



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
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Eidgenössisches Departement für
Wirtschaft, Bildung und Forschung WBF

Staatssekretariat für Wirtschaft SECO
Organisation, Recht und Akkreditierung
Recht

Ralph Krieger, Maggie Graf und Margot Vanis

6. European Working Conditions Survey 2015



Summary

The European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) is the largest comparative study of working conditions in Europe. It has been carried out every five years since 1990 by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound). More than 43,000 employees from 35 countries were surveyed in the sixth wave, which was conducted in 2015. The Swiss cohort surveyed for EWCS 2015 comprises 1,006 employees and is representative of Switzerland's overall working population.

The report focuses on the following topics: 1) Safety culture within businesses, 2) Working hours, 3) Health risks and resources at work, 4) Health, job satisfaction and well-being, 5) Employees' wishes and prospects. The SECO (State Secretariat for Economic Affairs) Report complements the Eurofound Report¹⁰ in three respects:

It firstly provides a detailed description of working conditions for employees who are subject to the Employment Act in Switzerland¹¹. The information contained in the report relates to 2015. The studies of sociodemographic and economic parameters (gender, age, size of business and economic sector) allowed specific risk groups to be determined. These are employees who are subject to particular demands at work.

Furthermore, changes in Switzerland's working situation between 2005 and 2015 are described.

Finally, the Swiss results from EWCS 2015 are compared with the European average and with the results of neighbouring countries Germany, France, Italy and Austria.

The report provides a broad overview of the topic of work and health and therefore forms a basis for establishing practical preventive measures and for conducting further analysis.

Physical stress at work

The report differentiates between environmental stress, stress on the musculoskeletal system and psychological stress. Environmental stress includes exposure to chemicals, and is grouped together with stress on the musculoskeletal system as physical stress for the purposes of this report.

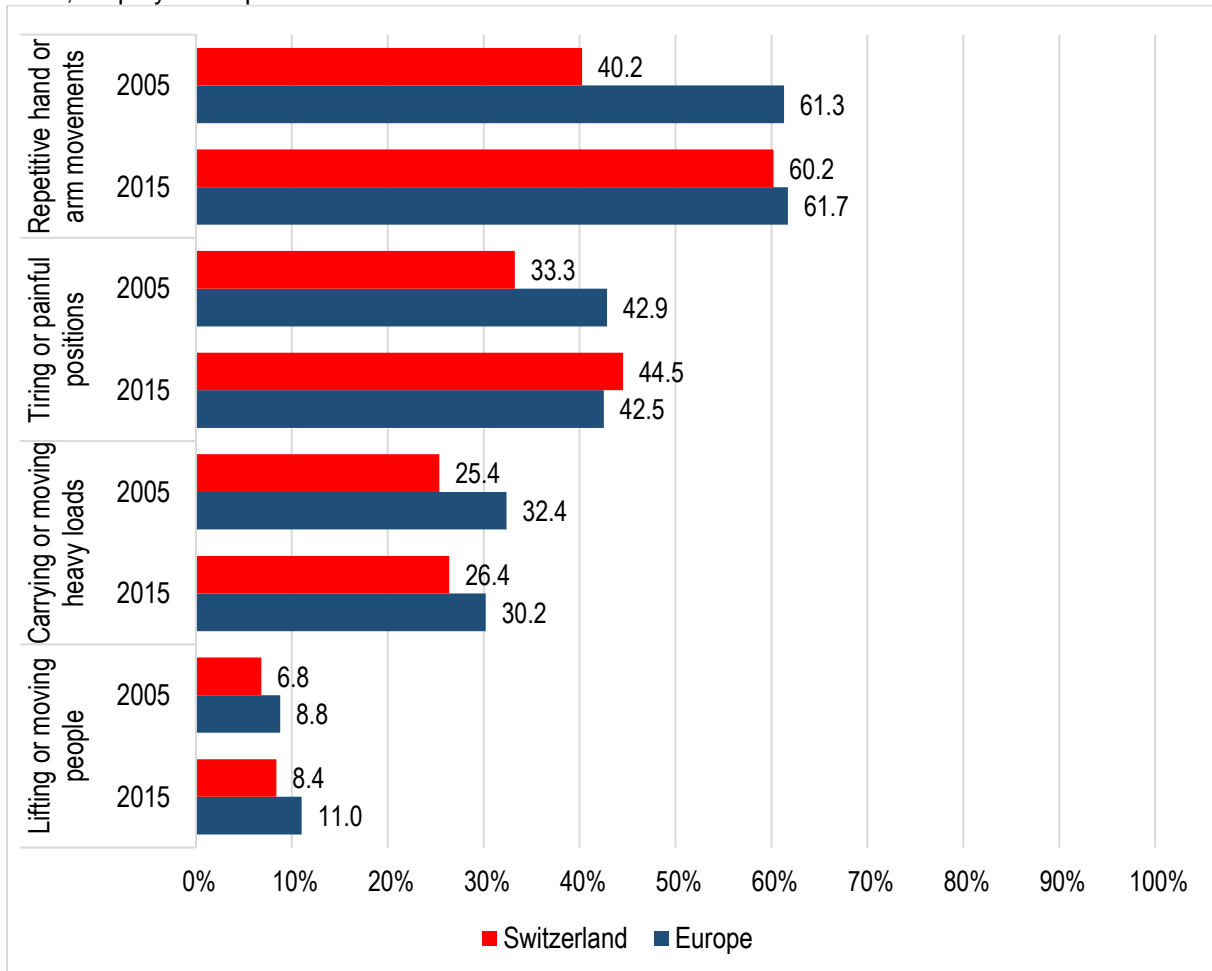
In all countries, musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) account for the most frequently reported health risks at work. In Switzerland, the most common physical stress factor at work in 2015 involves repetitive hand or arm movements. Almost two thirds of survey respondents (60.2%) report that they perform repetitive movements for at least one quarter of their working hours. In addition, 44.5% of employees work in tiring body positions for more than a quarter of their working hours. A good third of those surveyed sit for more than three quarters of their working hours. A good quarter indicate having to carry or move heavy loads for at least a quarter of their working hours.

