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# QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE, JOB QUALITY AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN ROMANIA. MEASUREMENTS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING WORKING CONDITIONS

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***Abstract:** The paper addresses problems of measuring quality of working life, job quality and work-life balance and focuses on providing a comparative analysis using European data (ETUI, EWCS, EUROFOUND). Using multilevel regression analysis, we identified predictors for WLB (work-life balance) and also support for a theoretical critique of the limits and local understanding of work-life balance as a key issue in improving working conditions through policy recommendations.*

***Keywords:** work-life balance, quality of working life, job quality, shift-work working conditions*

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## Introduction

Quality of working life is a rather ambiguous concept because it entails a sum of multiple dimensions with regard to objective conditions, as well as the subjective positioning towards working conditions (satisfaction indicators or the perceived quality of the workplace). The major theoretical frameworks for considering quality of working life comes from western orientations and sometimes there is an overlap between these conceptual developments and its practical enforcements in East-European working environments.

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Different welfare regimes shape differences in working conditions as well across countries, there are, however, some efforts to detail and refine a satisfactory measurement for the diagnosis of working conditions, from a comparative perspective, so that these comparisons between European countries can be reliable. Such a measurement is considered the Job Quality Index. This index contains a series of objective and subjective indicators (ETUI<sup>1</sup> 2008, 2012) like: socio-economic security (financial remuneration, type and duration of work contract); professional training; working conditions; work-life reconciliation.

At European level, wages are considered a proxy variable for measuring the quality of workplace, but remuneration of individual labor is only one of the possible measures and, for that matter, an incomplete one (de Bustillo *et al.*, 2011, Eurofound, 2013). Attempts to measure the non-pecuniary dimension of quality of working life have drawn considerable efforts (Eurofound, 2013). In the post-crisis era, because of the large-scale job reductions, a new attention was given to economic growth through the strategy of increasing occupational rate. As a consequence, evaluation of working conditions, as an important dimension for quality of a job, is secondary and remuneration only tends to get the primary space in the conceptualization of the “good working conditions”. Therefore, the construction of a non-pecuniary job quality index (Eurofound, 2013) represents not a decrease of the importance of wages in how a decent workplace is conceptualized, but a sustained effort to take into account the social dimension of what constitutes a workplace and a job position. These conceptualizations have implications for job outcomes and outputs, for productivity and, on the long term, for the economic growth, but also for a more even distribution of labor within organizations, between different employees. Precarious working conditions have consequences as de-professionalization of labor force, reduced workplace productivity, a higher incidence of overtime labor (extra working hours), precarious health and politically justified defenses of maintaining low wages.

