



Fulfilling Work in Ireland: Discussion Paper

Gail Irvine



Fulfilling Work

Research

Fulfilling Work
in Ireland

2018



CHANGING MINDS • CHANGING LIVES



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Foreword



For the majority of us, our ability to work has been the foundation of our economic security and has allowed us to participate in society.

But this is no longer the case for too many, with levels of in-work poverty and job insecurity on the increase.

In 2016 I was invited to co-chair the People's Conversation stage 2 Advisory Group on building economic and social wellbeing. This cross-sectoral Group sought to build upon the People's Conversation process of national conversations – on what citizenship means in today's Ireland, and how we can rebuild and strengthen the social contract between citizens and institutions following the economic crisis.

The Advisory Group took as their problem statement that: 'the material conditions and basic security of people affects their ability to participate in society. This diminishes our democracy'.

The public policy focus on work has conventionally been on quantity – from the 'jobs bonanza' of the pre-crisis years to the understandable focus on getting and keeping people in work – *any* work – during the worst years of the crisis.

But if we're going to build a sustainable recovery, where citizens get to share in

the benefits of economic growth – there needs to be a stronger focus on quality of work.

Quality of work really matters – to tackle low wages and in-work poverty, to unlock individual potential, build healthy and thriving communities, and ensure that paid work contributes to better quality of life.

This report highlights a number of issues with respect to the nature of jobs created since the recession – which appear to have been primarily lower paid jobs; that 1 in 5 self-employed say they are self-employed because of lack of alternatives; and the proportion working atypical hours appears to have increased in recent years.

This is an important new report from the Carnegie UK Trust which reviews what we currently know about quality of work in Ireland, and sets up some of the questions we now need to be asking to address the inequalities in our labour market and rebuild a thriving economy.

Tina Roche

Chief Executive, the Community Foundation for Ireland, and co-chair of the People's Conversation Strand 4 Advisory Group

Introduction

After ten years, Ireland is emerging from the long shadow of a recession which saw unemployment exceed 15% and unemployment among young people reach 40%.¹ The number in employment fell from 2.114 million in 2007 to 1.821 million in 2011, and those who remained in work experienced, along with Greece, the greatest increases in material deprivation of any EU country.² Only in recent years has the financial stabilisation and recovery in Ireland started to feel embedded. Unemployment has hit a post-recession low of 5.1%³ – but the benefits of economic recovery are not being felt equally across the country. Certain regions, demographics and industrial sectors are still very far off their 2008 employment peaks, and many more workers are experiencing a range of challenges around low pay and insecurity.

The Trust's 2016-2020 Strategic Plan includes a specific focus on Fulfilling Work as one of our three thematic priorities. As an organisation that seeks to improve the wellbeing of people in the UK and Ireland, we recognise the crucial role work has historically played in securing improvements in wellbeing. Essential for most of us to provide materially for ourselves

and our families, work is also, for many of us, one of our main sources of social interaction, of status and of identity. But some of the modern trends impacting the world of work in post-industrial economies, most notably the stark rise in working poverty and insecure forms of work, serve to undermine the social contract of work as a route to greater wellbeing. High levels of employment can be accompanied or even enabled by the growth of poor quality work. If the potential for a more buoyant economy to deliver a broader range of positive social outcomes is to be fulfilled in Ireland, the time is right for a closer examination of the quality of work that this economy offers.

Fulfilling Work in Ireland is the Trust's first survey of the experience of work in Ireland, completing our analysis of key job quality trends which began with our UK-focused *Work and Wellbeing 2016* publication. Ireland has a distinctive labour market and experience of recession. However, Ireland is also experiencing many of the same challenges arising from the modern world of work which are evident within the UK, and indeed within many developed economies. Examining and comparing the distribution of workforce trends between Ireland and the UK provides an opportunity for cross-jurisdictional learning; to deepen our understanding of the links between work and wellbeing; and to shape policy responses to enable the former to contribute to the latter.

The research is presented in two publications:

- 1 Eurostat (2018) <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tps00203&plugin=1> [accessed July 2018]
- 2 Ahrendt et al, *In Work Poverty in the EU*, Eurofound, online, 2017 <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2017/in-work-poverty-in-the-eu> [accessed July 2018]
- 3 CSO (2018) <https://cso.ie/en/> [accessed August 2018]

- **A data review** carried out by Ipsos MORI, looking at what data analysis has previously been undertaken in Ireland covering aspects of fulfilling work; highlighting research gaps; and presenting variations in access to fulfilling work by region, sector and demography.
- **This discussion paper**, which draws on the key insights from the data

review and places them within the current policy debate about work in Ireland. We propose that an explicit national commitment to improving job quality and to measuring this progress will be important in supporting the development of policies that link economic growth to sustainable employment and improved working lives for citizens.