¹⁰ Eurofound (2016): <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/de/surveys/european-working-conditions-surveys/sixth-european-working-conditions-survey-2015>

¹¹ Self-employed persons (n=135) have not been taken into account for the purposes of this analysis.



Figure 1: Musculoskeletal stress (at least ¼ of working hours), Switzerland and Europe 2005 and 2015, employees in percent

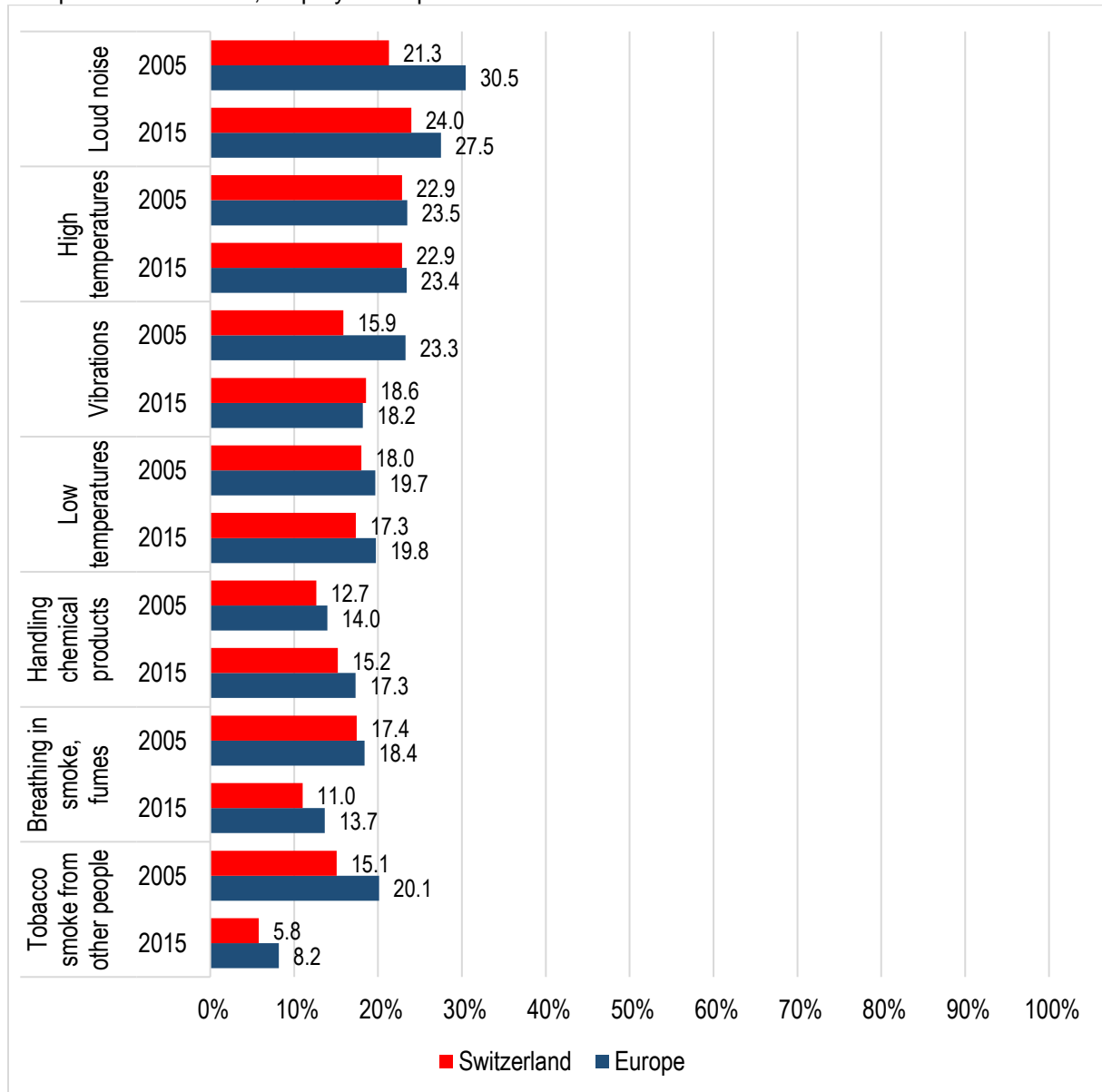


EWCS 2015, Q30: Please tell me, using the [same] scale, does your main paid job involve...? ... (A. Tiring or painful positions. B. Lifting or moving people. C. Carrying or moving heavy loads. E. Repetitive hand or arm movements.) Answer: *Around ¼ of the time or longer.*

Based on an estimated exposure time of at least one quarter of the working hours, the most frequent causes of environmental stress at work in 2015 were loud noise (24.0%), high temperatures (22.9%) and vibrations (18.6%). The exposure to environmental stress (including chemical risks) for Swiss employees is thus in line with the European average. Similar results have been reported by neighbouring countries Germany, Italy and Austria, which also correspond to the EU-27 average. Only loud noise, breathing in smoke and fumes and breathing in tobacco smoke from other people (passive smoking) are less common in Switzerland than in Europe. However, when the exposure time is at least three quarters of the hours spent at work, Switzerland is below the European average in all environmental factors. It appears that organisations minimise these risks by limiting the exposure time for individuals.



Figure 2: Environmental stress and chemical risks (at least ¼ of working hours), Switzerland and Europe 2005 and 2015, employees in percent



