

UNI Europa Literature Review: Labour Shortages and Turnover in Industrial Cleaning, Long-term Care and Private Security (VS/2019/0292)

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Introduction

Labour shortages and labour turnover represent significant, long-term problems in Property Services and long-term care (LTC). While this is also the case in other parts of the services industry, the sectors at hand share certain features that are particularly relevant to the issues concerned: notably, high labour intensity, low rates of unionisation, low wages and often precarious and/or hazardous working conditions. Nevertheless, there has previously been a low engagement with the issues of labour turnover and shortages in these sectors, and it has only been with the steep rise in labour shortages during the COVID-19 crisis that these subjects have begun to receive more attention. In this respect, the absence of a relevant academic literature review concerning this subject has been increasingly felt. We hope that the present review, which also draws on journalistic and industry accounts, may go some way to filling that gap.

This review forms part of the main report on the EU-funded RETAIN project (VS/2019/0292), which aims to identify the principal causes and policy solutions regarding labour turnover and shortages in the above-mentioned sectors. Below, we analyse and report on a range of literature offering both general and industry-specific insights and we identify policy advice for trade unions, EWC representatives and employers on how to reduce labour turnover, improve retention and develop equitable and sustainable recruitment strategies that foster trade union membership and improve workers' rights and collective bargaining outcomes.

In selecting the topics presented in this review, we were influenced by several factors: the results of project activities identifying the main causes of and solutions to labour shortages and labour turnover as defined by the principal stakeholders, in addition to the salience of topics in the examined literature.

In **Chapter 1**, we address the current **economic and social context** of these issues. As can be seen in section 1.1., rising labour shortages in other labour-intensive and low-pay sectors in the EU and UK have led to substantial wage increases (and more generally in the US), which could have knock-on effects for the expectations of employees in the LTC and Property Services sectors. In addition, significant rises in inflation across the EU (especially in Central Eastern Europe) and the UK are compounding these issues of remuneration. Yet, many employers are still failing to address underlying problems in labour shortages (from low pay to working conditions and unsocial hours) or to elaborate sustainable solutions which can address the sector's needs in the medium- to long-term, instead looking to short-term fixes such as

appealing to retiring/retired workers or, in the case of the US, offering sign-on bonuses to recruits.

Focusing on the situation in long-term and Property Services in particular, section 1.2. reveals that labour shortages and high employee turnover are substantial and long-term problems in these sectors. These problems are amplified by increasing service demands and high rates of workers exiting the sector in the case of LTC, and exacerbated by the conditions of the pandemic across all three sectors. In addition, in section 1.3., we examine how the demographic trend of an ageing population in Europe is revealed to have particular impacts for the disproportionately older and/or ageing workforces in the aforementioned sectors, as well as fostering greater competition in the labour market as a whole. In order for employers and trades unions to prioritise addressing labour shortages and turnover it is important to outline the impacts on business, workers, and the sectors at large.

Chapter 2 turns to the **impacts of labour shortages and turnover on businesses and workers**.

The business costs of labour turnover are shown to be substantial and of concern to any employer (2.1.). Aside from the self-evident costs of recruitment, induction and training for new staff, there are a range of direct, indirect and hidden costs that need to be considered. We detail how indirect costs can relate, on the one hand, to losses in efficiency and productivity, and, on the other hand, to the potential loss of business resulting from damage to a company's reputation in a situation of high workplace "churn". However, not all the business costs of high employee turnover are easy to anticipate: "hidden" costs can range from reductions in operational capacity to the creation of dysfunctional workplaces and unattractive industries that discourage the entrance of new staff and encourage quits.

In section 2.2., we show how the negative effects of high employee turnover and labour shortages extend beyond business costs and impact the commitment of employees, their working environment, the nature of the occupation and the quality of services. Risks for the workforce include the creation of a "turnover culture" and increases in overtime work, intensity of work, work-life balance conflict, stress, burnout, job insecurity and a range of related health and safety issues. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are particular concerns for how labour shortages affect services in LTC, such as through higher rates of viral infection and hospitalisation.

In the second part of the review, we look at the most prominent short-term fixes and long-term solutions to labour shortages and turnover. **Chapter 3** addresses **the use of migrant labour**, which continues to be promoted by many employers and policymakers. We explore the risks of using migrant labour systematically as a stopgap for shortages, leaving the roots of labour market imbalances unaddressed and creating a model of dependence on new waves of (short-term) migration. During the pandemic, reductions in new migrants and the return of many migrant carers to their home countries have further exposed these risks, as huge staff shortages have opened up in long-term care in some countries. This, along with long-term improvements in the economic situations of many "sending" countries, brings into question the sustainability of reliance on global migration flows to supply workforces in the care and cleaning sectors. The chapter also notably addresses how the employment of migrants in industrial cleaning and LTC has been associated with exploitation on the basis of "inferior wages and working conditions",

insecure contractual arrangements and precarious and informal work. Several policy recommendations are highlighted in relation to improvement in the conditions of migrant workers and their better integration into the labour market.

Perhaps the other most prominent and popular fix for labour shortages among employers and policymakers is the implementation of **digitalisation and automation**, which we address in **Chapter 4** of the review. Digitalised solutions to labour shortages and turnover in the LTC and Property Services sectors include robotisation (and cobotics), virtual care, monitoring technologies and automated scheduling. While advocates claim that these new technologies can automate strenuous and time-consuming tasks, free up workers to undertake more valuable tasks and render occupations more attractive, the rollout of such technology remains limited and variable across the EU due to factors such as the costs of investment for employers and requirements for relevant digital skills and infrastructure among the workforce and service users.

The chapter also addresses the implications of new technologies for the workforces in the aforementioned sectors. There are concerns from trade unions, and some employers, about how automation and digitalisation could impact work intensity, working arrangements and job security in these sectors. Such concerns also extend to factors directly impacting the job satisfaction of workers, such as the impacts of automation on the fundamentals of the caregiving relationship in the LTC sector and the narrowing of tasks and risks for health and safety in industrial cleaning. Finally, we discuss how social dialogue will be central to guiding and regulating technological development in the sector on a path that improves job and service quality, rather than simply targeting the cutting of labour costs. This will require consultation of workers and support for them to become competent guides to new technologies, including ongoing digital training schemes and qualifications in digital skills, which might genuinely help to improve the attractiveness of the sectors if matched by pay improvements.

In the remaining chapters, prior to the conclusions, we focus on solutions to labour shortages and turnover that address the nature of work and occupations in the LTC, industrial cleaning and private security sectors, or what might be termed “qualitative solutions” to these problems, beginning with **the potential to improve wages**, in **Chapter 5**. Here, we first outline how the three aforementioned sectors comprise workforces that suffer levels of pay well below national and European average earnings. We then detail a substantial body of academic evidence at the international level in the LTC and Property Services sectors indicating that increases in wages and benefits lead to improved recruitment, longer job tenure and lower turnover, in addition to surveys showing that large proportions of LTC employers in the EU and UK identify poor wages as a major challenge in recruiting and retaining staff. In the private security and cleaning industries, we outline statements from employers at the international level explaining how providing pensions and paying higher rates than other employers helps them to maintain substantially lower turnover figures and attract better staff. Lastly, we explore specific remuneration challenges in the LTC sector, including the opinions of workers, and detail a possible tendency toward wage rises in some parts of the sector across Europe in response to the pandemic situation, including in Germany.

Chapter 6 looks at how **working conditions, working arrangements and health and safety** concerns in the aforementioned sectors can be linked with lack of job satisfaction, intention to

quit, burnout/absenteeism, unattractive work and increased labour turnover. A range of international evidence, including at the EU level, is presented, including on issues such as organisation of tasks and job autonomy, working hours, involuntary part-time and casualised work. Such evidence is concentrated in the LTC and industrial cleaning sectors, and there is a need for more relevant research concerning the EU's private security sector. This chapter also gives details of how “elementary” and “contact-intensive” occupations in long-term care and Property Services appear to be disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which demands continued initiatives from employers and trades unions, not least to avoid the exacerbation of existing labour shortages and turnover, as well as negative consequences for service users.

Offering a reflective and analytical approach to policy questions, **Chapter 7** looks at how skills and training constitute important factors in labour shortages and turnover from the differing perspectives of employers, government, and workers and trades unions. We explore, first, the case for skills mismatch and skills shortages as they relate to labour shortages, second, the importance of how “skill” is defined in relation to the status of work in the present sectors, and, last, the relevance of education and training to tackling labour shortages from both “mismatch” and worker perspectives. To simplify, on the one hand, employers often argue that skills shortages or mismatch are inhibiting recruitment and encouraging turnover and issue calls for greater public investment in education and policy changes relating to the identification and development of skills. On the other hand, trade unions often push for increases in training in order to improve the status of employees' work and allow bargaining for improved wages and job security.

In the final **chapter (8)** of the main body of the review, we examine a range of popular, institutional and academic sources proposing **human resources (HR) strategies and practices** as solutions to high turnover within the sectors at hand, and more generally. Among these, management and supervisory practices (8.1.) are identified as a central factor in high employee turnover. Key problem areas in relations between management and employees are said to encompass issues such as trust and transparency, micro-management and “supervisor undermining”, while the structural problems discussed in the literature include levels of supervisory personnel and improvements in recruitment selection and leadership training for management. The section also includes an exploration of positive ways in which managers can interact with employees to create a working environment conducive to retention.

Subsequently, section 8.2. looks at popular claims that workplace culture is a factor affecting staff motivation, engagement and loyalty and a major reason for employee quits. Accordingly, research in the UK long-term care sector and statements by employers and trades unions link a positive organisational climate with retention factors such as job satisfaction, motivation and decreased occupational risks. A number of solutions for improving workplace culture are outlined as means to reduce staff turnover include, including mentorship programmes, diversity and inclusion policies, employee recognition initiatives and rewards for performance.

Further to the above, HR voices in the three sectors at hand advocate strategies of “open communication” and “employee engagement” (8.3.) in order to support retention of staff by addressing problems before they crop up and by building a trusting employer-employee

relationship. Suggested initiatives range from employee surveys to regular group feedback sessions between employees and supervisors, mutual psycho-social support groups among employees, digital platforms for facilitating multi-level communication within organisations, and redistribution of responsibility for recruitment communications and the development of new activities and services. Finally, in section 8.4., we detail the support for “values-based” strategies for improving employee retention, based on evidence from a range of academic studies, and reports from Social Services Europe and a UK workforce charity in the long-term care sector.

Part I: Statement of the problem

| 1 | Context

Labour shortages and high labour turnover in the Property Services and LTC sectors are a longstanding problem identified by employers and trade unions in the years prior to the pandemic (CoESS, 2019; ESN, 2016; Turlan, 2019; Lill, 2009), as further detailed in section 1.1.

Among employers, large facility services multinationals, such as ISS, Sodexo, MITIE and Securitas, have recognized the importance of these issues and have recently been featuring figures on labour turnover or retention in their annual reports. The European Committee of the Regions (2021) has also recently called for a “step up” in efforts to tackle the shortage of care workers, which it frames as a “medium- to long-term” issue.

We will begin by examining the current macroeconomic context of intensified labour shortages in a number of sectors and countries in the wake of an end to pandemic emergency shutdowns (at the time of writing: November 2021). Data is limited on the specific effects of the pandemic on labour turnover and shortages in LTC and Property Services, yet it is important to anticipate the indirect influence of increased competition for workers in other areas of the labour market that offer similar kinds of pay and demand some of the same skills.

1.1. The pandemic economy and labour shortages in labour-intensive sectors

In this section, we present the issue of labour shortages from the perspective of employers, within the context of the current pandemic situation. The reopening of large sections of the economy during the spring to summer of this year, following extended pandemic shutdowns, has triggered labour shortages in a number of countries, with a range of consequences for businesses and the economy: from wages to service provision, production levels and inflation. As detailed below, a breadth of causes and remedies for shortages have been proposed – including a number of the topics addressed in this review.

There is some evidence that the pandemic has exacerbated shortages in the LTC and Property Services sectors, which we shall detail in the following section (1.2.). However, it is worth

exploring the labour shortages that have been most publicised across various countries, which include labour-intensive and contact-intensive sectors¹ that are comparable to the sectors considered in this review and are probable competitors on the labour market. A relevant anecdotal example of the increased competition in demand for labour is the recent news that some care workers in the UK have switched to Amazon warehouse jobs due to these offering 30% higher pay (Booth, 2021). In this section, we will give a brief overview of the impact of labour shortages in the Eurozone area as well as the UK and US, where labour shortages have been particularly widespread.

In the EU, labour shortages since economic reopening have varied greatly across Member States. In at least two sectors, however, shortages appear more generalised. Construction has seen a record high in firms reporting labour shortages (27% of contractors), in conditions of strong demand, particularly across Germany, Austria and France (Arnold, 2021; ECB, 2021b; van Sante, 2021). The financial corporation ING has suggested that companies could try to solve this problem by increasing labour productivity through mechanisation and digitalisation, by attracting skilled migrant labour, or by investing in training for younger employees to bind them to the company for a longer period (van Sante, 2021). Meanwhile, in road haulage, worsening lorry driver shortages across Europe (e.g., 60,000 drivers are lacking in Germany) are predicted to lead to “high single to low double-digit” wage increases (Dempsey & Khan, 2021; Arnold, 2021). Such wage developments in other services sectors could mean that more workers in LTC and Property Services will opt to move sector in order to earn greater wages, thereby exacerbating the existing labour shortages identified in the RETAIN project.

It is also worth noting developments in specific Member States. In Belgium, Manpower Group reported that, as of June 2021, labour shortages were at a 15-year high across the country, with 83% of employers finding it difficult to fill vacancies, representing a 24-point increase on 2019 (*The Brussels Times*, 2021). Manpower BeLux’s director called for policies to increase the activity rate in the workforce and for improvements in education and training to stem shortages that could “jeopardise” economic recovery. In the Netherlands, as of August 2021, shortages were also reported to be limiting economic recovery: extending from healthcare, to factories, to hospitality – where restaurants are re-closing from lack of staff – to the railways, where a lack of traffic controllers resulted in service disruptions and firms requesting the return of retired workers and delayed retirement for older workers (*Al Jazeera*, 2021). One explanation offered by company directors and investors is that younger workers are deterred from taking up the work due to unsocial hours and concerns about work-life balance. Meanwhile, in Berlin, managers in hospitality have said they may raise wages to deal with shortages of workers, reluctant to rejoin a potentially “unsustainable” industry, in the context of recurrent restrictions on opening (Arnold & Solomon, 2021). A parallel between the hospitality and restaurant sectors and the LTC and Property Services sectors is the prevalence of unsocial working hours. This creates high levels of fluctuation.

In Central Eastern Europe, problems are of a greater magnitude than elsewhere in the Eurozone. *Reuters* reports (Charlish & Than, 2021) that rapid recovery from the pandemic is being attenuated by a labour squeeze caused by “years of emigration to Western Europe and

¹ In the US, this includes sectors such as manufacturing and hospitality (Warrington, 2021).

an economic boom across the region”, contributing to gross wages jumping by an annual 9.2% in March in Hungary, Q1 nominal wages by 3.2% in the Czech Republic, and corporate sector wages by 9.9% in Poland (experiencing employee shortages in manufacturing) in April. In Hungary, there is talk of “inflation risks” (Charlish & Than, 2021), with consumer prices inflation reaching 5.3% year-on-year in June, prompting consecutive interest rate hikes by the central bank (Cseresnyés, 2021). Another fact that should be drawn attention to is that Central and Eastern European countries are older...

However, that in respect of the Eurozone as a whole, it should be noted that the ECB (2021a) has dismissed the prospect of a situation where surging demand and tight labour markets “generate stronger lasting price pressures”, instead predicting subdued inflation in the medium term, despite sharp rises over summer 2021 (Koranyi, 2021; Arnold, 2021). Such an orthodox perspective views tight labour markets as an economic problem rather than being an opportunity for workers and trade unions to redress the power imbalances and inequalities of preceding decades.

In the UK, as low-paying sectors experience widespread labour shortages², there has been evidence of increases in wage offers by as much as 18% in hospitality and catering, and 14% in jobs paying under £25,000 (Davis, 2021). In industries particularly affected by the return of migrant workers due to Brexit and the pandemic (and new migration restrictions) such as the meat processing sector and road haulage, acute labour shortages and a large-scale failure to meet goods/service demand have been met by wage increases sometimes several times the rate of inflation, as well as increased overtime payments and expanding automation in the former case (Strauss & Foster, 2021; *BBC News*, 2021b; Harris, 2021; O’Connor, 2021c). There are also long-term underlying employment problems contributing to such shortages³. Overall, incidences of reduced business output in the UK due to shortages of staff or materials were fourteen times higher than usual in August 2021 and the largest since January 1998 (IHS Markit & CIPS, 2021). These changes have been feeding through into inflation, which reached a 9-year high of 3% in autumn 2021, and was expected to rise further (Plummer, 2021; Giles, 2021; Smith, 2021). As in France (*The Economist*, 2021c), labour shortages have been commonly attributed to the government furlough scheme introduced in March 2020⁴. According to the deputy governor of the Bank of England, the furlough scheme has kept people in their current jobs, rather than enabling people to “move to where the jobs would be in future”, conflicting with the ‘K-shaped recovery’, where some sectors are growing fast and need to hire, while others are in decline and unlikely to reemploy workers shed during the pandemic.

