

Working conditions  
**Striking a balance:  
Reconciling work and life in the EU**





# Striking a balance: Reconciling work and life in the EU



European Foundation  
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## Country codes EU28

AT	Austria	FI	Finland	NL	Netherlands
BE	Belgium	FR	France	PL	Poland
BG	Bulgaria	HR	Croatia	PT	Portugal
CY	Cyprus	HU	Hungary	RO	Romania
CZ	Czech Republic	IE	Ireland	SE	Sweden
DE	Germany	IT	Italy	SI	Slovenia
DK	Denmark	LT	Lithuania	SK	Slovakia
EE	Estonia	LU	Luxembourg	UK	United Kingdom
EL	Greece	LV	Latvia		
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# Executive summary

## Introduction

Combining work and life is a fundamental issue, one that policymakers, social partners, businesses and individuals are seeking to resolve. Simultaneously, new challenges and solutions are transforming the interface between work and life: an ageing population, technological change, higher employment rates and fewer weekly working hours. This report examines the interface between work and life for people in the EU, the circumstances in which they seek to reconcile the two, and what is most important for them in achieving work–life balance. The findings are based on a range of data sources – in particular, the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) and the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS).

## Policy context

The European Pillar of Social Rights adopted in 2017 has created a momentum for EU policy on work–life balance. In addition, the proposed Directive on Work–Life Balance aims to remove barriers to women’s entry into the labour market, and to ensure a more equal distribution of care between men and women. The proposal complements other EU legislation, such as the Working Time Directive, and initiatives that promote gender equality by facilitating a better work–life balance. And at Member State level, policy is evolving in terms of legislation and initiatives, with reforms to child-related leave and flexible working time being introduced.

## Key findings

### Life course perspective

Nearly one in five workers (18%) in the EU reports a poor work–life balance; this percentage has remained stable since 2000, as measured by the EWCS. Indicators of conflict between work and life have increased slightly in the past decade, as measured by the EQLS. Women in employment report a better work–life balance than men, linked to their shorter working hours. Differences in reported work–life balance between people of different age cohorts emerge when a life course perspective is considered: problems combining work and life are most frequently reported by people with young children. This is especially the case for men: during this phase, they also express a strong preference for working fewer hours.

### Gender distribution of work

Volume of work is the strongest predictor of work–life balance. While weekly working hours have decreased in recent decades, working 40 hours a week is still the norm for men in the EU; moreover, the working week is longest during the parenting phase of life. Women spend on average 34 hours per week in paid employment (less during the parenting phase) but spend significantly more time in unpaid work (largely consisting of care for children or dependent adults). This gender gap, in terms of time spent on paid and unpaid work, differs substantially between Member States. An equal distribution of work and care, however, is the exception rather than the rule.

### Flexible work arrangements

Flexible working arrangements, whether full flexibility over working hours or more limited flexibility, are generally helpful for workers juggling work and private life. Even a little flexibility goes a long way: those who can take an hour off to take care of personal or family matters are much less likely to report a poor work–life balance than those who cannot do so. Nearly two-thirds of employees in the EU, however, have no say over their working schedules. The relationship between telework and work–life balance is ambiguous: where telework substitutes for working time in the workplace, it facilitates the work–life interface. However, when it results in extra work, the opposite is the case.

### Role of working conditions

Although the number of hours of work is by far the most important factor in work–life balance, other working conditions play a role. The organisation of working time – regularity and predictability, working atypical hours such as nights and weekends – is important. For example, high-intensity work and the associated stress can negatively affect home life, while social support at work from management and colleagues can alleviate problems.

### Impact of care responsibilities

Most unpaid work involves caring for children or dependent adults. Women assume care responsibilities more often than men (working fewer paid hours or not at all). Formal support services are not available or affordable for everyone: a sizeable share of women not seeking employment because of care responsibilities indicates a lack of available or affordable care services. There are clear indications that the demand for formal long-term care (LTC) is rising and will continue to do so.

However, to meet this demand will put pressure on government budgets: hence, further reliance on informal care is likely, with a consequent impact on work–life balance.

### Benefits of work–life balance

Achieving a better work–life balance is likely to increase employment rates and lead to a more equal distribution of work and care between men and women. A better work–life balance is also linked to a better mental well-being for workers and more engagement in the job, leading to a more productive workforce – ensuring benefits for workers and employers alike. And those with a better work–life balance tend to be more satisfied with their life and work, and happier overall.

### Policy pointers

- Policy interest in work–life balance is warranted because its benefits are wide-ranging. Improving work-life balance mostly happens at the workplace but the involvement of stakeholders at different levels can create a facilitating policy framework.
- People’s specific work–life balance needs to change dramatically across the life course; this should be taken into account when designing appropriate policies.
- Reducing the volume of work has the greatest impact on improving work-life balance. However, the organisation of work is also important: irregular or unpredictable working hours, working at unsocial hours or a high level of work intensity all complicate the interface between work and life.
- Informal support for flexibility goes a long way: an hour or two off from work at crucial moments makes a tremendous difference. This highlights the pivotal role of the workplace and the manager; moreover, evidence shows that formal arrangements go hand in hand with actual flexibility.
- Telework positively affects work–life balance, but also risks increasing the volume of work. Substitutional telework, rather than supplemental, should be encouraged.
- The demand for long-term care will continue to increase. Meeting this demand by further reliance on informal care can have a negative impact on work–life balance and the distribution of care between men and women.



# Introduction

Striking a balance between work and other aspects of life is crucial for people of working age across the EU. Policymakers, social partners and companies are currently discussing measures that aim to improve the interface between work and life. Better reconciliation of work and other commitments is crucial to gender equality: it enables more men to take up caring responsibilities and it allows more women to enter the labour force. As this report shows, a better work–life balance is also an indicator of overall well-being and quality of life in that it enables people to live healthier and happier lives.

Profound changes in demographics, household structures and employment patterns present new opportunities and challenges for achieving work–life balance. With increasing numbers of women entering the labour market, traditional divisions of work and care responsibilities in the household are shifting. People remain in employment longer and this raises the question of how to balance work and life across an extended life course. Technological advancements can provide much-needed flexibility when juggling work and other responsibilities, but may also blur the line between work and the private sphere of everyday life.