EWCS 2015, Q29: Please tell me, using the following scale, are you exposed at work to...? (A. Vibrations from hand tools, machinery, etc.; B. Noise so loud that you would have to raise your voice to talk to people; C. High temperatures which make you perspire even when not working; D. Low temperatures, whether indoors or outdoors; E. Breathing in smoke, fumes (such as welding or exhaust fumes), powder or dust (such as wood dust or mineral dust) etc.; F. Breathing in vapours such as solvents and thinners; G. Handling or being in skin contact with chemical products or substances; H. Tobacco smoke from other people; I. Handling or being in direct contact with materials which can be infectious, such as waste, bodily fluids, laboratory materials, etc. Answer: *Around ¼ of the time or longer.*

Overall, physical stress in Switzerland is increasing. The two exceptions are tobacco smoke from other people (-9.3 percentage points) and breathing in smoke, fumes, powder or dust (-6.5 percentage points). Increases of more than two percentage points are recorded for loud noise (+2.8 percentage points), vibrations (+2.7 percentage points) and handling or being in skin contact with chemical products or substances (+2.6 percentage points). The most commonly reported physical stress factors at work registered a double-digit percentage increase: tiring or painful positions (+11.2 percentage points) and repetitive hand or arm



movements (+20.0 percentage points). These findings correspond to the increase that was found in the Swiss Health Survey between 2007 and 2012. The change in work-related physical risks appears overall to be heading in an unfavourable direction: Self-reported risks are on the increase, and Switzerland has lost the comparative advantage it held in 2005 in this regard.