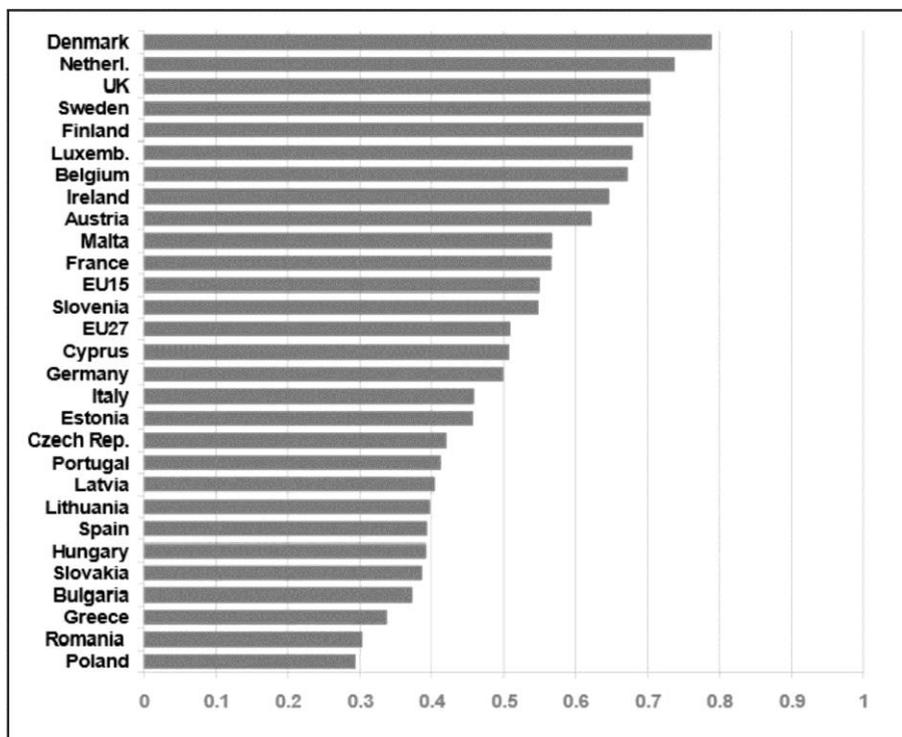
Concerns for the measurement and monitorization of job quality is reflected in index construction for comparative analyses (Quality of Job Index- European Commission, OECD<sup>2</sup>; Job Quality Index-ETUI, 2008). These complex measurements aim to facilitate comparisons between European countries in order to provide evidence-based support to improve occupational policies, especially in countries where workers’ protection is low because of reduced activity and power of unions. Job Quality Index (ETUI 2008) is a multidimensional construct and it includes: wages; atypical employment; working conditions; working time and work-life reconciliation; professional training and interest representation (ETUI, 2008).

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**Figure 1. Job Quality Index**  
(2008, based on EWCS 2005)



Source: ETUI-REHS, 2008. Note: The index can vary between 0 and 1, countries with values greater than 0.5 can be considered as having a high job quality index.

Romania has a job quality index of 0.3, a very low figure. Also, each indicator from its composition places Romania in the lowest third in European comparisons (Eurofound, 2012; ETUI, 2012). In some countries, as it is the case with Romania, workplace quality is also associated with a low set of abilities for adaptation at the individual level, mostly reflected in the low occupational rate (Piasna, 2015).

The value of this index can reflect the precarious working conditions in Romania for most of the workers, but can also indicate different working environments with some dimensions of the index being more important than others, which can unsubstantially and unjustly place Romania at the bottom of the hierarchy. Many comparative analyses do not use different weights for each sub-indicator, which can be erroneously interpreted. In some organizational cultures, some dimensions can be more salient in how valued they are, as well as in how frequent they are reinforced in practical terms. At the same time, structural differences based on legislation and social dialogue as well

can affect how workers respond during surveys to each of the item from the job quality index (Gosetti & La Rosa, 2014).

A series of studies indicate the component of professional training as being the adequate choice for increasing the quality of the workplace, the most educated and trained workers being the most satisfied with their workplace, but at the same time technological development could compensate the negative role of lack of professional abilities on job quality (Stier, 2014).

At the same time, this measurement is critiqued for lacking indicators that describe the working environment, most of the indicators focus either on work characteristics and on workers. (Van Wanrooy et al., 2013). In a refined theoretical framework, *job quality* can be conceptually placed at the intersection of *quality of work* and *quality of working life* (Gosetti & La Rosa, 2014)

Capturing trends in quality of working life in a comparative perspective can be a useful tool for integrated public policies, especially for an international labor market. Recent studies have shown convergencies, as well as divergent trends of different countries, when it comes to job quality (Drobnič *et al.*, 2010, Holman, 2013). Task-autonomy is one of the sub-indicators of job quality and is defined as the possibility to change or choose task order, to choose or change the methods a worker accomplishes his tasks, and also the possibility to choose or change the speed and the rhythm of his/her work. (Holman, 2013). Task-autonomy is embedded in welfare regimes. Nordic countries significantly differ from other countries when task-autonomy is evaluated, mostly because unions have a better activity and a greater influence (Holman, 2013), so here task-autonomy is considerably higher.

