

# **‘Vulnerable’ groups on the labour market in Europe from an intersectional and comparative perspective**

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## Aim of the webinar

- Overview – setting the scene
- Measuring economic vulnerability/precarious work
- Surveying and monitoring vulnerable groups  
Importance to compare
- Future of a vulnerable/precarious workforce



# Overview - Vulnerability and precariousness on the labour market

# What makes a person vulnerable?

- Limited rights and/or relative power imbalances
- Limited resources
- Limited knowledge/information
- Illness or disabling condition
- External stigma/stereotypes
- History of abuse
- Loss of family
- Loss of culture/historical roots

# Vulnerable populations?

- Children/youth
- Seniors
- Women
- Sexual minorities
- Persons with disabilities
- Immigrants / refugees
- People living in poverty

**Important: belonging to such a group does not mean automatically that you are in a vulnerable situation!**

# What do we mean with vulnerability

- Gained prominence because of its **potential impact on individual well-being and economic performance**
- **No consensual definition**  $\Rightarrow$  vague (“sense of insecurity, of potential harm people must feel wary of - something bad may happen” Dercon, 2006).
- **Generally:** refers to a **risk chain**: (a) risk or risky events, (b) options for managing risk, or the risk responses and, (c) outcome in terms of welfare loss (Alwang et al. 2001).

## Definitions

- Within fields of sociology and social policy  
⇒ vulnerability = **economic** (integration–exclusion) and **social** (insertion–isolation) **conditions** (Castel 1991)
- **Vulnerable individuals** = people in need of protection and care, or with limited access to a set of resources and opportunities (Misztal, 2011, Mackenzie et al. 2014).
- **For employment:** also concerned with the power relationship within the workplace.

## Vulnerability and work

- The TUC Commission on Vulnerable Employment (UK) defined vulnerable work as *‘insecure, low-paid and places workers at high risk of employment rights abuse. It holds very little chance of progression and few opportunities for collective action to improve conditions.’* (TUC; 2009: 12)

# Challenge

- Not always clear whether concept applies to **individuals/groups**, or to vulnerability **created by precarious work**, or, indeed, whether it is useful to apply the term to all those in employment
- Different levels of vulnerability
  - individual (identity)
  - situational
  - universal

# Individual (Group Identity)

- Where a group, or individuals within that group, have a **particular characteristic** which makes them more likely than other groups/ individuals to be in precarious work situations and/or increases their vulnerability.

- **Example:**



## Situational vulnerability

- Applies to individuals / groups **but also to situation** in which individuals / groups find themselves in **due to being in precarious work**.
  - **IMPORTANT:** vulnerability does not refer to workers themselves but the situation they are facing due to their engagement into precarious work, as well as other disadvantages related to other specific characteristics.
- **Context specific** and *‘stresses the ways that inequalities of power, dependency, capacity, or need, render some agents vulnerable to harm or exploitation by others’* (Mackenzie et al 2014).

# Universal vulnerability

- Level at which we all share vulnerability just because we are human beings and have a level of dependence upon the state for our well-being (Fineman 2008)
- Role of the **‘responsive’ state** and institutions responsibilities in relation to peoples’ vulnerabilities

# Economic vulnerability and precariousness

- Often used interchangeably (Burgess et al. 2013; Pollert & Charlwood 2009)
- Concepts are linked but not identical
  - **Vulnerability:** implicit risk that has not yet materialised and which is by extension not directly observable.
  - **Precariousness:** five different level (Campell and Price 2016): in the job, in employment, as a worker, as a group of workers, globaly

# Precariousness in employment

- Related to forms of employment which **deviate from so called 'standard employment'** - full-time, long-term and socially secure job (Bosch, 2004; Bercusson, 2009; Davidov, 2016)
- Related to **different developments** (Kallenberg 2011)
  - Globalisation
  - Digital transformation
  - Dissolution of traditional structures in employment (such as flexibilisation, deregulation and de-unionization)
  - Reduction of welfare state support
    - ⇒ Individualization of life courses

## Shortcomings

- Little reference to **longstanding inequalities** based on class, gender, or race
- Ongoing **definitional ambiguities** as to the very meaning of **precarious work**.
- Adoption of an **ahistorical approach**, overlooking that precarious work represents a return to earlier instabilities due to capitalist development