The Carnegie UK Trust and the People's Conversation

The People's Conversation is an initiative by the Wheel, Ireland's professional body for the community and voluntary sector, and supported by the Carnegie UK Trust. It started as a series of national conversations in which more than 150 people discussed their aspirations for a new vision of citizenship for today's Ireland. Intended to mark the centenary of the Easter Rising and the proclamation of the Irish Republic, the conversations were also shadowed by 'more recent traumas, including the economic crisis which continues to be felt by so many of our people'.⁴

The second phase of the project (2016-2018) saw the formation of a series of stakeholder groups to advance the ideas, concerns and recommendations produced by the People's Conversation. An Advisory Group⁵ co-chaired by Carnegie UK Trust Chief Executive Martyn Evans and Community Foundation Chief Executive Tina Roche considered how to advance the link between economic and social wellbeing to encourage greater citizen participation. While group participants welcomed the return of economic growth in Ireland, they were concerned to avoid a return to 'business as usual'. By this they feared that policy makers were trying to recapture the dynamics that characterised the 'Celtic Tiger' years of booming employment, without addressing the underlying structural issues or policy failures which may have precipitated the financial crisis or worsened its impact for those already struggling. This instigated the Trust's focus on understanding the contribution of fulfilling work in Ireland towards supporting wider economic and social wellbeing.

4 James Doorley and Fergus O'Ferrall, in their foreword to *Citizens Rising, the Final Report of the People's Conversation*, October 2015 <http://peoplesconversation.ie/citizens-rising-a-report-from-the-peoples-conversation/>

5 The Advisory Group was additionally comprised of senior representatives from The Wheel, ESC Rights Initiative, Community Action Network, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Social Justice Ireland, the European Anti-Poverty Network, Basic Income Ireland, the Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice, and private individuals Fergus O'Ferrall, Lay Leader of the Methodist Church in Ireland as well as Ryan Meade, Public Affairs and Communications consultant.

Our concept of Fulfilling Work

‘Fulfilling work’ is a multifaceted concept, encompassing a range of objective and subjective factors. Academic literature around the topic commonly draws a distinction between ‘hygiene factors’ relating to the extrinsic conditions of people’s work such as pay, terms and conditions and job security; and ‘motivators’, which relate more to the intrinsic nature of the work itself, such as enjoyment of tasks or a sense of achievement. Arguably, work needs to achieve an acceptable baseline across

both hygiene factors and more intrinsic elements to improve overall quality of life. However, that baseline may shift depending on individual workers’ personal preferences, situation or stage of life.

Where it has addressed issues of job quality, public policy has tended to concern itself with hygiene factors, enshrining in legislation, for example, minimum standards in relation to fundamental issues such as pay, working hours, and health and safety. These clearly make essential and immediate contributions to overall job quality. But less easily quantifiable aspects of work –

Availability of work	Availability of fulfilling work
<p>? How easily and fairly can people find the type and level of work they would like?</p>	<p>? Do the terms, conditions and opportunities at work meet people’s expectations?</p> <p>? Do wider factors around engagement, connection and agency at work support personal development and fulfilment?</p>
Unemployment	Income and pay Personal agency Engagement at work
Over or underemployment	Terms and conditions Work-life balance
Flexible working	Job security Management support Social connections at work
	Opportunities for progression Training Skills development Work with ‘meaning’ Job satisfaction

such as feeling supported by colleagues and managers, having latitude to apply our own thinking, or to choose hours which fit more optimally around other commitments – also exert a powerful bearing on whether it is ‘life-enhancing’ for the worker. We understand this instinctively and a significant body of research corroborates this.⁶ While the routes to enabling these aspects of job quality can be less clear to policy makers, an important first step is to get better at measuring and understanding their contribution to wellbeing.

Why measurement matters

Although it might appear a rather technocratic issue, accurate and relevant measurement is crucial to good governance – as the Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi Commission noted, ‘what we measure affects what we do; and if our measurements are flawed, decisions may be distorted.’⁷ When it comes to work, for decades employment levels have been the decisive metric used to assess whether labour market policies are effective- in a similar fashion to how ‘Gross Domestic

Product’ (GDP) has been used as shorthand to rate government’s stewardship of the national economy. Salary levels are also sometimes used as a proxy for the levels of good quality work in the economy.

The Carnegie UK Trust has been active in the push to look beyond economic and financial indicators to measure and value wider indicators of social progress. We have worked closely with partners across the UK and internationally in embedding wellbeing frameworks in governance, which pull together performance data on multiple domains of human activity where governments can drive improvements – such as work, education, housing, etc. When done well, wellbeing frameworks can establish an evidence base and platform for public discussion and focus government priorities on a greater range of the subjects which matter to people. Measuring access to fulfilling work alongside employment levels and financial proxies is similarly important, if policy makers are to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the success or failure of labour market policies and their links to individual and societal wellbeing.

