countries where it is legal) and variably long working hours. Fixed-term contracts are an issue particularly in the Central and Eastern European countries, but traditionally seasonal work and recurring unemployment are characteristics of the sector. In some countries, they are addressed through paritarian funds compensating workers for particular losses of income.[12] The risk of **seasonal unemployment** consists in discontinuous income (increasing the pressure to work longer hours when employment is available), loss of skills and employability. Stakeholders, workers and researchers observe an **increasing segmentation** that distributes these risks unevenly, concentrating them on subcontractors and their employees, immigrants and other newcomers to the sector. However, even in those companies offering open-ended contracts, it is common to employ new hires on a fixed-term contract first, which works effectively like an extended probation period.

In Belgium, temporary contracts practically do not exist in construction due to the tight labour market. For periods of adverse weather, there is a distinct insurance system that pays workers compensation. In Norway, both large contractors predominantly use open-ended contracts (ca. 80% of employees) but regard temp agency work as an inroad into a

[12] http://www.paritarian-funds-construction.eu.

permanent contract that allows to test new workers' competence and performance first. In Bulgaria, small, quality-oriented ECOCONSTRUCTION has all its employees on open-ended contracts, but both BULCONSTRUCTION and GREENCONSTRUCTION use fixed-term contracts for at least half of their workers. They also place workers on unpaid leave if there is no sufficient work, with the downside that this practice does not allow them to receive unemployment benefit – and possibly even requires them to find informal work to tide them over.

Indeed, the risks of discontinuous employment have traditionally been based on a form of virtual security that is common in low-wage sectors: "Good", that is, reliable and competent builders and tradesmen can be confident to find another job if work is available in the relevant labour market or make ends meet by working informally. With the crisis and also the internationalisation of work in the sector in the 2000s, this increasingly requires international mobility with the negative impact on quality of life that this entails.

3.3.3 Working time

Working time in the investigated case studies appears to be **fairly regular**, typically starting at 7 or 8 a.m. and going on until 4 or 5 p.m. However, commutes to the building sites are added to that, and there is some seasonal and climatic variation. Especially in Bulgaria, work in the summer starts and finishes earlier, or there is a longer lunch break. Possibly because of the crisis, **overtime or weekend work** at the time of the case studies appears not to be a critical issue. It occurs infrequently, is mostly voluntary and in the more regulated economies is limited by collective agreements. In Belgium,

> "via collective agreement, a maximum of 130 additional work hours per calendar year is allowed, a ratio of maximum 1 hour per day, paid as regular working time. In practice, even this upper limit is considered to be all too strict, and Belgian building companies have the reputation easily to revert to undeclared work if supplementary working hours have to be performed" (Van Peteghem et al. 2011b: 20).

The practice of paying for overtime in cash is also reported (mostly indirectly, as a practice of competitors) from Hungary and Bulgaria. In Norwegian SCANCON, managers and employees observe different attitudes of different groups of workers with regard to overtime. Migrants tend to prefer working longer hours in return for long weekends that make it worthwhile to travel home to their families. However, this meets with objections by both managers and unionists:

> "Both the managers and the shop union argued that they should avoid this practice both because they wanted to follow laws and agreements and because they worried that long work hours and work days would jeopardize safety on construction sites" (Finnestrand 2012a: 6).

Indeed, fighting undeclared and informal work practices is comparably high on the agenda of sectoral stakeholders in Norway (Torvatn/Finnestrand 2011), hence we can expect that the practice occurs but is regarded as less legitimate.

3.3.4 Recruiting, staff turnover and human resources management

Recruitment in construction generally happens in a **networked** way. Hiring both employees and subcontractors, companies rely on previous experience and reputation or recommendations, and tend to hire workers or subcontractors with whom they have worked before. With new hires who often come through recommendations they may look at certificates but generally emphasise probation periods and foremen's or managers' impressions of a person's performance. Low- or unskilled workers are hired through personal contacts and family relationships as well. In Bulgarian ECOCONSTRUCTION, the brigade for rough construction is a family enterprise in itself. It consists of a group of Roma fathers, sons and cousins from a nearby village, who are recruited by their team leader and well appreciated for their work. Young recruits are supported by the company in completing their secondary education. However, with the increasing use of subcontractors and the lengthening of value chains, new subcontractors and companies come from further afar or abroad, and the flow of information partly becomes less reliable.

In Belgium and Bulgaria, managers complain about difficulties in recruitment since the young people employers would like to hire tend to prefer office jobs:

> *"What is left over, is only a small group of potential construction workers having limited capabilities (…)The only way out is either looking abroad and hiring migrant workers, or subcontracting as much as possible – which roughly boils down to the same, because most small enterprises that we subcontract to employ non-native builders as well" (business manager, ECOHOUSE, Belgium, quoted in Van Peteghem et al. 2011d: 17).*

Consequently, **turnover of key staff members** is seen as a serious risk in the Belgian companies, which is partly due to the pioneering role and know how in energy-efficient construction of the "green" companies. Large ECOHOUSE recruits workers in Poland itself by

> "sending a recruitment team to Poland, putting up a stand containing a mock building site and inviting a number of applicants that are asked to carry out some brick laying. The best ones are hired on the spot, brought over to Belgium where they are offered lodging in buildings owned by ECOHOUSE. '*At a later stage, some bring over their families and become regular immigrants. In the beginning, they do not master the language. We have one site manager that interprets. Some meetings are held in Polish and lead to instructions and texts in their own language'"* (Van Peteghem et al. 2011d: 17, quoting the ECOHOUSE manager).

In Bulgaria, this difficulty also applies to technical and engineering positions that still require on-site work. BULCONSTRUCTION reports that even attempts to train up-skilled workers have failed:

> *"... they do not want to work in the open, they prefer the office with the computer there. This is not the profession of construction engineer. One cannot be an engineer or designer if s/he has no practical experience. You need to know how things work out in the real world, at the site" (technical manager, Bulgaria, quoted in Peycheva et al. 2012a: 13).*

The company now recruits technical school graduates with different specialties and trains them in construction "by doing" under close supervision of a manager over six months – which was deemed a success. It is also involved in the Bulgarian Construction Chamber's initiatives to develop and improve training schemes.

Managers in well-known companies in their segment, such as Belgian TREEHOUSE, Norwegian SCANCON or Bulgarian ECONSTRUCTION, also find recruitment difficult but appear to do comparatively well with their local reputation as a good employer and a green image where that applies. There is apparently some mismatching of applicants and required skills involved, since these companies report a constant flow of applications. On the other hand, NORSCON is experiencing losses of workers and managers that appear to be related to the perception of senior management's lack of attention to the construction part of the business and a somewhat hierarchical company culture.

In Bulgaria and Hungary, workers may also leave for promises of higher incomes in other companies, but managers and workers report that some experience shadier practices there. BULCONSTRUCTION's manager thus decided to utilise these experiences to retain his staff when disappointed ex-workers came back:

> *"Better forgive a detractor to save many others from repeating the same mistake ... other employers refused to take them back to work, I made an exception because I want them to share with their colleagues how they were cheated by other companies, because if I tell them the same story they would never believe it" (manager, Bulgaria, quoted in Peycheva et al. 2012a: 15).*

3.3.5 Gender and ethnicity: Segmentation and vulnerability

Construction across Europe remains a predominantly **male sector**, with some women in administration and HR and a few in specialist or engineering positions. In Belgium, the idea of female colleagues causes some giggles among workers, and interviewees refer to the generally macho culture on building sites, the "hard and dirty work", the absence of toilets and washroom facilities and the habit of working bare-chested during the summer (Van Peteghem et al. 2011b:10). A Bulgarian manager articulates the probable consensus among workers:

> *"If a woman wants to work in the sector she has to be really strong and self-assuring. I remember when I was a young worker what kind of treatment I was getting, let alone a woman" (BULCONSTRUCTION manager, Bulgaria, quoted in Peycheva et al. 2012a: 11).*

Consequently, the company's single woman site manager is experienced and well-respected.

With regard to **ethnicity**, we see an increasing influx of migrants in each country's construction labour market that is in line with the respective migration pattern. In countries known as origins of migration such as Hungary and Bulgaria, there is also immigration for instance by Ukrainians (who may be part of the Hungarian-speaking minority in Ukraine). Indeed, the segmentation and fragmentation observed in the labour market has a strong ethnic dimension.

In Belgian ECOHOUSE, the recruitment of migrants responds to a perceived shortage of skilled construction workers in the labour market. This has brought ECOHOUSE to recruit young unskilled workers directly from Poland, offering them low-cost accommodation, and looking towards Romania and Bulgaria for future recruitment. MANOR has about one third of migrants among its builders, most of whom are Moroccan. Two Moroccans are plasterers and a slightly separate team for the more difficult jobs. Managers and team leaders (one of whom is Moroccan himself) say there are no difficulties apart from an occasional lack of language skills, and Ramadan fasting is seen as a challenge:

> *"The output is clearly lower then, in the cold season as well as in summertime. Having to work hard with your hands, and not being allowed to eat or drink: it should be terrible. It ain't sensible" (manager, quoted in Van Peteghem et al. 2011b: 10).*

TREEHOUSE sees fluency in Dutch as a key requirement and at the time of the interviews had no migrant workers.

In Bulgarian companies, there are some Turkish and Roma minority workers who are well respected for being skilled and hardworking. Roma concentrate mostly in unskilled functions, except for ECOCONSTRUCTION's rough construction brigade of very experienced workers who are highly valued for the quality of their work.

In the Norwegian case studies, the labour market segmentation is outlined most clearly. In Norway, agency workers who mostly are migrants from Sweden, Latvia or Poland, usually work in their own teams, which minimises the need for coordination between Norwegian employed and foreign agency workers. Migrants' more precarious employment (through agencies) and everyday discrimination overlap.

In the NORSCON case, employees are clearly aware of the company's attempt to replace their employees with agency workers, which does not improve relations:

> *"[Concrete worker:] They want the Poles in order to save money.*
>
> *[Interviewer:] What do you think about it?*
>
> *[Concrete worker:] It is a scary development. It is fair enough that they are cheaper per hour, but they hardly know what they're doing. They make more mistakes, so we have to fix it afterwards. And it's not so easy to plan a work week with somebody who speaks a foreign language" (interview section quoted in Finnestrand 2012b: 10).*

SCANCON workers experienced the same sentiments, with Polish workers feeling partly patronised, partly treated as "second-rate" (Finnestrand 2012a). Language was experienced by workers as part of the problem, and also a health and safety risk emerging

from communication problems, but the combination of unequal employment contracts and remuneration, Norwegians' suspicion of getting undercut by the foreign colleagues led to team structures becoming more exclusive and exacerbated migrant workers' sense of being treated as "second-best".

3.4 Wages and payment system

3.4.1 Hourly rates and piece rates

The construction sector has an extensive tradition of **piece rate** remuneration in varied combination with **hourly rates**, which effectively become the minimum rate. In Belgium, workers are paid according to the sectoral collective agreement with few extras or bonuses. In April 2012, hourly wages for unskilled labour were between EUR 12.97 and EUR 15.61. For Norway, we do not have concrete wage information. At Hungarian STONEWORK, blue-collar employees earn ca. EUR 500 a month, which is ca. 20% above the industry average. Engineers receive ca. EUR 830. In Bulgaria, the collectively agreed minimum basic salary for a qualified construction worker in 2011 was at Leva 570 (EUR 285), for a low-skilled one Leva 360 (EUR 180), above the national minimum wage of Leva 240. This rate increases by 1% for each year of tenure. BULCONSTRUCTION pays between Leva 700 and 1,000, compared to ca. Leva 1,000 as the lowest salary before the crisis. In the Bulgarian cases, hourly wages are negotiated individually, based on qualification and performance. At GREENCONSTRUCTION in particular, workers are discouraged from talking about their wages. In the cases investigated, workers also appreciate the reliability of payments – and workers in Hungary and Bulgaria tell stories about others' unsuccessful trade-offs of this security for higher pay promises which may not materialise.

It appears that wages of **foremen** and brigade leaders often are not much higher than those of skilled workers. In Norway, foremen are part of the salaried group and paid by the hour. In Belgium, they receive 120% of the highest wage bracket, and in Hungarian STONEWORK, they are generally regarded as "informal leaders". Nevertheless, there is higher pay and they receive a larger share of premiums that are generally based on the price of the work. This amounts to some 20-30% higher wages than an ordinary skilled worker would receive (Tóth/Hosszú 2012d).

Performance-related pay varies from collectively agreed piece rates to premiums driven by the market or by management decision. At both Norwegian SCANCON and NORSCON, construction workers are generally paid piece rates, and the actual rates are negotiated with the union on the level of each project. Manager and union representative together assign "time factors" to each job according to its complexity. For workers, this is more favourable than hourly rates in most cases. However, agency workers are generally kept out of the piece rate system, working at the lower hourly rates. The actual practice varies between the two companies. At SCANCON, waiting times, meetings and other non-productive times are kept outside of the piece rate. In NORSCON workers feel unfairly treated, complaining that activities outside of their control are factored into the piece rate. This has been part of a long-standing conflict of carpenters with management:

> *"They try to work against the piecework rates that we try to reach and they can make things difficult for us. (…) They try to give us the responsibility for things that are not our problem. We will not spend time taking in building materials, it should just be there when we need it" (carpenter, Norway, quoted in Finnestrand 2012b: 7f).*

Managers in turn complained about practices of go-slow and absenteeism.

At Hungarian STONEWORK, premiums up to double the hourly wage are paid if the price of the project allows it and/or the work needs to be finished in a hurry. In the Bulgarian cases, there appears to be some more negotiation with the teams. At a BULCONSTRUCTION project with a large surface and long time horizon, a brigade negotiated "payment for a square meter":

> *"At first we discussed together with the boss who is enough of a tolerant person to understand this point of view and he is ready to talk with us at any time. We told him our idea to work on 'a payment for a square meter' basis and he said he would discuss this proposal with our foreman. There was a proposal of both parts ... and finally we reached a final agreement [compromise]" (worker, Bulgaria, quoted in Peycheva et al. 2012a: 21).*

At both STONEWORK and in the Bulgarian cases, brigades themselves decide on the distribution of the premium.

> *"We know within the team/brigade how every one of us works and what the capacity of each and every one are. So we know more or less precisely who will get what at the end of the day. Let's say four or five of us work at 100% so they get 100%, others work at 90% and that is it. Everyone knows that from the very beginning of the work" (qualified worker at GREENCONSTRUCTION, Bulgaria, quoted in Kirov et al. 2012: 15).*

3.4.2 Benefits

Some companies offer additional benefits to workers. Providing work clothes and shoes is common practice across Europe. At ECOCONSTRUCTION, workers may buy apartments built by the company at preferential prices. BULCONSTRUCTION pays its workers a benefit of Leva 1,000 (= EUR 500) for the birth of their first child, Leva 2,000 (= EUR 1,000) for the second, and a wage supplement of Leva 50 or 100 (EUR 25 or 50) per month. Norwegian SCANCON is a publicly held company that also offers shares to its employees. Some 20% of total shares are owned by employees and more than half of them are shareholders. Belgian TREEHOUSE started out as a cooperative partnership in which in the beginning, every employee was a partner but later, workers did not want to become partners.

> *"Many, if not most, of blue-collar workers desire a more neutral relationship with the employer, and are distinctly reluctant to show a high commitment" (TREEHOUSE partner, Belgium, quoted in Van Peteghem et al. 2011c: 19f).*

3.4.3 On-site work

Since construction is by definition work on the site, it requires some mobility, and this is organised and compensated in different ways. Workers often face **long commuting time**s (or improvised accommodation) – resulting in extensive work-related hours that reduce time for other activities, family obligations and recreation. The **piece rates and bonuses** for performance in time-critical situations ensure workers' interests in this mode of working. However, they may cause conflict within and between work teams and shift the risks of bad planning onto workers.

Generally, **car-pooling** to reach distant sites and sharing temporary accommodation are common practices in construction. Remuneration for travel times and company contributions to expenses have been **reduced** in Belgian, Hungarian and Bulgarian companies. At Belgian ECOHOUSE, commutes to work used to be paid as regular working times a few years ago. However, as the company expanded its activities regionally, (and traffic became denser), this was abolished.

> *"'At that moment, this was acceptable because the majority of the building sites were in the proximity of the headquarters. But we had to change that because the distances grew greater, and due to traffic jams we couldn't afford anymore to pay all these hours spent in traffic'*, says the Operations Director. That boiled down to a considerable decrease in income for the people involved, and eventually led to the loss of a substantial number of blue-collar workers" (Van Peteghem et al. 2011d: 22).

The company now pays a mobility premium for long commutes. Team leaders use a company lorry and cell phone and are also responsible for deliveries of building materials. For them, the hours spent returning to the warehouse and loading the lorry are paid working hours, which all in all amount to long working days. At TREEHOUSE, who also operate in the region, the traditional practice is for workers to meet at headquarters to go to their respective sites, exchanging some information and conversation at the time. However, this practice is gradually eroding as workers live farther away from the headquarters and increasingly prefer to drive to their site directly (Van Peteghem et al. 2011c: 10). In Bulgaria and Hungary, most construction workers come from villages in the country and normally commute weekly – or, like migrants in Norway, work through each alternate weekend, welcoming the extra pay. Companies based in Sofia or Budapest used to pay for hostel rooms or apartments in the capital for some workers (with workers paying for the running cost), also providing luncheon vouchers and kilometre allowances, but generally abolished these benefits in the crisis.

3.5 Work organisation: Men at work

3.5.1 Job content

By definition, construction work is **teamwork** and the core unit on the site is the **"brigade"**, which may have two to twelve members and is mostly a stable group but sometimes consists of a smaller core team and workers that are attached if necessary. When outsourcing or using staffing agencies, companies often hire entire brigades as

well. Hierarchies on a building site tend to be comparatively flat, and small and medium-sized construction companies do not have large administrative units either. Storehouses or workshops to pre-fabricate modules are also parts of building companies. Site managers, on larger sites also technical managers, negotiate with the foremen of each brigade of own employees or subcontractors, and **daily meetings** serve to distribute work. Planning and logistics are obviously critical, and workers, through the various piece rate systems, have a central interest in smooth workflows. In addition to work meetings on the building site, SCANCON and TREEHOUSE have regular staff meetings to exchange information across projects.

> *"It seems a rather unimpressive detail in the work organisation, but the absence of basic information and the uncertainty on the things to be done on site are a major source of work stress for builders" (HR manager, TREEHOUSE, Belgium, quoted in Van Peteghem et al. 2011c: 17).*

Modes of work organisation, levels of discretion and control vary with the size of both the project and the respective company and the amount of specialisation. A subcontractor of Norwegian NORSCON puts it aptly:

> *"You notice a big difference between major serious companies such as NORSCON, and smaller projects with smaller contractors. Smaller contractors have not as much focus on internal control systems and health and safety. At the same time a small project is smoother because it is more straightforward and you do not have to go through many systems in order to make a decision" (subcontractor within electro, Norway, quoted in Finnestrand 2012b: 13).*

A typical organisation at one larger building site is represented by Bulgarian GREENCONSTRUCTION. A project manager and three technical managers supervise both their employees and the subcontractors. Each manager is responsible for one zone of the site, and the requisite operations in that zone. Work starts each morning with a daily briefing of all workers and subcontractors by the technical managers. Technical managers and some administrators also gather at the end of each workday to plan the next, based on the detailed documentation prepared by the company (Kirov et al. 2012: 16f).

Quite contrasting types of work organisation are observed when comparing two companies within Belgian green construction (cf. Ravn et al. 2012): TREEHOUSE and ECOHOUSE. Both companies have in common the reliance of green building on technical standards, in particular a series of airtightness tests that buildings need to conform to be energy-efficient. This means a particular attention to processes and procedures, but these can be achieved in alternative ways: through a craft-like model of skill upgrading or through standardisation. TREEHOUSE has four project managers who liaise with customers and oversee each construction site and six team leaders supervising teams of 2-4 workers. The project managers were only introduced a few years ago – before, one of the three company partners directly supervised team leaders. They give close attention to work preparation, have regular staff meetings, continuous training and also performance reviews:

> *"Control is nevertheless not the preferred way to get things properly done. We try to motivate our blue-collars to do things right out of their own conviction. During the early stages of the company's existence this was not too difficult. The pioneering spirit still reigned, and the few collaborators we had at the time were the result of a strict selection process and there were constantly close contacts amongst each other. But a few years ago I realised that it was no longer possible to continue that way" (partner/manager, Belgium, quoted in Van Peteghem et al. 2011c: 14f).*

Belgian ECOHOUSE with its clear focus on standardised products and procedures uses management techniques borrowed from lean manufacturing, which is fairly uncommon for the construction sector: production and resource planning, formal organisation charts and structured meetings. However, even ECOHOUSE has no dedicated HR manager or department. A particular focus of its lean management is on logistics to cut down waiting times on the sites – with the side effect of limiting workers' access to "left over" materials for their own projects and moonlighting jobs.

However, in all cases workers emphasise that there is a **generic uncertainty** in building that inevitably requires some **discretion**, at least about "how" the work is performed. A brigade leader at STONEWORK puts it like this:

> *"No two kinds of work are the same. You always have something. A piece of prepared stone is broken by accident, a wall is not properly prepared by the previous contractor, there is a sudden rain, no electricity ... anything could happen. You have to be always ready to solve a problem. This is why I love this work. You have to be innovative. Ready to troubleshoot" (brigade leader, Hungary, quoted in Tóth/Hosszú 2012d: 16).*

In BULCONSTRUCTION, discretion is located in between technical standards and workers' experience:

> *"We are often approached by the technical manager and asked: 'How do you intend to do that and that?' .... I usually answer with arguments like: 'I am going to start with that and proceed with that because I believe the result would be better, or I will do my work without smudging and staining the premises.' There are always several approaches to a certain task and if there is enough understanding and trust the results are much better. On the contrary if there is a rigid approach and you are told how to do every single detail of your work and in what consequence then results are not that good" (BULCONSTRUCTION worker, Bulgaria, quoted in Peycheva et al. 2012a: 25).*

3.5.2 The role of foremen and site managers

Even and especially in a cost-driven, fragmented world of construction, the role of middle managers, foremen, team leaders and site managers is becoming increasingly central and complex. TERRA AUSTRALIS' contractors look for subcontractors and brigades who bring their own foremen, tightly supervise their people, and are likely to be competent partners in the ongoing game of negotiation and renegotiation. In Norway, Belgium and

Bulgaria as well, subcontractors or agency workers are also hired as brigades. Foremen and team leaders are responsible for applying detailed plans and translating them into work assignments for their teams. They often provide their teams with the necessary building materials as well. However, the division of labour and administrative tasks among foremen, team leaders and middle managers varies, and the position sometimes, for instance in Hungary is not formally acknowledged or remunerated. At Belgian MANOR, team leaders are just responsible for material deliveries but do not have administrative duties. In Norwegian SCANCON, there is an elected function of coordination, the so-called "team bas", who takes over parts of a team leader's function, while foremen are part of the salaried employee group:

> *"The 'bas' is elected by the group. The 'bas' works physically as much as us on some of the projects. So he's a working fellow who writes hours, wages, sends messages, trying to calculate materials, set up small project schedules and trying to place people on some of the projects. He must be little ahead and directing jobs for all who are there. The larger the team, the more planning for the 'bas'" (construction worker, Norway, quoted in Finnestrand 2012a: 8).*

Even in craft-oriented TREEHOUSE, the role of team leaders is changing and gaining importance. A few years ago, a team leader was less of a supervisor and more of a *primus inter pares*. Increasingly, the job is characterised by communication and meetings – to the surprise of experienced blue-collar workers in a construction environment.

> *"I notice that I gradually do less and less manual work. First thing in the morning for me is helping to get the various team members started up, and as some of them are still relatively inexperienced, this can take up the whole morning (…) As a former blue-collar, this makes me uneasy on occasions, but the boss says I'm doing all right" (team leader, Belgium, quoted in Van Peteghem et al. 2011c: 9).*

At TREEHOUSE as in the other cases, team leaders are recruited internally and carpenters with potential are rotated through different tasks to enrich their knowledge and enable them to take over that function.

Still, leadership and middle management roles in construction require a certain **hands-on approach**. A concrete worker at NORSCON, where generally management are felt to be too remote, talks about his expectations:

> *"There is nothing better than that we see the management at the site [Interviewer:] Why? [Concrete worker:] You cannot build a building from the office. (...) We get quicker decisions if there is a problem. (…) then they can say 'now we do such and such', rather than for everyone to sit and send e-mail to each other" (interview section, quoted in Finnestrand 2012b: 14).*

However, the manager in question at a site with very tight schedules reported a 50-to-60-hour work week, with administrative work and meetings on top of the work on the site, and was suffering from sleeping troubles and eventually changed his job. Generally, with logistics and administrative duties, and meetings at the end of the work days, team

leaders and managers generally have a risk of long work days and in other places as well report some 12-hour shifts.

3.5.3 Increasing time pressure

Apart from those cases affected massively by the crisis and some underemployment, such as STONEWORK or BULCONSTRUCTION, **time pressure is increasing** on construction sites. As we have seen, subcontractors are often used because they need to and can work faster:

> *"If I am cutting five days of work here, five days there, and I am ready earlier with the whole project, and I could go to the next construction. The money runs quicker and the same money generates more turnover, more return" (owner of Firm3 in TERRA AUSTRALIS, Hungary, quoted in Tóth/Hosszú 2012c: 11).*

Nevertheless, this acceleration increases the **need for quality control** by site managers. Work may be modified and renegotiated through verbal contractual amendments, or it may be rejected and another contractor paid to complete the work – all of which makes delays as well as budgets less predictable.

"Green" building also generates time pressures. Building with wood, the specialty of TREEHOUSE, requires tight schedules for particular work steps such as roofing in order to avoid moisture. This also limits the possibility of teams to absorb new workers. ECOHOUSE has increased its time pressures through the use of more standardised materials and parts and just-in-time logistics:

> "Where, up to a few years ago, the putting up of a carcase structure (including the roof truss) took several weeks and the workers involved had a considerable decision latitude in planning the various tasks, the carcase phase now lasts less than one week, and the various tasks to be performed rapidly follow up each other – again highlighting the growing importance of the central planning department" (Van Peteghem et al. 2011d: 20).

Whether this pressure makes itself felt in workers' quality of work is a matter of management. Just-in-time delivery of semi-finished construction elements and automation also limit the physical workload, and tighter planning avoids the material and equipment shortages at the construction sites that builders apparently hate. Hence, in well-managed sites, standardisation can contribute to a steadying of workflows that avoids work peaks and rushes – but then, deepened divisions of labour and work with unfamiliar subcontractors renders work more unpredictable.

3.5.4 Health

Across Europe, the construction sector has traditionally been affected by **high accident and injury figures**. Partly, this is due to the "nature" of the work because of working outdoors, working at considerable heights and working in adverse weather conditions. As the manager of ECOCONSTRUCTION puts it:

> *"Just to give an example – this building is going to weigh about 5,000 tons. These 5,000 tons in most construction companies would have to go through the hands of the workers. In our company we are trying to introduce as much machinery and mechanize the processes as much as possible ..." (manager, Bulgaria, quoted in Peycheva et al. 2011b: 16).*

Partly, mounting work intensity, a growing division of labour across companies and increasingly diverse and multilingual work environments exacerbate the problem. However, the sector and its stakeholders have also long experience in setting and maintaining standards for health and safety – also in the interest of fair competition.

All case study companies report that they follow **legal requirements**: workers take part in regular health briefings, companies provide working clothes and shoes and have safety representatives, construction sites have health and safety plans. They also use the occupational health service for screenings – however, Bulgarian companies complain about the somewhat lacklustre engagement of the service whereas Norwegian builders at NORSCON say that the safety procedures are "a bit too much" (Finnestrand 2012b: 12). At Norwegian SCANCON, all construction workers attend the 40-hour health & safety (H&S) course that is usually designed for H&S representatives. Due to the lack of observation in the case studies, we cannot say what difference these procedures make in practice. However, ECOHOUSE report comparably high rates of accidents that have been decreasing since 2006, and NORSCON has high sickness absences – which are ascribed to the ongoing conflict between carpenters and management.

Many case study companies and workers express **concerns over being able to work beyond age 50**. For bricklayers in particular, this appears to be unlikely, and in Belgium, they tend to retire early for health reasons. Technicians such as plumbers and electricians are likelier to stay on until retirement age. There are a few options to redeploy health-impacted workers, for example in warehouses or workshops.

