



European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

# Quality of work in Italy survey, 2002

*About the survey*

*Working time*

*Worker participation and autonomy*

*Conflict, harassment and discrimination*

*Health and safety*

*Training and work perspectives*

*Work satisfaction*

*Commentary*

*References*

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*Levels of formal training, participation in decision-making, and teamwork in the Italian workplace are lower than the European average, according to the 2002 Isfol quality of work survey. Despite these issues, however, and a lack of work-life balance, the survey reveals that work satisfaction in Italy is high.*

In 2002, [Isfol \(in Italian\)](#), the national agency for training, carried out the first working conditions survey in Italy in 20 years, following significant changes in the Italian labour market, such as deregulation, decentralisation and increased training measures. Among the principal findings of the survey were that work-life balance opportunities are very low, and that levels of formal training, involvement in decision-making, and teamwork are lower than the European average.

Nonetheless, more than 90% of those interviewed reported that they were satisfied by their work, though it should be pointed out that other Italian surveys ([Istat \(in Italian\)](#), 2004 and [DS \(in Italian\)](#), 2002) and internationally self-reported figures for job satisfaction tend to be very high, at around 80% or more. Surveys at local level also confirm these results.

A possible reason for the apparent contradiction between working conditions and job satisfaction is that 'low strain' jobs (low work intensity and high autonomy) account for about 40% of the workforce. Most jobs with high work intensity also have high autonomy, and are held by professionals, supervisors and entrepreneurs, who appear to derive satisfaction from more stimulating work, despite the stress factor.

## **About the survey**

The 2002 Isfol survey on quality of work ('La qualità del lavoro in Italia') is the first national survey in Italy that covers all sectors, including self-employed people and entrepreneurs. It provides, therefore, a representative cross-sample of the entire working population. The report was presented in May 2004 and its publication is planned for 2005.

The study is based on computer assisted telephone interviews with a sample of 2,000 workers. The [third European Working Conditions Survey](#) (EWCS), carried out in 2000 by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, provided the reference model for the sample design (multistage random sampling) and for the questionnaire structure, with some modifications added to suit the telephone interview method.

The results are grouped under six topics:

- working time;
- worker participation and autonomy;
- conflict, harassment and discrimination;
- health and safety;
- training and work perspectives;
- work satisfaction.

At the same time as this survey, [Democratici di Sinistra \(DS\) - 580Kb Powerpoint presentation: in Italian](#), the main centre-left party, launched a 'social survey' through its newspaper, *l'Unità*, and its related website. Although its research differs in methodology and, to an extent, in the work-related topics, the results are relatively consistent with the Isfol survey. These two national studies follow a number of surveys at local level, instigated by local authorities (Agenzia per l'Impiego di Trento, 1998, [Irpel, 1999 \(423Kb pdf: in Italian\)](#), [AFI-IPL, 2002 and 2003 \(in Italian\)](#), [Provincia di Pesaro e Urbino, 2003 - in Italian](#)).

## **Working time**

### **Work schedules**

Some 22.3% of respondents work, on average, less than 30 hours a week, while 19.6% work more than 45 hours a

week. Gender differences are significant: 40.4% of women work less than 30 hours a week, compared with 10.3% of men, while 25.9% of men work more than 45 hours (9% for women) - see Table 1.

The working time of women is influenced more by marital status than by being the main income provider. A higher proportion of unmarried than married women work less than 30 hours a week, and more than two out of three divorced or separated women work full time. Men most frequently work more than 45 hours a week when they are widowed (35.7%) or married (26.9%), and when they are the main income holder (28.7%).

**Table 1 Actual hours worked, by household earner status and marital status (%)**

	Up to 16 hours	From 17 to 30 hours	From 31 to 45 hours	More than 45 hours
<b>Men</b>				
Main income earner	0.6	8.6	62.0	28.7
Not main income earner	2.4	9.6	66.5	21.4
Civil status				
Unmarried	2.4	9.9	63.8	23.9
Married, partner	0.9	8.7	63.5	26.9
Separated	0.0	7.6	76.1	16.3
Divorced	0.0	8.1	71.2	20.7
Widowed	0.0	0.0	64.3	35.7
Total men	1.3	9.0	63.8	25.9
<b>Women</b>				
Main income holder	3.2	34.4	50.9	11.5
Not main income holder	7.3	36.4	48.0	8.3
Civil status				
Unmarried	7.7	38.8	43.7	9.8
Married, partner	6.1	35.7	49.9	8.3
Separated	2.3	23.6	67.4	6.8
Divorced	1.9	18.7	68.2	11.2
Widowed	2.6	21.7	53.3	22.4
Total women	6.4	36.0	48.6	9.0