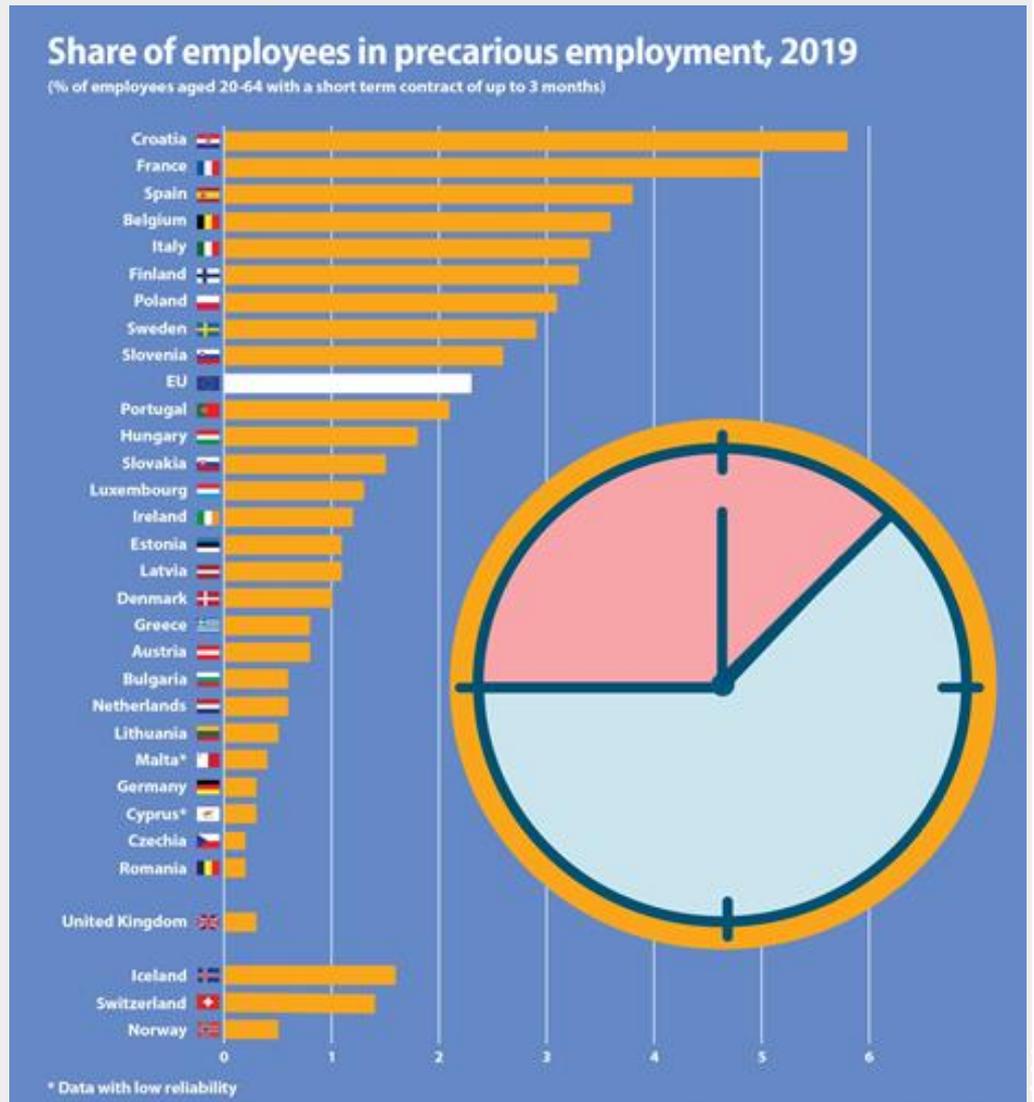
# Measuring economic vulnerability and precarious work

# Common approaches

- No **universally accepted definition** across Europe.
- **Three strands:**
  - **1) ILO: work contract centered** (operate in relatively precarious circumstances, such as family workers/self-employed)  
⇒ identification of subpopulations at risk (such as women, migrants etc.)
  - **2) Low wages and non-unionism:** distribution of power between employers and employees
  - **3) Risk and capacity (general framework):** vulnerable workers = higher risk of exposure and lower protection capacities (O'Regan et al. 2005; Taylor 2008)
- Point towards **multidimensionality**