The goal of this report is to examine how people in the EU balance work with other aspects of life, where they struggle to reconcile the two, and what is most important when striving for work–life balance. Two factors are of central importance in discussing work–life balance: the time that people spend on their job and how they organise this time, and the need to reconcile this with care responsibilities for children or other relatives. It must be recognised that work–life balance is broader than work and care; a better reconciliation of work and interests other than care (e.g. sports, socialising and volunteering) is important for many people, regardless of whether they have care responsibilities or not. However, time spent on work and care has been central to the policy debate around work–life balance and takes a central role in this report.

The discussion on working time, and the organisation of work more generally, builds mainly on findings from the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS). Care responsibilities and the role of services in relation to work–life balance is also emphasised and assessed through the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS).

This report builds on previous Eurofound work about the topic:

- a report on working time patterns (Eurofound, 2017a)

- the overview report of the EQLS 2016 (Eurofound, 2017b), which includes a chapter on work–life balance
- the overview report of the EWCS 2015 (Eurofound, 2017c), which makes the link between job quality and work–life balance
- a report on reconciling work and care (Eurofound, 2015a)

## Policy background

Work–life balance is a recurring policy theme on several levels. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality includes a specific target that aims to promote the shared responsibility of care within the household and address the underrepresentation of women in the labour market. Using survey data from 83 countries, the United Nations (2017) reports that, on average, women spend three times as much on unpaid domestic and care work as men.

Similarly, at the EU level, the main objective of policy development with regard to work–life balance has been to reduce gender inequality in the labour market. The rationale is that the lack of rights conducive to work–life balance forms a barrier that prevents women from taking up paid employment. The Maternity Leave Directive of 2008 (European Commission, 2008) sought to extend the minimum length of maternity leave from 14 to 18 weeks, but was ultimately withdrawn in 2015. The Parental Leave Directive of 2010 (Council of the European Union, 2010) provides workers with an individual right to parental leave of at least four months on the grounds of the birth or adoption of a child, until the child reaches a given age. However, the directive does not impose any obligations in terms of pay during parental leave. In addition, it is at the discretion of Member States or social partners to define the detailed conditions for parental leave.

Momentum was regained in 2017 with the proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, which consists of 20 principles. Principle 9 refers explicitly to work–life balance:

*Parents and people with caring responsibilities have the right to suitable leave, flexible working arrangements and access to care services. Women and men shall have equal access to special leaves of absence in order to fulfil their caring responsibilities and be encouraged to use them in a balanced way.*

(European Commission, 2017c)

A new EU initiative, the ‘New Start to Support Work–Life Balance for Parents and Carers’ was announced on 26 April 2017 as part of the European Pillar of Social Rights. By proposing a new directive on work–life balance, the European Commission has taken a broader approach in addressing women’s underrepresentation in the labour market (European Commission, 2017a). The general objective of this proposed directive is the promotion of gender equality in the labour market and the reduction of gender gaps in employment, pay and pensions. The directive specifically aims to improve access to work–life balance arrangements, such as leave and flexible working arrangements, and to increase the take-up of family-related leave and flexible arrangements by men. The most prominent measures in the proposal are: to introduce a paternity leave of at least 10 working days compensated at the level of sick pay; to make four months of parental leave non-transferable and compensated at sick pay level (at least); to introduce a carer’s leave of five days per year, also compensated at sick pay level; and to extend the right to request flexible working arrangements to all working parents of children up to 12 and carers with dependent relatives (European Commission, 2017a).

While the proposal for a work–life balance directive explicitly aims to improve work–life balance, other EU directives and initiatives also include elements with a similar aim. Most prominently, the Working Time Directive includes many provisions that are conducive to work–life balance: for example, limiting the average working week to a maximum of 48 hours, ensuring an adequate rest period between working days, and restricting the length of night work. However, in the context of work–life balance, and because of its nature – to lay down minimum safety and health requirements for the organisation of working time – the Working Time Directive has a limited reach in actually reducing maximum working time in certain situations due to the exceptions and derogations it contains (Eurofound, 2015b; De Groof, 2017). Another relevant EU directive is the Part-Time Work Directive, which aims to eliminate discrimination against part-time workers by facilitating the development of part-time work on a voluntary basis.

More recently, a Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions has been proposed in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights. This directive stipulates that employers are required to inform workers about the place of work, the amount of paid leave and the work schedule. Where there is a variable work schedule, the employer is supposed to inform the worker about the reference hours and days within which the worker may be required to work, as well as the minimum advance notice the worker should receive before commencing an assignment. Such advance notice increases the predictability of working hours – an important element for workers when they are organising the interface between work and private life.

Other EU initiatives feed into work–life balance policy. For example, the 2002 Barcelona Objectives on the development of childcare facilities aimed to increase women’s labour force participation and to improve work–life balance for working parents (European Commission, 2018a). Furthermore, the promotion of work–life balance throughout the life course features very prominently in the European Pact for Gender Equality 2011–2020 (Council of the European Union, 2011). In the context of the European Semester, the Employment Guidelines state:

*[Member States should ensure that] parents and other people with caring responsibilities have access to suitable family leaves and flexible working arrangements in order to balance work and private life, and promote a balanced use of these entitlements between women and men.*

(European Commission, 2017b)

At Member-State level, policies with regard to work–life balance are being developed further. Between 2015 and 2016, legislation on maternity and paternity leave was amended or extended in a number of countries, and paternity leave was introduced for the first time in Ireland (Eurofound, 2017d). Furthermore, parental leave is being reformed to allow more flexibility and equal sharing between partners. In addition to family leaves, labour laws have been introduced that increase the rights to request flexible work, and reduce working time or unsocial working hours. Member States have also been designing policies that increase the supply and affordability of childcare (Eurofound, 2017d).

## Changes in demographics and working life

Policy development and discourse should be placed in the context of demographic changes and employment patterns. The demographic composition of households in the EU is changing, albeit slowly. The two main trends are a decrease in the proportion of couples and an increase in single adults, as well as a decrease in households with children. The percentage of single-adult households increased from 34% in 2009 to 38% in 2017, according to Eurostat’s European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS). This is mostly single-adult households without children, because the proportion of single-parent households is stable at just over 4%. The proportion of households consisting of couples with children decreased over the same period from 21% to 20%, while couples without children increased by 0.5 percentage points to 25%. The implications of these trends for work–life balance are ambiguous. On the one hand, households with children may have more caring responsibilities than households without, and the decreasing proportion of households with children may therefore reduce overall pressure on work–life balance. On the other hand, an increase in

single-adult households may have the opposite effect: while these households may still have caring responsibilities outside the household (e.g. older relatives and children), they may lack the support of sharing these responsibilities with other household members.

