

# RETAIN: Tackling labour shortages and turnover in the Property Services sector

Authors: Mark Bergfeld &  
Jelena Milos

*Please cite as: Milos, J. and Bergfeld, M. (2022)  
RETAIN: Tackling labour turnover and labour  
shortages in the Property Services Sector UNI-  
CARE Europa project VS-2019-0292 02*



## Devising Union Strategies for Recruitment and Retention

### ABSTRACT

*The Covid-19 crisis has further exacerbated labour shortages, leading to the so-called 'Great Resignation', with many workers leaving their jobs across different sectors, and consequently many employers struggling to continue their business operations. The RETAIN project in that sense offers a pathway to break the vicious cycle of labour turnover and shortages by improving the overall standards in the sector. The main aim of the report is to offer policy recommendations for tackling labour shortages and labour turnover, and improving retention in the Property Services sector, which includes both Industrial Cleaning and Private Security.*

**UNI**  
global  
union

cleaning  
& security



This project is co/financed by the European  
Commission (VS/2019/0292 02)

# 01

## INTRODUCTION

1.1 ABOUT THE REPORT AND  
THE RETAIN PROJECT · 4

1.2 LABOUR SHORTAGES AND  
TURNOVER: WHY THEY  
MATTER AND TO WHOM · 6

# 03

CONCLUSION · 31

# 02

## ANALYSIS OF LABOUR SHORTAGES AND TURNOVER IN THE PROPERTY SERVICES SECTOR WITH PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS · 9

2.1 IMPROVING WAGES AND  
WORKING CONDITIONS · 11

2.2 SUPPORTING UNION  
ORGANIZING AND SECTORAL  
COLLECTIVE BARGAINING · 16

2.3 PROMOTING SKILLS AND  
TRAINING AND CAREER  
PROGRESSION · 21

2.4 ADVANCING HEALTH AND  
SAFETY IN THE WORKPLACE · 26

# 04

REFERENCES · 32

# Intro- duction

01

# 1.1

## About the report and the RETAIN project

Labour shortages and high labour turnover represent significant, long-term problems in the property services sector, which is why in 2019 UNI Europa's affiliates decided to implement the EU-funded RETAIN project (VS/2019/0292). The Covid-19 crisis has further exacerbated labour shortages, leading to the so-called 'Great Resignation', with many workers leaving their jobs across different sectors, and consequently many employers struggling to continue their business operations. The RETAIN project in that sense offers a pathway

to break the vicious cycle of labour turnover and shortages by improving the overall standards in the sector.

The main aim of the report is to offer policy recommendations for tackling labour shortages and labour turnover, and improving retention in the Property Services sector, which includes both Industrial Cleaning and Private Security. The policies are designed to be used by the key stakeholders in the sector: trade unions and EWC representatives, public authorities, employers, investors, and other relevant actors.

The report summarises key findings from the research and implementation phase of the RETAIN project. The findings are derived from desk research, academic literature review, and interviews, workshops and meetings with the major stakeholders (policy makers, trade unions, employers, investors, and academic experts) on causes of and solutions to labour shortages and turnover.

The industrial cleaning and private security sectors have been jointly analysed in this report as UNI Europa's secretariat coordinates these as part of its work in Property Services. Moreover,

they share many features relevant to the issues addressed by this report: high labour intensity, similar wage levels and working conditions, low rates of unionization and training, and similar health and safety environment.

In the following sections, we will first show why labour shortages and turnover are one of the most important issues for businesses and workers alike, we will then analyse the main issues in the sector leading to turnover and shortages, and offer policy recommendations for each of the identified issues, i.e. policy areas.





# 1.2

## Labour shortages and labour turnover: why they matter and to whom

Labour turnover and labour shortages constitute a transnational problem for trade unions and businesses alike. In industrial cleaning, the labour turnover is considered to be high (Eurofound, 2019), while labour shortages are also found: most recently cleaners were ranked as one of the most widespread

shortage occupations (McGrath, 2020). In the private security sector, a lack of “skilled labour, both in terms of quantity and quality” is documented along with an ageing workforce posing challenges to the entire sector (CoESS, 2019), while high rates of voluntary employee turnover have also been documented

across the sector, at 32.7 %, although the data is outdated (CoESS, 2013).

