

## Centre for Policy Futures

# The Global Job Quality Divide: Evidence of Winners and Losers in the World of Work

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*What is a Good Job and Who Gets It? A Typological Analysis of Job Quality in a Global Sample of Countries*

### Key points

Job quality is multidimensional: job quality is not solely determined by pay or job security, but includes factors like autonomy, skill utilisation, stress and physical intensity.

Globally, we found two clear job categories that match objective and subjective notions of 'good' versus 'bad' jobs. Good jobs score high on positive characteristics (e.g., job security) and low on negative ones (e.g., work-related stress). Workers in good jobs also report higher job satisfaction and lower intentions to quit their jobs.

There are winners and losers in the labour market: workers in low-skilled positions, with lower education levels, spells of unemployment, and waged employment are more likely to be in 'bad' jobs. This highlights the presence of systemic inequities in the labour market worldwide.

### Why this study?

A key shift in employment policy has been a growing recognition that governments must focus on job creation as well as improving job quality. Yet, how to distinguish 'good' from 'bad' jobs, or whether such a clear distinction even exists, remains a subject of scholarly and policy debate. Some jobs, for example, might contain a blend of positive and negative aspects (e.g., high pay and high stress).

We investigated three key questions:

1. What types of jobs are out there?
2. Do these job types fall into defined 'good' or 'bad' typologies?
3. Which groups of people (for example, by age, education or background) are most likely to end up in each of these job types?

### Drawing on a global sample

Existing evidence tends to be limited to waged workers in high-income countries, where detailed data on jobs is more readily available. Our research is the first to draw on a truly global sample, encompassing self-employed and waged workers in 37 high, low and middle-income countries. This data is available through the 2015 wave of the [International Social Survey Program](#).



We grouped jobs based on 15 different job characteristics (e.g., pay, security, stress, physical intensity, whether the job is interesting, flexibility, and opportunities for career advancement). We found that these job characteristics tend to group into two clearly defined types of jobs. While one job type scored high on positive job characteristics, such as pay, security, and opportunities for career advancement and low on negative ones, such as stress and physical intensity, the other job type was the exact opposite: low on positive job characteristics and high on negative ones. We also found a clear distinction in worker outcomes: respondents working in the first job type reported higher job satisfaction and lower intentions to quit. This evidence strongly suggests the existence of clearly defined 'good' and 'bad' jobs, revealing a common thread that spans different labour markets and institutional settings globally.

Critically, we showed that 'good' and 'bad' jobs are unequally distributed across the population, and this holds even when we consider country-specific differences. We found that workers in low-skilled jobs, with lower levels of education, recent unemployment spells and waged workers are more likely to be in 'bad jobs'. Our research underlines how crucial access to higher education, upskilling opportunities or sufficient capital for business ventures is for securing a 'good' job.

Overall, our study is the first to show that the global divide between good and bad jobs creates a clear distinction between winners and losers in the labour market that reinforces existing social and economic inequalities.

## Policy implications

- **Develop better measures of job quality:** Policymakers should adopt multidimensional frameworks to evaluate job quality, looking beyond pay and job security to include factors such as autonomy, opportunities for progression, and working conditions. Doing so requires better data systems that can track not just how many jobs are created, but whether those jobs support wellbeing and economic mobility. Without this, it is difficult to understand what prevents the creation of good jobs or to design policies that improve outcomes for workers most at risk of poor-quality employment.
- **Employers need to adopt a holistic approach to good work design:** Good work design enhances productivity and improves the health and well-being of workers ([Safe Work Australia](#)). Good work design addresses the physical, cognitive and psychosocial aspects of the work, along with the

needs and capabilities of the people involved. Our findings underscore the importance for employers of embedding both extrinsic (e.g., opportunities for progression, security) and intrinsic (e.g., whether the job is interesting, autonomy) dimensions within existing work design practices.

- **Level the playing field:** Policies and regulations aimed at improving job quality should not only focus on creating better jobs but also on equipping vulnerable groups with the support, training, and pathways needed to access these jobs. These efforts should combine effective policy interventions (e.g. targeted education and inclusive employment services that address vocational and non-vocational barriers to employment) with stronger employer engagement to promote access to quality jobs and sustainable employment.
- **Break the myth that 'any job is better than no job':** The idea that any job is better than no job is not always true, particularly when it comes to mental health. Poor quality jobs, with low autonomy and high insecurity, can be as detrimental to mental well-being as unemployment. Reforms aimed at reducing unemployment should therefore focus not only on increasing employment rates but also on ensuring access to high-quality jobs. This is essential to break the cycle of disadvantage and reduce churn in the labour market. This study offers valuable insights for identifying what constitutes a good job and for informing policies that promote access to decent, sustainable employment, particularly for those most at risk of exclusion.



For a comprehensive overview of the study's methodology and findings, please refer to the full article: [What is a Good Job and Who Gets It? A Typological Analysis of Job Quality in a Global Sample of Countries](#).

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