² Evans (2021) cites figures from recruitment firm Broadbean finding that in April, vacancies in UK hospitality rose 77% from the previous month, while, compared with April 2020, the number of applications decreased by 82%.

³ Of particular interest, some media accounts have exposed problems predating the pandemic (O’Connor, 2021c): stagnating wages and poor facilities, combined with overwork and unsocial hours, resulting in large numbers quitting the profession. Despite requiring a specialist qualification (usually paid for by the worker), the job increasingly compares unfavourably with other low-pay work in its conditions. While employer short-term shortage fixes, such as contingent sign-on bonuses, have failed, trade unions are arguing for long-term reforms equivalent to those in the Netherlands, where a collective agreement between employers and unions sets a legal floor on pay and conditions across the sector (O’Connor, 2021c).

⁴ The UK government contributed 80% of wages up to July 1 for participating employers, and since then has paid 70% for those employers who were willing to cover the additional 10%; The UK sectors with by far the highest totals in furlough claims have been the accommodation, food services, wholesale, and retail sectors (Flint, 2021).

Relatedly, anecdotal evidence indicates that the prolonged disruption of the pandemic and furlough leave has caused some workers to rethink their personal and professional situation and to divert their career away from the physically intensive, emotionally demanding work and long or unsocial hours offered by industries such as hospitality (Evans, 2021; *The Economist*, 2021c; Taylor, 2021). It is worth asking whether similar tendencies might be seen in the three sectors at hand in this review. A *Financial Times* article from June (O'Connor, 2021a) cautions that people are weighing the risks of work – or migration for work – against the rewards and suggests that this crisis has exposed that labour “isn’t a commodity that can be picked up and put down at a moment’s notice” but “a relationship with people that can be sustained or squandered.” In the Eurozone context, quantitative evidence in labour market slack bears consideration in this regard: the number of people in the Eurozone that would like to work but are not looking (therefore not included in unemployment statistics) totalled, as of July 2021, 1.3 million more than before the pandemic and was higher than during the financial and the euro crisis in 4Q (Colijn et al., 2021). ING claims that this includes groups such as workers deterred from workplaces by Covid health risks, migrants returning home due to the crisis, and students returning to live with their families, while slack has grown disproportionately among the young (Colijn et al., 2021)⁵.

Among the major economies, labour shortages have been most widespread in the US, where they have affected “every industry”⁶ (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2021) and have contributed to wage increases at around 3% (Robb, 2021), with the strongest first quarter advance in 14 years (Lubbers, Rockeman & Pickert, 2021), the biggest surge in inflation in 13 years (Bartash, 2021b). Wage raises in most industries have, however, been “cancelled out” by year-on-year consumer price inflation reaching 5.4% in July (Luhby, 2021). The shortages have been most commonly attributed to worker reluctance to return to workplaces perceived as unsafe or stressful in the pandemic context, a lack of childcare facilities, and insufficiently attractive wages and working conditions in a context of increased government benefits over the pandemic period (Long, 2021; Mutikani, 2021)⁷. How have employers responded to this new situation? Aside from wage rises, popular measures to address shortages have included sign-on bonuses (as high as \$5000), offers of funding for college education and “stay bonuses” for current employees (Dean, 2021; Dempsey & Lee, 2021; Manayiti, 2021). At the same time, civil society campaigners are demanding additional “hazard pay” and increases in paid time off for retail workers (Manayiti, 2021).

1.2. Labour shortages and turnover in LTC and Property Services: some facts

Labour shortages and high rates of labour turnover in the aforementioned sectors are long-term issues that significantly pre-date the pandemic, as detailed below. Thus, the COVID-19 crisis

⁵ There is also evidence that labour market slack has previously been underestimated (ECB, 2021), helping to explain sluggish wage growth in some countries since the Great Recession.

⁶ Shortages are particularly acute in retail and warehousing, with unfilled vacancies rising from 750,000 pre-Covid to 1.1m in July 2021 (Manayiti, 2021).

⁷ The pandemic-induced decline in immigration is also increasingly being cited as a factor, in combination with otherwise stagnant population growth in certain areas (and a generally ageing population) (Abidi, 2021) and the geographical unevenness of “creative destruction” and labour demand in the recovery (The Economist, 2021a).

should be seen as exacerbating substantial existing problems with retaining and recruiting staff to these industries, while also presenting some new problems, such as dramatically increasing the real and perceived health risks of contact-intensive work (see 5.1.). In long-term care in particular, we find that this deterioration of the workforce situation is contributing to alarming trends in the numbers of workers wanting to quit their jobs and current and projected shortfalls in the supply of services. To make matters worse, mandatory vaccination programmes in the social care and healthcare sectors are exacerbating the labour shortages, leading to more workers quitting their jobs and fewer applications in countries such as the UK (Lee & Jackson, 2021; Otte, 2021).

Beginning with Property Services, it is most notable that “Cleaners and Helpers in Offices, Hotels” made a return in 2020 to the European Commission’s list of the most severe shortage occupations (following its absence in the 2019 list) at a higher ranking than 2017 (3 rather than 4), with shortages in 9 countries, which are concentrated in northern Europe and the Baltic states and extend to Hungary, Slovenia, Malta and Cyprus (McGrath, 2020). Industrial cleaning has long experienced high levels of turnover (Lill, 2009; Kirov, 2011, p.59; *European Cleaning Journal*, 2016, p.5), and Larsen et al. (2019) note that employee turnover in German and Danish cleaning companies is high in comparison to the rest of those countries’ labour markets⁸. The largest facilities services multinational, Sodexo, which conducts around 40% of its business in Europe⁹ and also provides care services, has seen consistent rises from 2016 to 2020 in the departures of staff on continuous contracts as a proportion of the total workforce (a low-end measure of turnover), from just under 34% to over 37%¹⁰, while 18.4% of staff did not stay longer than three months in their post during 2019¹¹.

Concerning the private security industry, specifically, labour shortages have also been a well-identified problem in recent years. CoESS (European Confederation of Security Services) (2019) highlights an increasing lack of “skilled labour, both in terms of quantity and quality”, along with an ageing workforce that poses a challenge to the “entire sector” in responding to market demand. Problems finding “skilled workers” affect 78% of private security companies in Germany (the country’s most affected sector after temporary employment) and 55% in France (CoESS, 2019). Fairly high rates of voluntary employee turnover across the sector – at 32.7% – were documented in the last decade by CoESS (2013). Some of the largest multinational companies in the private security sectors have begun recognizing labour turnover as an important issue and have included data in their annual reports. Securitas’ figures, for example, show that the company reduced its employee turnover rate from 40% in 2018 to 36% in 2020. (Securitas, 2018a, 2020).

In the long-term care sector, increases in demand associated with demography are an underlying factor in shortages, compounded by long-standing problems in recruitment and retention. Specifically, the supply of LTC workers per 100 elderly people (aged 65 and over) has stagnated in most OECD countries since 2011 (OECD, 2020), and aggregate growth in the

⁸ They cite Bundesregierung, 2015; DI, 2018.

⁹ According to Sodexo (2020); up from 38% in 2017 (Sodexo, 2017).

¹⁰ See “References” for Sodexo annual reports (Universal Registration Documents) 2017-2020.

¹¹ This has seen a decrease in 2020, to 16.4%, which Sodexo judges at least partly attributable to the pandemic (Sodexo, 2020).

workforce was outpaced by the growth of the elderly population between 2011 and 2016¹². Nevertheless, in order to continue to provide five care workers per 100 people aged 65 and over, the numbers of care workers will need, on average, to more than double by 2040 – an increase of 13.5m workers in the OECD countries (OECD, 2020)^{13 14}.

Particularly worrying, in this context, are projections by past studies that the number of LTC workers will decrease in Germany and Poland and stagnate in the Netherlands in the years up to 2031, even as demand for services substantially increases (Geerts, 2011); for instance, service users in Germany are forecast to rise from 2.86 million to 4.5 million by 2060 (Knight, 2018). The report of 36,000 vacancies in Germany’s care sector in 2018 corroborates such an account (Knight, 2018). **What is with EPSU’s calculation of 240,000 vacancies?**

Meanwhile, the recent situation regarding shortages seems no more positive in England, where 8.2% of all roles were estimated to be vacant in August 2021 (Skills for Care, 2021b)¹⁵. Scotland, meanwhile, has seen recruitment and retention problems reach “startling” levels during the pandemic, with around 45% of private and third sector social care providers (of 251 surveyed in summer 2021) “not confident” that they could continue delivering services at current levels over the next 12 months if the recruitment situation remained unchanged (Scottish Care, 2021).

Simultaneously, turnover for care workers is reported to be as high as 70% in some European companies, while the rate in Portugal ranged from 17-36% in 2019 (Oliveira Neves et al., 2019, as cited in Eurofound, 2020a)¹⁶. What is more, OECD (2020) estimates for Europe show that average tenure is low in the LTC sector, being two years shorter than that among the overall working population.

Finally, workers leaving the long-term care sector altogether seems to be a significant problem: a move made by around 7% (80,000) of the Netherlands’ 1.2 million care workers each year (Social Employers & EPSU, 2020). Intentions to quit the sector are widespread among large sections of the workforce: 70% of LTC practical nurses in Finland have occasionally considered changing professions (SuPer, 2016; as cited by Eurofound, 2020)¹⁷; since the pandemic, 31 % of workers in Germany have considered leaving the sector to seek work elsewhere (December 2020); and 61% of care nurses in Ireland have considered quitting (May 2021) due to the impact of the pandemic on their wellbeing (Hans Dubois, Eurofound in advisory board meeting). Once they leave, it seems unlikely that staff will rejoin the sector unless working conditions improve.

¹² The OECD (2020) also reports that rising LTC shortages will be seen especially in health and social care personnel educated at the tertiary undergraduate level, in the coming decades, including nurses, physiotherapists and health visitors, through a combination of growth in demand and modest growth in supply.

¹³ According to charity Skills for Care (2021), the UK care workforce, for example, will apparently need to increase by 29% (480,000 new jobs) by 2035 in order to keep up with the increasing population of over-65s.

¹⁴ The ILO (2020) notes that this number is likely to increase when accounting for people in need of care and support as they recover from severe cases of COVID-19.

¹⁵ Nor in Denmark, where 73% of municipalities faced “shortages of skilled staff” in 2017 (EPSU, 2018).

¹⁶ Elsewhere, in the UK, the industry as a whole saw employee turnover of around 1 in 3 circa 2019 (twice the cross-sector average) according to CarePlanner (Price, 2019), and the same survey evidence indicates many – although not a majority – of employers recognise retention as one of their “top three” business challenges.

¹⁷ Price (2019) reported 37% of care workers in the UK were considering leaving the sector in the next five years.

1.3. Demographic changes as a driver of labour shortages

The demographic trend of an ageing population in Europe, which has been in process for some years, will affect the whole labour market, increasing competitiveness on its demand side¹⁸. At one level, it will particularly impact sectors with disproportionately older¹⁹ and ageing²⁰ workforces, including cleaning, long-term care and private security, which already have to deal with the challenge of building up a younger workforce to replace the greater proportion of staff who reach retirement age each year (not helped by higher turnover rates among younger employees²¹). At another level, as demand for services increases substantially in sectors like long-term care and healthcare (which competes with the former for recruitment) over the coming years²², so will the demand for labour, with the potential for even greater intensity in shortages than currently seen. As such, employers will need to take greater measures to remain competitive in the labour market, such as improvements in wages and conditions, as we will consider later in this review.

Recent reports give some startling projections. A European Parliament briefing on demography (Margaras, 2020) finds that the working age share of the EU population (aged 15 to 64) decreased for the first time in 2010 and is expected to decline every year to 2060. With particular relevance to LTC, the briefing notes that whereas in 2006 there were four people of working age (15-64) for each person aged 65 or over, by 2050, this ratio is projected to be just two people. In addition, the European Commission's (2020) Report on the Impact of Demographic Change finds that while the working-age population (20-64 years) in 2019 amounted to **59%** of the entire population, by 2070, this is projected to decline to **51%**.

The Parliament briefing also finds that migration into and within the EU, which remains a commonly proposed solution to population ageing and labour shortages (see Chapter 3), may only temporarily ease the problem of ageing in certain regions²³, since in the long term these migrants themselves will gradually age. Moreover, it is argued that population ageing and depopulation are likely to have “profound” socioeconomic implications, nationally and regionally, as regards the capacity of governments to raise tax revenue, balance finances, and provide adequate pensions and healthcare services. This evaluation is particularly relevant to the

¹⁸ See ICPMD research from Frelak, J.S., Chirita, O., and Mananashvili, S. (2021): “Population ageing has long been accelerating in Europe, putting pressure on labour markets throughout the continent. Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, estimates indicated that, across Europe, the labour supply was growing by about 0.3% annually – whereas labour demand was increasing by approximately 1%.”

¹⁹ According to the TUC (2020), 47% of cleaners and 43% of security guards are over the age of 50, compared to 30% of all workers; according to Eurofound (2020), the share of workers aged 50 years or over in LTC is 4.7 percentage points above that in the entire workforce: 37.9% versus 33.2%.

²⁰ Eurofound finds the share of LTC workers aged 50 or over to have increased faster over the past decade, by 9.8 percentage points (from 28.1% in 2009) compared with 7.3 percentage points for the entire workforce; Social Employers and EPSU (2020), citing Eurostat, find that the share of workers above 50 years in “social services” to have increased from 28,63 % in 2009 to 36,12 % in 2018, compared to 32,51% for all employment activities.

²¹ This is not helped by sometimes higher turnover rates among younger employees. See Eurofound (2020a, p.10) and Transform Research (2017, p.3).

²² Including due to increasing rates of disability and illness (Social Employers & EPSU, 2020).

²³ A paper presented by Doudeijns and Dumont (2003) to a European Commission and OECD conference on migration has stated that, “substantial research has shown that migration alone could not alleviate the impact of population ageing”.

present sectors, which rely for much of their business on a public sector tendering process in which cost constraints are already widely understood to exacerbate problems in labour conditions (EFCI, 2021; CoESS, 2020; Social Employers & EPSU, 2020; Larsen et al., 2019; Trygstad et al., 2018; SSE, 2017). Finally, long-term quantitative labour shortages may only be intensified by the pandemic, as the briefing notes that fertility prospects have since been negatively revised in Italy, France, Germany, Spain and the UK.

Summary: Chapter 1

Rising labour shortages in other labour-intensive and low-pay sectors in the EU and UK have led to substantial wage increases (and more generally in the US), which could have knock-on effects for the expectations of employees in the LTC and Property Services sectors. In addition, significant rises in inflation across the EU (especially in Central Eastern Europe) and the UK are compounding these issues of remuneration. Yet, many employers are still failing to address underlying problems in labour shortages (from low pay to working conditions and unsocial hours) or to elaborate sustainable solutions which can address the sector's needs in the medium- to long-term, instead looking to short-term fixes such as appealing to retiring/retired workers or, in the case of the US, offering sign-on bonuses to recruits.

In the LTC, and Property Services sectors, labour shortages and high employee turnover are substantial and long-term problems, which are amplified by increasing service demands and high rates of workers exiting the sector in the case of the former, and exacerbated by the conditions of the pandemic across all three sectors. In addition, the demographic trend of an ageing population in Europe is revealed to have particular impacts for the disproportionately older and/or ageing workforces in the aforementioned sectors, as well as fostering greater competition in the labour market as a whole. In order for employers and trades unions to prioritise addressing labour shortages and turnover it is important to outline the impacts on business, workers, and the sectors at large.

| 2 | Impacts of labour turnover and shortages on businesses and workers

In this chapter, we address first of all how labour turnover and staff shortages lead to a range of substantial costs for business, whether direct, indirect, or hidden. Secondly, we look at the extensive negative effects of high labour turnover on both the workforce and quality of services, which can in some cases produce a circular “feedback” effect where this turnover is continuously reinforced. The harmful consequences for service levels and staff wellbeing and safety, detailed as regards the LTC and private security sectors, are of particular concern during this period of a pandemic.

2.1. Impacts on businesses

Labour turnover impacts business in a number of ways: firstly, through **direct costs** associated with staff replacement and training; second, through the **indirect costs** of staff shortages and

the departure of experienced staff, in terms of workforce effectiveness, service quality and business reputation; and, finally, through **hidden costs** relating to the prioritisation of business resources and undesirable effects across the industry as a whole.

Concerning direct and indirects costs of turnover, it is generally recognised that these are substantial to any organisation, with estimates upwards of 30% of a departing employee's annual salary (Ongori, 2007; Akinyomi, 2016). The Society of Human Resource Management, however, gives an even higher projection of 6 to 9 months' salary on average (Centralus, 2021).

We will examine the nature of these various business costs in turn. Due to a lack of sector-specific academic literature in this area, we refer here to studies dealing with the private sector in general, in addition to some industry HR literature.

