



Precarious employment relationships and their consequences: higher health risks for young workers

A German-Italian research project
Marvin Reuter, Morten Wahrendorf, Nico Dragano.

BRIC-47 Policy Brief

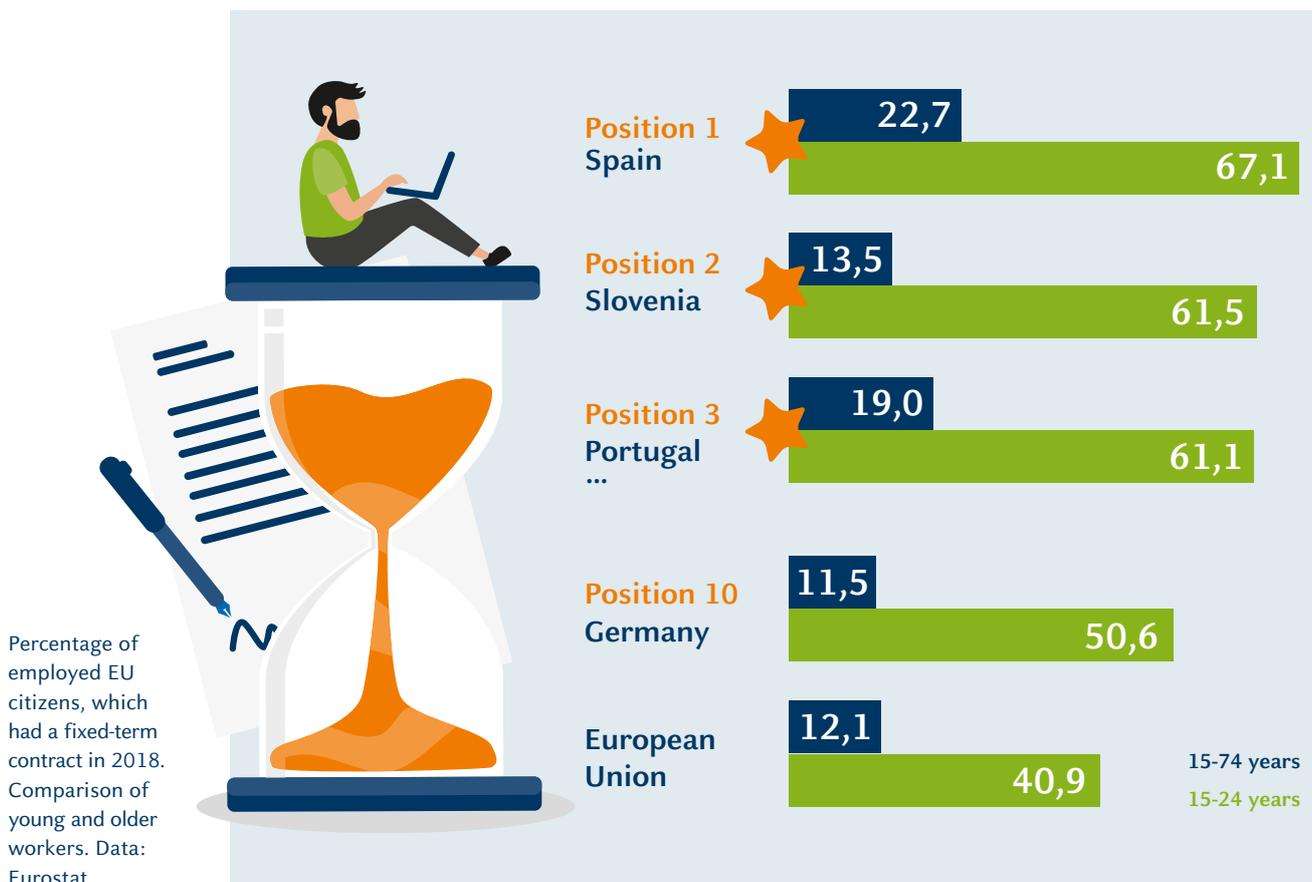
Summary

In an EU-wide comparison, young people are more likely to be unemployed, are more likely to have fixed-term contracts and are more likely to be in precarious employment relationships.

It has already been well researched how important a stable working life is for our health and wellbeing. On the other hand, little is known about the health situation of young workers, who are unemployed more often than older people or are in precarious employment relationships.