The use of machinery, in particular of lifting systems, makes a difference on strain, as a worker at SCANCON reports:

> *"Lars and I have installed all the windows in the building here. And I have also worked with the windows here all alone because I've got a skateboard, so I picked up the windows and rolled them. We had a machine with suction cups, so I just steered with the sticks and controlled it. I lifted them up and pushed them in, and he installed them. We installed the windows all day and we were not tired at all when we got home. It is absolutely amazing. SCANCON is good at providing us with tools and machines" (construction worker, Norway, quoted in Finnestrand 2012a: 10).*

Green construction, on balance, may also have a positive impact: On the one hand, windows and doors used for energy-efficient building tend to be heavier (Van Peteghem et al. 2011d: 21), but on the other hand, the use of prefabricated elements and the steadying of workflows through standardisation omits some risk. In addition, "green" materials containing less solvents or mineral fibres also remove some health risks (Van Peteghem et al. 2011c: 16; cf. Kirov et al. 2012).

3.5.5 Greening and standardisation

The growing importance of energy-efficient construction is particularly driven by European policy. Thus, the **EU Directive 2002/91/EC on the energy performance of buildings**[13] requires Member States to apply minimum standards for the energy performance of new and existing buildings. Apart from the standard certificates and procedures concerning quality and health and safety at work, green construction requires **additional standards and certification**. Bulgarian GREENCONSTRUCTION – one of the few specialists in Bulgaria – has its buildings certified in compliance with the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) standards. This is a globally recognised design certificate for construction and exploitation of green buildings that addresses environmental concerns, financial return on investment and the implementation of health and safety rules and procedures well above the national standard (Kirov et al. 2012: 5). Such certifications require considerable documentation work, for which GREENCONSTRUCTION employs a specialist.

Generally, greening itself does not change the job content of actual construction much, according to the managers of specialist companies in Belgium and Bulgaria, apart from requiring more meticulous work and different materials, which fits in with an increasing importance of following norms and standards in general (Van Peteghem et al. 2011b: 12). The main challenge appears to be airtightness to achieve energy efficiency, which requires different mechanisms for checking one's work:

> *"When you apply traditional building techniques, you automatically feel that you're doing things right. But putting in high-performance insulation or making a roof lining airtight is not so straightforward. You only realise you committed an error when performance tests, e.g., on the insulation quality, fail. And then you have to tear down some elements and start all over again" (business manager of MANOR, Belgium, quoted in Van Peteghem 2012b: 14f).*

In some of the "green" companies, greening amounts to an **increased standardisation** of work – firstly because it is implemented through new standards for results and processes. Secondly, it may imply the use of more and more complex prefabricated parts that leave less to workers' discretion but reduce the work done on the site. Belgian TREEHOUSE makes increased use of its central workshop but retains its craft-based approach. In Belgian ECOHOUSE, prefabrication has led to an almost Taylorist specialisation:

[13] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2003:001:0065:0065:EN:PDF.

> "Up to now, every brick layer and electrician did his part of the tiring and dusty job of realising grooves in brick walls for all kinds of ducts by means of a grinding disk. Recently, this job was exclusively allocated to a few workers, who move from site to site and do nothing else but working with the grinding disk. This job is now considered as a specialist function, and specifically rewarded – but you hardly can call this job enrichment" (Van Peteghem et al. 2011d: 15).

For GREENCONSTRUCTION, the situation is complicated since the standard and its procedures and technologies are "imported" and somewhat less related to the skills of local builders:

> *"Well we face certain difficulties because we are trying to make people work the way we want and some of them believe they have enough skills and experience to work on their own. This is a requirement imposed on us by a foreign company which represents ….. So the construction technology is also imported. We follow instructions: sequence, materials, instruments. All the information is there, we just have to put it into practice ... The workers are getting used to it because they are monitored all the time and detailed instructions are given" (technical manager, Bulgaria, quoted in Kirov et al. 2012: 26).*

GREENCONSTRUCTION is also the only case where investigators note a negative impact of green building on working conditions and pay: Workers are more tightly monitored to comply with the LEED standard, and since they are paid by piece rates, more complex construction directly decreases their wages. A more adequate way of measuring performance has not yet been found.

3.6 Working cultures and norms

Working cultures in construction appear to go beyond work in a narrow sense since construction workers also share a certain **lifestyle**: Long commutes, car pooling and sharing accommodation during the week play a part when construction sites are remote. Some discontinuity of employment (which may require temporary migration or be compensated by informal work or work on workers' own or their families' houses) is also a common experience. The role of brigades is central, and the common piece rates and premiums that in some cases are distributed by the team create a sense of being "in it together" but may also render teams exclusive and wary of newcomers (Finnestrand 2012a). "Fun at work" and a certain hands-on management style are also appreciated by builders across cases. Still, each case study company has their own specific working culture.

Belgian TREEHOUSE started out as an "alternative" or "collective" company and practices a distinct mixture of democratic and professionalised participation. There are monthly meetings across sites and the company has also conducted an employee survey and SWOT[14] analysis.

[14] Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats.

> *"We wanted to do it better than regular companies (…) To us, being customer friendly and going about decently with our staff have always been our two basic assumptions. We were never in it for the big money: in the first years, we even definitely underestimated the importance of cost-efficiency. (…) The words 'should' and 'must' are hardly heard here" (business manager, Belgium, quoted in Van Peteghem et al. 2011c:19f).*

Still, top management experience the work and participation overload that is typical of "alternative" enterprises. They notice that recently hired carpenters do not necessarily buy into the culture and have a more instrumental approach to their jobs. Nevertheless, managers continue to see themselves as service providers to their teams.

Hungarian STONEWORK, the remainder of a socialist company bought by its management in the 1990s and struggling with massive downsizing and the ambition to maintain its standards, is a different community that can be characterised as "holding on together":

> *"This has been a community for ages. I am 65. The co-owner and managing director is 70. The chief engineer is 77. Most people have been working here for decades. I am coming to work every day because we are a community. We have worked together for ages. I come tomorrow because they need me. We are old colleagues. We are upholding this profession, this firm. They need me. I need them. We are in one boat" (CEO/owner, Hungary, quoted in Tóth/Hosszú 2012d: 11).*

Similarly, at BULCONSTRUCTION with its downsized workforce of generalists, long-term familiarity among workers and site managers generate this togetherness in adverse circumstances.

At the other extreme, the fragmentation of work and employment in the sector in Hungary in particular is mirrored in an almost callously transactional view of the employment relationship. The TERRA AUSTRALIS contractor says about the new kind of subcontractors he hires:

> *"How they make their living out of that money? (…) Not my business. I do pay for them at the end of the day, provided that they did the work correctly, and I don't care what and how they do. They come, I agree with their leader on the work and on the price, and at the end of the day, if I accept their work, I pay what we have agreed. If they don't do the right work, they don't get a forint, or they have to deconstruct what they did and re-construct how I want. How they live? It is enough for them? I don't care about this. They did accept the work, that' it. ... How to pay tax, social security out of such a low income? That is their business. They have to deal with the tax office, not me. ... many of them are too stupid to be able to do the paperwork. But that is their life and not mine" (contractor, Hungary, quoted in Tóth/Hosszú 2102c: 18).*

Larger companies may have more elaborate and detached management structures. NORSCON in particular appears to suffer from a certain detachment of upper management, which concentrates strains on site managers (several of whom left the

company). For example, the company reserved benefits such as free gym memberships and barbecues for its upper echelon – which was not appreciated by workers who commented that "*they were lucky if they were given an hour off to eat cake and celebrate that the construction project was completed*" (workers, Norway, quoted in Finnestrand 2012b: 14).

3.7 Skills and development: From craft to what?

3.7.1 Skills and qualifications

In many countries, construction has traditionally had quite established schemes of **vocational training and apprenticeships** that are being continuously developed and adapted. In line with its craft-based traditions, **"learning by doing"** either within or outside a formal apprenticeship, is emphasised in nearly all companies.

Sector experts observe a **variety of challenges**:

- a skills shortage due to the sector's limited attractiveness for skilled young people while older ones retire,
- a mismatch of training content and practical needs, balancing general skills and specialisms,
- introducing new content in a sector described as conservative,
- and most importantly, the question of the distribution of cost and responsibility for training in the face of lengthening value chains and fragmented careers of builders (cf. European Commission 2012).

Generally, the traditional skills and competencies in construction are complemented by **skills of accommodation and coping**: being able to handle hard work and to work in adverse weather conditions, being able to work in small teams but also independently, to work safely in high-risk environments, adhere to standards and improvise, coping with long distances from home and somewhat improvised accommodation, and so on.

In Belgium, Bulgaria and Hungary, managers see difficulties with the respective training systems. In a fragmented industry, a collective good such as a skill base is increasingly eroded and managers regard the training offered by vocational training schools and technical colleges as little relevant for practice. In Hungary in particular, a vicious circle is observed. Comprehensive skill and competence is only ascribed to older workers, who are gradually leaving the labour market. New hires in a cost-driven market have fewer skills and less experience, and conditions in the sector are unlikely to attract talented people. In addition, under the time pressure that is observed in subcontracted work in particular (but not exclusively), the time to ensure inexperienced workers' and newcomers' learning is simply not there. Hence, even a training-intensive, craft-oriented pioneer such as Belgian TREEHOUSE faces some constraints. The company sees a long in-house training period as inevitable, and offers continuous training using self-developed training materials, which in its segment of the market is necessary.

Still,

> *"contrarily to the past, it is so busy that the company begins to cut back on training and education. Things have to go faster, and this applies to the training process as well" (team leader, Belgium, quoted in Van Peteghem et al. 2011c: 19).*

Predictably, it is the larger companies that are well-embedded in their institutional environments, such as Norwegian SCANCON, that still invest in training during working time; SCANCON also runs its own "academy". However, Bulgarian ECOCON-STRUCTION can also be cited as exemplary, since it invests at a lower level: young recruits in the Roma rough construction brigade are supported to complete their secondary school education on paid working time.

In the same company and some others that aim for higher standardisation, most training occurs on the management level. Companies relying on "cheap labour" opt for higher standardisation and tighter controls rather than investing into their skill base (Tóth/Hosszú 2012d). In Belgium, the choice of vocational training in construction is often the result of an unsuccessful school career, leaving the sector with somewhat frustrated and unmotivated recruits in managers' view. For the same reason, managers are sceptical about the possibilities of the social economy for providing training and labour market entry. They would prefer direct subsidies to employers to hire unemployed workers.

Even MANOR's office manager, who used to be a teacher of woodwork to the unemployed, has his opinions on real-life learning:

> *"These people [graduates of woodworking courses for the unemployed] mostly find a job easily, but they have one weak point: they are particularly good at proceeding with woodworking machines, but still have a long way to go when you want to call them in at the construction sites. There, manual labour, including working with hand-held equipment, is paramount; and you shouldn't forget that 80 to 90% of the timberwork is done on site. These skills they can only learn whilst working at a construction site" (office manager, Belgium, quoted in Van Peteghem et al. 2011b:14).*

As a result,

> *"we have to look everywhere to find a good applicant (…) Things have changed. Earlier, you still found capable persons who, for one reason or another, were not allowed to go to school, but had a decent intellectual level. This is a basic requirement: you have to be smart when you want to work in the construction sector" (business manager at MANOR, Belgium, quoted in Van Peteghem et al. 2011b: 9).*

For this reason, experienced generalists are still and increasingly sought after: BULCON-STRUCTION and STONEWORK, with their consolidation strategy, seek to retain the most general skilled and experienced workers who are most efficient at handling smaller sites.

Workers also see a need to develop more generalised skills:

> *"Obviously we needed to re-train and acquire new skills, so when one function was not in demand we could perform others" (worker, Bulgaria, quoted in Peycheva et al. 2012a: 11).*

A SCANCON worker observes an increasing demand on workers to plan ahead:

> *"It is not necessarily most important that you are able to make the ceiling lists look extremely neat. It is as important that you have the ability to look ahead and manage to stay ahead and prevent stop in production. In any case, in the larger companies like us it's the production that counts. You must make sure that you always have everything you need. Stop in the production is bad business for yourself and for your company. We have skilled 'bases' that are trying to look ahead, but there are limits for how much he can do" (construction worker, Norway, quoted in Finnestrand 2012a: 11).*

Opinions on the influence of the "greening" of construction on skill requirements vary as much as company strategies. On the one hand, workers need to work to more exacting standards and must learn to handle new materials and technologies. Insulation workers have to refine their techniques and work with new materials. Some "new jobs" and functions are emerging such as the installation of solar panel systems, energy recovery systems, etc. – which in line with current tendencies in the sector may be handled by more or less dependent subcontractors rather than new employees. On the other hand, as the ECOHOUSE architect comments,

> *"for the basic construction jobs, like roof workers or bricklayers, the modifications are not at all dramatic. It boils down to working somewhat more methodically and accurately. Once they get the hang of it, workers can continue proceeding as autonomously as before" (architect, Belgium, quoted in Van Peteghem et al. 2011d: 24f).*

Hence, it appears most likely that green construction skills will need to be acquired and developed in the context of existing developments in a sector that generally observes considerable needs for improving training, skill bases and innovative capacities in the face of adverse developments such as fragmentation of employment and internationalisation.

3.7.2 Careers and perspectives

Construction has traditionally been an industry attracting newcomers to national or regional labour markets, offering men from rural regions or immigrants access to (more or less) regular employment, with considerable value set on experience. Access to skills and careers within the sector or transitions into industrial work thus were possible. Vice versa, in Bulgaria and other post-socialist countries in the 1990s, companies still found an influx of workers from other occupations and sectors that were suffering through the transformation of the economy. Indeed, a reservoir of smart but not necessarily academic people is currently missed in the sector. The ones who are present in the sector, both autodidacts and formally skilled workers, apparently have comparatively good prospects

of becoming foremen. These positions are generally recruited internally. In the Bulgarian and Belgian cases in particular, we are observing some impressive careers. In BULCONSTRUCTION, a team leader with a woodworking background says:

> *"I started as an apprentice in finishing works ... starting from the lowest position because then there were such vacancies I grew very fast in the profession, but of course I needed to spend a certain time at each position to prove that I am capable of being a foreman ... you cannot start right away as a foreman and receive such a high salary ... So the first 4-5 months I was an apprentice then got promoted into journeyman. After another five months I became second degree journeyman ... One year after that I started on the foreman position ... by that time I was receiving the salary equal to my status. So I grew quite fast to the top level workers in the company ... After that I was team leader and group leader depending on the need and the type of construction work that needed to be performed" (team leader, Bulgaria, quoted in Peycheva et al. 2012a: 17)*

Foremen need to be able to read technical documentation and construction plans and to have gained some experience. At GREENCONSTRUCTION, skilled workers outline the requirements:

> *"It is important to be able and to know how to read technical documentation: plans, diagrams, drawings because each site is unique in terms of design and technical requirements. At one construction site you might be able to read the documents but at the other if they are more complicated or just different. So you must have the experience of at least two – three construction sites, so that you can compare the different systems and requirements" (qualified worker, Bulgaria, quoted in Kirov et al. 2012: 11).*

3.8 Industrial relations and representation

Social dialogue in the construction sector is traditionally well developed in many European countries, but there is limited union presence in the companies, especially the smaller ones. Union density across the sector is traditionally higher than elsewhere, and, in general, regular employers also have an interest in sectoral bargaining and the establishment of standards that level the playing field. In Bulgaria, there is a sector-level collective agreement (with salaries well below the level that is actually paid), but in none of the case study companies is there any **union presence**. **Pay negotiations** in all cases happen with management, either individually or collectively on the brigade level. BULCONSTRUCTION and GREENCONSTRUCTION are members of the Chamber of Construction and BULCONSTRUCTION is quite involved with training initiatives in Bulgaria.

In Hungary, TERRA AUSTRALIS is obviously a non-unionised zone of small entrepreneurs, contractors and subcontractors on various levels. STONEWORK, the downsized specialist that is trying to hold on to its operations in a critical environment, insists on collaboration with the union. Through the union, complaints are addressed and

conflicts negotiated. Indeed, the union managed to prevent a comprehensive reduction in paid working hours of the administrative personnel. This collaboration has a distinct flavour of "paternalistic care" (Tóth/Hosszú 2012d:10).

> *"The game is not that I am banging the heads of the management to demand higher wages and better conditions. We have to act together to ensure survival. We have to be ready to find a compromised solution for the problems. If we have work, there is possibility to give money to people. That is the most important. To have work and to do it rightly" (STONEWORK union leader, Hungary, quoted ibid. 13).*

One of the key tasks of the union is to redistribute the funds from the membership fees among workers, paying for support to families with children, Christmas presents and similar benefits. However, the union collaboration is complemented by regular workers' assemblies in which management give information on orders, projects and the situation of the company and seek workers' consent to measures to ensure the company's survival.

In Belgium, the union presence in the "green construction" companies investigated is also patchy. TREEHOUSE, with its roots as an "alternative" partnership, has an elaborate structure of three-monthly general team meetings, in which all kinds of daily management issues, including the sequencing of sites and projects, can be discussed by all staff members. The business manager is also involved in the negotiations of sectoral agreements, and gets along with the trade unions rather well. Nevertheless, he is wary of trade union presence in his own company, concerned that it might upset the delicate company culture in a way that is not unfamiliar from other "alternative" companies:

> *"When trade unions gain ground in your company, there'll be an extra power taking shape that brings in new elements into the discussions. I do not necessarily dread that, it isn't an unfavourable evaluation per se" (business manager, Belgium, quoted in Van Peteghem et al. 2011c: 21).*

ECOHOUSE and MANOR have no works council, and ECOHOUSE does not have a H&S committee either, in spite of this being mandatory. The company negotiates with a trade union delegation and managers feel that relations are easy but the union has some concerns over the management approach:

> *"The notion of lean management isn't popular in trade union circles (…) It results in delivering higher quality with fewer people, and often leads to a greater extent of outsourcing (operations director, Belgium, quoted in Van Peteghem et al. 2011d: 27).*

In Norway, at both SCANCON and NORSCON, union density is at about 97-98% (compared to > 50% on the Norwegian average). The union is also involved in both companies through its negotiation of "time-factors" and piece rates in each construction project. In addition, collective agreements are generalised and enforced by the Labour Inspectorate.

3.9 Conclusions

Construction is one of the most important sectors in Europe in terms of employment. It is also the sector hit most directly by the crisis from 2008 or even 2007 onwards. With its specific transaction cost economics of relational and transactional subcontracting and varying degrees of segmented fragmentation, it provides a striking example of deregulated work and organisation in the crisis. The continuum between employees and subcontractors, relational contracting, familiarity and contempt brings the practices of project-based working environments into sharp focus. Looking at the fragmented end of the sector, Tóth and Hosszú describe the challenges:

> "The life of decentralised construction projects is the continuous bargaining among workers, brigade leaders, site managers and the final customer over what was in the contract, how it was carried out, *who* is responsible for what, who is responsible for mistakes, delays, is certain work part of the contract or not, and so on. In this world of everyday bargaining, continuous problem handling and being smart is the key to be able to make money, or not to be duped by the other" (Tóth/Hosszú 2012c: 9).

Overall, we see a disparate picture of fragmentation of employment and cost-driven competition on the one hand, efforts at high quality, sustainability and professionalism on the other. Quality of work in the sector is influenced by its **'natural' characteristics** (e.g., working outside, physical effort) as well as the **greening of construction, internationalisation, cost pressure** and the shifting power relations in **changing value chains** in which multinational companies as well as larger and smaller, specialised and generic subcontractors play a part, and even small businesses increasingly operate internationally. This has an impact beyond the immediate job situation of those affected and the generally more intensive competition: discontinuous employment, unpaid leaves, self-employment, payment in cash and income losses also put **workers' pensions and social security entitlements at risk.**

Builders in the countries, regions or subsectors less affected by the crisis still have a certain sense of sector-related security:

> "A competent bricklayer, or by extension everyone working in the construction sector, will always find a job. In this sense, job security has always existed in the construction sector and will continue to do so" (Van Peteghem et al. 2011d: 28).

However, this may require increasing concessions with regard to mobility, formal employment and income, and may not even apply to workers in the fragmented segments. In addition to the increased risks of individual careers (cf. Hohnen 2012), the **collective goods** that the sector has developed are also at risk – or require dedicated efforts of social partners, policy and innovative companies to adapt and reinvigorate them: health and safety standards, training and learning systems, sector-specific security schemes and paritarian funds may be eroded by increased transnationalisation and segmentation – but are all the more necessary to handle the increased risks of the sector.

4 Shrinking budgets for growing work: The care sector

4.1 Relevant contexts: Policy frameworks and sector trends

Of the wide range of business functions and jobs in the health & social work sector, **walqing** selected to investigate the provision of **domiciliary elderly care**. Domiciliary elderly care refers to delivering nursing and basic living services to the elderly within their own homes (see Kirov 2011). In **walqing**, research in domiciliary elderly care was carried out in **Denmark**, **Germany**, **Italy**, **Lithuania**, and the **United Kingdom**. These countries represent different **welfare state regimes**, which is particularly relevant in the context of elderly care, as the provision of care – and, as a consequence, carers' working conditions – are embedded in the general care regime of a country (see Simonazzi 2008; Hohnen 2012). Crucial features of the care regimes in the investigated countries as well as recent developments on the macro-level are therefore briefly summarised in the following, as they form important contexts for the case study findings to follow.

Denmark: Public funding and drastic change

All domiciliary elderly care in Denmark is publicly financed and was, until 2003, carried out by public providers. In 2003, public procurement of care was introduced by law in all Danish municipalities, and private providers entered the scene. Today, 95% of personal care is still provided by the municipal care units, but the share of private providers is expected to further increase. While domiciliary care in Denmark is regulated by national law, municipalities determine the service quality level as a basis for the assessment of care entitlements of an individual. There is a free-choice model stipulating that clients can choose the (public or private) care provider. The Danish care sector has undergone considerable change in the last decade that peaked in dramatic restructuring and downsizing measures in the context of the economic crisis in recent years (Hohnen 2011; Ajslev et al. 2011; Møller/Hohnen 2011).

Germany: A part-cover insurance system

In 1995, Germany introduced nursing care insurance, which is mandatory for everyone. A person's need for care is assessed based on 13 predefined activities of day-to-day life. A person who needs help with these activities for a defined minimum amount qualifies for assistance from nursing care insurance. Clients can choose between home care and residential care. Home care is split into private care carried out by family members and professional care provided by a service organisation. Depending on the kind of care provided, benefits are cash or in-kind in character. The German long-term care insurance is explicitly a part-cover insurance and as such involves family care to a high extent (Kümmerling 2012a, b, c).

Italy: Reliance on families and some public assistance

In Italy, care has until recently been provided unpaid by women within the extended family. Due to increasing female labour market participation and the ageing of society, this traditional arrangement is increasingly challenged. Nevertheless, public funds for elderly care in Italy remain low. At the same time, there is a tendency towards privatisation from local authorities to private care organisations by means of a contracting-out model. The importance of private providers is growing, particularly that of cooperatives (not-for-profit organisations in the social work sector). Cooperatives are now active both in the contracting-out arrangement with public authorities and in the private market. Furthermore, while until about eight years ago there was a high demand for residential care, there has been a shift towards a preference for domiciliary care both by customers and by the local authorities. Clients can choose their favourite provider even within the publicly funded service provision (Bizzotto/Villosio 2011a, b).

Lithuania: Care as a family duty with restricted support

Domiciliary care in Lithuania is provided through public and third sector organisations. Access to service is far from universal and based on a strict evaluation of needs for such services. The unpaid provision of care is still dominant, and the prevailing attitude is that care is a family duty. Planning and provision of home care services are based on funds allocated by local politicians or projects. The fees service users have to pay for the services are determined by national laws and depend on customers' income. Daytime domiciliary care is primarily provided by public organisations, but only for few clients and restricted hours (Naujaniene 2011, 2012).

United Kingdom: Outsourcing and competition

Domiciliary care in the UK is provided through public, private and third sector organisations as well as through private arrangements where individual personal assistants are hired directly by service users. The UK health and social care sector has seen significant change in recent years. Government policies have required improvements of efficiency, and much of the publicly funded care that was previously provided by local authorities has subsequently been contracted out to the private and third sectors. There is vigorous competition for local authority contracts among private providers, with many increasingly offering specialist services (McClelland/Holman 2011a, b, c).

4.2 The case studies: Selection criteria and case characteristics

4.2.1 Selection criteria and case study data

As the previous section indicated, care provision includes public, private, third sector and public-private partnership arrangements. In the selection of cases investigated in the **walqing** case study research, therefore, researchers tried to vary cases along these and other criteria.

The **Danish** selection of cases takes the recent appearance of private providers into account by including one private for-profit and two public cases, including one "traditional"

and one “innovative” case. In **Germany**, cases were taken both from West Germany and Eastern Germany, including non-profit and private, large and small organisations. The **Italian** cases were selected considering a private versus public dimension as well as regional variety. In **Lithuania**, case studies were carried out in two different organisations offering care services in municipalities: a public agency and a non-governmental organisation. In the **UK**, case studies were undertaken with the public, private and third sector in order to obtain accounts from the full range of domiciliary care providing organisations there.

4.2.2 Presentation of the cases: 13 care providers in five countries

The five countries involved in the research contributed a collection of 13 case studies, whose findings this chapter is based on, and which are briefly presented in the following. Information about size and workforce composition of the organisations is provided in Table 4.1 and Table 4.3.

Denmark’s REHABCARE (Hohnen 2011) is the domiciliary elderly care unit in a medium-sized Danish municipality. It employs innovative strategies and has implemented a shift towards **reablement**, which is found in the UK context as well. Reablement in the Danish context can be explained as follows:

> “Basically, instead of only providing care work for elderly citizens, the focus is on providing training to elderly citizens in order to make them more capable and less dependent on care. Elderly citizens are allocated assistance based on *their training potential* rather than solely based on their present inabilities” (Hohnen 2011: 3).

REHABCARE has undergone considerable and ongoing **restructuring** in the last ten years. In order to compensate for decreasing resources and increasing competition from private providers, the elderly care unit was restructured and an **internal temp agency unit** established. 20% of care is now provided by temp staff. Whilst there used to be labour shortage, the labour market situation changed in 2008 because of the financial crisis. For the case study, three units of REHABCARE have been investigated.

PRIVATE CARE COMPANY in Denmark (Ajslev et al. 2011) is a private elderly care provider operating in several municipalities and one of the large players in the recently developing private market. Involved in the case study is **PRIVATE CARE DISTRICT**, one department of PRIVATE CARE COMPANY. Although being a private provider, it has to work in close cooperation with the local authorities who pay for the service. As a private provider, PRIVATE CARE has the advantage of being allowed to offer extra services to be paid for directly by the clients, which the management sees as an important competitive asset. On the other hand, private organisations are not allowed to offer medical care. PRIVATE CARE is currently undergoing a **restructuring** process in which work routes are rearranged to fit geographical routes better in order to save time.

Denmark’s STEADY CARE (Møller/Hohnen 2011) is owned by a medium-sized municipality; workers are employed by the local authorities. STEADY CARE has experienced **downsizing and reorganisation** in the last four years including a major

municipal reform in 2007 and a large restructuring process in 2009; however, staff could be maintained. Municipalities were merged, nursing and personal care functionally separated, and provision of care was divided into five new units. Compared to REHABCARE, STEADY CARE is characterised by a more traditional approach to care. In the case study, three units were investigated. STEADY CARE's relation to the private providers is characterised as "competition as well as enforced cooperation" (Møller/Hohnen 2011: 7). Due to the problematic economic situation, the political and managerial focus is currently on **cutting costs**. This again leads to **further organisational restructuring.**

German WELFARECARE (Kümmerling 2012a), is a large, hierarchically structured organisation. It is a long-established non-profit association running several welfare centres of a large German city with a very large number of **voluntary members** and about 600 employees. It provides services funded by both nursing care insurance and statutory health insurance funds. WELFARECARE finds it increasingly difficult to attract new customers. It is confronted with an **oversupply of home care providers**, with the primary competitors being the private providers.