Populations across the EU are ageing: the share of population aged 65 years or over increased by 2.4 percentage points over the period 2007–2017 as a result of low birth rates and higher life expectancy. On the one hand, low birth rates may reduce the share of households with children and therefore the share of households with caring responsibilities for children, but, on the other hand, the growing share of elderly people may increase the demand for care. The European Commission (2018b) argues that the demand for formal care will increase significantly in the coming decades, putting pressure on government spending. Arguably, the increased demand for care may result in an increased demand for informal care. Eurofound (2017c) found that 32% of men and 40% of women are involved in caring for children or grandchildren, and 15% and 20%, respectively, are involved in caring for people with disabilities or infirm relatives or friends. Care for children or grandchildren is most common in the age groups 25–34 and 35–49, while care for dependent adults is most common in the age group 50–64. Both types of care are mostly taken up by women and some have both responsibilities at the same time – the so-called ‘sandwich generation’.

And it is precisely women who have become increasingly more active in the labour market in recent decades. While the employment rate of women in 2001 was 54.3%, it increased to 62.5% in 2017, in line with the EU objective of achieving an employment rate of 75% by 2020. This development not only has a profound impact on gender equality, but also on how paid work is organised in the household. In fact, the single-earner-household model is slowly disappearing. Of all households consisting of couples in the EU, the proportion with at least one adult working and one adult not working dropped from 25.6% in 2009 to 23.7% in 2017. Conversely, the percentage of couples with two working adults increased from 46.1% in 2009 to 48.3% in 2017. Most of this increase can be attributed to both partners in the couple working full-time, although the share of one full-time and one part-time worker has also increased. The increase in labour force participation may be in conflict with responsibilities other than paid employment, such as, but not limited to, care. Often, women still draw the short straw and remain off the labour market. In fact, a significant gender employment gap of around 10 percentage points remains, and Eurofound (2016a) estimates that the foregone benefits amount to 2.8% of the EU’s GDP, or around €370 billion.

Not only have more people joined the labour market in the last two decades, but more people also remain in work longer. As a consequence of increased life expectancy and policies formulated by governments across the EU, people retire at a later age. Eurostat reports an increase in the duration of working life from 32.9 years in 2000 to 35.6 years in 2016. Eurofound (2017b) shows that roughly 30% of those aged 50–64 and 23% of those aged 65 and older are involved in caring for children or grandchildren, thus indicating that many take up caring for grandchildren after retirement. As such, an extended working life may interfere with finding the time to care for grandchildren.

More people are working but, as Eurostat data show, the average number of weekly working hours in paid employment has been decreasing steadily for decades (see Chapter 2). Working hours have a significant impact on work–life balance, but so too does the regularity, predictability and intensity of working hours, as well as the flexibility workers may have in determining their working hours. Many of these factors are undergoing change, with new ways of organising work affecting the way work is performed. Technology has a crucial role in this development. Modern information and communication technologies (ICT), such as email, online messaging and videoconferencing, as well as the usage of mobile devices such as smartphones, tablets and laptops, have resulted in employees being able to work anytime and anywhere. Teleworking has become more widespread and is often regarded as a means to achieving a better work–life balance. Eurofound and the ILO (2017) argue that working outside the employer’s premises using ICT is associated with not only more flexibility, autonomy and productivity, but also with longer working hours, work intensification and interference with personal life.

## Structure of the report

Chapter 1 introduces the concept of work–life balance and clarifies how it is understood and measured in the EWCS and EQLS. Trends in these measurements of work–life balance are presented, and differences between groups are revealed. The surveys measure work–life balance for people in paid employment only, but work–life balance is also relevant for people who are currently not in paid employment. With that in mind, Chapter 1 also discusses whether the prospect of work–life balance is a barrier to taking up paid employment.

Working time and care responsibilities are important determinants of work–life balance and core elements of the policy debates surrounding such a topic. Chapters 2 and 3 explore in depth the topics of working time and care. Chapter 2 focuses on paid and unpaid working time patterns and working time flexibility, while Chapter 3 highlights the role of care in achieving

work–life balance. Chapter 4 examines a wider range of determinants of work–life balance and highlights what is most important when explaining differences in work–life balance. Chapter 4 also highlights the benefits of a better work–life balance. The report concludes by compiling the main results and their implications for policy.

## Data sources – EWCS and EQLS

This report uses a range of data sources, but draws particularly from the EWCS and the EQLS.

The EWCS assesses and quantifies the working conditions of employees and the self-employed, analyses relationships between different aspects of working conditions, identifies groups at risk and issues of concern, and monitors progress and trends. The survey aims to contribute to EU policy development, particularly regarding quality of work and employment issues. The EWCS has been carried out by Eurofound

every five years since 1991. This sixth survey (EWCS 2015) interviewed nearly 44,000 workers in 35 countries. In addition to measurements of work–life balance, the survey covers a wide array of topics, including working time, working time arrangements, job intensity and support.

The EQLS is a representative, questionnaire-based survey that interviews individuals aged 18 years and older, across all EU Member States, about work and life circumstances. The survey was first carried out in 2003, and was reiterated in 2007, 2011 and 2016. The EQLS 2016 asked participants about 262 different items covering topics ranging from socioeconomic background, resources and living conditions, to social ties and the use of social services. The latest wave of the EQLS covers many topics that are of particular relevance to work–life balance, including numerous indicators that describe how work and care can be reconciled, as well as information on other long-term care (LTC) services offered across EU Member States.

# 1 Work–life balance in the EU – Overview

The goal of this report is to examine work–life balance in the EU, and to determine what matters most for achieving a better work–life balance. However, before answering these questions, it is important to have an understanding of what the term ‘work–life balance’ actually means. It is critical to discuss this because it is used in a wide variety of contexts, and interpretations often differ. This report relies strongly on the EWCS and EQLS, both of which pose a range of questions related to work–life balance to the respondents. These questions largely determine how work–life balance is defined and operationalised in this report, but discussing the concept of work–life balance is also crucial for the interpretation of the findings from the surveys.

This section starts by clarifying the concept of work–life balance and outlines different perceptions in the academic literature. It then proceeds to explain how work–life balance is measured in the EWCS and EQLS, before presenting an overview of trends and distribution of work–life balance in the EU. In the surveys, questions about work–life balance are only asked to people in paid employment, but work–life balance considerations may also be important for those not in paid employment. As such, the report makes the case that work–life balance considerations play a pivotal role in the decision to take up employment.