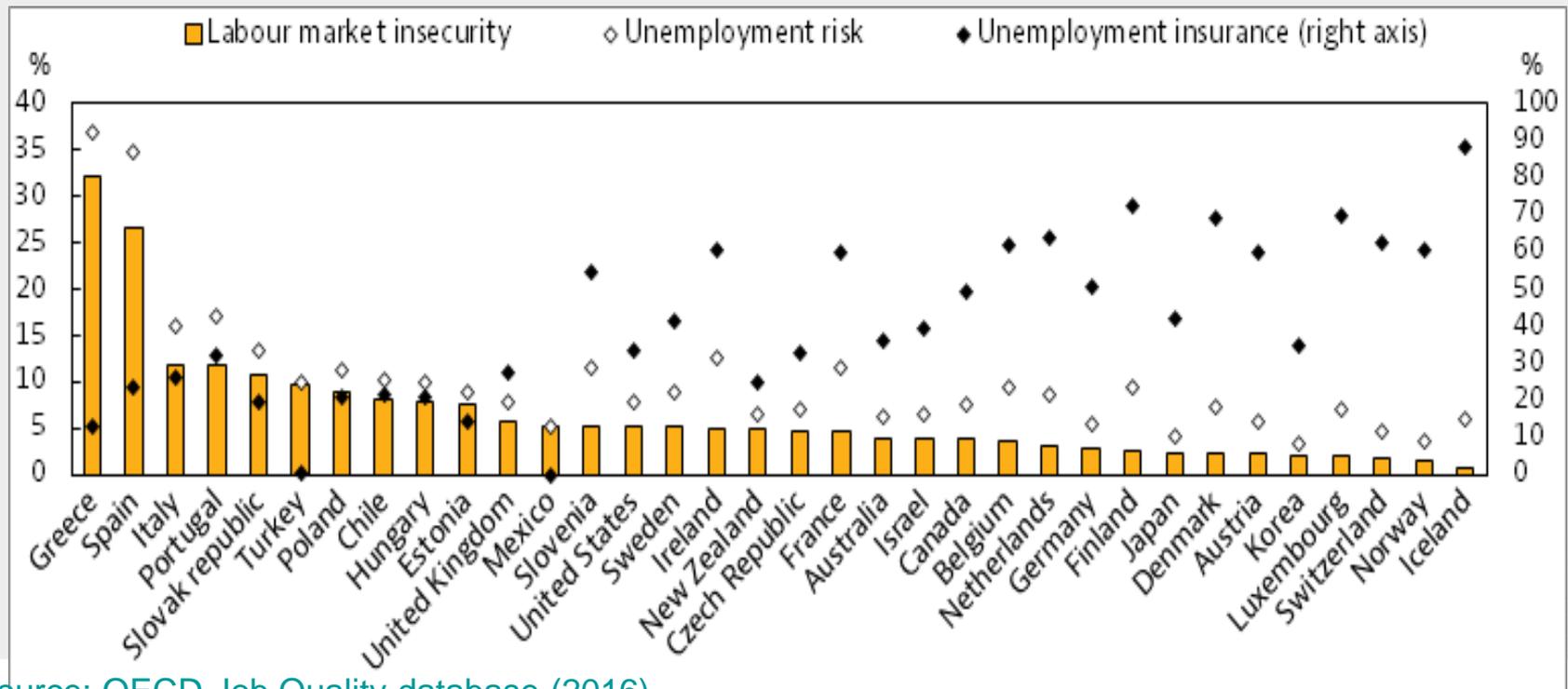
# Overview - 2019

Precarious employment = meaning that the work contract did not exceed three months duration.



# Multidimensional approaches - work/job quality

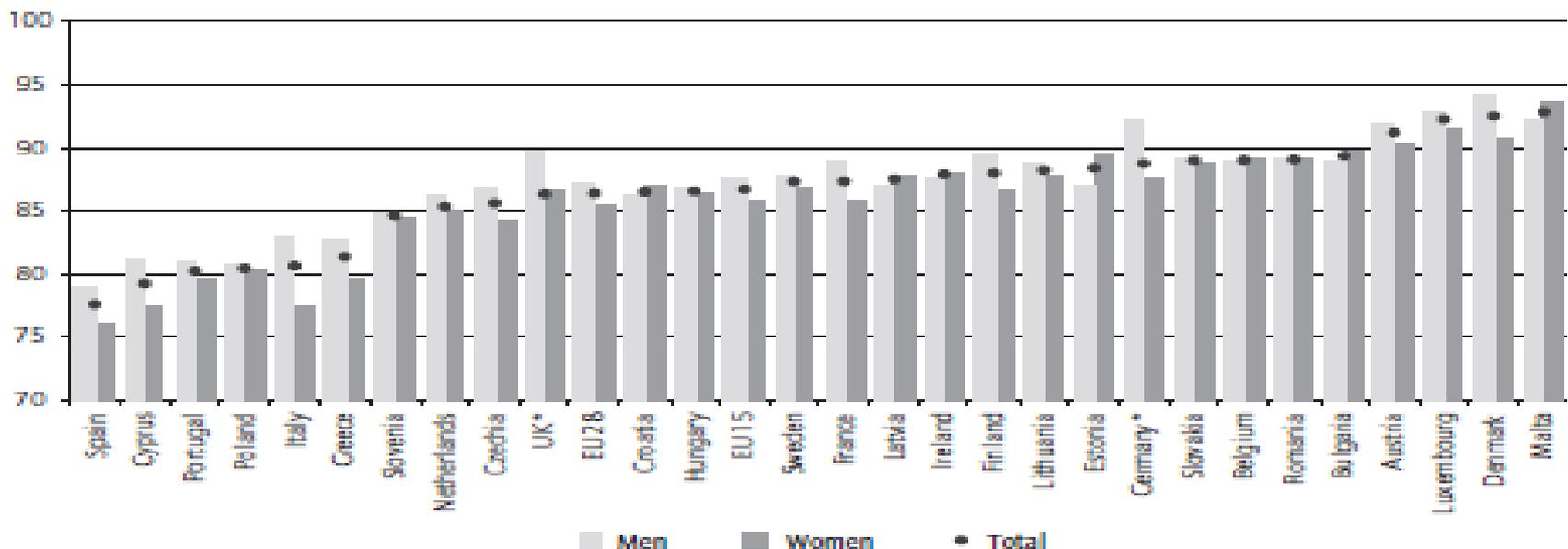
- **OECD (three dimensions):** earnings quality (*average earnings + distribution*), labour market insecurity (*unemployment risk + received benefits*), quality of the working environment (*high job demands + low resources*)



