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Stability and Competition

Quality of employment in the contract catering
sector in Spain

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Barcelona, November 2011

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Introduction

The hotels and catering sector is crucial for the functioning of the Spanish economy. Foreign tourism is Spain's most important export, albeit a special one because the consumption takes place inside the country. Domestic tourism during holidays and at weekends is also important, as are catering services for work and leisure. Not all tourism is done through the hotel system as many tourists have holiday homes. However, the hotel business is indicative of the health of the sector. Tourism is a seasonal activity with the main business in summer although Spain's climate and some anti-seasonal policies (especially tourist packages for retirees in periods of low activity) attenuate this effect.

The sector underwent major growth in the last phase of expansion (1995-2007), in which it increased its proportion of total employment. In 2007 the sector, like the whole economy, began to decline because of the collapse of foreign and domestic tourism, shrinking household spending, and unemployment. The reduction in employment in the sector has been lower than the total reduction in employment in Spain (8.2% and 10.2%, respectively). However, while employment in hotels fell by 5%, in restaurants and catering it fell by just over 10%. This difference is mainly due to the fact that consumption in restaurants and catering has been forced down by the fall in domestic demand for this non-primary good, with fewer meals being eaten outside the home for leisure- and work-related reasons. However, the sector still represents more than 7% of all employment in Spain. As it is a fairly feminized activity, it represents 9% of female employment against 6% of male employment. In the recession, however, it has been one of the few sectors in which there has been a greater fall in female employment than in male employment, perhaps because (particularly in restaurants and catering) there is less sexual segregation in some job categories and men have been better able to maintain their jobs

The restaurants and catering subsector is in itself a very complex one because it includes a wide variety of other subsectors with very different characteristics of employment and work organization.

- Gastronomic restaurants targeting a high segment of the market, often business clients. This is a sector that employs qualified workers, though it also employs many workers on work placement and training contracts.
- Medium-level restaurants of varying sizes targeting tourists and leisure clients. These tend to use a small core of employees and very different organizational models according to the market niche: tourist areas, urban restaurants, rural zones specialized in weekends, etc.
- Restaurant chains, an emerging sector in large cities. These combine partial preparation of food in centralized industrial kitchens with final preparation in the restaurant. This model shows some similarities with that of contract catering firms.
- Totally industrialized fast-food chains, which typically employ unskilled young people
- Family restaurants, bars and cafeterias
- Functions catering
- Contract catering

The market and working conditions in each of these subsectors are slightly different, though they share common features. They have all been affected by the crisis through the fall in tourism and in general business, but the sector is still large.

1 Regulation of working conditions

Hotels and catering is similar to other sectors in the regulation of working conditions. The main questions are regulated by the Fourth National Labour Agreement for the Hotels and Catering Sector (*Acuerdo Laboral de ámbito Estatal para el sector de Hostelería*, ALEH), which was signed by the main social partners: in representation of the trade unions, the National Federation of Workers of Retailing, Hotels and Catering, Tourism and Gambling of the General Workers' Confederation (*Federación Estatal de Trabajadores de Comercio, Hostelería Turismo y Juego*, CHTJ-UGT) and the National Federation of Retailing, Hotels and Catering and Tourism of the Confederation of Workers' Commissions (*Federación Estatal de Comercio, Hostelería y Turismo*, FECOHT-CCOO); and in representation of the employers, the Spanish Federation of Hotels and Catering (*Federación Española de Hostelería*, FEHR) and the Spanish Confederation of Hotels and Tourist Accommodation (*Confederación Española de Hoteles y Alojamientos Turísticos*, CEHAT).

The main element of this agreement is the standardization of professional categories. These are divided into 6 functional areas:

1. Reception, porters, public relations, administration and management.
2. Cooking and supplies.
3. Restaurant, hall, bar and similar.
4. Floors and cleaning.
5. Maintenance and auxiliary services.
6. Complementary services.