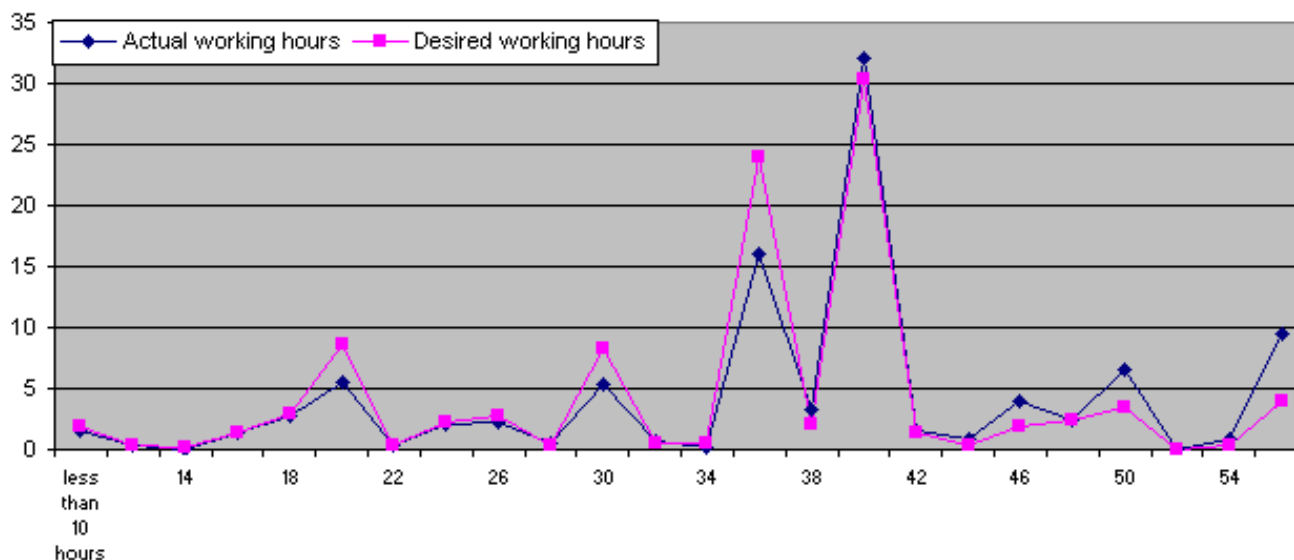
Source: Quality of work survey, Isfol, 2002

Some two thirds (67%) of workers have regular working days and working hours. These employees work mainly in medium-sized and large companies. Some 15% of workers have irregular working days and often work on Sundays, while the remaining 18% have mainly regular working days with irregular working time, and often long hours. The latter situation includes jobs with technical and/or supervisory responsibilities, or self-employed people/entrepreneurs. In general, short working hours and irregular working days correlate with poor quality jobs.

### Satisfaction with working time

Some 40% of workers with short hours and part-time jobs (less than 16 hours a week) would prefer to work more hours, while 85.5% of full-timers are satisfied with their working time. Almost two out of five people working more than 55 hours a week report that they are satisfied with their working time; presumably, this category consists primarily of self-employed workers, entrepreneurs and professionals. Figure 1 shows a strong preference for working 36-40 hours a week.

**Figure 1 Actual and desired weekly working hours (%)**



### Work-life balance

According to the [EWCS 2000](#), only 16% of workers report that they are fully satisfied with their work-life balance, compared with a European average of 33.9%.

Work-life balance issues are discussed in more depth by means of a factor analysis. Workers without any caring responsibilities enjoy enough leisure and do not report any problems in carrying out domestic tasks; this is the case for men and women, without significant gender variation. In relation to households that include non-employed members (children, older relatives), two groups emerge. The first is composed mainly of women, working 36 hours a week at most, and not doing any overtime or night work; the second group comprises men with a high probability of working long days or nights, at least once a week, with little family time for children and older relatives. Most self-employed workers are included in this latter group.