The **direct costs** of turnover are most prominently associated with recruiting replacement staff and inducting and training them (Ongori, 2007; Akinyomi, 2016; 4M, 2018). Less obvious, but significant, direct costs comprise the management and HR time associated with processing staff departures and recruitment (Ongori, 2007), and the expenses of covering outgoing employees' hours, sometimes using overtime rates or temporary staff (McNally, 2004; Securitas, 2018b).

Perhaps equally significant for companies are the **indirect costs** of high turnover and staff shortages. First of all, these take the form of losses in efficiency and productivity (Githinji, 2014). Denvir and McMahon (1992), in their study of the labour-intensive London hotel industry, found such losses to result from outflow of important skills and experience, reductions in real and perceived managerial effectiveness, and interference in the personal development of employees and the quality of their training. Where persistent labour shortages lead to employer initiatives to outsource certain tasks, as was the case for 23% of companies surveyed by the Employment Service in Slovenia in 2019, this is said to contribute to a loss of expertise and joined-up working in the organisation that is outsourcing (Eurofound, 2021). In a broad review of the academic literature, Ongori (2007) also highlights increased pressure on remaining staff from high labour turnover, along with reduced staff morale, and losses to "organisational memory". In the HR sphere, cleaning specialists 4M (2018) point out how high turnover brings both decreased return on investment in employees and productivity losses during the learning curve for new hires, as they get used to new duties (see also Akinyomi, 2016; Ongori, 2007).²⁴

Secondly, according to 4M (2018), high workforce "churn" can result in damage to a company's reputation, due to the perception (among clients) or the actuality of service inconsistency – for example, through inadequate performance of tasks by incoming staff. Gaupel (2019) cites a case wherein competitors to a multinational private security company leveraged the negative image conferred by its high rates of attrition in order to successfully engage a client to terminate some of its contracts. The author also notes that a "revolving door" effect may create a general deficit in experience and knowledge in the workforce, negatively impacting performance and safety and lowering levels of positive service interaction. *Security* magazine (McNally, 2004), meanwhile, equates high retention with greater customer satisfaction and more contented employees working in safer environments. On the costs of underperformance, it cites senior HR

²⁴ According to Centralus (2021), this can take on average up to 28 weeks.

professional Michael Goodboe: "paying low wages that lead to high turnover is penny wise, pound foolish."

Hidden costs of turnover can take a number of forms. First and foremost, staff shortages resulting from turnover and the financial burden of staff replacement can reduce the operational capacity of firms and require them to turn down business or restrict services, limiting their growth potential, according to Securitas (2018b) and Eurofound (2021). The latter cites recent studies of SMEs, in Austria and in Finland, showing consequent reductions in company earnings. There are even broader hidden costs to be considered, however. Denvir and McMahon (1992), citing Samuel (1969), argue that high turnover rates create dysfunctional workplaces and an attractive image of an industry that, discouraging new entrants to the workforce and encouraging others to leave as they grow older, may render the recruitment of effective staff even more challenging. Indeed, Samuel notes that high turnover "prevents continuing relationships between employers and employees and so inhibits the growth of mutual responsibility."

2.2. Impacts on the workforce and the sectors at large

High labour turnover and labour shortages also result in a range of negative effects that go beyond business concerns, and make these subjects of concern for employers and trade unions alike. We will first examine these issues from a general labour market perspective, and subsequently turn our attention to the LTC and Property Services sectors specifically.

Firstly, increased turnover has been shown to have a downward effect on the behavioural commitment of remaining employees (Mueller & Price, 1989), generating the feedback effect of "turnover culture" and contributing to employees' intention to quit (Abelson, 1996, as cited by Winterton, 2004; Iverson & Deery, 2007). As such, Winterton (2004) advises that a strategy for retention should seek to reverse this trend through building employee commitment. More concretely, Eurofound (2021) has found that the key impacts of labour shortages on employees (and owner-managers in SMEs) comprise increased requests for overtime and rising work intensity, along with related increases in work-life balance conflict, stress, burnout and other health and safety issues. In another circular effect, it notes that the accumulation of such factors can increase rates of absenteeism and staff turnover. Additionally, when employers contribute directly to high turnover, whether through poor recruitment practices or elevated sackings and redundancies, this may be viewed through the lens of "job insecurity" in the workforce – referring principally to the fear of losing one's job (Green, 2020). Job insecurity, a growing problem since the great recession and increasing labour market flexibility, has (like unemployment) well established causal detrimental effects on workers' mental and physical health (Green, 2020).

In long-term care, specifically, a range of studies show that elevated employee turnover, staff shortages and workforce drop-out have damaging impacts on the workforce and services:

- Increased burden on long-term workers, weakened social support and informal networks in the workplace and disruption to the continuity and quality of care, particularly when specific job vacancies prove challenging to fill (Turnpenny & Hussein, 2020);

- Gaps in care, reduced care quality, affected patient outcomes²⁵ and degraded working conditions through understaffing, underskilling and workers “not having the time to do the job properly” (Eurofound, 2020a; ILO, 2020; Marková et al., 2020);
- Associated higher rates of viral infection and hospitalisation in residential elderly care, according to studies throughout the 1990s and 2000s (Donoghue & Castle, 2009);
- Contributing to waiting lists (according to studies in Lithuania, Malta and Slovenia) and geographical inequalities in access to LTC between Member States and between urban and rural areas (Eurofound 2020);
- Amid rising social care needs, putting at risk the capacity to ensure the right to social care services and adequate social protection for long-term care needs²⁶, resulting in increased inequalities and effects on the wellbeing of the EU population at large (Social Employers & EPSU, 2020; Marková et al., 2020).

In addition, as regards the current COVID-19 context, it is worth highlighting findings from the US that nursing homes with higher staffing levels of registered nurses have the potential to better control the spread of the virus and reduce mortality rates among residents (Li et al., 2020, as cited by ILO, 2020). In other words, the proportion of higher skilled workers contributes to improved workplace safety.

As there is a scarcity of studies addressing this issue within Property Services in the European Union, it is worth looking toward the United States. One US study of the private security industry (LAANE, 2006) found high turnover rates and understaffing to be linked to a lack of essential public safety training in newly hired officers and serious failures in service (e.g., reports of building entry points left unguarded and procedures unperformed). Moreover, the authors point out that a high annual turnover rates meant that most officers left before they were able to gain the experience and familiarity with a property and its tenants that are “necessary to protect against threats and respond to emergencies”. At the same time, new officers would be put on the job before receiving adequate training, further risking standards of service, staff wellbeing and public safety. The high staff churn also led contractors to ask officers to work “many hours” of overtime. The study’s findings indicate that while overtime can often be necessary to these low-paid workers in order to boost their income and allow them to make ends meet in the short-term, it creates the trap that workers burn out faster, are more likely to make mistakes, experience higher rates of injury and illness and are ultimately more likely to quit.

Summary: Chapter 2

The business costs of labour turnover are substantial and should be of concern to any employer. HRM studies estimate the cost of replacing an employee to be a minimum of 30% of their annual salary (often much more). Aside from the self-evident costs of recruitment, induction and training for new staff, employers also need to consider the management and HR

²⁵ In the US, Akosa Antwi and Bowblis (2018) found a 10% increase in turnover to be associated with an increase in mortality among nursing home care residents and a decrease in the quality of care measured by the physical environment and infection control, among others (as cited by OECD, 2020).

²⁶ Marková et al (2020) concur: “... in a labour-intensive sector such as social care... staff shortages or inefficient work with human resources could represent the greatest threat to social care provision.”

time associated with processing staff departures and onboarding, along with the expenses of covering outgoing employees' hours (especially when using overtime rates or temporary staff). Compounding these direct costs are *indirect* costs, relating firstly to the losses in efficiency and productivity that result from: (a) outflow of skills, experience and "organisational memory", (b) reduced real and perceived managerial effectiveness, (c) interference in employees' professional development and decreased ROI in employees, (d) increased pressure on remaining staff and reduced staff morale. Indirect costs also encompass potential loss of business owing to the damage to a company's reputation from high workplace "churn"; specifically, there can be a perception or a reality of service inconsistency, such as when tasks are inadequately performed by inexperienced or overworked staff. Lastly, not all the business costs of high employee turnover are easy to anticipate: "hidden" costs can range from reductions in operational capacity, limiting growth potential, to the creation of dysfunctional workplaces and unattractive industries that discourage the entrance of new staff and encourage quits, worsening problems with retention and inhibiting the growth of "mutual responsibility" among employers and employees.

Yet the negative effects of high employee turnover and labour shortages extend well beyond business costs and make these subjects of concern for employers and trade unions alike. First of all, high employee turnover has a downward effect on the behavioural commitment of remaining employees, with the potential to create a "turnover culture". At the more concrete level, it is likely to result in increases in overtime work, intensity of work, work-life balance conflict, stress, burnout, job insecurity and a range of related health and safety issues that can, in turn, exacerbate absenteeism and turnover. Addressing the impacts on services in the long-term care sector, multiple studies have shown that high staff turnover and staff shortages are also linked to disruption to the continuity and quality of care and affected patient outcomes (including higher rates of viral infection and hospitalisation). Regarding COVID-19, evidence from the US indicates that higher staffing levels of registered nurses in care homes can help to control virus spread and reduce mortality rates. Meanwhile, in the private security industry, a 2006 US study found high turnover rates and understaffing to be linked to a lack of essential public safety training in newly hired officers and serious failures in service, including with relation to public safety.

Part II: Short-term fixes and long-term solutions

| 3 | Migrant labour

Employers and policy institutes promote migration as a solution to labour shortages in many sectors, including in LTC and Property Services, against the context of a declining working age population in the EU and increasing service demand in areas such as LTC (Taylor, 2021; Hogarth, 2021; Kenny & Yang, 2021)²⁷. Current policy proposals concerning migrant labour, at the general level, include: developing skills partnerships to provide training in developing countries for potential emigrants so that they arrive ready to do the jobs required, accepting

²⁷ The latter paper estimates that, after accounting for 'business as usual' migratory flows, 44 million more workers will be required by 2050 in the EU+UK, and that there is no evidence yet that automation will reduce the overall demand for workers or be at all sufficient to counteract the effects of population ageing.

larger numbers of refugees to build networks and attract more immigrants, and ensuring housing and transition services “so new arrivals can be assimilated” (Kenny & Yang, 2021). The head of Germany’s Federal Labour Agency has, citing the above demographic effects, also called for increased numbers of “skilled immigrants” to “fill gaps in the labour market”, highlighting the social care sector (DW, 2021)²⁸.

Focusing on the sectors at hand, migrant workers make up a significant proportion of the EU workforce in industrial cleaning (30% according to EFCI, 2020)²⁹ and, increasingly, in LTC (7.9% according to Eurofound, 2020)³⁰, and have done so for many years. There are no available recent statistics for the private security services, however, anecdotal data collected during the RETAIN interviews with affiliates indicates the strong presence of post-migrants, or the children of migrants, in security work.

As we will discuss below, the use of migrant labour is at present accompanied by a number of negative effects: migrant workers are often exploited, employed on insecure contracts, and work in inadequate employment conditions that can further contribute to turnover and shortages. At the same time, mass migration of labour in the EU has brought about problems of ‘brain drain’, with the depletion of the workforce and the creation of new or increased labour shortages in ‘sending’ countries, within Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) in particular.

3.1. The employment conditions of migrant workers

It is important to consider how the relationship between the use of migrant labour and inadequate employment conditions can contribute to further labour turnover and shortages. Doudeijns and Dumont (2003) argue that the roots of labour market imbalances lie in low pay, insecure working conditions and unattractive occupations. When migrant labour is used “systematically” as a stopgap for shortages and the former factors are not sufficiently addressed, this can sustain these root problems. This contributes to the persistence or growth of imbalances in the medium to long term and rendering many OECD countries even more dependent on flows of migrant labour. At the same time, “longstanding immigrants” gradually leave arduous or insecure jobs, such that “new waves of immigrants are constantly required to alleviate the shortage of labour for unpopular types of work.” Current observations from other labour-intensive, low-pay sectors may also be relevant. For example, in the UK meat processing industry, there is evidence that highly demanding working conditions and arrangements can “evolve around” migrant workers, perpetuating the need for such recruits, who work intensely for a short time to maximise their income, and contributing to labour shortages by closing off the

²⁸ This follows the introduction of the Skilled Immigration Act in 2020, easing restrictions for some non-EU nationals.

²⁹ A study by Trygstad et al (2018) has put recent figures as ranging from 67 percent in Norway and 34 percent in Germany, to 25 percent in the UK; the chairman of the British Cleaning Council (Nixon, 2020) has noted that “the proportion of lower paid, lower skilled migrant workers” in the sector is “much higher” than the average across the economy as a whole.

³⁰ Of whom 4.5% are from outside and 3.4% from within the EU. While proportions of migrant workers in LTC in large states range from 9% to 19%, other states such as Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia have virtually no migrants working in the sector (1% or below); Social Employers & EPSU (2020) note an increasing reliance on migrant labour to fill shortages in LTC, and Eurofound (2020) indicates that the number of foreign workers in LTC increased by 28% in Germany between 2012 and 2015 and doubled in Denmark between 2008 and 2018 (rising faster than the labour market average).

sector to non-migrants who can find “less demanding jobs with steadier shifts that pay a similar wage” (O’Connor, 2021b).

In the industrial cleaning sector, the considerable increases in migrant workers from CEE since EU expansion in 2004 and the financial crisis in 2007 (e.g., rising from 5 percent to 30.5 percent of the cleaning population in Norway in the decade following), has been described in terms of “inflows of cheap labour and enterprises... challenging wage floors and collective regulation systems” (Trygstad et al., 2018) and CEE labour migrants and those from third countries have been engaged by companies “offering inferior wages and working conditions”. Exploitative subcontractors and agencies are also noted to be a major factor in the precariousness of migrant work in the sector (Pajnik, 2016). Although such practises might be expected to exist in other areas of Property Services, there is currently a paucity of literature on the conditions of migrant workers in the European private security industry, or how the use of migrant labour may relate to shortages and turnover in the sector.

In the care sector, national policy arrangements such as the historic absence of publicly financed social care, its cutting back and marketisation, or the provision of unregulated cash benefits are all said to be associated with large scale domestic employment of migrant carers by families, often on an informal basis³¹, without work or residence permits and lacking social protection (van Hooren, 2020)³². In Italy in 2018, three-quarters of 402,413 such domestic carers were foreign nationals (over 70% of whom were from Eastern Europe) and in Spain, in 2017, 63% of those employed in domestic help and care were foreign nationals (totalling 69,000 in care). Commenting on the issue of informal domestic carers, the ILO (King-Dejardin, 2019) notes that “tensions in an employment relationship between care recipient and caregiver may have negative consequences on the care relationship and quality of care”.

Where migration is pursued as a strategy to fill labour shortages, institutions provide a number of recommendations relevant to the retention of the workforce. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) (2021) calls for full implementation of the Posting of Workers Directive to ensuring migrant workers in the care sector are not excluded from the protection of national statutory minimum wages, along with more accessible integration services and information (available in workers’ mother tongue) concerning their rights. Meanwhile, Eurofound (2020a), EFCI (2020) and Social Employers and EPSU (2020) focus on improvement of migrants’ working lives and the opening up career opportunities – which might contribute to reducing turnover and quits – by enhancing recognition of workers’ capacities and foreign qualifications and the facilitation of access to language courses, basic digital skills and soft skills training.

In Spain and France, civil society coalitions and trade unions have campaigned for mass regularisation of informal domestic care workers (van Hooren, 2020), and, in Italy, such a policy

³¹ There are an estimated 10,000 undocumented and undeclared migrant domestic workers in Cyprus (ESPN, 2018b, as cited by Eurofound, 2020a).

³² Indeed, trade unions have expressed concerns that direct payments in the context of local funding shortages has led to potential exploitation of vulnerable migrant workers (Cangiano et al., 2009, as cited by King-Dejardin, 2019).

was enacted in May 2020 in the agricultural sector in order to retain workers in the context of pandemic border closures³³.

3.2. The impacts of COVID-19 on labour migration

The pandemic situation and consequent revisions of border arrangements have caused a reduction in immigration in the EU (Margaras, 2020), and it is pertinent to question whether these effects could persist. At the same time, there are concerns that reliance on short-term migration has undermined the resilience of service provision in some sectors in the EU, while also resulting in a failure to properly integrate migrant workers into the workforce at large.

Among care workers, the numbers of migrants travelling internationally to take up employment has significantly reduced and left destination countries with substantial shortages in this area (ILO, 2020). In the case of Germany, at the first pandemic peak in March 2020, the Association for Home Care and Nursing projected that up to 200,000 people would no longer be cared for at home due to the departure of migrant care workers (ILO, 2020). Van Hooren (2020) claims that such developments show that a reliance on temporary and mobile migrant care workers – similarly demonstrated in Austria – has undermined the resilience of social care systems. In this regard, Van den Broeck (2021) opines that Member State and EU policies have been likely to promote temporariness of “less skilled migration”, jeopardising integration for such migrant workers³⁴, who are often denied access to education and training, labour market guidance and recognition of skills and qualifications. As such, the author recommends “longer term temporary visas” that would lead to less “unproductive churning”.