## Conceptual and practical limits of “work-life balance”

Work-life balance (WLB) is a practical evaluation of policies that sustain family and social life outside the working environment, as well as an indicator of gender equality. WLB can be influenced by occupational policies and can also be considered a proxy indicator for working conditions, because individual evaluations frame time use in various life domains and depend on institutionalized time regimes at the worker’s workplace. Factors that influence WLB are family situation, number of children working hours, as well as task-autonomy.

Based on European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), we underline that in Romania satisfaction with the working conditions was higher in the pre-UE period, which can indicate an initial optimism related to future social changes that were largely anticipated at that moment, not necessarily an objective change in how strategies to harmonize family life with working life were developed. However, Romania repeats the same pattern as other post-communist countries (Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria).

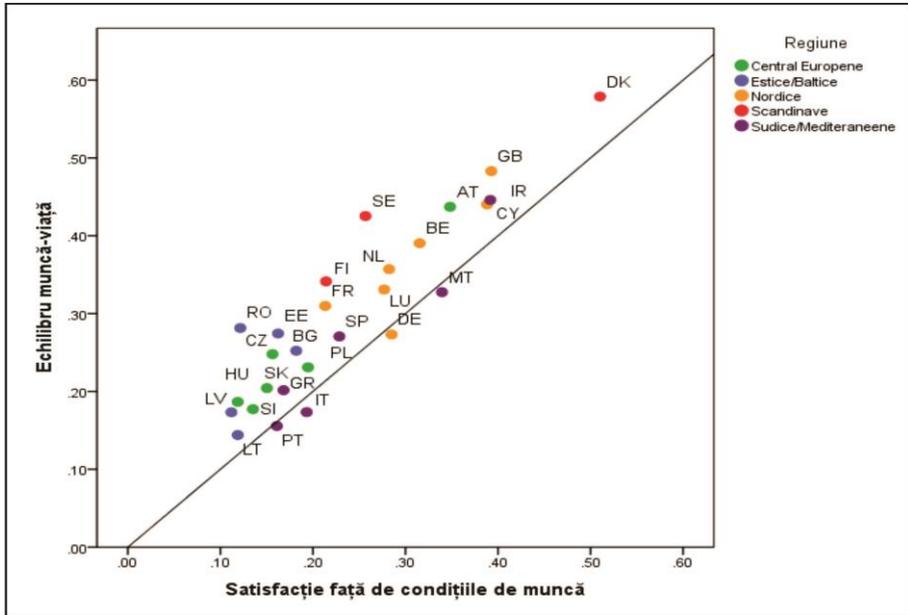
**Table 1.** Changes of WLB and of Satisfaction with working conditions (EWCS 2005, 2010)

	<b>WLB 2005-2010</b>	<b>Satisfaction with working conditions 2005-2010</b>
Romania	+12%	+17%
Poland	+14%	+6%
Latvia	+9%	+4%
Slovakia	+7%	+5%
Bulgaria	+4%	+8%
Greece	+7%	+3%
Ireland	+6%	+4%
Netherlands	+6%	+3%
Sweden	+6%	+2%
Denmark	+6%	+2%
Estonia	+5%	+2%
Cyprus	+4%	+3%
Italy	+2%	+3%
Malta	0%	+4%
Spain	0%	+4%
Finland	0%	+4%
Lithuania	0%	+3%
Hungary	+5%	-2%
Slovenia	+1%	+3%
UK	+2%	0%
Belgium	+1%	+1%
Luxembourg	0%	+2%
Austria	-1%	+1%
Czech Republic	-1%	0%
Portugal	-2%	0%
Germany	-3%	-1%
France	-2%	-3%

*Source: Own analysis, based on EWCS 2005 and EWCS 2010*

In Romania, working conditions differ substantially from those from other European countries, with a lesser extent of worker's protection because of a lower implication of unions in how work is organized; in 2011, changes in labor legislation and in provisions of the collective agreement in favor of the employer rendered forming unions even more difficult (Eurofound, 2014). Subjective social indicators are useful to expose how objective working conditions are dealt with by employees. These indicators collect observations about work satisfaction, which, from an institutional point of view, depicts international differences and possible proposals for changes in labor policies.