Businesses in the security and cleaning industry have been increasingly recognizing the importance of decreasing labour turnover and enhancing employee retention by including these issues in their social responsibility programmes and annual reports. For example, G4S Global notes that "staff turnover is a key indicator to us of employee satisfaction, and reducing it improves service excellence and reduces recruitment costs". (G4S, 2021). Similarly, ISS Facility Services notes that the "turnover is critical to a self delivery company like ISS where our people are key to our value proposition. Turnover reduces the incentive to train, and less training causes quality issues, and quality issues undermine our ability to deliver - to win and retain customers." (RETAIN Advisory board meeting, 2021).

**There are many ways in which labour turnover and shortages negatively impact businesses. Most importantly, these problems can lead to higher recruitment and training costs, loss of productivity and efficiency due to the departure of experienced staff, and to a decreased quality of service** (O'Connell and Kung,

2007; Ongori, 2007; Akinyomi, 2016).

**Labour turnover and shortages can heighten health and safety risks resulting from understaffing and excessive workloads for the remaining staff.**

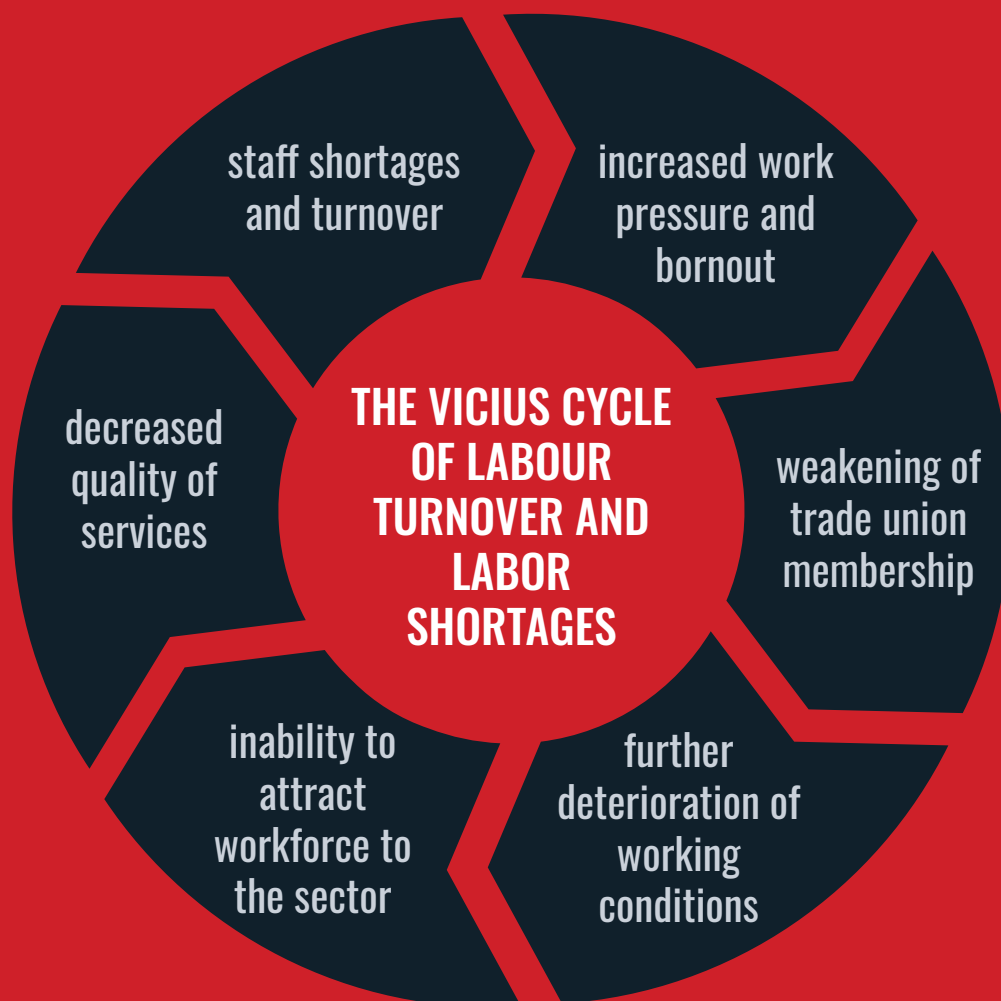
Additionally, staff shortages and turnover can reduce the operational capacity of firms and require them to turn down business or restrict services, limiting their growth potential (Securitas, 2018). Such developments can trigger further negative trends and contribute to companies' reputational damage, due to the perception (among clients) of service inconsistency.

Labour shortages and turnover represent no less of a problem to the workers themselves, causing higher workloads, overburdening the remaining staff and leading to higher levels of work stress and absence rates, which ultimately leads to many workers leaving the sector. Eurofound (2021) has found that the key impacts of labour shortages on employees 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.

