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Invisible Workers

Quality of employment in the cleaning sector in Spain

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Introduction

Our study focuses on the cleaning of buildings and premises, a completely separate sector from that of street cleaning, although some large business groups are present in both.

Building cleaning includes a wide variety of subsectors:

- cleaning of public and private offices
- cleaning of homes and condominiums
- cleaning of facilities: hospitals and educational establishments
- cleaning of industrial buildings
- cleaning of transport hubs: railway stations and airports

In Spain, the business sector covers all these activities with the exception of home cleaning, which is carried out in three main ways: housework, servants and informal workers. The number of workers in full-time and part-time domestic employment is large and has increased even further in recent years. It is mainly associated with the care of elderly people combined with additional tasks such as house cleaning. Families with low incomes do not recruit staff. Informal work is quite widespread in middle-class families, who tend to contract workers informally to do housework by the hour. Part-time workers often use this type of work as a means to supplement the family income. The workers are mainly local women, but some foreign women are also employed. Private companies are contracted by condominiums to clean the communal spaces of apartment blocks. However, in working class areas this is also done by the neighbours themselves or through informal recruitment.

Building cleaning is mainly a private sector and the public sector is almost totally absent. This is due to the late development of public facilities which occurred simultaneously with the crisis of the public management model. Both factors led public authorities to outsource services to the Spanish business sector right from the start, thus creating a sector specialising in building cleaning. Only in street cleaning are there still some municipally-owned public companies, but they are beyond the scope of this study.

In the last decade the sector has experienced a considerable expansion, largely associated with the general economic growth. All facilities need to be cleaned, and the increase in the number of facilities has led to an expansion of employment in the sector. This expansion can be observed in the data provided by the Survey of the Active Population conducted by the National Statistics Institute (Table 1).

Table 1 Employment development in the cleaning sector (2000-2010)

| Year | INE Data (Government) | | UGT Data (Union) | |
|------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| | Employment increase (thousands) | Last year variation (%) | Employment increase (thousands) | Last year variation (%) |
| 2000 | 359.0 | - | - | - |
| 2001 | 383.4 | 6.8 | 256.1 | - |
| 2002 | 403.1 | 5.1 | 289.1 | 9.1 |
| 2003 | 431 | 6.9 | 299.2 | 3.5 |
| 2004 | 456.9 | 6.0 | 333.0 | 10.9 |
| 2005 | 487.3 | 4.5 | 361.7 | 8.6 |
| 2006 | 526.2 | 8.0 | 386.5 | 6.6 |
| 2007 | 564.1 | 9.1 | 431.6 | 11.7 |
| 2008 | 565.8 | 0.2 | 477.7 | 13.8 |
| 2009 | 549.2 | -2.9 | 449.7 | -5.8 |
| 2010 | 540.5 | -1.5 | 436.0 | -3.1 |

Source: 1. INE Encuesta Población Activa; 2. UGT Análisis del Sector Limpieza 2011.

Cleaners are included in the category of “Building maintenance and gardening”, which also obviously includes building maintenance and gardening workers. Column 3 includes an UGT estimate (2011) drawn up for cleaning workers only. Both series show a steady growth in employment in the sector until 2008 and a drop in 2009-2010, though a gentler one than that experienced by the entire labour market. This indicates two things: a) cleaning work expanded over the two stages of expansion of the building stock; and b) once the building stock had been formed, employment tended to persist over time as a structural activity within building maintenance. If the estimate of staff working strictly in cleaning is correct, the sample indicates a greater increase in cleaning activities than in overall maintenance activities (cleaning rose from 66% of the sector in 2001 to 80% in 2010).

Employment in the sector is clearly feminised. According to UGT estimates, 76% of employees in the sector are women. In cleaning, women account for 78.6% of employees, compared with 64.4% in all building maintenance activities. Employment in the sector accounts for 4% of total female employment, which means that the sector employs 1 in 25 employed women.

The education level of workers is medium to low: Almost 30% of employees only have primary or incomplete education, compared to 62% who have secondary education and 7-8% who have a higher education. Current data sources do not allow us to gauge the impact of recent immigrants on the sector. According to the 2001 census, immigrants accounted for 6.2% of the total, but the enormous subsequent inflow and the growth of employment in the sector mean that the current figure can be expected to be above 10%

The business structure of the sector is highly diversified. According to the Business Directory of the INE, 25,700 companies with a wide range of sizes were active in the sector in 2010 (Table 2). Over 10,000 of these companies had no employees, which could indicate self-employed individuals. 463 companies had over 100 workers and only 40 employed more than 1,000. The large companies operated at a national level whereas the rest were small, local companies.