There are 23 professional categories divided among these six areas. This classification is used to define the appropriate functions for each job and the reference wage. Contract catering workers are included mainly in 6 occupational groups:

- Chef (Group 5): The 4th ALEH states that the main duties of a chef are the planning, organization and control of cooking tasks, in addition to inventory control and materials. However, 'the presence of manager-type cooks is becoming quite widespread. This function is being used greatly by contract catering firms' (JAB, CCOO delegate). In other words, each workplace is considered as a franchise in which the chef manages the staff and does human relations-type work. This, coupled with the administrative work arising from the strict health and hygiene inspections carried out in contract catering, means that chefs actually spend little time on cooking tasks.
- Second chef (Group 5): In the 4th ALEH this category represents the chefs' assistants or the persons who replace them in their absence. Because of the managerial and administrative duties carried out by the chef, the second chef is

probably in charge of the cooking tasks.

- Cook (Group 6): The cook performs tasks related to preparing dishes, and collaborates in the other tasks such as control of material, inventories and costs. CCOO considers this category as too wide, bearing in mind that cooks should only have to cook and not ‘do inventories, purchasing, staff control, etc., etc.’ (JAB, CCOO delegate). Ultimately their daily tasks involve ‘checking each invoice, taking details of delivery notes, noting the temperature of arrival [...], the water samples every day and entering the information. The temperatures of all refrigerators, the temperatures of the freezers, the temperature of the food [...], cutting off all the bar codes and putting them through the computers.’ (MEL, UGT delegate).
- Head of supplies (Group 6): This person deals with stock control, orders and the procedures involved. In practice these tasks are done by the cooks or by other categories.
- Assistant cook (Group 7): This person supports the cook and has some autonomy in the work done. It is quite common for companies to employ cooks as kitchen assistants in order to pay them less.
- Kitchen assistant (Group 8): This is used as a catch-all category. Kitchen assistants mainly clean the cooking utensils and kitchen premises, and also transport materials. The definition of the 4th ALEH does not include tasks strictly related to the preparation of meals but in daily practice these workers ‘absorb five categories: they work as waiters, assistant cooks, dishwashers, kitchen hands, loaders and unloaders of products, cashiers, etc.’ (MEL, UGT delegate).
- Community supervisor (Group 10): This category is parallel to the category of chef within the subsector of contract catering. The biggest difference is that they generally do not have to intervene in food handling or other direct tasks (though they may do so if necessary) but function more as staff managers. ‘Today the supervisor is far more important than the human relations manager’ (JAB, CCOO delegate).
- Contract catering assistant (Group 12): Workers in this category may be used for the distribution of dishes, customer service in self-service lines, dining halls or receptions, food handling, table laying, cleaning, transportation from stores to departments, and in general all the least-valued tasks in the kitchen. It is a functionally flexible category that is always considered low-skilled. Companies use this category to contract people on low pay.

The most important feature of the last category is its wide definition. Workers may be required to perform any task within the workplace, and this category can clearly be used to place workers at a lower level than corresponds to the tasks they carry out. It is therefore surprising that the Catering Federation, which signed the Catalan collective agreement, calls for greater functional flexibility, i.e. workers should cover a wider range of tasks, though with pay supplements to compensate for it. Thus, what the employers want is a greater grouping of categories so that workers can carry out certain tasks according to the agreement.

Another key point of the 4th ALEH is the content of Chapter 10, devoted only to the subsector of contract catering and regulating certain guarantees of workers in cases of subrogation, i.e. when a new company takes over in a workplace. This is a phenomenon

that occurs often in this type of workplace. Chapter 60 of the regulatory framework on 'allocation of staff' states that the staff in a workplace must be maintained if the contracted company changes, thus ensuring employment stability in the sector. 'The companies of the sector shouldn't use temporary contracts too much. They tend to be used for substitutions due to sickness, holidays and leave. But they are used little. In Sodexo, for example, the workforce is 100% stable' (JAB, CCOO delegate). However, this stability has its downside. Because companies are unable to dismiss workers, when they have to cut labour costs they tend to place them on part-time contracts. 'In contract catering in general they are suggesting that people who worked eight hours change to a six-hour day. And do the same work' (MEL, UGT delegate). The part-time contracts tend to be for a maximum of 5 hours per day or 20 hours per week. This measure affects mainly workers in schools and factories. The UGT also mentions the use of 'part-time contracts with overtime' to disguise full-time work and reduce the costs to the company.