Labour turnover negatively impacts trade union membership and is a major obstacle for organising workers in the sector. Losing or changing jobs is one of the most cited respondents' answers when asked why they resigned from their union (Visser, 2019). At the same time, studies show that trade unions play an important role in decreasing labour turnover as unions are “capable of relaying and helping to resolve concerns employees have at work, resulting in them staying longer than they might have done in the absence

of unionisation” (Bryson and Forth, 2017). The effect, however, seems to be limited to workplaces with a union representative on-site, pointing to a crucial role of organizing and union representation at the workplace.

To illustrate the harmful effects of labour turnover and labour shortages on the property services sector, we have created a stylized representation of a chain of events called *the vicious cycle of labour turnover and labour shortages*.





**Analysis of major  
causes of labour  
turnover and  
shortages with  
proposed policy  
recommendations**

**02**



The RETAIN project research found that labour shortages and high labour turnover in the property services sector are not an isolated issue but a symptom of larger problems affecting the sector.

Namely, the insights gained from the RETAIN research show that the main reasons associated with high turnover and shortages are linked to wages and working conditions, collective bargaining and union representation, training and career progression, and workplace health and safety. These issues have been almost unanimously mentioned in all the workers' interviews, and also feature high on the list in both expert literature and social partners' literature.

Based on the established causes, we have developed in this report a set of policies focusing on the following areas:

-  improving wages and working conditions
-  supporting union organizing, sectoral collective bargaining and social dialogue
-  advancing health and safety in the workplace
-  promoting skills and training and career progression

In the following sections, we will explain in more detail each policy area.

# 2.1

## Improving wages and working conditions



Because of low wages, the security industry has become a stop gap. You become a security guard if you are out of another job, and this leads to constant turnover.

An EWC representative, Ireland.

Throughout the course of the project, inadequate wages and working conditions have been stressed as the most salient issue pertinent to labour shortages and turnover in the private security and industrial cleaning sectors.

Wages in both sectors are considered to be low. Across the 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% less (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).

In addition to suffering from low wages, the private security sector is marked by a high share of involuntary part-time work, atypical and unpredictable working time arrangements, as well as night and weekend work, which causes a disruption in the work-life balance, making the sector less attractive to workers. The work plan tends to change in short notice and guards have to be available for on call periods. Additionally, our respondents report an increase in workloads and tasks arising from the clients' demands. Self-employment and employment through

temporary work agencies is still rare, which is justified by the fact that "many countries have strict requirements for certification in order to be involved in sector-related activities" (Eurofound, 2019, p.15).

Similar problems are marked in the industrial cleaning sector. The sector is characterized by high rates of non-standard employment (part-time work, fixed-term contracts and self-employment): 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 preference for working greater hours (32% and 13% respectively), which could imply that a substantial portion of part-time employment in the sector is involuntary (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 part-time workers to combine their cleaning job with other income sources, which means that they have to hold multiple jobs in order to secure a living wage.

Among the unfavorable working conditions are also atypical working time arrangements disrupting the work-life balance and making the sector unattractive to workers, such as nighttime cleaning as well as unpredictable work schedules.

According to the available data, cleaning is usually performed outside the usual office hours, and early morning and evening shifts are the predominant working period in the cleaning industry (EFCl, 2016). The lone working outside daytime cleaning represents a problem for workers' mental wellbeing (among other things), contributing to isolation and cleaners' invisibility (Recio & Godino, 2011).

Increasing wages and working conditions in the sector can create quality jobs, increase workers' motivation, and boost employee retention rates, thus saving businesses the costs of high turnover. 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). Additionally, 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.

Public procurement tenders in both sectors are often awarded according to the lowest price criteria and not the best quality of service (UNI Europa and EFCl, 2016; Uni Europa and CoESS 2016). A strong competition for contracts for service provision based on price is placing downward pressure

on wages across the industries. Low commitment from clients to pay for services is often blocking the possibility to raise the working conditions in the sector (Devetter, 2021).

Currently, more than half of the EU's public procurement contracts are allocated solely on the basis of lowest price, which means that neither the quality of service or working conditions are considered and that public procurement rules in fact incentivise companies to undercut each other on working conditions in order to receive a contract (UNI Europa, 2021).