Working hours, flexibility and time pressure

A full-time employee's working week¹² in Switzerland lasts longer than the European average (42 hours per week in Switzerland vs 39 hours per week for EU-27). On the other hand, a good quarter of all employees work less than 5 days per week (26.2%). This share of part-time employment is significantly higher than the European average (16.6%). Switzerland's figures for work performed at night, weekends and during leisure time are on a par with Europe's.

Switzerland registers the highest proportion of employees who are able to set their own working hours completely by themselves (Switzerland: 11.7% vs EU-27: 5.6%). Conversely, regularly occurring short-notice changes to working hours are also more frequent in Switzerland (Switzerland: 18.2% vs EU-27: 12.5%). Such unforeseen changes to work schedules can have a negative effect on health since it prevents these people from being able to plan and structure their leisure time as they wish, resulting in less time for regeneration.

More than six in every ten employees in Switzerland report that they have to work at a fast pace (64.6%) or to tight deadlines (62.8%) for at least one quarter of the time. Of these people, more than half work at a fast pace (32.4%) or to tight deadlines (33.3%) for three quarters of the time. This percentage has decreased in Switzerland in comparison with EWCS 2005. Thus, fewer people work at a fast pace or to tight deadlines in 2015 than did ten years prior. These figures correspond both to the European average and the average of neighbouring countries Germany, Austria, Italy and France.

Cooperation and self-determination

In general, the proportion of employees in Switzerland who have the possibility to exert influence on their work fell between 2005 and 2015. This is true both in respect of freedom of time (choosing one's own pace or rate of work, 2005: 73.0% vs 2015: 68.0%) and in respect of opportunities to decide on how work is carried out (2005: 80.3% vs 2015: 72.1%). A particularly marked decrease is indicated for the opportunity to apply one's own ideas at work (2005: 61.9% vs 2015: 48.8%) and to take a break when one wishes (2005: 54.1% vs 2015: 42.2%). In general, younger employees (15-24 years old) have fewer opportunities to exert influence at work than those who are older.

This combination of a lack of autonomy to determine one's own schedule and the requirement to work under high time pressure can have particularly negative effects on health. Around 11% of employees are affected by this negative combination of factors.

¹² Between 90-100% FTE.



While the proportion of employees in Switzerland who have the possibility to influence matters at work is falling significantly, the European average is stable. As a result, Switzerland is now on a par with the European level.

Quality of work

Integrated tasks that the worker believes to be useful and that are demanding, without excess, not only have a motivating effect but also assist in professional development and promote health. Careful tailoring of the interaction between humans and machines is important, especially in times of increasing digitisation and automation at work. An increasing number of people report that their work involves monotonous tasks (2005: 22.4% vs 2015: 32.9%). The proportion of employees who believe that the work they do is useful is higher in Switzerland than elsewhere, but has fallen in comparison with the 2005 survey findings (2005: 92.3% vs 2015: 85.8%). In addition, fewer people report that their work involves complex tasks (2005: 72.0% vs 2015: 64.3%), that they are required to assess the quality of their own work themselves (2005: 84.6% vs 2015: 80.1%), that they need to solve unforeseen problems on their own (2005: 87.9% vs 2015: 81.7%), or that their work provides them with the opportunity to learn new things (2005: 85.5% vs 2015: 69.7%). Nevertheless, the work of an increasing proportion of employees involves meeting precise quality standards (2005: 76.8% vs 2015: 82.9%).

Overall, most aspects related to task design and organisation of work indicate a move towards the European average. For Switzerland this means that the country has lost the leading position it held in the 2005 survey in respect of these aspects.