The 4th ALEH is the regulatory base for collective agreements at regional or provincial level. The main aspect in these agreements is the setting of pay levels. In the case of Catalonia, where our research was done, there is a regional agreement that includes different pay rates depending on the province in which the workplace is located and the category assigned to the employees. However, in the subsector of contract catering business practices make the application of the agreement more complex. Although 85% of workers are covered by the Hotels and Catering Agreement of Catalonia, 15% are covered by the elderly care agreement. Contract catering companies thus take advantage of the fact that the agreements for workers in elderly care homes have worse conditions than the Hotels and Catering Agreement. 'The basic wages of a cook in hotels and catering (in the province of Barcelona) is €1277 and that in elderly care is just over €800. There is a difference of almost €390 for doing the same work or more.' (JAB, CCOO delegate). There are not only differences in pay but also in the cover of workers in cases of sickness.

These aspects must be taken into account in the analysis of each case study. It is important to consider the categories that are recognized in each company, the use made of part-time work and the agreements that are applied.

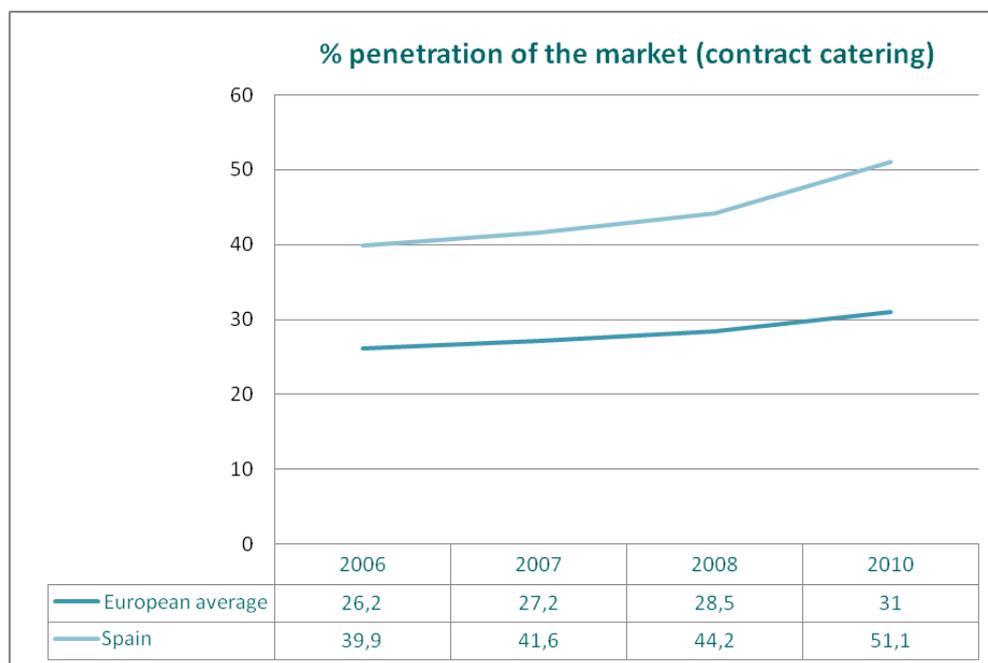
2 The contract catering sector

Within the restaurants and catering sector, contract catering is a subsector with its own characteristics. Like the rest of the sector, it underwent major growth in the early 2000s which came to an end in 2007. The companies in the sector provide services in many facilities: schools, hospitals, government offices, military facilities, industrial companies, private offices and others.

