

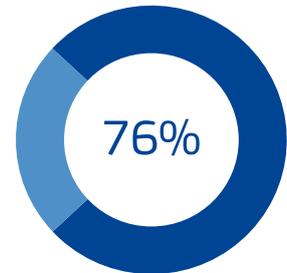


ANALYTICAL HIGHLIGHT

PROSPECTS FOR Office clerks

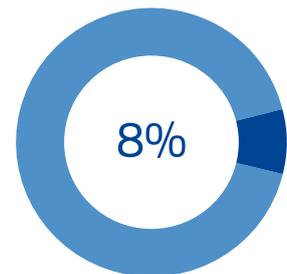
- Office clerks are the third largest occupational group across the EU-28, although their share of EU-28 employment declined substantially from 2003 to 2013.
- While this decline is set to continue, there will still be a considerable volume of job openings in countries such as Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Germany.
- Covering a wide range of sectors, the skills required by office clerks are, in part, defined by the industries they work in. Clerks working in the financial services sector require greater numeracy skills, while other industries put greater store on high-levels of literacy.

▼ Figure 1a – General, keyboard and other office clerks share of clerical support workers occupational group, EU-28, 2013



Source: Cedefop forecasts (2014)

▼ Figure 1b – General, keyboard and other office clerks share of total employment, EU-28, 2013



Source: Cedefop forecasts (2014)

WHAT DO THEY DO?

General, keyboard and other office clerks¹ (known here as office clerks) mainly record, organise, store and retrieve information related to the office tasks in question. They also compute financial, statistical, and other numerical data.

There are six main subgroups:

- general office clerks;
- specific office clerks (e.g. library, and personnel clerks);
- secretaries;
- keyboard operators (e.g. typists);
- numerical clerks;
- material-recording and transport clerks.

The specific tasks undertaken vary between the subgroups. They include: stenography

and typing; operating computers and other office machines; carrying out secretarial duties; using word processing and spreadsheet packages; recording and computing numerical data; keeping records of and coordinating the timing of production schedules, level of stocks and timely delivery of goods; filing documents and other materials, and; preparing and checking material for printing².

Employment outlook

In 2013, 7.8% of the total EU-28 workforce (almost 17.5 million people) worked as office clerks, making this the third largest occupational group (see Figure 1a). Office workers comprise most of the wider clerical support workers occupational group (see Figure 1b)³.

The relative share of EU-28 jobs held by office clerks declined from 2003 to 2013. A small increase in the absolute number of office clerks in the period 2003-2008 was followed by a large decline from 2008-2013 (equivalent to around 1.5 million jobs lost).

This more recent fall is highlighted in the 2014 European Vacancy and Recruitment Report (EVRR⁴) which shows that office clerks, secretaries, keyboard operators, and other clerical support workers were all among the top 25 occupations showing employee decline from 2011 to 2012. Transport clerks bucked this trend and were among the top 25 occupation for employee growth across the EU-28.

At country level, both numerical clerks (Belgium; the Netherlands; Poland; Slovakia; and Sweden) and material-recording and transport clerks (Austria; Hungary; Italy; and Slovakia) were top ten growth occupations in a number of countries from 2011 to 2012. However, office clerks were a top ten occupation for employee decline in nine countries (Belgium; Cyprus; Denmark; Greece; Hungary; Ireland; Luxembourg; the Netherlands; and Portugal).

Office clerks are widely-dispersed across different sectors. In 2013, the majority office clerks worked in either the business and other services sector (31%) or the distribution and transport sector (30%). A further one in five office clerks worked in the non-marketed services sector (19%) and over one in ten worked in manufacturing (13%).

From 2003 to 2008, employment grew in most service-related sectors across the EU-28. However, from 2008 to 2013, the number of office clerks fell in every major sector and most subsectors. Reflecting wider occupational patterns, the share of office clerks with high-level qualifications grew by six percentage points from 2003 to 2013 (approaching a quarter of all office clerks by 2013, as shown in Table 1).

▼ **Table 1 – Share of General, keyboard and other office clerks by qualification level compared to all occupations, EU-28, 2013**

	Low	Medium	High
General, keyboard and other office clerks	15.9%	61.8%	22.3%
All occupations	21.2%	48.1%	30.7%

Source: Cedefop forecasts (2014)

A look into the future

Figure 2 shows that the share of EU-28 employment relating to office clerks is expected to continue to decline from 2013 to 2025, losing greater share than any other occupational group. In numerical terms, there is expected to be a decline of around 3.5 million office clerks (more than a fifth of all workers).

There is predicted to be a decrease in the number of jobs in virtually every sector and subsector, with notable net decline in the largest sectors of business and other services, distribution and transport, and non-marketed services.

Whilst employment levels are forecast to fall, job opportunities will still exist because of the need to replace people who leave their jobs due to retirement and for other reasons. This replacement demand is forecast to offset the overall reduction in office clerk jobs. It remains such a large occupational group that, in countries such as Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Germany, Greece and Estonia, at least one in every 20 job opportunities will be for office clerks (see Figure 3).

The share of office clerks holding low- and especially medium-level qualifications is forecast to continue to decline. The share of workers with high-level qualifications is expected to grow to around 30% by 2025, almost double the share in 2003.