## Defining work–life balance

### Different interpretations

Work–life balance is a widely used term in research, policy, business and daily life. Many men and women seem to struggle with striking a balance between work and private life, and numerous blogs, articles and self-help books offer insights into ways to deal with the time pressures of combining a career with parenthood, care, education, hobbies or other interests outside work. Businesses recognise the importance that employees attach to work–life balance, and attract staff by offering flexible working time, teleworking and other policies. Furthermore, in government policy, work–life balance is considered part of the solution for many important problems, as national governments and the EU devise work–life balance policies to promote employment, productivity, gender equality and healthy workplaces. At the same time, a growing number of academic studies focus on what actually works in achieving a better work–life balance and what does not.

In fact, the word has become so ubiquitous that it is often unclear what it actually means.

In academic literature, the term is used widely, and different meanings have been attributed to the same term. Some researchers use a different definition of the same term, while others use different measurements of the same definition (Casper et al, 2018). Conversely, a myriad of terms in the literature seem to be related to the concept of work–life balance but have a different label. Just to name a few: work–life conflict, work–life enrichment, work–family balance, work–non-work balance, role balance, reconciling work and private life, work–life integration, work–life fit, work–life interference, work–family interface, spillover, work–life integration, or a combination of these terms. Some of these labels refer to the same concept, while others refer to something conceptually different, reflecting theoretical development of a relatively new academic field.

The fact that ‘work–life balance’ is an abstract term is one of the reasons for its broad interpretation. When dissecting the term, a few questions immediately arise. Firstly, ‘work’ and ‘life’ are presented as being mutually exclusive domains: one is supposed to find balance between the competing domains of ‘work’ and ‘life’. However, it is hard to argue that ‘work’ is not a part of life. On the contrary, work is considered an integral part of life in quality-of-life frameworks used by international research and policy organisations. For example, work resides within Eurofound’s (2017b) concept of ‘quality of life’, as well as in the idea of a ‘better life’ as proposed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2017a). While the ‘work’ element of ‘work–life balance’ is perhaps the most straightforward – usually only referring to paid employment – ‘life’ and ‘balance’ certainly are not. In the context of work–life balance, ‘life’ does not refer to the aforementioned quality of life frameworks, but is often focused on family and care responsibilities, or more generally to the sphere of life that is not paid employment. Interestingly, this means that work is considered as being part of the ‘work’ domain when it is paid, and part of the ‘life’ domain when it is not. Some authorities refer to work and non-work domains, but for the purposes of the report, the term ‘work–life balance’ will be used, with ‘work’ referring to paid employment and ‘life’ referring to all else, including but not limited to unpaid work.

## Roles, demands and resources

The concept of 'balance' finds its origin in role theory (Goode, 1960; Marks and MacDermid, 1996). Much of the research on work–life balance originates in this theory, which recognises that individuals have different roles at work and in the private domain of life – for example, as an employee, parent, volunteer, carer or a friend. Individuals attempt to 'engage' in whatever role they are performing, and positive role balance is achieved when the performance of each role is fully engaged (Marks and MacDermid, 1996). Role strain is when there is difficulty in meeting role demands, and can occur when the demands of different roles are in conflict: for example, when overtime at work prohibits someone from attending a family event. Conflict occurs not only because of time constraints and it can act in the other direction, from the private domain to the work domain. For example, fatigue from caring for a relative may hamper productivity at work.

The idea of having interdependent roles in different domains of life has been carried forward in subsequent work–life balance research. Greenhaus and Powell (2006) introduce the concept of *work–family enrichment*. Rather than emphasising conflict between roles, the concept of enrichment focuses instead on the positive spillovers of combining work and family roles. Work–family enrichment is defined as the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in another role (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). This can occur, for example, when skills or social connections acquired at work are used in the family domain, or vice versa.

Voydanoff (2005) proposes a demands and resources approach to conceptualising work–life balance. Similar to the job demands-resources model that has been applied in the context of burnout (Demerouti et al, 2001), Voydanoff suggests that work comprises demands and resources, and that this also applies to the family domain. In both domains, *time-based demands* (e.g. working hours and household work) exist alongside *strain-based demands* (e.g. job insecurity and worrying about children). Similarly, resources are divided into enabling resources (e.g. autonomy at work and spouse support) and psychological rewards (e.g. meaningful work and parenting rewards). Finally, Voydanoff introduces *boundary-spanning* demands and resources, which serve in both domains: for example, flexible schedules, commuting time, dependent care, care by relatives or parental leave. Work–life balance is considered as a 'global assessment that work and family resources are sufficient to meet work and family demands such that participation is effective in both domains' (Voydanoff, 2005).

## Role engagement and satisfaction

So there are different conceptualisations of roles and domains, but how exactly is balance achieved? One perspective is that balance is the *absence of conflict*, possibly supplemented by positive spillovers (Greenhaus and Allen, 2011). However, balance may be more than the absence of conflict (Carlson et al, 2009). For example, individuals may perceive very little conflict between work and family roles because they have reduced their family commitments to a minimum (Greenhaus and Allen, 2011) by outsourcing them (e.g. through formal childcare) or by relying on the commitment of, for example, their partner. Another perspective, referring back to role theory (Marks and MacDermid, 1996), is that work–life balance is achieved by being 'fully engaged' or 'effective' in each role and by being satisfied about that. This, however, implies that individuals should be equally engaged in every role despite valuing roles differently. For example, some may find family more important than work or vice versa. The question arises as to whether balance is achieved when engagement, involvement, and/or effectiveness in multiple roles is *equal*; values or preferences may give a different weight to different roles, despite going against the metaphor of balance, which implies equality of weights.

Rather than implying equality of role engagement or satisfaction with each role separately, Valcour (2007) focuses on *overall satisfaction* with work–family balance. She argues that ultimately 'people want to be able to fulfil their commitments to both work and family and to experience satisfaction and success in so doing'. This approach encapsulates individual differences attached to the value of roles and preferences. Rather than relying on satisfaction, some argue that work–life balance is achieved when involvement in roles is consistent with individuals' values (Greenhaus and Allen, 2011) or as an accomplishment of role-related expectations that are negotiated and shared between partners in both work and family domains (Grzywacz and Carlson, 2007).