**For the past two years, UNI Europa has been campaigning to change public procurement rules at the EU level with a simple demand: no public procurement without a collective agreement. The demand has so far been supported by more than 100 MEPS. Looking at the sectoral level, CoESS, EFCl and Uni Europa have published best value guides that offer a toolkit for the selection of private security and industrial cleaning companies according to the best quality and not the price.**

# Recommendations:

**Social dialogue:** Employers and trade unions should work together on establishing fair wages and quality working conditions through collective bargaining. Special focus should be attributed to building social dialogue with large companies;

**Capital strategies:** Union should lobby and advocate with investors to influence the overall employment standards in the market;

**Partnership for decent work** between employers, trade unions, local or national authorities, clients, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders should be promoted. Such cooperation could include for example establishing sectoral observatories to monitor wage levels in the sector, thus promoting living wages and workforce retention;

**Toward a job for life:** Companies should develop a range of measures to improve employment standards and increase retention, most urgently: define extensive wage progression pathways, shift away from the use of precarious contracts (agency work, temporary contracts, limited-hour contracts) and promote full-time employment, establish seniority days and end-of-career working time reductions;

**Work schedules and workloads:** Other sector-specific measures should be promoted, such as: implementing predictable work schedules to allow for better work-life balance through collective bargaining agreements, providing fair remuneration for the cleaners' commuting costs, clearly defining workloads of security officers and cleaners through collective agreements in order to avoid excessive workloads and unexpected demands from the clients (for example, test cleaning can be conducted to estimate the necessary time for surface cleaning while the security officers' tasks can be clearly listed in the CBA);

**Daytime cleaning:** Following the UNI Europa's and EFCL's joint declaration (2007), daytime cleaning should be promoted across the sector, based on the benefits for employers, clients and workers, as proposed by UNI Europa and EFCL. Additional measures can be introduced to support daytime cleaning such as making the nighttime cleaning more expensive by the CBA, as is the case in Finland;



## Social criteria in public

**tenders:** Social partners, employers and clients should promote social criteria for public procurement to raise wages and working arrangements, especially: 1) the public contracts should be awarded based on the best quality and not the lowest price, 2) contracts should be given only to those providers who have a collective bargaining agreement, 3) public authorities should monitor compliance with legislation and collective agreements throughout the duration of the contract, 4) the tendering company should keep the workforce employed by the outgoing company on the contract;

Member States should implement the relevant Directives designed to improve wages and working conditions for all workers, including the Work-Life Balance Directive, the Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions, as well as the Directive on adequate minimum wage and the Gender Pay Transparency Directive. Best practices in implementing the Directives should be addressed in the sectoral social dialogue meetings.

## Acquired rights directive:

social partners should transpose the TUPE Directive into collective agreements to guarantee that the workers have the possibility to stay on the contract when the client changes contractors, as the results of the Watch the gap” project show that the improvements of the national legislation by collective agreements make a difference for the protection of workers<sup>1</sup>;

<sup>1</sup> For more information, see <https://www.syndex.eu/news/case-study/study-workers-influence-outsourcing-tender-processes-and-transfer-employment>

## 2.2

# Support union organizing, sectoral collective bargaining and social dialogue

“Sectoral collective bargaining is the most effective buttress against bad pay and working conditions. As workers and citizens, we all benefit from collective agreements. It is a check on inequality and precarity.”

Oliver Roethig, Regional Secretary, Uni Europa



The respondents note a decline in collective bargaining coverage in the private security and industrial cleaning sector, however there are marked differences across countries. The level of collective bargaining is especially low in Southeast Europe and Central and Eastern Europe where the governments broke with the obligation of sectoral collective bargaining (in many cases as a consequence of the 2008 economic crisis) and a dominant form of bargaining is the single-employer bargaining. Similarly, the EU Sectoral Social Dialogue Committees in Private Security and especially in Industrial Cleaning also mark a lack of participation of Central and Eastern European Member States delegates from both sides (Eurofound 2019; Eurofound 2019b).

Trade union density in the industrial cleaning and private security sector remain low while the client has the power to determine the price of cleaning services, which makes bargaining for higher wages more difficult. Trade union organizing is made more difficult as security officers work in client's premises and are spread out across many different worksites (Eurofound 2019), while the cleaners operate between several different clients.

Improving union presence, collective bargaining and social dialogue can substantially improve working conditions in the sector and thus curb shortages and turnover. Studies show that the union presence in the workplace increases tenure as

unions resolve issues their employees are facing (Bryson and Forth, 2017). Collective bargaining can positively influence working conditions and wages (for example, workers who are covered by a collective bargaining agreement earn as much as 10% more than workers in comparable jobs who are not covered), it reduces gender wage gaps and also helps to fight discrimination and abuse in the workplace, whereby the workers in firms with workers' representation report less bullying and harassment (European Commission, 2018).