This is where the German-Italian project BRiC 47 comes in: In three studies, it investigated the situation of young European workers in precarious employment situations. The research groups found that young workers in comparison to older or permanent employees

- have poorer access to occupational safety and health (OSH),
- are more likely to go to work regardless of illness,
- and are more frequently sexually harassed in the workplace.



The researchers therefore strongly recommend improving the rights of young workers in precarious and irregular employment situations when it comes to health and employment security.



Unemployment in Europe (2018): Comparison between young and older employees. Data: Eurostat

Young people have restricted access to operational work and health protection

The first study conducted with data from Italy compared whether young workers were more likely or less likely to have access to and an awareness of OSH. On top of that, it examines whether different working conditions are related to the age of the employees.

Random Sample

8,000 working men and women between the ages of 19 and 65, of which 732 young workers were under the age of 30 years; survey data from Italy (INSuLA 1, 2014)

Study Design

Six questions concerned access to health protection (e.g. access to an occupational health physician) and five questions assessed awareness of OSH (e.g. knowledge of emergency regulations).

Outcomes

- Compared to older workers, young workers have less access to and a reduced awareness of issues regarding OSH protection.
- The nature of the employment contract contributes to differences between older and younger workers.

Temporary employees work more frequently despite illness

The second study examines, whether employees with a fixed-term employment contract work more frequently in case of illness, a phenomenon also known as 'sickness presenteeism'.

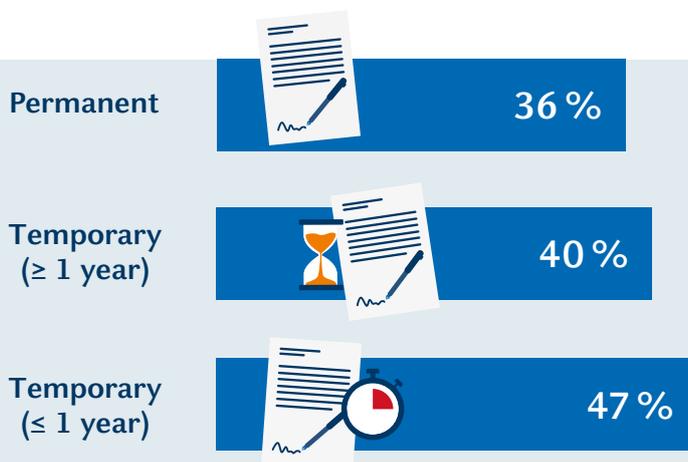
Random Sample

Cross-sectional data of 20,240 employees, who have participated in the European Commission Survey on working conditions in 2015. The employees were grouped according to the type and duration of the employment contract.

Outcomes

- European workers – above all young and middle-aged people – averagely work on 39 percent of the days on which they're ill.
- Temporary employees go to work much more frequently when they are ill than permanent employees, in particular if the contract is limited to less than one year. This happens regardless of age.

Results suggest that temporary workers have less access to social protection and therefore appear ill at work more often.



Percentage share of days over the past year when an employee has come to work ill in relation to all days when they were ill. Adjusted for country, sex, duration of employment, working hours, income, occupation, industry, company size and number of cases of illness.

The more precarious the employment relationship, the higher the risk of sexual harassment

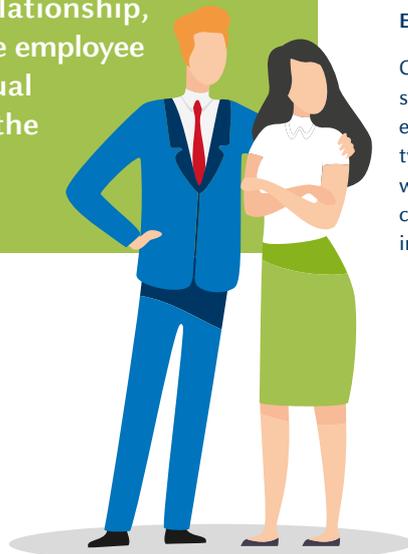
The third study examines the effects of a precarious employment situation on unwanted sexual attention and sexual harassment. Affected are especially young working women, whose health often suffers from it.

Random Sample

Sample of the European labour force with 63,966 employees in 33 countries who have participated in the European Working Conditions Survey in 2010 or 2015.