Data sources

Fulfilling Work in Ireland provides a snapshot of the data currently available to measure quality of work in Ireland. The report also identifies the limitations of this data.

- Much of the data analysed in this paper comes from the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS). This European-wide study has been conducted six times since 1991, most recently in 2015, with a sample of

6 See, for example, evidence produced by What Works Wellbeing, who conclude ‘The evidence is fairly conclusive that almost nothing has as great an impact on our wellbeing as employment.’ Nancy Hey, Director of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, who contributed evidence to the Carnegie UK Trust-RSA Measuring Job quality Working Group, adds that for wellbeing the data suggests: ‘Having a job is good and having a good quality job is miles better.’ <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/product/job-quality-and-wellbeing/>

7 Stiglitz, J et al, *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress*; online 2009, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/118025/118123/Fitoussi+Commission+report> [accessed August 2018]

around 1,000 people in Ireland. This national sample is relatively small, which precludes detailed sub-group analysis or segmentation by region. However, the EWCS has a robust sample design and methodology and captures a rich array of data across many aspects of work, including many subjective aspects. Drawing on the EWCS has facilitated comparisons between the experience of work in the UK and Ireland, as well as comparisons between Ireland and the EU average.⁸

- The extent of Ireland's economic recovery in the past few years means there is a risk that elements of the EWCS findings have become dated. However, the data has been supplemented by findings from relevant Central Statistics Office (CSO) and EU datasets as well as secondary sources, drawing on, for example, the detailed analysis of CSO labour market data produced in Social Justice Ireland's Employment Monitor.⁹
- At the time our data review was completed, the key national source of employment data, the Labour Force Survey conducted by the CSO, was undergoing changes as part of a merger with the Quarterly National Household Survey and a broader modernisation programme. The CSO has since published two new LFS data releases, in March and in June 2018.

8 We recognise that the EU28 countries include a wide range of economies at different stages of development, some of which may not be relevant comparators for Ireland.

9 <https://www.socialjustice.ie/>

These findings do not significantly alter the picture of employment in Ireland as described in our data review – although we update relevant and interesting statistics for the purposes of this discussion paper – and on the whole we do not utilise the LFS extensively because it gives limited coverage to job quality (as opposed to quantity) issues.

Where this paper does not provide a reference, the data in question is from the EWCS.

The impact of the recession

The intention of our research is to support an ongoing broader national discussion about work, which encompasses job quality as well as quantity. However, any exploration of fulfilling work in Ireland must be set in the context of the severe unemployment experienced during the prolonged recession and slow recovery. Clearly being able to access work – *any* type of work – is the first hurdle if work is to have the potential to enhance wellbeing. While we have sought to present an up-to-date picture of work in Ireland by drawing on the latest available sources, understanding the scale of the impact the recession has had on Ireland's labour market is clearly relevant in understanding the current labour market dynamics and how people 'feel' about their work. For this reason, the report also makes reference to the distribution of employment trends during the worst years of the recession (2007-2011).

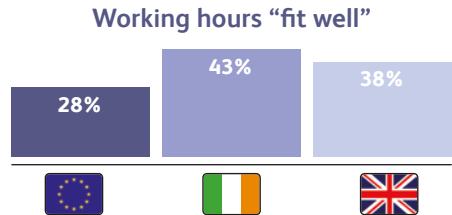
Key findings

Below we summarise a number of emerging trends and issues for fulfilling work in Ireland that this research has highlighted.

The findings suggest that the Irish labour market has distinctive strengths which has enabled fulfilling work for many workers across key measures, despite the significant strain caused by the recession. **Across several measures, workers in Ireland appear to fare better than their counterparts in the EU, and on some measures, better than performance in the UK.** For example:

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Many more people working in Ireland (43%) say that their working hours fit 'very well' with their family and social commitments compared with the EU (28%) and UK average (38%).

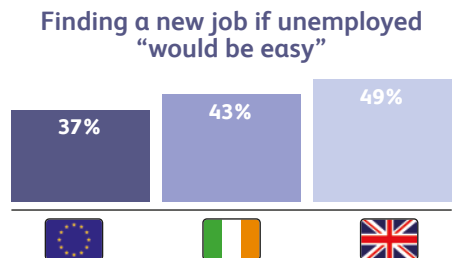


PROSPECTS

Almost half of workers (47%) believe that their current job offers good opportunities for career progression. While this may prompt concerns about how the other half of the workforce considers their prospects, it compares favourably with the EU average of 39% (the UK figure is slightly higher at 49%).