# Multidimensional approaches - work/job quality

- European Job Quality Index (six dimensions):** (1) wages; (2) forms of employment and job security; (3) working time and work-life balance; (4) working conditions; (5) skills and career development; and (6) collective interest representation

Figure 4 JQI dimension on forms of employment and job security in 2015, by country and gender

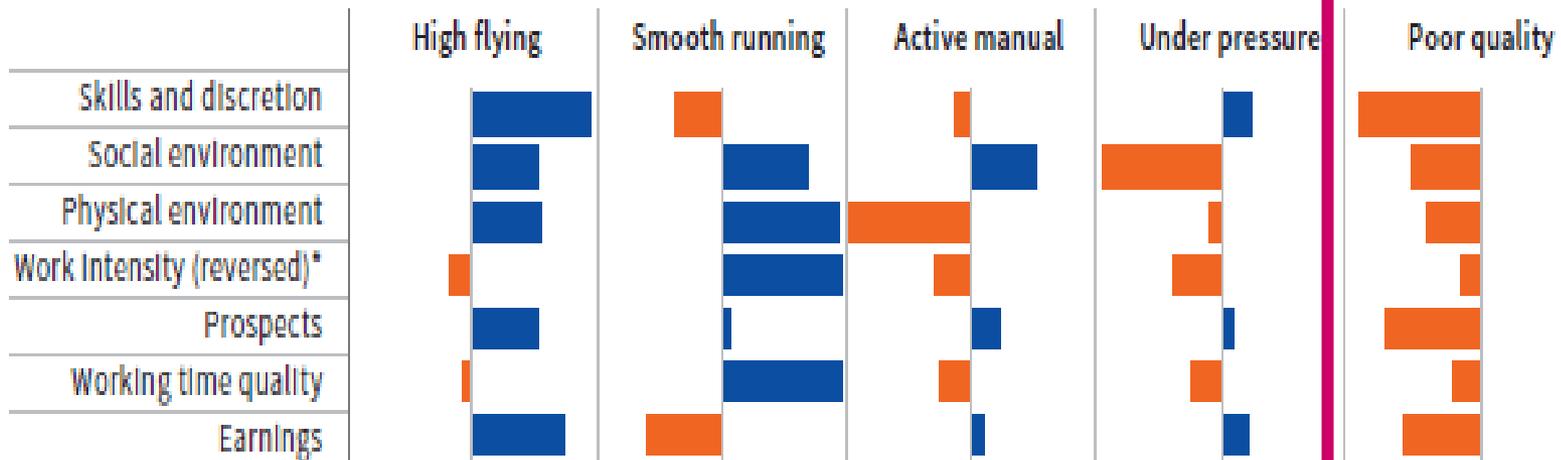


Notes: \*missing data on involuntary temporary employment.

# Multidimensional approaches - work/job quality

- Eurofound (2016) identify groups of workers with similar job quality features using LCA