These perspectives imply that work–life balance is a psychological, rather than a social, construct (Grzywacz and Carlson, 2007). Achieving a good fit between work and private life that is consistent with one's values, preferences, negotiated roles and/or being satisfied with the fit may be a desirable objective for the individual or perhaps an employer. However, achieving work–life balance on an individual level might be at odds with social policy objectives that aim at gender equality. For example, a couple may have negotiated that that one partner works full-time while the other works part-time, and both may be very satisfied with their work–life balance, but such an arrangement goes against the gender equality policies in place. In fact, women in paid employment in the EU are more likely than men to say that their working hours fit with their

private commitments, despite working more if paid and unpaid work is added up (Eurofound, 2017c).

### Work-life balance and policy frameworks

Work-life balance as a concept may also be placed in the context of a set of values – for example, as formulated by a policy objective. The European Commission's (2017a) proposal for a directive on work-life balance aims to increase gender equality by promoting women's employment and supporting their career progression, as well as by engaging men in caring. The general objective is to ensure the principle of equality between men and women with regard to labour market opportunities and treatment at work by better reconciliation of work and caring duties. Inadequate work-life balance policies are identified by the European Commission (2017a) as a cause of women's underrepresentation in the labour market. Work-life balance is regarded as a barrier to employment, and improving work and life is positively related to increasing the labour supply of women. The proposal foresees legislative measures aimed at parents and carers, and thus focuses on *work-family* balance rather than *work-life* balance, and refrains from explicitly aiming to increase the labour force participation of women without children or caring responsibilities. This is in line with the fact that having children has a strong negative association with female labour force participation (Eurofound, 2016a).

Eurofound's (2015c) working definition of sustainable work over the life course is that 'working and living conditions are such that they support people in engaging and remaining in work throughout an extended working life'. The focus is simultaneously on quality of the job and the work environment, and on the individual. This conceptualisation is in fact close to the job demands-resources model of Voydanoff (2005) in that it recognises demands and resources in the domains of both work and private life. Similar to the European Commission's (2017a) approach, Eurofound's (2015c) sustainable framework ultimately regards a lack of work-life balance as a barrier to employment. The perspective is broader in the sense that it also takes into account more than just the work-family balance, explicitly taking a life-course perspective and acknowledging that work and life demands and resources differ across the life-cycle, and addresses engagement in work, rather than just participation.

To sum up, caution is warranted when speaking about work-life balance because of the multitude of conceptualisations. There are three considerations. Firstly, how do we assess involvement in a role?

Dimensions that can be taken into consideration are: time spent in the role, the engagement while spending time in the role, and the satisfaction derived from performing the role. Effectiveness in performing the role, and the demands and resources in each role can also be taken into account. Secondly, what roles are considered and what exactly is being balanced? More broadly, (paid) work and non-work domains are the focus, but often research or policy objectives consider only the work and family domains, leaving out other aspects of life, such as civic and political participation, hobbies, culture and entertainment, as well as further education or training. Finally, when are roles balanced? For some, roles are balanced when individuals are involved to an extent that is in line with their values, preferences or what they have negotiated with others. For others, roles are balanced when the involvement in roles is equal or in line with certain policy objectives, which may or may not be in line with individual values or preferences.

### Evolution of work-life imbalance

For this report, the operational definition of work-life balance is ultimately driven by its measurement in the data. This research report is mostly based on the EWCS and EQLS, and uses the questions of work-life balance included in these surveys and relates them to other characteristics of work and private life. The fact that both surveys include questions on work-life balance is no coincidence: reconciliation of work and private life is situated on the interface between working and living conditions, or the quality of work and the quality of life. The EWCS focuses on the former while the EQLS focuses on the latter, and both bring insights into work-life balance from a different entry point. Headline figures on work-life balance are presented in the most recent overview reports of both surveys (Eurofound, 2017b, 2017c).

This section examines work-life balance in the EU and how it has evolved. While doing so, it also shows how the EWCS and EQLS capture aspects of work-life balance and how these are related to the conceptualisations of work-life balance outlined in the previous section.

### Fit between work and personal commitments

As reported by the EWCS in 2015, the vast majority of workers in the EU (80% of men and 84% of women) claimed that, in general, their working hours fitted in well or very well with their family/social commitments outside work. This share has remained relatively stable since the question was first asked in the EWCS in 2000.

### Box 1: Measuring the fit between work and family/social commitments

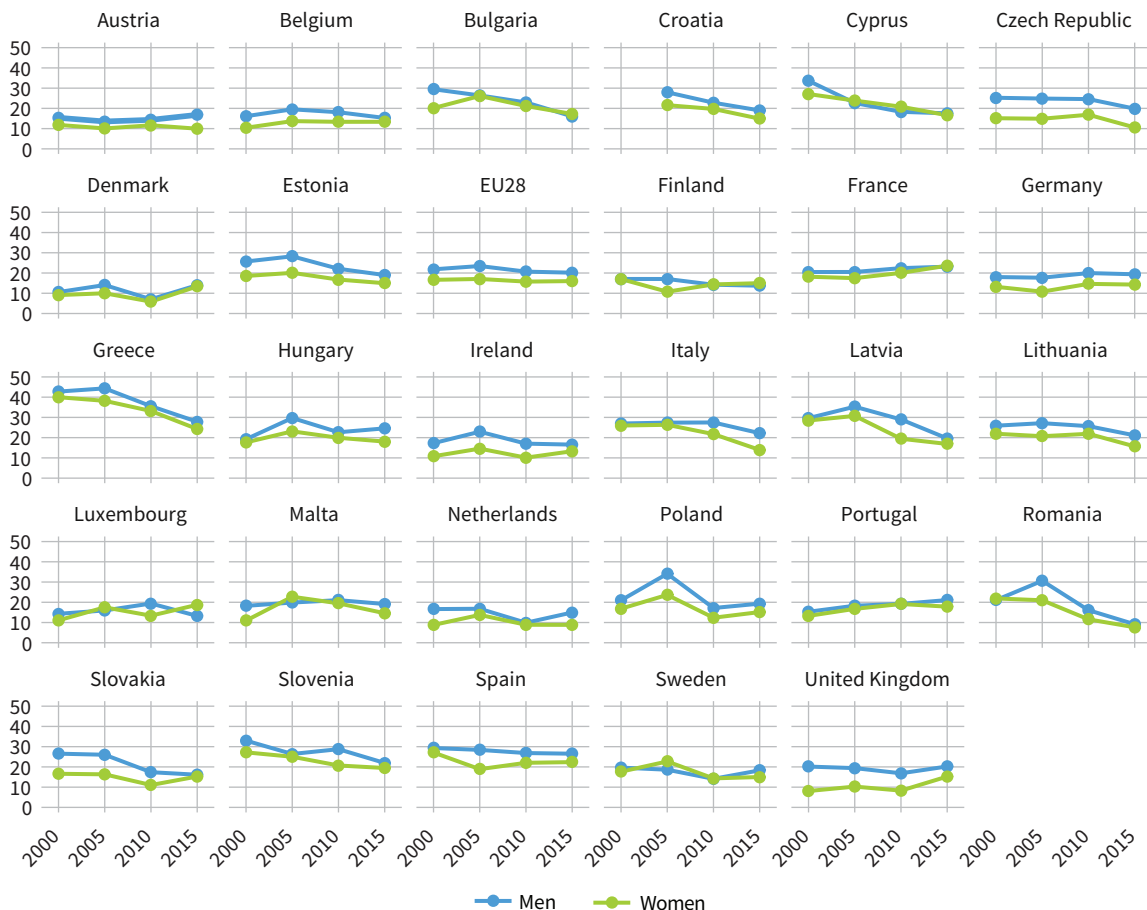
Both the EWCS and EQLS ask participants to assess the ‘fit’ between work and non-work. More precisely, both surveys include the question: *In general, how do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work?* In the EWCS, respondents can respond ‘Very well’, ‘Well’, ‘Not very well’ and ‘Not at all well’, and in the EQLS, respondents have the options ‘Very well’, ‘Rather well’, ‘Rather not well’ and ‘Not at all well’ (EWCS 2015 and EQLS 2016). Since the EWCS has included this question for a longer period of time, this report will mainly use the EWCS for this question.