Table 2 Size of cleaning companies (1999-2009), in %

| Number of employees | Year | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
| 0 | 40.37 | 39.86 | 39.44 | 38.59 | 38.48 | 37.31 | 37.72 | 37.39 | 37.62 | 40.47 | 39.04 |
| 1 to 2 | 21.73 | 20.16 | 19.93 | 19.44 | 19.49 | 22.37 | 22.53 | 22.21 | 22.66 | 22.02 | 22.56 |
| 3 to 5 | 11.11 | 11.59 | 11.79 | 11.85 | 11.77 | 11.60 | 11.47 | 11.94 | 12.26 | 11.91 | 12.49 |
| 6 to 9 | 7.24 | 7.19 | 7.55 | 7.77 | 7.93 | 8.18 | 8.43 | 8.72 | 8.36 | 7.79 | 8.12 |
| 10 to 19 | 7.59 | 8.16 | 10.99 | 11.59 | 11.78 | 10.97 | 10.58 | 10.67 | 10.60 | 10.00 | 10.18 |
| 20 to 49 | 6.64 | 7.46 | 5.18 | 5.32 | 5.24 | 4.68 | 4.49 | 4.51 | 4.24 | 3.91 | 3.81 |
| 50 to 99 | 2.48 | 2.57 | 2.35 | 2.36 | 2.21 | 2.06 | 1.88 | 1.93 | 1.70 | 1.61 | 1.61 |
| 100 to 199 | 1.44 | 1.55 | 1.30 | 1.49 | 1.47 | 1.34 | 1.44 | 1.28 | 1.19 | 1.09 | 1.14 |
| 200 to 499 | 0.96 | 0.96 | 0.99 | 1.10 | 1.07 | 0.97 | 0.96 | 0.91 | 0.94 | 0.80 | 0.66 |
| 500 to 999 | 0.30 | 0.33 | 0.33 | 0.30 | 0.32 | 0.31 | 0.30 | 0.26 | 0.24 | 0.23 | 0.22 |
| 1,000 to 4,999 | 0.13 | 0.13 | 0.11 | 0.16 | 0.19 | 0.17 | 0.14 | 0.14 | 0.15 | 0.14 | 0.14 |
| 5,000 to +5,000 | 0.01 | 0.02 | 0.03 | 0.02 | 0.04 | 0.04 | 0.04 | 0.04 | 0.03 | 0.03 | 0.03 |

Source: Directorio central de empresas (INE).

This differentiation between large and small companies is reflected in the membership in business organisations. The large companies are members of the Professional Association of Cleaning Companies (*Asociación Profesional de Empresas de Limpieza, ASPEL*), whereas the rest are members of local or regional organisations represented at national level in the Federated Association of Cleaning Companies (*Asociación Federada de Empresas de Limpieza, AFELIN*).

ASPEL has 16 member companies, the largest ones in the sector, and many of them members of powerful national or international groups. This is the case of the subsidiaries of the large Spanish construction groups (business groups that combine public works with the provision of public services and energy production). These include Clece (a subsidiary of ACS), Fomento de Obras y Construcciones (FCC), Acciona, Valoriza (a subsidiary of Sacyr), Ingesan (a subsidiary of OHL) and Aldesa. Others are subsidiaries of foreign

groups such as ISS (with Danish capital), Onet España and Samic Ibérica (with French capital). The rest are private Spanish companies that have reached a high level of activity: Eulen (a diversified service group), Limpisa (part of the Norte group, which arose from the splitting up of Eulen), Cliner, Eurolimp, Lacera, Saminsa and Pilsa (a subsidiary of the ONCE, a semi-public non-profit organisation that is funded through lotteries and spends much of its income on providing services to blind people). AFELIN has 31 regional or provincial member associations that represent most companies in the sector.

The worker representation in the sector is exercised 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 (CCOO) and the General Workers' Confederation (UGT). CCOO is a trade union organisation formed from clandestine organisations that began to be 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. Cleaning-sector members form part of the Federation of Diverse Activities, which represents all employees of auxiliary or subcontracted activities.

The UGT is a Socialist trade union with a history of over 100 years. During the dictatorship, its organisation 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. The reorganisation processes of recent years have led to a concentration of these federations. Cleaning workers form part of the Service Federation, which has leaders specialized in the sector. There are many other trade unions at national (USO, CGT) and regional level (ELA-STV and LAB in Euskadi, CIG in Galicia), but these have little presence in the sector. A revision of all the collective agreements of the sector only revealed the participation of ELA and LAB in two agreements of the Basque Country and the participation of the CIG in the agreement of the province of Lugo. The rest were negotiated exclusively by CCOO and the UGT.

In fact, due to the dispersion of jobs and the fragmentation of companies, the cleaning sector is one of low membership and difficult for the trade unions to organise. In Spain, two areas of trade union representation are operative, i.e. the two electoral colleges (manual workers, and office and technical staff) chosen by all the workers of a company. The workers' committees represent the workers in relations with the company. They are normally chosen from electoral lists put forward by the trade unions, and the places on the committee are assigned according to the votes obtained by each list. Only companies of over 50 workers have a representative committee, whereas in those with over 20 workers' delegates can be elected. However, in companies employing fewer than 50 workers it is quite common to have no trade union representation at all. The results obtained by each trade union in the company elections are used to calculate their representation at sectoral level and to determine whether the trade union is a "representative" one: i.e. the number of delegates obtained in each company allows it to obtain a given number of representatives in the workers' representation at provincial and national level. Only CCOO and the UGT have this sectoral representativeness at provincial or national level.

1 Actors and regulation of working conditions

As stated above, the main actors in the sector are two federations of employers and two trade unions. ASPEL has 40% of the representativeness on the bargaining commission and AFELIN has 60%. For the trade unions, CCOO has 55% of the representativeness on the bargaining commission and the UGT has 45%. In CCOO, the Federation of Diverse Activities deals with matters concerning the cleaning sector and in the UGT the Service Federation does so.