**Figure 2.** *Work-life balance and satisfaction with working conditions (EWCS, 2010)*



Source: own analysis, based on EWCS 2010

The relationship between satisfaction with working conditions and evaluation of work-life balance indicates that an evaluation of a satisfactory WLB does not necessarily mean that people are satisfied with their working conditions (from those 30% that have declared they have a good WLB, only 10% are very satisfied with their working conditions), a situation also accurate for other European countries, but with smaller differences between evaluation of work-life balance and satisfaction with working conditions. On one hand, this is a signal that WLB provides an evaluation embedded in gender roles marked by a highly gendered division of labor, at home mostly. At the same time, those who evaluated their WLB as being good provide a contradictory situation taking into account that Romania is one of the countries with the highest number of working hours. In this case, the explanation might be provided by the fact that, considering long working hours and the deteriorated working conditions after the economic crisis, family became even more important, as a compensatory reaction to the overall structurally-induced insecurity (Eurofond, 2014).

## Methodology

In order to identify how different predictors, influence WLB, a multilevel regression (MLA) was performed using data from three waves of the *European Working Conditions Survey* (2000, 2005 și 2010). There are three levels of analysis: individual (I.1), year of

survey (L2), and country level (L3). There were five cumulative models developed: the null model, (M0), the second model using socio-demographic variables (M1), the third model that also includes workplace characteristics like years of work experience, having a middle position, but not a managing one, whether the respondent is self-employed or not, whether is he/she working from home, how many hours per day does he/she work and what is his/her commute time (M2); the fourth model includes workplace and task organization and difficulties like the number of working weekends per month, autonomy in choosing working hours, if the job she/he holds has health risks, if there is perceived discrimination at the workplace and also if she/he works in shifts (M3); the last (fifth) model includes time and PIB/GDP (M4); an alternative model is the one with only the variable of whether the respondent works in shifts or not (M1alt)

Metrical variables are centered at the European mean, so that the intercept/constant should refer to a hypothetical person with medium characteristics randomly chosen from a random country. Each new model is more fit than the previous one, according to Chi Square tests.

## Results-Determinants of Work-Life Balance

**Table 2.** Multilevel regression with dependent variable as WLB

		M0	M1	M2	M3	M4	M1alt
	Intercept/Constant	3.09**	3.04**	3.06**	3.17**	3.21**	3.15**
L1	Age		0.04**	0.03**	0.02**	0.02**	
L1	Household dimension		-0.03**	-0.03**	-0.03**	-0.03**	
L1	Gender (F)		0.10**	-0.03**	-0.02**	-0.02**	
L1	Work experience (25 years or more)			0.03**	0.04**	0.04**	
L1	ISCO 2,3,4			0.13**	0.03**	0.03**	
L1	Self-employed			-0.03**	0.00	0.00	
L1	Works from home			-0.04	-0.01	-0.01	
L1	Number of daily working hours			-0.18**	-0.14**	-0.14**	
L1	Commute time			-0.08**	-0.08**	-0.08**	
L1	No. of working weekends per month				-0.07**	-0.07**	
L1	Autonomy in working hours				0.06**	0.06**	
L1	Health-risk workplace				-0.22**	-0.22**	
L1	Perceived discrimination (yes)				-0.19**	-0.19**	
L1	Works in shifts				-0.16**	-0.16**	-0.33**
L2	Time					-0.06**	
L3	(GDP/PIB-gm)					0.03	
	-2LogL	179873	179109	172662	166000	165988	177779
	R2 (L3)		0.03	0.34	0.52	0.55	0.07
	R2 (L2)		0.00	-0.25	-0.25	0.00	0.00
	R2 (L1)		0.01	0.09	0.16	0.16	0.03
	L3var	0.029	0.028	0.019	0.014	0.013	0.027
	L2var	0.004	0.004	0.005	0.004	0.004	0.004
	L1var	0.597	0.591	0.544	0.499	0.499	0.581