German PRIVATECARE (Kümmerling 2012b) is a small private care service provider. Despite its size, it offers a wide range of services. In doing so, it works with all health insurance and nursing care funds. The key issue in this organisation is, very clearly, the high **lack of staff and recruitment possibilities**, a problem that began recently. An oversupply of home care services in some of the regions where PRIVATECARE is active aggravates the problem. As a reaction, PRIVATECARE enters new segments such as specialised and innovative services to set itself apart from competitors. At the time of the case study, PRIVATECARE was undergoing a **phase of transition and reorganisation.**

German BIGPRIVATECARE (Kümmerling 2012c) is one of the oldest and largest companies in the area it is operating in. While it is one of the few cases offering **full-time work**, the contribution of **mini-jobbers** is crucial for the functioning of day-to-day work. The services for home care are split into basic care and nursing treatment. Being a large organisation, it is hierarchically structured.

Italian MUNICIPAL CARE (Bizzotto/Villosio 2012a) is the public elderly care provision service of a large organisation that has been active for several decades. The municipality in charge has a higher share of aged population and single households of elderly people than the national average. This increased the demand for care. Combined with a reduction of financial resources, the local authorities were forced to **restructure the organisation** and its provision of care services. At present, only the most urgent cases are provided with care; others are held on a waiting list. Moreover, hours for social care operators' tasks are currently reduced in favour of more of the cheaper hours of what is called "personal assistants". The service is now organised by the local authorities, but the operational management is contracted out to non-profit cooperatives through a public tender. Two of several districts that the service is allocated to were included in the case study.

Italian COOPCARE (Bizzotto/Villosio 2012b) is a private home elderly care service founded by several non-profit cooperatives and a temporal work agency. These organisations take on different aspects of the service, though in close coordination. Two cooperatives were included in the case study. COOPCARE is a small company that has only existed for a few years. It provides care services for those people who are not entitled to public home care, which is reserved for the most severe cases in Italy. The market is driven by the large supply of immigrants who seek jobs as personal assistants, often work illegally and de facto set the market price for elderly care services. **Undeclared work**, therefore, is the main competitor for the organisation. COOPCARE, in order to keep costs low, does not employ other than management and coordinative staff, while care workers are employed by the temp agency. It is, however, involved in selecting staff as well as organising, coordinating and monitoring services.

Lithuanian PUBCARE (Naujaniene 2011) is a municipal institution providing daytime social care services and other social services. The area in which the organisation operates is characterised by a **high demand for care services**; PUBCARE has a waiting list of customers. Private competitors are therefore not seen as relevant. Nevertheless, management sees PUBCARE's strength in the fact that its prices are lower than those of private providers and its weakness in that it only provides services on weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.. Those who need care outside these hours usually hire care workers informally or are cared for by family. The **economic crisis** led to severe cuts in budget that resulted in higher workload but not in dismissals.

Lithuanian VOLUNTARY CARE (Naujaniene 2012) is a non-governmental organisation providing home services and daytime social care. The activities are provided all over Lithuania, and the research was carried out in several Lithuanian cities. VOLUNTARY CARE has about 200 employees and works with an additional, much larger number of volunteers. The case study only involved employees who are employed within the context of a **European project** aiming to provide domiciliary services to elderly people. Characteristic of this case is the fact that workers' employment and employment conditions are entirely contingent upon the project available and its funding. Within the frame of the project, services are provided free of charge, but only to customers up to a certain income limit. An idealistic notion of the work is highly valued, and this appears to be at the expense of trying to do the best for employees' working conditions with the money that is available.

UK's REABLEMENT (McClelland/Holman 2011a) is a self-contained reablement unit of a local authority care provider. Care workers are employed directly by the local authority, and REABLEMENT does not make use of agency work. REABLEMENT recently selected to offer **specialist reablement services**, a current policy-led trend that is described as follows:

> "The philosophy behind reablement is to enable service users to 'do things for themselves', rather than, as is the case in homecare, 'to have things done for them', and is the result of broader policies around the reduction of costly social care" (McClelland/Holman 2011a: 7).

Within the reablement service, REABLEMENT does not have any competitors, and all care for those who could not be reabled was contracted out to the private sector. As a pilot project, the future of REABLEMENT depends on its ability to realise cost savings and is currently insecure (McClelland/Holman 2011a). The reablement approach, which is also adopted in Denmark's REHABCARE (Hohnen 2011), is highly interesting with regard to quality of work.

UK's EASTBROOK HOMECARE (McClelland/Holman 2011b) is a medium-sized private sector care provider offering domestic and personal care services. Most of its business is obtained by contracts with local authorities. EASTBROOK HOMECARE has undergone a period of change involving **restructuring** and **expansion**. At the time of the case study, administrative and HR roles were being newly created or redefined. A **cost-saving policy** by the local authorities has led to reductions in hourly pay rates.

UK's COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY CARE (McClelland/Holman 2011c) is a relatively young and small cooperative social enterprise offering a range of domiciliary care services and was selected as a third sector provider. Since its opening a few years ago, COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY CARE **has grown steadily** and has been able to introduce some minor improvements to work and employment conditions.

The table below provides an overview over main characteristics of the 13 cases studies conducted as well as of the selection of interviewees in each case.

Table 4.1: Overview of case studies in the care sector

Country	Case study pseudonym	Case characteristics	Size/workforce	Interviews conducted
Denmark	REHABCARE	a municipal domiciliary care unit promoting innovation in the provision of elderly care	350 care helpers, 100 care assistants, 60 nurses	6 managers 1 works councillor 5 care workers Total: 12
	PRIVATE CARE	a multinational private care provider offering personal care	16 employees of 3 types: unskilled workers, skilled care workers, care workers responsible for planning	3 managers 7 care workers Total: 12
	STEADY CARE	a municipal domiciliary care provider	300 care workers (care helpers and care assistants)	5 managers 1 union rep. 6 care workers Total: 12
Germany	WELFARECARE	a large social and welfare non-profit association	650 employees, 75 volunteers; 70% care assistants, 30% qualified care professionals	4 managers 1 works councillor 11 care workers Total: 16
	PRIVATECARE	a small private care service provider	8 employees; at the time of the case study the provider lacks at least 3 full-time workers	1 manager 1 administrator 2 care workers 1 trainee Total: 5
	BIGPRIVATECARE	a large private care service company	100 full-time employed and 100 mini-jobbers; 20-30% unqualified, 70-80% qualified	2 managers 6 care workers Total: 8
Lithuania	PUBCARE	a municipal social services centre	*confidential data*	3 managers 1 works councillor 6 care workers Total: 10
	VOLUNTARY CARE	a non-governmental organisation	*confidential data*	4 managers 7 care workers Total: 11
Italy	MUNICIPAL CARE	a private service of domiciliary elderly care	400 social care operators, 5,000 personal assistants	8 managers 5 social care operators 2 personal assistants Total: 15
	COOPCARE	a publicly funded home elderly care service	100 personal assistants plus some social care operators and administrative staff	3 managers 2 social care operators 5 personal assistants Total: 10
UK	REABLEMENT	a public sector care provider	100 carers, all have similar roles	4 managers 9 care workers Total: 13
	EASTBROOK HOMECARE	a medium-sized private sector care provider	100 care workers, all have similar roles	2 managers 1 coordinator 7 care workers Total: 10
	COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY CARE	a small third sector care provider	12 care workers	2 managers 1 coordinator 4 care workers Total: 7

Source: Internal national partner reports for Work Package 6 of the walqing project.

4.3 Employment structures and conditions: Low security, high flexibility

4.3.1 Employment conditions: Precarious contracts, unpredictable wages

Domiciliary care work is dominated by **part-time contracts**[15] and generally characterised by an increase of **fixed-term contracts**. The prevalence of part-time contracts is partly due to work peaks linked to the character of the work. For example, breakfast has to be made in the morning, help with going to bed provided in the evening, etc. As a rule, there is most work to do in the mornings and less at lunchtime and in the afternoon. Some organisations therefore make use of **split shifts**. While some contracts are bound to **collective agreements**, as, not surprisingly, those in Denmark, others are not, as, e.g., in two of the three German cases. As a rule, contracts include **probationary periods**, after which only in some organisations the contract will automatically be turned into a permanent one – something that, even if stipulated in collective agreements, is not always put into practice (Ajslev et al. 2011).

While **part-time** is the only kind of contract some organisations offer, the problem is reversed in others: The few organisations that mainly offer **full-time contracts** allow very few alternatives (e.g., BIGPRIVATECARE, PUBCARE), which implies difficulties for workers with children or health problems. Most often, it is for wage reasons that people would like to work more hours. The general low wage in elderly care makes it hard to make ends meet for workers when they are only part-time employed. This problem is further exacerbated by the increasing use of **zero-hour contracts** and contracts with **few guaranteed hours**, a pattern that we find primarily in the UK and partly in the Danish cases. It leads to what can be identified as the **main problem** in terms of employment conditions: an increasing **unpredictability of wages**. In combination with few hours and low wages, contracts with few or no guaranteed hours lead to considerable problems for employees in making ends meet, with some workers living in actual poverty (see also Hohnen 2012). Hours may be lowered during summer time, but also unforeseeably when clients go to hospital. Contracts without or with few guaranteed hours also have disadvantages such as **unpaid sick leave** and shorter or unpaid **vacation**.

> *"I think I do about, on average, 25 hours per week. You see if I'm off work, I'm only getting paid for 3 hours a day, because I've only got a contract for 16" (care worker, UK, quoted in McClelland/Holman 2011c: 17).*

Different categories of workers often face **extremely different working conditions**, for example in the German case with its either full-time or mini-job workforce (BIGPRIVATECARE), or the Italian case where high and low qualified workers are formally employed in completely different ways (MUNICIPAL CARE). Employees in several organisations were not sure about who their employer actually was or what the

[15] Part-time work here covers a wide range of definitions and contracted hours. What is regarded as very short time part-time in Denmark due to employment policy traditions and cultures, such as about 30 hours per week, may be perceived as long part-time in other countries.

precise terms and conditions of their contracts were (e.g., Italian, German cases). In the Italian case, this has to do with the sometimes complex relations of different employers including public sector, private sector and private households. In the German case, workers were not sure whether their contracts were open-ended or fixed-term.

The table below provides an overview of some important aspects of employment conditions.

Table 4.2: Employment conditions

Case/Country	Contracts	Amount of working time	Other
REHABCARE DK	450 employees, 350 in temp unit (100 'permanent temps', 250 on zero-hour contracts)	majority work 32 hours	amount of weekend work is a contested area; wages regulated by CLA, few extra benefits, wages increasingly under pressure; public procurement very influential
PRIVATE CARE DK	5 workers on permanent contracts, 10 paid by the hour, 10-15 temps	majority work 32-37 hours	wages regulated by CLA, few extra benefits
STEADY CARE DK	all care workers on permanent contracts	typically 32 hours	wages regulated by CLA, few extra benefits; CLA seniority policy: some days off per year for seniors
WELFARECARE GER	almost all workers: open-ended contract; plus mini-jobbers	typically 32.5 hours, has been decreased (used to be full-time work)	collective pay agreement; problem: overtime starts only from 40 hours
PRIVATECARE GER	open-ended contracts after 1 year, most are full-time	full-time = 42 hours – higher than standard working times	no collective agreement
BIGPRIVATECARE GER	100 full-time (more than doubled since introduction of long-term care insurance); 90 mini-jobs (have jobs elsewhere)	usually full-time (= 40 hours); part-time only in exceptional cases	no collective agreement; generally split shifts
PUBCARE LT	majority have open-ended contracts	majority have full-time contracts	working times 9-5, exceptionally evenings or weekends; prolonged annual leave (35 days instead of 28)
VOLUNTARY CARE LT	all workers have fixed-term contracts (3 years)	full-time or part-time	only daytime care; working hours 8-5, sometimes evenings or weekends; project-based employment; unpaid overtime; substitutions not paid
MUNICIPAL CARE IT	social care operators are employees of the cooperative, accredited by local authorities; personal assistants hired by clients (50%) or temp agencies (50%) on 2-to-6-month contracts	social care operators: usually full-time (35 hours); number of hours reduced due to current budget costs; personal assistants either cohabitants (= 54 hours per week), full-time or part-time	formalisation of undeclared work of personal assistants
COOPCARE IT	personal assistants employed by temporal agency on 6-months-contracts; social care operators and administrative staff employed by organisation	social care operators: usually full-time (35 hours); personal assistants either cohabitants (= 54 hours/ week), full-time or part-time	some have second job, often undeclared; cohabiting workers: little flexibility, 3 free hours a day and 1 free day a week
REABLEMENT UK	care workers employed directly by local authorities; 10 workers on zero-hour contracts	majority have permanent, part-time contracts; 30 hours per week most common	sick pay and holiday pay proportionate to contracted working hours; premium of 15% paid for working unsocial hours; trialling of using split shifts
EASTBROOK HOMECARE UK	majority have zero-hour contracts	majority part-time; 16 and 25 hours per week most common	sick pay and holiday pay proportionate to average working hours; extra pay for unsocial shifts
COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY CARE UK	most workers part-time	typically 16 hours per week	sick pay and holiday pay calculated proportionate to contracted working hours; premiums for working on scheduled days off

Source: Internal national partner reports for Work Package 6 of the walqing project.

4.3.2 Recruiting, staff turnover and human resources management: Contrasting patterns

Recruiting is a **key issue** for several organisations in different countries – but in **contrasting ways**. Some organisations are faced with very **severe recruiting problems** and declining numbers of people starting training in care, resulting in higher workloads for employees and lower service quality for customers.

> *"We took on almost anyone who had anything to do with care. We just couldn't find qualified staff. That meant of course that the quality of care was not as good" (care service manager, quoted in Kümmerling 2012c: 9).*

> *"We constantly advertise… the recruitment can't keep up with the pace of the work, basically. We desperately always need staff, it just never stops" (senior manager, quoted in McClelland/Holman 2011b: 10).*

German WELFARECARE faces a different aspect of the problem: They have many applications for high and low positions within care work but few and declining numbers of suitable candidates for **middle positions** (Kümmerling 2012a).

Public budget cuts and the **financial crisis** have resulted in a pronounced change in the labour market. In particular, this is reported from Denmark, where organisations faced staff shortages before the crisis, but not anymore. UK's REABLEMENT, on the other hand, would be able to expand further and take on more customers but cannot do so due to the restrictions of having a low budget (McClelland/Holman 2011a).

Meanwhile, some organisations are confronted with an **oversupply of applicants** and can afford to go through **strict selection processes**. For instance, Danish PRIVATECARE counted 66 applications for the last vacant night-shift job (Ajslev et al. 2011). They closely monitor new employees, particularly with regard to sickness absence. In the Italian COOPCARE case, which actually does not employ workers but organises the selection process for private households who will be the actual employers, only one in eight applicants is taken up in the COOPCARE database in the course of a thorough selection process (Bizzotto/Villosio 2012b).

Staff turnover ranges from very high to very low and so does **tenure** accordingly. This is impressively illustrated by the huge difference between two of the German cases with 3-4 months versus 20-30 years as typical tenure, the latter pattern to be found in UK's REABLEMENT as well. While one clear pattern explaining differences in turnover cannot be identified, the labour market situation (chances to find another job), wage dissatisfaction (and thus leaving the sector as a whole) and the "trade-off" between meaning attached to job and bad working conditions (see Section 4.5.9) play a part. As Kümmerling (2011a) points out, low staff turnover has the advantage for the organisation of having an experienced and reliable workforce, and the disadvantage of an ageing staff with higher levels of sickness absence. In cases with tough staff selection processes such as COOPCARE (Bizzotto/Villosio 2012b), turnover is low as a result. Ironically, staff shortages, high levels of sick leave and high staff turnover put pressure on the workforce

but also make the job feel relatively secure, as both Kümmerling (2012c: 11) and McClelland/Holman (2011b: 14) note.

As for **maternal leave**, most case studies report that employees usually come back to work under the same conditions as before, though sometimes doing morning shifts only. Among problems mentioned in the context of **pregnancies** and maternal leave is the fact that pregnant women are prohibited to do certain tasks in care work in Germany, which causes problems for their coworkers (Kümmerling 2012c).

4.3.3 Gender and ethnicity: Segmentation and vulnerability

In a sense, domiciliary elderly care appears to be less prone to gender segmentation than other female-dominated sectors due to the fact that a lot of effort is put on organising visiting rounds and workers usually work on their own in the home of the client, with the result that whoever is out in the field with the client will simply have to do all the tasks that need to be done (see Sardadvar et al. in progress; Kümmerling 2012a, c). Overall, we can observe a tendency towards **increasing shares of men** in the sector. At the same time, there is evidence from German and Danish cases that when male workers are present they are overrepresented at **higher hierarchy levels** and get more opportunities to take part in further training or be promoted (see Sardadvar et al. in progress; Kümmerling 2012a; Hohnen 2012). As can be seen in the table below, **gender composition** in this traditionally female sector varies substantially from 0% to 40% males. The main explanation for this variation can be found in **management's attitudes**. The following example is taken from the organisation with the highest share of male workers, Germany's WELFARECARE:

> "Despite this, the HR employee says the ideal applicant is male and between 30 and 40 years old. The reason for this is a pragmatic one: women are more likely to take family-related career breaks or to need particular shift patterns, e.g., to be able to combine their work with nursery hours. According to the HR employee, women cannot therefore be deployed as flexibly – a disadvantage that can be offset with a higher proportion of men" (Kümmerling 2012a: 11).

At the same time, the **more traditional perception**, according to which men are less suitable for care work than women or simply not interested in this kind of work (Ajslev et al. 2011), prevails as well. In organisations representing this perspective we find no or low numbers of male workers as well as an absence of gender-specific distributions of work tasks within care provision.

The **major issue** with regard to gender of the workforce from the organisations' point of view, is, however, that male workers tend to be **rejected by clients.** This experience is widespread in almost all cases. Examples of rejection are given both with regard to female and male clients. Either way, we can observe a clear pattern in which customers often prefer women or reject men, but hardly ever the other way around.

The issue of **rejection by clients** is also a very dominant one with regard to **migrant, immigrant and ethnic minority workers** (see also Hohnen 2012). In all countries' case

studies, incidences of racist rejection, insults or abuse are reported. In several cases, the risk is particularly high for black workers and female workers wearing a headscarf. An interesting variety of this pattern is that in some cases clients actually **prefer particular ethnic minorities,** because they regard them as having more "care attitudes" (Bizzotto/Villosio 2012b: 21). Interviewees present **discrimination by customers** as the predominant problem with regard to racism. However, there is evidence of **unequal treatment by management** as well. For example, in the Danish REHABCARE case, ethnic minorities are perceived as having language problems and being inclined to "overperform" care tasks, which is not appreciated in the context of the reablement approach (Hohnen 2011). Confronted with discrimination and racist insults, organisations' most typical reaction is to allocate the worker to another customer and provide the customer with a care worker who is "more acceptable" to him or her. One Italian case tries to tackle the problem by means of an EU-funded programme aiming for higher acceptance of migrant or ethnic minority workers by clients (see Villosio 2012 for details). Furthermore, it should be noted that **national immigration policies** interlink with employment conditions and may aggravate difficult situations for workers, e.g., when permits to stay in a country are dependent on open-ended work contracts, which specifically the migrant workforce often do not have (Bizzotto/Villosio 2012a).

Finally, there are **hardly any workers with disabilities** to be found in the case studies, and no specific policies targeted at them. In one Lithuanian case – one of the few where the issue is mentioned at all – employees with disabilities are "allowed" to work part-time, but nothing else (Naujaniene 2011). In UK's REABLEMENT, management perceives it is simply impossible to work in this job with a disability (McClelland/Holman 2012a).

In spite of the prevailing problems, **equal opportunity or diversity management policies** are absent in most of the organisations investigated. An exception is found in the UK cases. They do not provide examples of positive action either, but there is some observable drive for equality in line with the legal framework set up by the Equality Act 2010, which requires, for example, that recruitment equality impact be assessed (McClelland/Holman 2011a).

The table below illustrates some important aspects of workforce composition and segmentation.

Table 4.3: Workforce composition

Case/Country	Gender	Age	Ethnicity
REHABCARE DK	almost entirely women	average age 35-50; but also some young and some old (60+ workers)	5% ethnic minority workers (shares increasing among low-skilled)
PRIVATE CARE DK	almost entirely women	average age 25-30 years	almost no minority workers
STEADY CARE DK	almost entirely women	average age 40-50, older than general workforce	ca. 2% ethnic minority workers
WELFARECARE GER	90% female	majority in age group 45-63	almost no migrant workforce
PRIVATECARE GER	all carers female, one man working at the office	young; average age around 30	all German
BIGPRIVATECARE GER	40% male (manager preference)	comparatively young; average age 35-40	no information about the share of migrants available; majority German
PUBCARE LT	almost entirely women	older than general workforce	majority Lithuanian nationals
VOLUNTARY CARE LT	all workers female	various age groups, comparatively young	all workers Lithuanian
MUNICIPAL CARE IT	highly skilled workers: mainly women; less skilled workers: almost exclusively women	age 35-50	high-skilled: mainly natives; low-skilled: mainly immigrants
COOPCARE IT	10% males in total workforce	most workers comparatively young	majority immigrants
REABLEMENT UK	80% female (in line with rest of sector); number of male workers increasing	mainly middle-aged	predominantly white and British
EASTBROOK HOMECARE UK	10% male, lower than UK average of 20%, but increasing since financial crisis	typically older (40-60 years); trend towards recruiting younger staff	workforce considered as ethnically diverse
COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY CARE UK	all female, no males (customer rejection)	20-55 years, typically in 30s, comparatively young	mainly white and British

Source: Internal national partner reports for Work Package 6 of the walqing project.

4.3.4 Flexibility: Flexible work in many senses

Flexibility is an issue in domiciliary elderly care in most of its senses. **Employment conditions** are flexible in an unfavourable way for workers, as they tend to be precarious with non-guaranteed amounts of hours and fixed-term contracts. Moreover, flexibility is an important **requirement** in care work. A core characteristic of the work in almost all organisations is that care workers need to be flexible when it comes to **unforeseen situations** or having to **substitute at short notice** (see Section 4.5.4). Some organisations try to systematically ensure flexibility by hiring flexible staff in order to replace absent workers.

Another influential feature of care work is that some parts of work are perceived as **naturally having to be done at certain hours**. In all countries, the work requirement is lowest at around **lunchtime**, which some organisations react to by using **split shifts,** while others use it for workers to do the increasingly demanding **documentation work**. Split shifts are not as common as, e.g., in the cleaning sector (see Chapter 1) – but there is evidence of a trend towards introducing more split shifts.

> "Work is very busy from 7 a.m. until 10 a.m. as this is when the citizens are getting up, being dressed, eating their breakfast, are given their medicine, being helped get ready for day centre. After 10 a.m. or 11 a.m. there is less to do, and the tasks are more related to practical care like cleaning and laundry. This rhythm repeats in the evenings as every citizen eats dinner within the same hour" (Møller/Hohnen 2011: 17).

Most organisations work using **shifts**. There are usually two to four shifts from morning to night, organised as rotating shifts, permanent shifts or split shifts. **Weekend work** and work at other **unsocial hours** are very common, with the exception of the Lithuanian cases, which mainly deliver daytime care. Weekend work is usually compensated with days off during the week. Only in some countries, e.g., the UK or Germany, workers get paid supplements for working unsocial hours. The same is true for **overtime**, which is compensated 1:1, with supplements, by days off or extra pay (sometimes to be chosen, sometimes not). However, in some exceptional cases, overtime is not paid at all (Lithuanian VOLUNTARY CARE).

In some cases, as in WELFARECARE, shift and visiting plans are so finely tuned that employees have very little control over working hours (Kümmerling 2012a). In others, employees report **flexibility on their own behalf,** e.g., being able to leave early for personal reasons. Clearly, this tends to be the case in constellations where employees can negotiate minor working time changes directly with clients, as, for instance, in the Italian cases. Furthermore, **reablement** tends to raise flexibility on workers' behalf, while **standardisation** lowers it.

4.3.5 Equipment and reimbursement: Private expenses for a low paid job

Equipment provision and reimbursements of various kinds are an important and sometimes contested issue in domiciliary elderly care. Care workers need a lot of equipment and incur expenses related to their work. These include protective clothing

(gloves, shoes, aprons, and uniforms), cars, bicycles or public transport passes, and mobile phones. The provision of these tools and equipment varies not only between countries, but also between cases within countries. A particular problem in this regard is that some of these tools are located at the **boundaries between work and private life**.

The findings regarding these kinds of reimbursements reveal some interesting points. For one thing, **satisfaction** does not appear to be in line with the extent to which reimbursements and equipment are provided by the organisation. Rather, those workers who appear to have worse conditions appear to be so used to them that they are most satisfied and most grateful for small improvements, as in the UK's COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY CARE compared to the other, more favourable UK cases. For another, **transportation costs** in general and **mileage compensation** in particular are clearly most debated (MUNICIPAL CARE, REABLEMENT, EASTBROOK HOMECARE).

Travelling from client to client is organised in various ways: walking, by bike (e.g., Denmark), by private car, by company car (e.g., Denmark), by public transport (e.g., Lithuania). While some organisations pay mileage compensation, others contribute a flat rate, compensate for public transport tickets or provide a company car. When there is compensation for transport costs, it is usually perceived as **insufficient** by employees, and this is a vital source of dissatisfaction. In Lithuania, public transport tickets were among the first things that were cut after the beginning of the **economic crisis.** Moreover, **unqualified staff** tends to be disadvantaged with regard to transportation:

> "Unlike the qualified staff, the care assistants do not have access to a company car, and travel on bicycles or on foot. This is often seen as a strain. All the interviewees stress that they are outside in all weathers – hail storms, snow and heat waves" (Hohnen 2011: 17).

Telephone communication is a vital aspect of the job, although contributions towards **telephone costs** vary, too. Many workers still use their private phones and do not receive any reimbursement for work-related phone calls, despite this being a crucial tool for organising work.

4.4 Wages and payment system: Low incomes, few hours

In the **UK**, the pay level in the sector is very low and paid at an hourly rate, with a median rate of £6.50 (EUR 8.12) and thus close to the UK national minimum wage of £5.93 (EUR 6.82) per hour (Skills for Care 2011, quoted in McClelland/Holman 2011a). Wages vary according to employer, region and tenure.

In the **Danish** context, organisations differentiate between groups of workers based on their professional education level and function. In all three Danish cases, wages are regulated according to the collective agreement. Wage according to the collective agreement starts at EUR 32,660 per year for newly trained carers and goes up to EUR 36,960 per year after eleven years. Wages are frequently complemented by elements of performance-based pay, area, work functions, individual qualifications and anciennity allowances. In REHABCARE, most employees get additional payment according

to work functions and individual qualifications. Overall, wages in the **private sector** are not very different from those in the public sector in Denmark (Ajslev et al. 2011).

Wages in only one of the **German** cases are bound to the **collective agreement**, which defines eleven pay bands with four levels each, taking into account both professional qualification and work experience. Within this scheme, wages range from EUR 1,400 to EUR 3,200 per month (Kümmerling 2012a, b, c).

In **Italy's** two cases, the collective agreement for social care operators is applied, stipulating a minimum gross wage of EUR 1,313 per month. In the last agreement, the minimum wage level was raised by 14%. However, this increase has not been included in the municipalities' contributions, and cooperatives have to bear a large part of it. Financial pressure on part of the public authorities is thus transferred onto the cooperatives. The minimum wage for personal assistants (not cohabiting) ranges from EUR 5.60 to EUR 6.20 per hour depending on the kind of care that is provided. It should be noted that the minimum wage levels in the collective agreement are on average **lower than those in other collective agreements** (Bizzotto/Villosio 2011a, b).

In **Lithuania**, wages in PUBCARE as a public institution are legally prescribed; the stipulated basic monthly salary is very low, at EUR 35.5. In PUBCARE, the lower qualified care workers earn about EUR 333 per month, the higher qualified social workers EUR 434 per month. Thus, in the Lithuanian case as in others, wage is differentiated according to education and work experience, though there is some concern that the difference is not big enough and that better-qualified social workers in particular are not paid adequately. Moreover, wages at PUBCARE have **decreased** recently. It should be noted that, as Naujaniene (2011: 18) points out, the average monthly gross income in the public sector was EUR 629 in 2010, which means that care workers' salary amounts to only **half of the average public sector income**. In VOLUNTARY CARE, collective agreements do not apply and salaries are set by the organisation, depending on the area where care workers do their job. They are set by the management alone (Naujaniene 2012). Differences are substantial, with wages at VOLUNTARY CARE ranging from EUR 260 to EUR 405 per month. As Naujaniene (2012: 10) analyses, high **unemployment rates** contribute to organisations being able to offer lower wages, particularly in smaller towns (Naujaniene 2011, 2012).