There are many examples of good practices achieved by UNI Europa's affiliates through collective bargaining

**In Belgium, the sectoral collective agreement for industrial cleaning includes a clause transposing the TUPE directive: in addition to the automatic one-year job protection linked to the transfer of employment contracts to a new employer, the Belgian collective agreements provides for 6 months job protection against economic dismissal (Syndex Europe&International, 2021; RETAIN interviews, 2021). In Germany, the social partners**

**agreed on raising the wage floors in 2022 upon announcement that the German government would lift the minimum wage to the previously agreed level. This agreement ensured that wages in industrial cleaning were above the statutory minimum. In Finland, the collective agreement ensures that nighttime cleaning is more expensive and thus workers are shifted to daytime. In Norway, the unions' long-term policy of securing higher wages in the industry led to decreased labour turnover, having secured wages in the industry to be no less than 95 % of industrial workers' wages. In Denmark a new sectoral collective agreement for the security workers has been secured amidst the Covid-19 crisis in 2020 and included wage increase, special savings that can be used for senior days, care days, holidays or pension, and also a surcharge for nights and weekends calculated above the minimum wage.**

# Recommendations:

## **Freedom of association:**

Clients and companies should ensure that the workers' rights to freedom of association, free of retaliation, interference and opposition, as recognized by the core ILO conventions and the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights, are protected at all times, and that adequate resources are provided to unions to carry out their tasks. Public authorities both at national and EU level should ensure that trade unionists are at all times protected against dismissal and discrimination and develop additional measures and legal initiatives to prevent union-busting activities and ensure unions' access to workplace;

## **Support for collective bargaining:**

Public authorities at the national and EU level should develop measures and legal action to support social dialogue and collective bargaining, such as the obligations for Member States to increase collective bargaining coverage and strengthen social partners' capacity while defining clear targets, as drafted in the Directive on adequate minimum wages in the European Union. Additionally, public authorities should positively appraise social dialogue and collective bargaining in their public discourse, as well as provide sufficient resources for capacity building, especially in areas with lower rates of unionization and collective bargaining;

## **Sectoral collective bargaining**

should go hand in hand with enterprise bargaining as it is the most efficient way to raise wages and employment conditions, resulting in improved retention;

## **Global agreements**

with the multinational companies should be sought in order to improve the working conditions of the MNC workers themselves, but also to raise the overall standards in the sector by targeting the 'big players';

## **Gender perspective**

should be included in all collective agreements and global framework agreements to make sure that the rights of women workers are being taken into account;

## **EU-level:**

Social partners should regularly address the best practices for increasing retention in the European sectoral social dialogue and the EWC meetings;

## **Capacity-building:**

Unions should continue raising capacity in Central and Eastern Europe to increase unionization rates and sectoral collective bargaining rates. Building on the successful experience of the Central European Organising Center (COZZ), similar organizing centers could be established in

other regions where appropriate, and more resources in general should be directed towards regions with low union density. This will in turn strengthen the social dialogue structures at the EU level.



## 2.3

# Promoting skills and training and career progression

“Training is expensive for companies, so companies only do the basics, they do not plan ahead, they do not upskill workers and then they have to lay them off. Reskilling and upskilling is important: instead of firing older workers and getting new ones, they need to enable their workers to acquire new skills.

An EWC member in the security industry, Portugal.

The respondents consider a lack of training and career progression one of the dominant reasons for labour turnover both in the industrial cleaning and private security sectors. According to Winterton (2004), employers see little point in raising skills in sectors where a high proportion of individuals will leave, yet the failure to invest in training and development may contribute to higher labour turnover, triggering the previously mentioned vicious cycle.

In the private security sector, among the listed problems are different training standards between the countries (in terms of both length and requirements), the quality of induction training, and the fact that the training costs in some cases are covered by

the candidates themselves, or that the training does not lead to career progression. A lack of training in digital and soft skills is especially noted (i.e. communications, cultural sensitivity, and people skills).

Career progression scales are reported as not very extensive, training is not linked to career progression nor sufficiently rewarded by pay increase. This does not incentivize security workers to engage in further training. Similarly, there is a lack of extensive seniority scales that would encourage workers to stay longer in the company, which is especially important given the fact that most employees are reported to leave the company in the first three years.