Within Europe Spain is one of the countries in which contract catering has reached the highest level of activity, above the European average (Figure 1). This is because of the late development of public services, which are the main clients of the sector. The expansion of this service in the 1980s was associated with the predominance of neo-

liberal policies that include the outsourcing of auxiliary services, including catering. In many cases the new facilities were already set up with outsourced catering, whereas in others the outsourcing formed part of the reorganization of services.

Figure 1 Penetration of the market (contract catering)



Source: Fédération Européenne de la Restauration Collective Concédée (2009)

Catering is less common in private Spanish companies because of their small size. Traditionally, catering has been limited to large industrial companies and the central offices of large service companies. Many services were originally provided by staff of the companies, but in the 1980s outsourcing began to favour the presence of large catering firms. As part of a cost-reduction policy, business managers wished to offload the management of services that were outside their core activities. However, outsourcing has not always involved company canteens. Food vouchers have also been used, particularly in the public administration and in offices in urban areas where there are a wide range of restaurants near to the workplaces.

Though contract catering has achieved a high level of penetration in its potential market, the business is highly dispersed, with a large number of small companies often serving a single location. Nevertheless, large contract catering firms have been gradually increasing their market share.

The large industrial groups (Table 1) include subsidiaries of multinationals: Eures (a subsidiary of the British Compass group), Sodexo, Seruni3n (a subsidiary of the French group Elior) and recently the Danish cleaning group ISS, which has bought several Spanish companies. The Spanish-owned companies include specialized subsidiaries of service groups, such as Clece. In many cases these groups combine functions catering with contract catering. In other cases companies began managing restaurants (especially for functions) and later moved into contract catering (e.g. the Arturo group, Soterias and

Paradís). In yet other cases they are subsidiaries of hotel chains (e.g. Serhs and Menta). The business model is therefore one of common elements in different types of catering. This arises partly from the standardization of part of the process and preparation of meals in central kitchens, combined with final processing at the point of service. This phenomenon is also found in conventional restaurant chains, which share some features with the fast-food industry. A major advantage of this business model is the economy of scale achieved by supplying large quantities. For all these companies contract catering has the advantage of having a far more stable and predictable demand than functions catering. The personnel management is also more stable.

Table 1 Main contract catering companies ranking (annual turnover)

	Company/Group	Sales 2008 (m €)	Sales 2009 (m €)	Employment
1	Grupo Seruni3n	288	331	15,000
2	Eurest Colectividades – Compass	302	320	11,100
3	Sodexo Espa3a	175	185	4,000
4	Grupo Arturo Cantoblanco	147.5	147	3,000
5	Auzo Lagun	128.37	142	5,718
6	Newrest Inflight Espa3a	138.57	140	1,000
7	Aramark Servicios de Catering	135	138	5,900
8	ISS Soluciones de Catering	92	96	2,095
9	Comp. Intern. Wagons-Lits et du Tourisme – Sucursal en Espa3a	95	90	1,310
10	Mediterr3nea de Catering	73.92	80	1,800

Source: INE (2009)

Though the common activity is preparing and serving meals, each type of client has some specificities. The education and health sectors are particularly important. In education, in addition to lunch the midday period also involves looking after the children and extracurricular activities (the normal school day is 9.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. and 3.00 to 4.30 p.m., leaving two hours free). Therefore, the companies that cater for schools also offer child supervision services, though these may also be offered by other companies or institutions. In the health sector the essential business is the preparation of special meals according to patient requirements. In this case companies only prepare the meals because the direct service in the wards is provided by medical assistants. In the remaining sectors, the restaurants are mainly self-service and the service provided includes preparation of tables. Some companies also offer cleaning services.