### Worker participation and autonomy

#### Worker participation

More than 50% of workers report that they are fully involved in how their work is organised. Figures vary, from a maximum of 56.9% of workers who claim that they are involved in defining methods and production techniques, to a minimum of 54.7% who are involved in setting targets and strategies. Focusing on employees only, these figures decrease: from a maximum of 45.8% consulted in technical aspects of their jobs, to a minimum of 42.1% involved in strategic decisions. Some 28.2% of employees feel totally excluded from any organisational involvement. In general, the results show a lower sense of autonomy at work (56%) and lower use of teamwork (37.5%) than the EU averages found in the EWCS 2000 (64% and 56%, respectively).

## Job control model

The Isfol report analyses job involvement according to the 'job demands-job control' model of Karasek and Theorell (1990); see also the EWCO topic report on work-related stress [NL0502TR01](#) . The model identifies groups of workers and sectors exposed to different psychological and physical pressures, by analysing the relationship between the degree of autonomy at work (job control) and time constraints, such as deadlines and pace of work (task requirements). By combining these two variables, jobs are divided into four categories:

- passive jobs, characterised by low work intensity and little influence over pace of work and work organisation;
- low strain jobs, characterised by low work intensity and high control over the work environment;
- active jobs, characterised by high work intensity and high control over their work environment: typical of managerial and professional jobs;
- high strain jobs, characterised by high work intensity and low control over their work environment.

The survey shows that 40% of respondents perform low strain jobs, concentrated in the service sectors, especially commerce and utilities. Some 38.6% are active workers, who have a high work intensity, high occupational risks, and who hold responsibilities. Workers in passive jobs account for 12.3% of respondents, while high strain jobs (9.6%) are concentrated among irregular workers, with irregular work schedules (especially Sundays), heavy workloads, and poorer health and safety conditions.

## Conflict, harassment and discrimination

Discrimination, conflict and harassment constitute very recent research topics in Italian quality of work surveys. In the Isfol survey, the most reported forms of discrimination are linked to age (7.5%), political opinion (5.5%) and gender (4.9%). In general, men report more frequently than women that they are aware of discrimination at their workplace, and older people are more aware of it than younger people. Only in relation to sexual discrimination do women report more cases than men. Younger respondents report discrimination concerning religion and sexual orientation more frequently than older people do. These figures are, in general, higher than those of the EWCS, especially with respect to age discrimination and work intimidation, where the reference period is limited to the past 12 months.

**Table 2 Awareness of discrimination, by gender and age (%)**

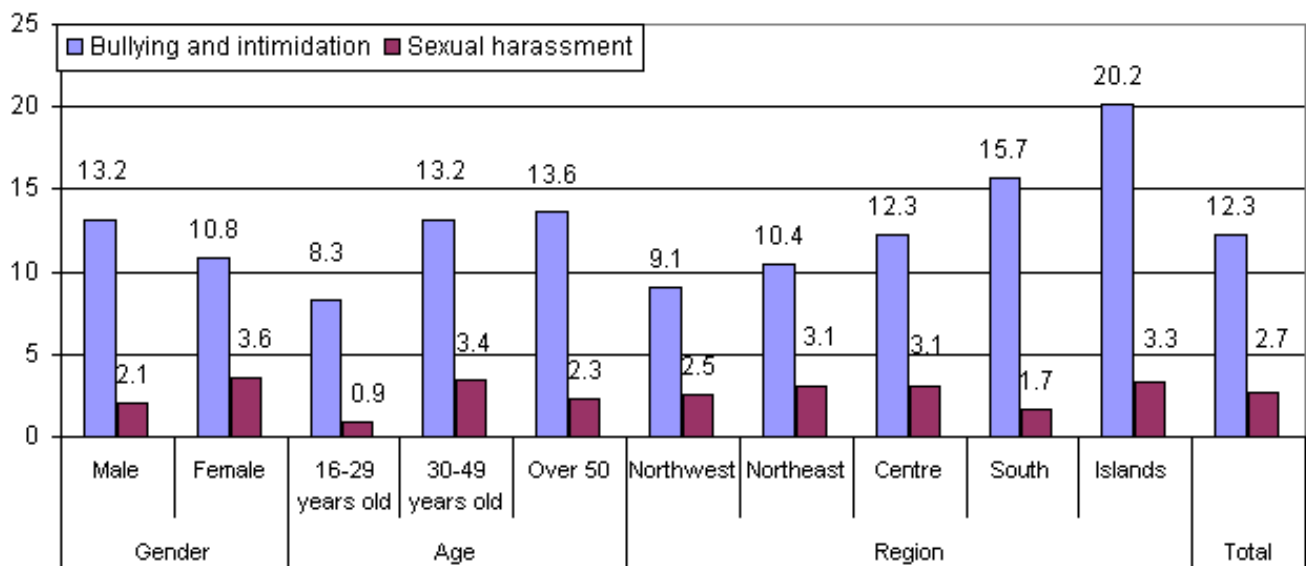
	Men	Women	16-29	30-49	50+	Total
Age	8.4	6	6.1	7.9	7.8	7.5
Gender	3.9	6.5	2.9	4.9	6.7	4.9
Disability	3.3	3.1	1.2	3.7	3.9	3.2
Nationality	3.7	2.7	3.3	3.4	2.9	3.3
Religion	2.6	0.7	4.3	1.2	1.5	1.9
Political opinion	7	5.5	3.4	6.1	6	5.5
Sexual orientation	1.6	1.2	1.8	1.3	1.4	1.5
Other reasons	0.3	0.2	0	0.1	1	0.2