Outcomes

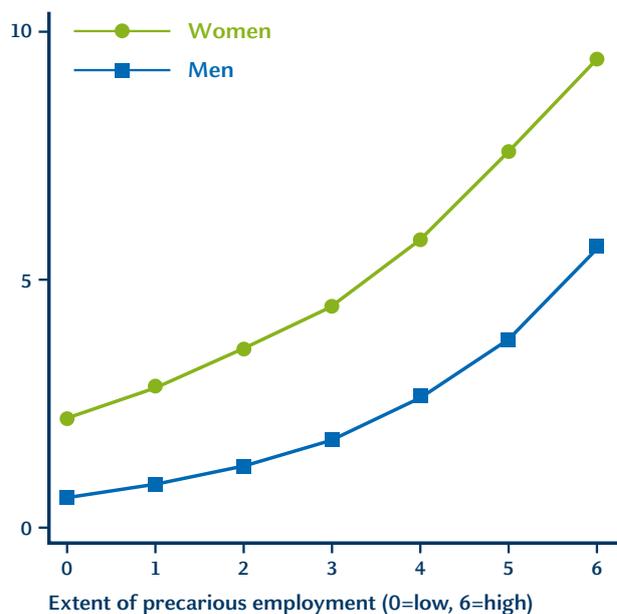
- Employees in precarious employment situations experience unwanted sexual attention more often and will be sexually harassed more often.
- The more precarious the employment relationship, the more did the employee experience sexual harassment at the workplace.



Study Design

A multidimensional approach has been used and points have been assigned for fixed-term employment, low wages, involuntary part-time work, frequently changing working hours, lack of protection against health risks and safety at work and multiple employment. The higher the score, the more precarious the employment relationship.

Sexual Harassment (%)



Connection between precarious employment with unwanted sexual attention. The higher the score, the more precarious the employment. Results adjusted for age, education, household type, migration background, duration of employment, weekly working hours, professional position, working sector, size of company, gender ratio at the workplace and whether the job includes customer visits.

Young workers need better protection

Young workers in insecure and flexible employment relationships are exposed to health risks more often, have access to offers of occupational safety and health (OSH) services less often and experience sexual harassment in the workplace more frequently.

Since the basis for a healthy working life is a healthy start into the profession, policymakers and the corporate social partners have to work with emphasis on improving the situation, especially for the precariously employed young people in Europe.

The results of the research project suggest that young workers in precarious employment situations more frequently accept unfavourable working situations with corresponding hazards for their health because they are less socially secure. An example of this is that temporary employees less often fulfil the waiting period to receive continued payment of wages in case of illness or to have a claim of unemployment benefit. There are opportunities for political shaping in order to improve the general protection of young workers as well as the necessary operational measures.

Against the background of the economic consequences resulting from the current COVID-19 pandemic, insecure und precarious employment relations are expected to increase, which might particularly true for young workers.



Published and completed studies

Study 1

Dragano, N., Barbaranelli, C., Reuter, M., Wahrendorf, M., Wright, B., Ronchetti, M., Buresti, G., Di Tecco, C., Iavicoli, S. (2018). Young workers' access to and awareness of occupational safety and health services: Age-differences and possible drivers in a large survey of employees in Italy. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 15(7), 1–10.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15071511>

Study 2

Reuter, M., Wahrendorf, M., Di Tecco, C., Probst, T. M., Ruhle, S., Ghezzi, V., Barbaranelli, C., Iavicoli, S., Dragano, N. (2019). Do Temporary Workers More Often Decide to Work While Sick? Evidence for the Link between Employment Contract and Presenteeism in Europe. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(10), 1868.

<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16101868>

Study 3

Reuter, M., Wahrendorf, M., Di Tecco, C., Probst, T.M., Chirumbolo, A., Ritz-Timme, S., Barbaranelli, C., Iavicoli, S., Dragano, N. (2020). Precarious Employment and Self-Reported Experiences of Unwanted Sexual Attention and Sexual Harassment at Work. An Analysis of the European Working Conditions Survey. *PLoS ONE* 15(5): e0233683.

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0233683>

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Institut für Medizinische Soziologie
Centre for Health and Society
Universitätsklinikum, Gebäude 17.11
Moorenstr. 5, 40225 Düsseldorf

Contact: Prof. Dr. Nico Dragano
(Mail: dragano@med.uni-duesseldorf.de)

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This research is supported by funding from the Italian National Institute for Insurance against Accidents at Work (INAIL)

Project number: INAIL BRIC 2016 n. 47.