3 Actors of the sector

The workers of the sector are represented by the trade unions. In Spain there are several trade unions, though 80% of the trade union representation is held by the two majority unions: The Trade Union Confederation of Workers' Commissions (*Comisiones Obreras*, CCOO) and the General Workers' Confederation (*Unión General de Trabajadores*, UGT). CCOO is a trade union organization that was formed from clandestine organizations that were set up in the 1960s, stimulated by activists linked to the Communist Party, other left-wing parties and Christian community groups. Constituted as a trade union in 1976, it is divided into sectoral, and in some areas regional, federations. The members in the hotels and catering sector form part of the National Federation of Retailing, Hotels and Catering and Tourism (*Federación de Comercio, Hostelería y Turismo*). UGT is a Socialist trade union with a history of over 100 years. During the dictatorship its organization was reduced to a handful of militants, but after the restoration of trade union freedom in 1977 it was reborn and soon became the second trade union force in Spain. Like CCOO, it is divided into sectoral federations. In the reorganization of recent years these federations have been concentrated. Catering workers form part of the Federation of Retailing, Hotels and catering, Tourism and Gambling (*Federación de Comercio, Hostelería, Turismo y Juego*), which has leaders specialized in the sector. There are many other trade unions at national level (USO, CGT) and regional level (ELA-STV and LAB in Euskadi, CIG in Galicia), but these have little presence in the sector.

The employers are represented by the Spanish Federation of Hotels and Catering (*Federación Española de Hostelería*, FEHR), which includes restaurants and catering, and the Spanish Confederation of Hotels and Tourist Accommodation (*Confederación Española de Hoteles y Alojamientos Turísticos*, CEHAT). Collective bargaining is carried out at provincial or regional level and the local employers' federation negotiates the agreement in each case. As it is a large, highly consolidated sector, contract catering companies do not seem to have a major presence in collective bargaining, though the general conditions of the sector are well-adapted to the subsector, as will be seen in the next section.

Contract catering companies have their own association, the Spanish Federation of Social Catering Associations (*Federación Española de Asociaciones Dedicadas a la Restauración Social*, FEADRS), which includes several regional federations. This federation does not intervene directly in collective bargaining, which takes place at the level of hotels and catering in general. The action of the federation focuses more on acting as a lobby of large companies in order to establish criteria on working conditions and other questions that affect their business: public contracts, health regulations, technological innovation, etc. It is associated with the European Federation of Contract Catering Organizations (FERCO).

4 A Sector marked by cost competition

The sector is dominated by fierce price competition because of its operational characteristics and the position of its clients.

The public sector, its main client, is under continuous pressure to cut costs, particularly since the economic crisis led to a sharp decrease in public sector income. Price pressure is particularly great in the health sector, because of increasing costs and the fact that meals are served free to patients. In the education sector, on the other hand, the meals are paid for by families and the cost must also include the wages of the staff who supervise the children during the meals and recreation. Many families find the cost of school meals to be an excessive burden, which they try to avoid in two ways: asking relatives (particularly grandparents) to feed and look after the children at midday, thus reducing the demand for services; or asking the authorities for the school meal subsidies which are available to parents on low incomes and without family support. The number of subsidies awarded has recently grown in some regions, particularly because of the massive influx of immigrants with low incomes and no family support. This has increased the need to reduce costs. In the private sector the cost is often born by the companies, so there is also pressure on prices.

Price competition may be reinforced by the fact that the product, daily meals, is very heterogeneous and it is therefore difficult to compare its quality. The price of the meal is therefore taken as the reference for controlling expenditure.

In catering there are four main cost items: Labour, food ingredients, energy and water. The last two are the most difficult for companies to control, at least in the short term, because in Spain they are controlled by oligopolistic structures that leave little room for manoeuvre. Labour and food ingredients are more subject to adjustment. Savings on ingredients can be made in several ways: reducing the quality and price of the products used; good purchasing management, which is easier the larger the firm is because larger firms can obtain better prices; and good management of the production process, particularly with a view to minimizing waste and optimizing the amounts used. Technological innovation is of prime importance here, and reinforces the more industrialized food preparation processes.