43% of workers in Ireland feel it would be **easy** to find a new job in the event of being made unemployed, versus 37% in the EU (again, the UK figure is slightly higher at 49%).



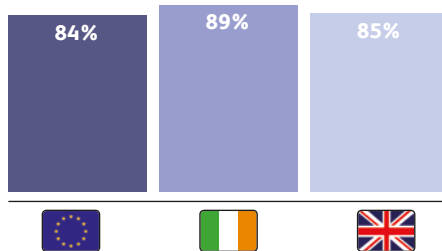
TRAINING¹⁰

89% of workers in Ireland report receiving effective training which helped improve the way they work, compared to an 84% EU average and 85% of workers in the UK.

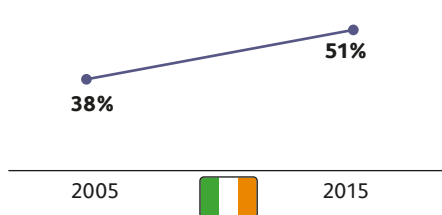
Access to training **actually increased** during the recession – 51% of workers in Ireland had received training in 2015, compared to 38% in 2005. The EU average increased over the same period from a lower base (from 26% to 39%), while the UK echoes Ireland’s trajectory, increasing from 39% in 2005 to 51% in 2015.

¹⁰ All training figures are from Eurostat (2018) (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/labour-market/quality-of-employment/database> [accessed July 2018])

Received effective training



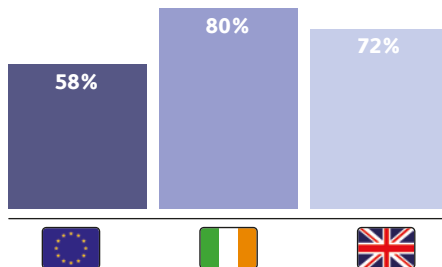
Access to training



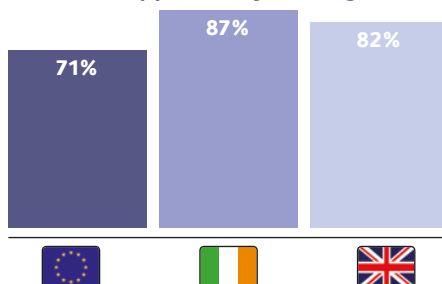
SUPPORTIVE MANAGEMENT AND COLLEAGUES

80% of workers in Ireland feel their manager helps and support them always or most of the time (compared to 58% in the EU and 72% in the UK) while 87% also feel supported by colleagues (compared to 71% in the EU and 82% in the UK).

Feel supported by manager



Feel supported by colleagues

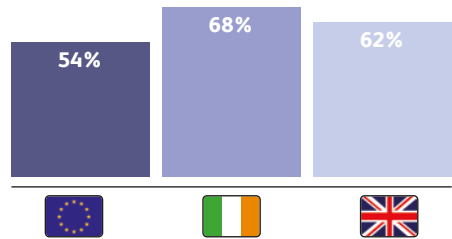


AGENCY AT WORK

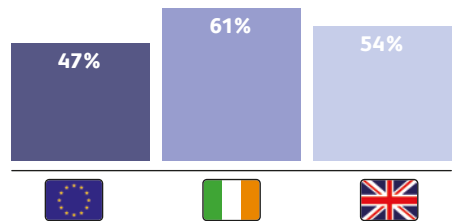
There is clear evidence that feeling in control is a factor in better individual wellbeing.¹¹ Similarly, being able to apply your own thinking at work, to your work tasks and to influence broader decisions in the workplace, is positively correlated with greater job satisfaction as well as productivity.

Workers in Ireland report higher levels of agency at work than the EU and UK across most relevant measures. 68% feel able to apply their own ideas at work (compared to 54% in the EU, and 62% in the UK) and 61% feel they can influence decisions which matter to their work (compared to 47% in the EU, and 54% in the UK).

Can apply ideas at work



Can influence work decisions



11 See for example: April, Ket al 'Impact of Locus of Control Expectancy on Level of Well-Being' Review of European Studies. 4 (2), 2012; or Stajkovic, A. D. & Luthans, F. 'Self-efficacy and work-related performance: A meta-analysis'. Psychological Bulletin. 2: 240–261, 1998)

REALITY CHECK

The findings above provide some grounds to be positive about the foundation of fulfilling work in Ireland. However:

Q Much of the data above are subjective in nature. It may simply be the case that workers in Ireland are more appreciative or ‘overplay’ the positive aspects of their job for a variety of reasons which need further exploration.¹²

12 It is understood that personal wellbeing scores ‘can be influenced by low expectations, cultural norms, or “internalised oppression” –Wallace, J, *Wellbeing in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland: Reframing the role of government*, forthcoming.