Source: Quality of work survey, Isfol, 2002

Knowledge about the occurrence of bullying and intimidation in the workplace strongly correlates with age and region. Sexual harassment is perceived less by young and male workers. The larger the firm and the higher the

regional employment rates, the lower the reported incidence of bullying and harassment.

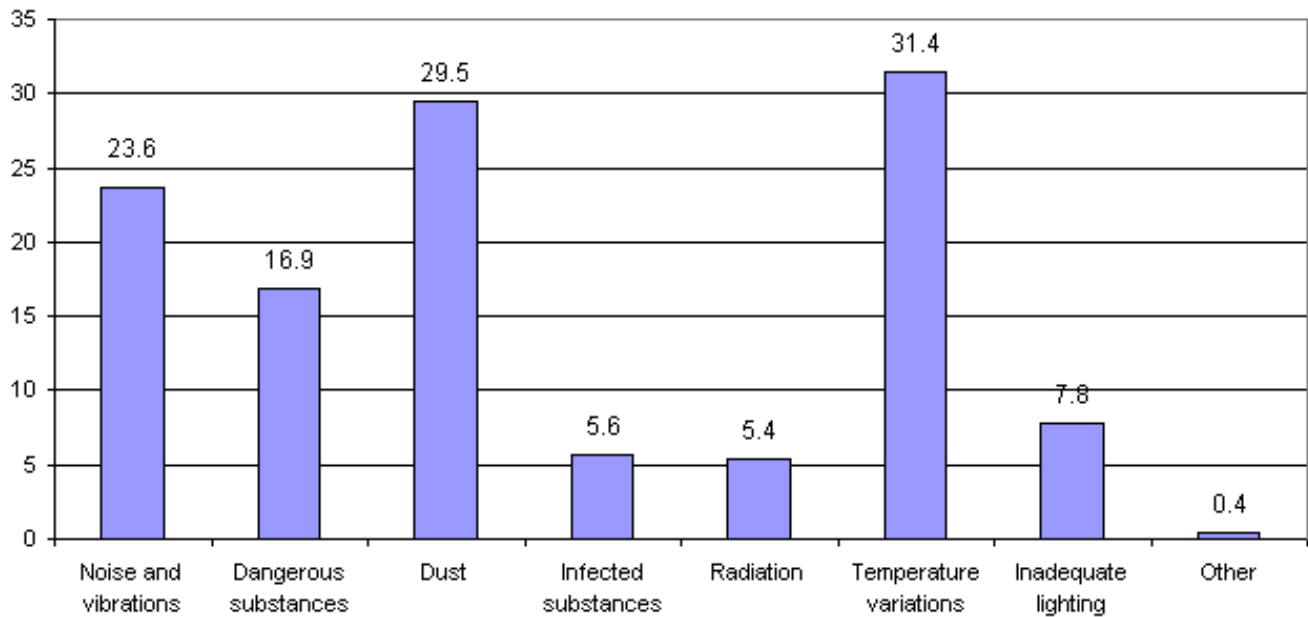
**Figure 2 Bullying and sexual harassment (%)**