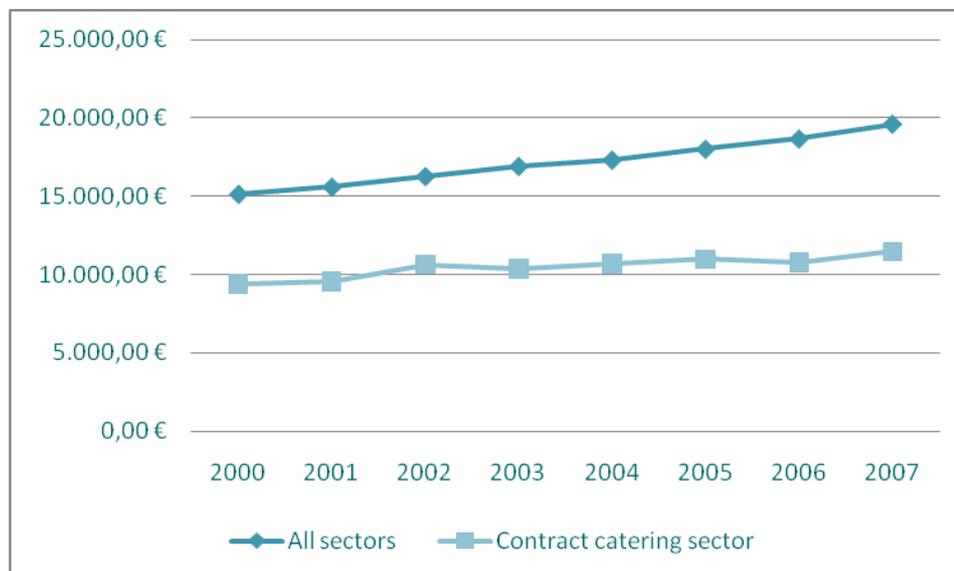
Although pressure on costs leads to a decrease in product quality and a worsening of working conditions, this trend is countered by another element. Catering serves a basic need for nutrition and has important implications for health. It is therefore subject to many controls to prevent problems arising from poor management. First and foremost these controls are aimed at avoiding food poisoning or similar problems. Attention is therefore paid to the cleanliness of facilities and equipment, food conservation, hygiene, and clothing. Nutritional aspects have recently also gained importance as a result of awareness that food has a long-term influence on health.

5 Working conditions

Hotels and catering is a typical secondary sector of employment. With the exception of the elite working at the top of the catering profession and the management staff, all jobs are at the low end of the labour market:

- Pay is low (Figure 2).
- The working days are among the longest and working times are socially undesirable: working at night and on weekends is common.
- There is much temporary and seasonal work, so annual income is low.
- There is much part-time work to deal with workloads at peak times: midday (in Spain lunch tends to be the main meal of the day), weekends and evenings, according to the type of restaurant or bar.
- Not surprisingly, there is some informal employment, particularly in small establishments and in functions catering.
- The working conditions in kitchens are hard because of the heat and the stress of peak activities.
- With the exception of top restaurants, the sector has a low level of professional recognition.

Figure 2 Average salary evolution (2000 – 2007)



Source: Encuesta Anual de Salarios – INE (2011)

Within this general framework of working conditions, the subsector of contract catering shows some improvements.

Employment is more stable than in Horeca in general. The subrogation system ensures continuity of employment when the company providing the service changes. In a sector with frequent changes in the companies contracted, this system ensures that employment is maintained. The fact that the public sector is the main client tends to reinforce fulfilment

of this regulation, because the public sector is stricter about application of the law and is also subject to greater social pressure: in cases of bankruptcy of companies contracted to provide service in a public workplace, the workers have pressured the corresponding public authorities to ensure fulfilment of subrogation by the new contractor.

There are some exceptions in which employment is not maintained or the situation is distorted. This happens when a service is first outsourced to an external company. In this case the situations vary greatly and the working conditions of the former public employees are often not maintained. For example, in the city of Barcelona the meals service of public nurseries was outsourced. The former public employees had the same holidays as the other workers of the service (seven weeks holiday in summer, from 15th July to 7 September, when the service was closed), whereas the employees of the outsourced service have a fixed-discontinuous contract. During the seven weeks they receive unemployment benefit corresponding to 70% of their base rate and they take their holidays during the other periods of closure of the facilities, at Christmas and Easter. They are discriminated against in comparison with the other workers in their workplace, who as municipal workers receive 100% of their pay when the facilities close.