Leadership, collaboration and discrimination

Switzerland achieved a relatively good result in respect of health-promoting aspects of management behaviour compared with its neighbouring countries and Europe. Swiss employees report receiving praise and recognition from their superiors (79.9% vs EU-27: 70.9%) and receiving useful feedback (78.5% vs EU-27: 70.2%) more frequently. Moreover, according to the employees' own assessments, Swiss superiors are comparatively more successful in getting people to work together (78.3% vs EU-27: 72.7%). This also applies for Austria and Italy. In relation to managers' encouragement and support for development, Switzerland (68.0% vs EU-27: 68.0%) is on a par with Austria and France at the level of the European average.

Social discrimination is one of the most important stress factors in working life. In general, women report experiencing infringements of personal integrity or discrimination at work more frequently than men. The most marked gender-specific differences are observed in respect of unwanted sexual attention (men: 0.1%, women: 6.7%), sexual harassment (men: 0%, women: 5.1%) and gender-based discrimination (men: 0.3%, women: 3.8%).

The proportion of people who report suffering discrimination linked to their nationality (4.2%), unwanted sexual attention (3.4%) or sexual harassment (2.5%) is higher in Switzerland than the European average (1.6% / 1.8% / 0.8%).

While in 2005 8.0% of employees reported being subjected to bullying or harassment, in 2015 this has almost halved to 4.2%. However, affirmative responses to the question



regarding sexual harassment at work have almost doubled (2005: 1.1%, 2015: 2.5%). Nevertheless, these findings must be treated with caution owing to the small numbers involved and uncertainties about the understanding of the questions.

Feelings of stress and exhaustion

24.4% of employees report experiencing frequent or constant stress at work. This question was not asked in the EWCS 2005, so no comparison can be made.

More than a third (35.2%) of survey respondents indicate that they feel exhausted at the end of the working day most of the time (22.2%) or always (13.0%). The Swiss results of EWCS 2015 are broadly similar to the European average in this respect.

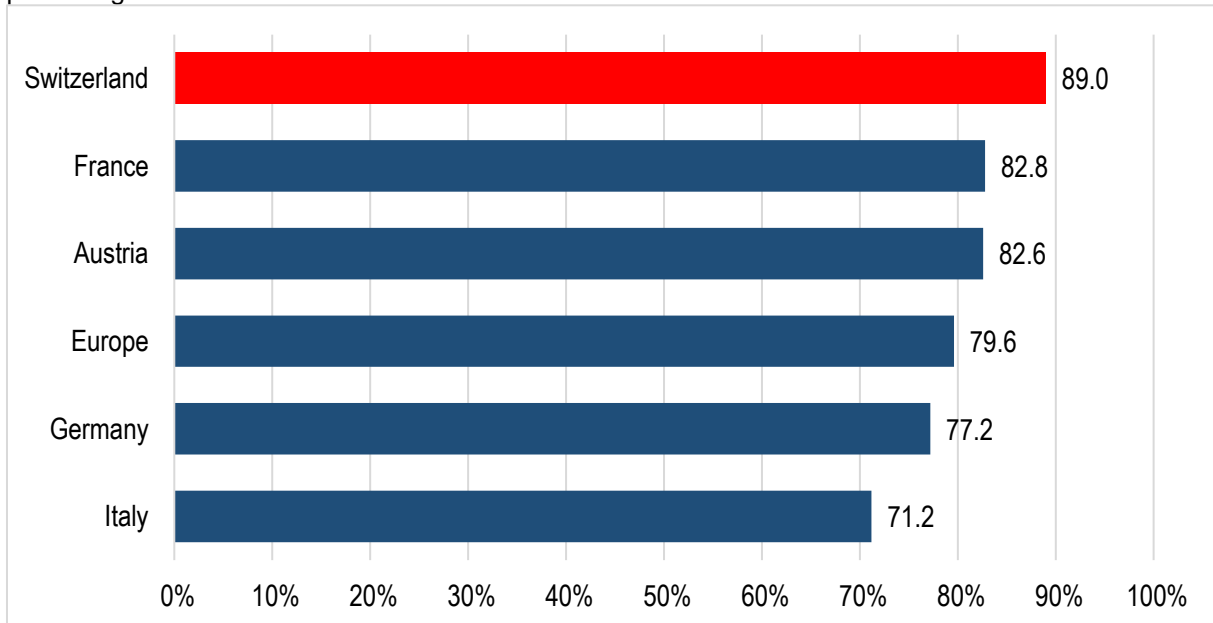
The duration and quality of rest periods are important for dealing with the health impact of high work demands. If recovery is impaired and the resources used are not replenished, a worker's well-being will be affected. A good quarter (25.5%) of respondents who report feeling exhausted either always or most of the time at the end of the day also experience a feeling of exhaustion and tiredness when waking up the next day. This applies to 9 percent of all employees. The health of these people may be in jeopardy

