3.

HAZARDS AND RISKS IN THE SECTOR

The hotels and restaurant sector includes a wide range of tasks and jobs which pose different risks. The complexity of the sector makes it difficult to present an exhaustive view of the situation. Much attention goes towards working in kitchens and to a lesser extent, to waiting staff. Supporting activities such as cleaning jobs, goods supply, etc. are randomly represented in scientific literature.

The workforce in the sector is faced with a large number of physical and psychosocial risks, which are summarised in Table 3. According to Houtman, et al. (2002) who analysed sector profiles on working conditions based on the third Eurofound survey, and trends over the last five years, workers in the hotels and catering sector (as well as the transport sector) have to deal with the most unfavourable working conditions in the economy, and have seen a deterioration in working conditions from 1995 to 2000, especially with regard to psychosocial risks (ergonomic conditions, working hours, job demands and job autonomy).

Table 3: Quality of work and employment in the hotel and restaurant sector

Physical work environment		
Risk	**Description**	**Health outcomes**
Noise, hearing and high sound levels	■ Kitchens (pots and pans) ■ Discotheques, cafés and nightclubs (sound equipment) ■ In restaurants the noise levels tend to be high due to customers talking, staff shouting orders, clashing dishes, glasses, cutlery, different kitchen appliances, ventilation and hoists	Hearing loss, mental fatigue, lack of concentration can lead to accidents
Low light conditions	■ A cosy low light environment may be pleasant for guests (restaurants, bars and casinos), but may be a cause of risks, such as falling, burning and eyestrain.	Higher accident risk
Temperature and breathing problems	■ High temperatures (hot steam) ■ Draughts, because of open doors and air conditioning ■ Warm and humid environments ■ Alternating between cold and hot surroundings ■ Indoor climate problems such as poor air quality and bad smells ■ Annoying, harmful and toxic substances in the air (dirt, grease, oil, vapour, smoke and gases) ■ Artificial cold in food storage is also a serious problem	Discomfort, heat stress, inability to concentrate, muscle cramps, heat exhaustion. weakness, headaches, heat stroke
Physically demanding work	■ Long periods of standing in kitchens ■ Repetitive activities in kitchens such as chopping, washing dishes, stirring ■ Walking and carrying loads as a waiter, often aggravated by frequent climbing and descending stairs ■ Carrying heavy loads (beds and furniture for room personnel, bulk food packages for kitchen personnel)	MSDs such as carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis, etc.

Physical work environment		
Risk	**Description**	**Health outcomes**
Contact with dangerous substances	■ Workers can be exposed to potentially dangerous chemicals such as oven and floor cleaners, disinfectants, soaps and detergents, pesticides ■ Dermatitis, as a result of extensive wet work ■ Skin allergies that result from contact with food, excessive water, cleaning agents and disinfectant materials ■ Chambermaids face the risk of allergies and biological infections	Eczema, infections, skin, eye and nose irritation, allergies, respiratory diseases
Equipment and technology	■ New equipment and technology is often beneficial in the hotel and restaurant sector. However, new problems may also arise, because of incorrect or clumsy handling of equipment, simplification of tasks and work content, and repetitive movements.	Stress
Slips, trips and falls	■ Food spills on walkways, objects, slippery mats and coatings, insufficiently illuminated walkways, changes in floor levels, missing signs ■ According to the US National Floor Safety Institute [1], wet or otherwise dangerous floors directly cause most slips and falls that occur in the foodservice industry. Inexperience affects the likelihood of a slip-and-fall, as does age.	Accidents can cause sprains, broken limbs, injured necks and backs, cuts and bruises from falling, and injuries from falling onto or in machinery, or into deep fat fryers
Safety conditions	■ Sharp objects and working with hot substances and materials among kitchen personnel ■ Risks for waiters and kitchen personnel are related to the physical environment of organisations and include differences in floor levels, stairs, and deficiencies regarding canopy roofing over loading bays and goods entrances ■ Injuries are also common among chambermaids cleaning up broken glass etc. ■ Employees who have to return home late at night after work may face additional safety risks	Cuts, limbs caught in moving parts, electric shock, lacerations and needle stick injuries
Smoking, alcohol consumption	■ These substances are part of the hospitality service. People have easy access to these materials. ■ Passive smoking is particularly a problem for employees working in nightclubs, cafés, bars and discotheques	Irritant and respiratory symptoms, lower life expectancy

(1) *Safer surfaces to walk on, reducing the risk of slipping,* J. Carpenter et al., Ciria 2006, http://www.ciria.org/downloads/01/c652_restricted_access.pdf

Work organisation		
Risk	**Description**	**Health outcomes**
Violence, harassment and discrimination	■ Violence and harassment from customers, added to that from colleagues and superiors, is a significant risk factor in the hotel and restaurant sector. Employees who have contact with clients need to stay friendly and calm, which is not always easy in these situations.	Physical violence includes kicking, pushing, burning someone with hot equipment or food, and throwing objects.
	■ Contact with the public is especially related to violence, aggression and discrimination for employees working in pubs, discotheques, nightclubs and bars. In this case, it often involves members of the public who have drunk too much.	Unwanted sexual attention
	■ Staff working in food takeaway outlets also faces the risk of violence and abuse from the public	
	■ Risk factors for doormen include violence or the threat of violence.	
High workload and stress	■ Continuous customer contact	Workers in the Horeca sector report more than average headaches, stress and fear
	■ Complexity of certain tasks requiring high concentration levels	Impaired work-life balance
	■ Workload rises at peak hours and is dependent on customer behaviour	Depression, increased absenteeism
	■ Lack of replacement of sick colleagues, which in turn leads to more work for the remaining staff	
	■ Complaints also result from working additional hours and working with difficult clients	
Organisation, management and working climate	■ Employees often have to perform more than one task, and tasks may be different depending on the time of the day. However, performing more than one task may also expose employees to strenuous work, and to a higher probability of injury due to lack of specific training and professional specialisation	
	■ Sometimes, employees in the sector feel squeezed between demanding employers and clients	
	■ Typical of the work organisation in the sector are the peak periods, which put an amount of work pressure on the worker	

Work organisation		
Risk	**Description**	**Health outcomes**
Autonomy and control	■ Problems related to control in and over work, checks by superiors, no time for breaks, uncertainty about the finishing time of the work, and lack of communication are practically inherent in the hotel and restaurant sector ■ Employees report a low degree of influence over their own work and also experience low predictability of work ■ Monotonous work and work without creativity and initiative is widespread in the sector, though this depends on the type of work and organisation	
Training, learning opportunities	■ Much work tends to be of an unskilled nature ■ Concern also relates to non-completion of training courses ■ Limited structured career development	

Working time and precarious work		
Risk	**Description**	**Health outcomes**
Part time contracts, casual and precarious work	■ In many countries there is a high share of part time work, casual and seasonal work in the sector	Lack of work-life balance, no control over working time, reduced psychosocial and physical well-being