When existing staff from other companies is accepted, the contracts are sometimes maintained under the previous agreement. This happens when the labour rights in the sector of the company outsourcing the service are worse than those of the hotels and catering sector. This is often the case in elderly care centres. The result is that some large contract catering companies have part of their workforce on different collective agreements (elderly care, cleaning and even education), which is another mechanism of discrimination.

The second area of difference between contract catering and Horeca in general concern working time. This is a very important issue for many workers. Though the times of contract catering vary greatly according to the workplace, they tend to be more regular and predictable. In many cases, such as schools, standard working hours are observed, with free time in the afternoons and at weekends.

In fact, even when the service is required at weekends, as in hospitals, the technological innovations introduced in food preparation, and especially in cold storage, minimize work on certain days. Though these technologies are designed to reduce costs, they have also offered better working times to the employees.

Another aspect is working conditions. In contract catering the work is more predictable and organized than in a restaurant, where the kitchen must adapt to the clients' orders. Most contract catering services offer a limited range of meals that are normally prepared beforehand. The flow of service is often also predictable because the clients have known habits. There is always some variability, such as special menus for hospitals or children, or a choice of meals in company canteens, but it is more easily manageable than in conventional restaurants.

The other difference is in the equipment used in the workplaces. In general large contract catering companies have specialized equipment that facilitates the work and avoids accidents. Hygiene is strictly controlled by the health regulations.

The pay and nature of the work in contract catering share common elements with general catering, with working conditions at the lower end. However, employment is more stable and working times are better than the sector average.

6 Effects of competitive pressure on working conditions

Though some working conditions in the contract catering subsector are better than those in hotels and catering as a whole, some aspects are worse. Part of the competitive pressure of the sector is transferred to working conditions, influencing the workload, professional recognition, pay and the introduction of technological and organization changes.

Pressure on working time occurs at different levels of the occupational structure of all contract catering firms, depending on the size and characteristics of the firm. In large workplaces such as large company canteens and universities the normal structure includes the centre manager, a chef, an assistant chef, kitchen assistants and table staff. The division of work increases with the complexity of the service offered. For example, in some workplaces the companies also manage a bar, which requires dedicated staff. In others the variety of meals and the amount of preparation involve specialization, which means that some staff must be devoted exclusively to dishwashing and cleaning kitchen utensils. In schools the table service includes supervision of children. In some schools the cooking is done in the workplace and in others only the final preparation and serving are done in the workplace (in the latter case the food is transported from the kitchens to the restaurants in heated cabinets). In smaller workplaces, such as nurseries and small elderly care homes, the team consists only of a cook and a kitchen assistant because the meals are served by the staff of the centres. The number of employees in each workplace is determined by the workload.

There are several key areas in which this pressure is most evident. One of these is that of the staff occupying the highest posts in the workplace (the centre manager, chef or cook, as applicable), who cover a wide range of tasks, including coordinating and controlling all the activity of the workplace and many administrative tasks. The administrative workload has increased for two reasons. First, cost control policies lead to the need for strict control of consumption, stocks, etc. Second, there is a greater need for health control and process traceability. The increase in administrative tasks often leads the persons in charge of workplaces to work longer hours, which they accept because of their position as middle managers. However, some of their normal workload is often transferred to their immediate subordinates, who transfer work successively downward.

Another key area in the assignation of the workload is that of the dining room assistant category. The collective agreement defines restaurant assistants as functionally flexible

workers who can perform elementary food handling, serve tables, clean and supervise. This category has a very low basic wage, so the increase in workload can be dealt with at a far lower cost. Companies find it easy to employ workers in this category because of the poor definition of job categories and the low level of professional recognition. In fact, companies are able to decide the categories of each employee unilaterally, because there is no formal negotiated procedure for determining categories and access to each category is not subject to professional accreditation. Companies are only obliged to provide basic training in two areas: health and safety, and food handling. This training is provided by the companies themselves.