Health

While almost nine of every ten employees (89.0%) overall report their general state of health to be good or very good, in the over-55s age category the figure is around eight out of ten (80.4%). By implication, therefore, one in every ten employees report their general health to be fair, bad or very bad. This rises to two out of every ten employees for the older age group. Given the demographic change that will result in an older working population, there should be greater focus on maintaining working capability in order to protect the country's potential labour force. If employees' health is not better protected, in future it is highly probable that more people will be working in a sub-optimal state of health, or there will be greater pressure on invalidity insurance. Switzerland's result is good compared to Europe. The proportion of employees who assess their own health to be good or very good is around ten percentage points higher in Switzerland than the European average.



Figure 3: Employees with good or very good general state of health, Switzerland 2015, employees in percentage

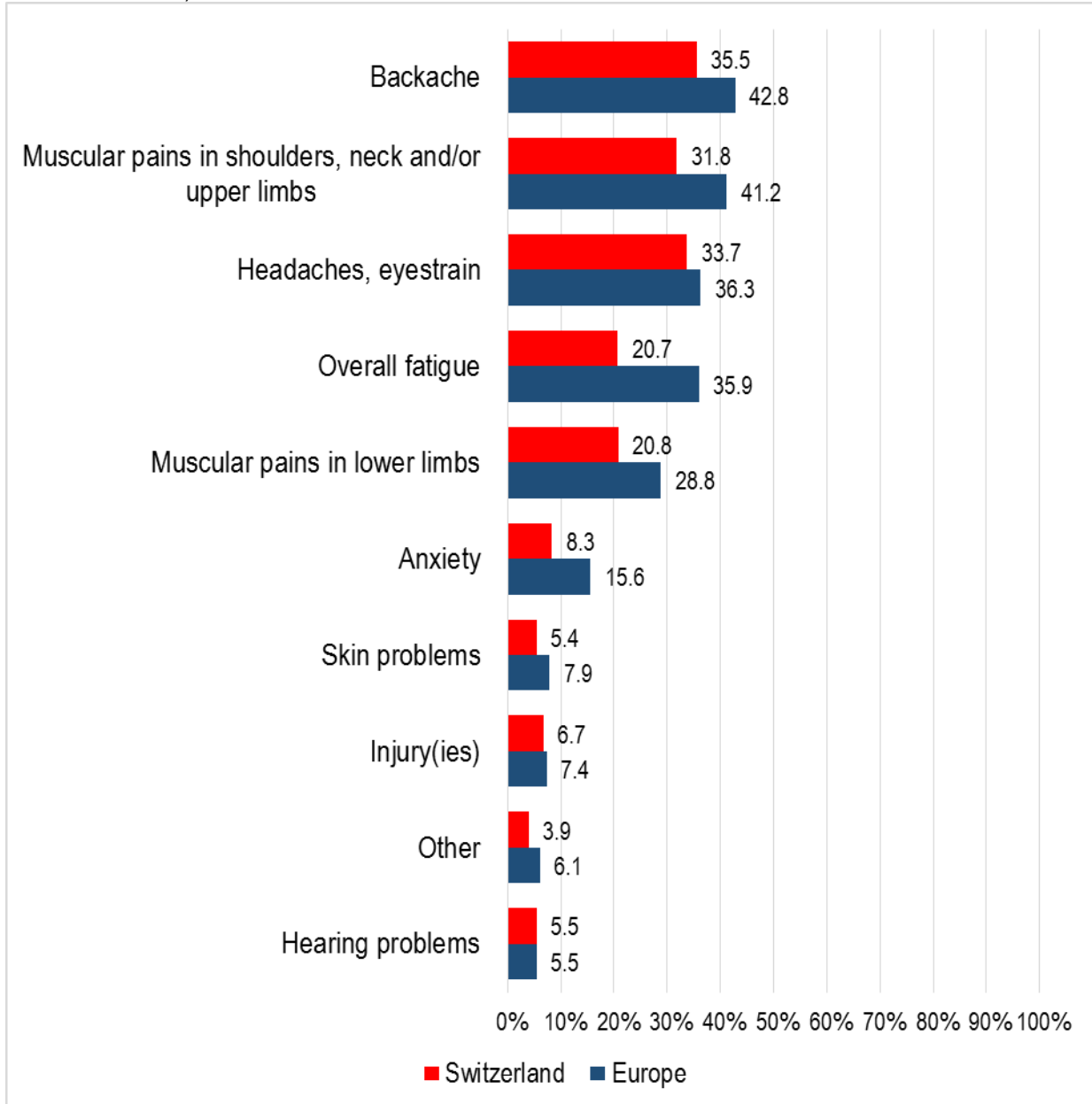


EWCS 2015, Q75: How is your health in general? Would you say it is ... Answer: good or very good.

The EWCS asks detailed questions about several health conditions that are frequently associated with work. These conditions are not necessarily caused by work, but working conditions may be a major factor in their presentation or progression. The most commonly reported complaints in Switzerland in 2015 are backache (35.5%), headaches and eyestrain (33.7%) and muscular pains in shoulders, neck and/or upper limbs (arms, elbows, wrists, hands, etc.) (31.8%). With the exception of hearing problems and injury(ies), Switzerland is below the European average in respect of all the listed health problems. The proportion of employees who report that they have health problems is practically the same in Switzerland as in the neighbouring countries Germany, Italy and Austria in all respects.



Figure 4: Health problems, Switzerland and Europe 2015, employees in percent (Switzerland: n=871; EU-27: n=28,079).