These circumstances are converging with the reality that in some sending countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the economic situation is steadily improving, and salaries are rising, motivating the return of migrant workers to their home countries (see: Social Employers & EPSU, 2020). This points to a wider question of internationalism to be considered: the recruitment of qualified workers from abroad can simply transfer labour shortages to those ‘sending’ countries, who may in turn have to turn to other countries to fill labour demand³⁵, while, in LTC, such flows, or “global care chains”, are often insufficient to meet the rising demand from demographic change (CoR, 2021; MacLeavy, 2020; Social Employers & EPSU, 2020; Eurofound, 2021)³⁶.

Summary: Chapter 3

³³ Van Hooren (2020) emphasises that regularising undocumented migrant workers is “not a silver bullet” for workforce resilience, and does not address issues such as necessary qualifications, recognition of foreign qualifications and improved working conditions.

³⁴ Who have a 48% higher probability of being a temporary worker (Van den Broeck, 2021).

³⁵ In the context of feminised LTC and cleaning workforces, there is also an informal “care drain” in sending countries to be considered, since many migrant women initially move alone (Social Employers & EPSU, 2020).

³⁶ MacLeavy (2020) also notes that, “With political resistance to international migration on the rise, questions have also been raised about the sustainability of this response to the care deficit over the long term (Marsden, 2018).”

Migrant labour continues to be promoted as a solution to labour shortages by many employers and policymakers. However, it has long been argued that the systematic use of migrant labour as a stopgap, leaving the roots of labour market imbalances (in questions of pay, working conditions and the attractiveness of occupations, for example) unaddressed, can reinforce the root problems, creating a model of dependence on new waves of migration to undertake unpopular forms of work. Specifically, the employment of migrants in industrial cleaning (30% of EU workforce) and LTC (7.9%) has been associated with exploitation on the basis of “inferior wages and working conditions”, insecure contractual arrangements and precarious and informal work. Policy recommendations to improve the conditions of migrant workers in these sectors have included calls for the full implementation of the Posting of Workers Directive to guarantee national statutory minimum wages and access to information services and workers’ rights, in addition to better recognition of foreign qualifications and the facilitation of access to language courses, digital skills and soft skills training. In Spain and France, civil society coalitions and trade unions have also campaigned for the mass regularisation of informal domestic care workers.

The present pandemic situation should only strengthen concerns about the problems of dependence on short-term migrant labour within the aforementioned sectors and the inadequacy of measures to integrate migrant workers. Specifically, reductions in new migrants and the return of many migrant carers to their home countries during the pandemic have opened up huge shortages in long-term care in some countries, such as Germany and Austria. Immediate policy responses could include longer-term temporary visas. However, there is also an emerging long-term reality of improving economic situations in many “sending” countries, with rising salaries, which provide additional incentives for migrant workers to return to or remain within their home countries. This brings into question the sustainability of reliance on global migration flows to supply workforces in the care and cleaning sectors; an arrangement that also represents a flawed internationalism – often simply entailing the transfer of labour shortages to sending countries. The abovementioned limits on migration as a short-term fix for labour shortages may be increasingly driving business to focus on the other most prominent “quantitative” solution for employers and policymakers alike, notably digitalisation and automation.

| 4 | Digitalisation, robotics and automation

In this chapter, the review addresses digitalisation and new technologies within the three sectors, which are often proposed as partial or complete solutions to labour shortages in services (Poulsen & Burmeister, 2019; Markovitz & Sault, 2021; Dempsey & Lee, 2021). We look at the most salient proposals within the literature on certain labour-saving technologies that advocates claim may reduce labour turnover and shortages within the aforementioned sectors, and we examine some of the critiques and concerns from academics and social partners. Specifically, these include the use of robotics, monitoring technologies and platform working within the long-term care sector, and robotics and automated scheduling within Property Services.

In general, across the labour market, there has been increasing discussion of accelerating digitisation and automation of work, particularly in the context of the present pandemic³⁷. Reports claim (MacLeavy, 2020) that technologies such as automation save on labour in industrial contexts, can augment human capacities in services and, as they take over simple and monotonous tasks, may allow the devotion of greater amounts of labour power to skilled tasks and tasks requiring cognitive and interpersonal sensitivities. There are, however, concerns about the impacts of digitalisation on aspects of work that could influence labour turnover and the attractiveness of occupations, such as wage decline, erosion of bargaining power, job insecurity and deterioration of job quality (Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2021; Casselman, 2021; MacLeavy, 2020). In addition, despite increased digitalisation, the nature of the sectors in question currently remains labour-intensive.

4.1. Long-term care: digitalisation and caregiving concerns

The adoption of digital technologies in social services provision across Europe is said to be “inevitably” expanding, albeit unevenly so (Social Employers & EPSU, 2019). While digitalisation in long-term care encompasses a range of developments from robotics, to telecare, to smart homes, to platform working (Eurofound, 2020b), discussion concerning the former aspect was found to relate most pertinently to problems of labour shortages and turnover in the examined literature.

Use of robots in health and social care varies greatly across Europe, according to Eurofound (2020b), with several examples of use of robots in the Netherlands. In the ongoing pandemic context, it has been expected that the level of hygiene offered by robots may bring greater investment and normalisation of automation (MacLeavy, 2020). However, up to now, the price of robots has been found to constrain adoption in home care, since social robots and virtual care models cost approximately €28,000, and investment from care homes or the public sector remains lacking beyond pilot projects (Eurofound, 2020b). Pekkarinen et al. (2020)³⁸ find that care robotics is considered a “market of the future” in Germany, for example, and note that, “it remains to be seen to what extent care workers can be supported and the shortage of specialist staff resolved by it,” since care institutions are “under huge financial pressure” and need to find a balance between technology and care staff. Another central challenge to the rollout of robotics and telecare is the lack of access to and use of the internet by older people; in 2015, only 45% of 65-74 year-olds in the EU used the internet once or more per week³⁹ (EPTA, 2019, p.8).

Overall, there is some scepticism among social partners and academics regarding the extent to which developments such as ‘intelligent machines’ permit full replacement of carer roles, and, frequently, a more collaborative relationship with this new technology is envisioned (Social

³⁷ A recent international survey of leaders and HR strategists at large companies (World Economic Forum, 2020; as cited by Saadi Sedik and Yoo, 2021) found 80 percent are accelerating the digitalisation of their work processes and 50 percent indicate that they will accelerate the automation of jobs in their companies. However, there is evidence from the US to the contrary of these claims (The Economist, 2021b). The IMF (Saadi Sedik & Yoo, 2021) finds that robot adoption increases over time after pandemic events, especially in the case of severe health impacts and significant economic downturn, with some lag, and describes how pandemic-induced uncertainty could add to incentives for automation, as firms try to anticipate similar future labour disruptions.

³⁸ In a qualitative study based on industry interviews.

³⁹ As few as 14% in Greece, 23% in Poland, 26% in Portugal, and 31% in Spain.

Employers & EPSU, 2019; MacLeavy, 2020). Social contact and human relationships are often claimed to be “fundamental” to the provision of social care services (Social Employers & EPSU, 2019; Druckman & Mair, 2019; Pekkarinen et al., 2020), and MacLeavy (2020) has argued that certain tasks combining “physical and affective elements” cannot easily be broken down for mechanisation, or that doing so would be to lose core properties of care⁴⁰. On the other hand, the EPTA (2019, p.14) notes that some researchers make the distinction of using robots exclusively for routine care jobs, while caregiving tasks that “require emotional, intimate and personal involvement” would be done by people.

Where more autonomous use of robots and machines is proposed, a range of concerns have been raised by researchers and civil society groups, from a loss of humanity and personal autonomy for care users (MacLeavy, 2020; Pekkarinen et al., 2020; EPTA, 2019, pp.14 & 111) to increased demands on family caregivers. Particularly relevant to the issue of labour turnover are concerns about impacts on the caregiving relationship for care workers themselves as their duties are redefined (MacLeavy, 2020), since this aspect of the job has been shown as central to their motivation (Marková et al., 2020; Engström et al., 2010; EPTA, 2019, p.111).

Recent innovations take a different approach, however. ESN (2021) describes how a UK public authority (Hampshire County Council) has recently trialled battery-powered, lightweight “cobot” lumbar assistive devices for carers, on the basis of increasing awareness of the physical toll of the work on staff and the desire to minimise client contact with different carers. The devices are said to have had a “very positive” reception from staff: activities such as washing have been made much easier, tiredness decreased, and workers have felt less exposed to the risk of Covid-19 infection and more “valued”, due to investment in the devices. This “blending” of a human and cobot workforce is also said to have the advantages of more flexible deployment, reduced staff absence and lower turnover, helping to reduce recruitment effort and costs (ESN, 2021). On the other hand, it is worth noting that extensive cobot rollout in Japan has been associated with increases in non-standard work (often using migrant staff) and reduced wages for nurses and care workers (Eggleston et al., 2021).

Issues of job satisfaction and job quality associated with the use of new technologies also arise in social partner discussions. Social Employers and EPSU (2019) cite worker concerns that digital solutions could impact workload (more obligations for reporting, for example) and working time, trigger mistakes or affect service user trust. In this light, it is insisted that digitalisation should be primarily at the service of attaining improved service quality, knowledge and control for care users and workers, and that a safe and responsible digital “transition” requires consultation of workers and support for them to become competent guides to new technologies (see also Albrecht & Gerst, 2021). Currently, Pekkarinen et al. (2020) find that in Germany, Sweden and Finland, there is a lack of information and knowledge concerning “care robotics” among staff in the sector that will inhibit acceptance of these technologies in the workplace. In this vein, the CoR (2021) calls for “ongoing training schemes” in new digital tools for workers (also see EPTA, 2019, p.8), while EPSU and Social Employers (2019) propose qualifications in digital skills, to be integrated into relevant education structures and continuous professional

⁴⁰ For example, in addition to meeting survival needs, tasks such as washing, lifting and dressing are usually intended to “produce or modify an emotional response, whether that be a sense of security, a reduction of fear or the satisfaction of sensualities”.

development⁴¹. It is worth asking whether such digital upskilling and “up-dating” of the workplace might help to improve the attractiveness of the social care sector – particularly if matched by pay improvements.

Other specific possibilities for digitalised changes in working life in LTC are said to include use of monitoring technologies, mobile apps and electronic patient files⁴² for optimising work processes (Social Employers & EPSU, 2019; Care Success, 2019; Sekoia, 2020). In this regard, MacLeavy (2020) warns that increased control over and monitoring of care strengthens tendencies towards homogenization and conformity in caregiving practice and can impose an instrumental view of care, leading to less personal discretion from workers. In addition, social partners (Social Employers & EPSU, 2019) observe that evolving online platforms for care services could put at risk quality standards⁴³ and the organisation and regulation of work in the sector, including through increases in casual work, on-call work, temporary agency work, informal work and “dependent” self-employment⁴⁴. The latter “independent contractor” arrangement denies care workers the conditions and benefits of employee status and reduces access to labour and social protection (MacLeavy, 2020)⁴⁵. The above risks raise obvious questions concerning the sector’s reputation and the attractiveness of the work and employment conditions it provides (see also Chapter 6), which is of particular concern in the context of the rapidly-growing and large-scale shortages in the sector as detailed in Chapter 1. In addressing these issues, constructive social dialogue has been highlighted as central to guiding and regulating technological development of the sector on a sustainable and fair path that improves job and service quality (Social Employers & EPSU, 2019).

4.2. Property services: cobotics and automated scheduling

Within industrial cleaning, there have also been claims that cobotics can contribute to improving the retention rates and the attractiveness of the sector. The basis for these assertions by robotics manufacturers is that their machines, with “intuitive interfaces” (Tennant, 2020), can boost “engagement” and job satisfaction within cleaning teams. It is stated that cobots “liberate” cleaners from carrying out repetitive, strenuous and time-consuming tasks, and allow them to undertake more valuable, varied and rewarding tasks that make “a real difference” to service quality and which “only a human can do” (Tennant, 2020; van der Zijl, 2020). However, given that the examples provided of such “human” tasks include “high-touch cleaning and disinfection of surfaces” (Tennant, 2020), the question arises of whether these technologies could in fact lead

⁴¹ On the subject of training, it is also suggested that new digital methods such as the use of simulators could help to develop workers’ practical and technical competences, including in increased traineeship programmes.

⁴² The non-profit employers’ association Social Services Europe (SSE, 2017) also notes how one of its members, Cooperative La Rete, has used the database ‘Anthology’ to bring together different sets of data from a range of agencies, building detailed folders on clients that allow workers to spend more time with them, rather than collecting data. New resources freed up by the technology have, SSE reports, led to the opening of a new centre.

⁴³ According to MacLeavy (2020), the attendant culture of arranging care in short units of time is said to promote fragmented and task-oriented working practices, rather than a more person-centred approach that could deliver better outcomes for those in receipt of care and provide a better work experience.

⁴⁴ MacLeavy (2020) notes that while flexible work arrangements offered on platforms are claimed to help women (in particular) undertake paid work, there is usually a trade-off between flexibility and earnings.

⁴⁵ “Including compliance with minimum wage laws, employer social security contributions, anti-discrimination regulation, sick pay and holiday entitlements, as well as the ability to associate freely and bargain collectively” (MacLeavy, 2020, citing de Stefano, 2016).

to a narrowing of cleaning tasks, with potential health and safety risks, such as more intensified interaction with cleaning chemicals⁴⁶.

On the other hand, manufacturers propose that through engaging with and managing “cutting-edge” technology, cleaners could develop new skills (van der Zijl, 2020) and that embracing robotics could make workplaces more attractive to employees, based on the perception that a company is a better, “cooler” place to work and one that values innovation (Tennant, 2021). Working alongside staff, and instructed and monitored by personnel, cobots are said to have been successfully introduced by major facilities management companies such as ISS and Sodexo, who are developing plans to extend their use. This said, unions and workers may wish to approach the introduction of cobotics to the cleaning industry with some caution. Its primary appeal as advertised in the manufacturer literature seems to centre on “cost efficiencies” (van der Zijl, 2020; Tennant, 2020 & 2021), and it remains to be asked any savings for employees would be passed on to employees in the form of wage rises for “upskilled” jobs.

In the private security sector, meanwhile, there have been proposals (Lozier, 2019) for digitalisation that would streamline administrative processes and, according to advocates, balance the costs of high turnover associated with overtime, recruitment, on-boarding and wage increases. The technology could be targeted at “reduc[ing] the manual effort associated with maintaining schedules” and optimising scheduling to better allocate staff time. It is worth asking, however, whether such initiatives in automating scheduling (and other processes) could risk reducing flexibility for staff – thereby degrading work-life balance and job satisfaction – and might also reduce upskilling of private security staff and internal mobility into administrative or supervisory roles. At the same time, Gaupel (2019) states that the program “Advanced Scheduling”, which allows employees to request time off through a web portal and ensures they receive the appropriate time off, has been recommended in the US (Alberta) as a partial solution to a recognised problem of overwork among private security guards amid labour shortages and scheduling issues (itself attributed to low wages). Gaupel claims that the program will provide companies with detailed reporting on staff needs that will enable reliable scheduling.

Summary: Chapter 4

Digitalised solutions to labour shortages and turnover in the LTC and Property Services sectors include robotisation (and cobotics), virtual care, monitoring technologies and automated scheduling. The principal claims in favour of these new technologies are that they can automate strenuous and time-consuming physical tasks, free up workers to undertake more “valuable”, “human” and satisfying tasks, render occupations more attractive through digitalised work, or, in some cases, replace or eliminate staff roles. However, especially as regards robots and machines, the rollout of such technology remains limited and variable across the EU due to factors such as the costs of investment for employers, requirements for digital skills among staff and, as per the LTC sector, limited internet access among older people.

⁴⁶ A broader and related point is made in a paper by Mogstad Aspøy (2020) on skills development, which notes that technological change in cleaning “does not imply knowledge work in itself”, citing observations in previous research that sophisticated technology “might be used to control employees and limit the skills they can deploy and the discretion they may exercise”.

At the same time, trade unions also raise concerns about how automation and digitalisation (including platform work and automated scheduling) could impact work intensity, working arrangements and job security in these sectors. Constructive social dialogue will be central to guiding and regulating technological development in the sector on a sustainable path that improves job and service quality, rather than simply targeting the cutting of labour costs (as is publicised by the providers of automated technologies). A safe and responsible digital transition will also require consultation of workers and support for them to become competent guides to new technologies, including ongoing digital training schemes for workers and qualifications in digital skills, which might genuinely help to improve the attractiveness of the sectors if matched by pay improvements.

Within the LTC sector, specifically, there also remain significant concerns from trade unions, academics and some employers about the impacts of automation on the caregiving relationship, which is considered fundamental both to the service received by care users and the job satisfaction of care workers. It is contested as to what volume of caring tasks can be feasibly broken down or replaced without undermining the humanity of the caring process. Meanwhile, in industrial cleaning, trade unions should be concerned as to whether new robotic technologies could in fact lead to a narrowing of cleaning tasks and risks for health and safety and job satisfaction.