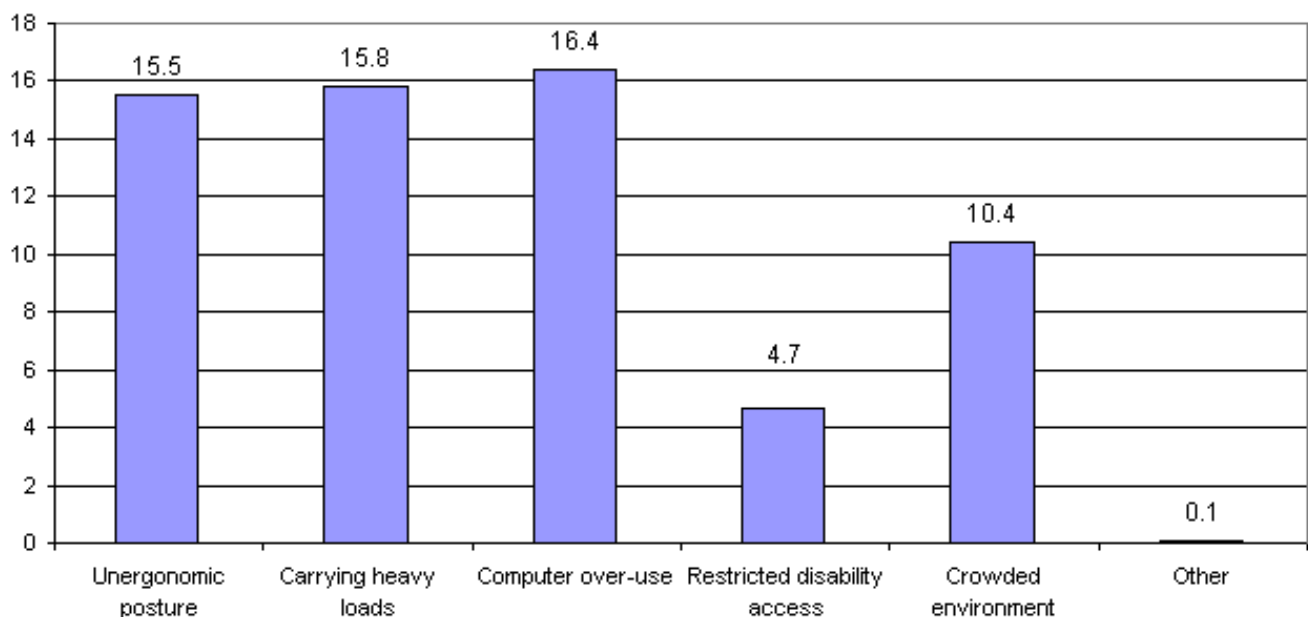
### **Health and safety**

Physical environmental factors most frequently suffered by workers are exposure to temperature variations (31.4%), dust (29.5%), and noise and vibrations (23.6%) - Figure 3. The main occupational risks are: excessive use of computers (16.4%), carrying heavy loads (15.8%), and unergonomic posture (15.5%) - Figure 4. In each case, most of these factors are higher than the EWCS European averages.

**Figure 3 Physical environment factors (%)**



**Figure 4 Occupational risks in the workplace (%)**



Employees feel more exposed to physical environmental factors and occupational risks than self-employed people; permanent workers feel more exposed to these conditions than temporary workers; workers with a formal contract more than those with an informal one; men more than women; employees in medium and large companies more than workers in small firms. These findings are consistent with all surveys at local level. According to the [Provincia di Pesaro e Urbino, 2003 \(in Italian\)](#) survey, permanent employees in companies of over 100 employees are regularly informed and receive training about occupational risks and, thus, are more aware of these factors than people working in smaller firms, and self-employed workers.

Temporary workers, however, are more exposed to arduous tasks: they feel more exposed to heat and cold, and are more likely than permanent staff to report having to carry heavy loads and work in unhealthy workplaces. They are usually employed in auxiliary heavy tasks. It is not surprising, therefore, that 77% of temporary workers suffered some accidents and injuries in their first year of tenure, compared with 14% of permanent workers, and that 53% fell sick (6.5% among permanent workers).

Permanent workers are more likely to get ill, the longer they are in the job. This is attributed to the low level of training about work risks, which is part of the general pattern of Italian 'learning by doing', where little emphasis is placed on formal training. Nonetheless, permanent workers generally perform less heavy tasks, and are better informed and more aware of the risks they face.

### ***Training and work perspectives***

Three out of four workers report that their jobs offer the opportunity to learn something new. Differences by gender and geographical area are significant, but not as striking as those by education, professional status and labour regime. Just over half (53.3%) of lower educated workers report learning on the job, compared with 94.4% of workers with a degree. Only 33.5% of non-qualified, self-employed people, and 41.1% of high-skilled workers, report that they learn on the job, compared with a figure of 90% among higher-level professions (Table 3). Non-permanent workers have fewer on-the-job learning opportunities than permanent workers.