Figure 124: Five job quality profiles, by job quality indices



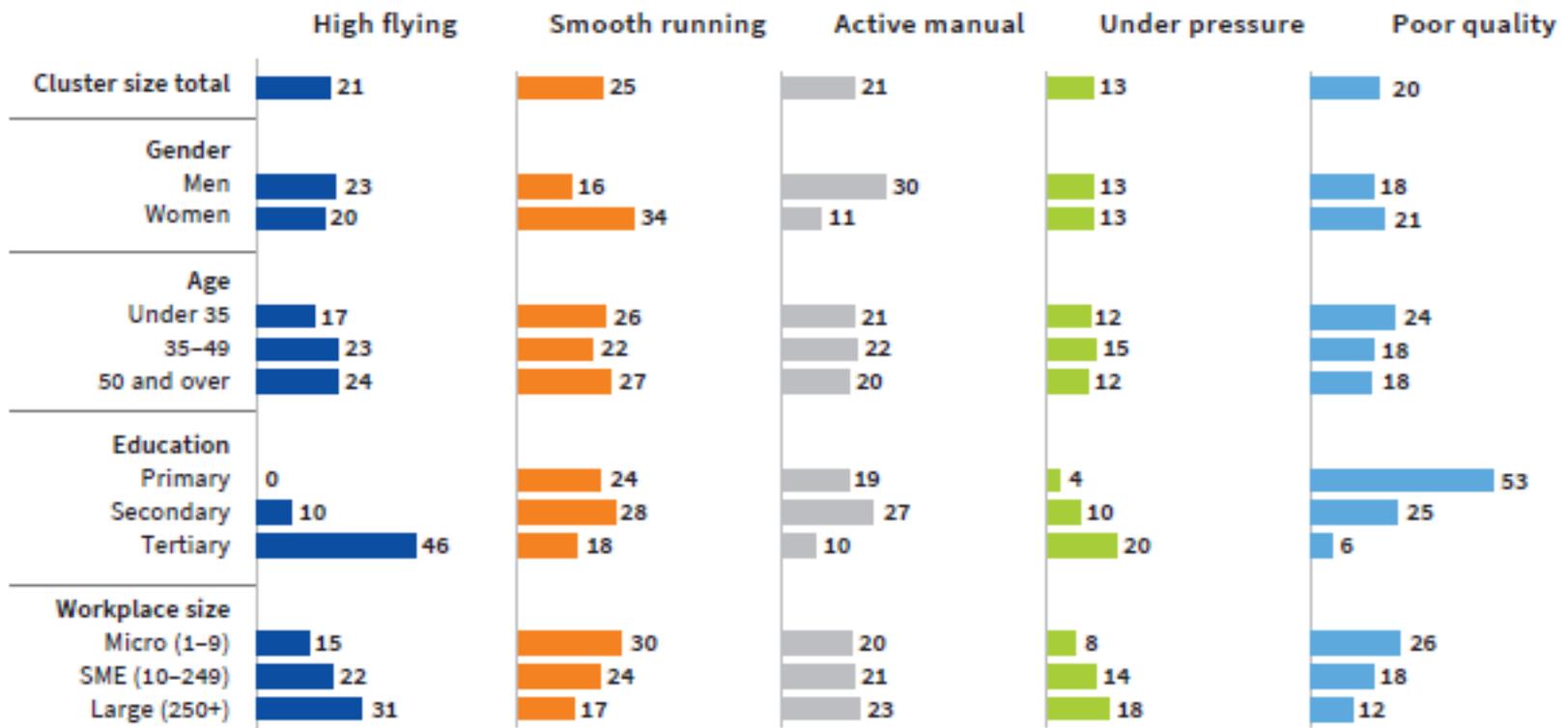
Note: \* In contrast to the other job quality indices, a higher level of work intensity lowers job quality. The bars in the figure show the z-scores of each cluster (columns) for each of the job quality indices (rows).

# Poor quality jobs

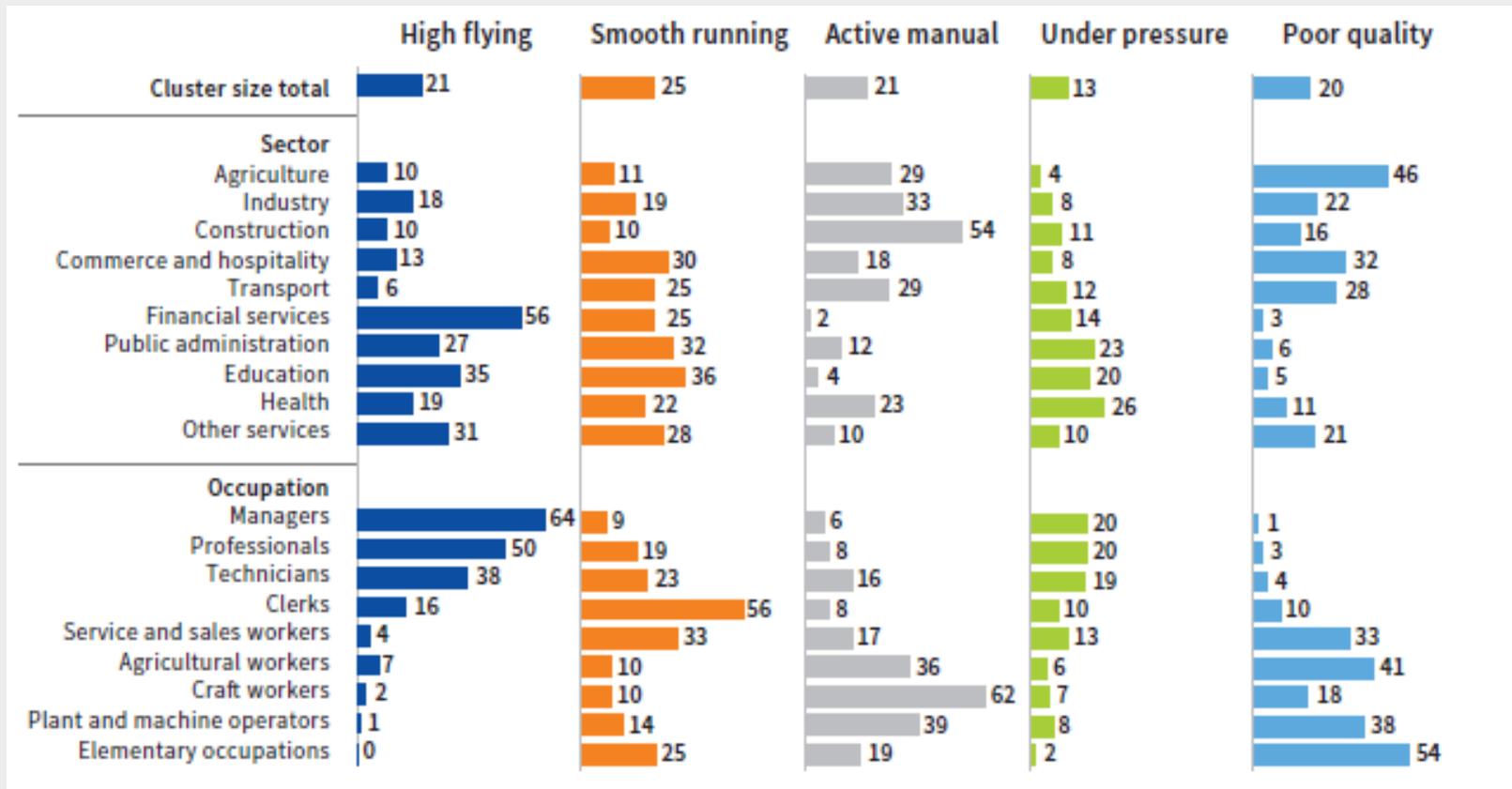
- 20 % of EU workforce works in poor quality jobs
- **Characteristics:**
- **Lowest rank** in skills and discretion + in earnings and prospects.
- Monthly earnings are about 1/3 of those in 'high flying' profile. About 1/3 of the workers fear they may lose their job within six months and 42% strongly disagree that their job offers good prospects for career advancement.
- 24% have fixed-term contracts (24%) and 22% have temporary-agency contracts or no contracts at all.
- Learning new things is uncommon and the proportion of workers who have received training is low (18%)