In the industrial cleaning sector, cleaners also report limited opportunities for training and career development. Our interviewees suggest that the employers in the sector are not sufficiently investing in training so the turnover in the industry is rather high. One of the reasons for low investment in training is that cleaning is considered as a low-skilled occupation. The percentage of cleaning workers who reported having received training paid for by their employer in 2014 was much lower than the average: 14% compared to 34% across all sectors (Eurofound, 2014).

As the Covid-19 has showed, a proper training of security guards is crucial for securing quality services and maintaining public safety, while proving training in industrial cleaning has become increasingly important for maintaining public health, especially taking into consideration a rise in deep cleaning and new requirements for specialized cleaning and disinfecting procedures brought forward by the pandemic.

Training provides opportunities for career development, can lead to higher job satisfaction and more commitment from employees, which in turn reduces labour turnover, attracts more workers to the sector and increases the quality of service provision.

There are many examples of good practices regarding the training provision. One such example is the

Swedish **BYA training center**. The **BYA training center in Sweden** is owned by the employers' organization **Säkerhetsföretagen** and the **Swedish Transport Workers' Union** and is a leader in providing a broad range of basic, specialized and continuing education for security companies. The basic training is cost-free and is funded by the collective agreement. The **BYA** provides training for around **300 security companies**, which make up about **95 % of the market share**, meaning that the **BYA significantly influences training standards in the sector**.

According to our respondent, the security sector in Sweden was previously not seen as a high-status work, but the **BYA** managed to change that in Sweden by raising the standards and regulations, which is why the industry is now recruiting more people who have a desire to stay in the industry. The success of the **BYA**, in the view of our respondent, lies in trade unions and employers jointly owning and running the center.

# Recommendations:

## **Extensive career pathways for**

(curriculum of added qualifications) linked to wage progressions should be defined by social partners through collective bargaining, to motivate workers to stay longer in the sector;

**Vocational training:** Public authorities and companies should promote the professionalization of the sector by incentivizing vocational training, and lifelong learning;

**Public procurement:** Public authorities should use the best value public procurement criteria to reward companies who in addition to basic training provide specialized training and refresher training, and have designed training curricula as elaborated in the best value public procurement guide;

**On the job training:** Companies should ensure more on-the-job training as well as better induction training programmes (especially by better communicating job description and the security guard roles, without incurring costs to employees;

**Career progression:** Training provisions should be further incentivised through collective bargaining agreements, including measures such as free days for training, linking training (including on-the-job training) to career progression and higher wages or offering trainees permanent full-time jobs;

**Digitalisation and new technologies:** Specific training should be developed to meet the future challenges in the sector, such as training programmes to meet digital changes and new technologies in order to prevent labour shortages in both sectors. Additionally, training in human and interpersonal skills is needed, especially to deal with the increased risks from violence faced by security workers;

**Social partner involvement in training:** Social partners should be included in the provision of training and professional development. Where the formal provision of training is inadequate, the social partners should consider establishing joint training centres to raise the level of training in the sector and its professionalization, following the Swedish model;

## **Rise of integrated facility**

**services:** In the industrial cleaning sector, more research is needed to closely examine the impact of integrated facility management services on employee satisfaction and a possibility of career progression;

## **Pandemic preparedness:**

Lessons from Covid-19 should be used to upgrade the training standards, including the development of guidelines on the pandemic hygiene in the industrial cleaning sector and the development of training for security workers designed to tackle the increased violence risks from customers.

# 2.4

## Advancing health & safety in the workplace

“The occupation is not very attractive or valued, and it entails significant health and safety risks. For example, in some hospitals, everybody has safety equipment but the cleaners. It is as if they are invisible. Our task is to make them visible.

A trade union official, CFDT, France.





Both the industrial cleaning and private security sectors are marked by increased health and safety risks.

The private security sector is characterized by an increased risk of work violence: physical violence (such as being attacked, but also sexual harassment, bullying and intimidation), and the work organization risk factors (working alone, irregular work time arrangements but also psychosocial risks which can lead to poor mental health). A study done on the 750 frontline security workers in the UK found that almost 40 % of them suffered from the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), 50 % of security guards suffered verbal violence as regular as once a week,

while 43 % of respondents reported threats of violence at least once a month (University of Portsmouth, 2022). 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 (ONS, 2021). There are also specific risks for the women security personnel including a risk of sexual harassment, physical and verbal violence as women work more on the jobs that include permanent contacts with workers.