EWCS 2015, Q78: Over the last 12 months, did you have any of the following health problems? (A. Hearing problems; B. Skin problems; C. Backache; D. Muscular pains in shoulders, neck and/or upper limbs (arms, elbows, wrists, hands etc.); E. Muscular pains in lower limbs (hips, legs, knees, feet etc.); F. Headaches, eyestrain; G. Injury(ies); H. Anxiety; I. Overall fatigue; J. Other (spontaneous).) Answer: Yes

In relation to the integration of the chronically ill in the labour market, it can be seen that Switzerland has comparably fewer people who suffer from illnesses or health problems that have lasted longer than six months. Overall, 7.9% of employees report that they suffer from chronic complaints. In the over-55s age category, reports from those suffering from chronic complaints are more than twice as frequent (17.4%) as the Swiss average.

Switzerland and Italy record the lowest proportion of chronically ill employees (7.9% each). The European average is twice as many (17.2%). A considerably higher percentage of



employees have chronic illnesses in Austria (17.9%), Germany (19.6%) and France (25.5%) than in Switzerland.

Satisfaction and well-being

Overall, almost nine out of every ten employees are satisfied or very satisfied with their working conditions (88.0%). One in ten people is not very satisfied or not at all satisfied. This places Switzerland on a par with the European average.

In terms of motivation, compared with Europe, 75.7% of employees in Switzerland report working for organisations that are able to motivate them to give their best job performance. Accordingly, Switzerland does better than the European average (61.2%) and its neighbouring countries Germany, Austria, Italy and France.

Switzerland comes out on top for respondents' agreement with the following two statements on their working situation: 1) "Considering all my efforts and achievements in my job, I feel I get paid appropriately" (Switzerland: 65.9% vs EU-27: 50.6%) and 2) "I receive the recognition I deserve for my work" (Switzerland: 75.5% vs EU-27: 64.3%). These two aspects underline key elements of favourable working conditions and clearly reveal two advantages of the working conditions in Switzerland. Satisfaction with the reward for work is an important basis for ensuring good mental health.