**Table 3 Learning on the job (%)**

	Opportunity to learn on the job
Men	77.9
Women	71.4
Primary education	52.5
Lower secondary level	65.4
Upper secondary level	79.3
Third-level degree	94.8
Self-employed	78.5
Employees	74.4

Source: Quality of work survey, Isfol, 2002

More than four out of five (81.8%) respondents consider that their skills are adequate, while 14.4% think they are in excess of those needed for their job. This is especially the case for younger respondents (18.5%), and for respondents in southern regions (20.2%). In the industrialised regions of central and northern Italy, the skills mismatch lowers as people grow older, and is also lower for less educated workers and self-employed people. The DS survey also examines the job-skills match: it finds that 19.3% of respondents report that they do not apply what they learnt at school in their work, while 32.9% state that they only partly do.

The perception that skill levels are in excess of those required for the job is higher than the EU average, especially among better educated workers (Table 4).

**Table 4 Adequacy of skills (%)**

	Adequate	Underskilled	Overskilled
Men	81.1	3.0	15.9
Women	83.0	5.1	11.9



16-29 years	77.6	3.9	18.5
30-49 years	81.3	3.5	15.2
50+ years	87.0	4.3	8.6
Northwest	83.9	3.9	12.2
Northeast	83.7	3.7	12.6
Centre	83.0	2.9	14.1
South	75.0	4.8	20.2
Islands	82.2	3.3	14.5
Primary education	87.7	6.9	5.4
Lower secondary level	81.8	2.8	15.4
Upper secondary level	80.9	4.3	14.8
Third-level degree	82.2	2.3	15.5
Self-employed	89.2	3.1	7.6
Employees	79.1	4.0	16.9
Total	81.8	3.8	14.4

Source: Quality of work survey, Isfol, 2002. \*significant at 0.05; \*\*significant at 0.01

Training could play a key role in reducing risks of exclusion and risks associated with a job-skills mismatch. However, this opportunity does not seem to be availed of at present, as 65% of respondents state that they have not received any training, while 8.9% of respondents partly or fully paid for training themselves. This is despite the fact that 49.5% believe that training is necessary for their job. Workers receiving more training are concentrated in manufacturing and services sectors, especially in companies with more than 200 employees. Overqualified workers receive more training that has been financed from public funds.

These figures are consistent with those of the DS survey: 25% of workers receive formal training from their company, while 38% have to manage by themselves.

### **Job security and career opportunities**

Although 75% of respondents consider that their job is secure, only 53% report being able to find an equivalent job within a few months, with a strong positive relation between education and employment status, and a negative correlation with age. This is consistent also with findings of the Italian Work Mobility Observatory (Contini et al, 2002).

Career prospects are rather limited: only 40% of dependent workers consider that they have some career opportunities (65.5% among self-employed people). This is attributed to the number of small firms with less than 10 workers, and also to the fact that workers with an upper secondary or third level education benefit from a relatively high starting point. The DS survey reveals that 10.8% of respondents have identified career opportunities outside the company they are currently working for.

### **Work satisfaction**

The Isfol report devotes much attention to analysing determinants of satisfaction. In general, the level of work satisfaction is high: 90.6% consider themselves either very satisfied (39%) or reasonably satisfied (51.6%). These

figures do not vary much by gender or by weekly hours worked, but are affected by a host of other variables, such as: education level, professional skills, career opportunities, pace of work, monotony/repetitiveness of work, perception of usefulness of work for self, company and society in general, compensation, professional status, and work recognition (Table 5). See also Incagli, 2004 (81Kb pdf; in Italian) for a further discussion.

**Table 5 Probability of degree of employee satisfaction (0-1)**

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Unsatisfied
Aged over 50 years *	0.402	0.519	0.079
Artisans, clerks, skilled blue-collar workers *	0.347	0.557	0.097
Managers, high-skilled professionals **	0.218	0.591	0.191
Earning less than €550 a week **	0.262	0.601	0.137
€551-900 **	0.344	0.549	0.107
€901-1,250 **	0.331	0.533	0.116
€1,251-1,750 **	0.386	0.547	0.068
More than €1,750 **	0.526	0.427	0.047
Work recognition **	0.399	0.538	0.063
Repetitiveness **	0.300	0.572	0.128
Health at risk **	0.239	0.575	0.185
Work-life balance **	0.378	0.538	0.084
Long working days **	0.363	0.536	0.102
Work autonomy *	0.411	0.516	0.073
Insufficient skills for assigned tasks **	0.155	0.605	0.240
Overskilled **	0.143	0.594	0.264
Satisfaction with relations with employer/supervisors **	0.390	0.547	0.063
Quality of workplace **	0.203	0.589	0.208

Source: Quality of work survey, Isfol, 2002. \*significant at 0.05; \*\*significant at 0.01

Looking at satisfaction in specific areas also provides an insight (Figure 5). In particular, having a job gives social status and is considered beneficial to social relations; satisfaction is least evident in relation to pay (63.3%) and career opportunities (57.7%).