Common occupational diseases of cleaners include musculoskeletal disorders, skin diseases such as contact dermatitis and eczema,

allergies, respiratory disorders including asthma, and cardiovascular diseases. Workers in the sector experience poor health, high levels of absenteeism due to work accidents and high levels of presenteeism (working when sick) (Eurofound 2014). Heavy workloads that lead to physical strains represent a significant problem for workers as companies are reported to change and increase the workloads, sometimes without previous consultations with social partners (RETAIN interviews, 2021).

A large body of evidence suggests that shift work and atypical working times – known to be prevalent in the two sectors at hand – are associated with a range of health risks, from anxiety, burnout and depressive syndromes to cardiovascular disease and accidents at work (Eurofound, 2017).

Health and safety has substantially deteriorated during the Covid-19. Many UNI Europa's affiliates reported no protective equipment, testing or access to vaccination during the pandemics, as well as increased stress, anxiety and mental issues arising from the fact that the security workers and cleaners were the frontline workers ensuring public safety and public health while at the same time facing aggressive behaviour from customers or a lack of protective equipment.

Improving the workers' health and safety, especially following the tragic experience of Covid-19, is imperative

in ensuring employee retention in the sector. Addressing health and safety can help decrease labour turnover as safer workplaces decrease absenteeism that occurs due to work accidents, making the occupation more attractive to future workers.

An important part of improving health and safety consists of increasing workers' representation and union presence, as workplace representatives are in constant contact with the security workers and can help identify health and safety risks. Clients also play an important role in preventing interference risks that might arise from a lack of awareness of safety protocols that the client might have.

**During the RETAIN advisory board meetings, the participating employers stressed the importance of health and safety in increasing retention. For example, ISS management mentioned the importance of creating a safety culture which includes many elements: ISS Safety Rules enabling uniform health and safety standards across countries, training not only in physical but also psychological risks, Health Alerts which provide guidance**

and training to employees and communicate latest policies and protocols through their HSE app, the use of the app to report incidents (including the Near Miss incidents) and carry out corrective actions to amend the root causes, as well as regular campaigns around HSE (for example posters, Toolbox talks, appointments of

safety ambassadors in charge of promoting HSE), creating different personal health and safety profiles depending on the customers' activities etc. In this way, the company claims to have reduced the lost time injury frequency by 80 % in the past decade (RETAIN advisory board meeting, 2021; ISS 2021).

## Policy recommendations:

### **Tackling psycho-social**

**risks:** Companies and trade unions should work together to put in place preventive measures for both physical and psychological risks related to the sector, best practices should be exchanged during the sectoral social dialogue and European Works Council meetings;

### **Tackling 3<sup>rd</sup> party violence and sexual harassment:**

Social partners should implement H&S recommendations specifically targeted at women to prevent violence, bullying and harassment. Through collective bargaining and global agreements, social partners should develop protocols for preventing and reporting harassment, such as: facilitate paid leave for legal meetings or medical appointments, enable flexible working arrangements or change work location for the victim if necessary, as well as to provide them with financial assistance;

## Public procurement and health & safety:

Public authorities could add training in health and safety to the public procurement award criteria in order to improve the general health and safety in the sector, as elaborated in the Best value public procurement guide;

**ILO C190:** Member States should be urged to ratify the ILO Convention 190 on eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work in order to improve workplace health and safety;

## Specific health and safety

**measures** should be developed to protect the workers and residents against Covid-19, including: ensuring personal protective equipment, infection disease training, training in Covid-19 protocols and paid sick leave. Access to vaccines should be granted to all the property services workers having a direct contact with the clients or working in high-risk environments (for example hospitals, nursing homes, grocery stores). Covid-19 should be recognized as an occupational disease, while the health and safety measures reflecting the Covid-19 risks should form a part of the new EU OSH strategy;

Social partners should work together to ensure effective health and safety workplace representation through elected worker representatives or joint labour and management committees, consistent with the ILO Occupational Safety and Health Convention (155) and national legislation;

The European Works Councils and European Sectoral Social Dialogue Committees should be regularly involved in gathering information and proposing solutions related to health and safety risks.

# Conclusion

The aim of this report was to analyse the main causes of labour turnover and shortages in the property services sector, and offer policy recommendations on increasing retention that can be used by trade unions, employers and policy makers alike. The report showed us that the main causes of and solutions to labour shortages and turnover are linked to wages, working conditions, health and safety and training opportunities in the sector. If these issues are not tackled on a systemic level, it is expected that labour shortages and turnover will persist in the future.