# Who works in poor quality jobs?

Figure 125: Job quality profiles, by sociodemographic characteristics, EU28 (% of workers in each category)



# Who works in poor quality jobs?



# Challenges

- No common understanding of precarious employment / vulnerable work ⇒ **no common set of indicators**
- Which one is **'the best'**?
- Group and country **comparisons**
- Significant shares of precarious employment are **not counted** in current statistics (part-time contracts with very few hours, other forms of underemployment, quasi self-employment, and undeclared / informal work)
- **Limitations** of available data (McKay et al, 2011).

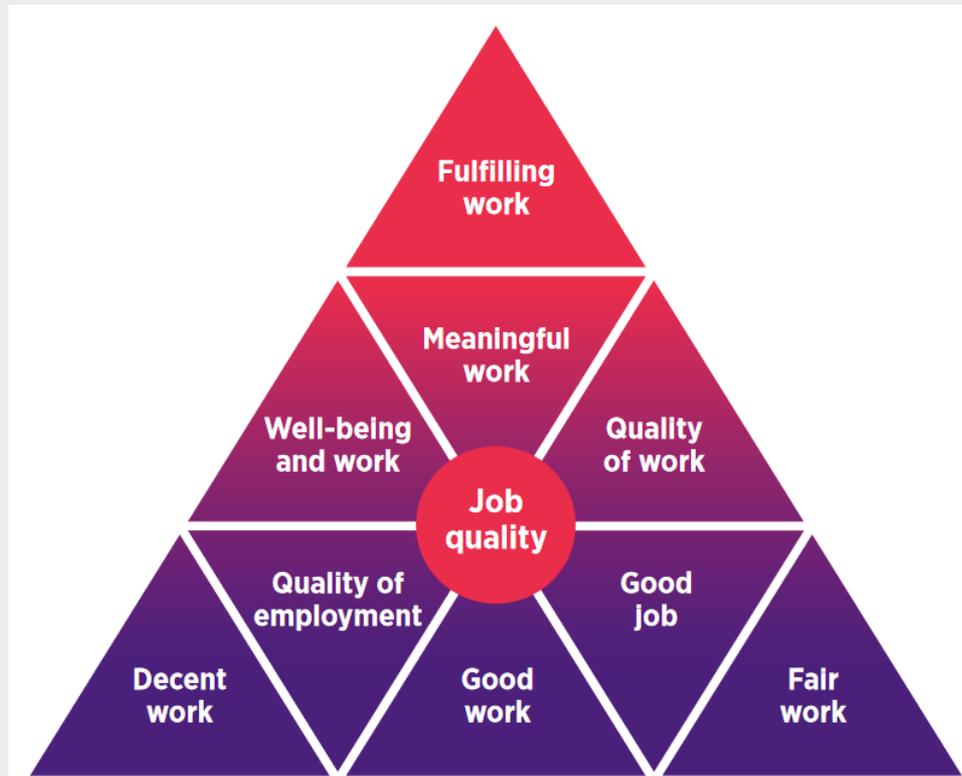
# Limitations of existing data and consequences to monitor vulnerability