The main regulatory agreement at national level is the “National Framework Agreement of the Sector of Cleaning of Buildings and Premises”¹ signed in 2005, which regulates the basic working conditions in the sector and proposes the basis for the collective agreements in each region or province. The main aspects dealt with in both the framework agreement and the regional agreements are the following:

Subrogation

To analyse the regulation of the sector, one must bear in mind that the contracts are awarded through public competitions. Public and private organisations that need to use cleaning services for a given workplace must periodically organise calls for tenders. Interested companies present their tenders and the contract for cleaning the premises is awarded. The right to subrogation or assignation of staff guarantees that the workers of the cleaning services will remain in their jobs if the contracted company changes. This principle is compulsory and minimises the impact of changes in contract on the job stability of workers.

As in the sector of building cleaning labour costs make up 80-85% of total costs, in a normal scenario the first measure for cutting costs would be to reduce the workforce. Subrogation removes this possibility. The employers claim that they are forced to maintain the workers and to reduce the prices of the cleaning services, thus reducing profits (the public administration is the largest client of cleaning services). AFELIN claims that this situation pushes firms to failing to perform the agreed services, leading to deteriorating service quality. The trade unions, on the other hand, see subrogation as an accomplishment but are cautious about its consequences, such as an increase in part-time work.

Classification of professional categories

Within companies the workers are divided into the following groups, subgroups and professional categories:

- Group I: Management staff and graduate technical staff
 - Subgroup 1: Management staff
 - Subgroup 2: Graduate technical staff
- Group II: Administrative staff

¹ Acuerdo Marco Estatal del Sector de Limpieza de Edificios y Locales (BOE 14 September 2005).

- Group III: Middle management
- Group IV: Subordinate staff
- Group V: Manual workers
- Group VI: Multi-function staff

This classification reveals a certain hierarchy from “greater” to “lesser” in terms of both social prestige and pay. As cleaning is a labour-intensive sector, most of its employees are found in the manual workers group (90%), followed by management and technical staff (8%) and administrative staff (2%).² Among manual workers there are four professional categories:

Specialists: The functions of this category tend to focus on the use of machinery and special equipment. Workers in this category tend to work in areas that need special cleaning, such as factories and hospitals, and include staff who operate floor polishers.

Specialised hands: These clean the windows of buildings, for which they sometimes need to know how to use cranes.

Cleaners: The main function of these workers is to clean a wide range of buildings and premises. It is assumed that the working instruments used are of a domestic type and/or are easy to handle.

Driver-cleaners: These workers carry out the dual function of driving and cleaning. Men tend to account for a majority of specialists and specialised hands (85% and 65% respectively), who receive better pay according to the regional agreements. Most jobs, however, are in the category of cleaners, 90% of whom are women (2008 figures).

Pay

The Framework Agreement does not lay down a specific basic wage, which is the competence of the regional collective agreements. However, it does specify that there must be a basic wage (by category and unit of time) plus a series of wage components such as seniority, danger, night-work and overtime. Basic pay in the different agreements ranges between €600 and €990 per month. In Catalonia, for example, the average gross wage is €916 for a 40-hour week. The trade unions are fighting to attain a wage of €1,000 per month.

Working time

The situation with working time is similar to the payment situation. The framework agreement lays down a maximum of 40 hours per week on average. Subject to this limit, each agreement establishes specific working times. The average agreed working time is 38.5 hours per week. However, one must bear in mind that 70% of cleaning workers work part-time, usually 20 hours per week. Rather than a voluntary personal initiative, this situation stems from the cuts established by the companies in the sector. As they are not able to dismiss workers because of subrogation (see above), they tend to reduce their

² *Análisis del Sector Limpieza 2011*. Gabinete de Estudios de FeS-UGT.

working time. Another common practice is to recruit workers on part-time contracts and pay them overtime to do a full working day, which also reduces wage costs.

Promotion

Advancement and promotion are regulated by Article 39 of the Workers' Statute (1980), which refers to questions of functional mobility in general, including regulations to preserve the dignity of workers. The Framework Agreement makes no specifications on this subject. The regional agreements do, in general, refer to promotion, defining it literally as "advancement". It is agreed that, among manual workers, internal promotion will take into account seniority and technical capacity (this is the case of the agreement in Catalonia³). In practice, however, cleaners are reluctant to be promoted to specialised hands because this change of jobs involves continual movement between different buildings and premises while cleaners tend to settle in their workplaces.

Sexual harassment

The Framework Agreement classifies sexual, moral or psychological harassment as serious offences but does not define them further. The regional agreements do deal with the subject of sexual harassment, clearly defining the situations in which sexual harassment takes place between employees of the cleaning company. They not only refer to sexual behaviours but also to attitudes that have a sexual intention after the person who is the object of the harassment has shown signs of rejection. Fewer agreements mention moral or psychological harassment, and those that do focus on verbal and behavioural abuse. These are considered very serious offences and the measures adopted include geographic relocation of the affected worker within the company and dismissal of the harasser. The clear feminisation of the sector in the lower categories and the masculinisation of the higher categories have made it necessary to regulate this subject. The occupations in the sector suffer from a great lack of social prestige. In addition there are groups at risk among female cleaners, such as divorcees and immigrants, who may be subject to harassment more easily or with impunity. There is a need for more preventive measures against harassment instead of merely punitive ones.