To summarise, the UK system is based on equal payment for care workers, while most other countries differentiate between categories of workers. In the UK, wages are close to the national minimum wage. In Denmark, wages do not appear that low as such, but in all countries, the situation is rendered precarious by the fact that most care workers only have a **part-time wage**. **Unpredictability of the monthly income** due to getting only worked hours paid is certainly one of the most virulent problems, to be found in particularly dramatic ways in the UK and in Italy. An additional source of dissatisfaction found in several cases is that in the dominating part-time contracts in the sector, **overtime supplements** will often only be paid for hours exceeding full-time (rather than contractual) hours – if overtime is paid at all. In comparison, wages are particularly low in absolute as well as relative terms in **Lithuania.**

4.5 Work organisation: Running out of time in standardised ways

4.5.1 Job content: Domestic work, emotional work, physical work

"I think my job is a mixture of a cleaner and an accountant. We do everything: we clean, go to banks, manage our clients' documents, bathe them, prepare food for them, clip their nails, (...) have their medication prescribed by a doctor" (care worker, Lithuania, quoted in Naujaniene 2011: 6).

The actual content of the care workers' job is contingent on several conditions: First, on **regulations** in the country or local authority that define which education is necessary to carry out which tasks. Second, and accordingly, on the **education level** of the worker and thus the tasks she or he is allowed to carry out. Third, on the **market, recruitment and competitive situation,** which may lead to a pattern of over-qualification in case of an oversupply of labour. Fourth, in the case of public funding, tasks carried out depend on **care standards** set by governments and local authorities.

Summarising across countries and cases, we may however roughly differentiate the following typical **categories of tasks** and divisions of labour, even if in detail they vary across cases:

Table 4.4: Typical contents of work and divisions of tasks

Category of tasks	Contents	Category of workers
Personal help and care	personal hygiene, washing, dressing, delivery and serving of meals, escorting to shops and appointments	un- or low-qualified staff
Domestic chores	cleaning, laundry, groceries	un- or low-qualified staff
Relational, social support	talking, listening, emotional work	un- or low-qualified staff
Health-related tasks	managing medication, getting prescriptions, control of bed sores, relations with health staff, administrative management	medium or highly qualified staff – high national differences in regulation
Supervision and coordination of care workers	time scheduling, day-to-day management, solving conflicts with clients	high-qualified staff
Documentation work	documentation, monitoring of health condition, informing supervisors about changes	done by all workers who are in direct contact with the client
Nursing treatment	medical help in the narrow sense	done by high-qualified nursing staff or especially qualified elderly care workers

Source: Internal national partner reports for Work Package 6 of the walqing project.

Several things are particularly notable in this overview. For one thing, the provision of **health-related tasks** is regulated in strikingly different ways in the countries. For instance, unskilled staff in the UK are allowed to do some of the tasks that not even medium-skilled

staff are entitled to do in Germany. For another, the relevance of **relational and social support** is now sometimes only left implicitly in the task agenda but has increasingly less room in the more and more dominant principle of striving after efficiency. At the same time, however, workers in all countries tend to name it the most important part of their job.

> "The oldest care workers still remember how not so long ago it was possible to take the elderly for a walk, taking care of the elderly in broad terms rather than just providing a prescribed package of services. Today only the most necessary care is provided" (Møller/Hohnen 2011: 7).

Furthermore, these usually precisely defined areas of activity sometimes **overlap** in everyday work practice. A case in point is Italy's MUNICIPAL CARE, where the blurring of task division is due to a lack of time for coordination and the decrease of hours allocated to the higher skilled social care operators (Bizzotto/Villosio 2011a). On the other hand, when there is a very **sharp division** between activities and workers qualified for them, as, for example, in Germany's WELFARECARE, this may be reflected in major differences in terms of working conditions and quality of work between categories of workers according to their educational level. Another problem is that **patients' needs change over time**, so that the carer in charge eventually may not be allowed to do the tasks anymore (Kümmerling 2012c). Finally, some organisations, in contrast to most, do **not differentiate between domestic work and care work**, which leads to dissatisfaction among skilled workers about having to carry out domestic work tasks (WELFARECARE, REHABCARE).

4.5.2 More work in less time: Growing workloads, increasing time pressure

If only one widespread, dramatic and increasing problem in the quality of work in current domiciliary elderly care had to be selected, it would have to be **time pressure**. Too little time for their work and clients, with tasks being forced into very rigid – perceived as unfeasible – standards is what bothers care workers across countries and cases most. The main forces leading to time pressure are trends towards **standardisation** and **downsizing** (Hohnen 2012). In the case studies, these are typically due to substantial **cuts in public budgets** in- and outside the context of the economic crisis. As a result, we can observe **principles of efficiency and cost-cutting** being enforced in organisations in processes of **restructuring.**

These developments are most clearly visible in Denmark, where the deterioration of conditions – from a high standard – is most pronounced, while in Lithuania, the economic crisis came on top of a situation that was problematic in terms of funding anyway. Public budget cuts negatively influence employment conditions but also work organisation and thus quality of work on several levels. In terms of work organisation, they are felt by means of increasing **time pressure**, which, in turn, is often linked to an increasing **standardisation of time allocation** to work tasks (see also Hohnen 2012; Sardadvar et al. 2012). This more and more rigid and tight allocation of times to tasks is most pronounced in some of the **German** and in the **Danish** cases. The following quotes illustrate this:

"You get 16 minutes for the morning wash and in that time I have to prepare the bathroom, bring the customer to the bathroom, undress him, wash him, dress him again, brush his teeth – all that in 16 minutes and that's the time they think it takes a non-expert. Then I'm paid another three minutes to make breakfast. How's that supposed to work?" (care service manager, Germany, quoted in Kümmerling 2012b: 15).

"So it's not like you can sit down and talk to the citizen. 12 minutes – what is that when you need to prepare breakfast, lunch and do the dishes" (care helper, Denmark, quoted in Ajslev et al. 2011: 17f).

"At present I am in an extraordinary situation. Talk about the quality of work when I have to look after thirteen people. Can you see? I run in, ask what they want and run out" (care worker, Lithuania, quoted in Naujaniene 2011a: 7).

This **pattern of budget cuts – downsizing – standardisation – precise time allocation – time pressure** is, in some cases, complemented by some additional aspects of work organisation that contribute to time pressure. One of them is, in the context of standardisation, the introduction of new **monitoring systems**, as the one implemented by the local authorities in the UK's EASTBROOK HOMECARE, which requires care workers to register the time they spend with customers by telephoning in at the beginning and end of a visit (McClelland/Holman 2011b). We find a similar system in Denmark's STEADY CARE (Møller/Hohnen 2011).

Quality standards, too, are continuously changing in order to meet public demand and cut down on public expenditure, as is illustrated by the following example from Denmark:

"One example of changing quality standards from 2011 concerns the quality level around 'making beds' where service specifications changed from providing a service termed 'making the bed' into a service termed 'smoothing the bed'. Many of the home care workers found the difference hard to specify in practice, however, time allocation was reduced accordingly" (Hohnen 2011: 11f).

Another aspect is that the already-mentioned **travelling times**, too, are increasingly standardised and in many cases calculated considerably shorter than necessary in working life reality. This has consequences not only for time pressure during the workday, but also for pay:

"So if I work a six hour shift I will only get paid for five because I have to leave each call ten minutes early to get to the next one… I've not had the lessons in teleportation yet. And I can't evaporate. It is a big problem" (care worker, UK, quoted in McClelland/Holman 2011b: 15).

"The cooperative pays 15 minutes of travel time to move from one client to another one irrespectively of the effective time required to reach the elder person's home. That is not fair" (social care operator, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto/Villosio 2012a: 24).

Yet another change contributing to time pressure refers to **changes in customer groups and customers' conditions**:

> *"Things in care are getting worse and worse because the patients are getting older and sicker. It really is like that. For instance, we have a patient with Parkinson's disease and for them things get worse and worse. He can hardly walk anymore and he shakes really badly. You really do need more and more time to care for him. And unfortunately we don't have the time any more. Human relations are absent for most people. You really just go to work like a robot now because you just don't have the time" (care assistant, Germany, quoted in Kümmerling 2012c: 17).*

Thus, time pressure is among the most virulent problems in contemporary elderly care, and it can be expected to further increase as it is enhanced by several current tendencies.

4.5.3 The relation to the client: At the heart of care work

Relational and social support is not only perceived as the core task of care work in terms of service. Personal relations are also a key characteristic of domiciliary care work as such and are **decisive for the quality of work**. Personal attachment between the care worker and the client can take on extreme forms in two directions: A widespread problem is that the **client becomes too attached** to "his" or "her" care worker and will not accept other workers any more. Another risk lies in care workers feeling very close to their clients, which may **blur the boundaries between the professional and private sphere**.

> *"I cared for an elderly paraplegic woman. There were 4 people who cared for her during the day but she only wanted to be touched by me. Because there was a feeling between us" (personal assistant, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto/Villosio 2011b: 24).*

In this context, the most **vulnerable groups** tend to be the **low-skilled workers**, as they usually spend most time with clients, do most personal care and have least training (Bizzotto/Villosio 2011b). Furthermore, there is evidence that **migrant and ethnic minority workers** often face problems of not being accepted or treated badly by clients (see also Hohnen 2012).

Meanwhile, organisations employ **contrasting strategies** with regard to the worker-client relation. While some deliberately try to build staff changes into the rota in order to protect workers from too much strain when, for instance, the customer becomes severely ill (Naujaniene 2012), others have a philosophy of trying to ensure as little staff change as possible, which is usually preferred by clients but often also appreciated by workers. Both strategies are thus beneficial and risky for quality of work at the same time.

Finally, many problems in the relation between client and worker are raised in the context of **standardisation and downsizing.** When tasks or time allocations have been changed or reduced, the care workers have to explain this to the client, deal with his or her complaints about it, and try to both stick to the rules and at the same time deliver satisfying work to the client. The same is true for delays in the schedule that are typical of care work and exacerbated by too narrow time frames. Here, too, it is the care workers

who have to deal with the problem, not only by adapting their own work but also by having to explain delays to annoyed clients.

Clients and carers' relation to them shapes quality of work in several other ways, too, both positively and negatively. First, in cases where work is less standardised, care workers can **negotiate** things such as days off, actual visiting times or conduct of tasks directly with the clients, which usually benefits their own flexibility and discretion. Second, the client is usually the **main source of feedback** for care workers, particularly when the contact to the employer organisation is loose and there are no institutionalised staff meetings. Third, the impact of the relation to the client varies in line with the **care regime**. In Denmark's public sector REHABCARE case, for example, it is not the client who pays for the service, so that his or her influence on the care work and the care worker is limited (Hohnen 2011). In contrast, clients in Italy's MUNICIPAL CARE are now entitled to choose their preferred cooperative, which results in cooperatives becoming more dependent on their judgement (Bizzotto/Villosio 2011a). Fourth, care workers may also feel obliged to adapt their schedule to clients' requests:

> *"Some clients do not accept our visits before 3p.m. This implies that we are forced to have a longer lunch break than desired and a postponed end of the working day, when shops are closed" (social care operator, Italy, quoted in Bizzotto/Villosio 2011a: 30).*

4.5.4 A work routine of unpredictability: Temporal flexibility as "part of the job"

> "*Every day there's some unforeseen incident that you have to deal with" (care worker, Germany, quoted in Kümmerling 2012b: 12).*

Although it is usually carefully scheduled, care work can only be planned to a certain extent. As many interviewees in the case studies narrate, tasks may take longer or shorter, as neither the client's condition nor her or his needs are the same every day. To some extent, this is an **inherent characteristic** of working in care. And it does not only refer to small changes but also to larger unforeseen events, e.g., when the client suddenly has to go to hospital or has had an accident at home. This characteristic of care work requires care workers to adapt flexibly. Adaptation may refer to how they carry out tasks at the clients' home and how long they take but also to changes to the overall rota at short notice. Constantly having to react to these kinds of unforeseeable events and changes is commonplace throughout the cases. Many workers see this flexibility demand as something **that comes with the job** (and thus do not complain about it or regard it as changeable), and many managers perceive it to be a **precondition for employment** in care work in the first place. However, even if this unpredictability is, as noted, in some ways inherent to care work, it is of course also subject to **work organisation**. And what we can see in this regard it is that work organisation may substantially exacerbate or relieve the strain coming with this aspect of care work.

An exceptional **good-practice example** in this context is found in the UK's REABLEMENT. There, workers have very predictable shift patterns, and the main reason for why basic shift patterns are hardly ever changed for workers lies in the fact that such

changes have to be negotiated with the unions (e.g., a worker usually doing the morning shift changing to the evening shift). The organisation uses a 6-week rolling rota system in which shifts are fixed so that each worker permanently works the same shift (i.e., always morning, evening or night shift, including one or two weekends every three weeks) (McClelland/Holman 2011a).[16] Regarding this **"block shift approach"**, the case study authors arrive at the following conclusion, which can be underlined on the basis of the comparative case study analysis:

> "Overall, the block shift approach appeared to be advantageous to care workers who were able to organise their lives around their work. If shifts needed to be reorganised this was usually possible and arranged both informally (i.e., between coworkers) and formally (i.e., with management). If time had to be taken off in an emergency, management would arrange to cover the care calls, usually with casual staff" (McClelland/Holman 2011a: 17).

In contrast, in the UK's EASTBROOK HOMECARE case, demands for flexibility at short notice are particularly pronounced. The organisation practices a weekly rota system with four daily shifts. Workers, many of whom are employed on zero-hour contracts, state at the beginning of their contracts when they are available; additionally, all workers are expected to take over one evening shift per week and work one weekend in every two. Shift splits are commonplace and overtime is paid at the common rate. Despite the rota system, shifts are extremely variable, changing at short notice or even without notice. Workers are very often called to cover extra shifts, which leads to high levels of frustration and dissatisfaction among them, to difficulties in their leisure time and family life as well as to physical exhaustion. The following quote illustrates how far the organisation goes in demanding flexibility:

> *"I can be in bed and they're ringing. It can be your day off and they're ringing. And I know it's dead easy to say, 'Well, don't answer your phone', but then they say, 'We've been ringing you, why didn't you ring us back?' I went on holiday and they were still ringing me. They knew I was on holiday and they were ringing me saying, 'You're off for two weeks and you're only going away for one, so can you not come in and do some work, we're really stuck?'" (care worker, UK, quoted in McClelland/Holman 2011b: 18).*

Among the reasons for this situation are high amounts of sick leave; further reasons can be found in more general **social policy** as well as in **economic and market changes** in the care sector:

> "Turbulence in the broader social and health care sectors as a result of policy and economic change in recent years has, however, shifted the emphasis away from quality of care to the value of care, with implications for organisations such as EASTBROOK Homecare, who now compete mainly on the cost of their services" (McClelland/Holman 2011b: 7).

[16] At the time of the research, REABLEMENT was also experimenting with split shifts, which are less favourable for workers.

Looking at the quality of work, private sector care workers appear to be worse off than public sector workers in this situation (see McClelland/Holman 2011c; Hohnen 2012).

In Danish PRIVATE CARE, where time pressure has been increasing in recent years, as it has for Danish care providers in general, the relation between time pressure and quality of work again becomes very clear:

> "Employees' perception of what it means to perform good professional care (…) does not correlate with the conditions that [are] offered at the job. This general time pressure is something that affects the employees' sense of job satisfaction (…)" (Ajslev et al. 2011:18).

Thus, in the light of repeated cuts in quality levels, employees may either leave the house in a condition that does not correspond to their own professional standards – or violate the rules (Ajslev et al. 2011). Standardisation and tight scheduling, as Ajslev et al. (2011) point out, also has an impact on quality of work as it restricts the use of individual professional judgement, and a part of job crafting (see Hohnen 2012) thus gets lost for employees.

Notable in this context is also the role of **mobile phones** as tools for managing and demanding flexibility, becoming particularly clear in the quotation by the care worker in the UK quoted above (see also Chapter 1 on cleaning).

4.5.5 Work in isolation: Lonely vulnerable groups

Care work is, as many case studies reveal, a lonely job. As a rule, employees work on their own in the homes of clients, and social contact with colleagues is rare (with some exceptions). In a comparative perspective, isolation is most pronounced in the **Italian** cases.

> "In the COOPCARE service the job is mainly performed in loneliness and for many personal assistants the only relationship they establish is with the older person" (Bizzotto/Villosio 2012b: 35).

Additionally, the risk of working in isolation is particularly high for the vulnerable group of **low-skilled workers**. In the Italian example quoted above, for instance, the situation is eased for higher-skilled social care operators who, as opposed to personal assistants, take part in regular meetings with staff. A lack of contact characterises the Lithuanian PUBCARE case as well:

> *"It is specifically organized in such a way that we would not meet each other: our time is arranged in such a way. Even if you meet someone, you are urged to leave soon" (care worker, quoted in Naujaniene 2011a: 23).*

Yet, even in cases where regular meetings with colleagues and contact to the employing organisation take place frequently in comparison, as in Denmark's STEADY CARE, workers still express a **wish for more exchange** and social relations to their coworkers (Møller/Hohnen 2011). A **positive exception** is the UK's COOPERATIVE CARE, where the case study authors report:

> "Care workers interacted with each other frequently and there was a sense of cohesion that was reflected in the shared belief that they were all part of a team. Indeed, all care workers that were interviewed described how they relied on their coworkers for help and support in the job as well as for sharing knowledge about the service users" (McClelland/Holman 2011: 15).

These more favourable conditions are likely to be facilitated by a) the small size of the organisation and b) its status of being a third sector organisation.

Looking at the collected case studies, it becomes obvious which aspects of work organisation favour social contact, and thus, how this important aspect of quality of work could be improved. Based on good-practice examples, case descriptions and the perceptions of workers, we can identify the following **factors enhancing social contact**:

- **Regular meetings** with teams and/or supervisors do not only further social contact between workers but are also beneficial for discussing problems and receiving feedback.
- In some organisations, all workers **meet up at the head office** every morning to collect things like schedules, keys and medication (as in Danish cases) while in others they leave directly from their homes to the homes of clients (as in Italian cases). Obviously, the first kind of work organisation is beneficial with regard to meeting coworkers. However, starting times should be organised in a way that allows workers to actually meet, i.e., in that they do not have different starting times (see Møller/Hohnen 2011).
- **Joint lunch breaks** at the head office, if feasible in the broader organisation, are an important framework for making contacts with coworkers. However, the **spatial facilities** (e.g., a nice recreation room) need to exist, and this appears to be the exception. Positive examples can be found in Danish and German cases, while in some cases, there is no adequate room for workers at the head office. Furthermore, in the context of high workload and time pressure, and differing conditions as to whether lunch breaks are paid or not, it is sometimes difficult to keep **breaks free from work** (Hohnen 2011).

4.5.6 Health risks and absenteeism: A vicious circle

Sickness absenteeism is generally high in elderly care work, and one reason this can be linked to is the fact that the workforce as a rule is older than the general workforce. In addition, care workers do not want to infect their clients and usually take care not to work when they are ill. The high level of absenteeism, often combined with a long duration of absenteeism, too, is one of the reasons for the high demands for temporal flexibility, as a relevant share of the staff is absent at any time (e.g., 15% in German cases). As can be concluded from the case study analyses, a **vicious circle** is going on in this context: Not only does a high level of absenteeism increase flexibility demands and workloads for the other workers, but they also suffer from these working conditions and are exposed to more stress and physical strain and are thus more prone to get sick.

Overall, the **most dominant health and safety risks** across cases are backaches, musculoskeletal injuries, burnout, emotional exhaustion, stress, contracting contagious

diseases, and specifically, the increasing problem of multi-resistant micro-organisms clients may catch in hospitals. Risks are aggravated when clients' homes are not suitably adapted to the clients' physical problems and when they are obese and thus heavy to lift and move (Bizzotto/Villosio 2012b). Additionally, risks can be higher for **unqualified or low-qualified workers** who have little training about safety at work (Bizzotto/Villosio 2012a, b). Furthermore, when flexible staff are employed in order to cover for absent staff, this may only transfer the problem, as in Germany's WELFARECARE, where a special workforce substituting for absent workers is employed – who are by now overworked, too (Kümmerling 2012c).

A widespread problem is the risk of being exposed to **aggressive or abusive behaviour** by clients, as well as rude and confrontational behaviour by their family members (Holman/McClelland 2011a). This risk is particularly high for **migrant and ethnic minority workers** (see in more detail: Hohnen 2012; Sardadvar et al. 2012) based on racism and prejudices, as well as in work with clients with **mental disease**.

> *"She's got… I think it's dementia… she can be very abusive. And she can chase you, and she'll throw you out of her flat and everything. So if I'm there in the morning, like I was this morning, I couldn't sleep last night because of that reason" (care worker, UK, quoted in McClelland/Holman 2011c: 17).*

Another problem reported from Denmark concerns the job's character of being mobile work undertaken at unsocial hours:

> "Being alone in certain areas of the municipality in the nights and evening is disconcerting for the employees. Until last year all employees worked in pairs during the night but this has been cut to lower expenses causing resistance from the employees" (Møller/Hohnen 2011: 18).

Finally, care work is characterised by high **emotional demands.** These are closely linked to the fact that domiciliary elderly care work happens in close contact to the client, which workers derive high meaning from and which often results in deep emotional bonds.

> *"It doesn't matter how long you've done the job, it hurts when somebody dies, it really does have an effect" (senior manager, UK, quoted in McClelland/Holman 2011c: 17).*

In line with the broader tendency towards efficiency, some companies have implemented **measures to lower absenteeism levels.** Often, these are based on new **technological tools** that make work less physically demanding. Another crucial aspect is to have people **work in pairs** when a task such as heavy lifting needs to be done. This option is in some cases legally prescribed (as in Germany), and in others defined by the organisation (as, e.g., in UK cases). In a single case, it is the rule rather than the exception that employees work in pairs, and here this is made possible by the high involvement of volunteer workers in the organisation (VOLUNTARY CARE). In addition, we find **corporate health measures** such as health panels, back care courses, talks on hygiene and nutrition,

investment in hoisting machinery and training on moving and handling people (e.g., WELFARECARE, REABLEMENT, EASTBROOK HOMECARE).

It is, however, not always clear to what extent corporate measures support workers or put them under even more pressure. This refers particularly to **"sickness talks"** that appear in several case studies. They imply that management has a talk with workers who are noticed to have a high level of absenteeism, trying to figure out reasons and supportive measures. Another case in point is Danish STEADY CARE, where new ways of **monitoring sickness absenteeism** were implemented as part of the rationalisation activities, with the effect of lowering absenteeism from 8.1% to 7.4%, i.e., below the national average for the sector. It is difficult to judge to what extent such talks have the character of improving the workers' situation or of reprehending and disciplining employees or even making them go to work when sick.

Particularly in **small organisations**, sickness absenteeism is a huge organisational problem, and these are mainly where we find the widespread pattern of **managers or other office-based staff substituting** for "regular" care workers in the field and thereby working very long hours.

4.5.7 Discretion and documentation: "If it isn't documented, it didn't happen!"

The pattern of increasing standardisation is also manifest in the growing importance of **documentation** of the work done with the clients – with several effects on quality of work. For one thing, the heightened demand of documentation work increases the workload on top of the intensification of work in care work itself. In the case studies, documentation work is sometimes done in the car, during lunch breaks, in the time between split shifts, or at home after the "actual" work. For another, documentation work tends to be a particular difficulty for workers with **low educational background or low language skills** (Møller/Hohnen 2011). In some cases, the implementation of higher documentation standards includes the introduction of new technical tools such as **smartphones**, which some workers find hard to work with or get used to and others perceive as time-consuming bureaucratisation with little outcome (Hohnen 2011). Upon her visit during one of the case studies, Kümmerling observes:

> "On the blackboard in the recreation room there is a small poster that says 'If it isn't documented, it didn't happen!'" (Kümmerling 2012c: 17).

Documentation is sometimes also connected to a decrease of discretion, as are other standardisation measures. Overall, in most of the cases, care workers have a reasonable amount of **discretion**. Not surprisingly, leeway and autonomy are higher in the less standardised cases. In the project-based work in Lithuania's VOLUNTARY CARE, for instance, the project does not specify the tasks that are to be provided, allowing for a situation in which "*a person comes and does what is necessary*" (coordinator, quoted in Naujaniene 2012: 5), albeit negotiated with what the client thinks is necessary or not. The contrast could hardly be higher to the precise time allocation and task specification that we see in Danish cases.

What has to be emphasised in the context of discretion and autonomy is that in care work this is a **highly ambivalent** aspect of quality of work. Elements of independence and job crafting may be highly appreciated by some care workers, but they also go hand in hand with high expectations of independence and, thus, a high amount of **responsibility**, which is not always easy to deal with (see also Kümmerling 2012c). However, qualification as well as work organisation appear to make a difference in this respect: In the Danish cases, skilled workers usually feel qualified and confident to solve problems that occur. In addition, they have a high degree of social support from managers and coworkers.

4.5.8 Reablement schemes: A new way towards higher quality of work?

In the context of work organisation and quality of work, it is worthwhile to have a closer look at the reablement schemes that characterise the UK's REABLEMENT and Denmark's REHABCARE cases. There is strong evidence that reablement approaches have some very **advantageous impacts** on quality of work. But there are also **new risks** attached to them. In fact, UK's REABLEMENT is an exceptional case in the positive sense with regard to many of the features of care work discussed so far. Foremost, **time pressure**, which is generally increasing, has actually been reduced with the implementation of the programme.

> *"We don't stick to times and this is better because you're not rushing" (care worker, quoted in McClelland/Holman 2011a: 17).*

Absenteeism, too, has been reduced, and **workers' qualifications are raised** by specific reablement courses. Furthermore, reablement is linked to considerable **autonomy** over how work is undertaken, higher input of workers and thus more job discretion (McClelland/Holman 2011a).

Yet, we can observe changes in the **image of the "ideal worker"** in the context of the reablement scheme. This change is towards an even more flexible organisation of work and a more pedagogical orientation of care – a change in professional attitude that is not easy to accomplish for some workers who are used to focus on helping customers rather than trying *not* to help them with everything (Hohnen 2011: 18). Reablement is also connected to increasing cognitive demands and demands to adapt to a new culture of care:

> "Working within Reablement was necessarily more cognitively challenging than traditional services as care workers were no longer expected to complete tasks passively, but to engage and interact with service users and become fully involved with their care plans" (McClelland/Holman 2011a: 18).

Emotional demands, too, are particularly high within reablement:

> "The emotional demands placed on care workers were sometimes significant. Although the aim of reablement was to get services users back to independence, any lack of progress was felt between both the user and care worker. Even more difficult was the need for care workers to remain detached from the service users" (McClelland/Holman 2011a: 18).

The specific needs in the reablement approach may be particularly problematic for **senior workers** who are used to another culture of care, and for **workers with low reading and writing skills**, which are required to a higher extent in reablement, too. In Denmark, there is also some concern that the reablement programme may **lower recognition for care** work even more:

> *"Much of the recognition that care workers experience are related to their being caring ... and often the professional pride and meaning of care work has been related to when Mrs Hansen says: 'I am so happy that it is you today, because you always pass by the bakery on your way here'. What happens then when it is part of the rehabilitation scheme that Mrs Hansen should train to be able to go to the bakery herself?" (project leader rehabilitation programme, Denmark, quoted in Hohnen 2011: 22).*

However, while recognition from the clients may decrease, reablement may also promote recognition from society by developing care work into a more pedagogical direction, understanding care workers as coaches or even teachers. [17]

Further specific drawbacks and potential future problems linked to reablement in the UK's REABLEMENT are limited career progression opportunities, increasing perceptions of job insecurity, and the introduction of poorer contracts (McClelland/Holman 2011a: 18). The Danish report adds the following shortcomings of the reablement approach: training related to it is not formally acknowledged in wages or new types of jobs, reablement results in more conflicts with the clients, and it is accompanied by the fear that it will eventually lead to dismissals as it is linked to a reduction of the support delivered (Hohnen 2011).

