

# Employees in the cleaning sector in Luxembourg<sup>1</sup>

## Profile, employment and working conditions

### Summary of the study

Over the past decade, companies outsourcing cleaning tasks, the tertiarisation of the economy and more stringent hygiene and safety standards have affected the development of the cleaning sector. The number of cleaning companies has doubled, increasing by 38% in the overall economy. The number of employees who work in the sector as their main activity has also grown more than average in the overall economy (+42% and +32% respectively). Moreover, the turnover in the cleaning sector has doubled in fifteen years. Finally, since 2014, the search for cleaners for facilities has been the 6<sup>th</sup> most sought-after job in ADEM job offers.

In March 2019, 170 companies were registered in the cleaning sector. The median size of the companies has dropped over the past decade, going from 12.5 employees to 9, due to the growth of small companies in the sector. However, the degree of concentration remains high. Indeed, the cleaning sector is the second sector in which the concentration of employees is the highest, after private security. In March 2019, 42% of employees worked in 3 companies and 55% in 5 companies.

In March 2019, practically 11,200 employees exercised their main professional activity in the cleaning sector. In terms of sociodemographic data, most employees are women (83%), Portuguese (53%) and have at least one dependent child (55%). Proportionally, cross-border workers, Luxembourgers,

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Germans and Belgians are fewer in number than in the overall economy. Most cleaners reside in the cantons of Esch-sur-Alzette (31%), Moselle (19%) and in Meurthe-et-Moselle (12%). On average, they have fewer formal qualifications than employees in the private sector and in low-skilled sectors such as construction and commerce.

The cleaning sector is characterised by greater job insecurity than other sectors.

First of all, despite the fact that most cleaning employees have permanent contracts (87% in March 2019), the number of workers with fixed-term contracts is higher than in the rest of the economy, i.e. 11% and 6% respectively. In addition, the duration of the fixed-term contracts is often very short. 12% of the fixed-term contracts for cleaners have a duration of under one month (with 5% with a duration of under 2 weeks and 7% with a duration of under one month), against 3% in the overall economy, catering and private security.

In addition, part-time work is the norm. 66% of cleaners work part-time, compared to 28% of employees as a whole. The number of contracts for positions that do not even represent a part-time job is also proportionally higher than in other sectors of the economy. 11% of cleaning staff have an employment contract that does not even correspond with a part-time position, compared to 5% of other employees. Most cleaners who work part-time fall in this bracket. For example, in 2013, 58% of cleaners wanted to work full-time. Due to their part-time contracts, cleaners are often forced to take on several jobs at the same time, a trend that is more common in the cleaning sector than in others. In March 2019, 14% of cleaning staff had multiple concurrent jobs, compared to 3% of employees in commerce and 1% in private security.

Pay in the cleaning sector is also lower than in other sectors. Thus, in March 2019, the gross hourly wage for 50% of cleaning employees was lower than 12.6 Euro, against 19.6 Euro for other employees on average. For the purpose of comparison: the median gross hourly wage in catering is 13.6 Euro, in commerce it is 15.5 Euro, and in private security it is 15.8 Euro.

Finally, the seniority of the ongoing contracts of employment and in the company are also lower than in the other sectors under analysis, with the exception of catering. For example, in March 2019, cleaning employees were working under a contract of employment that had been running for 3.5 years, compared to 3.3 years in catering and 5.3 years in the overall economy. The

cleaning sector is the third sector in which the number of staff having left the company (for whatever reason) between March 2018 and March 2019 was the highest, after catering and private security.

Greater job insecurity is not the only differentiating feature in the cleaning sector. Working conditions are often physically harder than in other sectors too.

Cleaners are more exposed to substance and/or radiation hazards and must perform rapid repetitive movements over long periods, as well as perform tasks in uncomfortable positions. The risk of injury is also higher than in other sectors. In 2013, 52% of cleaners believed that the risk of injury at work was high, compared to 63% of construction workers, 36% of workers in commerce and 34% of private security employees.

On average, cleaners state that their work represents fewer *psychological demands*<sup>2</sup> than that of employees in the other sectors under analysis and in other low-skilled sectors. Cleaners have lower levels of decision-making powers and less support from their working environment. They also believe that their workloads affect the quality of their work.

Cleaners are more likely to believe that they are overqualified (47%) compared to workers in commerce (29%) and construction (28%). At the same time, they clearly have fewer opportunities for continuous training: in 2013, only 12% of cleaners attended a training course paid for by the company over the former 12 months, compared to 46% of workers in higher-skilled jobs. Cleaners are also proportionally fewer in number to believe that they have good career development prospects (16% among cleaners, compared to 37% in commerce and 34% in transport, for example).

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are more common in the cleaning and catering sectors than in the others under analysis, but the feeling of work-related stress is no higher in the cleaning sector than in the other ones. In catering, however, staff suffer from both MSDs and stress. In 2013, 51% of cleaners reported having been absent from work due to illness or injury over the former 12 months. This is lower than in the private sector as a whole (59%). On the other hand, when cleaners take leave due to the above causes, their absence is longer and more frequent: on average, 12 days' leave over

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<sup>2</sup> The *psychological demands* score is the sum of the following criteria: performing tasks requiring a high level of concentration + working under pressure + being frequently disturbed when working + receiving contradictory instructions + not being able to forget one's work once at home.

the year compared to 8 days' leave in the private sector as a whole, and 2.5 times a year compared to twice a year overall.

Greater job insecurity and worse working conditions than those in other sectors lead to higher levels of dissatisfaction among cleaners. Indeed, on average, cleaners express less satisfaction with their wages, work and life in general than other workers in skilled or unskilled sectors.