The functional flexibility of workers at the lower professional levels is not exclusive to contract catering. In fact, this subject arose repeatedly in the interviews with the representatives of the employers and trade union leaders of the sector. For the employers functional flexibility is the central issue in bargaining in the sector. They consider it necessary and call for the discretionary powers to establish incentives for employees with functional flexibility. The trade unions claim that functional flexibility is common to most medium-sized and small restaurants, where the difference between cooking staff and cleaning staff has become blurred and kitchen assistants often perform complex tasks without receiving professional recognition for it.

In the contract catering subsector kitchen assistants represent the majority of employees, so low pay is predominant. This situation is aggravated by the fact that in some workplaces (especially schools) part-time work is predominant because meals are only served at midday. Income is thus low because of a combination of low hourly pay and few hours of work. In other workplaces, such as health centres, workers are employed full-time and the main concern is the socially undesirable working times—especially weekend work.

Technological changes have been introduced in kitchen operations in recent years. First, there is greater use of pre-cooked or prepared ingredients (clean and cut vegetables, sliced meats, etc.). This change is related to the expansion of the food industry and the development of freezing and washing of vegetables in the agriculture sector. Second, new cooling systems allow for better conservation of food and make it easier to cook meals before the service is provided.

These two changes have major advantages for employers. They favour cost control and standardized processes: use of exact quantities of goods, controlled waste disposal, standardization of food preparation, quality control, more predictable process organization and better time management. They also reduce peak work times because refrigeration allows meals to be cooked outside mealtimes and according to standardized work plans. The staff necessary at times of service is thus reduced to the workers needed for the final preparation. In short, new technologies allow savings in staff and materials.

For the workers the impact of technological change is mixed. Greater industrialization of the process has a potentially negative effect on employment. The use of precooked ingredients reduces the number of tasks and the peak workloads. It also reduces the professional requirements, because parts of the processes are eliminated and the cooking

procedures are concentrated in simple and clearly prescribed operations. The call for functional flexibility is thus coherent with what could be called a Taylorist development of employment. The introduction of refrigeration allows a more compact working day and therefore favours the reduction of jobs at socially undesirable times by limiting them to those that are strictly necessary for the final service. This situation varies according to the subsector.

The same technological development is also seen in other catering subsectors, in which large restaurant chains are increasingly using precooked products, refrigeration as a means to conserve food and reorganize working time, and central kitchens. To some extent the fast-food model is thus being extended to more sophisticated sectors of consumption.

In recent years new levels of qualified staff have also been observed in contract catering firms. Some companies have employed dieticians with university degrees to meet the new demands for healthy diets. However, the presence of these high-ranking employees does not affect the professional qualifications of the remaining staff. On the contrary, it seems that cost control and technological change is reducing control of the work process of qualified kitchen staff.

7 Prospects for change

Low pay, lack of professional recognition and socially undesirable working times are predominant in the hotels and catering sector. In the contract catering subsector the problem of working time is slightly less important. In many cases the working conditions are hard, particularly with regard to heat, stress at peak times and heavy work such as cleaning of utensils. Technological changes have palliated some of these problems but not others. The demand for function flexibility seems to be aimed at increasing the discretionary powers of companies rather than increasing professional qualification. The budget restrictions of clients reinforce these tendencies by making price competition a major factor in the sector.

There are few possibilities for a change in trend. Efforts should be aimed at achieving a stricter definition of professional requirements and recognition of real qualifications to establish a clearer professional category for kitchen assistants, for example. However, it does not seem likely that this will be possible in the near future.

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Annex: List of Stakeholders

MEL	Trade Union Contract Catering sector delegate (UTG)
JAB	Trade Union Contract Catering sector delegate (CCOO)
JMT	Hostel and Restaurants Employer Association Sub-director (Gremi der Restauració de Barcelona)