This measurement of work–life balance focuses on a number of elements. Firstly, it focuses on time-based demands because it specifically asks how working hours fit in. Secondly, it is primarily focused on the impact of work on non-work activities, rather than the other way round. Thirdly, it broadens the parameters of work–family balance by including social commitments outside work. The interpretation of ‘social commitments’ is left to the respondents. Finally, the respondent is asked for a judgement of the fit. This means that the answer depends on the values, preferences and expectations of the respondent.

The fit between time spent in work and non-work activities varies across EU Member States in different ways. First, it varies in terms of the level. Figure 1 depicts the shares of workers reporting a poor fit between working hours and other commitments. It shows that, in 2015, the shares varied from 10% or less for men and women in Romania, and women in Austria and the Netherlands, to around 25% or more for men in

Hungary, and men and women in France, Greece and Spain. The second important aspect is that, in most countries, men report a poorer fit than women, which is largely because men in paid employment have more working hours than women in paid employment. The exceptions are Bulgaria, Finland, France and Luxembourg, where more women report a poor fit than men.

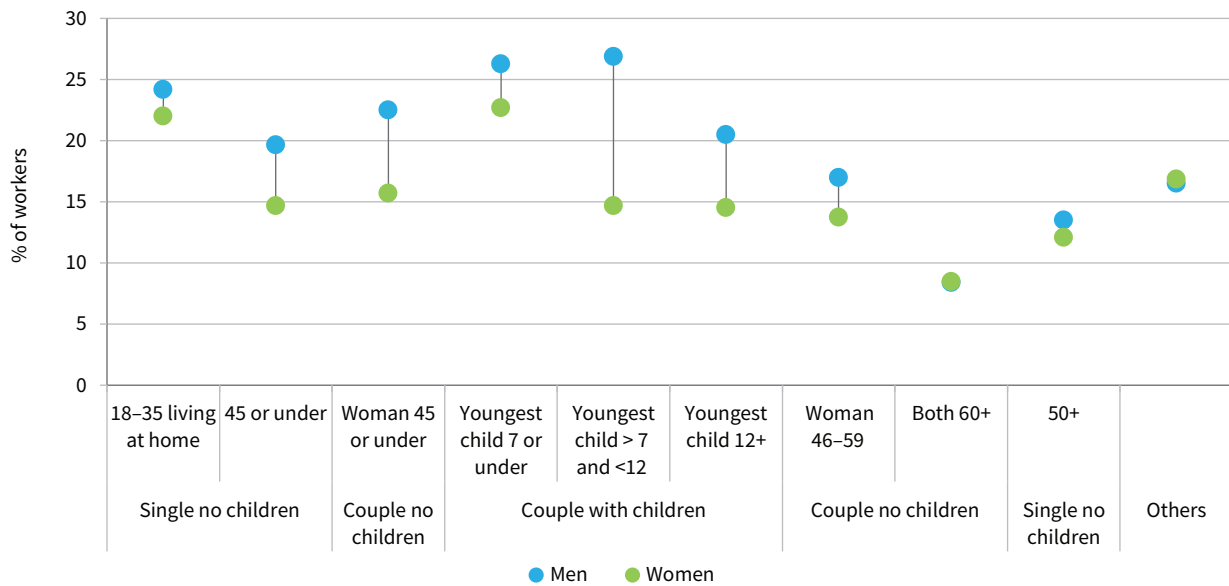
Figure 1: Poor work–life fit by sex, 2000–2015 (%)



Note: ‘Poor fit’ is those answering ‘not very well’ or ‘not at all well’.  
Source: EWCS (2000, 2005, 2010, 2015)



Figure 2: Poor work-life fit by life stage and sex, 2015 (%)



Source: EWCS 2015

Finally, there are some differences in the trends within the EU. Overall in the EU, the proportion of workers reporting a poor fit is stable: 20% in 2000, 21% in 2005, 18% in 2010 and 18% in 2015. The three largest Member States (France, Germany and the United Kingdom) represent nearly half of the employed workforce and therefore strongly drive up the EU average; the proportion of those reporting a poor fit in these countries has actually slightly increased since 2000. Most of the other Member States offset this with a decreasing trend or a flat trend. Greece, the country that reported the poorest fit in 2005, has seen the proportion of those reporting a poor fit halved in the last 10 years. This may reflect less concern about work-life balance in the face of unemployment and income insecurity. Also, in Cyprus, Latvia and Romania, the fit between work and family/social commitments has substantially improved since 2000.

In addition to country of residence and sex, the respondents' age and the composition of their household are two important characteristics associated with the fit between working hours and other social/family commitments. The use of stylised life stage categories (Figure 2) highlights the effect of children on the fit between working hours and family/social commitments. Work-life balance appears worst for women when they are in a couple with a young child (under seven years of age) and for men when the child is between seven and twelve (the same stage in which the gender gap in terms of hours spent in paid work is largest).