In summary, reablement programmes, albeit mainly introduced in order to cut costs, can have very beneficial outcomes for quality of work – in fact, in some of the current core problem areas. However, they also tend to add some new problems to the agenda.

4.5.9 "Happy" after all? The central ambiguity of care work

From the chapters above it has become clear that domiciliary care work has low objective job quality in many aspects. Contracts are often – and increasingly – precarious, wages are not only low but frequently also part-time-based and unpredictable, demands are high and manifold, health risks are considerable and societal recognition is perceived as frustratingly low by many. One would expect that in such a context, workers would express high dissatisfaction with their work. As a matter of fact, however, most of them do not. And the reason why is the **meaning** that they attach to their work and derive from it, enjoying the relation with the client, feeling they do something important and useful. We have summarised this pattern elsewhere as the **"central ambiguity of care work"** (Sardadvar et al. 2012). The striking parallelism of being aware of bad working conditions

[17] Thanks to Pernille Hohnen for the additional input on this aspect.

but at the same time being happy with the job is illustrated perhaps most impressively in the following quote – one of many:

> *"To be honest, I wouldn't advise anyone to become a carer now, really I wouldn't. It's not just our company. There are lots of companies where absolutely everything is wrong. There's a real state of emergency in care work now. We need lots more people even though I would no longer advise anyone to go into care work. I wouldn't do it again. Or maybe I would. I don't know. I love this job. You need to be born to this job. I like working with people" (care assistant, Germany, quoted in Kümmerling 2012c: 18).*

Paradoxically, this high level of meaningfulness derived from work **adds to workers' vulnerability**. It may prevent them from demanding better working conditions, and it makes them reluctant to consider measures such as strike, as these would harm their customers. It can be argued that it is precisely the meaning derived from work regardless of all prevailing problems that makes workers vulnerable: namely in the sense that they are more willing to accept bad working conditions if they are "compensated" for them by other means. Following this argument, workers in elderly care will be less likely to complain, organise, leave or make demands, which the case study findings underline (see Sardadvar et al. 2012; Hohnen 2012).

4.6 Skills and development: Soft skills and new skills

4.6.1 Formal, informal and changing skills

Most countries have systems with two different categories of care workers (low skilled and skilled) who are complemented by nurses. The duration of education for these categories of workers differs however between countries. Meanwhile, the case studies draw a clear picture of **soft skills** and **personality characteristics** being regarded as the most important skills.

> "Most of the workers interviewed, no matter if they were social care operators or personal assistants, reported that being naturally inclined to offer help and to support people in need is an important prerequisite in this job, more than technical skills that can be acquired on the job" (Bizzotto/Villosio 2012a: 31).

This perspective is found throughout most of the countries and case studies, and repeated by workers as well as managers. On a more general level, it should be noted in this context that a perspective on skills that focuses on soft skills, which in the case of care are often skills that are traditionally ascribed to women, is known to be one way of denying female-dominated jobs material recognition (see, for example, Briar/Junor 2012).

The **"ideal care worker"**, we can summarise on the basis of various statements in the case studies, is perceived as highly flexible, motivated, responsible, independent, able to work in a team and able to communicate. She (she is most often a woman) also has the "right personality", a caring attitude, a warm personality and enjoys care work. The ideal worker possesses punctuality, reliability, idealism, empathy and honesty. Managements'

and employees' images of the ideal care worker overlap in most parts, and so do perspectives in different countries and cases.

The focus on soft skills, however, does not always overrule other criteria; the more so as the latter may be **legally prescribed**. Nevertheless, **qualification requirements differ** very much between countries. For example, care workers in Lithuania's VOLUNTARY CARE are expected to have higher education in social work, and Danish cases employ very few unskilled workers nowadays. In contrast, particularly the UK managers explicitly value soft skills more than academic credentials and have no objections to recruiting staff without any training as carers, providing them with a comparatively short induction after they have started working at the organisation. Some, like Lithuania's PUBCARE, do not even provide their unskilled new staff with initial training:

> "However, at the organization there are no trainings for newcomers, and, according to our research participants, 'you get an address and you go there'" (Naujaniene 2011: 24).

In Italy, too, the category of personal assistants is not required to have any training, but they will be provided with courses which count as formal qualification and are the basis for the possible next step, becoming a social care operator (see also: Bizzotto/Villosio 2012c).

In Italy and in Denmark, there are instances of "deprofessionalisation", due to both privatisation and public austerity. Thus, we find **several conflicting trends** when looking at skill requirements and qualifications. There is the reablement scheme with a new set of competences and training, but at the same a trend towards no longer regarding it as necessary to employ care workers with formal skills.[18]

As a rule, care workers have to participate in **legally prescribed regular further training** and refreshment courses regularly. Additionally, **many of the organisations studied offer training** either to complete a vocational training course or to specialise within particular fields. The main pattern here is that organisations offer these courses at **no cost for the workers**, be it because they have public funding, pay for them, or have funding from customer contributions. The training offered thus does not necessarily or consistently differ along the public/private or the big/small organisation criterion. In addition, organisations usually try to adjust training times to work schedules, so that training does not interfere with working hours. Only in exceptional cases, however, can workers attend training during their (i.e., paid) working time (VOLUNTARY CARE).

Throughout the case studies, we can find several aspects that work as **barriers** towards taking part in training. One is a lack of confidence in one's **language skills**, which is linked to the specific vulnerability of migrants and immigrants. Another one, which is mentioned only once but is very telling, is the concern that nobody else is going to do one's care work while one is attending the training (Naujaniene 2011).

[18] Thanks to Pernille Hohnen for the additional input on this aspect.

Finally, some important trends can be identified with regard to **changing skills requirements.** First, the increasing **use of technology**, which is, for instance, a contested issue in Danish STEADY CARE, and which possibly indicates a more general trend: STEADY CARE is replacing its documentation system with smartphones; a change that is not entirely easy for workers on the one hand, but appears to improve some aspects of work quality on the other hand, as coordination becomes easier (Møller/Hohnen 2011). The consequences of such changes may go far beyond mere issues of skills and of how to organise single work tasks, influencing, in this case, the **concept of time** in very crucial ways:

> "Technology is also shaping the concept of time as documentation and computerization means that time consumption of all specific care services are meticulously calculated, and these calculations are the base of the annual revisiting of how much time is assessed for the services. This has been called 'time tyranny' by the employees and especially by the employees in the rural area who were accustomed to a local assessment of care needs" (Møller/Hohnen 2011: 23).

Second, we can see an increasing need of **documentation skills**, which imply new organisation skills and increasing computer skills; a development connected to the tendencies of formalising, standardising work. Third, the rise of **reablement approaches**, which we observe in Denmark and the UK, is, as mentioned, linked to changing skills requirements. Finally, with extending groups of customers, the demographic change and a general increase in the use of domiciliary care, there is increasing demand and importance for individual **specialist competence**, e.g., for particular illnesses such as dementia, wound treatment, etc.

Meanwhile, an issue that remains insufficiently solved is the question of **medical competences**. While these are formally regulated, problems in practice persist. These may take the shape of care workers feeling able to do some tasks while not being allowed to, or of care workers having to do tasks in everyday work life that they are actually not entitled to.

4.6.2 Careers and perspectives: Training opportunities, but few positions

Promotion perspectives in domiciliary elderly care are generally **limited,** and they are so, in particular, for two groups of workers: qualified carers, and unskilled or low skilled migrant or ethnic minority workers. In the first case, already **qualified carers** do find opportunities to be trained for management positions, but do not have much of a practical chance to be promoted, as positions at this level are rare. In the second case, **unskilled or low-skilled migrant or ethnic minority workers** face specific barriers to moving upwards, as they tend to face or perceive language barriers in becoming trained. From some cases, we get evidence that promotion prospects depend highly on the **management**, thus are not formalised and tend to be unequal. In one German case, this results in men having better opportunities than women do. In one Danish case, contact to management appears to be decisive for individual opportunities. Generally, further training is not a realistic option for many because, even when it is financed publicly or by the employer, workers find it hard **to dedicate their leisure time** to an additional obligation.

> "The lack of career mobility may turn care work into a dead-end occupation, both in the perception of workers and in fact" (Bizzotto/Villosio 2012b: 20).

A particular problem is over-qualification as well as **the deteriorating prospects of high-skilled staff** in some countries. This problem is dominant in **Italy**, where hours previously allocated to high-skilled social care operators are increasingly being transferred to low-skilled, "cheaper" personal assistants – rendering the future prospects of skilled staff more and more negative. A realistic alternative for them is to work in **residential care**, which, however, is perceived as less attractive in terms of job quality despite the higher security (Bizzotto/Villosio 2011a).

Apart from vocational training and formal qualifications, many employers organise **courses in specialist areas**. Some of these are **legally prescribed** (Germany, UK), in some exceptional cases they will be followed by **wage increases** (Danish REHABCARE), and in some they can lead to a **formal certification** (Italy). Particularly favourable conditions can be found in some cases: WELFARECARE in Germany adapts work schedules for care assistants who train to become qualified carers (Kümmerling 2012a), German PRIVATECARE is able to offer complete career-path training to allow care workers to train as qualified nurses or elderly care professionals, while the UK's COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY CARE is one of the few case-study organisations where opportunities arise in reality, too. The lowest prospects are probably to be found in the Lithuanian VOLUNTARY CARE case, where nobody saw anyone becoming promoted or perceived any realistic options.

In several countries, options are limited in the light of **legal restrictions** that do not allow care staff to carry out medical tasks, which care workers perceive as demotivating. Additionally, we can identify the problem that those people who did train are **unsatisfied afterwards** because they either cannot use their new skills or do use them but do not see them reflected in pay levels (BIGPRIVATECARE, WELFARECARE).

4.7 Working cultures and norms: A changing culture of care

The atmosphere at the centres of the organisations is perceived and described as good and friendly both by researchers upon visits at the organisations and by interviewees. Yet, **status differences** tend to be reflected in **rooms and facilities**, for instance in the Danish REHABCARE case, where the facilities for permanent workers are considerably more generous and nice than in the temp unit. In the Italian cases, workers hardly ever visit the organisation's centre, working in a very isolated way, having to solve problems via phone and rarely meeting coworkers, while in the German and Danish cases, there are usually rooms where teams meet to do documentation work, have breaks, have coffee, eat, smoke and chat. In organisations with high staff turnover, such as German PRIVATECARE, the atmosphere can suffer from these **constant changes of staff**. An interesting detail is found in specific **mourning areas** available in German WELFARECARE, which allow workers to remember patients who have passed away.

Recognition of work is perceived as low, and many care workers suffer from this lack of recognition. Clearly, the most important source of **feedback and appreciation** of their work is from **clients and their families**. This fact puts even more relevance on their relations to clients. Only a few organisations make use of **formalised feedback systems** (e.g., the UK's COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY CARE). Some organisations practice **rituals** such as celebrations (e.g., Lithuanian, Danish cases) or annual performance appraisals (e.g., UK cases). In a work situation prone to isolation, such gatherings are one of few occasions to establish contact with the employer and coworkers and to receive recognition.

Finally, Danish STEADY CARE, with all its restructuring, is a telling example of how much **cultures**, too, change in the context of policy and organisational changes. The traditional culture of helping others, captured in the **"narrative of the 'caring employees'"** (Møller/Hohnen 2012: 25) is challenged by current changes:

> "The professional identity of the employees is therefore under pressure from several sides: There is a change in the way of giving care towards more coaching and empowering of the elderly, the overall rationalization of the provision of care will gradually result in less time spent with the elderly, and a change of mind-set among the citizens could be troublesome for the employees' way of relating to the elderly. Other developments such as usage of both computer technology and welfare technology, more private competition and further commodification of public services is also viewed as likely to result in a change of work and working conditions in STEADY CARE" (Møller/Hohnen 2011: 26).

Structural change and professionalisation clearly have an impact on quality of work, and it has to be emphasised that they do not only change work organisation and everyday work tasks but also appear to transform the whole **culture of care**.

4.8 Industrial relations and representation: Who takes care of the carers?

"I just don't know anything about it" (care worker in the UK about trade unions, quoted in McClelland/Holman 2011c: 21).

"Do we actually have one?" (care assistant in Germany about trade unions, quoted in Kümmerling 2012c: 21).

In most of the organisations studied, trade unions are absent. In many cases across countries, workers do not know who the union in charge is, whether there is one, or even what a union is in the first place. Very consistently, there was **little knowledge** and, accordingly, little interest in joining a union.

This means that, as a rule, employees need to make use **of other ways to resolve problems**. Often these needs are met by the open-office policies of management, meaning that workers can address them directly in the case of problems. Regular team meetings, held in some of the cases only, also provide a forum where problems can be

discussed. It is particularly Italian personal assistants who hardly have support or contacts to turn to and work in isolation without regular contact to employer or coworkers. They are, as a rule, not unionised, as opposed to social care operators, many of whom are.

Even if workers have access to trade unions or there is a works council, most case study authors arrive at the conclusion that these are perceived as neither very present nor active. In Lithuanian PUBCARE, there is a works council as well as an employees' health and safety representative, and some workers are members of the union. Yet, neither the works council nor the union's activities are known to the workers. How weak the representation is illustrated by the fact that even the works councillor reports he has

> *"left the union. There were no activities. No changes. And if you have to do things yourself, what is the union for" (works councillor, Lithuania, quoted in Naujaniene 2012a: 29).*

Germany's WELFARECARE and the UK's REABLEMENT are exceptions in that workers in REABLEMENT are unionised and WELFARECARE has an elected works council. Also more generally, chances to speak up and openness of communication appear to be higher here than in other organisations. The only cases being characterised by high, active and consistent workers' representation are the **Danish** case-study organisations. In line with a dominant tradition for employee representation in Danish elderly care (Møller/Hohnen 2012), there are collective agreements, works councils and most workers are members of unions. But even there, we see instances of workers not being sure about what the unions do or could do for them, increasing pressure on wages in collective agreements, and an increase of private providers without collective agreement.

In summary, the most vulnerable workers tend to be less unionised, and the organisations with the most precarious employment conditions, i.e., private ones, are the ones that are most likely not to have a collective agreement. In distributed work, and even more so when work is done in private homes, it is particularly hard for employee representatives to reach workers (see Krenn et al. 2005). It can be concluded that trade unions should do more to increase their exposure within care, as employees' knowledge about them is strikingly low. With the precaution necessary with regard to the qualitative data, we can note that the cases investigated indeed suggest a pattern of correlation between unionisation or other kinds of employees' representation and comparatively good employment conditions.

4.9 Conclusions

Domiciliary care work has unfavourable and often precarious employment conditions, manifested in low pay, part-time contracts, zero-hour contracts, private expenses for work that are only partly reimbursed, and very high flexibility requirements with limited flexibility for workers' needs. These unfavourable conditions reflect low societal recognition for care work, being traditionally female work otherwise often done unpaid. However, the working conditions are under additional pressure in the context of current trends in the sector. The most influential ones are public budget cuts, striving for more efficiency, an increasing

share of private care providers on the market, standardisation and, in Denmark and the UK, rehabilitation programmes, the latter showing some potential for improvements of some aspects of work organisation (see also Hohnen 2012). Overall, however, these developments result in work contracts and future employment becoming more insecure. A particular pain point observed in Italy is the worsening situation for qualified staff. This trend is not unlikely to be seen in other countries in the future. While on the one hand, there is a trend toward specialisation in terms of new groups of clients and increasing competition by private providers, on the other hand, skilled workers' futures are particularly endangered as their labour is comparatively expensive and positions for career progression are scarce.

On the level of work organisation, we can identify increasing time pressure as one of the main and most problematic developments. Altogether, the widespread downsizing trend challenges traditional concepts of care work in crucial ways: by decreasing autonomy and discretion, by a high standardisation of work tasks and time use, by a rising importance of documentation, by accompanying new skill demands and by changing cultures of care. Vulnerable groups, e.g., ethnic minority workers, are particularly concerned by some of these changes.

Against this background, it is surprising that many employees appear to be rather satisfied with their job, as they ascribe a lot of meaning to it. While this certainly increases subjective quality of work, it may also make workers even more vulnerable in that they find it hard to strive for better working conditions (see Sardadvar et al. 2012).

The main sources of dissatisfaction can be seen in the level of wages, the low number of contracted working hours and their unpredictability, as well as the lack of adequate compensation for work-related expenses such as transportation costs. Virulent, but often accepted as an inevitable part of the job, are the extremely high flexibility requirements that workers are confronted with. Another problem often faced is aggressive or abusive behaviour by clients. This is even more of a problem as relations with the client are decisive for perceptions of quality of work in domiciliary elderly care.

In summary, care work is changing, either in a direction of downsizing and standardisation or in a direction of a new understanding of care within reablement schemes. These are different tendencies currently observable in domiciliary elderly care, and they are linked to different future scenarios as well as political options. In the context of the cases adopting the reablement approach, we can see tendencies towards changing roles of care workers due to professionalisation (including up-skilling in formal training as well as soft skills) and an increasing use of technology. In Denmark, there is a continuous development of new welfare instruments as well. In other cases, the trend is towards privatisation or the use of unskilled employees. The two scenarios reflect very different solutions, but we can observe both, with policies not being consistent in this regard not even on national (or even municipality or case) level.[19]

[19] Thanks to Pernille Hohnen for the additional input on this aspect.

Keeping in mind that both the number of people in need of care and the use of *domiciliary* elderly care specifically are expected to further increase in the next years and decades, the relevance of quality of work in domiciliary elderly care is high and rising. The main areas through which quality of work might be improved include increasing trade union activity in worker representation, a continuation of existing programmes that train unskilled staff, projects that tackle racist and other forms of abuse by clients (see Villosio 2012 for a good-practice example), health and safety measures both in terms of technological tools and working in pairs, improving future prospects for “expensive” high-skilled workers, solutions for demands for flexibility at short notice, reimbursement of work-related expenses, and opportunities to socialise with coworkers – to name only some that come to mind in the context of the findings. What care work needs most, however, are higher and reliable wages that prevent people doing hard work from living in poverty. The current trend is, however, pointing into the opposite direction; towards an increase of zero-hour contracts, mini-jobs, part-time contracts and non-guaranteed hours.

5 Cooking under pressure: The catering sector

5.1 The sector and the case studies

The **hotels & restaurants sector** consists of diverse business functions and jobs. Research in the **walqing** project selected the area of **contract catering**, often referred to as **industrial catering** for in-depth research. Contract catering can be defined as “the provision of food services based on contractual arrangements with the customer for a specific period of time” (Kirov 2011: 81). Typical examples are the operation of canteens and cafeterias for factories, offices, hospitals or schools on a concession basis. Research in contract catering in the **walqing** project was carried out in Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Spain and the United Kingdom.

This chapter of the report integrates the findings of the 12 company case studies with regard to company strategies and practices that concern quality of work in the dimensions of employment security and flexibility, wages, work organisation, skills and development opportunities, and worker voice.

Table 5.1: Overview of case studies and interviewees in the catering sector

Country	Company	Interviews
UK	the INHOUSE catering unit of Cityside University	2 managers (1 male, 1 female) 10 catering & kitchen assistants (7 female, 3 male) 1 chef (male)
	the CONTRACTOR managed catering unit of Central University	5 managers (female) 4 catering assistants (3 female, 1 male) 1 chef (male), 1 store keeper (male)
Germany	ELDERCAT, one of several locations run by the subsidiary of a charity organisation	2 managers (1 male, 1 female) 1 executive chef (male, works councillor) 2 canteen managers (female) 2 sous-chefs (2 female, 1 of them a works councillor) 4 kitchen/canteen assistants (female)
	CHILDCAT, a subsidiary of a private company active in different types of catering in Germany	1 manager (female) 1 executive chef (male) 4 cooks (male) 3 kitchen assistants (female)
Hungary	INTERFOOD, a large multinational company offering catering services	2 managers 3 trade unionists
	EDUFOOD,a catering firm concentrating on delivering catering in education institutions	1 manager 1 trade unionist
Lithuania	PRIMA, a private sector catering company offering services for nurseries, hospitals, schools, private companies and events	4 managers (1 female, 3 male) 1 chef (female) 7 cooks (6 female, 1 male) 1 kitchen assistant (female)
	SECUNDA, a private sector catering company offering services for events and state institutions	4 managers (female) 8 cooks (6 female, 2 male)
	TERCA, a private sector catering company offering services for private customers	2 managers (female) 4 cooks (female) 1 kitchen assistant (female)
Spain	MULTIFOOD, a large multinational company offering catering services	4 managers, (1 female, 3 male) 1 cook (male) 1 kitchen assistant (female) 4 union representatives (female)
	TRANSFOOD, a subsidiary of a large catering service group	4 managers 1 cook 2 cleaning assistants 1 cashier 3 union representatives
	HEALTHYFOOD, a family business group focusing on catering services for hospitals	5 managers 1 cook 2 union representatives

5.2 The companies and their environment

Contract catering as a sector has developed in the context of the continuous externalisation of services that started some decades ago. Increasingly, companies, schools, hospitals, universities and other places are outsourcing their food operations to specialists instead of running their own canteens. Contract caterers comprise large multinationals, medium-sized regional or national operators and small local companies. Alternatively, both for-profit and non-profit providers of health, care or education services outsource their own catering units to form new subsidiaries that may also offer their services on the external market.

Three types of companies can be distinguished in the case study sample: subsidiaries of large catering multinationals, large or medium-sized, national or regional catering companies that operate multiple sites with varying degrees of centralisation, and small, local units that operate one or several sites but basically provide catering for one or a few institutions in the region.

5.2.1 Subsidiaries of multinationals

Among the case studies, Hungarian INTERFOOD and Spanish MULTIFOOD are subsidiaries of the same large multinational that will be called INTERMULT in this study. TRANSFOOD belongs to another multinational. These companies in general pursue a strategy of becoming generic multi-service providers that are also active in cleaning, personnel leasing, facility management, etc. to improve both their margins and their status as an indispensable multi-purpose service provider (Tóth/Hosszú 2012a; Antentas 2011c, b). Their expansion has mostly taken place through acquisitions of national or regional companies.

INTERFOOD in Hungary was originally a regional monopolist providing catering for public institutions in Budapest. After being acquired by INTERMULT in 1993, it expanded to take over company canteens across the country, and currently employs 2,200 workers at 800 sites.

In Spain, INTERMULT subsidiary **MULTIFOOD** has been operating since 1976, currently employing approximately 4,000 employees at 325 sites, covering care facilities, schools (to a small extent) and company canteens.

Spanish TRANSFOOD is the subsidiary of another European catering multinational which was established in Spain through the merger of several smaller companies. It has 14,500 workers in 2,000 sites and is distributed all over Spain. Its highest share of turnover is generated in education, followed by health and then company canteens. In addition, the company runs high-end catering services in theatres and museums. The company has been pursuing a strategy of aggressive growth in recent years and emphasises client loyalty.

5.2.2 National or regional large multi-site companies

Other companies in the sample are also large and operate nationally or regionally at multiple sites, running central or on-site kitchens or using a combination of both modes of food delivery. In Hungary and Lithuania, post-socialist privatisation and the establishment of public procurement laws requiring public institutions to purchase catering services through public tenders triggered the outsourcing of institutional catering.

Spanish HEALTHYFOOD is the catering part of a family business group that was established as a food wholesaler in 1949. It specialises in hospital catering, a more demanding and less volatile segment of the catering market than schools in Spain, and distinguishes itself from the multinationals by investing in decentralised kitchens on the clients' sites. It currently employs 850 workers, 85 of whom work in the hospital unit investigated, together with 15 catering workers employed by the hospital.

CHILDCAT in Germany is one of several subsidiaries of a private company with operations throughout Germany in the areas of corporate and event catering, children's meals, and catering for the care industry, i.e., hospitals and homes for the elderly. For the group as a whole, 80% of its turnover is from corporate catering. The regional subsidiary analysed in this report focuses on catering for nurseries and schools through a central kitchen but also caters for hospitals and homes for the elderly and takes on event catering contracts. It aims for a quality approach but is limited by the cost pressures of public tendering. The central kitchen has some 57 employees, the company as a whole 1,200 (Schwarzkopf/Jaehrling 2012).

Lithuanian PRIMA and SECUNDA are among the four major companies providing catering services in Lithuania with in between 170 and 550 employees. Both are joint stock companies which originally pursued different activities but shifted to catering after the Public Procurement Law of 1997, which established tendering procedures and, generally, three-year contracts. PRIMA provides catering services for public institutions, companies and events and also owns a network of restaurants and cafés. SECUNDA specialises in event and banquet catering and pursues a high-quality strategy.

EDUFOOD in Hungary is a former state-owned company that was established in 1953 to provide catering services for company canteens and education institutions in the Budapest area. It was privatised through a management buy-out of employee shares in 1995 and currently has 800 employees of a fairly senior age. It is described as a "traditional Hungarian company" that has neither a website nor professional HR management or a strategy going beyond its current business model (Tóth/Hosszú 2012b).

5.2.3 Small, local units

Small units are found as part of public and non-profit sector organisations that may provide services to one or a few other organisations or outlets. Here, organisational boundaries are specifically permeable. Units may be retained in-house, be outsourced into subsidiaries owned by the original organisation, or managed by a contractor. There is also one small takeaway and delivery company in Lithuania, which presents an

exceptional case in the sample. Originally, it was selected because access to the other large Lithuanian providers was impossible. However, it provides us with insight into the small-business, unregulated segment of the hospitality sector. This is TERCA, a privately owned fast-food company that started as a kebab eatery and then generalised its offers to takeaway and food delivery to offices and homes and a small café-bar with 10 workers.

German ELDERCAT was originally the in-house kitchen of an elderly care home which belongs to a charity with activities throughout Germany. A few years ago the home's kitchen merged with kitchens of other nursing homes run by the charity in the region. This was the result of a company audit conducted by a large private catering company suggesting that the charity could organise their kitchens in a more cost-effective way. Instead of outsourcing the service, the charity formed a limited liability company "to preserve the jobs of long-service employees and to safeguard the quality of their jobs" (Jaehrling/Mesaros 2012: 4). This company caters for the home as well as for two schools and also provides some event catering services with its 12 employees.

British CONTRACTOR is the contractor managed catering unit of a medium-sized university in the Southeast of the UK. This means, the university employs its ca. 85 catering workers itself, but has outsourced just the management of its catering to a specialised catering company who runs it with five of its own managers (McClelland/Holman 2012d).

INHOUSE is the relatively self-contained catering unit of CITYSIDE UNIVERSITY in the UK, which runs the university's 17 refectories and cafeterias with ca. 100 employees, one of the few "profit centres" inside the university (McClelland/Holman 2012e).

5.3 Who pays what for food? Markets, clients, competition

Contract catering in Europe is expanding as both companies and public sector institutions externalise non-core services (other examples are cleaning, private security, etc.). At present, around 33% of firms or collective organisations in Europe have a contract with a catering company (www.ferco.org). Catering is also affected by social and institutional changes such as the increasing participation of women in the labour market, the related expansion of childcare facilities or all-day schools in Continental European countries, and by changes in lifestyles and consumer behaviour in the richer countries, such as an emphasis on healthy or organic food.

Catering appears to be less affected by the **current economic crisis** than the tourism-related parts of the sector (cf. European Foundation 2012). Catering companies are generally affected by the way in which economic developments affect their clients, the private and public sector and end customers respectively. Where they provide services for public institutions, demand is increasing, due to demographic and institutional change. However, public budgets have been tightened since well before 2008, which has driven down the prices per meal considerably in Germany or Hungary. Still, companies note further impacts of the crisis; austerity measures, cost-cutting exercises and shrinking

incomes decrease the budgets of both institutions and consumers, in particular in Hungary, Spain and Lithuania.

Caterers to public institutions report different modes of **cost controls**: In Germany, municipal authorities negotiate the fees for food and lodging of those elderly care home residents who are unable to pay for it themselves. This negotiation departs from the average regional costs – which means, lower-cost care facilities reduce the negotiable budget and disadvantage those homes that employ older workers and/or have more costly collective agreements. For secondary schools, contracts are also tendered by local authorities and the standard price for a midday meal is usually set at less than EUR 3 per meal (and the multinational SODEXO is reported to offer it from EUR 1.55 according to Standard, Oct 10, 2012). Higher-priced options may be offered freely, which means the profitability of a contract may be contingent on the number of "upgraded" meals that are sold.[20] In order to find caterers for all schools, some local authorities award packages of contracts with a mix of (more) profitable and unprofitable schools, or combine the contract for supplying school dinners with one for the operation of a school tuck shop which is generally profitable.