Q The positive national averages highlighted above conceal a range of inequalities at the sectoral and socio-demographic level. For example, the aggregate increase in access to training 2005-2015 may be partly explained by the fact that more jobs were lost during the recession in lower-paid sectors, which Ipsos MORI’s analysis shows tend to offer less training, than were lost in higher paid sectors, which tend to offer more training.¹³

13 Employment in Ireland’s two highest paid sectors, financial services and ICT, remained relatively stable and grew, respectively, during the recession – see Bobek, A and Wickham, J, *Enforced Flexibility? Working in Ireland today*, TASC; online <https://www.tasc.ie/publications/enforced-flexibility-working-in-ireland-today/> [accessed July 2018].

CHANGING WORLD OF WORK IN IRELAND

Ireland has been subject to similar long-term changes in the structure of the labour market as the UK and many other developed economies. Many of the trends contributing to an increase in in-work poverty, more atomised and contingent forms of working, and associated worker insecurity, have complex roots but their prevalence seems to have been exacerbated by the recession.

Below, we examine what the data tells us about the distribution of key modern employment trends in Ireland. We also highlight the particular groups of workers who have been most exposed to their negative impacts.

UNDEREMPLOYMENT¹⁴

When it comes to impact on wellbeing, availability of work is not only about having access to employment opportunities. It is also about being able to access work which provides adequate hours to make ends meet, and which fits into other family and social commitments.

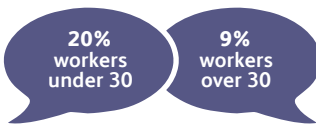


Involuntary part-time work in Ireland rose by a striking 26.6% during the recession worst years (2007-2011).¹⁵

The incidence of involuntary part-time work in Ireland today is particularly concentrated among **young people, women**, and in the **retail, hospitality and cleaning** sectors:

20% of **workers aged under 30** want to work more hours, compared to 9% of workers over 30.

Want to work more hours

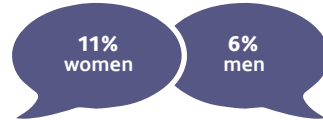


14 While underemployment can also refer to working in a role which is beneath your skills level, the data we discuss focuses on the incidence of underemployment in terms of working fewer hours than you would like to.

15 Broughton et al, *Precarious Employment in Europe: Patterns, Trends and Policy Strategies*, Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policy Department A, European Parliament, 2016 [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU\(2016\)587285](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU(2016)587285) [accessed August 2018]

11% of **women** want to work more hours, compared to 6% of men.

Want to work more hours



Around 20% of all **bar staff, sales and retail assistants, and cleaners** say they are working part-time when they would prefer full-time hours or else that they are willing and available to take on extra hours.¹⁶

Working part time, would prefer full time



Between 2010 and 2013, just 31% of disabled people aged 20-59 in Ireland were in work, although half were interested in working, suggesting that there may also be **significant under-employment among disabled people**.¹⁷

16 Nugent, C., A time-series analysis of precarious work in the elementary professions in the Republic of Ireland, Nevin Economic Research Institute, 2017 <https://www.nerininstitute.net/research/a-timeseries-analysis-of-precarious-work-in-the-elementary-professions-in-ireland/> [accessed August 2018]

17 Watson et al, *Employment Transitions among people with disabilities in Ireland*, ESRI, 2017, <https://www.esri.ie/projects/employment-transitions-among-people-with-a-disability-in-ireland/>

Q The increase in the numbers of **self-employed** people who report becoming so due to lack of alternatives (which is identical to the EU average at 20%, but higher than the UK measure of 14%)¹⁸ might also point to the lack of employment opportunities offering adequate hours.

18 Vermeulen, Greet et al, *Exploring self-employment in the European Union*, Eurofound, online 2017 <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2017/exploring-self-employment-in-the-european-union> [accessed August 2018]

Q Interestingly, people in Ireland are less likely than their EU or UK counterparts to say they are looking exclusively for a full time job, with 81% of people in Ireland willing to consider full-time or part-time work (versus 63% of people as an EU28 average who said this, and 72% of people in the UK).¹⁹

19 Ipsos MORI analysis of figures available at: <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/>

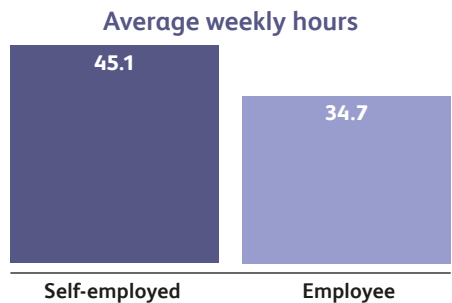
OVERWORK

Alongside underemployment, working excessive hours is seen as a growing and harmful trend for certain groups of workers. Actual average weekly hours vary significantly by sector and seniority in Ireland, but across several objective measures, workers report less optimal work-life balance than their EU28 counterparts. For example, 45% of workers in Ireland worked more than 10 hours a day at least once a month in 2015, compared with 32% across the EU as a whole (the figure in the UK is comparable with Ireland at 44%); and 59% worked over the weekend more than once a month compared with 54% across the EU (the figure in the UK is identical to Ireland).