Differentiating between different household types (not shown), single mothers, single fathers and men in couples with children are those reporting the poorest

fit. Men also report high levels of poor fit between working hours and family/social commitments. (To some extent, women in households with people other than their own children also report this.) The self-employed with employees, employees with fixed-term employment contracts and self-employed men without employees are more likely to report a poor fit between their working hours and their family/social commitments than employees with indefinite contracts.

There are marked differences between occupational groups. Those occupational groups with the worst fit include service and sales workers, managers, and plant and machine operators. Clerical support workers and elementary workers and professionals report the best fit. In terms of sectors, the worst fit is seen in transport, commerce, hospitality and health, while the best fit is found in the other public areas of the public sector – education and public administration – as well as in financial services.

### Work-life conflict

The demands of work and private life are not always compatible, and this can lead to conflict between the two. As mentioned previously, one of the perspectives on work-life balance is that balance is achieved when there is no conflict between the work and non-work domains (Greenhaus and Allen, 2011). Contrary to the respondents' assessment of the fit between working hours and family/social commitments, the questions included in the EWCS and EQLS about conflict focus not only on *time-based* conflict, but also on *strain-based* conflict (see Box 2). In addition, conflict can originate from the work domain or from the non-work domain.

## Box 2: Measuring work–life conflict

Another set of questions in the EWCS and EQLS focus on conflict between the work and non-work domains, following similar operationalisations in Grzywacz and Marks (2000) and Netemeyer et al. (1996). Three areas of this have been investigated in the EQLS since 2003, and with similar wording in the EWCS since 2015. The question is ‘How often has the following occurred in the past 12 months?’ and the statements are:

1. *I have come home from work too tired to do some of the household jobs which need to be done.* This is a measurement of work-to-non-work conflict originating from strain-based demand at work, since the direction is from work to the private domain and it is about strain other than time. Household work is not conditional on having a family at home, so this measurement goes beyond work–family conflict.
2. *It has been difficult for me to fulfil my family responsibilities because of the amount of time I spend on the job.* This is a measurement of work-to-family conflict originating from time-based demands at work.
3. *I have found it difficult to concentrate at work because of my family responsibilities.* The directionality of this measurement of conflict is reversed (family to work) and is a measurement of strain-based demands originating in the family domain.

The EWCS 2015 has two additional items on work–family conflict. The question starts with ‘How often in the last 12 months have you...’ and the statements are:

4. *found that your job prevented you from giving the time you wanted to your family?* Similar to (2) above, this is a measurement of work-to-family conflict originating from time-based demands at work.
5. *found that your family responsibilities prevented you from giving the time you should to your job?* This is complementary to the questions above because this is a measurement of family-to-work conflict originating from a time-based demand in the family.

In the EWCS, the answering options are ‘Always’, ‘Most of the time’, ‘Sometimes’, ‘Rarely’ and ‘Never’. In the EQLS, these are ‘Every day’, ‘Several times a week’, ‘Several times a month’, ‘Several times a year’, ‘Less often/rarely’ and ‘Never’.

Following the framework of resources and demands as suggested by Voydanoff (2005), the combination of five questions in the EWCS covers strain- and time-based demands leading to conflict in both directions and is therefore comprehensive. Questions 1, 2 and 4 reflect conflict originating in the workplace that affect the non-work domain; questions 3 and 5 cover conflict in the opposite direction. Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran (2005) show through meta-analytic examination that, despite correlation between the two directions of work–life conflict, there is adequate validity to discriminate between the two. However, most of the measurements are of work–family conflict, and will therefore be more applicable to people with care responsibilities.

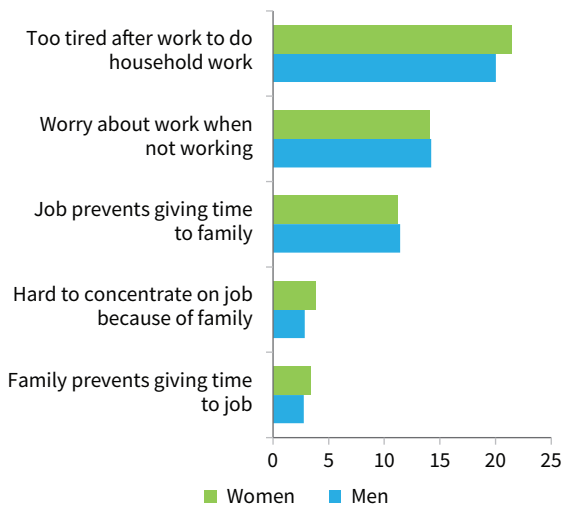
Workers are more likely to report the existence of conflict in the direction from work to life than the opposite (see Figure 3). This applies to both men and women. Overall, one in every five workers report being too tired after work to do household work (‘Always’ or ‘Most of the time’), while one in 10 declare that their job prevents them from giving the time they want to their families. Altogether, 4% of individuals working in the EU (similar shares for men and women) report all three situations at the same time. Work–life conflict originating in the family and affecting work is reported by around 3% of workers. Overall, 1.2% of workers report both situations of conflict in which family responsibilities impact on their capacity to

concentrate and the time that individuals would like to devote to their job.

Conflict between work and life is increasing slightly. The EQLS features three questions on conflict, which have been included in the survey since 2003. Note that these are not directly comparable to the EWCS (Figure 3) because of a different scale of answer categories.<sup>1</sup> The most common type of conflict – being too tired after work to do household work – was reported by 24% of workers in the EU in 2003 (‘Every day’, ‘Several times a week’ or ‘Several times a month’). This was 22% in 2007 but rose to 25% in 2011 and 32% in 2016. Difficulty in fulfilling family responsibilities because of the amount of time spent on the job remained more or less constant

<sup>1</sup> In the EQLS, the answer categories are: Every day, Several times a week, Several times a month, Several times a year, Less often/rarely, Never. The category ‘Every day’ was added for the 2016 wave and this may account for some of the differences between 2016 and 2011.