> "According to the managers, price competition has led to an increase in contract fluctuation because contracts that have already been awarded are constantly put out to tender again because clients suspect they can make further savings" (Schwarzkopf/Jaehrling 2012: 4).
>
> *"So it will run for a year and then they will put it out to tender again because they say the quality standards are not what we expected and then the whole business starts again from the beginning. It means the market is very unsettled" (CHILDCAT managing director, Germany, quoted ibid.).*

The UK's CONTRACTOR is the only case in the sample where the semi-outsourced configuration contributed to more favourable working conditions that resulted from workers being employed by the university. While this required some changes of habits from managers from the catering industry, they appeared to see it more as a "good" challenge than a problem:

> *"From the catering company's point of view, the university are very strict on their Working Time Directives … So that can be a bit frustrating … If they're employed for a 37-hour week it's a 37-hour week. If they work over, the staff do get reimbursed for it, which is fair enough, but there are questions asked, 'Why are they having to work over …?'" (manager, UK, quoted in . McClelland/Holman 2012d: 23).*
>
> "... There was no suggestion that regulations and policies should be changed, however, '*Regulations are very, very strict, so yeah. No, I think they're there for a purpose'* (manager)" (McClelland/Holman 2012d: 23).

[20] However, this could give companies an incentive to drive down the quality of the "standard" meal in order to have more customers order the "upgraded" options, unless the budget it is complemented by quality controls.

In addition to decreasing budgets, in Hungary public sector clients are increasingly slow in paying their providers' bills – putting pressure on caterers' liquidity. End customers are also known to become increasingly economical with their spending on food in Spain, Hungary and the UK, in particular in schools or universities:

> *"There are now parents, where one of them is unemployed and it is now possible for their children to have lunch at home. Or they stay at school with their packed lunch. We even have kids who bring lunches from home at a British-style school that is very elitist. At other schools (…), it is not possible to bring a packed lunch, due to internal rules" (MULTIFOOD centre manager, Spain, quoted in Antentas 2012c: 5).*

British university caterers are concerned about the increased tuition fees (raised from ca. £ 3,000 to up to £ 9,000 from September 2012), which may decrease both student numbers and food budget. INHOUSE were open to the possibilities of downsizing and centralising in the event of this (McClelland/Holman 2012e) but still intended to maintain their services in-house rather than contracting them out, despite ongoing interest from large contract catering companies.

All of this squeezes caterers in the more crisis affected countries from two ends of the market: Larger companies may have more capital, some economies of scale and higher bargaining power with raw material providers, but still may choose to cut cost by lowering staffing levels and increasing the pace of work. On the other hand, small businesses may be able to undercut the competition by avoiding some tax or social security contributions, paying their employees partly in cash.

Companies apply various strategies to counter these challenges: Hungarian EDUFOOD has simply halved its turnover and staff, using retirement schemes, and, like Lithuanian SECUNDA and TERCA, reduced wages to the legal minimum wage. Offering cheaper dishes and using cheaper ingredients is an obvious path for several cases. Some companies, such as INHOUSE in the UK or German CHILDCAT, increase marketing efforts and try to expand their more profitable segments. Multinationals are the ones that have more strategic space: Spanish TRANSFOOD pursues a quality and innovation approach, but cuts some cost of raw materials:

> *"So you have to be very imaginative to offer our type of service, to make sure it doesn't paralyze us and that the client sees it as an improvement within the recession, you see? We've started to use white label products, we haven't reduced the service, we still maintain the standards we had, and if we can improve them ... We take ideas from public restaurants and apply them here, such as wok menus, pasta menus and health foods (…) And all of that will help us to achieve client loyalty" (TRANSFOOD regional manager, Spain, quoted in Antentas 2012b: 4).*

Its competitor MULTIFOOD aims to become an integrated service provider, improving client loyalty in this way and also adding more profitable services:

> *"We want to be the provider of an integrated solution for clients. So they can forget about any other external services. Although at present what I have is restaurant services (...) This gives clients a single provider and a single invoice. But it isn't a topic where you can say 'today we'll start doing it like this'. It is a change process for everybody" (regional manager, Spain, quoted in Antentas 2012c: 4).*

5.4 Working through the lunch hour: Employment conditions, security and flexibility

Work in contract catering differs significantly from the work in hotels and restaurants. Working hours are more predictable, and kitchen and service assistants mostly work **part-time around lunch hours** – working times during the day that are favourable for people with family responsibilities or sometimes for students. However, catering is still a sector employing a mostly low-qualified and low-educated workforce, dominated by women and migrants. There is some, if unsystematic, evidence of over-qualification in the cases of migrants in particular. The sector also makes use of a wide variation of employment contracts utilising most of the **flexible options** that national labour market regulation provides – with the possible exception of agency work which was rarely observed in the cases.

While the hotels & restaurants sector in general is regarded as a young persons' sector (cf. European Foundation 2012), employees in catering are often **older**, having moved there from other hospitality jobs or from different sectors, or returning to work after raising children. An extreme case is Hungarian EDUFOOD, where managers and also many employees are well above pension age – managers because they bought the company in the 1990s, and employees who continue to work to supplement their low pensions with low wages. In German ELDERCAT, which outsourced its catering operation to maintain employment continuity, employees and managers say they are set to "*grow old together*" (quoted in Jaehrling/Mesaros 2012: 6). Younger workers are encountered mostly in cook and chef positions, or as students or school-leavers (in the UK, Spain and Lithuania) in more casual employment, such as event catering.

Women represent some 55-80% of employees and in most cases there is a clear **vertical gender segmentation**. Women tend to work as kitchen and serving assistants and men as cooks and chefs in full-time positions. In Lithuania, there is also a majority of women in cooks' positions. While management positions are disproportionately filled with men, women managers are a presence in catering. Lithuanian SECUNDA has a more subtle gender segregation line. Here, cooking is generally regarded as a feminine occupation because

> *"women [by nature] adapt more easily to monotonic work, heavy work load and are more hardworking (…)" (cook, female, 43, Lithuania, quoted in Kuznecoviene/Ciubrinskas 2012c: 8).*

The exception is the **preparation of meat**, in particular for barbecues at events. This is regarded as a masculine activity that interviewees regard as "more difficult, more complicated, requiring higher qualification, and thus, better paid" (ibid.):

> *"Our men [in the kitchen] are different in a sense that they go to events to grill meat skewers [šašlykai]. Of course, this is not a women's job because it is believed that it is a men's job, since they help to build the grills and so on. If there are many events, then we also go to the grill, yes, we also grill, but seldom" (cook, female, 45, Lithuania, quoted in Kuznecoviene/Ciubrinskas 2012c: 8).*

In some cases, interviewees note some changes in the gender composition in catering: Spanish MULTIFOOD respondents report that with the crisis, they receive increasing numbers of applications from men for kitchen assistant positions as well and indeed hire more men for these positions. Vice versa, some women are hired as chefs. The UK's CONTRACTOR have been hiring more young men in recent years,

> *"*something that the managers put down to the changing profile of the operation that now required longer working hours, occasionally atypical hours (e.g., evening shifts), and the creation of new roles (e.g., baristas). One described how changing attitudes might have also contributed, *'We also have a lot more males work for us as well. It's not such a stigma.'* (senior manager)" (McClelland/Holman 2012d: 9).

The entry of younger and male workers appears to be contingent upon the labour market in the respective country, the standing of the respective employer in the labour market, including the wages and benefits paid in relation to the alternatives, and possibly, also the success of sectoral or company efforts to upgrade skills and open up career perspectives.

Migrants are also frequently found: Spanish TRANSFOOD and German CHILDCAT have some 35% of migrant employees, and UK university caterers see increasing applications by migrants. In Lithuania, members of the Russian- and Polish-speaking ethnic minorities make up a proportion of catering workers – but ethnicity does not appear to visibly structure the labour market or work relations in the sector. It appears that the proportion of migrants is lower in those companies that employ a lot of part-time workers, since migrants tend to prefer longer working hours or full-time positions.

Part-time work is found in most but not all companies and countries, in line with each country's general labour market patterns. It is the domain of middle-aged women with low skills or devalued skills in the respective labour market. In this way, Hungarian and Lithuanian companies (except small TERCA) hire few part-time workers, and in Spanish HEALTHYFOOD they are also a minority although the company plans to hire more part-timers in the future. MULTIFOOD and TRANSFOOD both typically hire kitchen and serving assistants for half days to cover lunchtimes. In addition, Spanish unionists report that with the crisis some companies cut cost by asking workers to perform the same amount of work in six rather than eight hours (Recio/Godino 2011). German CHILDCAT has a very wide range of contracts, making use of the German tax and social security subsidies for marginal employment:

> "The contracted hours range from 2.5 to 39 hours per week. 19 employees are in mini-jobs[21] (most of them just under 11 hours), 16 are in part-time jobs subject to social security contributions (most of them 20 to 30 hours) and 22 are in full-time positions subject to social security contributions (35 to 39 hours). There is a considerable split between the sexes: whereas over half of the men (56%) have a full-time job, less than a quarter of the women are in full-time positions (23%)" (Schwarzkopf/Jaehrling 2012: 6).

This workforce is supplemented by workers with more casual contracts to cover events or understaffed periods. Generally, caterers appear to be looking for ways to increase their use of shorter- or zero-hours contracts rather than extending working hours. Cooks and chefs tend to work full-time. However, one cook in Lithuanian TERCA works part-time voluntarily to support her other job as a freelance chef.

Otherwise, in Lithuania caterers employ workers for fixed-term periods that coincide with the duration of their contracts with the clients (3 years as a rule in case of public authorities). "Good" employees may be retained and deployed at a different job after a contract expires. German ELDERCAT employs two mini-jobbers with fixed-term contracts (which cannot be renewed more than 3 times) but workers are confident that these will be made open-ended when that period expires. In Spain, the collective agreement regulates certain guarantees of workers in cases of transfer, i.e., when a new company takes over in a workplace. The agreement stipulates that the staff in a workplace must be maintained if the contracted company changes, thus ensuring employment stability in the sector. However, this stability has a downside. When companies have to cut labour costs and are unable to dismiss workers, they tend to place them on part-time contracts.

Seasonality of work contracts is limited in catering. It concentrates at school and university caterers, who may downsize or close down their services during the summer holidays. Indeed, TRANSFOOD in Spain cuts its workforce from 14,500 to 4,000 in June, and some younger and more mobile workers then move to jobs in tourism. The British university caterers offer seasonal contracts over 32 weeks with 15-32 hours, which coincide with school term times and thus are considered favourable for those women with school-age children who can afford the loss of income in the summer.

German ELDERCAT has an interesting working time arrangement that takes account of school holidays (Jaehrling/Mesaros 2012). During school times, employees work longer hours than those stipulated in their contracts. These extra hours are offset by the twelve weeks of school holidays when the canteens are closed. For instance, the two canteen managers have a contractual 19.5-hour working week, but actually work 27.5 hours per week during school term. Overtime above that is paid and cannot be taken as holiday. Employees say they are happy with these working time arrangements because they have so much time off at once. The mini-jobbers in the canteens are contracted to work a 13.5-

[21] Mini-jobs are a special form of part-time employment. Average monthly pay must not exceed EUR 400. The employer has to make a one-off social security payment of around 30% for an employee in a mini-job. The employees themselves are exempt from paying social security contributions and under some circumstances do not have to pay tax either.

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

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

5.5 From skills to personality and back: Recruitment

To recruit new workers, the multinationals and larger companies select new recruits through fairly **formal procedures**. This is also the case in the British university caterers. These companies generally report an **increasing pool of applicants** due to both the crisis and their own reputation for fairly favourable working conditions and wages. Spanish companies' capacity for recruitment is limited by the rules of subrogation: when taking over a public sector contract, new contractors must take on the existing workforce for whom continuity lies with the client rather than the employer. Lithuania's PRIMA also favours hiring workers from the previous contractor who are familiar with the premises.

Cooks and chefs are generally hired through advertisements, websites or job fairs. Smaller and regional companies also rely on their **employees' networks** of friends and acquaintances, and this may also be the case in larger companies for the unskilled positions.

Spanish companies say they increasingly rely on workers' formal qualifications in the sector. However, HEALTHYFOOD also make use of state allowances for hiring formerly unemployed women and women returning to work after childbirth. British employers increasingly look for "personality", good interpersonal skills and working time flexibility, arguing that the technical skills can be trained more easily. German CHILDCAT only look for qualifications when hiring cooks, and also warn that in their type of work there is limited space for creative flair and ambition. Here, age and gender play a part in recruitment already, due to the physical challenges of work in the kitchen areas. The executive chef says:

> *"For instance, and this has nothing to do with old people, I wouldn't employ someone who was 50 or 55. He wouldn't cope. If he had to replace G. for example. That lad is 30. He is in the prime of his life. He has strength, power. He helps me lug things around every morning. I don't think that someone of that age would manage it" (executive chef, Germany, quoted in Schwarzkopf/Jaehrling 2012: 8).*

While he would not rule out hiring women in general, physical stamina is central, and currently there are only men employed in the central kitchens:

> *"They obviously have to have some strength in them. That's the way it has to be because nothing is light here. Nothing is light in our work. (…) If we start to lift something, it's going to be way more than 100 kilos. You have to think of that" (executive chef, quoted in Schwarzkopf/Jaehrling 2012: 8).*

In German ELDERCAT, where there have been no recent new recruits, for the position of kitchen assistants skill is generally deemed irrelevant by the executive chef:

> *"I am not interested in their school education or what they have done in the past. I just look at how they work. To me that's important" (executive chef, Germany, quoted in Jaehrling/Mesaros 2012: 8).*

Lithuanian TERCA are also very aware of the limitations:

> *"A highly qualified cook won't go here. It's a different level. We work with low-cost products. Women come from hospital or school canteens. Well, that's the sort of their qualifications ... but here it's enough" (manager, Lithuania, quoted in Kuznecoviene/Ciubrinskas 2011a: 10).*

5.6 "The lowest of the low": Wages and payment system

The downsides of catering work are first and foremost the **low pay** without the extra compensation of tips. Some companies pay bonuses for extra work or good performance. Across Europe, workers agree that their pay is among "the lowest of the low" – but are somewhat resigned to it. Patterns of wages vary mostly with the respective countries.

As we might expect, **Hungarian** and **Lithuanian** catering workers have the lowest wages. The Lithuanian legal minimum wage is at LIT 800, that is EUR 232/month, and this is what kitchen assistants generally receive. Cooks' wages are estimated at LIT 1,100-1,300, that is EUR 320-380. However, in the absence of sectoral collective agreements or any collective representation, Lithuanians are reluctant to talk about their actual wages. All three companies pay bonuses, but in the owner-managed companies, SECUNDA and TERCA, these are perceived as arbitrary. SECUNDA also had cut wages with the crisis and had apparently been slow to take back the cuts compared to other companies. In Hungary, EDUFOOD pays its kitchen assistants some EUR 250/month, cooks receive EUR 400-500. This is topped up by the availability of free meals at work which amounts to an equivalent of an extra EUR 100. Wages at INTERFOOD are a little higher, starting at EUR 300. Nevertheless, in both cases interviewees report that workers leave for restaurant work with its better earning opportunities, although some return after finding restaurant employment more unstable. Lithuanian workers consequently complain about "ridiculous" wages, and at TERCA feel these are only feasible for young people living with their parents.

In the other countries, pay is still low and characterised by an **increasing variation of collective agreements** due to outsourcing and various transfers of undertakings.

Both **British** universities had engaged in a pay review between 2004 and 2007 as part of a national agreement between higher education institutions and the trade unions with the aim to encourage equality relating to job roles and pay, and to ensure that employees' contributions were recognised and rewarded fairly. At a basic hourly rate of approximately £8.00 (or EUR 9.43) at CONTRACTOR, catering assistants were on a higher wage than the catering sector average of £6.77 or EUR 7.79. Some variations in the hourly pay rate appeared to correspond with contract types: a few catering assistants on older, fixed-hours contracts earned approximately 10% more than those on variable hours; casual staff earned around £8.50 (or EUR 10.02) per hour because their holiday pay was included in the hourly rate that they received (McClelland/Holman 2012d: 16). At INHOUSE, a second pay review in 2010 decreased hourly rates again from £8.50 (or EUR 9.75) to ca. £7.80 or EUR 9.11. Accordingly, workers in the UK are comparatively satisfied with their wages, comparing them to other catering jobs. A catering assistant at CONTRACTOR says:

> *"We're quite well paid for the work… [A] reception manageress, she was talking to me and I said, 'I make the same, if not more, making coffees, and you're doing that'. And she was like, 'You're kidding'. And I was like, 'No, I earn the same, just a little bit more than what you earn'. She couldn't believe it" (catering assistant, UK, quoted in McClelland/Holman 2012d: 16).*

In **Spain**, MULTIFOOD employees are covered by up to five agreements, connected to the subrogation of personnel at the centres where the company wins new contracts.

> "The main collective bargaining agreement is Hotels & Restaurants, of which some 85% of the staff are members, followed by Geriatrics, Cleaning, Teaching and Healthcare. In practice, this means that employees who do similar jobs are subject to having unequal wage conditions. The agreement that offers the best salary conditions is for Hotels & Restaurants and the worse is Geriatrics. For example, for chefs, the base salary of the first is 1,277 euros and a bit less than 900 for the second" (Antentas 2012c: 8).

New hires are paid based on the agreement in place at the respective work site. In TRANSFOOD, most employees are also covered by the hotels & restaurants agreement, and cooks and chefs receive a small supplement to improve retention. At HEALTHYFOOD, kitchen assistants receive some EUR 1,100/month. The head of the plating section at one hospital kitchen complains, in particular with regard to the demand in catering work:

> *"The pay doesn't ... You see we work at Christmas, Easter, every day of the year ... Our pay slip shows ... The thing is catering is very badly paid. It's the worst there is. So they pay you so much, what's laid down by the agreement and that's it, and we can't do anything because that's what the agreement says ..." (kitchen worker, Spain, quoted in Antentas 2012a: 14).*

German CHILDCAT pays the wages of the regional hotels & restaurants agreement which has been declared generally binding. Most workers are in the lowest pay bracket and

receive hourly wages of between EUR 6.76 and EUR 7.92, which would amount to a fulltime wage of EUR 1,142 and EUR 1,339 after two years' employment. If staff are taken over during a transfer of undertaking, the company tries to integrate them into this pay system after the one-year period of protection is over. If they have had higher earnings before, which happens very rarely, this is adjusted by paying a bonus outside the collective agreement. After that period, the company is also prepared to grant a small pay rise above the collectively agreed wage if workers ask:

> *"They do have to come to us. I don't go to someone and say: 'I think you're great, you've earned more money.' But if that person comes to me, of course I have a few in mind who I'd say yes to. If they plucked up the courage to come to me, of course they would get something" (operations manager, Germany, quoted in Schwarzkopf/ Jaehrling 2012: 10).*

ELDERCAT is covered by the owner charity's collective agreement which used to be based on the German public sector collective agreements. In 2007, this was reformed to include a new pay grade for "extremely simple activities", with much lower wages than those stipulated in the old pay scale. Pay for this type of work was decreased from EUR 9.56-11.42 an hour (depending on length of service) to EUR 8.56-9.55 an hour in 2011.

> "According to the collective agreement, this new pay grade includes a large number of ancillary housekeeping and catering activities, including 'food and drink servers' and 'washing-up, washing vegetables and other activities in the housekeeping and kitchen area'. However, for employees who were recruited before the collective bargaining reform, a provision was negotiated to preserve their status quo ('Bestandsschutz')" (Jaehrling/Mesaros 2012: 9f).

This has led to a two-tier wage system at ELDERCAT with the long-service employees in the central kitchen on higher wages and the relatively new employees in the school canteens on lower wages. Some employees report that management discourages workers to talk about their wages, and canteen managers did not give information about their pay in the interviews. In addition, the collective agreement has lower hourly wages for marginal part-time employees in between EUR 6.75 and EUR 8.50, which is illegal with regard to the German law on part-time work and temporary employment ("Teilzeit- und Befristungsgesetz"). Workers (also the marginal part-timers) are aware of that inequality but appear to find it fair when comparing take-home pay:

> *"Because the others are permanent, they have to pay all their social security contributions and taxes and everything else; they have far more deductions (…) so they are paid more" (marginal part-time weekend assistant, Germany, quoted in Jaehrling/Mesaros 2012: 11).*

Again, workers tend to justify their low earnings in a somewhat resigned way, reasoning that they are unskilled, that other employers pay even worse, or that at least, in their current job they receive all the benefits they are entitled to:

> *"Yes, because I'm not a skilled kitchen worker, I'm really just an unskilled worker, it's actually pretty normal these days. If you don't accept it [the pay] then you don't get the work. What's the point in getting stroppy and saying I would like 7.90 euros or whatever? People either accept it, but I find that at my age I can't make demands any more. I am happy to get something at all" (marginal part-time kitchen assistant earning EUR 6.75/hour, quoted in Jaehrling/Mesaros 2012: 12).*

In CHILDCAT, who do pay a bit less, most interviewees would like longer hours or the possibility to advance to higher positions. This concerns male junior cooks who have families or would like to start one, and female kitchen helpers as well. One of the cooks supplements his income through an extra weekend mini-job for the company for which he is hired through an agency to take advantage of the tax exemption for mini-jobs. A kitchen helper has two other jobs in private homes to top up the wage from her 30-hour job (Schwarzkopf/Jaehrling 2012: 17).

5.7 Hierarchies and team spirit: Work organisation

5.7.1 Overall work organisation

Work in catering includes planning menus and deliveries, preparing and cooking meals from more or less pre-prepared ingredients, serving customers, and cleaning up after meals. Generally, this involves a fairly elaborate **hierarchy** of chefs, cooks, assistant cooks and kitchen assistants (cf. Hohnen 2012: 123), but the division of labour and distribution of work tasks vary with the type of catering, the respective company and the centralisation of food preparation. Indeed, in the sample we find variations of central kitchens versus on-site preparation of meals and different technologies.

For example, Hungarian EDUFOOD uses a centralised kitchen system to provide school dinners:

> "Thus food preparation is taking place in a two-step procedure. The first phase of food preparation is taking place, as a rule, in high-capacity basic kitchens. Such a high-capacity basic kitchen operates as a warehouse and has a capacity to prepare daily 10-15,000 portions of meals. If there is a meat stew on the menu, then the basic kitchen is cooking the meat stew out of 900 kilograms meat and the portions are only warmed up in the finalising end kitchens. But, if there is Wiener Schnitzel on the menu, the basic kitchen only prepares the meat filets to be fried, but the frying of the wholly prepared meat slices is taking place in the finalising end kitchens" (Tóth/Hosszú 2012b: 8).

In German CHILDCAT, as in the other multi-site providers, we have a combination of central and decentralised preparation that also illustrates different technologies:

> "The nurseries and schools are generally supplied using the Cook & Hold method: meals are prepared in the central kitchen, the orders are picked and packed into insulated boxes and delivered as hot meals. The meals are normally served by the customer's own staff. In two schools, midday meals are supplied using the

> Cook & Chill method: here, meals are prepared in the central kitchen until they are 90 per cent ready and are then chilled again rapidly. The meals are delivered chilled and cooking is completed on site. In another school meals are prepared and served on the school's premises by employees of the case study company (Cook & Serve)" (Schwarzkopf/Jaehrling 2012: 3).

Indeed, with the multinational and large providers, the degree of centralisation usually depends on the client's infrastructure and requirements. Cook & Hold requires hardly any kitchen investment whereas Cook & Chill requires warming-up facilities and obviously, Cook & Serve requires a fully equipped kitchen on the premises.

Spanish HEALTHYFOOD represents a special case. Its overall strategy consists in investing in clients' (hospital) kitchens, and in the site investigated by Antentas (2012a), it had recently introduced cold line (= Cook & Chill) preparation which made a comprehensive change to work organisation: meals are precooked three days before, put on plates and stored, and only reheated when needed. This involves comprehensive changes in the work organisation and working conditions. Use of precooked ingredients and industrial products is increased, but peak workloads, number of tasks and professional requirements are reduced:

> *"Now, when people go down to work in the kitchen, they keep the same rate of work from start to end. Why? Because we cook the meal three days before the patient eats it, so the cook is working without the pressure of the dietician or assistant telling him: 'Listen, I've got to do the tray, OK' ... When we're preparing the tray, the patient is going to eat the meal three or four hours later because we keep it cold, so we're not plating with the pressure of someone saying: 'Come on, we're short of time and we've got to rush' (operations manager, Spain, quoted in Antentas 2012a: 16).*

Weekends are now free for all workers in the kitchen area and they only do one shift with an even workload. The night cleaning shift has been eliminated. The change was negotiated by the management and the workers' committee starting a year earlier, particularly with regard to the distribution of working time and with the aim to conserve the jobs along with the new design and new work schedule.

This example shows the **ambiguity of standardisation**: There is some deskilling and increased control of the labour process by the company, which the company's operations manager blithely points out:

> *"Kitchen staff have always been difficult, above all cooks. They're highly unionized and it's difficult to manage them, you know? In European [cold line] kitchens the staff don't have to be specifically qualified for cooking. They have to be qualified to do their job, which may be mixing the ingredients and pressing the button of the tilt pan that does the job for you. And they found that they were able to change the management model, that it could be far more efficient and they didn't have to depend on the type of staff that always cause problems and are difficult to replace – I and with all the different shifts and night work required by the hot line" (operations manager, Spain, quoted in Antentas 2012a: 19).*

On the other hand, this is an effective way of evening out the workflow, reducing shift work and work peaks with their respective pressures.

5.7.2 Working hours

In catering, working hours are **more predictable** than in restaurants, and obviously they are related to the meals covered and the operating hours of canteens. Most contract catering services offer a limited range of meals that are normally prepared beforehand. The flow of service is also often predictable because the clients have known habits. There is always some variability, such as special menus for hospitals or children, or a choice of meals in company canteens, but it is more easily manageable than in conventional restaurants.

Working times may vary with particular functions. Generally, work starts between 5 a.m. (CHILDCAT) and 8 a.m., and goes on until lunchtime or the afternoon, but serving and cleaning staff or other assistants may come in later, depending on each company's use of part-timers for these types of work. For example, in Spanish TRANSFOOD, cooks and kitchen assistants, and serving and cleaning staff come in at 12, also to work until 4 p.m. Where work is also done in evenings or on the weekends, different shift systems are used, alternating working days and days off. Overtime and unpredictable work times are mostly related to event catering, which companies like ELDERCAT and the British university caterers increasingly take on. This extra work is offered and taken on a voluntary or semi-voluntary basis.

In the school canteens of ELDERCAT and also at Lithuanian PRIMA, workers report that to cope with the increasing workload they come in earlier without pay, to be able to do the work.

> "For example, although formally cooks' working day starts at 7am, in order to be able to serve breakfast at 7am cooks have to start at least 1 or 1.5 hours earlier. The cooks say that such an organisation of working time is justified by managers very simply: there is no requirement for a cook to come earlier; it all depends on how the cook is able to perform his tasks. Cooks perceive such an organisation of working hours as wrong. They also see dishonesty towards employees when they finish their work half an hour or an hour earlier, but cannot leave their workplace; even if they came much earlier. Then, as one interviewee said, '*we have to hang around the kitchen. We cannot leave, despite we came much more early*' (cook, female, 40) (Kuznecoviene/Ciubrinskas 2012b: 18).

In ELDERCAT, employees' loyalty to the school is an important factor.