- Check out report:

[http://www.inclusivegrowth.eu/files/Output/D11.3\\_inventory\\_report.pdf](http://www.inclusivegrowth.eu/files/Output/D11.3_inventory_report.pdf)

- Giusti, C.; Bertarelli, G. & Pratesi, M. (wip): Small area methods to study vulnerabilities using anonymised EU LFS microdata

# Hierarchical mosaic of job-quality-related concepts



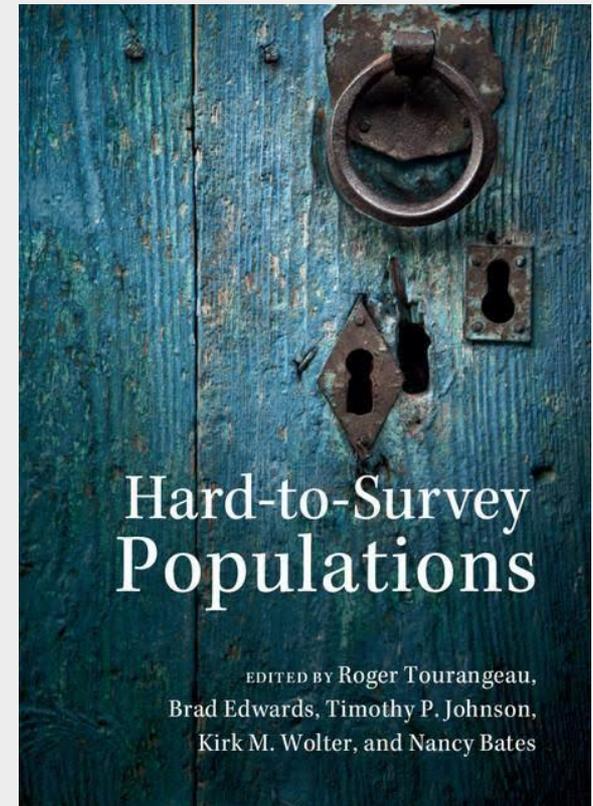
# Are we able to identify all vulnerable groups?

- **SDG 8 ‘Decent work’** ⇒ requires monitoring of all possible individuals who are at risk of not having ‘decent’ work across countries and over time
- **BUT:** analysis and monitoring is often based on survey data ⇒ affected by (serious) biases
- **QUESTION:** Are particular ‘**hard-to-reach**’ populations with a higher risk of not decent work systematically excluded from labor market analysis?

# Hard-to-survey populations

Hard-to-survey populations are those that create problems for one or more key survey operations (Tourangeau et al. 2014)

- Hard-to-sample (rare populations with no population-specific frame)
- Hard-to-identify (based on hidden or stigmatizing characteristics)
- Hard-to-find or contact (mobile populations; pop's with access issues)
- Hard-to-persuade (resistant; alienated)
- Hard-to-interview (language barriers)



**How to identify in a survey?**

## Case study with the InGRID-2 project

- Provide **overview** / inventory for 26 European micro-level datasets whether and how it is possible to identify nine vulnerable groups in the labor market
- Identify **data gaps** and challenges
- Develop **indicators** to monitor vulnerable groups across countries and over time

# Results

- **Easy groups”**: gender, age and migrant background  
⇒ same measurement / easy to harmonise across surveys / detail varies
- **“Challenging groups”**:
  - **Sexual minorities** (if at all via HH grid)
  - Single parents (HH grid/composition, some predefined)
  - Nationality (**citizenship hardly included**), ethnicity (only in selected surveys, variation in detail), religious minorities (only in selected surveys, different measures)
  - Disability (huge variation on measurement)