In the subsequent chapters, we address solutions to labour shortages and turnover that focus on the nature of work and occupations in the LTC and Property Services sectors, or what might be termed “qualitative solutions” to these problems, beginning with the potential to improve wages in these low-pay sectors.

| 5 | Wages and benefits

In the literature reviewed, wages and associated benefits are frequently cited as an important factor in labour turnover and shortages. Most recently, in October 2021, policy directors at the OECD and the Hans Böckler Foundation have identified raising wages as the central policy solution in the current European labour shortages crisis across a range of low-paying labour-intensive sectors (Taylor, 2021). Furthermore, as illustrated by the numerous examples given in section 1.1., and as argued in Eurofound’s 2021 report, persistent labour shortages in an industry can ultimately result in an increased wages, as businesses and sectors compete to attract (and retain) the best available workforce. Here we will briefly review evidence concerning pay in the sectors and, subsequently, look at various findings linking wages to turnover and the attractiveness of the occupations in question.

5.1. Low or below-average pay

Framing this discussion, it is important to state that these sectors are widely understood to comprise “low-pay” work for good reason. Eurofound (2020) points out that large sections of the LTC workforce across the EU are paid “well below the national average wage”, and in many

countries several care occupations within LTC are paid at the level of the minimum wage⁴⁷, with an overall deterioration in pay since the financial crisis. The CoR (2021) has recently sought to remind the European Commission and Member States that care work “is not paid in accordance with its social value”, and this is a situation that is proving unacceptable to many LTC workers, who feel less often (43%) than all workers overall (51%), and healthcare workers (47%), that they are paid appropriately, given their efforts and achievements in their job (EWCS 2015, as cited by Eurofound, 2020). In this vein, the Red Cross EU (2017) has argued that insufficient pay is a major reason for workers leaving the social services sector⁴⁸, whereas adequate pay “contributes to job satisfaction” and “helps retain skilled workers”. In addition, the OECD (2021, Box 1.4) pinpoints low wages and poor job quality in LTC as exacerbating labour shortages and leading to recruitment and retention difficulties.

Pay in Property Services is also unattractive in many cases. Across European OECD countries, including the public sector, median earnings for cleaners are between the 10th and 20th percentile of the earnings distribution, while those of security guards are between the 40th and 50th percentile (OECD, 2021). In the UK, cleaners’ median hourly pay was 32% less than the median worker, and security guards, 24% less⁴⁹ (TUC, 2020), while in Germany, as of 2016, 70% of all German cleaning workers earned wages below two-thirds of the median national wage (Bundesregierung, 2016, as cited by Larsen et al., 2019).

5.2. Wages, turnover and attractiveness of work in the sectors

Long-term care

In an ESN (2016) survey of 97 managers, commissioners and researchers in public social services across 27 European countries, 73% of respondents identified poor wages as a major challenge in recruiting staff. Similarly, in the UK learning disability social care sector (Hft, 2018), 80% of employers cited low wages as the biggest barrier to recruiting and retaining staff, and 76% listed “Better paid careers in other sector(s)” as one of the top three reasons given by employees for leaving. Moreover, a study of home care in the US by Barnow et al. (2013, p.155) revealed that low pay and benefits “tempered the enthusiasm of even the most highly motivated to enter and stay in the field of home health care”, noting that workers would often depart for other low-paying sectors with “less stress, regular hours, and lower levels of commuting”.

A number of more particular challenges linking remuneration with recruitment and retention also arise in the LTC literature: **a)** In home care, lack of compensation for travel between the homes of care users risks underpayment of minimum wage rates (Eurofound, 2020); **b)** In the UK, increasingly, pay in care work is not enough to cover the costs of childcare (Charlesworth, Baines, & Cunningham, 2015, as cited by MacLeavy, 2020) – of particular import when

⁴⁷ In the UK, too, Tumpenny and Hussein (2020) report care workers as “among the lowest paid workers in the economy”, and the country’s Low Pay Commission has flagged social care as a sector of concern in terms of compliance with the national minimum wage (OECD, 2020).

⁴⁸ In the UK, a GMB Union (2020) survey of members in the care sector found 79% felt staff shortages were likely because people were unwilling to work at current levels of pay amid the increased risk posed by COVID-19.

⁴⁹ Where average private security pay among other European countries is estimated by jobsearch websites, it appears consistently low (White, 2021).

consideration is given to the feminised character of the workforce and prevailing societal gender norms; **c)** In countries such as Denmark, Italy and Lithuania (Eurofound, 2020), the lack of pay progression with tenure (with the same employer or sector) – or minimal progression in the UK context (Vadean, F. & Saloniki, E., 2020)⁵⁰ – can also be noted as a challenge to retention, given the above findings on dissatisfaction with low pay; **d)** LTC wages can in some occupations compare poorly with similar ones in healthcare, e.g., at the population-weighted EU27 level, care workers earn €2.02 less than their healthcare equivalents (Eurofound, 2020).

Employers in the private sector also need to take into account the fact that LTC wages in several Member States are generally higher in the public sector (Austria, Cyprus, Czechia, Finland, Ireland, Poland, the UK) (Eurofound, 2020), while the same is true for cleaners and security guards in the UK, with median hourly pay for the latter being 32% higher in the public sector (TUC, 2020).

Substantial evidence from the last decade indicates that in the UK, US, France and Korea wage increases in LTC have led to “employment of more workers, longer job tenure and lower turnover” (OECD, 2020, p.117)⁵¹. On this basis, in June 2020, amid the pandemic, the German government, in an effort to attract more entrants to the sector, increased the minimum wage for “unskilled” elderly care workers from €9.35 to €11.60 (it will eventually rise to €12.55 for nursing assistants in 2022) and is also increasing wages for qualified nursing assistants and care workers (van Hooren, 2020; Lorenz-Dant, 2020). Mandatory paid vacation days are also being increased in the sector (Lorenz-Dant, 2020). Further to this, it has been reported that some employment agencies increased wages for formally employed migrant care workers in order to encourage them to stay in Germany (van Hooren, 2020). In the Eurozone as a whole, it appears that a similar tendency toward rising wages could be emerging, since the group of workers receiving the largest wage increase in the Eurozone in Q2 of 2021 was health and social workers, at 3.3% (just above inflation), according to Eurostat (Arnold, 2021).

Property Services

In the Property Services sectors, there is a range of international evidence that increased wages and benefits are a major factor in lower labour turnover and improved recruitment. This ranges from a study surveying 4,102 officers in Turkey’s private security sector (Demirci & Ergen, 2020), to US studies comparing private security workforces across cities (LAANE, 2006) and tracking the year-long trial of a \$3 per hour increase for guards at 12 Detroit public schools (where annual turnover went from 57% to zero) (DeHaven, 2019), to surveys of cohorts of officers in Singapore (Long & Perumal, 2014) and in three Kenyan cities (Kimosop, 2007). The interviews done as part of the RETAIN project confirm that wages make up one of the most important factors influencing turnover.

In addition to this evidence, significant employers in the US private security and UK cleaning industries, such as Magenta Security (2020), 4M (2018), Birkin (Ashton, 2019) and Regional

⁵⁰ MacLeavy (2020) notes the influence of casualisation on this problem.

⁵¹ The OECD adds: “When higher wages have led to an increase in skilled workers, they have contributed to more consumer value than they cost”, citing Hackmann, 2017.

Services (2020), publicise statements affirming that, on the one hand, providing pensions and paying higher rates than other employers helps them to maintain substantially lower turnover figures and to attract “the best people”, and, on the other hand, that competitive or above-market pay “is the first important step to retaining happy, satisfied employees” who feel more valued and are more productive.⁵² Going further, UK “ethical” cleaning company, Clean For Good, founded in 2017, advertises that it pays real “Living Wage”⁵³ rates and explains this as being about treating employees “with respect”, showing that their work “has dignity”, and “saying that Black lives matter and women’s lives matter in an industry powered by women and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic workers” (Thorlby, 2021).

In issues of relevance to all the sectors at hand, Long and Perumal (2014), also observe that better pay can create larger pools of applicants to positions and is more likely to attract better qualified and educated employees. Looking beyond individual businesses, Securitas (2018) also emphasises that contract bill rates must be responsibly negotiated by customers and providers to accommodate “meaningful wages and benefits”, since constant lowering of rates eventually leads (due to tight margins) to shrinking wages⁵⁴ and greater staff turnover that will affect both service quality and other supplier costs.

Summary: Chapter 5

Workforces in the three sectors studied in this review frequently suffer levels of pay well below national and European average earnings. At the same time, a substantial body of academic evidence at the international level⁵⁵ covering the LTC and Property Services sectors over the last two decades indicates that increases in wages and benefits have led to improved recruitment, longer job tenure and lower turnover. Interviews done as part of the RETAIN project also confirm that wages make up one of the most important factors influencing turnover.

From the perspective of employers, recent surveys have shown that large proportions of LTC employers (73-80%) in the EU and UK identify relatively poor wages as a major challenge in recruiting and retaining staff. At the same time, a range of significant employers in the US private security and UK cleaning industries currently publicise statements affirming that providing pensions and paying higher rates than other employers helps them to maintain substantially lower turnover figures, to attract better staff, and to retain employees who feel more valued and more satisfied with their work and are more productive. Concerning the issue of contract billing rates, in particular, Securitas (2018) has also emphasised that these must be responsibly negotiated by customers and providers to accommodate “meaningful wages and benefits”, since constant lowering of rates eventually leads (due to tight margins) to shrinking wages and greater staff turnover that will affect both service quality and other supplier costs.

⁵² Security magazine has also noted that the “top reason” for voluntary turnover is unsatisfactory compensation, in view of various studies and reports (McNally, 2004).

⁵³ As determined annually by the independent UK charity The Living Wage Foundation.

⁵⁴ Likewise, Keune and Pedaci (2019) note that in Europe’s cleaning industry, cost pressure from major clients like airports, universities, large offices and ministries leads to pressure on wages.

⁵⁵ From the UK, US, France, Korea, Turkey, Singapore and Kenya.

In the long-term care sector, specifically, recent developments in labour shortages in the pandemic context have seen the German government initiate substantial increases in the minimum wage for “unskilled” elderly care workers, qualified nursing assistants and care workers, while, the group of workers receiving the largest wage increase in the Eurozone in Q2 of 2021 was health and social workers, at 3.3% (just above inflation). Specific remuneration challenges to be addressed in the LTC sector also include: failure for wages to account for rising costs of workers’ childcare needs, lack of pay progression, poor comparability of pay with the healthcare sector (the principal labour market competitor) between similar occupations, and absence of compensation for travel costs for home care workers. Finally, there has been a deterioration in pay in the sector since the financial crisis, and there is evidence that workers recognise this problem, feeling less often than all workers overall, and healthcare workers, that they are paid appropriately for their work.

| 6 | Working conditions and arrangements

Improvement in working conditions⁵⁶ and a healthier, safer work environment have been highlighted as key in reducing turnover and absenteeism in long-term care and improving the attractiveness of the sector (OECD, 2020; Barnow et al., 2013, p.157; CoR, 2021), and evidence from Sweden also indicates that LTC workers see working conditions and underemployment (along with low wages) as central to their decision to remain or not in the sector⁵⁷. Likewise, issues such as arduousness, unsocial or difficult working times, excessive workload, and stress have been said to reduce job satisfaction levels among both cleaning workers and LTC workers, and can increase intention to quit (Lene, 2019; Social Employers & EPSU, 2020). Some of the above claims may be extended across the three sectors, and we will explore a range of similar issues. However, it is also worth highlighting that staffing levels may contribute to all of the above issues across the sectors studied, along with other issues such as short-notice work in LTC (Eurofound, 2020). Accordingly, there is a pressing need to break this potential ‘vicious circle’ of labour shortages and turnover in the sectors at hand.

6.1. Working conditions and job satisfaction

According to Eurofound’s indices of job quality (2020), LTC scores worse than average for physical environment, working time quality, social environment, monthly earnings and work intensity, with only 22% of LTC workers being ‘very satisfied’ with their working conditions (26% among the general workforce). In the private security sector, studies from Kenya and the US have found that the routineness of job duties has been associated with lack of job satisfaction (in turn associated with labour turnover) and lack of challenges at work, as well as monotony and boredom outside of peak hours, particularly during night work, has been linked with dissatisfaction and inattentiveness (Kimosop, 2007; Nalla & Cobbina, 2017). Gaupel (2019) also

⁵⁶ This is the main element of a Dutch plan of action to address labour shortages in the sector (OECD, 2020), and central to Germany’s Concerted Action in Care plan (2018), including attention to the physical burden of work, occupational health, shift plans, continuous managerial training, and work-life balance (Eurofound, 2021).

⁵⁷ 4 out of 10 LTC nurses and nursing assistants regret their choice of profession owing to the conditions of the job, low wages and underemployment and half have considered changing profession in the last year (Kommunal, 2018, as cited by Eurofound, 2020).

notes that newly hired security officers “rarely know what they are getting into”, and have a “stylized or stereotyped understanding” of the job that is far from its daily reality, which can contribute to turnover. Meanwhile, in industrial cleaning, a potential problem for workers’ mental wellbeing⁵⁸ lies in the personal isolation caused by lone working⁵⁹, the dispersion of cleaners over multiple sites and atypical or split-shift working patterns. These factors can render cleaners ‘invisible’ to their co-workers and building occupants and undermine the formation of common identities and efforts at union organisation (Recio & Godino, 2011; Keune & Pedaci, 2019)⁶⁰.

6.2. Health and safety

In the current pandemic context, health and safety concerns are especially acute in contact-intensive professions. In the UK, data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) covering 2020 showed elementary occupations (including in the security sector, notably) as the group with the highest COVID-19 mortality rate and “caring, leisure and other service occupations” as the group with the second highest rates (ONS, 2021). Globally, the ILO (2020) has observed that care workers were disproportionately affected in the first phase of the pandemic. They cite evidence that health risks (which continue) intersected with precarious employment conditions⁶¹ to compel staff to continue working when unwell, as in the case of a residential care home in Gothenburg, Sweden, where several staff tested positive for COVID-19. As part of responding to such problems, trade unions in Norway and Denmark have successfully campaigned for COVID-19 to be classed as an occupational disease for health and care personnel (and other groups), allowing the right to compensation for those exposed to high risks of infection (Pelling, 2021).

There has been some discussion associating poor attention to health and safety hazards and ambient dangers in the private security industry with labour turnover (Kimosop, 2007; Gaupel, 2019); however, there is a much greater volume of literature in the other sectors. In both LTC and industrial cleaning, there are high levels of absenteeism, predominantly due to sickness in the former case and to accidents in the latter (OECD, 2020; Eurofound, 2014). These are reflected in higher-than-average proportions of workers who think that their work negatively affects their health (Eurofound, 2020; Eurofound, 2014), who report being exposed to physical risk factors at work (OECD, 2020; Eurofound, 2014), and, in the case of cleaning, who report poor general health (Eurofound, 2014). Major factors in the above problems within the cleaning industry are reported to be the physical and psychological workload associated with non-regular working times, physically demanding work processes, and monotonous tasks, according to research by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (Larsen et al., 2019). As such, the agency has called for the implementation of a “holistic” preventive approach to health and safety in the industry, including improvement in working conditions and hours, which it claims

⁵⁸ Which has been found to be lower than the EU average (Eurofound, 2014).

⁵⁹ Teamwork has been found to be less prevalent in industrial cleaning (49%) than across the entire EU workforce (62%) (Eurofound, 2014).

⁶⁰ An OECD (2020) report notes that care workers, too, often work alone with the care recipient, especially in home care settings, and need to make difficult professional decisions on their own; it recommends that a supportive manager can bring relief to the strain.

⁶¹ It notes: “lack of social health protection measures, including access to healthcare, paid sick leave or financial compensation in the event that they contract COVID-19”.

would result in better service quality and reduced staff turnover and absenteeism (Tregenza, 2009).

It is also important to address particular health and safety problems of the sectors at hand. Firstly, musculoskeletal conditions are widespread in LTC⁶² and industrial cleaning⁶³. In order to reduce the occurrence of such injuries and to improve workforce retention, recommendations made have included better evaluation of risks, overall prevention policies addressing impacts on the workers' whole body, adaptation of the work to the individual, and improved training and instructions, in addition to the availability of lifting and handling equipment and training for care workers to safely carry out their job and improved selection of equipment for cleaners, through involving workers in the process (Social Employers & EPSU, 2020; OECD, 2020; EU-OSHA, 2008; Eurofound, 2014).

Secondly, a large proportion (46%) of LTC workers are exposed to mental well-being risk factors that generate high psychological stress (OECD, 2020), with an “alarmingly high” incidence of adverse social behaviour in the sector (more than twice that of the overall workforce) (Eurofound, 2020). Such psychological stress has been amplified by the pandemic for many care workers across Europe, particularly in relation to the fear of transmitting the virus to care users (Pelling, 2021). The greater-than-average emotional demands of care work have also been linked with burnout and intention to leave (Eurofound, 2020; Turnpenny & Hussein, 2020). With regard to the prevention of such psychosocial risks, Social Employers and EPSU (2020) opine that “worker participation and a high level of management commitment” play a key role, and call for close cooperation from social partners on these issues.