 Among employees in Ireland, the highest average weekly hours worked are found in the **agriculture, forestry and fishing sector** (48.2 hours).²⁰

20 Figures from CSO (July 2017) QNHS Detailed Employment Series Quarter 1 2011 – Quarter 1 2017 <https://cso.ie/en/> [accessed August 2018]

Self-employed people in Ireland work substantially more hours than employees (45.1 hours a week compared to 34.7 hours).²¹ This corresponds to trends seen across the EU where long working hours are reported by more than half of the self-employed with employees (54%); one third of the self-employed without employees (34%); and about one in 10 employees.



21 Ibid

JOB INSECURITY

Another integral aspect of fulfilling work is *predictability* of hours and income. The increased use of ‘contingent’ workers has become one of the most contested modern employment trends, with a growing preference among employers to make use of temporary contracts, agency workers and contractors rather than offering permanent employee contracts that offer greater security along with the traditional range of workplace rights. The use of low and variable hours contracts, such as zero hours²² and ‘if

and when’ contracts, are also attracting concern. These contracts demand flexibility from the employee to work when required but do not guarantee set working hours. While some workers may value the flexibility of such contracts, clearly, not knowing which hours you will be working from one week to the next, or being employed on temporary contracts, is not optimal for many people in terms of budgeting, having peace of mind financially, or for managing activities outside of work. Fluctuating incomes also make it difficult for people to access social security payments, plan for retirement, or demonstrate creditworthiness to get a mortgage or loan.

22 The CSO does not collect data on the number of zero hours contracts (ZHCs) in Ireland, but it is commonly reported as less than 2% of the workforce. Legislation is currently making its way through parliament to outlaw ZHC in many incidences. ‘If and when’ contracts are considered more prevalent (the difference being that people on ZHCs are contractually obliged to make themselves available for work while ‘if and when’ workers are not) however, the variety of contractual arrangements which contain ‘if and when’ arrangements make their overall share of the labour force difficult to quantify. For detailed analysis, see: *A Study into the Prevalence of Zero Hours Contract*, University of Limerick; online 2016 <https://dbej.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Study-on-the-Prevalence-of-Zero-Hours-Contracts.pdf> [accessed July 2018]

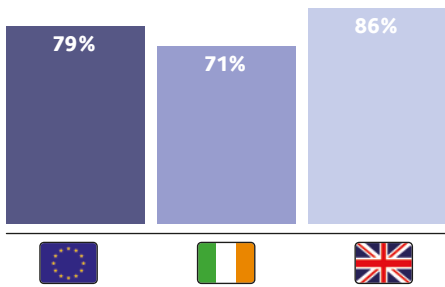
OBJECTIVE VERSUS SUBJECTIVE SECURITY

The most interesting aspect of the data relating to insecure work in Ireland is the contrast between the increased *incidence* of objectively less secure forms of work, and how people actually *feel* about their job security.

 Ireland saw a 28%²³ increase in **involuntary temporary working** during the recession (2007-2011).

Although the use of temporary contracts as a share of total employment has been decreasing since 2012 (to around 7% today²⁴) workers in Ireland are less likely than their EU and UK counterparts to be employed on a permanent contract (71% compared to 79% in the EU and 86% in the UK).

Employed on permanent contract

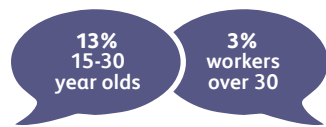


31% of workers in Ireland have been recently affected by a restructuring at work, compared to 23% of their counterparts in the EU (although the UK figure of 30% is almost identical to Ireland).

However, workers in Ireland do not appear to be more concerned overall about their job insecurity: 76% **disagreed** that they might lose their job in the next six months (compared to the EU average of 69% and 74% of people in the UK).

In Ireland, young people are more likely than older cohorts to be on temporary contracts when they would prefer a permanent position: 13% of 15-30 year olds compared to 3% of workers aged over 30.