Source: own analysis, based on three waves of EWCS: 2000, 2005, and 2010

Sociodemographic variables do little to explain WLB ( $R^2$  at L1 is only 3%). Women consider on average that they have a high WLB, but when the other variables are controlled, the relation between gender and WLB changes: at the same number of working hours and type of activity, a woman will declare that she has a WLB lower than a man does. The fact that the relation between WLB and gender is initially positive shows that when women work on average a smaller number of hours than man and in different conditions, women are more satisfied with their WLB, but when working conditions are the same, women are less satisfied with their WLB. Providing explanations for this gap should probably target other variables not included in the model, like having children or the amount of household chores they are in charge of, roles that are particularly gendered and could take a lot of women's time. It is possible that understandings of WLB in countries like Romania focus mostly on family relationships and family wellbeing, as satisfaction with family life is reported to be important (Pop 2015).

Age has a positive influence: an increase with 10 years is associated with an increase of 0.04 points of WLB, which means that, on average, older people have a higher reported WLB than their younger counterparts. This positive relationship is maintained when other variables are controlled, but it loses its intensity (0.02). When we have a household with a higher number of members (so a household more difficult to maintain), WLB will decrease (with -0.03 at each new member), and this relationship is the same when controlling the other variables.

Variables that describe type of work increase the explanatory power of the model at 9% at the first level and at 34% at the second level (country level). A great deal of international differences is based on differences in labor market composition (proportion of highly qualified workers, average number of working hours, commute time).

**How type of work influences WLB.** Each working hour reduces WLB with 0.18 points; those who work in qualified positions, but not on managing level (ISCO 2, 3 or 4) have, on average, a WLB higher with 0.13 points than those less qualified. The fact that this decreases at 0.13 when other variables are controlled (working conditions) shows that a great deal of differences can be explained through the higher level of autonomy and a smaller number of working hours in weekend and/ or in shifts or in having a workplace that is faced with health risks.

When commute time is increasing (with double the time), this decreases WLB on average with 0.08 points. Work experience slightly increases WLB (+ 0.03 points for those with more than 25 years of work experience), and being self-employed has the same effect (+0,03). Those that work from home are not significantly more satisfied with their WLB than those having commute time, when all other variables are controlled (but even when we don't control them, the effect is not significantly different from 0).

Models are improved by introducing variables for type of work and working conditions, the predictive power increases from  $R^2 = 0,09$  to  $R^2 = 0,16$  at first level, so differences between categories of people are partially explained by the working conditions they are faced with. Those who work in environments where they risk their health or where they

perceive they are discriminated against report lower values of WLB, when all other variables are controlled (-0,22 and, respectively, -0,19 points difference when compared to those who don't work in these type of environments). It is possible that health risk is a proxy for being tired or having burn out. Those who work on weekends report lower WLB (for each week-end day -0.07 points decrease in WLB). Instead, those who declare they have autonomy in choosing working hours declare a higher WLB (+0.06).

**The influence of country-level variables over WLB.** Economic development measured through GDP is positively associated with WLB (+0.03 at each 10.000 euro equivalents added to GDP), but the difference is not statistically significant. If other predictors hadn't been introduced in the regression model, the association between GDP and WLB would have been statistically significant and positive- an increased one in developed countries (+0.08 at each 10.000 euro added to GDP) and variations between countries would have been reduced with 24% when introducing the indicator in the regression model. The fact that individual predictors eliminate the national predictors' influence shows that, if we would standardize socio-demographics and the working conditions (those present in these particular regression models) of each active population from each country, there would not be differences caused by economic development, so two persons with the same socio-demographics and with the same working conditions from two countries with different economic development would not differ in how they appreciate their WLB.