**Figure 5 Satisfaction for specific aspects of job (%)**

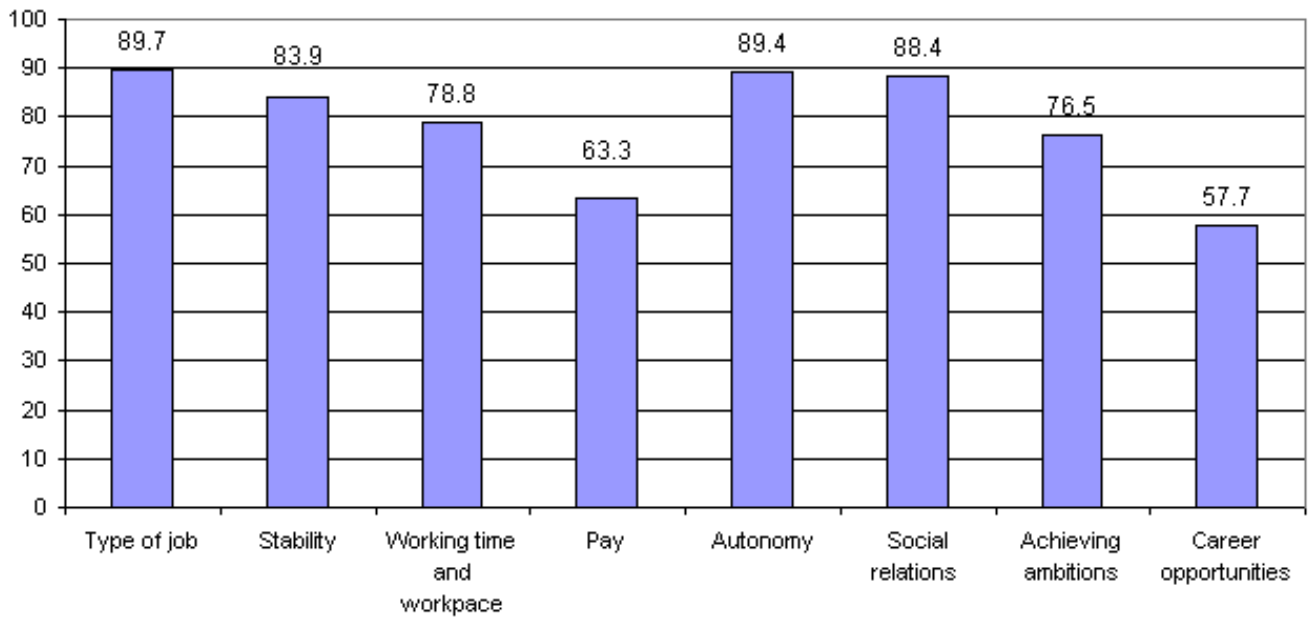


Table 6 summarises the results of logistic regressions concerning satisfaction about specific aspects of work: namely, working time and pace of work, work autonomy, job security, and career opportunities. Satisfaction about working time and work pace are explained mainly by personal characteristics of respondents, and working time arrangements. Satisfaction about work autonomy is explained mainly by the actual level of autonomy enjoyed. Satisfaction about job security positively correlates with permanent contracts, and with good relations with supervisors and employers, and negatively correlates with being overskilled.

Being overskilled and repetitiveness are statistically significant in decreasing satisfaction about career opportunities, as are relations with supervisors and employers, work recognition, career perspectives, learning on the job, and pay. The surprisingly positive satisfaction figure for low compensation may be attributed to young workers at an early stage of their working life, often with an atypical contract, who are confident that their career prospects will improve.