Third, in cleaning, chemical health hazards are noted as a major reason for occupational disability and employee turnover⁶⁴ (it is the occupation with the highest incidence of contact dermatitis and an increased risk of asthma and rhinitis), with risks being similar across different sizes of enterprise (Suleiman & Svendsen, 2015)⁶⁵. A high proportion of cleaning workers have been found to be not very informed about health and safety risks at work (Eurofound, 2014), and it has been argued that cleaners should receive a general theoretical, as well as practical, introduction to the work, along with continuous in-service training dealing with issues such as correct use of chemicals and ergonomics and follow-up training checks from the authorities (Suleiman & Svendsen, 2015).

6.3. Organisation of work, stress and autonomy

⁶² In Sweden, Stranz and Szebehely (2018) cite official statistics that physical load injuries have previously (2007) been found to be three times more common in eldercare than the average in the labour market, and both back pain and exhaustion are reported considerably more often by care workers than by the rest of the workforce, and these problems have increased significantly among care workers in recent years.

⁶³ 74% of interiors cleaners reported experiencing muscular aches, pains and discomfort in 2007-2008 according to EU-OSHA (2008).

⁶⁴ According to Arif et al. (2008), industrial cleaners use multiple products during tasks, with many of the active ingredients being established respiratory irritants or sensitizers, and an increased risk of upper respiratory symptoms has been seen among Danish female cleaners, especially in association with the use of sprayers.

⁶⁵ N.B. Cleaning products are the cause of up to 12% of reported asthma cases in several countries across Europe (Suleiman & Svendsen, 2015).

In the UK long-term care sector, Turnpenny & Hussein (2020) observe an association between turnover and job-related stress, “resulting from heavy workloads, time pressures, inflexibility of schedules and tasks, role conflict and ambiguity”, while noting that job autonomy, task flexibility and organisational practices allowing staff to “perform what they consider meaningful and relational aspects of the job” have been associated with reduced intention to quit. Such findings are reflected in the OECD’s (2020) observations that, among care workers, high caseloads and limited time with patients are generating feelings of “frustration and overload”, while increasing standardisation and administrative burden have led to the feeling of “a lack of control”, even while workers report insufficient opportunities to use their professional skills and knowledge. The COVID-19 pandemic has only amplified high-pressured conditions and cases of staff shortage in the sector (Eurofound, 2021)⁶⁶, with increases in caregiver workload reported in all nine countries⁶⁷ surveyed in a project by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung⁶⁸ (Pelling, 2021). In view of these problems, trade unions in Portugal, Spain and Germany have been campaigning for improved enforcement of legislation on the levels of appropriately qualified staff (patient-staff ratios) in care facilities, or for new regulation to strengthen these where necessary (Pelling, 2021).

Many industrial cleaning jobs have also been characterised by higher than average levels of work intensity and lower than average levels of autonomy, which can risk workers accumulating high levels of unresolved strain, potentially leading to “unhealthy stress levels and consequently a range of stress-related illnesses” (Eurofound, 2014). Larsen et al. (2019) have observed that widespread use of performance-related pay systems in Denmark has led to a significant increase in work intensity, citing research from 2018⁶⁹, while Keune and Pedaci (2019) note that performance standards in industrial cleaning have intensified in most European countries.

Anticipating these developments, Kirov and Ramioul’s 2014 study describes how cleaning industry efforts to boost productivity, commonly labelled as “professionalisation”, have in some cases (at one major Belgian employer, for example) led to the use of standardised calculations and detailed work method prescriptions (e.g., the number of square metres to be cleaned in different kinds of spaces), and fragmentation of tasks, with strict timeframes for each operation (“taylorism”). In the context of increasingly tough competition and contract negotiations, this has intensified cleaning work and resulted in demotivating factors such as “less interesting work” and less of a team-oriented and organisational focus for supervisors. The study contrasts this approach with the professionalisation process at a subsidiary company in Norway⁷⁰, which also

⁶⁶ For instance, in Germany, 52% of home care workers in Germany report that their work has become more burdensome and 34% report that conflict situations with the care receiver have been more frequent since the crisis (Eurofound, 2021).

⁶⁷ England, Germany, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Portugal, Scotland, Spain and Sweden.

⁶⁸ “[A] non-profit German foundation funded by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany... committed to the advancement of both socio-political and economic development in the spirit of social democracy”.

⁶⁹ Their reference is: “Faarbæk PH (2018) *Sundhedstjek- sundt arbejde – sundt liv*. Copenhagen: 3F.”

⁷⁰ The authors advise that this Norwegian corporate strategy conforms to “the Scandinavian tradition of high-involvement workplaces and the historical endorsement of the importance of good job quality to competitiveness at the national level by both employer organizations and trade unions”; good job quality is “embedded in the social dialogue” and “an essential element in industrial relations practices”.

made use of new technology and changes in cleaning methods, but instead adopted “advanced forms of teamwork and employee involvement schemes”, increasing the variation of tasks and assignments and allowing team leaders the autonomy to distribute these among employees. The authors observe that this strategy resulted in more interesting work and learning opportunities, along with the recognition that cleaning requires a specific set of skills and that investments in training are justified. Further outcomes of these practices were said to be increases in the status of the job and in wages. We might judge, given evidence elsewhere in this review, that this rendered such work more attractive to prospective and current employees.

6.4. Shift work and scheduling

A large body of evidence suggests that shift work and atypical working times – known to be prevalent in the three sectors at hand – are associated with a range of health risks, from anxiety, burnout and depressive syndromes to cardiovascular disease and accidents at work (OECD, 2020; Eurofound, 2017). While the LTC and private security sectors often necessitate round-the-clock staffing, it is irregular shift patterns (alternating/rotating shifts) – particularly common in care work⁷¹ – which are especially problematic for workers and which have been linked to labour shortages (Eurofound, 2020; Eurofound, 2021). Accordingly, the OECD (2020) has observed that, in Australia, social care management models allowing greater flexibility in scheduling and choice over shifts led to a reduction in turnover⁷². Social Employers and EPSU (2020), meanwhile, anticipate cooperation over the development of working time models that incentivise working in the sector and prevent exhaustion or burnout, especially by working on the improvement of schedules and worker sovereignty over time⁷³.

A qualitative study on the US private security sector supports such perspectives (Nalla et al., 2016). Guards discussed poor scheduling as a problem inhibiting their job satisfaction, and the study authors propose that shift design could be a critical factor in retention, giving consideration to staffing levels, annual leave requests, training needs and family-work balance.

Regarding work-life balance, In the labour market as a whole, there is substantial evidence that the introduction of family-friendly policies can assist in reducing turnover (Abbott et al., 1998, as cited by Winterton, 2004). In long-term care, specifically, Turnpenny and Hussein (2020) note evidence of the impact of low work-life balance and high work-family conflict on turnover, and the CoR (2021) indicates that “good work-life balance plays a key role in the career choices of potential entrants to the [care] sector”. Here, it is worth noting that evening, night and weekend work are substantially more common in LTC than across the economy and, in general, more common than in healthcare, which competes with the sector for staff recruitment (Eurofound, 2020). In the cleaning industry, meanwhile, Recio and Godino (2011) observe that many

⁷¹ Irregular types of shifts (alternating/rotating shifts) make up 57% of all shift work in LTC, compared to 51% in healthcare and 48% in all sectors (Eurofound, 2020).

⁷² It is worth noting that this finding was replicated in another labour-intensive industry – UK clothing manufacture – by Taplin and Winterton (2007), who noted the associated importance of work-life balance for long-staying workers.

⁷³ They allude to the Work-life Balance Directive adopted by the EU in 2019.

available jobs have working times that adapt poorly to the needs of family life⁷⁴, since the common split shift work⁷⁵ concentrates working hours at either end of the working day when most family duties arise.

By way of a solution to this problem of unsocial working times, UNI Europa and EFCI have argued in their joint declaration (2007) for the more widespread adoption of daytime cleaning, which they say could ease recruitment and turnover difficulties because it is more attractive to workers, providing better conciliation with family life, and improving the dignity of the work by visibilising cleaners as part of the client's staff. Accordingly, EFCI (2021) has recently recommended that daytime cleaning should form part of the execution criteria for quality-based procurement⁷⁶.

6.5. Involuntary part-time work

In the cleaning and LTC labour markets, it is possible that there is significant slack related to the underemployment of part-time workers, which also appears to be a significant source of dissatisfaction at work. As of 2014, one in four industrial cleaners in the EU28 worked fewer than 20 hours per week, and, across all workplace sizes, they were considerably more likely than workers in general to express a preference for working greater hours (32% and 13% respectively), which could imply that a substantial portion of part-time employment in the sector is involuntary⁷⁷ (Eurofound, 2014). Larsen et al. (2019) note that contracts of fewer than 15 weekly hours are widespread in Germany (50% of cleaning workers) and Denmark (42%) and often force these marginal part-time workers to combine their cleaning job with other income sources. The authors claim that as many as 70% of Danish marginal part-timers hold multiple jobs in order to secure a living wage. Meanwhile, among part-time workers in LTC, who work on average 24 hours per week, approximately one in three want to increase their working hours, constituting 13% of the workforce, with particular potential in Denmark, France and Sweden to address staff shortages in this way (Eurofound, 2020).

6.6. Casualised work

In the long-term care sector, research from the UK has found that the use of zero-hour contracts in LTC has a strong, positive association with both turnover rates and job vacancy rates

⁷⁴ It has been asserted that working time arrangements in industrial cleaning depend greatly on the sites workers are sent to and on their relationship with the front-line managers who make the work schedules (Holtgrewe & Sardadvar, 2011, as cited by Kirov & Ramioul, 2014).

⁷⁵ The marginal part-time jobs associated with these work patterns are also said to affect eligibility for social benefits in some cases (Keune & Pedaci, 2019).

⁷⁶ EFCI (2010) have previously noted that in Norway daytime cleaning had become the rule, representing 80 per cent of total cleaning time, followed by Belgium, where about half of cleaning is done during daytime.

⁷⁷ Recio and Godino (2011) note that as employers in the sector are not able to dismiss workers when contracts change hands (due to subrogation laws), they often reduce working time, and, additionally, there is a common practice of recruiting workers on part-time contracts and paying them overtime to do a full working day, to reduce wage costs.

(Vadean & Saloniki, 2020)⁷⁸. Secondly, workers with casual hours, involuntary hours, or hourly pay with variable hours are more likely to report higher intention to leave, whereas permanent contracts and salaried pay are negatively associated with turnover intention (Turnpenny & Hussein, 2020)⁷⁹. In the EU, it has also been noted that zero-hour contracts in the home care sector, along with self-employment and undeclared work, provide “strong incentives” for workers to continue working while ill, which risks spreading illnesses and is a problem for workers’ health and wellbeing (Eurofound, 2020). To illustrate the extent of this problem: around one quarter of Sweden’s care workforce⁸⁰ and the same proportion of the UK’s adult social care workforce are employed under hourly/zero-hour contracts (58% in UK home care services) (Szebehely, 2020; Skills for Care, 2019). Meanwhile, in Finland, where zero-hour contracts are also more common in care work than in other sectors, the arrangement has begun to decrease since legislation on the matter in 2018; however, a pay-by-task for an on-demand service model (‘gig contracts’) seems to have become increasingly popular (Eurofound, 2020).

Similar issues are found in Property Services. Cleaners (10%) and security guards (7%) in the UK’s private sector are two to three times as likely to be on zero hours contracts compared to the workforce as a whole (3%) (TUC, 2020). In recent years, Eurofound (2014) has also reported a high incidence of fixed-term contracts in cleaning across the EU, and in 2017, about 56% of newly hired cleaning workers in Germany had a fixed-term contract (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2018, as cited by Larsen et al., 2019). In Denmark, it has been found that many cleaning companies typically terminate employees’ contracts when they renew or bid on new contracts as part of the tendering process, typically every second or third year (Mori, 2015, as cited by Larsen et al., 2019).

Summary: Chapter 6

There is significant evidence at the international level (including within the EU) linking disagreeable working conditions, problematic working arrangements (organisation of tasks and job autonomy, working hours, involuntary part-time and casualised work) and a range of health and safety concerns with lack of job satisfaction, intention to quit, burnout/absenteeism, unattractive work and increased labour turnover across these three labour-intensive sectors. Evidence preponderates in the LTC and industrial cleaning sectors; there is a need for much greater research into such matters within the private security sector, as studies and reportage are particularly scarce within the EU.

It is also worth highlighting that “elementary” and “contact-intensive” occupations in long-term care and Property Services appear to be disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, according to mortality rates for the disease. On this basis, protection of workers from

⁷⁸ A one percentage point lower share of staff employed on zero-hours contracts is associated with a 10 per cent lower turnover rate and a 13 per cent lower job vacancy rate in their study.

⁷⁹ The Nuffield Trust (Curry et al., 2019), an evidence-based healthcare charity, has also recommended “improved employment security for the many direct care staff on zero-hours contracts” in order to bolster recruitment and retention.

⁸⁰ At the beginning of the pandemic, staff shortages due to ordinary workers being on sick leave or in self-isolation, led to an even higher use of casual workers, with less or no formal training, which led to problems with hygiene routines (Szebehely, 2020).

infection, providing access to adequate sickness leave and addressing precarious employment conditions that encourage presenteeism should be particular employer and trade union priorities, not least to avoid the exacerbation of existing labour shortages and turnover, as well as negative consequences for service users.

| 7 | Skills and training

Skills and training are commonly seen as important factors in labour shortages and turnover. Put simply, employers often argue that skills shortages or “skills mismatch” (meaning that the existing skills on supply among the workforce do not fit with those demanded by employers) are inhibiting recruitment and encouraging turnover and issue calls for greater public investment in education and policy changes relating to the identification and development of skills. Meanwhile, trade unions often push for increases in training in order to improve the status of employees’ work and allow bargaining for improved wages and job security. We will explore, first, the case for skills mismatch and skills shortages as they relate to labour shortages, second, the importance of how “skill” is defined in relation to the status of work in the present sectors, and, last, the relevance of education and training to tackling labour shortages from both “mismatch” and worker perspectives. This chapter is of particular relevance to those seeking a policy perspective on issues of labour shortages and turnover.

7.1. Skills mismatch

The notion of “skills mismatch” – that the existing skills on supply among the workforce do not fit with those demanded by employers – has been increasingly advanced by various government and employer institutions as an explanation for labour shortages in the aforementioned sectors and beyond. For instance, in a context of both high vacancy and high unemployment rates, the ECB (2021b) has linked it to shortages of workers in contact-intensive services sectors, and Eurofound (2021) has found that, within the EU, addressing skills mismatch is the most frequent focus of national policy measures to address labour shortages. Previously, in 2019, European employer federations, including CoESS and EFCI [highlighted the issue](#) (European Employers’ Statement, 2019), citing a “scarcity of qualified workers” in sectors requiring specialised skills. At the same time, there are various large-scale, intransparent calculations of the global macroeconomic costs of skills mismatch: for example, business strategists Boston Consulting Group (Hoteit et al., 2020) make the projection of an 11% loss in productivity or \$18 trillion in unrealized global GDP by 2025.

However, the usefulness of the mainstream “skills mismatch” proposition is highly questionable in relation to evaluating the needs of the workforce in the present three sectors. The most widely recognised analyses of skills mismatch within occupations (e.g., for the OECD: Adalet McGowan & Andrews, 2015; Brun-Schammé & Rey, 2021) measure this using (a) the OECD Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC), which [assesses adults’ skills](#) based exclusively on measurements of literacy, numeracy and “problem solving in technology-rich environments”, and (b) the highest educational level attained by the respondent. No measure is taken of any of the physical, interpersonal and decision-making skills relevant to the occupation in question, and which are so important to work in the presently studied sectors. As such, cleaning and

personal care workers are scored at the bottom of a ranking of occupational skills, with no other distinctions made. Unfortunately, this misrecognition of the full range of skills involved in certain occupations (Mogstad Aspøy, 2020) can have institutional and policy implications.

In the most recent [analysis by the OECD](#) (Brun-Schammé & Rey, 2021), mismatch in an occupation is diagnosed on the basis of the proportion of surveyed workers scoring one standard deviation more (over-skilled) or less (under-skilled) than the median “skill” for surveyed workers in that occupation. Personal care work was found to be the occupation where workers skills had the greatest “over-skill” mismatch in relation to their occupational profile (based on the above-mentioned PIAAC skills scores) and their training profile (based on the highest level of education attained). This interpretation reinforces the conception of personal care work as inherently “low skill”, and as not requiring workers with a range of developed skills, including numeracy, literacy and technological/problem-solving skills, who are deemed “mismatched” and would supposedly be better allocated to other work. Implicitly conveyed is a dismissal of the need to ensure an appropriately trained profession that is able to attract workers with the above-mentioned skills or to train its staff to acquire beneficial levels in such skills. In addition, whether the occupation would score so highly on “mismatch” were the full range of skills (physical, interpersonal, social, decision-making etc.) to be considered is unknown, but understanding this fuller picture would be desirable and useful to an accurate evaluation of recruitment parameters and training needs.