**The influence of variable year over WLB.** Year of data collection was introduced in the regression models as a metric variable, to understand if there is a general tendency of increase or decrease of WLB at European level from 2000 until 2010. Variable TIME is coded with 0 for data collected in 2000, 0.5 for data collected in 2005, and 1 for data collected in 2010, so that the regression coefficient should describe the difference between the last and the first moment of observations (so between 2010 and 2000). The value of coefficient (-0.06) is statistically significant and suggests that a slight decrease of WLB took place from 2000 until 2010, a decrease that does not depend on changing the working conditions or the socio-demographics. This change is not visible when other predictors are not included, so we can say that although the WLB average didn't decrease, the general tendency is that at the same working conditions from 2000, a person would consider a lower WLB in 2010.

Working in shifts reduces WLB with an average of 0.33 points when we don't control other variables. This relationship is maintained even when we control other variables, but the effect is less intense. But does working in shifts have effects in each country? We estimated residuals at country-level in order to see if the influence of country over WLB is still maintained when we control individual predictors<sup>1</sup> on one hand. On the other hand, we also focused to see if differences between countries are also maintained when it comes to effects of shift work.<sup>2</sup> (See the above table).

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<sup>1</sup> (random intercept residuals)

<sup>2</sup> (random slope residuals)

**Table 3.** Variation of the effect of shift work over WLB at country-level

Country	WLB average ( <i>random intercept residuals</i> )		Shift work influence ( <i>random slope residuals</i> )	
	Coef	Rank	coef	rank
<b>UE27</b>	<b>3.20</b>		<b>-0.16</b>	
Italy	-0.27	1	+0.14	24
Greece	-0.21	2	+0.08	19
Latvia	-0.17	3	+0.18	26
Slovenia	-0.15	4	+0.00	12
Spain	-0.13	5	+0.03	15
Portugal	-0.11	6	+0.12	22
Lithuania	-0.07	7	+0.01	13
Hungary	-0.05	8	-0.02	11
Poland	-0.04	9	+0.13	23
Germany	-0.04	10	-0.03	10
France	-0.03	11	+0.02	14
Slovakia	-0.02	12	+0.08	18
Netherlands	-0.01	13	-0.12	6
Estonia	-0.01	14	+0.10	20
Bulgaria	+0.00	15	+0.15	25
Czech Republic	+0.01	16	+0.04	16
Luxembourg	+0.04	17	+0.06	17
Malta	+0.05	18	+0.11	21
Sweden	+0.06	19	-0.21	3
Romania	+0.06	20	+0.19	27
Belgium	+0.08	21	-0.07	8
Cyprus	+0.11	22	-0.30	1
Finland	+0.11	23	-0.16	4
Austria	+0.14	24	-0.07	9
Ireland	+0.18	25	-0.23	2
United Kingdom	+0.19	26	-0.14	5
<i>Denmark</i>	<i>+0.28</i>	27	<i>-0.10</i>	7

Source: own analysis, based on EWCS (2000, 2005, and 2010)

After doing a listing of residuals of average WLB estimations, from the country with the lowest level to the country with the highest level, we found in table 3 not average values of WLB at national level, but deviations from the European average value when we control individual predictors. When we have the same gender, age, number of working hours, overtime hours or the same health risks and perceived discrimination, people from Italy, Greece, Latvia or Slovenia will have a lower WLB than the European average WLB, whereas people from Denmark, UK, Ireland or Austria will have a higher WLB.