**Challenge:** how to address common exclusion of particular populations?

## Monitoring vulnerable groups

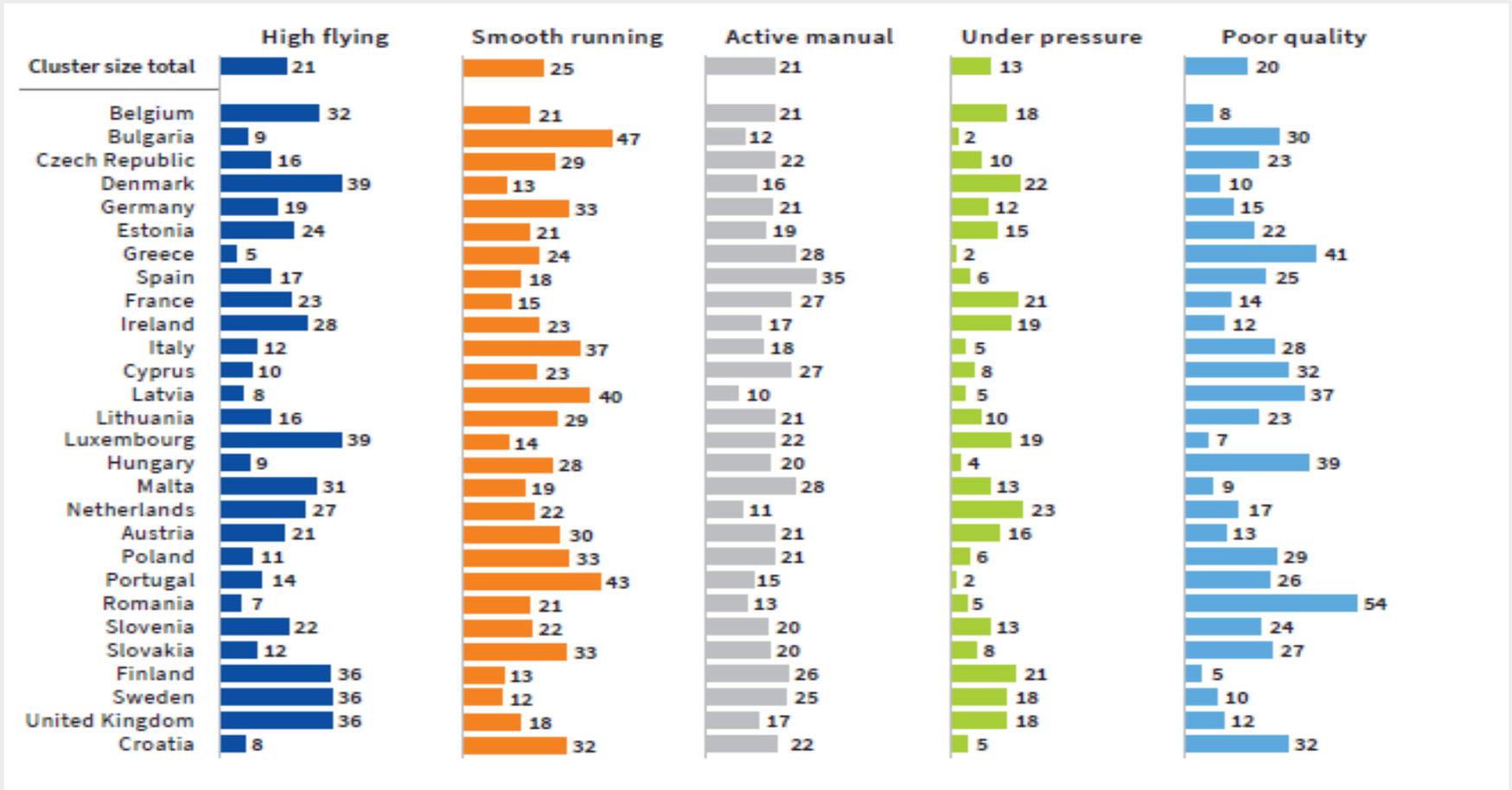
- Important for policy makers
- **Challenge:** simple indicators (such as LFP, UER) are often not reliable because surveys are not designed for it
- SAE models maybe be a solution, but
- Open problems:
  - Weights cannot be recalibrated:
  - The original sample weights are not available in the anonymized data.
  - Small area estimation methods for composite and multidimensional indicators have to be developed



# The importance to compare

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# Huge cross-national variation in quality jobs



# Institutions matter

- **Institutions** and **social relations** outside workplace can act to *mediate* the relation between work and the worker.
- Does not eliminate or qualify character of work as precarious, but can *modify* the potential impact of precarious work on the worker
- Either **amplifying** (i.e. migration policies assigning precarious migrant status) or **cushioning** risks (i.e. welfare state payments reduce the risk of low pay leading to poverty).

# Multi-level framework

- Important to account for the multilevel structure
  - **Individual level** such as gender, age, education/skills, etc.
  - **Work place** such as size of firm, sector, etc.
  - **Country context** such as laws, regulations, norms etc.



# The **FUTURE** of a vulnerable/precarious workforce

# Challenges

- How to tackle a **multi-level phenomenon**?
  - **Individual and group level vulnerability** requires action to tackle discrimination/ disadvantage at an individual/ group level.
  - **Situational vulnerability** requires actions to provide security and limit exploitation in the work environment.
  - **Universal vulnerability** requires national approach to protecting and providing resilience, through asset accumulation, for individuals and groups.

# Challenges

- **EU-level:** consensus that something needs to be done but prevalence of precarious work is different in each country
- **BUT:**
  - Each country has its **own legislative system**, laws and social support mechanisms
  - **EU- directive vs national implementation**
  - **One-dimensional policies** and overlap with other life domains



# Thank You!