Health and safety at work

Because the sector is highly feminised, some emphasis is placed on facilitating cleaning functions in cases of pregnancy. However, there is no mention of changing functions for this purpose. The general measures for preserving health and safety at work are based mainly on safety codes, suitable health and safety training for workers and penalties for those who fail to meet the regulations. Despite the differences between trade unions and employers, the precarious situation of the sector has led them to create a common organ of understanding and analysis that is outside the bargaining commission but makes use of social dialogue. The National Observatory of the Sector of Cleaning of Buildings and Premises (Observatorio Estatal del Sector de Limpieza de Edificios y Locales) created in

³ Convenio Colectivo de Limpiezas de Edificios y Locales (DOGC, 13 January 2006).

mid-2010, has the goal of analysing, evaluating and drawing up reports and proposals on all subjects relevant to the better functioning of the sector, and in particular on the rationalisation and articulation of regulatory collective bargaining. To some extent, both AFELIN and CCOO see public administration as the common enemy of the sector because by reducing budgets for auxiliary services it forces cuts. Both parties fight to raise the sector's prestige by improving the social recognition of the work done by cleaners. The Framework Agreement itself fails to recognize the social role of cleaners, by defining the category as follows:

“Workers who, manually with traditional instruments or with easily handled electrical and mechanical instruments considered as of domestic use though of greater power, carry out tasks of mopping, dusting, brushing, polishing of floors, ceilings, walls, furniture, etc., in premises, enclosures and places, and of glazing, doors, windows from the inside or shop windows, without these tasks requiring more than due attention and the desire to carry out instructions by using mainly physical strength.”

First, the instruments and tasks to be carried out are categorised as domestic, which means that the workers do not need training. This categorisation has two implications: that the work is clearly female in nature and that women already know how to do domestic tasks such as cleaning. It is curious that the regulatory text insists in using the terms “limpiador” and “limpiadora” (the masculine and feminine words for “cleaner” in Spanish), whereas in other categories in which men are a majority they simply use the masculine word.

2 An invisible activity: Characteristics and consequences

An essential aspect of cleaning stressed by all the actors interviewed is that, despite its importance, it is a fundamentally “invisible” activity. The representatives of both trade unions and employers agree on this point (Figure 1).

Figure 1 The invisibility of the task (quotes)

| |
|---|
| <p>AO (Cleaning officer of UGT)</p> <p><i>“It’s not seen if everything is clean. It’s seen as something to be done by the cleaning lady, not as a job for society.”</i></p> |
| <p>JG (CCOO leader)</p> <p><i>“They don’t want the cleaning lady working at the same time as the rest. They don’t want them to be visible. In general, they are not seen.”</i></p> |
| <p>MP (employers’ advisor)</p> <p><i>“Cleaning does not exist except when it is not there. ... When it’s clean it doesn’t exist, it has no value.”</i></p> |
| <p>Study by ACITE (based on interviews with companies)</p> <p><i>“It’s curious that such a vital service for the correct functioning of our daily life has so little social value. In fact, it is only valued when the service is absent.”</i></p> |

This social invisibility can be explained by the convergence of several elements:

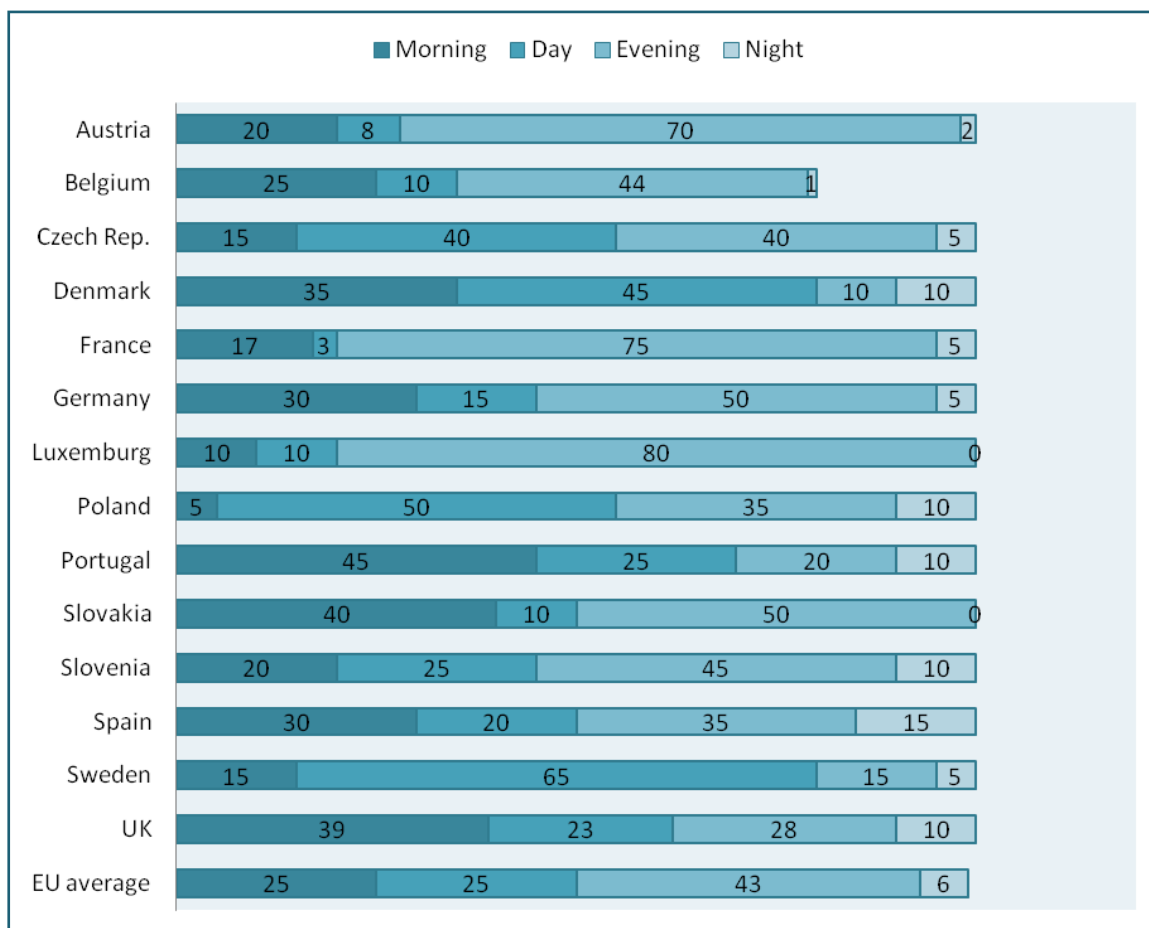
- **It is a feminized activity:** Cleaning is seen as an extension of housework, which is traditionally carried out by women. In fact, in the surveys carried out on the distribution of housework, cleaning is always an activity in which women have a special involvement. The feminisation and domesticity of cleaning work mean that it is perceived as a common activity that requires little or no skill and is a mere extension of women's daily life.
- **It is an auxiliary activity:** Cleaning is an activity necessary for the proper functioning of installations and facilities but it does not form part of the core activities of companies and public services. It involves a general cost that is necessary but it is not integrated in the company's core activities. Perhaps the main exception is found in the health sector, where cleaning has the essential function of guaranteeing aseptic conditions in hospitals and health centres, often requiring tasks of cleaning inter-related with care. In all other activities cleaning is an inevitable task but far removed from the normal operations.
- **It is an activity that interferes with the normal functioning of companies and services:** Cleaning often prevents the normal functioning of the activities of companies and public services. Therefore, it is often scheduled to not coincide with the company's normal business activities, and is invisible to the other members of the institutions.

These basic characteristics have a series of consequences that explain the functioning of the sector:

1. The **feminisation** of the sector leads to the consideration that cleaning is an **unskilled job** for which any woman immediately meets professional requirements. Therefore **no specialized vocational training or procedures for recognizing professional qualification are available**. Although it is known that not all people perform tasks with the same level of extra quality, this is never recognized or included in professional qualification plans, because the activity is lost in the limbo of unskilled activities that anyone, particularly women, can do.
2. The need to adapt cleaning times to the working times of companies leads to a **proliferation of atypical working times**. This is not a deterministic situation: In fact the variety of cleaning processes and institutions and the variety of production processes allow for a wide range of solutions with regard to the use of time. But in many cases these processes involve the proliferation of special working times. Cleaners work at times in which the normal services are not operative, so working time tends to move outside the central hours towards the early morning or late evening. Spain seems to be one of the European countries in which these polarized working hours at either end of the day are most common (Figure 2). It is not clear whether this is a question of tradition in the use of time or a choice related to business management models.
3. This polarization of working hours at certain times of the day may explain the importance of part-time contracts to ensure coverage of these peak times. Another explanation may be related to the fragmentation of tasks, especially in the cleaning of small premises such as small offices, shops (including banks and shop franchises) and the staircases of condominiums. There are, however, signs that in

some cases part-time recruitment is used as a mechanism to reduce labour costs because part-time contracts ensure that employers conform with labour regulations and at the same time avoid part of the cost: the workers will do a normal working day, but will only be covered for part of it.

Figure 2 Working times in the cleaning industry (2005)



Source: Eurostat (2005).

Personal isolation often goes hand in hand with these atypical working times, especially in the cleaning of small buildings. The employees work alone without any contact with workmates or workers of the company or institution they are cleaning. This isolation adds to the individualisation of working conditions because of its psychological effects, health and safety problems (possibility of accidents when workers are alone) and the difficulty of trade union action. Of course, not all cleaning workers experience the same type of isolation, but it is clear that many of them do.

An important question that arises from the combination of feminisation and unusual working hours is the much-debated subject of work-life balance. The way this question has been formulated in Spain, it tends to be reduced to the work-life balance of women. In theory, part-time work is a mechanism for facilitating work-life balance, but in practice the question is far more complicated. Many of the

available jobs have working times that adapt poorly to the needs of family life. Some part-time jobs therefore have two elements that are unattractive: low pay and socially undesirable working hours. This may explain why some women prefer informal domestic cleaning, which often offers more pay in hand and greater possibilities for managing their working time.