> *"My children went to school here and I used to help out a lot voluntarily. As I said, there are still some teachers here who taught us" (canteen manager, Germany, quoted in Jaehrling/Mesaros 2012: 17).*

Generally, we observe a tendency of employers to increasingly use part-time work or offer shorter or more flexible hours. On the other hand, with the operating hours of kitchens and canteens, there is little flexibility on offer for employees. Nevertheless, coming from

different occupations or having improved their working times, workers favour the predictable working hours which outside of event catering are generally reasonably compatible with household and family responsibilities or leisure activities:

> *"I used to have alternating shifts, an early shift and a late shift, and could perhaps be a bit more flexible in the way I approached my day. Now it's strictly regulated – I work in the morning and can do anything else in the afternoon. The advantage is that you can develop a very different social life. Because you're available in the afternoon when other people finish work. You can go out with friends or do team sports. All things that you can't manage at all if you work shifts" (cook, male, Germany, quoted in Schwarzkopf/Jaehrling 2012: 16).*

5.7.3 Division of tasks

While hierarchies in catering are fairly elaborate, work tasks are more elastically assigned. Kitchen assistants may take over some cooking and some cooks do not necessarily have the appropriate vocational qualification. Where fast food is being served, as in the university cafeterias of UK INHOUSE and CONTRACTOR or Lithuanian TERCA, the required cooking skills are limited. In most cases, here is some space for task rotation, mostly according to preference or sometimes deliberately imposed by the company. UK INHOUSE, Spanish MULTIFOOD and TRANSFOOD rotate their staff across sites as well, which employees do not like much. Unionists at TRANSFOOD say the intention is to keep workers' contact with clients to a minimum:

> *Delegate 1: "They never want us to talk to the clients, no ... the less contact the better."*
>
> *Delegate 2: "Yes, yes ... for example they forbade me to talk to the client, just like that! Just like that ... They told me it was forbidden for me to talk to the client ..." (unionists, Spain, quoted in Antentas 2012b: 12).*

At MULTIFOOD, chefs are moved in order to give customers some more variety, and at INHOUSE, the intention is more to improve flexibility and be able to cover all tasks and sites.

Some **enlargement of tasks** is observed both at the "top" of the catering hierarchy and at the bottom. The role of chef at MULTIFOOD in Spain is increasingly developed into a general management position, but does not provide much relief at the core tasks:

> *"The role that is being implemented a lot is the chef as a manager and boss. This position is being [used] a lot at companies with collective groups, even at hotels and restaurants. (...) The problem is that the chef is there to cook, not to do stocktaking, purchases, control of personnel and a long etcetera, which is what is being implemented often now among worker collectivities. The problem with this organisational structure is that the chef ends up doing everything" (chef and union representative at MULTIFOOD, Spain, quoted in Antentas 2012c: 5f).*

On the other hand, kitchen assistants in ELDERCAT have been asked to take over tasks outside their accustomed work role:

> "This includes cleaning the windows in the kitchens. The employees claim that this work was 'dumped' on them when a contract was signed with a new cleaning firm. In order to save money, this area and a few others were removed from the contract with the new cleaning firm and transferred to the kitchen staff. Cleaning the executive chef's office is not regarded as part of their job either*: '(…) It sounds a bit silly – I started here as a kitchen assistant; I'm not the cleaner (…) and that's how my colleagues saw it too'* (sous-chef, female)" (Jaehrling/Mesaros 2012: 14).

5.7.4 Work intensification

In most case study companies, employees report some **intensification** of work as companies try to cut cost by reducing staffing levels or manage extended services with the same amount of personnel. A cleaning assistant at TRANSFOOD and a sous-chef at ELDERCAT put it succinctly:

> *"There used to be more of us to do this! And we had more time! When one person had to leave early there were three of us on duty. And now it's only me and less and less people ... and there's a mountain of work, you know? And on top of that they say 'if you've got time I want you to do the windows'! And if you've got time do this, that ... Give me a break!" (cleaning assistant at TRANSFOOD, Spain, quoted in Antentas 2012b:10).*

> *"When I joined the kitchen in 2004 and we were only cooking for the home, there were 12 people in the kitchen. (…) I mean, there were too many of us, no question. And then over the years, when someone retired or left, no one was taken on to replace them" (sous-chef, Germany, quoted in Jaehrling/Mesaros 2012: 15).*

Partly, this workload can be absorbed by changes in work organisation or the use of more convenience products, but workers note increased pressure and exhaustion:

> *"I now work only a 5-day week, thank God, but when you go home on a Friday you are completely knackered" (sous-chef, Germany, quoted ibid.).*

Cooks in Lithuanian SECUNDA find this intensification the downside of increasing skills:

> "The higher qualification one achieves, the greater number and more sophisticated dishes one has to prepare: *'The more I learn, the more I have to do*' (cook, female, 43)" (Kuznecoviene/Ciubrinskas 2012c: 19).

5.7.5 Standardisation

In catering in general there is **considerable standardisation** – but this may help to **counter increasing workloads**. Hygiene regulations and increasing use of convenience products also play a part. Meals and menus are developed centrally by food technologists in the larger companies, and cooks need to closely follow the given recipe.

Lithuanian SECUNDA with its high-end event catering is an exception. Here, initiatives are always supported:

> *"Here we have no problems with novelties; hurray if you want to introduce some new dish! The director herself asks if someone knows something new, she says, go ahead, think, fantasise" (cook, female, 45, Lithuania, quoted in Kuznecoviene/ Ciubrinskas 2012c: 17).*

> "When the cook proposes a new recipe, the dish is made in the kitchen, and then degusted; cooks and director consult and if they decide it tastes good – the recipe is prepared, the cost calculated and the dish starts to be made" (ibid.).

However, cooks feel that the recognition received for innovations and improvement is somewhat unpredictable and mostly depends on the directors' mood. There are no bonuses or incentives.

5.8 Kitchens are dangerous places: Health and safety

While the hotels & restaurants sector generally is not known for particular health hazards, the **risks concentrate in kitchen work**. Here, heavy workloads occur, and workers are exposed to physically demanding conditions (e.g., hot and noisy environment, also cold environments and having to move between both, heavy equipment) and high-risk tasks (e.g., through the use of dangerous machinery). This often leads to back and joint pains and musculoskeletal problems. This may be exacerbated by the time pressures at peak working times. While some companies invest in more ergonomic equipment, others tend to neglect these improvements especially under more dire cost pressures.

HEALTHYFOOD in Spain, who strategically invest into kitchens, point out one obvious measure:

> *"We are investing increasingly in facilitating movement. We try to make sure that everything is moved on wheels so the employees don't have to do any lifting. Nevertheless, people are sometimes careless: 'no, no, it's all right, I'm OK, it's only a moment' and crack! They've put their back out" (operations manager, Spain, quoted in Antentas 2012a: 20)*

ELDERCAT offers the care home workers some training to prevent back problems and musculoskeletal disorders to which employees of the catering subsidiary are invited. However, according to employees the training collides with the caterers' peak working time and thus cannot be used during working time.

The German and Lithuanian case studies in particular give attention to health and safety issues. In addition to more specific pains, here catering workers talk about a generalised sense of exhaustion.

> "Some cooks told us that they *often* feel psychologically and morally drained due to inaccurate and unspecific requirements set by the director or the managers. *'Well, you get tired; I say, sometimes you get so tired both physically and morally. (..) Sometimes M. [a manager], and sometimes the director – they do not know what they want themselves. (cook, male, 31)" (Kuznecoviene/Ciubrinskas 2012c: 20).*

At Lithuanian PRIMA, management's attitude towards failure is felt as a source of extra stress – and workers do not perceive any resources to cope with the tension:

> *"There is a lack of humanity, understanding. If something happens, everyone shouts and scolds and it turns out that 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 female, 40, Lithuania, quoted in Kuznecoviene/Ciubrinskas 2012b: 19).*

> "The most common answer to the question of whether the cooks themselves try to reduce tension, or (…) whether there is anything done on the management level in order to reduce the tension, was '*I don't know, I really don't, sometimes I think about the need to flee from here, there will be no tension or anything'(cook's assistant, female, 51)"* (ibid.).

However, not just management demands but also the collaborative relations among coworkers add to the burden, since in the face of intensifying work pressures, staying at home sick or even asking for help is regarded as an additional burden on colleagues. A kitchen assistant at ELDERCAT says,

> *"'You don't want to keep asking 'Can you help me?' (…) And I think this kind of job is really hard (…) and now there are also a lot of slim women doing it too and they may find their lower back goes one day. Or their knees will pack up. Or they will keep falling ill. And then of course there's the question (…) if you are off sick for a long time, it doesn't look good' [kitchen assistant 1].* This fear was voiced by an employee who suffers from osteoarthritis and, according to her, only copes with her day-to-day work with the help of medicines and injections. 'Easing off a bit' is out of the question for her: *'Impossible. You plan to, but it's impossible. You have to do your bit here.'* She would not tell the catering manager of her concerns because she did not want to be given 'preferential treatment' over her colleagues*"* (Jaehrling/Mesaros 2012: 17).

Although working while ill can be a problem in catering because of hygiene, the **ethos of avoiding sick leave** in order not to let coworkers down is widespread. In PRIMA, a cook says:

> *"Here, two weeks ago I was ill and I am guilty for the illness, I feel this way because my work has to be done by some people in the kitchen. Because of me they are short of staff but they don't employ someone else. Then you feel yourself that it's hard for them and that I have to go back to work as soon as possible" (cook, female, 46, Lithuania, quoted in Kuznecoviene/Ciubrinskas 2012b: 19).*

The **obligatory health and safety and food hygiene training** measures are generally implemented in the case study companies. Indeed, this is a subject that has also been addressed by the social partners (cf. Kirov 2011: 101) – but as we have seen, addresses only a part of the H&S issues in catering. Overall, with regard to health and safety, work organisation does not appear that favourable unless deliberate efforts are made to improve ergonomics, maintain reasonable staffing levels and even out the workflow. In the face of clients and customers cutting cost and increasing demands, this appears less likely, and with ageing employees and widespread resignation, vicious circles of increased strains, decreasing health and increased turnover are more likely than virtuous ones.

5.9 "Even the chefs help clean sometimes": Working cultures and norms

The division of labour and intensity of work in catering is apparently only rendered feasible by an **overarching norm of collaboration and mutual help**. Nearly everywhere, workers in all positions agree that when work is to be done, everybody pitches in. In German CHILDCAT, a junior cook says:

> *"So there's no difference between a cook and a kitchen helper. Once the cooking's done we're all the same. (…) I think that's a very good thing. At least here no one has status. Even the chefs help clean sometimes and I think that's a very good thing" (junior cook, Germany, quoted in Schwarzkopf/Jaehrling 2012: 16).*

In Lithuanian SECUNDA, a cook says:

> *"Well, I come to work in the morning and start cooking everything immediately. But if there is someone who cannot finish on time, while the food should be ready for taking 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 is really impossible to make it alone" (cook, female, 25, Lithuania, quoted in Kuznecoviene/Ciubrinskas 2012c: 13).*

Indeed, this **team spirit** appears to be the key resource with which catering workers handle the challenges of their jobs. This is also the reason why job rotation is disliked.

> *"I do like the team we've got and that's been a bit of morale boosting keeping teams together, because, they have a thing that…every few months we were being changed around and that did nobody any good, at all, you can't bond. I think they're [management] realising that you need to build a team and let that team build, for your customers" (catering assistant, UK, quoted in McClelland/Holman 2012e: 16f).*

However, this is based less on boundless commitment than on a pragmatic, occasionally resigned arrangement with the benefits and challenges of the job. Still, the creation of a "positive and friendly working atmosphere, with catering assistants able to rely on both informal and formal networks of support as and when required" (McClelland/Holman 2012d: 19) is centrally contingent on management support. **Perceived unfairness** or unpredictability in task assignment and recognition contribute to the pressure and to

workers' sense of exhaustion. In this way, in Lithuanian SECUNDA, workers feel there is unequal treatment of cooks and assistants and also of junior and senior people:

> *"Yes, we say [to older cooks], but wait, it is not that you have already retired and already earned your well-deserved pension, when you get as much as you have theretofore earned. Here it must be like this, as much you work, as well you work, as much you earn… Although I know that that a cook who obviously fakes receives a bigger salary than mine, however, I cannot say this. She works not for me. She works for the director. So this is how it is. And the director does not stand beside all the time, does not see. So we just pour this out to each other and that's it" (cook, female, 27, Lithuania, quoted in Kuznecoviene/Ciubrinskas 2012c: 17).*

In PRIMA, a cook articulates a generic recognition problem of kitchen workers (and many others). Management perceive problems and assign blame, but good work may easily be taken for granted – and in working environments characterised by standardisation ascribed to procedure rather than individual performance:

> *"Well, you know, when there is a failure, then all [the executives] come, but when there is success, then one tells you thanks, it was delicious, but it rarely happens. If it was delicious ... [management] thinks that this is the way it has to be" (cook, female, 40, Lithuania, quoted in Kuznecoviene/Ciubrinskas 2012b: 22).*

5.10 Training offers but few promotions: Skills and development

The catering sector is seen as one of the sectors in Europe where **upward mobility** is still possible for people that do not have high qualification levels, although there is a gap between the skilled cook and chef positions and the mostly unskilled kitchen positions. On the other hand, like the entire hospitality sector, the sector in many countries faces problems attracting workers (cf. European Foundation 2012). Kitchen assistants often are women aged 40+ who may have held different types of (low-skilled) jobs before or are returning to the labour market.

5.10.1 Skills and training

In all the cases investigated, some initial training in food handling and hygiene is **obligatory**. This, however, may range from a course of self-study of manuals (HEALTHYFOOD) to an 8-week (German CHILDCAT) or 3-month (Lithuanian PRIMA) induction period. The multinationals (Spanish MULTIFOOD and TRANSFOOD, Hungarian INTERFOOD) have elaborate training programmes and the British university caterers also offer workers access to vocational training certificates and also to the universities' training and HRD programmes. The medium- or large-sized German and Lithuanian companies tend to hire cooks with vocational training from the external labour market. In this group of national or regional caterers, we also find a variety of **less formalised training measures**: Spanish HEALTHYFOOD uses self-learning manuals and tests and also offers "training capsules", short training units on-site and during meetings that may be as short as just half an hour and respond flexibly to particular problems or incidents.

Lithuanian PRIMA provides new workers with a mentor to learn from during the first days. In SECUNDA,

> "for example, the company invites a cook who has a certain qualification and can teach how prepare one or another dish. Hereby, a Japanese cook taught the company's cooks how to prepare sushi and an Italian cook demonstrated how to prepare Italian dishes. There is also an informal way by which cooks learn from each other by sharing experiences on how to prepare a discovered or invented dish. Quite often, new cooking technologies or recipes are taught by one of the company's cooks whose husband works in one of the most prestigious restaurants, and from whom she learns a lot of novelties" (Kuznecoviene/Ciubrinskas 2012c: 22).

However, most of this training concentrates on cooks, and kitchen assistants may find themselves somewhat disconnected from these opportunities. In Lithuania generally and also in German ELDERCAT, workers themselves feel that at age 40+ they are not able to learn anything new (cf. Hohnen 2012) and are somewhat reluctant to train and explore new options:

> "Most of them are convinced that it is too late to learn at the age of 45-50. Female research participants seemed to have come to terms with their current situation at work, they are satisfied with the rhythm of their life and work, and cannot see a reason why they should change anything. Their only wish for the future is increased wages" (Kuznecoviene/Ciubrinskas 2012b: 14).

This contrasts sharply with the assurance of catering workers at British INHOUSE (and also CONTRACTOR): *"I'm trained up, yeah!"*, says a catering assistant (quoted in McClelland/Holman 2012e: 20), and it appears that both units' accreditation with "Investors in People" makes itself felt at the workers' level as well.

5.10.2 Careers and perspectives

Although there are possibilities to advance in the sector, training and further perspectives of promotion and development are not necessarily connected. In the majority of cases and all the larger companies, there is evidence of one or several higher (sous-chef, chef or management) positions being filled through internal promotion, and managers agree that this is a preference. However, this possibility depends on its being selective, and middle positions do not appear to be expanding in the cases investigated.

In this way, a training initiative at CONTRACTOR generated some disappointment: three catering assistants had been trained to become middle managers and were also acting in that capacity but had not been promoted officially to such roles. They only received a modest pay rise because new middle management roles had not officially been created within the unit (McClelland/Holman 2012d: 13):

> "*'We [are] always very willing to develop people, but unfortunately we can't guarantee them a position at the end of it'*, commented their manager and one of the workers concerned said: '*The wages here, it wasn't what I was expecting [it] to be and what I was told before [it] was going to be"*' (ibid.)

Elsewhere, the possibility for formal promotion appears to be unevenly distributed amongst women and men. At TRANSFOOD, “most cooks are men and promotion from assistant cook to cook tends to be reserved for men” (Antentas 2012b: 7). A union delegate says:

> *“But men have more opportunities than women ... they always have a better deal ... they get the jobs as chef or supervisors ... they might only be cooks but from cooks they promote them to chefs ... But women? no way!” (union delegate, Spain, quoted in Antentas 2012b: 7).*

Spanish HEALTHYFOOD is the only company in the sample that shows any deliberate effort to correct these inequalities. The HR manager says:

> *“Something that I am very happy about is the promotion of women. When I came into catering 20 years ago, there were very few women in senior posts and I started to say: ‘Listen, with 70% women on the workforce, we have to start trusting women as managers’ ... and today, the important contracts are in the hands of women, but not because they are women ... but because of talent ... So can an immigrant woman do it? Yes, but they have to work hard, they have to show their interest, know how to take risks...the companies create opportunities and then it depends on what each person wants to do ... the proof lies in people who’ve been promoted from serving coffee to site managers ...” (HR manager, Spain, quoted in Antentas 2012a:13).*

Nevertheless, the proportion of women in HEALTHYFOOD who receive promotions and pay rises still is below their proportion in the workforce (Antentas 2012a: 16). The CHILDCAT executive chef also mentions an example of a career based on training and commitment:

> *“One lady from the cold meals area, she started as a kitchen helper as well and did some training (...) she did it with the local Chamber of Industry and Commerce and now she’s a cook here. She has a certificate. And so of course we supported her. She did it during her working hours and was then employed as a cook” (executive chef, Germany, quoted in Schwarzkopf/Jaehrling 2012: 18).*

Yet the researchers comment that

> “this case is somewhat enigmatic since the employee is most often referred to as ‘the lady from the cold meals’ and not as ‘cook’ and the wage statistics provided by the management doesn’t contain any female employee in the position and pay bracket of a cook” (ibid.).

It is thus likely that similar to the CONTRACTOR evidence, there is some **gap between promises of training and development and actual promotions** and that these gaps affect women in particular, who may be less obviously promotable in the gendered hierarchy of catering.

Indeed, workers' and managers' perceptions of human resource development are occasionally controversial. In TRANSFOOD, management pride themselves on their training and promotion policies while a trade union delegate says:

> *"There's no training or promotion ... they prefer to take someone from the street than to promote their own people ... promotion has been used in very few cases ..." (union delegate, Spain, quoted in Antentas 2012b: 7).*

A colleague also points out the more informal promotion criteria that workers also mentioned in Lithuanian companies:

> *"It depends on your attitude, not on how you work but on your attitude ... If you follow the lines laid down by the company you'll be promoted, if you're one of those who says 'No, no, that's not the way, I'm overworked' or ... then you won't be promoted ..." (ibid: 8).*

5.11 Industrial relations & regulations: Engagement and representation

Generally, with its small establishments, vulnerable workers and the frequency of part-time and marginal work, the hotels & restaurants sector is not a favourable environment for unions or employer organisations. The catering subsector has larger establishments some of which also have works councils, but also precarious employment. Coverage rates by **collective agreements** vary widely in the sector: Hungary and Spain have an extension mechanism of collective bargaining to cover all employees in the sector, Germany has collective bargaining on both the sectoral and the company level but no extension mechanism (with the recent exception of Lower Saxony)[22] and Lithuania so far has no collective bargaining in the hospitality sector (cf. European Foundation 2012).

In this context, it is almost surprising that in all investigated cases except two of the Lithuanian ones and the UK's CONTRACTOR there is a **union presence**, both in the company and in the coverage by collective agreements. INTERMULT, the multinational owning INTERFOOD in Hungary and MULTIFOOD in Spain, has had a European works council since 1998, which now represents workers from 22 countries (Tóth/Hosszú 2012a).

In Lithuania, in all three cases there is extremely low union presence – which might be expected considering that according to the Eurofound report on the hospitality sector, the country is among those with the lowest union density in the sector (European Foundation 2012: 27). It is only SECUNDA where there is a works council and a collective agreement, but both are perceived as invisible and powerless:

[22] http://www.ahgz.de/unternehmen/in-niedersachsen-gelten-nun-mindestloehne-fuers-gastgewerbe,200012191576.html.

> *"Well, three women belong to it [the works council], but things are done according to what the boss says. Well, for example, when there were those cuts [being made], the crisis and then wage reductions began, the accountant called the three girls in, supposedly following that thing [collective agreement], and an accountant told them nicely that it is necessary and they decided that now we reduce the salaries by such and such percentage, and then when the time is better, we will increase them again" (cook, female, 55, Lithuania, quoted in Kuznecoviene/Ciubrinskas 2012c: 25).*

In TERCA, the small fast food provider, workers articulate the highest distance to the possibility of voice:

> *"Here? Trade union? It's a private company. If you don't like it here – you are free to go away. Who would let to form a trade union here? And nobody needs it anyway. You must have nothing to do" (cook, 45, Lithuania, quoted in Kuznecoviene/ Ciubrinskas 2012a: 22).*

Elsewhere, it appears that it is often skilled workers, cooks, site managers or chefs (with the more permanent and full-time positions) that take up works council or union delegate positions. Interest representation is often complicated by outsourcing, transfers of undertaking or subrogation. In British CONTRACTOR, managers feel unions dislike the configuration of outsourced management on principle (although it appears to prevent rather than promote a deterioration of working conditions):

> *"What the unions don't like is the fact that the management are a contractor. They don't like the thought of a contractor onsite. So, if anything, it's against us as opposed to [it being for] staff" (manager, UK, quoted in McClelland/Holman 2012d: 22).*

Issues addressed by the unions concern work intensification, working hours and schedules in particular. While both unionists and workers perceive the low wages as the key problem of the sector, this is also the issue they feel most resigned about in the context of intense competition and cost-cutting. Union practices and relations of workers' representatives and management vary from conflict to cooperation. While in MULTIFOOD the company prides itself on its sophisticated human resource procedures, a union representative at the company reports that unionists' relationship with the company has been rough:

> *"They take a lot of disciplinary action, including against me. They have filed three disciplinary proceedings against me of one-month employment and wages each. What happens is that I have fought them to the end. The last was brought against me for harassment on the job a year ago. I reported it to the union representative. The company didn't pay attention to us. We mobilised. They fined us. We mobilised, going to emblematic locations (…). When we planned to go to the Hotel [Name], they paid a bit more attention and opted for 'no more mobilisations, no more penalty'. But yes, they are fast on the draw for giving penalties, written warnings and firing people" (union representative, Spain, quoted in Antentas 2012c: 13).*

On the other hand, in Spanish HEALTHYFOOD and German ELDERCAT, management supported or even encouraged the establishment of a works council. Here it was workers who were concerned first whether this would be risky. In HEALTHYFOOD, the works council then participated to a considerable extent in the implementation of the "cold line" work organisation and shaped schedules in a way that was welcomed by workers. Here also, the collaborative relationship reaches a limit where clients' demands are concerned, says the operations manager:

> *"The trade union tries to force me to provide more work-life balance measures but I have to meet the needs and requirements of my client and, well, here we are, but we don't have any major disputes ..." (operations manager, Spain, quoted in Antentas 2012a: 29).*

In Hungarian EDUFOOD, massively downsized and affected by the crisis, on the one hand the union had managed to prevent a cutting of administrative staff's working hours and salary. Generally though, unionists there saw their role as providing more comfort than conflict, for example giving small loans to employees,

> "to help to bridge the end of the month until the arrival of the next salary. Thus, the union is seeking to facilitate integration into the company, limit misuse of managerial power, and to alleviate social problems of employees with the limited resources at hand" (Tóth/Hosszú 2012b: 13).

Still, the union representative said

> "he feels a constant nervousness and 'stomach ache'. He explained that he might have to be more radical to defend employee interest, but he also has two children and he could not threaten his own job security by being too radical: 'I have also to lose'" (Tóth/Hosszú 2012b: 12).

5.12 Conclusions

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

At the workplace, we are seeing both a considerable intensification of work and an expansion of tasks. This concerns chef positions which have a risk of getting overburdened by management and accounting, and in particular the jobs of kitchen assistants who may have to take over cleaning tasks if companies economise on contracting out other low-wage services. In this context, the tendency to increase the use

of part-time workers and keep staffing levels as close to workloads as possible increases the pressure in jobs that are already physically challenging and intense.

While both large multinationals and regional providers pursue some initiatives to exert social responsibility and improve working conditions, often workers are faced with increasing workloads and demands for flexibility, cuts in (paid) working time and fragmentation of jobs, with employers utilising all the possibilities that labour markets provide for flexible and precarious work. The actual shape of working time arrangements and contracts is contingent on each country's regulation of atypical employment and the possibilities offered by a gendered labour market. Indeed, in the female-dominated segment of catering, companies are not forced to make use of more expensive forms of flexibility such as the use of temp agencies. Instead, they rely on a wide range of flexible working contracts which are viewed as matching the "flexible" working time preferences of female employees (and to some extent also of student employees if they are a presence in the labour market). Seasonal working contracts (Spain) or extended unpaid summer holidays for those working in school and university canteens (Germany, UK) are – de facto or supposedly – matching well with family obligations; and so do 'mini-jobs' with very low numbers of working hours (Germany) or zero-hour contracts (UK) for supplementary earners. Whether these contracts are still consistent with preferences of the majority of employees or not, is but one part of the explanation. The other part is that employers have become accustomed to the very cheap instruments of atypical employment to adapt the working hours of employees closely to fluctuating workloads (see also Jaehrling/Méhaut 2012). These instruments are based on each country's gender regime and, in turn, set incentives for the existing gender-unequal divisions of labour.

Still, where there is a presence of social partners, they are addressing these issues and occasionally aim to develop alliances that address clients and also end customers – but in the case studies, there is a widespread sense of limited possibilities and some resignation among both unionists and workers.

6 Conclusions

Investigating companies in the context of their respective sectors in various countries opens up diverse lines of comparison. In the previous chapters we have seen on sectoral level how organisations act in their respective markets and client relationships, how employment and work in particular operative functions are organised and managed, and what the outcomes for the well-known dimensions of quality of work are. In these conclusions, we shall compare some key findings between sectors.

Quality is obviously and inevitably a normative concept, and **walqing** assumed from the start that there are “better” and “worse” jobs and that they are distinguishable. However, looking at work that is mostly low-wage, low-skilled (although doing it well does require a variety of abilities and skills) and conducted in spatially distributed environments, some tenets of quality of work may achieve more contextualised meanings. Learning and skill improvement may for example take lower priority than employment continuity or social relations at the workplace. In this way, case study research, exploring particular histories and configurations of cases in their respective contexts, and comparing and contrasting cases along various lines, improves our understanding of the conditions and likely prerequisites for particular outcomes and complements the investigation of policies and macro-data by more contextualised findings.

6.1 The sectors and the contexts shaping them

A large part of the “new and growing” sectors in **walqing** are services that have certain aspects in common: they are labour-intensive and delivered “on the ground”, that means, they involve work at clients’ sites, and some mobility between workplaces. The same applies to construction which is obviously not a service but has some of these features in common. The **walqing** sectors also address basic societal needs of shelter, food, cleanliness, care and waste removal. In care, cleaning, catering and waste management, outsourcing the function from the public sector and also from other sectors has contributed to the sectors’ restructuring, often with an aim to cut labour cost. Some shifts of jobs from other sectors, and also some fragmentation of employment lies below the surface impression of growing sectors.

Generally, managers and workers in nearly all sectors are feeling increased cost pressures that translate into more pressurised work – unless this is compensated by new technologies and modes of work organisation as in some waste and cleaning companies, and also in Spanish HEALTHYFOOD with their transition to cold-line technology. In particular in those sectors where public procurement plays a part, these large clients’ demands and constraints centrally shape working conditions (see also Jaehrling/Lehndorff 2012). This is the case partly in cleaning, in catering, elderly care and waste collection. On the one hand, there is evidence that public sector clients are able to enforce standards that contribute to the quality of work not just by being prepared to pay realistic prices for good-quality services but also by demanding certain skill levels or technical equipment. On the other hand, with austerity policies and tightened budgets of public sector and private clients and also private end-customers, downward pressures are likely to continue.

Indeed, in Norway, Hungary and Germany, managers report that public sector clients are found more on the side of cost-cutting. Hence, in the **walqing** case studies, we see evidence for negative as well as positive influences of public tendering. Either finding underlines the role – and thus, the responsibility – of actors involved in public procurement in shaping quality of work and employment conditions.