Temporary workers who want to be permanent



23 *Precarious Employment in Europe: Patterns, Trends and Policy Strategies*, Policy Department A: Economic and Scientific Policy Directorate General for Internal Policies; European Parliament, online 2016 <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/supporting-analyses-search.html> [accessed August 2018]

24 Based on Table 15, QNHS Detailed Employment Series Quarter 1 2011 – Quarter 1 2017, CSO <https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/labourmarket/qnhsemploymentseries/> [accessed August 2018]

LOW PAY

Earning enough money to make ends meet and do the things you want to do in life is clearly one of the most fundamental aspects of work for many people. The recession exerted significant downward pressure on wages and earnings did not begin to recover until 2014, putting significant strain on household budgets. Wages are now picking up in 12 out of 13 industrial sectors,²⁵ but there are persistent earnings inequalities between different sectors and socio-economic groups.

Ireland has a relatively large number of highly paid workers but the number of low-paid workers is also greater than the EU average.

In 2014 21.6% of workers in Ireland were classed as low paid,²⁶ a similar figure to the UK (21.3%) but higher than the mean proportion across all EU countries (17.2%).²⁷

- 25 Earnings and Labour Costs Quarterly, CSO, 2017 <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/elcq/earningsandlabourcostsq12017finalq22017preliminaryestimates/> [accessed August 2018]
- 26 Where low pay is earnings two third or less than of national median gross hourly earnings.
- 27 Ireland has had a minimum wage since 2000, but there are exceptions and lower rates for a number of particular groups, including those under 18, those employed on a training scheme, those without prior work experience and those working for a relative. Low pay data derived from Eurostat (2017) http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=earn_ses_pub1s&lang=en [accessed August 2018]

- Q Minimum wage rates predominate in the **services sector**, which accounts for more than four out of five (81.7%) of workers earning minimum wage or less.²⁸
- Q Weekly earnings in Ireland's highest paid sector – **information and communications** – are more than three times higher than the average for **accommodation** workers.²⁹
- Q **Women and young people are over-represented among the minimum wage group.** During the recession, young people under 30 accounted for over half (53%) and women (of all ages) for nearly three quarters (73%), of all workers on the minimum wage.³⁰ While the disparity between these groups and the rest of the working population has narrowed since then, young people and, to a certain extent, women, are still over-represented: **15-24 year olds account for 38% of the minimum wage group, which is also 54% female.**

- 28 QNHS National Minimum Wage Estimates, CSO, 2017 <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/q-nmw/qnhs-nationalminimumwageseriesq42016/> [accessed August 2018] Services includes wholesale and retail, repair of motorcycles and motor vehicles, and accommodation and food activities
- 29 *Earnings and Labour Costs Quarterly*, CSO, 2017 <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/elcq/earningsandlabourcostsq12017finalq22017preliminaryestimates/> [accessed 2018]
- 30 Collins, M *Low pay: some insights*, NERI, online, 2015, <https://www.neri.institute.net/research/low-pay-some-insights/> [accessed August 2018]

🔍 **Young women** suffered particularly badly on pay during the recession. Mean weekly wages of 15-24 year old women fell by 3.3% and by 3.0% for women aged 25-29. This contrasted with a decrease of only 0.2% and an increase of 0.5% for men in the corresponding age groups. This is likely to drag on their lifetime earnings potential as they move forward through the labour market.

🔍 Employment status also has a significant bearing on pay. The **self-employed** earn substantially less than employees on average (€15,968 versus €27,619 per annum),³¹ while **part-time** workers, who comprise 23% of the work force, account for 59% of the workers at or below the minimum wage.³²

31 Ibid

32 *QNHS National Minimum Wage Estimates*, CSO, 2017 <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/q-nmw/qnhsnationalminimumwageseriesq42016/> [accessed August 2018]

Key inequalities in fulfilling work

The data continually highlights a range of challenges to fulfilling work facing workers in a number of industrial sectors and from specific demographic groups:

Young people

Young people were most likely to be unemployed during the recession and now appear most likely to be engaged in work that is poor quality according to many measures. They are more likely to be underemployed; low paid; on atypical contracts; to have less choice over their working time arrangements; and to have a lower sense of agency and engagement with their work. The youngest workers (aged 15-24) experience the sharpest distribution of all of these trends.

Women

While young men continue to have the highest rates of unemployment, women fare badly with respect to underemployment: low pay; temporary employment; lack of choice over working time arrangements; access to training; and report being less engaged and involved in decisions at work. One of the few areas where women fare better than men is across various measures of work-life balance.

Low earners

The rise in the number of people who might be identified as the ‘working poor’ poses a significant policy challenge for Ireland. However, Ireland’s low-paid workers also inherit a range of other challenges besides pay, including lower levels of access to training and engagement at work, and fewer opportunities to get involved in workplace decision-making.