Isolation and varied working times also lead to a profound individualisation of labour relations, which explains the low trade union membership in the sector. The exceptions are some large workplaces (e.g. hospitals), in which collective action is more feasible.

4. Procurers of cleaning services aim to keep reducing the costs of services:

This has been especially true since cost reduction for competitiveness has formed part of business strategies. Auxiliary services always tend to play a more immediate role in cost reduction policies because they are seen as secondary to core activities. To a great extent, the outsourcing strategies introduced in the 1980s were based on this mechanism to reduce costs, and the auxiliary services that do not form part of the value chain or the central service have since then been the focus of such policies. Initially this strategy was introduced in private companies for auxiliary activities and later for other stages of the production process.

Outsourcing was later extended to the public sector, which is always subject to budget limitations and has recently seen its efficiency questioned. The response of public-sector managers has been to generalise outsourcing and to reduce costs. In fact, cleaning services in the public sector are awarded in a process of public tendering, in which the cost of the service plays an essential part in determining the company that wins the contract. Political managers may be accused of misappropriation if they fail to follow this rule. This emphasis on cost reinforces pressure on prices for companies, who, in turn, pass it on to the workers. The feminisation of the sector facilitates this downward pressure because this workforce is unrecognized in terms of skills.

3 Working conditions marked by business competition

All actors agree that the market situation directly influences the working conditions in the sector. This is mainly because labour costs represent 80% of the total cost and there is therefore a direct relationship between labour costs and competition. There is some segmentation of activities but in all the segments pressure to reduce prices is felt. Because of the technological conditions it is possible for large and medium-sized companies to enter market segments previously occupied by small companies. Micro-companies are normally concentrated in services to condominiums and small businesses, the least attractive market segments, and it is not surprising that they adopt informal practices (uncontrolled overtime, use of part-time contracts with overtime, etc.). However, the main business is in services to large companies and the public sector. In this field the competition is quite fierce and unequal because large companies have several advantages:

- Large companies have financial potential, which is especially important for public contracts (30% of the market). They have financial resources and access to the capital market which allows them to deal with late payments by their clients. They thus help to finance their clients.
- Facility Management or outsourcing of the full management of facilities is growing in the public administration and in some private companies. The full management of buildings (cleaning, security, maintenance and management of supplies) is handed over to a company (in the public sector for periods of up to 30 years). The large corporations have a set of specialised subsidiaries able to offer full management or to carry it out through subcontracting, involving new cost pressure for the second-level companies. This strategy is common in companies linked to construction groups because the contract is often associated with the construction and financing of a facility in a full-cycle model.
- In the awarding of contracts by public tender the cost of services is the most decisive element, forcing companies to submit ever lower bids.
- A new competitor has appeared recently: occupational companies formed by persons who have some type of disability. These companies have a separate tax and labour status outside collective agreements. Some regional or local authorities prefer contracting these companies as a policy to fight social discrimination. The other companies regard this practice as subverting the market because the lower costs of these companies allow them to force normal companies out of the market. They believe that the legal provisions (LISMI) requiring all companies to employ 2% of staff with disabilities are better suited to improve competition and integration than the special treatment of occupational companies. This is yet another element that creates pressure on costs.
- In the past two years the economic crisis has led to new tension in Spain. As seen in Section 1, employment in the sector has fallen as a result of the adjustments of the private sector (company closures, restructuring, etc.). This is especially important in the financial sector because for example the restructuring of the enormous network of bank branches has led to the downsizing of a large subsector. The massive cuts in public spending have been important because the public sector is the most important client of the sector.

These competitive pressures are absorbed by the companies in two main ways. One, as mentioned above, affects the working conditions of staff employed in the sector; the other, more subtle, strategy is failing to fulfil parts of the cleaning contracts. These contracts normally include a list of activities that the company agrees to perform (type and frequency of actions); failing to fulfil them means not doing some of these tasks (for example by reducing the frequency). This is only possible because of the above-mentioned “invisibility” and the spatial limitation of cleaning tasks: the client is often unable (or simply unwilling) to evaluate the degree of fulfilment of the contract. Of course, some parts of the cleaning process lend themselves to control more easily than others, so the reduction of service is concentrated in the least visible activities.