On the right columns, we registered the differentiated effect of working in shifts, which means how much is added or subtracted from the global effect of -.016 for each

country. Countries like Italy, Latvia, Poland, Greece, Bulgaria or Romania have positive residuals of an estimated +.015, which renders the effect of working in shifts a null one (0,16 - (de la 0,13 la 0,18)  $\approx$  0). In other countries like Cyprus, Ireland, Finland, UK or Sweden, the residuals are negative, which adds to the global effect (-0,16 + (de la -0,14 la -0,30)  $>$  0,3). It is interesting to note that in countries where WLB is considered high on the same type of employee (mostly countries from Western Europe), there are big differences between those who work in shifts and those who don't (the latter being less satisfied with their WLB), whereas in some countries where WLB is lower (Eastern-Europe and South countries), the differences are smaller (so even if they are working in shifts or not, they have similar subjective evaluations of WLB). A possible explanation is that there are different values in Western countries when expectations about spare time and family time come into place, and working in shifts could disturb these expectations. Being more restricted in harmonizing schedules with other family members or friends could affect the evaluation of WLB.

## Recommendations to increase Quality of Working Life

### *Suggestions for improving working conditions*

The improvement politics of quality of working life particularly address the increase of work productivity and efficiency. Two strategies can maintain this growth: occupational flexibility and enhancing working conditions. The second strategy considers a series of changes that improve not just the quality of working life, but also of the individual's wellbeing, while also maintaining labour sustainability. Labour organization in present-day Romania mainly follows a model based on intensive work (Docherty *et al* 2009, Eurofound 2015), consisting of an extended work schedule and a reduced control over working conditions and employee wellbeing; particularly in the context of a diminished labour market access (with an official number of 5.8 million employees), the idea of labour sustainability and encouraging the improvement of working conditions are not top priorities. The data available in the official systems for collecting statistical indicators for the Romanian working conditions are more likely to address organized strikes, conflicts of interest and the number of workplace accidents (from Institute of National Statistics<sup>1</sup>), focusing very little on the work relations, non-material benefits or regulations of working hours.

Both the National Strategy for Workforce Occupation 2014 – 2020 and the European Strategy 2020 follow integrated objectives related to occupation where the increase in quality of workplace conditions are present.

A number of directions can be developed for improving working conditions, which must be addressed both at an occupational policies level and through the employing organizations:

- Improving the employees' union representation. Following changes in the collective agreement of 2011, the power of employees is diminished and, consequently, the

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<sup>1</sup> Data from AMIGO survey, Working Conditions section.

pressure towards ensuring a decent labour is also reduced. The unionisation level in Romania is different between those who possess temporary jobs (fixed-term contract) and those with standard jobs (European Commission, 2011), which can indicate major differences between working conditions.

- Working relations should be monitored in a manner that is efficient and adequate to the realities of work environments in order to prevent workplace harassment, mobbing and discrimination based on ethnic, physical ability or age criteria.
- Collecting indicators regarding the quality of workplaces (across different sectors) on the following sub-dimensions: health and safety, ability and skill development, work organisation and working hours. They can be used for comparisons between the different sectors and for developing policies regarding working conditions improvements.
- Collecting individual indicators for the work availability (measurements regarding the evolution of individual work trajectories by marking relevant life events, skills and abilities, motivation level, indicators regarding individual wellbeing and health). They can be addressed through policies that support adapted trajectories (inclusion of disabled persons, of those with a precarious health).
- Undeclared labour control. The lack of regulations has led to vulnerable groups (particularly lower-educated Roma and disabled people) bearing the costs of lacking access to the official labour market.
- For new labour categories produced by emerging information and communication technologies, a focus on the increase of digital skills should be tackled.
- The incidence of overtime is not high in Romania, but a series of practices, such as working on-call are more prevalent compared to other EU countries. 50% of the Romanian employed population works on-call. (EWCS, 2010)
- Strategies for improving rewards for overtime labour and for motivating employers to register and report overtime labour. The EU working hours' directive marks a maximum number of 48 hours per week, but as the new change directions propose, countries can opt out of this directive if there is an individual agreement between employer and employee. Although Romania doesn't officially register as exceeding this limit, evening overtime is mentioned by 45% of the population (EWCS 2010).
- Developing ways of measuring sustainable life-long labour and of improving the effects of workplace transitions for occupationally vulnerable populations (NEETs, lower-educated people, those with deprecated skills on the labour market, those with low digital skills, Roma, those who were not extensively active on the labour market).
- Atypical arrangements regarding working hours (working in shifts, long hours), although associated with adverse health effects, can be preferred by individuals, depending on their stages of life, offering a more desirable work/private life balance (Eurofound 2012). The need to address these differences within the measures to

