

Question in Project:

European Working Conditions Survey 2024

Question Topic:

Job and career/ Job situation & professional activity

Construct:

Employee self-declared

General Information:

Note: The item was tested in English, German and Polish.

Introduction:

English versions:

The next questions are about your employment status.

[with two or more jobs:] The next questions are about your employment status in your main job.

German versions:

In den folgenden Fragen geht es um Ihren Beschäftigungsstatus.

[with two or more jobs:] In den folgenden Fragen geht es um Ihren Beschäftigungsstatus in Ihrem Hauptberuf.

Question Text:

English versions:

Version 1: Are you working as an employee or are you self-employed? [with two or more jobs:] Are you working as an employee or are you self-employed in your main job?

Version 2: Are you working as an employee or are you self-employed?

German versions:

Version 1: Sind Sie angestellt oder sind Sie selbstständig? [with two or more jobs:] Sind Sie in Ihrem Hauptberuf angestellt oder sind Sie selbstständig?

Version 2: Sind Sie angestellt oder sind Sie selbstständig?

Instruction:

English version (ToolTip text in question version 1; Instruction text in question version 2; no instruction text in question version 3):

By employee we mean someone who gets a salary from an employer or a temporary work agency. This does not have to be linked to a contract of employment as such. If you are hired on an 'agreement outside of an employment relationship' or on a 'civil law contract', please select 'employee'.

Self-employed includes people who have their own business or are partners in a business as well as freelancers. A self-employed person may or may not have employees. 'Self-employed' also includes employees working for their own business and members of producers' cooperatives.

Family workers should determine which alternative matches their situation best.

German version (ToolTip text in question version 1; Instruction text in question version 2; no instruction text in question version 3):

Mit "angestellt" sind Personen gemeint, die ein Gehalt von einem Arbeitgeber oder einer Zeitarbeitsfirma erhalten. Dies setzt nicht unbedingt das Bestehen eines Arbeitsvertrags voraus.

"Selbstständig" ist, wer ein eigenes Unternehmen besitzt oder Partner in einem Unternehmen ist, sowie Freiberufler. Selbstständige können, müssen aber keine Angestellten haben. "Selbstständig" bezieht sich auch auf Angestellte, die für ihr eigenes Unternehmen tätig sind, oder auf Mitglieder in Produzentengenossenschaften. Mithelfende Familienangehörige entscheiden selbst, welche der Antwortmöglichkeiten am besten auf ihre Situation zutrifft.

Answer Categories:

English version:

An employee

Self-employed

Don't know

German version:

Angestellt

Selbstständig

Weiß nicht

Cognitive Techniques:

Cognitive interviews: Specific Probing

Findings for Question:

Findings Web Probing:

Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the three question versions with clarifications shown on demand (ToolTip), to all respondents (via instruction) or without clarification. In total, 62% (n = 491) of respondents reported that they were employed, 38% (n = 300) reported to be self-employed, and only one respondent answered question Q7 with "Don't know" (see Table 14). There were no significant differences between question versions ($\chi^2(4,792) = 3.022$, $p = .554$) or countries ($\chi^2(4,792) = 3.236$, $p = .519$).

Based on the response distributions, there is no indication whether or in which way clarifications are presented impacts response behaviour. Cognitive interviews were used to gain insights on possible silent misunderstandings, that is an incorrect understanding and subsequent self-assignment of respondents to the answer categories.

Findings Cognitive Interviews:

In the cognitive interviews, respondents were first shown question version 1 (ToolTip) and after discussing this question version, they were shown question version 2 (instructions displayed directly) on a separate screen.

In Germany, nine respondents declared themselves as employees and seven respondents as self-employed. In Poland eight respondents declared themselves as employees and seven respondents as self-employed. Additionally, one respondent (PL15) could not assign himself to one of the options.

While in Germany there were mainly no problems with the understanding of the two terms "employee" and "self-employed", in Poland different understandings of "employee" were mentioned. This is because in Poland the term for "employee" (PL: Pracownik najemny) can have negative connotations. Therefore, a question was explicitly asked in Poland whether the term "employee" was actually perceived negatively.

Eight Polish respondents stated that the term "employee" had negative connotations for them. They mostly understood it to refer to working arrangements based on another type of contract than employment contract (of mandate, specific work) or simple jobs such as being hired, without any social security or rights:

- *"Hired [PL: najemny] means there is a contract, but I would identify it more with*

blue collar work, with some simple jobs.” (PL05, employee)

- *“For me an ‘employee’ is a person who must get money of course, but who works for some limited time only, when needed.” (PL09, self-employed)*

This assessment most likely stems from the characteristics of the Polish labor market with very complex regulations which do not protect the weakest players of the labor market.

The other eight Polish respondents defined "employee" in neutral terms, as a person employed based on any kind of contract or working for someone else's business, also as a subcontractor.