Rather than taking such a holistic perspective, when it comes to addressing labour shortages, some of the mainstream institutional literature on skills mismatch simply ignores what employers might do to attract, develop or retain workers with appropriate skills and effectively using the full potential of their workers’ skills. Instead, deregulation and flexibilisation of the labour market are promoted, including measures such as increased use of atypical working arrangements, reduced employment protection, the lowering of pay and the undermining of collective pay agreements (e.g., Nikolov et al., 2018, p.4, p.63; Adalet McGowan & Andrews, 2015, p.8, p.9) with the rationale of reaching formerly inaccessible pools of labour. Even on its own terms, the sustainability of such an approach is highly questionable, and it would seem wholly counterproductive in addressing labour shortages in the present sectors, given the problems in Chapters 5 and 6.

However, skills mismatch literature does promote a number of state-led solutions that are more relevant to labour shortages in the present sectors: notably, vocational education and training (addressed below), lifelong learning, and active labour market policies. In the case of the latter, while there is a paucity of literature concerning the present sectors, it is worth mentioning that European employers’ federations have insisted (2019) that social partners should be closely involved in the design of national and European initiatives to invest in skills in order to ensure resources are used to meet the “real needs” of employers and workers.

Finally, the examined literature also identifies skills matching systems, which include public and private employment services, as one of the main factors in minimising skills mismatch. According to Eurofound (2021) many public employment services have increasingly focused on advanced profiling tools and individual action planning (in Belgium and Denmark), improved career guidance and career counselling systems (in Greece) and the better validation and

certification of existing skills (for example, in Croatia and Cyprus). In Sweden, the latter measure has particularly focused on refugees and asylum seekers. In a similar vein, the EESC (Nikolov et al., 2018) notes that National Qualification Frameworks and European Qualification Frameworks might, if made a reality, facilitate the employment of skilled migrants by providing validation of competences acquired under different educational systems (including “third countries”). Additionally, such frameworks might also increase employment of those outside of shortage sectors by validating informally acquired competences. Such a policy measure could be particularly relevant to those such as informal carers or, for example, those who have previously performed roles analogous with private security work.

7.2. Skills shortages or undervalued work?

The above macro-scale debates concerning skills mismatch are often connected with discussions of “skills shortages” at sectoral and company level (e.g., CoESS, 2020). The employer analysis of skills shortages as “major determinants” of labour shortages (European Employers’ Statement, 2019) can, despite positive proposals for investment in education, be seen as overly simplistic: it often seems to neglect other factors⁸¹ contributing to people not applying to certain jobs and not being attracted to certain sectors. For instance, Cedefop (2015) finds that, even among graduate-recruiting firms (i.e., those seeking “higher” skill level personnel) that reported labour shortages, only 12% attribute these to skills shortages alone; in reality, “uncompetitive” salaries and inefficiencies in HR practices play at least a similarly important role, according to the firms’ own admission. This view is supported by Brunello and Wruuck (2019) in their report for the European Investment Bank, which argues that, at firm level, reported skills shortages and problems filling vacancies could in fact be due to “the wage and working conditions being offered, workforce characteristics, or the effectiveness of the recruitment process, rather than to the lack of suitable candidates among job seekers”. The authors cite academic and European Parliament evidence, dating from 2011-2015, to show that organisations offering higher average wages relative to the average wage for the occupational group in a given area have been found to report fewer skills shortages.

In Property Services, a recent report from industry body the British Cleaning Council (Winters & Jones, 2021) notes that, according to The Employer Skills Survey (2019), employers attributed only 7% of vacancies in “cleaning and housekeeping managers and supervisors” to skills shortages. The report goes on to emphasise that (a) poor rates of pay and working conditions are “not always conducive” to attracting people into the industry, (b) companies offering attractive posts such as include a living wage and enhanced pension schemes report recruitment and turnover as less of an issue, and (c) cost of living can pose a particular challenge for recruitment in affluent areas. One prominent industry publication has also offered an implicit acknowledgement that claimed skills shortages may have little to do with a “mismatch” in wider society: an article in the *European Cleaning Journal* (2018) notes that in order to combat “growing skills shortages” in cleaning supplier sales, the industry should “work on promoting itself to potential hires”, offering “a generous salary and benefits package” and

⁸¹ E.g., “In case of a qualitative labour shortage, labour demand and labour supply are roughly in equilibrium, but a large share of unfilled vacancies and a high unemployment rate exist simultaneously, which implies lack of relevant skills,” (Nikolov et al., 2018).

“talking up cleaning’s prospects” to “illustrat[e] why it’s a great industry to enter – and make a career in”. There seems no reason why such an argument could not be applied to all occupations within the industry.

In the broader labour market context, the EESC (Nikolov et al., 2018) reports that many employers are “risk averse” in recruiting employees who do not fulfil skill requirements and are insecure concerning the extent to which investment in employees’ training and skills will be reflected in staff retention. Furthermore, Rathelot and van Rens (2017) point to research showing common employer preferences “for hiring experienced candidates over investing in training for inexperienced but promising candidates”. Later in this chapter, we explore the important role that training can play in ensuring workers have the appropriate skills for a job, but there remain other initiatives that employers can take to deal with uncertainty about the skills of new recruits. For example, in its report on recruitment and retention, Social Services Europe (2017) cites the example of Consorzio Sol.Co, a network of Sicilian social enterprises, which provides “intergenerational mentoring” and specialist professional development support for their employees, in which staff who are experienced in particular areas tutor relevant groups of fellow workers, including new recruits. Wider adoption of such a programme could ensure that the aforementioned “facilitators” gain recognition for their additional responsibilities through a seniority scale, with increased pay and benefits, which would provide further motivation for the long-term retention of workers.

7.3. Re-evaluating “low-skill” work

Consideration of occupations in the present sectors, or in analogous areas, as “low skill” or “low-skilled” (e.g., Nikolov et al., 2018; Brun-Schammé & Rey, 2021; ILO, 2020) is surely detrimental to their reputation, to their attractiveness to potential employees, and to the perspectives of policymakers and employers charged with meeting labour shortages. Without substantive evidence, it is even sometimes simply assumed that jobs deemed “low-skill” will be largely automated and subject to “falling demand” (Nikolov et al., 2018). Yet, as displayed during the pandemic, jobs in LTC and Property Services are among the most essential occupations (Lowrey, 2021; Pfohman, 2021; Pelling, 2021) and demand for them is increasing in many cases. Furthermore, as previously discussed, the incorporation of new technologies seems less likely to eliminate these professions, but rather to necessitate greater training and upskilling for existing workers (as should the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic), increasing the added value of such jobs and leading, in theory, to higher remuneration.

In relation to this issues, the European Federation for Services to Individuals, in its 2019 memorandum to MEPs and the Commission (EFSI, 2019), notes that the “stigma” relating to the classification of PHS (personal and household services) workers within “low-skilled profiles” does not reflect their need to develop “both technical and interpersonal skills”.⁸² The federation also states that skills shortages and under-qualification are holding back job creation in the sector, and, in light of “booming demand” for services, it emphasises the importance of developing “both transversal and specific skills” among caregivers and domestic workers. As such, professionalisation is observed to be central to ensuring good quality, formal service

⁸² See also OECD, 2020 pp.68-76 for an account of the complexity of care workers’ and nurses’ tasks.

provision, promoting social dialogue and attracting workers into PHS (see also Pelling, 2021), and the EU is urged to invest in skills development and training in the sector.

It is worth asking why the skills in many jobs in the present sectors are often not valued, and why the jobs are assumed to be “low skill” and worthy of low pay. A recent piece in *The Atlantic* magazine (Lowrey, 2021) argues that it is because of “the kinds of people” who hold those jobs and use those skills; often arduous jobs into which workers are “shunted” due to circumstances out of their control. Elaborating, the author notes studies demonstrating that the prestige and pay of professions declines as women join them, and that black workers are overrepresented in professions associated with depressed wages. More broadly, Professor Erica Smith (2009) argues that most would agree that “an objective measurement of skill in work is not possible”, and Herod and Aguiar (2006) state that skill should not be seen as an independent variable that is a fixed attribute of a particular job. Instead, skills can be seen as a social construction, central to which are the claims made by interest groups, the structural conditions allowing or preventing such claims, and the means of institutionalisation of said claims, according to Smith (2009), who explains that these conditions have an “immense significance in defining what are worthy and non-worthy occupations, and the training that is available and valued”. Going one step further, Smith (2009) cites Littler (1982) in pointing out that one means by which jobs gain a ‘skilled’ label is “because collective organisation by workers has won that label”, as in the case of many “pre-1950 industrial and craft jobs” that have been privileged over “more recently-established and service sector jobs”.

Within such a framework, it becomes clear that trades unions have an important role in enabling workers – of whatever ethnicity or gender or migratory background – to organise to secure greater recognition of their work and the skills it requires, whether through improvements in pay, in working conditions, or in training, which in itself may “reveal to workers the skill inherent in their jobs and their own potential for taking more control over their working lives” (Smith, 2009). For employers in the present sectors to eliminate skills shortages and reach adequate and sustainable staffing levels, they will need to reject the model of work in these sectors as “low-skill”, low pay and low on training and endeavour to raise the status of these jobs, through improved training, conditions and remuneration, above all [citations needed??!!].

7.4. Vocational education and training (VET) and higher education

Proposed solutions to skills mismatches and shortages frequently deal with reforming education systems (including with respect to “human” or “soft” skills) and improving VET, or rendering it more “efficient” (Adalet McGowan & Andrews, 2015; European Employers’ Statement, 2019; Nikolov et al., 2018).

A report for the European Economic and Social Committee (Nikolov et al., 2018) notes that vocational education participants experience a substantially shorter time lapse between finishing their studies and finding employment, compared to general education participants. Indeed, countries such as Germany and Austria, in which the share of VET graduates is “higher than the EU average”, show some of the lowest figures for youth unemployment (Nikolov et al., 2018). This high take-up of VET, in the words of the EESC report, provides young people with “improved chances of early market attachment” and the “tools” to minimise the risk of prolonged,

potentially “scarring”, labour market inactivity that might inhibit them from keeping up with changing skill requirements⁸³. Similarly, among the policies proposed for addressing skills mismatches, Eurofound (2021) also prioritises strengthening VET pathways, along with improving the attractiveness of these qualifications, increasing the “porosity” between vocational and tertiary education systems, and enhancing the delivery of transferable skills throughout education and training (including digital skills).

Vocational education and training has been shown to be well perceived in general across the EU, particularly in terms of providing relevant employment skills and job prospects, and there is substantial support for its greater prioritisation in terms of government investment (Cedefop, 2017; European Commission, 2014). However, in a 2016 EU-wide Cedefop survey, 23% (of 35,646 respondents, 16 and above) claimed that vocational education for people aged 16-18 has a negative image in their country, and only 48% of those who undertook general (not VET) upper secondary education said they received information about VET at the time (Cedefop, 2017). The great majority believe that general education has a better image than VET in their country, which is said to suffer from a perceived “narrowness”, and, at the same time, the importance of well-established vocational pathways appears to be diminishing in many EU countries (Cedefop, 2017; Nikolov et al., 2018; Eurofound, 2021).

In the long-term care sector, specifically, it is important to highlight the worrying decline in recent years in the rates of application to VET and HE qualifications for occupations such as nurse, nurse’s aide and care assistant, as seen in France, Sweden, Flanders (Belgium) and Lithuania (Eurofound, 2020). Yet, at the same time, the employers’ association Social Services Europe (SSE) observes “a growing awareness” that “all” social services workers require some form of vocational training to develop the necessary skills and expertise, and it claims that the expansion of such qualifications could raise the status of working in the sector and create a highly skilled and educated workforce that is “less vulnerable to job loss” (Lethbridge, 2017).

In the broader field of social care, it is also worth pointing to a corporate model of providing VET that can facilitate future working relationships and may be of interest to employer federations, large companies and unions alike. SSE details the example of Caritas Czech Republic, which runs its own University School for Social Work, with students often undertaking placements at the company and many graduates becoming employees – a model that allows both the student and the organisation to become familiar with each other (Lethbridge, 2017). Using this model, funding can be accessed from various sources to provide current staff with professional training in skills and knowledge, including the European Social Fund (ESF), in the case of Caritas Czech Republic. Regarding Property Services, there appears to be a paucity of literature concerning VET and skills in general.

In spite of the positive arguments detailed above, it is also important to note that some research questions whether the focus on expansion of VET for addressing skill mismatches or shortages is a valid one. Authors such as Rathelot and van Rens (2017) suggest both that it is an expensive solution and may not be as effective as expected, given the reality that if wages do

⁸³ In this vein, vocational education that includes on-the-job training has been shown among Hungarian graduates to be significantly (10-15%) more favourable to being employed right after graduation and receiving long-term work contracts.

not reward certain skills, students will either choose not to pursue such skills, or will pursue the skills but seek employment in other, higher-paying occupations. Similarly, Mogstad Aspøy (2020) notes, with reference to a number of sources, that many scholars “question whether boosting the supply of skilled labour necessarily ensures that skills will be utilised, such as when it comes to its potential to change job content”. Cedefop (2018) concurs that VET systems are not sufficient for responding to apparent skills shortages, and highlights the “critical” role of employers: shortages are smaller in countries where employers make greater commitments to “attracting and retaining talent” and where they offer “good-quality jobs”, with adequate health and safety measures and “ethical practices”. A long-term approach to hiring and managing staff is advised: including recruitment strategies that better target individuals “on the basis of their potential rather than on accumulated work experience” and employee induction training that allows for the improvement of workers’ skills (Cedefop, 2018)⁸⁴.

Recognising the above limitations of VET, Brunello and Wruuck (2019) point out that young people in particular must “balance the advantages of a rapid school to work transition with the expected costs of skill obsolescence”, and call for more extensive employer implementation of “well-designed” apprenticeship schemes. On this point, it is worth highlighting a US study by Lerman et al. (2014). Researchers found that registered apprenticeship schemes in LTC (which offered new starters a greater relative wage by the end of the scheme) led to increased productivity, job satisfaction (pride in the accomplishment and improved stature within the organisation), job tenure, and quality of care among new care workers. These apprentices received a greater quantity of training and were found by employers to be more skilled than those receiving training by other means. In addition, non-apprentices benefited from the mentoring and greater knowledge imparted by apprentices.

7.5. A harmonic triad: training, commitment and retention

Research by Winterton (2004) gives a conceptual insight into the issues of labour turnover and training. The author points out that the major costs of labour turnover for private employers often relate to training and development and that, “to establish an effective strategy for skill formation, labour retention must be high enough for the average length of service to provide a return on HRD investment”. As such, companies with “endemic” high turnover often reason that it is not financially worthwhile to invest more than the minimum in the training (and development) of employees, which only sustains poor retention and its negative consequences, as detailed below and previously in this review.

On the other hand, Winterton (2004) notes existing evidence that training positively influences organisational commitment, which in turn contributes to organisational effectiveness and employee retention. Thus, for the benefit of improved services, company performance and workers’ employment satisfaction, there is a need to create “a virtuous cycle of training and development” that is conducive to promoting labour retention.

⁸⁴ 75% of newly hired adult workers who did some non-formal or informal training during work hours significantly improved their skills since the start of their job; the figure for those with no training is 57%.

Specifically, it is important to note that organisational commitment is most likely to be improved by training leading to portable qualifications and transferable skills. However, in an apparent contradiction for employers, the latter are also associated with employee mobility within the labour market. In resolution of this problem, Winterton points out that the additional relationships of trust formed with employees mean that “training towards portable qualifications may have little negative impact on ease of movement compared with the positive impact on commitment”. As an alternative, the author also proposes that employees could be provided with training and qualification in “core” transferable skills, which are then complemented by firm-specific competences.

7.6. In-service and continuous training

There is significant contemporary evidence that improved in-service training can contribute to improving employee retention and the attractiveness of the sectors at hand. In 2018, the Dutch government implicitly acknowledged this fact with its large-scale Working in Care programme (budget: €320m) that will fund ongoing skills development⁸⁵, as well as initial training and retraining, with the aim of enhancing the appeal of the sector among young people and returners and of improving staff retention (Eurofound, 2021). Across the EU, while the proportion of LTC workers receiving training provided or paid for by their employer (58%) greatly exceeds the average across all sectors, 24% of workers in the sector feel that they “need further training to cope well with duties”, particularly in the case of younger workers (Eurofound, 2020). In addition, the relatively high levels of training are often not matched by formal qualifications, which could be affecting workers’ sense of professional integrity, recognition of their work, and, ultimately, their wages (Eurofound, 2020). Recently, employers’ association EASPD has developed the European Care Certificate, a new basic qualification for care workers, and has called for adequate continuous training and professional development in social care, to help workers meet the demands of new and evolving roles (Crowe, 2021 – [cite advisory board meeting](#)). In the UK, HR consultants Care Planner have found that care staff are 58% more likely to stay in a job for 3 years or more if there is a structured onboarding programme that includes reading, training and shadowing, and they point out that training can also provide an opportunity to build a sense of unity among a staff body (Price, 2019).

