

Brief

Prepared by the General Secretariat of the Council, under the direction of the President of the COR

Rationale Hardship is defined as exposure "to one or more occupational risk factors determined by decree and linked to marked physical constraints, an aggressive physical environment or certain work rhythms likely to leave identifiable and irreversible lasting traces" on employees' health. The risk associated with individual exposure to arduous working conditions has been offset by early retirement opportunities only since 2014 for private-sector employees, in addition to the special status granted to jobs in the "active" category of the civil service. A system of retirement on grounds of unfitness is also in place for "worn-out" workers whose inability to work has been medically certified, to also allow them to retire earlier. This dossier reviews all these schemes, recalls the links established between working conditions and health, and presents an overview of occupational risk exposure in France.

I. Retirement life expectancy, occupational health and leaving conditions

- ***Why take into account the potential effects of occupational hazards on pensions?*** The existence of a solidarity scheme that derogates from common rules is justified by the empirical link established between working conditions and health (document no. 2). Prolonged exposure to occupational risks is associated with health problems that reduce the length and quality of life in retirement (document no. 3), and in the French case, the transition to retirement seems to improve the health of those exposed.
- ***What are the effects of working conditions on life expectancy?*** The gap in life expectancy at age 35 of 6 years between executives and workers was maintained from the 1970s to the 2010s. Exposure to more difficult working conditions on average contributes to this gap, which raises equity issues for pensions. However, this gap also relates to income and education levels, childhood living conditions, lifestyles and health behaviors (document no. 2).
- ***Is the effect of working conditions on life expectancy verified in the civil service?*** In the civil service, differences in working conditions are dealt with by profession using a distinction between "active" and "sedentary" categories, the former being subject to "particular risks" or "exceptional fatigue" (document no. 15). Retirees in the active categories do not have a different life expectancy to those in the sedentary categories in the territorial and hospital civil services (document no. 4). This is due either because the professions do not target only those exposed to unfavorable mortality conditions, or because the early retirement of these categories cancels out the deleterious effects of working conditions, or finally because those who suffer the most difficult working conditions die before retirement or become disabled. Life expectancy is lower for men in the active categories in the civil service (document no. 17).

II. How is exposure to occupational hazards changing?

- ***How has exposure to arduous working conditions changed in recent years?*** In terms of the high exposure thresholds used for C3P, exposure fell for handling heavy loads, noise, hazardous chemical agents and repetitive work between 2003 and 2017. For other factors (awkward postures, vibrations, extreme temperatures, alternating shifts and night shifts), variations are more irregular or very slight. Autonomy at work, after increasing in the 1990s, has stagnated or declined since then. Social support in the workplace (team spirit, group cohesion and collaboration between colleagues) has remained very high, although harassment is more frequently reported (documents no. 6 and 7). In 2015, exposure to occupational risks in France was among the most unfavorable in France in comparison with comparable economies (Germany, Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom and Sweden) considering most of the types of physical hardship (document no. 9).
- ***How is exposure to arduous working conditions handled?*** The Working Conditions - Psychosocial Risks system (CT-RPS, DARES, DREES and DGAFP) and the Medical Surveillance Survey of Employee Exposure to Occupational Risks (Sumer) are the reference surveys for households and

businesses to measure the exposure to occupational risks (document no. 5).

- ***Do all employees feel able to carry out their work until retirement?*** In France, in 2019, 37% of employees do not feel capable of doing so (18% of those over 50). This is the case of people exposed to occupational risks, with an impaired state of health, or exercising an unskilled job, in contact with the public or in the care and social action sector (document no. 8).

III. Inaptitude, the arduous work account and active categories: three approaches to taking arduousness into account for pensions

- ***Do all countries compensate for hardship in the same way?*** Many countries comparable to France have no national compensation schemes (Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands - excluding the civil service, Sweden, the UK, Canada and the USA). For others (Austria, Italy, Finland, Poland), the working conditions taken into account in some cases go beyond the criteria adopted in France, particularly as regards physical work, exposure to physical and chemical substances, and mental and emotional load (document no. 10).
- ***Does their employers declare at risk many employees?*** In 2017, employees benefiting from a personal hardship prevention account (1.3 million) were more than twice as low the number of exposed employees recorded by surveys, which however use slightly different thresholds: exposure could therefore be under-reported in the C3P (document no. 12). The number of employees declared to be exposed under this scheme peaked in 2016 (898,000 employees), before the 2017 amendment which removed some of the hardship criteria taken into account, and then stabilized at 640,000 employees in 2020 and 2021. Night work and alternating shift work are those that concern the most employees, respectively 280,000 and 235,000, followed by repetitive work and noise, concerning 80,000 and 70,000 people (document no. 13).
- ***What proportion use the C2P for retirement?*** Among employees with at least one point on their C2P who retired in 2021, only 1,010 people (4.7%) benefited from an increased insurance period (MDAP) generating a pension right. This represents only half of the policyholders who could have benefited from the rights provided by their C2P. Among the others, some do not have enough points available in their account, and have already taken early retirement for a long career, or retired later than the legal retirement age (document no. 14).
- ***How can we characterize active category civil servants?*** In 2021, 751,000 civil servant retirees had retired under the active categories, including 23,400 new retirees in 2021. At the end of 2021, 634,000 civil servants are contributing under these categories. These retirees rarely leave at the age of entitlement (57, document no. 15), but rather at 60 on average, three years earlier than all other retirees. Finally, in 2021, 39% of jobs in the hospital civil services are filled by contractual workers in occupations that would fall into the active category if they had tenure (documents no. 16 and 17)
- ***Disparities among retirees due to incapacity?*** Among retirees entitled to a full-rate pension at the legal retirement age, former invalids are characterized by more complete careers and higher pensions for all schemes (between 1,000 and 1,200 euros) than former recipients of the disabled adult allowance (AAH), who receive around 900 euros (document no. 18).