Sectoral challenges

The low paid sectors of **hospitality and retail** – where large numbers of disadvantaged groups like women and young people tend to be concentrated – are also sectors in which workers are less likely to receive training, and more likely to be underemployed.

Workers in the **agriculture** sector are more likely to experience challenges around low pay, long hours and poor work-life balance.

Transport and industry workers report long hours, poor work-life balance, and are least likely to say that they have the feeling of doing useful work.

Missing data: regional inequalities

We found a scarcity of regional or county-level job quality data for Ireland. The relatively small national sample size of the EWCS, which informed much of our analysis, only allowed for a limited degree of analysis by province.

Further insight into how fulfilling work is distributed by region in Ireland would be valuable and timely. It is well established that employment opportunities are not evenly distributed across the country. Regions further away from Dublin entered the recession with a lower employment base, were more severely impacted and have subsequently been slower to recover than the capital city and its immediate environs.³³ The Irish Programme for Partnership Government sets out an ambition to create 200,000 new jobs by 2020, including 135,000 outside Dublin, and *Ireland 2040*, the government's national planning framework for the next twenty years, describes the range of improvements required in infrastructure and assets to enable all the regions of Ireland to achieve their potential. If improving the unequal distribution of work in Ireland

is to be a meaningful public policy objective, examining quality alongside quantity will help policy makers interested in rebalancing growth to appreciate the scale and distinctiveness of the challenges facing Ireland's different regions. These could be factored into the Regional Action Plans for Jobs, helping to support job creation which exerts a positive impact on wider quality of life for citizens across Ireland.

We recognise, however, that there are persistent challenges in generating and gaining access to data that can be sufficiently disaggregated to support decision-making at a regional level. This is a shared challenge across many OECD countries. While an increased international push for open data in the last decade has helped increase the availability of such data, it is still the case that a range of financial, technical and cultural barriers mean that such data, where it is available, cannot always be accessed in a timely fashion or disaggregated sufficiently robustly to the required level.

33 See for example: *Employment Monitor, May 2017*, Social Justice Ireland; online 2017 <https://www.socialjustice.ie/content/publications/social-justice-ireland-employment-monitor-issue-4> [accessed July 2018] and *Employment Monitor, March 2018*, Social Justice Ireland; online 2018 <https://www.socialjustice.ie/content/publications/quarterly-employment-monitor-march-2018> [accessed July 2018]

Job quality measurement for Ireland

The lack of regional disaggregation was one of the most notable data gaps emerging from our review. However, the wider point is that there appears to be a lack of high quality current data for Ireland relating to the broad range of concepts of job quality which matter to wellbeing. The recent changes to the LFS have not seen a significant departure from a focus on work quantity, with only limited coverage of quality issues (e.g. pay, over and underemployment.)³⁴ The EWCS provides a broader range of job quality data, but the infrequency (every 7 years) and sample size of the survey makes it difficult to maintain an up-to-date picture of how work is being experienced in Ireland, or plan interventions to pressing challenges.

There are calls from across the political spectrum in Ireland to ensure that economic growth is rooted in the recovery and growth of sustainable jobs. A key component in realising these ambitions is to clearly define and measure job quality, by understanding which aspects of work are fundamental to citizens' wellbeing. Such an understanding can be underpinned by improved data at the national level for measuring job quality.

³⁴ The Q2 2018 LFS data release contained an ad-hoc EU module relating to scheduling of work around family life, but we understand that there are no plans to include any further questions about job quality in the survey at this time. Correspondence with CSO officials, July 2018.

Many different jurisdictions are considering how they can move towards valuing, defining and measuring job quality in new, more systematic ways. This includes the Fair Work Convention in Scotland, the Northern Ireland Better Jobs Index, the Wales Fair Work Commission and the Measuring Job Quality Working Group (convened by the Trust) in the UK.

There may be opportunity to advance similar conversations in Ireland. There are already a number of organisations engaged in this field of activity, with groups including Social Justice Ireland, TASC, academic institutions such as NERI and the trade unions movement examining employment trends, analysing existing national statistics, and campaigning for new narratives and strategies to tackle in-work inequalities. The shared expertise and knowledge of these groups, alongside the relevant government and statistical bodies, provides a strong platform for considerations about how job quality data can be developed to underpin a new drive towards good work in Ireland.

We would welcome contributions and insight from all those interested in this field of activity, particularly stakeholders in Ireland who may wish to discuss or advance the ideas raised in this report.



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low pay
development
employee engagement
flexibility
sense of agency
sense of meaning
self-employed
predictable hours
job security
training
zero hours contracts
work-life balance
quality work
job satisfaction
wellbeing



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