In Property Services, the percentage of cleaning workers who reported having received training paid for by their employer in the previous twelve months was (at 14%) much lower in 2014 than across all sectors (34%) (Eurofound, 2014), with this difference being greatest for women and workers under 35 years of age. However, there are some indications in the sector that training can lead to improvements at work that might support retention of staff. Researchers Suleiman and Svendsen (2015) cite 2008 evidence from Norway finding that, in a limited survey, 33% of cleaners declared improved psychosocial working environment in view of relevant training and work adaptation. Keune and Pedaci (2019) also describe how a “common strategy” of trade unions in six European countries⁸⁶ (and the UK), including IG BAU in Germany, has been to attempt to reduce precarious work through improvement of training and skill development

⁸⁵ For staff in hospitals, nursing homes and home care, according to regional action plans coordinated by care institutions, training institutes and trade associations.

⁸⁶ Denmark, Germany, Spain, Italy, Netherlands, and Slovakia.

opportunities, for less skilled workers above all. This upskilling has been considered “fundamental” to strengthening job stability, career prospects and working conditions, and, since it is also of interest to employers, cooperative actions have frequently been developed, in many cases resulting in an expansion of atypical workers’ training rights in sectoral and company collective agreements. In Catalonia, a bargaining table was set up to develop a system of professional cleaner accreditation and re-qualification to allow workers to become specialists in certain techniques and methods, such as environmentally sustainable cleaning (Keune & Pedaci, 2019).

In the private security industry, a study of guards’ training in Portugal over the course of 2013-14 (Silva & Dias, 2016) found a positive and significant association between organisational training and organisational commitment, which, in turn, was negatively related to intention to leave. The author cites a number of previous, broader, studies (1998-2013) to support his claim that investment in training will strengthen workers’ bond to the company. CoESS (2020) also highlights initial training, upskilling and reskilling as crucial to the retention of security officers. In the context of the pandemic, with new tasks being incorporated into officers’ roles, the employers’ association calls for continuous training and certification relating to infection prevention and control, although this currently seems directed at “competent authorities”, rather than initiatives on the part of employers themselves. Nonetheless, a number of major multinational security companies and consultants also publicise advice that (a) ongoing in-service training, to ensure officers are well-prepared for duties, can help to improve retention rates, and (b) professional development⁸⁷ opportunities, such as completion of a series of industry-recognised certificates, can play a key role in reducing turnover (Allied Universal, 2021; Securitas, 2018; Hertig, 2021). Furthermore, a US study of small private security companies reports that officers stress the importance of training to their job satisfaction, citing the need to feel prepared for physical risks (Nalla & Cobina, 2016).

At the general level, it has also been argued that on-the-job training and the “ongoing delivery of skills” as part of lifelong learning can be key to reducing skills mismatch by helping to retain older workers, or by allowing greater “cross-sectoral mobility” of labour in response to the skills obsolescence in other sectors (Nikolov et al., 2018; Eurofound, 2021). Social Employers and EPSU (2020) also argue that reskilling opportunities “for a life-long career” in a sector such as LTC are an important means to “help to avoid career re-orientation, early retirement or emigration”, while pointing out that employers must take measures to ensure women and men have equal rights and opportunities in career development.

Summary: Chapter 7

7.1. Skills mismatch

7.2. Skills shortages or undervalued work?

7.3. Re-evaluating ‘low skill’ work

⁸⁷ There is strong academic evidence for the importance of career development prospects in turnover: documented by Akinyomi (2016) and demonstrated in a labour-intensive context by Denvir and McMahon (1992).

~~7.4. Vocational education and training (VET) and higher education~~

~~7.5. A harmonic triad: training, commitment and retention~~

~~7.6. In-service and continuous training~~

| 8 | HR approaches to reducing turnover

There is a wide range of human resources (HR) literature proposing solutions to employee turnover and recruitment, working at different levels of influence within the labour market. In this chapter, we examine popular online literature from HR companies (usually targeting SMEs), in addition to promotional literature from large companies (whether on their own websites or in industry magazines), academic human resources management (HRM) literature, and reports from employers' associations and social partners reflecting ideas and practices from the HR sphere. We will analyse and compare these related forms of HR writing according to a number of common themes. While HR literature often acknowledges training and career progression as important factors in employee turnover and retention, and sometimes addresses wages and working conditions, we have chosen here (for reasons of concision) to focus on its more distinctive contributions to the subjects at hand, which are also those that it tends to prioritise.

8.1. Management and supervisory practices

Management and supervisory practices are found to be a central factor in high turnover in a range of popular HR surveys and literature (Barnard, 2019; Medhi, 2021; Thompson, 2020; Tomàs, 2021; Heathfield, 2019; Mirza, 2019), which detail particular issues such as: micro-management and lack of autonomy (Martinelli, 2017), trust and transparency (Sumitani, 2020), failure to recognise employee efforts, poor manager training, and a lack of conflict resolution skills (McQuerrey, 2017). Going further, HR academic Jonathan Booth (2020) has recently argued that “supervisor undermining” is driving away companies’ “best employees”.

In the UK Property Services industry, research from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development has shown “a positive relationship with the line manager” to be one of the main factors encouraging cleaners to stay in their job (Hilpern, 2013). Meanwhile, in a review of the book *Reducing Turnover in the Services Sector: Lessons from the Security Industry*, international professional association ASIS finds that turnover solutions lie in leadership skills training for supervisors and managers, improved recruitment selection of the latter, and mentoring and coaching techniques to develop all personnel (Barnard, 2019). Offering more elementary suggestions, literature from security multinational Securitas (2018) argues that, on the one hand, high turnover can result from inadequate levels of supervisory personnel, inasmuch as these impact on training, scheduling and managing performance and disciplinary matters. On the other hand, it is noted that leadership has a “significant” role in shaping a professional and respectful work environment that retains employees, ensuring staff are valued and have clear directions on duties.

Such proposals are supported by findings from a qualitative study by Taplin and Winterton (2007) that analysed labour turnover in the “labour-intensive, highly competitive” UK clothing

manufacturing industry. Managers were said to play an important role in fostering the “supportive and considerate work environment” that was “crucial” to firms with low rates of turnover, which were also reported to be “more cognisant of reducing conflict and stress at work” and took initiatives to minimise friction between workers, ensuring work was “properly balanced” and helping and consistently encouraging those who are “not quite up to par”.

In the EU, SSE’s (Lethbridge, 2017) review of positive retention practices in the social care sector highlights how, at a provider in Finland (KVPS), service managers undertake substantial training showing the connections between “the well-being of workers and well-being of [service] users”, and there is a close focus on the organisation’s role as an employer that “take[s] care of workers” and which fosters career development and internal recruitment throughout the organisation, “for example, practice nurses becoming managers.” In a similar vein, academic evidence from the US (Donoghue & Castle, 2009), has shown that nursing home administrators who are “consensus” managers (leaders who solicit input from staff and allow this to influence their decision making) are associated with considerably lower turnover levels compared to “autocratic” or “shareholder” style managers. The authors found that the latter management styles, which predominated, can foster lower employee satisfaction because they tend to “deskill the profession by denying caregivers the opportunity to use their intuitive skills”.⁸⁸ Elsewhere, elderly care consultants Acorn Network (Australia) also cite effective management teams as “critical” to staff retention, but they highlight, significantly, the problem of “inadequate preparation” for employees transitioning into middle management roles (Todorovic, 2016).

8.2. Workplace culture and employee recognition

In popular online HR literature, it is frequently claimed that workplace culture affects everything from engagement to happiness among employees, and that a “toxic” culture makes workers “miserable and unmotivated” (*Security*, 2019; Sumitani, 2020). Recent HR surveys in the US show that misalignment with the culture contributes to diminished loyalty and is a reason for quitting (Thompson, 2020) and that many employees consider culture and managers to be closely linked (Mirza, 2019). On the other hand, academics Turnpenny and Hussein (2020), writing on LTC in the UK, find positive relationships with clients, co-workers, “and particularly management and supervisors” to be associated with job satisfaction and increased retention⁸⁹, according to a “sizeable body of research”. In the European care sector, Social Employers and EPSU (2020) argue that “Fostering a positive organisational climate is an important retention factor”⁹⁰, and that when employees perceive that their contribution is “valued and recognized”, they are more likely to be motivated and less likely to be exposed to occupational risks (e.g., accidents), illnesses and emotional burnout.

⁸⁸ The authors note that these findings are also reflected in previous studies showing that when mid-level managers exhibited similar “transformative” leadership styles (“empowering” lower level employees through shared governance), nurses had higher job satisfaction and were less prone to turnover. A similar management approach was called for in a qualitative study in the UK dementia care sector (Chalfont & Hafford-Letchfield, 2010).

⁸⁹ They continue: “Supervisor support and loyalty and perceived organisational justice, fairness and culture are associated with lower intention to quit.”

⁹⁰ They also describe how, to “bind” the workforce to the organisation, some employers are working towards a “shared understanding” of the work done, of “common values”, and of the sense of responsibility of workers.

A number of solutions are proposed for improving workplace culture and thereby reducing staff turnover in sources relating to the present sectors. These include mentorship programmes or “buddy systems” to help to shorten their learning curve of new employees and “introduce them to the company culture” (CleanLink, 2020; Poskin, 2020). Diversity and inclusion policies are also signposted by HR consultants as an important contributor to a culture that retains employees, with advised initiatives including: measures to close wage gaps, spaces for women’s career development, combating inappropriate conduct and diversity task forces (Medhi, 2021; CleanLink, 2020; Post, 2020)⁹¹. Most commonly, however, HR sources from the three sectors find solutions in employee recognition initiatives and discretionary rewards for performance⁹²: from manager comments, to ‘thank you’ letters, to public praise in meetings, platforms or bulletins, to employee awards and staff celebration events, to bonus checks. It is variously claimed that such methods can foster “ownership” and “pride” and improve employee satisfaction, or commitment (Winkler & Saur, 2019).

8.3. “Open communication” and employee engagement

According to HR voices in the sectors at hand, strategies of open communication and employee engagement, which are closely linked to workplace culture, may support the retention of employees by “address[ing] issues before they crop up” and keeping staff informed of developments so that they “feel valued” and relationships of trust can be established (Swept, 2020; Beheshti, 2019; McNally, 2004).

In European social services, ESN (2016) affirm that an organisation’s retention strategy should be built on “regular staff feedback” on job satisfaction, workload levels, and how well they feel supported by colleagues, managers and supervisors; accordingly, they recommend “group supervision” as a tool to allow care workers to regularly exchange experiences and concerns, discuss cases and issues, and provide “mutual psycho-social support”, particularly for those dealing with care user deaths and for lone workers.

Meanwhile, online sources in Property Services recommend digital tools to facilitate multi-level communication within organisations (Swept, 2020), or employee surveys to “uncover the source of morale and turnover problems” (Reilly, 2011) and to measure the success or failure of retention strategies (McNally, 2004)⁹³. Academic support for this overall focus on communication and engagement can be found in Tatlin and Winterton’s 2007 qualitative study of the labour-intensive clothing manufacturing industry in the UK: low turnover firms were notable for the “high degree of communication between management and workers”⁹⁴, and having a “responsible” rather than “adversarial” relationship with the union representative.

⁹¹ Post’s (2020) article, in *Security*, highlights a US study in the care sector which found that the experience of racism or ethnic discrimination significantly increased turnover intent among black and minority ethnic home health aides.

⁹² See: *European Cleaning Journal*, 2021; Sodexo, 2021; 4M, 2018; Walker, 2017; Allied Universal, 2021; Skills for Care, 2021c; Swept, 2016 & 2020; CleanLink, 2020; Magenta Security, 2020; Ashton, 2019; McNally, 2004. For empirical support for the strategy, see Bersin (2012) and Securitas (2018).

⁹³ Another common recommendation in this area is the use of “exit interviews” to gather feedback that “can be used to search for and eliminate the main causes of turnover to minimize future separations” (Thompson, 2020).

⁹⁴ They cite one production manager who emphasises informing workers of issues and problems “before they occur or have damaging consequences”, encouraging workers to come to supervisors or managers with problems.

In contemporary practice in the LTC sector, SSE (Lethbridge, 2017) cites the more participatory initiatives⁹⁵ of care providers in Finland (KVPS), Germany (Das Rauhe Haus) and Czech Republic (Slezska Diakonie). In these organisation, there is employee **involvement in decision-making**⁹⁶, including through “round-table discussions” on improving recruitment, retention and staff motivation (which have evolved into a series of broader Innovations Working Groups) and the sharing out of responsibility for job specifications and recruitment communications across the organisation (not simply undertaken by HR), as well as in developing new activities and services. Such practices led to praise from staff (in an annual review) at KVPS.

In the cleaning industry, Swept (2021) has suggested a “cleaner happiness program” to improve retention, with a dedicated manager conversing with staff on their needs to create a “feedback loop” that impacts practices and generates enthusiasm and commitment; a similar approach has, in fact, been reported (*European Cleaning Journal*, 2021) as successful at the company Facilicom (operating in the Netherlands and Belgium), which also offers a Living Wage.

8.4. Values-based strategies for recruitment and retention

Values-based strategies to the recruitment and retention of employees have a particularly strong basis in the academic literature on care and more generally (Marková et al., 2020; Winkler & Saur, 2019; Mathieu et al., 2016; Winterton, 2004). These approaches have been found to be undertaken by a significant minority of UK care employers in a report by workforce development charity Skills for Care⁹⁷ (2016), and they were shown to reduce turnover and offer improved effectiveness in understanding and building relationships with incoming employees. Such approaches should ideally be applied to “every aspect” of the workplace, according to the report’s authors, with comments from one employer reflecting a general theme: “We can train skills but not care values”. The study also finds that a number of employers were willing to offer jobs to candidates without relevant experience or social care qualifications if they exhibited “the right values and attitude”. Similarly, SSE cites the case of a provider in Finland (KVPS) that has been developing shared organisational values through training⁹⁸, to support “underlying motivation” and successfully improve commitment (according to an internal survey) (Lethbridge, 2017).

Summary: Chapter 8

A range of popular, institutional and academic sources at the international level (including reports from European employers’ associations and trade unions within the long-term care sector) propose specific human resources strategies and practices as solutions to high turnover within the sectors at hand and across the labour market.

⁹⁵ Winterton (2004) gives theoretical support to the benefits of such initiatives on organisational commitment.

⁹⁶ Also mentioned (not elaborated) by ESN (2016).

⁹⁷ It works as a delivery partner for the UK Department of Health and Social Care.

⁹⁸ The core “shared values” being “human respect, reliability, renewal and effectiveness”.

Firstly, management and supervisory practices are identified as a central factor in high employee turnover in popular HR surveys, academic studies and literature from major security industry companies. Key problem areas in retaining staff are said to include issues such as trust and transparency, micro-management and “supervisor undermining”. Concerning structural weaknesses contributing to turnover, the focus of the literature is on maintaining adequate levels of supervisory personnel and improvements in recruitment selection and leadership training for management, including for existing employees who are transitioning into such roles. Managers who are most able to help retain employees are said to shape a professional, supportive and respectful work environment in which the efforts of staff are valued and they have clear directions on their duties; such managers have the skills to reduce conflict and stress in the workplace and ensure work is “properly balanced” across the workforce. One US study (Donoghue & Castle, 2009) of nursing home administrators associates reduced employee turnover with a management style that solicits input from staff and allows this to influence decision making, while Social Services Europe (Lethbridge, 2017) highlights the promotion of career development and internal recruitment as a management practice that can boost retention.

Closely linked to the above, popular online HR literature and surveys (from a general and a private security sector perspective) pinpoint negative workplace culture as a problem affecting staff motivation, engagement and loyalty and a major reason for employee quits. At the same time, UK researchers in the long-term care sector have linked experience of positive relationships with clients, co-workers and managers with job satisfaction and increased retention, according to a “sizeable body of research”. This is a proposition supported by Social Employers and EPSU (2020), who advocate fostering a positive organisational climate as an important retention factor that helps to increase motivation and decrease occupational risks. Across the care and Property Services sectors, popular solutions proposed for improving workplace culture and in order to reduce staff turnover include: mentorship programmes for new employees, diversity and inclusion policies (addressing wage gaps, career development and inappropriate conduct, for example), and employee recognition initiatives and rewards for performance.

HR voices in the three sectors at hand also advocate strategies of “open communication” and “employee engagement” in order to support retention of staff by addressing issues before they crop up and keeping employees informed of developments so that they feel valued and a trusting employer-employee relationship can be established. Notably, there are examples of academic studies that support strategies within labour-intensive industries. Within the popular literature, suggested initiatives range from employee surveys to regular group feedback sessions between employees and supervisors (concerning issues such as job satisfaction, workload levels and support needs), to mutual psycho-social support groups among employees, to digital platforms for facilitating multi-level communication within organisations. In contemporary practice in the LTC sector, Social Services Europe (Lethbridge, 2017) highlights how retention can be improved through employee involvement in decision-making, including through “round-table discussions” on recruitment and staff motivation, sharing out responsibility for recruitment communications and developing new activities and services.

Finally, a range of academic studies and a UK government-supported report on the care workforce find that “values-based” strategies are important to effective recruitment and retention and can reduce turnover and help to build relationships with incoming employees. Similarly, Social Services Europe (Lethbridge, 2017) highlights how developing shared organisational values through workforce training can successfully improve commitment.

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