The Covid-19 crisis has put a spotlight on the value of cleaners and security workers for our society. It has also shown us how underpaid, undervalued and overburdened they are. We are currently witnessing more and more workers leaving the sector, contributing to even higher labour shortages. We hope that the policy recommendations brought forward by this report will serve as a point of dialogue between the relevant stakeholders and will help break the vicious cycle of labour shortages and turnover and increase retention in the sector.

However, we are very well aware that no policy has ever been successful without a strong collective standing behind it. That is why UNI Europa and Uni Global will continue to support and organize cleaners and security workers around Europe and the world in their fight for decent work.

# Refe- rences

# 04



Akinyomi, O. J. (2016). *Labour turnover: Causes, consequences and prevention*. *Fountain University Journal of Management and Social Sciences*, 5(1), 105-112.

Bryson, A. and J. Forth (2017), *The added value of trade unions. A review for the TUC of existing research*, Trade Union Congress, London;

CoESS. (2013). *Private Security services in Europe: CoESS Facts and Figures 2013*. Confederation of European Security Services (CoESS).

CoESS. (2019, November 28). *CoESS at BusinessEurope: low-cost procurement and labour shortages put pressure on our sector*. Confederation of European Security Services (CoESS).

Devetter, François-Xavier (2021). RETAIN advisory board meeting in the industrial cleaning sector (2021). Unpublished transcript.

EFCI. (2020). *The European Cleaning Industry 1995-2016 - trend report*. European Cleaning and Facility Services Industry (EFCI).

Eurofound. (2014). *Industrial cleaning: Working conditions and job quality*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Eurofound. (2017). *Sixth European Working Conditions Survey – Overview report (2017 update)*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Eurofound (2019a), *Representativeness of the European social partner organisations: Private security sector*, Dublin.

Eurofound (2019b), *Representativeness of the European social partner organisations: Industrial cleaning sector*, Dublin;

Eurofound. (2021). *Tackling labour shortages in EU Member States*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

European Commission (2018). *Employment and Social Developments in Europe*. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

G4S Global (2022). *Employee retention*.

Harris, I. (2019). *High turnover of security guards prompts Detroit district to hire its own force*. *Chalkbeat Detroit*.

ISS (2021). *Annual report 2021*.

Larsen, T.P., Mailand, M., & Schulten, T. (2019). *Good intentions meet harsh realities: Social dialogue and precarious work in industrial cleaning*. *Economic and Industrial Democracy* [article first published online].

McGrath, J. (2020). *Analysis of shortage and surplus occupations 2020*. European Union.

OECD. (2021). *OECD Employment Outlook 2021: Navigating the COVID-19 Crisis and Recovery*. OECD Publishing.

Ongori, H. (2007). *A review of the literature on employee turnover*. *African Journal of Business Management*: 1(3):49-54.

O'Connel and Kung (2007). *The cost of employee turnover*. *Industrial Management*, 49(1)

ONS. (2021, January 25). *Coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths by occupation, England and Wales: deaths registered between 9 March and 28 December 2020*. UK Office for National Statistics.

RETAIN interviews in the industrial cleaning sector (2020-2021).  
Unpublished transcript

RETAIN interviews in the private security sector (2020-2021).  
Unpublished transcript

Recio, A. & Godino, A. (2011). *Invisible Workers: Quality of employment in the cleaning sector in Spain*. Walqing Social Partnership Series. Centre d'Estudis Sociològics sobre la Vida Quotidiana i el Treball (QUIT), Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

Securitas. (2018). *Limiting Turnover In The Security Industry*.

Securitas. (2020). *Annual and Sustainability Report 2020*.

Syndex Europe&International. (2021). *Workers' influence on outsourcing, tender processes and transfer of employment contracts: watch the gap!*

Taylor, P. (2021, October 7). *The good news about labor shortages*. *Politico*.

TUC. (2020, June 15). *TUC calls for better deal for “overlooked and undervalued” security and cleaning staff*.

UNI Europa & EFCI. (2007). *Joint declaration on daytime cleaning*.

Uni Europa and EFCI. (2016). *Selecting best value a guide for private and public organisations awarding contracts for cleaning services*.

Uni Europa and Coess (2016). *Buying quality private security services*.

Uni Europa. (2021, November 30). *Over 100 MEPs call for public contracts to only go to decent work employers*.

University of Portsmouth. (n.d.). *Security guards struggle with PTSD and lack mental health support*. University of Portsmouth. Retrieved June 6, 2022.

Visser, J. (2019). *Trade unions in the balance*.

Winterton, J. (2004). *A conceptual model of labour turnover and retention*. *Human Resource Development International*, 7(3), 371-390.