improve working conditions must be linked to the proposals for the aging active population and, implicitly, to the association at this stage between the work/private life balance and schedules.

- Innovative labour systems through the use of new technologies, such as long-distance work through TIC (telework) can be an opportunity for creating jobs with better working conditions and can be a desirable option for socially vulnerable categories (NEETs, people with special needs or disabilities). The incidence of telework can be positively associated with the autonomy linked to the schedules desired by the employer and, implicitly, for obtaining a better work/private life balance. However, strategies to use telework in order to exclude vulnerable social categories should be avoided.

## Conclusions

On an European level, the effort of changing policies also addresses handling workplace quality through the collection of a wide range of factors (EQLS, EWCS, ETUI, ESS, Eurobarometer): physical risk factors, physical strains, labour intensity, workplace intimidation and discrimination, emotional strain and work-related stress, autonomy and task discretion, training and learning opportunities, career advancement opportunities, personal development opportunities, participation and empowerment within the organisation, intrinsic rewards, good management practices, task clarity and performance feedback, social support and good relations in the work environment, work/private life balance, fitting the work schedule with one's social obligations, working hours flexibility and workplace satisfaction.

As we could see from the multilevel regression analysis performed on the three waves of EWCS (2000, 2005, and 2010), work-life balance (WLB) is a complex combination of influences that focus not only on individual characteristics, but its understanding and evaluation changes in time and differ between countries. Striving for WLB for Romanian workers should be an important focus for improving working conditions, taking into account local realities as well.

The weaknesses of many endeavours focusing on pecuniary aspects refer primarily to the limited opportunities to make fast changes on short terms. Secondly, to the economic resources that are often directed less often towards improving the wellbeing of employees and more towards improving efficiency through extrinsic motivation and pay increase. And last, but not least, the way in which many of these indicators can be improved only through structural changes such as legislation, occupational policies and organizational culture shifts.

Increasing the participation rate of the aged population is one of the long-term directives of the European Union. In this context, addressing questions regarding the conditions of developing active aging implies extra attention given to the growth of working conditions in order to satisfy the needs of the different age categories, to fight against discriminatory practices based on the age of the employee and their employment on precarious or marginalizing contracts. Furthermore, active aging is difficult in the context of a precarious health system that is unable to make up the

difference in healthy life expectancy between the elderly population of Romania and that of wealthier countries.

The improvement of working conditions is dependent on the existing policies, regulations and practices and on their ability to change. These changes take place at all four levels: institutional (occupational legislation and regulations), that of the employing organization, that of the workplace and that of the individual (marked by the individual trajectory though life). At the institutional level, the public policies are meant to redirect the way in which precarious forms of employment (fixed-term contract, under-employment, on-call work, informal labour, and undeclared labour) are being managed. At the employing organization level, the conditions of the workplace are shaped by the collective representation abilities and of the employees' interests, by the professional autonomy and of the workplace environment. The workplace quality level is given, as it appears in many European-level comparative studies, by: income level, career and workplace stability prospects, intrinsic quality of the workplace (competence and autonomy in task management, social environment and labour intensity), working hours' quality (length, working hours scheduling, working hours' flexibility and the autonomy in setting up one's working hours).

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