Apart from the negative connotation of the term "employee" in Poland, two respondents (PL07, PL15) who owned a company with limited liability had problems classifying themselves correctly:

- *“I am one of the owners [of a company], so I wonder whether I am self-employed. A limited liability company is a kind of business where you are not self-employed, you have to sign an employment contract with such a person. Limited liability company is a family business, with 50% for me and 50% for my husband.” (PL07, self-employed)*
- *“On one hand, I am not an employee and on the other hand a self-employed person makes me think of a one-man business. And I am employed in my own company, but this is a limited liability company and I do not have to be employed there.” (PL15, don't know)*

Additionally, in Germany two respondents (DE03, DE05) had problems understanding what was meant by "family workers":

- *“The explanation of ‘self-employed’ is very informative, it's a longer text. Only the last part, with the family workers, I didn't understand.” (DE03, employee)*
- *“For example, ‘members of producer's cooperatives, family workers decide for themselves which of the answer options best fit their situation’ [...] It is a bit unclear what is meant.” (DE05, self-employed)*

Except for two respondents (DE09, PL04), no one used the ToolTips to answer this question. Most of the participants explained that they knew the answer to this question without looking up clarifications and that it was easy for them to differentiate between employee and self-employed:

- *“I understand what is meant by the question. It's very simple, whether I'm self-employed or employed.” (DE03, employee)*
- *“I didn't check it because the answer was clear.” (PL14, self-employed)*

In addition, seven respondents (DE: n = 1, PL: n = 6) explained that they did not use the ToolTips because they either did not know they could use it, did not notice it, or forgot about it:

- *"I forgot that there is such an option. But I read that such an option is possible at the beginning."* (PL05)
- *"I did not notice that I can move my mouse over it."*(PL06)

In both countries, the explanations of the terms "employee" and "self-employed" in the ToolTips were found to be informative. In Poland, seven respondents preferred the version with the ToolTips, eight preferred the version with the instructions shown directly and one respondent (PL02) found both versions equally good. In Germany, eleven respondents preferred the version with ToolTips and five the version with the instructions shown directly.

Respondents preferring ToolTips stated that it is easier to answer the question in this format and that it is clearly arranged:

- *"I think the ToolTips are better. It's clearer. You can click on it when you need it. [...] With the alternative version, I immediately think: 'Oh God, that's a lot to read'."* (DE01, employee)
- *"[Otherwise], I would have to read everything, even if it didn't concern me. I find the version with the ToolTips clearer; you can answer quickly, and you don't get lost in the explanation."* (DE16, self-employed)
- *"Although I did not check these instructions in ToolTips, I am a visual person. If there is too much text for me, I just don't read it."* (PL10, employee)

Respondents preferring the instruction shown directly explained that they would probably oversee the ToolTips, because they are hardly intuitive:

- *"I have to say, at first I thought the ToolTips were cool, they looked cool. But when I compare it now, it's true that I saw them but ignored them. Here I at least have to read about it, with the description below the text I find it better."* (DE06, employee)
- *"I have the whole message here. I just forgot that the blue ones, the text fragments with blue highlights, may lead to some explanation."* (PL05, employee)

One respondent (PL06) explained that there is no consistency in how the information is displayed in the questionnaire, that's why he overlooked the ToolTips:

- *"Explanation directly below question is clearer and I prefer this option. It is also because the previous questions came with such an explanation below, so that's what I expected."* (PL06, employee)

Summary

- In web probing, question format (ToolTips vs. instructions shown directly vs. no instructions at all) had no effect on respondents' answers to Q7.
- In the cognitive interviews, the majority of the respondents did not use the ToolTips and there was no clear preference between the two versions (ToolTips vs. Instructions shown directly).
- In Poland, the term "employee" was partly understood in a negative way and was understood in different ways. In addition, respondents who had a company with limited liability had problems classifying themselves.
- In Germany, the definition for "family worker" was not clear to everyone.

Recommendations:

We recommend displaying the **clarifications** in the ToolTip as an instruction below the question text. The concept of employment and self-employment are central to the EWCS. These explanations can be repeated in the form of ToolTips when the terms are used again in later questions.

The term "family worker" in the **instructions** should be highlighted visually in bold font and separated from the definitions of employed and self-employed.

In Polish, the term "employee" [PL: pracownik najemny] should be replaced by a more neutral term in both the question text and the response options. One possibility is to use the word "Pracownikiem" as a noun and add an explanation in brackets:

"Czy w swoim miejscu pracy jest Pan(i) pracownikiem (czyli osobą zatrudnioną przez pracodawcę) czy też osobą samozatrudnioną?" [In your job, are you an employee (i.e., a person employed by an employer) or are you self-employed?]

"Pracownikiem (czyli osobą zatrudnioną przez pracodawcę)" [An employee (i.e. a person employed by an employer)]

"Osobą samozatrudnioną" [Self-employed]

"Nie wiem" [Don't know]