Companies operating in these sectors take different positions and pursue various strategies. Indeed, the sectors are characterised by both very large and quite small and local companies. We have investigated some **multinational companies** and large, internationally active firms in cleaning, catering and waste. In cleaning and catering, the multinationals tend to integrate services and become general providers of facility management. They also pursue multi-site contracts. Through their capital and managerial capacity we found strategies of professionalisation in Norway, initiatives to actively manage and promote a diverse workforce in Austria, and a focus on quality even in crisis-ridden Spain. It appears that multinationals have a chance of retaining some manoeuvring space even in markets that are otherwise tightening. Yet, multinationals may also pursue a strategy of standardisation across countries that results in a loss of discretion for workers, as observed in the CENTIPEDE cleaning company in Belgium.

However, **medium-sized and small companies** may also find niches to limit the competitive pressures: a quality focus in cleaning, a specialisation on market segments that offer higher margins and also some space for investment (Spanish HEALTHYFOOD, the BELGIAN “green” construction companies) or a regional focus with limited ambitions for expansion (Austrian WASTESOLUTIONS, Danish CGC). Small to medium-sized Eastern European construction companies, struggling with the crisis, tend to focus on their core competencies and retain a core of generalists or specialists, outsourcing the rest of their work. Indeed, some family-run enterprises emerge as niche players with an interest in continuity and relational contracting. However, their capacities for providing sustainable and secure employment while being flexibly specialised (cf. Sabel/Piore 1984) are challenged by institutional environments in which social partnership is patchy and collective goods such as training facilities and programmes may be eroding or lack resources to adapt to new demands.

We have also investigated a group of **public-sector units and hybrid companies/units** that have been fully or partly outsourced from the public or non-profit sector or involve some private capital as in the case of Italian municipal waste companies. The picture of those units’ strategies is varied and they are specifically embedded with their national environments. Hence, Norwegian MUNICLEAN or Danish and UK elderly care providers are among the most avant-gardist with regard to teamwork and skill enhancement (including clients’ skills in elderly care oriented towards reablement), and Italian cooperatives centrally contribute to skill upgrading and social inclusion of migrant workers. Italian waste company GREENSMELL also pursues a distinct innovation strategy including technological development. On the other hand, municipal waste companies in Austria or Bulgaria (and partly, Italy) are faced with considerable lack of capital and underinvestment in equipment and technology that prevents them from improving working conditions. In these places, it could be argued that the pressures of potential outsourcing

can have a worse effect than actual outsourcing in which some standards of quality of work are retained. Put more generally, outsourcing and privatisation do not only have a crucial impact on the sectors investigated as a *reality*, but, for service providers in the public sector, as a *threat* as well to which they adapt their work organisation.

In sum, there are **distinguishable downward pressures** on job quality that result from a lack of resources and increasingly cost-based competition in the sectors affected and take shape in different context-specific ways. On the other hand, retaining favourable configurations of work and employment requires increased and increasingly **coordinated efforts** by several actors in the field: social partners AND companies AND clients (AND possibly, end-customers and their representatives) need to establish dialogues and develop efforts to improve working conditions in sectors that centrally contribute to the quality of life in Europe on a fairly elemental level.

6.2 Employment conditions: Security and flexibility

Since all sectors investigated are characterised by irregular workflows and contingencies resulting from client needs and expectations, market developments, environmental conditions and the consequences of their prevailing modes of work organisation, flexible employment contracts and working hours play a central part and centrally contribute to problematic working conditions. The effects are strikingly **gendered**: The women-dominated service sectors tend to address flexibility through part-time work (often also marginal part-time), whereas the male-dominated sectors use both subcontracting and long working hours in the case of construction and comparatively short de-facto working times (within full-time employment) in waste collection. In this context it is important to note that, despite widespread assumptions, the kind and prevalence of part-time work we find in the female-dominated sectors do not necessarily correspond to female workers' preferences in the cases.

The use of **temp agency work** in our cases depends on both national regulations and the relative pay levels of agency and sectoral workers. **Fixed-term contracts** are sometimes used to align employment and service provision contracts – in effect shifting the risk of discontinuity on to employees especially when rules of transfer of undertakings or subrogation do not apply. They are also used by some employers for first contracts in order to extend what in fact are probationary periods, especially with regard to gathering information on employees' levels of health and willingness and ability to work flexibly.

In care and catering similarly, we can observe an increase of **precarious employment contracts** in different shapes that depend on each country's regulations of atypical employment: we find involuntary part-time, fixed-term contracts, or zero- or low-hour contracts that result in unpredictable amounts of work and wages. In cleaning and catering, which are often done in part-time arrangements, we see some evidence of a contraction of working hours with intensified work. Findings indicate that the use of these kinds of contracts is more likely with private-sectors employers than public-sector ones (see also Hohnen 2012), and that it is exacerbated in the context of the economic crisis. Precarious contracts are connected to a high degree of ad-hoc flexibility on top of the

short working hours. This is logical since more workers working shorter hours increase the likelihood of friction, unplanned absences etc. Together with employers' and clients' reluctance to pay overtime supplements, this clearly strains the quality of both work and life; most visibly in cleaning and in catering. Quite simply, the closer a work organisation tailors its staffing levels to the work demands, the more vulnerable workflows are to contingencies.

Split shifts are common in office cleaning and elderly care where work concentrates in the mornings and evenings. They are problematic with regard to travelling times, long overall work-days (especially if unpaid domestic work in between shifts is included in the picture) and work-life balance. The Norwegian example of a general move back to day-time working hours in the professional parts of the cleaning sector proves that far-reaching changes are possible. In other countries, such as Belgium's cleaning sector, we can currently observe campaigns promoting daytime cleaning. In contrast, we find that split shifts are increasingly tried out and introduced in elderly care, e.g., in cases in the UK.

Overall, **women** are more affected by precarious employment contracts, as a result of the gender segmentation both between and within sectors. They are more likely to work in the sectors with generally worse conditions, such as care, more likely to work in the sub-sectors dominated by part-time contracts, such as office cleaning within cleaning, and more likely to be offered only part-time contracts. Among the dominating explanations for gendered divisions of labour and structural gender segmentation are ideas about some work being physically too heavy for women, but also beliefs that women usually prefer part-time due to child care obligations or that they only provide a complementary income in a male-breadwinner family. However, flexible working times are not favourable for carers of small children when the flexibility does not correspond to their needs. Moreover, part-time employment can be a veritable poverty risk for women in general and single mothers in particular (see also Hohnen 2012). The economic crisis appears to contribute to some **current changes in terms of gender composition**; with a slightly increasing male presence both in the care and the catering sector. The impacts of these changes will have to be observed in the future.

In the **male-dominated sectors** of construction and waste collection, **full-time e**mployment prevails. This can lead to fairly favourable working hours as in waste collection, especially when the full-time wage is paid for an explicit or de-facto piece-rate that can be achieved in five or six hours – although this practice found in Danish waste collection entails the risk of work teams intensifying their work beyond what is healthy. Conversely, in construction, work-days can be long with long commutes or weekly commuting to the workplace on top. In this sector, it is less the working hours than the employment contracts that are fragmented, using various arrangements of temp agency work, sub- and sub-subcontracting, which also increase the likelihood of lower pay, health and safety risks and discontinuous employment. This vulnerability increases with the internationalisation of construction, when workers through language and information barriers have less of a chance to be aware of their rights and of national standards. Still, the male-dominated sectors have stronger traditions and practices of regulating these hardships or at least compensating workers. Here, pay supplements, bonuses or

allowances are paid for instance for extra work (piece-rates), overtime, mobile work or work on-site. There is some evidence that these benefits are eroding, when for example a Belgian construction company no longer pays travel to the site as working time as it is expanding its radius.

6.3 Vulnerabilities

Through low wages and various forms of precarious employment, work in the sectors investigated may enhance the social vulnerability of particular groups of workers (see Hohnen 2012 in far more detail). **Older workers** are one group for whom risks tend to accumulate. They are comparatively highly represented in the sectors investigated, often having entered these jobs after some discontinuous careers through or into the low-skilled labour market. Many workers interviewed have worked in other precarious sectors (such as retail, construction, various trades or hospitality) before, and with health problems, family responsibilities or employer bankruptcies they have looked for employment with relatively better conditions with regard to security, working times or location closer to home. Migrants, refugees and ethnic minorities also face limited labour market options and may find their skills devalued. For women in Continental European countries in particular, periods of parental leave and ongoing care obligations may also devalue skills and force them into more precarious employment. In this situation, the high physical demands of the jobs included in the research, exacerbated by the dynamic of work intensification and the lessened employment security, affect older workers in particular. There is wide concern among workers whether they will be able to work in their jobs until retirement age, especially among workers past 40 who also expect limited possibilities for early retirement. Limited, but still, there are some cases in which older workers or workers with health problems can be relocated within the company to physically less demanding jobs or workplaces (waste, cleaning, construction).

Migrant, immigrant and ethnic minority workers are other groups with limited labour market alternatives that are present in the sectors, mostly in line with each country's respective patterns of migration: workers from Poland and the Baltic countries in Norway, immigrants from Turkey and refugees from Ex-Yugoslavia in Austria, Romanians in Italy are examples. In construction with increasingly internationalised labour markets, segmentation is most obvious, and there is a continuum of regional and international migration, for example when in Hungary workers and brigades are recruited from rural areas in the East or the Hungarian-speaking minority in Ukraine. Even in Norway, where unions and employers give considerable attention to the inclusion of migrant workers in regular employment and collective agreements, workers experience some nationalistic comments and discrimination. In all sectors, non-native or minority workers tend to be in worse positions for negotiating working conditions, especially if their language skills are limited, and may face discrimination, racist rejection and insults by customers in the service sectors (see also Hohnen 2012).

On the other hand, the jobs investigated by **walqing** provide **easy access** to formal employment for people with few alternatives on the labour market. In Italy in particular, this is complemented by some social entrepreneurship. Municipalities outsource part of

the work in waste collection and recycling to cooperatives and initiatives that provide jobs to other groups, such as the long-term unemployed, ex-drug addicts or convicts. In Bulgaria, companies in waste collection and construction take over some social responsibility and support their Roma workers in maintaining a regular family income or getting some education and training. However, this labour market access is segmented in several ways. For one thing, access to male-dominated sectors and sub-sectors is restricted for women, for another, access to some jobs is restricted along the idea of physical strength. This concerns women as well as older workers and people with disabilities, as in the catering sector and in the cleaning sector. There is practically no evidence in the sectors of efforts to increase **gender diversity** with the exception of one Spanish catering company where the share of women in management has been increased. By contrast, one German elderly care provider prefers and promotes the recruitment of male workers arguing that employing women entails the "risk" of them having a career break or wishing to work particular shifts when they have children. Initiatives to upgrade skills may then be double-edged: Where we find tendencies of up-skilling and professionalisation, as in the Norwegian cleaning sector, these may also result in hindering access for the poorly educated and for otherwise vulnerable workers.

6.4 Wages and payment systems

The sectors selected are **low-wage sectors,** albeit not always in a strict sense of wages below two thirds of the median wage (cf. Gautié/Schmitt 2009). Low-wage can mean many things and workers' own comments are quite differentiated: It can mean low, but sufficient to make ends meet (as in the Norwegian cleaning sector), low, but reasonable compared to other professions on a similar skill level (as in the Austrian cleaning sector) or very low indeed and even decreasing (as in the Lithuanian care and catering sector, in Hungarian and Spanish catering and the Bulgarian waste sector). In the female-dominated sectors under investigation (care, cleaning, catering), the problem is exacerbated by the fact that low wages are often earned on a **part-time basis**, which obviously results in very low de-facto wages.

Employees have several strategies of coping with these patterns: First, taking up **additional jobs**, and thus working for several employers, in several sectors, and/or in the formal as well as the undeclared labour market. This pattern is particularly common in cleaning where undeclared work is often easily available, but also occurs in waste collection and catering. Construction workers are also reported to bridge periods of unemployment with undeclared work. Second, getting by on a **family income** and regarding the low part-time wage as a complementary income only. It is usually women (with children) who live with this pattern, and while it may work out as long as the partner or other family members keep their jobs and the relationship continues, the risks are obviously high in terms of an end of the relationship or the loss of the main income – which has become more likely in the context of the economic crisis in many countries. Third, there are some ways to reach **wage increases** *within* the sector worked in, although these are often limited by few provisions for seniority and advancement within collective agreements or pay schemes, in particular in the women-dominated sectors. The

certification of skills translates to higher wages in Norwegian cleaning and Danish waste collection. Seniority provisions are found in public-sector employment and partly in construction. Another strategy workers use is to **take on additional hours or better-paid shifts** at unsocial hours. These options depend both on availability and on supervisors' agreement, and they can have adverse outcomes for work-life balance, health and quality of life. Reaching **next-level positions** is possible, but only for a few, and the example of first-line managers in cleaning clearly shows that wage increase does not necessarily compensate for the increase of demands. Thus, such options are restricted as well as ambivalent in their consequences. Even if many of the low-wage workers interviewed appear to somehow make ends meet, there are those who do not know what their wages will be like next month and live close to or in poverty. They are most visible in the **low-income countries** of Eastern Europe and across Europe in the **elderly care sector** and partly in **catering**, where low- or zero-hours contracts increase, which implies high insecurity and "lower low incomes" for workers. Still, for many workers, a job with **regular and reliable payment of wages** already is an improvement over other experiences in low-wage sectors. However, living wages are not a matter of course in the lower-wage sectors, and further downward pressures are likely.

Throughout the five sectors, **women** are structurally disadvantaged with regard to wages by the dynamics of horizontal (and some vertical) labour market segmentation both between and within sectors. Women concentrate in the worse-paid sectors where low pay, precarious employment conditions and low recognition accumulate, and also in the worse-paid parts of "their" sectors, as is observable in cleaning or the division between waste collection and street sweeping in Italy and Bulgaria. On the other hand, the male-dominated sectors with their stronger traditions of interest representation have developed modes of **compensation of performance** and also **hardships** that keep their wages above the poverty level: While piece-rates may increase the intensity of work and enrol work teams in self-rationalisation, they can be negotiated with favourable results, especially if unions are continuously involved in the evaluation of demands as in Norwegian construction. It is worth noting that the women's sectors are highly exposed to intensification of work but generally do not receive compensation. For mobile work, we also find compensation in the waste and construction sectors: Here we are seeing collectively agreed allowances for time on the road or working remotely and company-level practices of including commutes in working time, although these appear to be eroding. On the other hand, Austrian cleaners are compensated for public transport between workplaces only if they work split shifts, and the Bulgarian street sweepers with long commutes have trouble even paying for their train tickets. Gender inequality and each sector's traditions or non-traditions of collective bargaining thus result in quite unequal patterns of compensation that go beyond wages as such.

Hence, an important conclusion is that **equal opportunity policies** are required in low-wage sectors and female-dominated as well as male-dominated sectors to tackle women's accumulating disadvantages within the generally disadvantaged sectors of the economy. Overall, the case study findings indicate a **low level of consciousness** in management about mechanisms of gender segmentation and women's structural

disadvantages. With some exceptions, gender segmentations are perceived as a “natural” thing, or something external that cannot be influenced by management or stakeholders. Additionally, there are secondary effects, e.g., when work is being moved out of the public sector, where such policies may have been implemented. Obviously, there is a lot of room for improvement in this regard, starting with knowledge about the basic mechanisms of gender segmentation and continuing with concrete measures to fight both horizontal and vertical segmentation as well as entry restrictions – because on a very material level, they are all *de facto* linked to women being worse off in the currently dominating structural patterns. In this regard, much will depend on the strength and commitment of interest representation in the feminised sectors and again, the possibility of involving actors on the client side. Initiatives for daytime cleaning for instance could form alliances with municipal gender equality actors (if there are any).

6.5 Work organisation

Organising and managing spatially distributed labour-intensive work presents some distinct challenges: Workforces must be deployed across sites, schedules developed and adapted, absences covered and local contingencies accommodated. In the service sectors, work takes place in the **triangle** of employer – customer – worker (cf. Korczynski 2002; Martinez 2011), which may develop into a **quadrangle** if we consider both the client subcontracting work (a company or a municipality) and the end-customer or recipient of the service. Negotiations and interactions thus multiply, and so do organisational cultures as well as relationships of control and management. Nevertheless, hierarchies in cleaning, elderly care and waste collection tend to be flat, with foremen/-women or frontline managers in charge of several workplaces or large groups of workers. The resulting **need for coordination** is distributed among frontline managers, formal or informal teams, and local interactions of workers and customers on-site. It increases when employers resort to short-hours part-time work and thus have to coordinate more people. In catering and construction, hierarchies and divisions of labour are fairly well established, even if in construction they reach across companies into subcontracting networks. Still, the roles of plans and ad-hoc accommodation and local knowledge are comparably well-defined. Nevertheless, in all these configurations it is likely that the tasks of **foremen and frontline managers** can become quite complex very quickly, negotiating and being available for all sides. In construction and cleaning, we also find some informal leadership roles that are not necessarily remunerated. Neither are the expectations of 24/7 availability towards frontline managers. Pay supplements for foremen/-women are generally not high either.

Teamwork plays a part in construction and waste collection (with teams of two or three), and also in cleaning where larger objects are concerned. In elderly care, work in pairs is a crucial aspect of health and safety when physically heavy tasks need to be done. On the other hand, in elderly care, parts of waste management such as street sweeping or operating smaller vehicles, and the cleaning of smaller objects we find **“lonely work”** that is conducted with limited collaboration and may leave workers feeling exposed and insecure. Where teams take over more roles of coordination and self-determination, as in

Norwegian MUNICLEAN, this can be perceived as “too much of a good thing”, as workers feel somewhat overburdened by management responsibilities.

One of the major trends in the sectors investigated is a tendency towards **work intensification**. It increases stress, physical and psychological demands and may contribute to vicious circles lowering the quality of work, e.g., if there is too little time to take care of the relationship with clients in elderly care. In some cases in cleaning, care and catering, workers “cope” with work intensification by informally extending working hours, coming early to be able to do their job or leaving later, frequently accepting that this time will be unpaid. In waste collection and construction, work intensification is compensated by **improvements in technologies** in some cases, especially with regard to heavy lifting. The introduction of dry cleaning technologies also has some promise, as it reduces the need to carry loads of water as well as exposition to chemicals and risks of slipping, but so far it is used most comprehensively in Northern Europe. Another instance is cold-line food preparation which in Spanish HEALTHYFOOD helped to omit work peaks and render the workflow steadier, albeit with some deskilling involved.

In large companies and multinationals, we also find processes of **standardisation** that have varied impacts on the quality of work. Standardisation of service “products” such as different levels of cleaning in the Norwegian MUNICLEAN case, benefitted workers’ standing at the company and their possibilities to draw boundaries with regard to ad-hoc demands by customers. However, there are more instances of neo-Taylorist modes of standardisation, standardising processes on an international level in multinational companies, or allocating detailed and sometimes unrealistic amounts of time to different tasks in elderly care. All of this impairs workers’ discretion, increases the gap between local situations and prescribed procedures and thus increases the pressure and the workload by adding the need to document all steps.

The **greening** of products or services is not found to have a consistent impact on the quality of work. In the cleaning sector, it is mostly talked about as an aspect requiring some skill adaptation but not making many changes. Waste management companies regard themselves as green by definition. The differentiation of material flows and recycling processes has given them multiple inroads into the market and in the Danish and Italian cases is also used to provide workers with health problems with less strenuous work (“cardboard routes”). On the other hand, workers in treatment plants (which were outside the in-depth **walqing** research) are exposed to dust and potential (and potentially unknown) hazardous substances. Job quality is not automatically improved, but requires extra attention to the entire socio-technical system of waste handling that involves householders’ practices, design of bins and vehicles, work organisation and so on. In construction it has been made most evident how green building allows for varied forms of work organisation, from a craft-based, “alternative” approach (in Belgian TREEHOUSE that is challenged by its expansion and a new generation of more pragmatic workers) to increased standardisation of work. Some health risks are eliminated in these ways, such as work with solvents or hazardous materials, but windows and doors with better insulation tend to be heavier. Standardisation of modules may make it possible to produce more building parts in more controlled surroundings but eliminates discretion on-site.

Again, there is no observable automatism of greening improving working conditions, but the quality of work continues to need actors' deliberate attention.

6.6 Working cultures

As research into quality of work has frequently found, informal relations and mutual support by colleagues and management shape distinct types of **working cultures** that may provide considerable support in overcoming the hardships and challenges of work in the sectors investigated. In all sectors, in many companies researchers got a sense of a team spirit across hierarchical positions and a sense of being "in the same boat" although this is more difficult to achieve in the areas of "lonely work". In catering especially, the somewhat elaborate hierarchies are balanced by a norm of mutual help and everybody pitching in when there is work to be done. In construction, workers favour a management style of "walking around", of managers being accessible on the site, and open-door accessibility of managers is found in family-run companies in particular. This is not just atmospheric but likely to save time and provide for speedy problem-solving. In elderly care, workers very consistently attribute high meaning to their work, which, on the one hand, appears to somewhat compensate them for the unfavourable employment and working conditions they find, but, on the other hand, prevents them from striving for better conditions (see Hohnen 2012; Sardadvar et al. 2012).

Where notably vulnerable groups are employed, such as migrants or Roma, frontline and other managers are found to take responsibility beyond a strict managerial role, providing support in bureaucratic or financial troubles, helping with difficulties with the residency status and so on. This may amount to social work and is felt by both sides to be both necessary and appropriate. Only very few companies designate these efforts explicitly as corporate social responsibility initiatives. Indeed, managers' "caring" is much appreciated by workers. As it is contingent on these managers' resources and skills, however, it is a kind of support for workers that is likely to be unevenly distributed. Co-workers, especially migrants with better language skills or information, also provide help and support.

In some companies and municipal units that have seen better times or are confronted with downsizing and hiring freezes, like Austrian HILLTOWN, and/or a massive impact of the crisis, like the former Hungarian state-owned companies that are run by their old managers and also have fairly old staff, the working culture has a somewhat nostalgic flavour, and the sense of community is somewhat defensive. Indeed, the shared struggle to maintain employment gives workers and observers a sense of "endangered species". In others, especially in the Nordic countries and in the care and waste sectors, workers and managers manage to maintain a sector-specific professional ethos of providing important public services also in a privatised or restructured context.

In cleaning and catering, employees may feel more integrated in the **customer organisation** than in the employing company. This may be supported by systems of subrogation that ensure workplace continuity over changes of contracts, as is stipulated in the Spanish collective agreements for catering and cleaning, but also used occasionally in some other countries' cases.

Conversely, **remoteness of managers** and tokens of hierarchy are not appreciated and may easily render conflicts over work more intractable. Workers are sensitive to perceived unfairness and unpredictability of feedback and recognition. In several contexts, they say they receive feedback only in the shape of an absence of complaints. When there is intense work with a client, as in domiciliary elderly care, a lack of feedback by the employer may be compensated for by the client's appreciation. As found in other analyses for the health and social sectors, this can be an important source of meaning and job satisfaction – but also, with the ambiguity of emotional labour, a source of frustration and stress.

Either way, the overall findings on **management support** suggest that positive feedback by supervisors is often missing, and an increase could be important for the overall atmosphere and professional pride in the generally lowly-recognised sectors. Standardised quality control and feedback, however, rather tends to be implemented in a non-supportive way which enhances control and surveillance while not solving the day-to-day problems of a lack of resources and support.

6.7 Skills and development

In the sectors investigated, **skill levels** generally are low although workers and managers are aware that working successfully even in operative positions requires certain competencies such as common sense and awareness, physical stamina, social and interpersonal skills. These are often not formalised skills (and not easy to formalise) but elements of experience, tacit knowledge and overall smartness. Their importance makes itself felt in terms of difficulties recruiting the "right" people for the job. Managers in cleaning, catering and construction complain that what they call bright young people tend to prefer other kinds of work. On the other hand, lines of social inequality, unequal labour market access and gender and ethnic discrimination provide diverse reserve potentials of capable people with limited labour market alternatives. While thus viable possibilities for development could certainly be improved in the sectors involved, skill improvement in a simple sense reveals its limitations.

In care and catering, and to a minor extent in cleaning, we find instances of a pattern we can call **"available trainings – absent positions"**. That is, companies provide opportunities for operatives to train and upgrade their skills, sometimes even including achieving official certificates, but then actual promotions and improvements in pay do not materialise, generating disappointment. This pattern is encouraged by the flat hierarchies found in parts of the sectors.

Interestingly, skills are not even regarded as an asset in some cases in catering, cleaning, and waste collection where managements perceive training as useless because there are no options to develop anyway, or because they prefer to train workers according to the company's specific rules and thus do not demand or even appreciate previous training or work experience. In waste collection, training possibilities are generally limited to some transport licences and mandatory health and safety instruction, with the exception of the Danish vocational training that may be somewhat at risk with ongoing privatisation.

Elsewhere in the waste sector, even social partners tend to disregard the possibilities of skill upgrading in the sector. Across the company cases, especially where labour turnover is high, companies tend to concentrate training on management.

On the side of workers, we also find that in many cases, **demand for training** and skill upgrading is limited. Many of them define their jobs in a somewhat instrumental way, rationally and realistically considering possible perspectives of training, and developing other priorities. One reason for this is that many low-skilled workers have had a difficult experience of the education system and are understandably reluctant to enter a "school" situation again, especially if rewards are uncertain. Language barriers play an influential part. In Germany and Lithuania, several workers in care and catering comment that past the age of 40 they do not see a capability or benefit for learning. Again, workers and management in the Northern European case studies appear to have the highest commitment to training and skill upgrading, whereas in Southern and Eastern Europe resignation appears to be most widely spread. Nevertheless, we also find instances of training requests met by companies, training facilitated (or even imposed) by companies, and successful achievement of further qualifications followed by career advancements (see also Hohnen 2012).

Careers from the operative level into **first-line management positions** are still found and regarded as a possibility in the sectors of **walqing.** However, higher positions may have their own issues of job quality. In cleaning and construction, and partly in catering, they are characterised by very high workloads, long workdays, comprehensive and somewhat ill-defined responsibilities, and not corresponding compensation.

6.8 Industrial relations & regulations: Engagement and representation

Employee representation varies substantially between sectors, countries and cases (in more detail, see Kirov 2011). Indeed, there is some evidence that on the respective shop floors, union influence is less perceptible than on the sectoral level. It appears that a visible union organisation is most likely when there is a strong **tradition** for it, as in waste collection with its roots in the public sector, or also in parts of construction, which conversely suggests a **lack of more recent organising successes** of unions in growing sectors. In smaller companies, unions are often strikingly absent, but even in the multinationals that may have European works councils, worker representatives may share management's problems of remoteness.

Access to workers for trade unions as well as control of employment and working conditions are particularly difficult when work is spatially distributed, as in cleaning, catering and construction. This is exacerbated when it takes place in private homes like domiciliary elderly care as a whole or the formalised domestic work performed within the Belgian service voucher system. In some sectors and cases, specifically in the elderly care and catering cases, not only disinterest but also **ignorance** about trade unions and other forms of employee representation are striking. It can be concluded, then, that the mission trade unions would have to adopt in these areas is not only to win members but

also to provide very basic information about employee representation and employees' rights in the first place.

Another problem to be tackled by social partnership is the **co-existence of different collective agreements** and thus different employment conditions for groups of workers actually doing the same job. We find this situation, for instance, in the Austrian waste sector and the Spanish catering sector, where some collective agreements are legacies of the companies' or employees originating sectors, and alignment risks a downward spiral of losses of rights, benefits and income. It results in unequal conditions for workers within the same sector and even company.

As in other research, the Nordic countries with their strong and inclusive social partnership apparently have the least difficulty both organising low-wage work and having unions and employer organisations participate in the shaping of new and growing jobs. Indeed, they rely on this institutional basis to address the new and not so new challenges of "hard work" in multi-actor and heterogeneous contexts but may need to extend their platforms and subjects for dialogue and negotiation (cf. Ravn et al. 2012). Here and also in Belgium, collective actors and companies also express a common interest in continuity, ongoing dialogue and the establishment of standards to regulate competition and steer it in the right direction, preventing downward spirals. In the same logic, Bulgarian managers in the waste companies aim to establish a union representation in order to enter more predictable negotiations than unpredictable flares of conflict.

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