**Table 6 Logistic analysis of various satisfaction sources**

	Working time and rhythms	Work autonomy	Job security	Career prospects
Female	-.957**			
30-49 years	-1.182**			
50+ years	-1.227**			
Night work	-.951**			
Work-life balance	1,380**			
Shiftwork	-.640**			
Married	.731**			
Divorced/separated	1.596**			
Actual weekly working time	-.050**			

Less working hours desired	-1.215**			
High pace of work	-1.123**			
Central Italy		-.686**	-.564*	
Artisans, clerks, skilled blue-collar workers		-.725**		
Full autonomy		1.730**		
Partial autonomy		.765**		
Freedom in choosing breaks		1.056**		
Direct supervision		-.844**		
Fixed-term contract			-2.344	
Training contracts			-1.276**	
Economically dependent workers			-2.884**	
Temporary			-2.688**	
Overskilled			-.483**	-.990**
Satisfaction with relations with supervisors			1.364**	.737**
Work recognition				.624**
Repetitiveness				-.475**
Earn less than €550 a week				1.288**
€1,251-1,750				1,334**
Learning on the job				.765**
Career perspectives				1.767**
Constant	4.734		1.459	-3.338
Pseudo R2	0.263	0.169	0.189	0.225
Probability greater than chi2	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Source: Quality of work survey, Isfol, 2002. Note: <-1 indicates a strong negative correlation, >-1 and <0 indicates a negative correlation, >0 and < 1 indicates a positive correlation, >1 indicates a strong positive correlation. \*significant at 0.05; \*\*significant at 0.01

These figures are slightly higher than those of the EWCS 2000, but are consistent with surveys at local level. Both the Italian edition of the European Community Household Panel (ECHP), carried out by Istat, 2004 (in Italian) (77% of respondents satisfied), and the DS survey (80%) show lower levels of satisfaction. The latter examines the

reasons for work problems and the causes of dissatisfaction. Stress (45% of respondents) and bureaucracy (25%) are reported as the main occupational problems, while inadequate pay (45.2%), an inflexible work organisation (38.4%), and difficulty in maintaining a work-life balance (37.2%) are considered the main sources of dissatisfaction.

## **Commentary**

The 2002 Isfol survey is highly significant in terms of assessing working conditions in Italy. Since the ISVET 1971 and 1982 surveys of working conditions in the manufacturing sectors, no national surveys had been carried out. The Isfol survey was conducted following the reform of the Italian labour market in 1997 towards a 'regulated flexibility', and the decentralisation of employment services from central to local government, in addition to the progressive development of a lifelong training system.

Surveys at local level assisted local government in setting the strategy for employment services, and provided a general understanding of working conditions for temporary and economically dependent workers ([IT0501NU01](#)), the numbers of which grew considerably in the 1990s.

The increase in economically dependent workers was initially welcomed as a new form of work, free from the constraints of employment. However, both national and local-level surveys emphasise that economically dependent workers experience more unfavourable working conditions than permanent employees, although their levels of stress are lower. Permanent employment remains the most common labour status in Italy (Carcano, 1998; Addabbo and Borghi, 2003; Magatti and Fullin, 2002).

The 2002 Isfol survey summarises the main changes in working conditions and the labour market in Italy. The DS social survey, which was conducted at the same time, and included a much larger number of respondents (over 22,000), shows some divergences in more general issues, but reveals consistent figures for specific aspects.

Favourable levels of autonomy are not the result of widespread innovative work organisations but, rather, reflect the high proportion of self-employed workers (30% of the Italian labour force) who can set their own pace of work. This is also illustrated in limited career opportunities, as identified in the survey. Satisfaction about work is mainly due to good relations with colleagues and to the prevalence of permanent contracts among employees, which provide greater job security.

Work satisfaction may also be explained by the large number of low stress jobs in service sectors, rather than by a stimulating work environment; this compensates for low levels of satisfaction concerning work-life balance issues.

However, according to the 2002 DS survey and the Tuscany regional survey ([Irpel, 1999 - 423Kb pdf; in Italian](#)), there is a widespread sense of job insecurity, reflecting the growth of systemic uncertainty in the economy (e.g. globalisation and deregulation).

Less than 5% of respondents in the DS social survey are convinced that increasing the flexibility of the labour market will improve their working conditions, and less than 27% believe that active labour market policies will compensate for the increased uncertainty; more than 56% would prefer to stay in their current job.

Looking at the figures of the 1971 ISVET survey, there has been a significant shift from traditional work-related health risks towards stress as a key occupational problem. However, the analysis shows that the factor associated with traditional work-related health risks still records the highest score, and these risks are positively correlated with stress and short job tenure.

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