



Young workers — Facts and figures

Youth employment

The European Risk Observatory has prepared a series of reports describing health and safety at work as related to a specific risk, sector or group of workers. This factsheet summarises a report (1) on young workers. It is part of a larger project, whose goal is the earlier identification of emerging trends and risks at work in order to assist in better targeting of resources and to enable more timely and effective interventions.

This publication aims to provide a review of the hazards young workers are exposed to at work and what the consequences of this exposure are both in the short term and in the long term. It does this by analysing statistics and studies, and through selected case studies of prevention.

By bringing together this wealth of information, gathered from across the Member States of the European Union and beyond, the Agency aims to provide an important insight into the health and safety experiences of young people at work. The Agency hopes that this information will contribute to the better protection of young people as they embark on their working life, and therefore to their improved health throughout their working life.

Youth employment in the EU-25

The proportion of young workers is decreasing in almost all of the Member States. This is a reflection of the falling birth rate, but may also indicate that educational activities are becoming more common and are taking longer. In addition, young workers are more vulnerable to economic recession — employers react to economic pressures by cutting back on hiring new young workers.

In 2005, about 193.8 million people were employed in the EU-25, including 20.4 million young (2) workers. Young workers represented 10.5 % of the workforce. The employment rate (3) (EU-25) reached 36.3 % for young workers, compared to 63.6 % for the population aged 15–64.

The EU-25 youth unemployment rate was 18.7 %, more than twice as high as the total unemployment rate (9.0 %). In many EU Member States unemployment rates of young workers have also increased over recent years, although there are fewer young people in a population that is ageing overall. There are also substantial differences across regions: in two thirds of EU-25 regions, the unemployment rate for young people was at least twice that for total unemployment. Regional unemployment rates for young people varied from 6.2 % to 59.1 %.

However, a successful integration of young people into work life is vital for society and for enterprises, as well as being of great importance for young people themselves, and for their own control of their life, health and well-being.

Temporary, part-time, weekend and shift work

In 2005, in comparison to the overall workforce, workers aged 15–24 years were less often in full-time employment (72 % vs. 82 %), more often on temporary contracts (39 % vs. 14 %), and more often salaried workers (94 % vs. 83 %). However, considering the informal work arrangements that are common among young workers (e.g. volunteer jobs, working for a family business, apprenticeships), it is difficult to define employment.

Many temporary workers in the EU-25 were under 25: 37.5 % of young workers in the EU-25 had temporary contracts. Percentages ranged from 6.8 % in Ireland to 59.4 % in Spain.

According to data on temporary agency work (4), people employed on temporary contracts have less access to training and to participation in long-term competence development than workers with permanent contracts. Temporary workers also have less control over the order of tasks, pace of work and work methods, have lower job demands, and are less informed about risks at work.

In 2005, one in four young workers had a part-time job. Part-time work is also increasing. Research on part-time work in Europe indicates that there are fewer opportunities for training and career progression (5). The level of salaries and social security benefits is often lower and jobs are typically monotonous.

In addition, more than half of the young workers worked at least one Saturday per month. Young workers were also more likely to work shifts.

Where do young workers work?

A sectoral breakdown shows that, within the EU-25, the highest proportion of young workers can be found within hotels and restaurants (22.7 %), and trade (16.3 %). The hospitality sector is the number one employment sector for young workers in 20 of 25 Member States and among the top 3 in all Member States.

This distribution has important implications for the occupational safety and health of young people because of the specific set of potentially harmful conditions that characterises these sectors (including low pay, temporary seasonal work, poor employment conditions and physically demanding work). Within the EU-25 in 2005, young workers were mostly employed as service workers (5.2 million), followed by craft and related workers (3.6 million). Clerks (2.7 million) and technicians and associate professionals were in equal third place (2.7 million), closely followed by elementary occupations (2.5 million). This occupational breakdown differs slightly between the Member States. From 2000 to 2005, the largest increase in the number of young workers was in service workers and shop and market sales workers (+ 0.38 million).