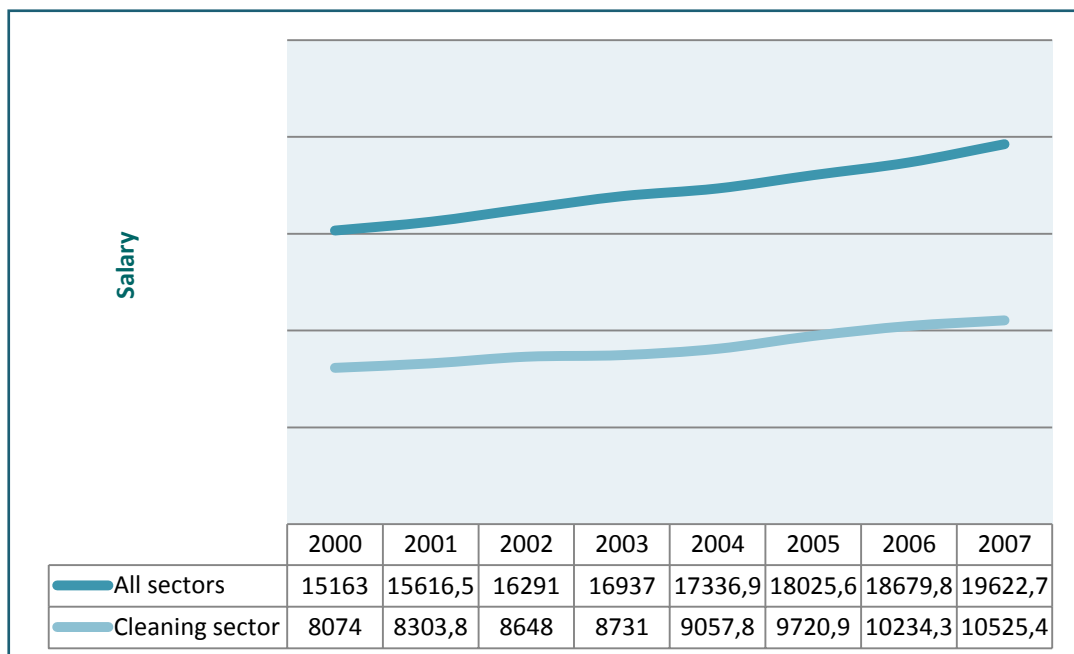
4 Working conditions: Main questions

The main quality factor characterising employment in the sector is **employment stability**, which is ensured by the mechanism of subrogation (described in Section 2). This mechanism protects the workers from job instability caused by the periodical shifting of contracts between companies by guaranteeing continuity in employment when the contracting company changes. As the sectoral collective agreements govern the entire sector, the change of company does not involve changes in the terms of the employment contract, though the forms of management of each company can influence daily working life. However, stability is not universal. Companies in the sector can also use temporary contracts to cover peak demands or to avoid a surplus workforce because of the changing terms of contract demanded by their clients. The UGT has estimated that temporary employment represents nearly 25% of employment in the sector, which would place it at the Spanish average - a very high level. Temporary workers are not protected by subrogation when the contracted companies change. The reduction in the amount of services required by some clients (particularly in the financial sector) has led to a new type of problem. When a client reduces service requirements, the first mechanism of adjustment is the termination of temporary contracts, but if the need for adjustment is pronounced, the working conditions of permanent staff may also change for the worse if they are forced to rotate between more jobs. This is not very important in the case of employees in large facilities but it does have major effects for those who clean branch offices because it may lead to new mobility problems (having to go to new workplaces that are further apart, involving greater travelling time that is not always compensated by working hours).

The price of stability is **low pay**. With the exception of management and some male “professions” (window cleaning and floor polishing), most workers are in the category of cleaners, and almost all of these are women. Pay varies considerably depending on the provincial agreement but, with the exception of the province of Guipuzcoa (located in the region of Spain with highest pay), the basic wage is about €608-916 per month for a working week of 38-48 hours (Table 3).

In Catalonia, where we did our research, there is a single regional agreement covering the agreements of the four provinces. The single agreement states that pay will gradually be adjusted to the highest level, i.e. the Tarragona agreement stipulating a basic wage of €916 per month, with 13 monthly payments (in Barcelona and Girona the basic wage is €759.35 and in Lleida it is €720.78). The trade unions have spoken of demanding a basic wage of €1000 but this seems unlikely to be achieved in the short term. Some supplements are added to the basic wage, the main one being linked to seniority: there is a small pay rise every three or four years depending on the collective agreement, but at present there is a tendency to freeze this amount or to eliminate it in the future. Other supplements are related to working nights and on weekends and to dangerous working conditions (mostly affecting window cleaners and those who use special products).

Table 3 Wage average (2000-2007)



Source: Encuesta Anual de Servicios (INE).

A problem associated with low pay is the proliferation of **part-time work** and **shorter working days**. A high percentage of workers in the sector work less than a full working day. Contracts of 4, 5 or 6 hours per day are common and involve a proportional reduction in pay. This factor may reinforce the feminisation of the sector because such contracts are not attractive for principal breadwinners of a family. A CCOO leader told us that there was a major difference between the sectors of building cleaning and street cleaning. The latter is far more organised, with higher pay (€1,200) and a predominance of full-time contracts. It is a sector that is attractive to many people and has a predominance of male employees, whereas people end up working in building cleaning only if they fail to find a better job.

The justification of part-time employment as a “second wage” of the family is countered by increasing evidence that many women working in the sector do not form part of the traditional model of “housewife/part-time worker” but wish to be autonomous. In cleaning they fail to earn sufficient income and it is not surprising that many supplement their incomes with informal work.

The reduction of working hours has recently been aggravated by two factors. The main one is the financial and economic crisis and the resulting reduction in business activity. Instead of laying off employees, companies often resort to reducing their staffs contractual working hours, sometimes even without consulting the workers. The workers usually accept these changes because they want to keep their jobs but the pay is so low that it is an insufficient income. The second factor is the reduction imposed by the demands of the clients, who do not wish cleaning hours to coincide with their normal working hours. This factor also leads to a shortening of the working day. The representative of the UGT interviewed told us of a case that exemplifies this situation:

“Last year there was a pitiful case at the University of Girona. There are almost 100 people working there. They work from 5 to 9 a.m. The lecturers didn’t want to meet the cleaning ladies so it was decided that the shift would be from 4 to 8 a.m. The earlier time was not only more unpleasant for the workers, it meant that no public transport was available. We protested, but because the ladies were afraid and the supervisor used her influence, the workers agreed to the change voluntarily. The 32 workers who did not sign were a minority. I think this is terrible”.