▼ **Figure 2 – Future share of General, keyboard and other office clerks, EU-28**



Source: Cedefop forecasts (2014)

Skills challenges

Office clerks work in every industry and this can shift the balance of skills, aptitudes and technological understanding required. For example, clerks working in the financial services sector will require greater numeracy skills, whereas those working in public administration often require greater literacy skills. Across the board, though, there is a focus on^{5 6 7}:

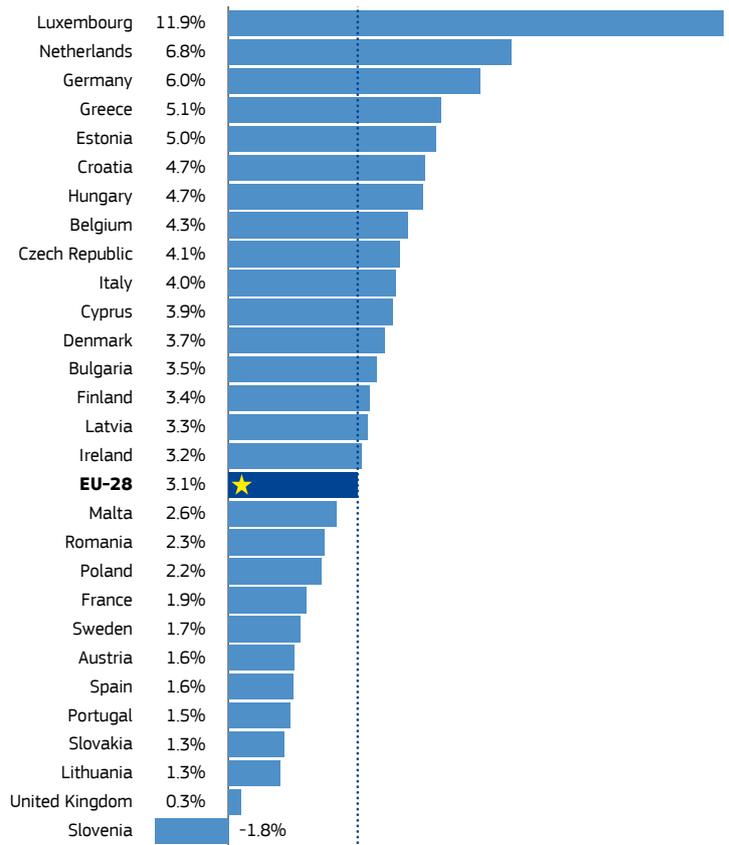
- **Clerical and administrative skills:** The knowledge and application of administrative and clerical procedures and systems, as well as an appreciation of business systems and processes.
- **Information ordering skills:** The ability to order information according to set principles and rules. However, office clerks often need critical thinking and flexibility to be able to employ different rules and procedures in order to organise information more effectively.
- **Communication skills:** Active listening; oral communication; reading comprehension; writing; foreign languages.
- **Numeracy:** Good numeracy skills.
- **Technology:** Communications technology; computer software; computer hardware and peripherals.
- **Customer management skills:** Internal (to the organisation) and external customer needs assessment; problem sensitivity, and; active learning.

As clerks operate in all industrial sectors, the demand for skills is influenced by wider sector trends. For example, the growth of health and social care, the resurgence of financial services and continued employment falls in manufacturing and primary industries changes the need for skillsets as defined by the host industry.

As with other occupations, technology is having a deskilling and an upskilling effect. It is increasingly replacing the routine tasks which office clerks traditionally performed; although increasingly the number of clerical tasks performed by others as consequence (e.g. managers). However, as part of these trends, the clerks that remain are increasingly taking on additional, higher functions including customer service, quality control, research and management^{8 9 10}. Clerks will also need to develop concomitant ‘soft skills’, such as, communication, problem solving and team work^{11 12}.

As we have seen with manufacturing jobs and skills, globalisation is expected to have a similar effect on clerical jobs due to greater and more efficient information flows and remote communication. As in manufacturing, this may lead to more generic clerical functions being undertaken in countries outside of the EU, but with more specialist and niche clerical functions undertaken in Europe¹³. ■

▼ Figure 3 – Share of General, keyboard and other office clerks in total job openings by country, EU-28, 2013-2025



Source: Cedefop forecasts (2014)

- 1 Defined as ISCO-08 Group 41, 43, 44 General office clerks
- 2 International Labour Organization (2012), International standard classification of occupations structure, group definitions and correspondence tables: ISCO-08 Volume 1
- 3 ISCO Major Occupational Group 4 – Clerical support workers
- 4 European Commission (2014), European Vacancy and Recruitment Report
- 5 OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers No. 143, Michael J. Handel (2012), Trends in job skill demands in OECD countries
- 6 O*Net (2014)
- 7 International Labour Organization Sectoral Activities Programme (2008), Vocational education and skills development for commerce workers: issues Paper
- 8 Department for Business Innovation and Skills Research paper number 134 (2013), Hollowing out and the future of the labour market
- 9 OECD (2013), The skills needed for the 21st century
- 10 European Commission (2013), Employment and social developments in Europe 2012: The skill mismatch challenge in Europe
- 11 Fiona Christie, DEPICT Project (2012), Literature review: Understanding employer skills’ needs across Europe
- 12 CFA business skills @ work (2012), Business and administration: Labour market report
- 13 Department for Business Innovation and Skills Research paper number 134 (2013), Hollowing out and the future of the labour market



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