(1) <http://osha.europa.eu/publications/reports/7606507>

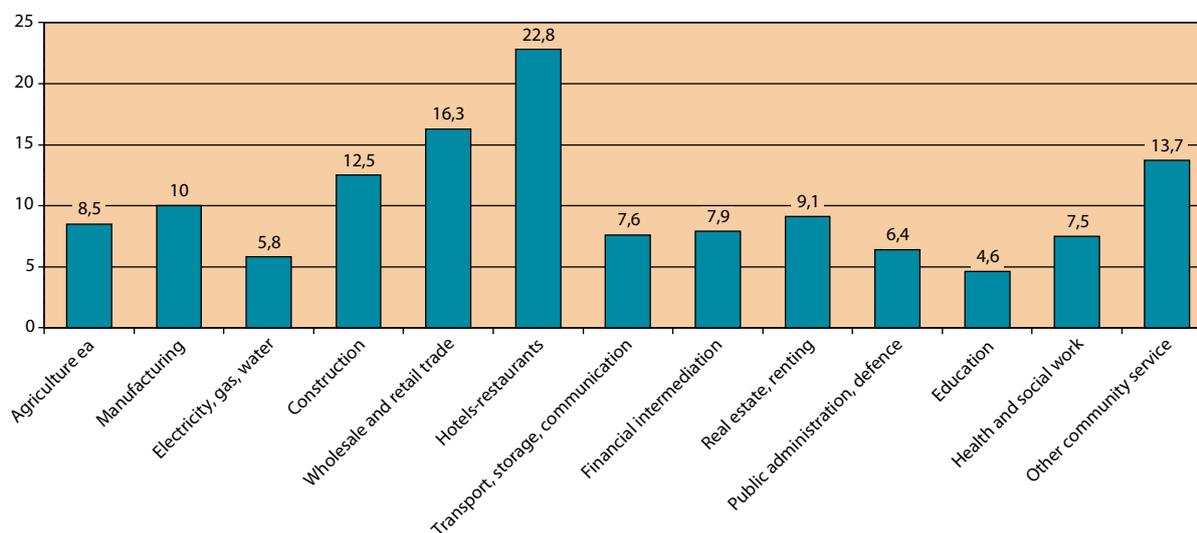
(2) Young workers: 15–24 years old.

(3) The employment rate represents the total number of persons in employment as a percentage of the population of that age group.

(4) Goudswaard, A., Andries, F., 'Employment status and working conditions'. <http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/htmlfiles/ef0208.htm>

(5) European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Dublin. 'Part-time work in Europe', 2005.

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/ewco/reports/TN0403TR01/TN0403TR01.pdf>



Proportion of young workers per sector, EU-25, 2005, LFS

Many of these sectors and occupations are characterised by high accident risks, exposure to many workplace hazards or, as is the case for the service professions, precarious employment situations.

Gender differences

There are gender differences faced by young workers just as there are in the general working population. More young men than women are at work: in 2005, 11.1 million young men and 9.3 million young women were working within the EU-25. Nevertheless, data on exposures and health outcomes which differentiates between young women and men is difficult to find.



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Gender issues strongly contribute to different hazard exposure and therefore to different health outcomes. For example, hairdressing is a predominantly female profession, with 87 % female workers. More than a million people are employed in about 400 000 hairdressing salons in Europe. This sector is also characterised by a young workforce: 83 % of recruits are aged under 26 and 56 % are under 19. As a result, almost all risk factors for hairdressers are automatically relevant for young workers. The main health problems in this sector — skin problems, asthma and musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) — therefore mostly affect young women.

More research is needed in order to:

- obtain a profile of risks to young workers and their exposure to workplace factors such as dangerous substances (more specifically biological agents, carcinogens and reprotoxicants), noise and vibration, physically strenuous working conditions and psychosocial risks;
- assess the importance of specific risks to young workers in the high-employment sectors, with a special focus on service sectors;
- assess the gender differences and the relative importance of the respective risks to young women and men;
- adjust awareness raising, training and prevention to the differences identified above and include diversity issues, for example regarding young migrant workers;
- ensure that training that does not lead to formal qualifications (which increasingly concerns female workers, for example in service sectors such as home care) includes occupational safety and health (OSH);
- effectively target risk-reduction policies for work-related accidents to young workers. Cooperation across policy areas (e.g. public health, combating child labour, transport safety) could also be beneficial in this respect;
- inform activities to put OSH into mainstream education at all levels.

More information

The report also contributes to the Agency's annual campaign, the European Week for Safety and Health at Work, which in 2006 was dedicated to the protection of young people at work. Under the slogan 'Safe start', over 30 countries participated actively in Europe's largest OSH campaign to protect young workers.

Information on exposure to risks and health effects for young workers are summarised in Facts 70: **Young workers — Facts and Figures: Exposure to risks and health effects.**

Further information on young worker safety is available at: <http://ew2006.osha.europa.eu/>.

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