This does not seem to be exceptional. In our own university we were told of a similar situation in a debate on subcontracting at the university (the original working day of 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. was changed to 6 to 10 a.m., with the resulting reduction in working hours and pay). As in the previous case, the reason for the change was that the lecturers did not want to coincide with the cleaning staff. This may not be widespread but it seems to be quite common.

Only in hospitals do things seem to be slightly better. Some workers even get bonuses for cleaning specialised equipment. However, there is an excessive proliferation of short-term jobs. There is also covert wage discrimination between men and women. Male jobs, particularly those of floor polishers, are not particularly difficult, but they are placed in a different category to justify the pay difference.

The particular working hours applied in the sector raise another important question: with this type of working time, to what extent is part-time work a suitable mechanism for work-life balance? The concentration of working hours at either end of the working day may in fact involve a problem for work-life balance because most family duties are concentrated in these times. This is especially problematic in Spain, where public personal care services are clearly insufficient.

Another important problem is health and safety at work. In Spain health and safety is regulated by the Occupational Risk Prevention Law, which provides for a series of control measures, such as training of workers on occupational hazards and how to avoid them, workers’ health and safety representatives, and compulsory company safety plans. Specific safety protocols have been established for window cleaners. The effectiveness of these measures increases with the size of the company.

There is, however, a problem with the effective fulfilment of these measures, mainly because of the spatial dispersion of the activities. Again, employees in large centres (hospitals, industrial companies, universities, etc.) are better protected than those who work alone, who are more exposed to unforeseen risks. The individualisation of work is dangerous not only in terms of accidents or other risks arising from the improper use of chemical products (the worst known cases are of workers intoxicated when they entered a facility that had just been chemically disinfected) but also in terms of mental health because of the impact of solitude and individualised relationships with superiors. The gender bias that affects cleaners and managers adds to this type of danger.

5 Policies for improving employment quality

There is awareness among workers' representatives and employers that things must change even though the trade unions are more concerned about improving pay and working conditions and the employers are more concerned about reorganising the sector.

A common point that both parties share is the need to enhance the social role of cleaning as a means to counter the pressure affecting the functioning of the sector. The basic argument is that only greater social awareness of cleaning as an essential part of all social and economic activities can counter the downward pressure on labour costs in the sector. This view is supported through a defence of traditional cleaning and the call for a **technical change based mainly on the need to use ecologically responsible cleaning techniques**. This change will require workers to have more training and greater professional qualification and will involve changes in company policies with regard to the use of new products and greater specialisation in the cleaning of specific facilities.

The workers' representatives and employers also feel that there is a need for a **suitable regulation of the cleaning market** aimed at preventing downward price competition from threatening the viability of companies and working conditions. In such a labour-intensive sector, the collective agreements establish a lower limit of costs that should be respected. Downward price competition may come up against this lower limit when the contracts entered into fail to cover appropriate costs. Some interviewees claim that this has already happened on several occasions, and that it leads to greater pressure on working times and failure to carry out the agreed cleaning tasks. On this subject there is some confrontation between the minority of large companies and the medium-sized companies. The former use their financial muscle and seek more complex strategic objectives that allow them to accept unprofitable contracts (such as obtaining contracts for other subsidiaries of the group). The dispute is sometimes extended to public contracting systems in which only certified companies can submit tenders. This practice is considered to further restrict competition by excluding companies because the certification is limited to a closed set of companies. The regulation of the role played by special work centres and the occupational companies employing people with disabilities is another demand.

The trade unions agree with these proposals by the employers because they fear that competition between companies will lead to a new deregulation of working conditions. This is particularly important at a time when a reform of collective bargaining is being negotiated and some employers are arguing in favour of eliminating or reducing sectoral collective agreements in favour of company agreements. If this took place, the competition between companies would automatically lead to downward pressure in collective agreements.

In order to advance in this direction, in Catalonia a Sectoral Cleaning Commission has been set up with the participation of employers' and sectoral associations. Its aim is to introduce three types of measure: a general increase in the prestige of the sector, organisation of the market (especially the public contracting market) and creation of a **Professional Cleaning Card**. This would be a way of recognizing the professional

knowledge of employees in the sector, making explicit their experience and professional qualifications associated with effective professional processes (another of the shortcomings that have been mentioned by the trade unions for some time), and favouring apprenticeship training and the application of ecologically responsible techniques and techniques for cleaning specific processes. The Professional Cleaning Card would certify the specific knowledge of cleaning workers, record their training and allow them to demand better working conditions. The employers accept most of these proposals as part of their call for an increase in the prestige of the sector but they are obviously cautious about the relationship between the Professional Cleaning Card and better pay. However, in the general context of adjustment these proposals are unlikely to succeed in the short term.

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Annex: List of stakeholders

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| JG | Trade Union representative of Cleaning sector (CCOO). |
| AO | Trade Union representative of Cleaning sector (UGT). |
| JP | Small and Medium Employer Association consultant (AFELIN). |