**Figure 3: Work-life conflict by sex, 2015 (%)**



**Note:** The chart presents the shares of workers who replied ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’ on a five-point scale from ‘always’ to ‘never’.  
**Source:** EWCS 2015

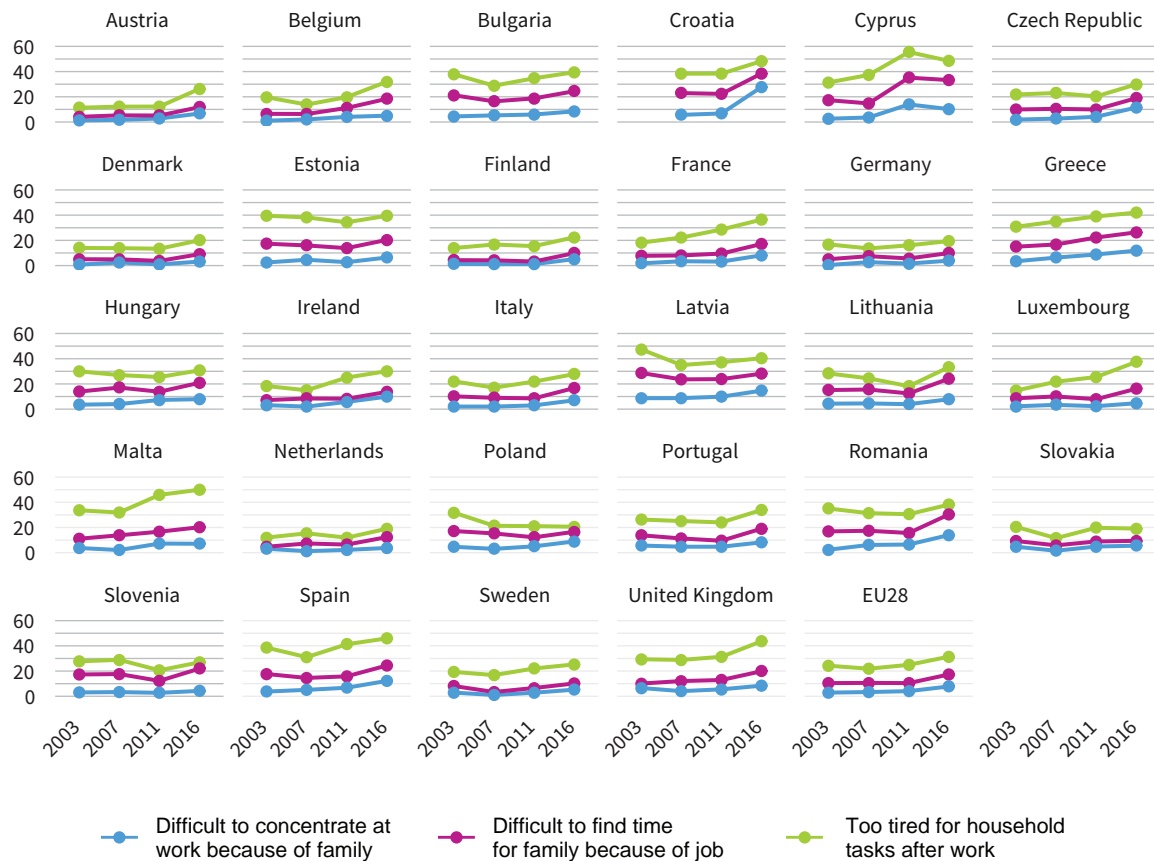
at around 10% of workers between 2003 and 2011, with a slight increase to 17% in 2016. Finally, increasing numbers of workers report difficulties with

concentrating at work because of family responsibilities. In 2003, 10% of workers in the EU had difficulties at least several times a month; this increased to 12% in 2007, 14% in 2011 and to 19% in 2016. Figure 4 shows that these trends are prevalent throughout the EU, although differences between the Member States do exist.

Some household types are more prone to reporting work–non-work conflict than others. Single mothers, for example, report conflict in both directions at a higher rate than men and the EU average alike. And men and women living in couples with children are also slightly more likely than average to say that their job prevents them from giving the time they want to their family.

Self-employed workers (in particular, those with employees) seem more likely to report conflicts arising from work impacting on the non-work domain, and vice versa. This may be related to the fact that the self-employed generally work more hours than employees. Women who are self-employed without employees, as well as male and female employees with fixed-term contracts, are also more likely than the average to say that they are always, or most of the time, too tired after work to carry out household work. It is

**Figure 4: Trends in work-life conflict by country, 2003–2016 (%)**



**Note:** The answer categories are: ‘every day’, ‘several times a week’, ‘several times a month’, ‘several times a year’, ‘less often/rarely’ and ‘never’. The category ‘every day’ was added for the 2016 wave. The chart presents the shares of workers who replied ‘every day’ or ‘several times a week’.  
**Source:** EQLS 2016

interesting to note that the share of respondents indicating that family responsibilities impact on their job is substantially higher for self-employed women (both with and without employees).

Men and women in different occupations also seem to report different degrees of conflict between work and the non-work domain. For instance, managers, agricultural workers, and plant and machine operators are more prone to reporting conflicts between work and non-work domains. In contrast, professionals, technicians and clerical support workers report below-average levels of conflict between work and non-work domains, in both directions.

Female agricultural workers (30%) and plant and machine operators (31%) are much more likely to say they are too tired after work to carry out household tasks (30% and 31% respectively.) The proportion of workers reporting that their job prevents them from giving the time they want to their families is higher among male managers (17%) and plant and machine operators (15%), as well as female managers (15%), agricultural workers (15%) and craft workers (15%). Female craft workers also present higher levels of family-work conflict: 7% report that it is hard to concentrate on their job because of their family, and 6% declare that their family prevents them from giving the time they want to the job.

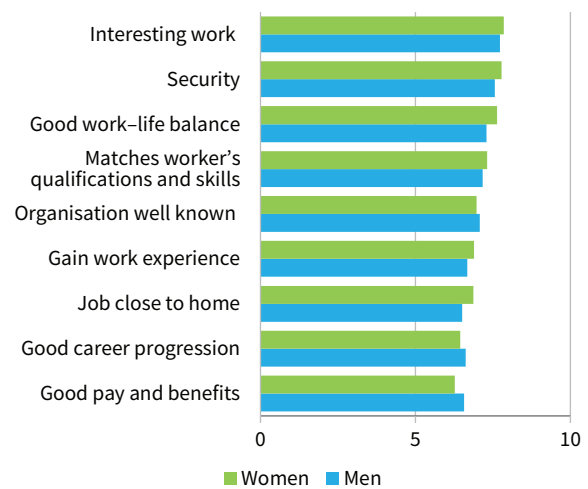
The sector of activity also seems to play a role in the degree of reported conflict between work and non-work domains. Workers in financial services and public administration, as well as in the education sector (mainly men), are less likely to report a conflict between their job and their household/family responsibilities. In contrast, above-average shares of workers in agriculture, construction, transport and health report conflict between their jobs and their household/family responsibilities. The differences are more accentuated for both men and women in agriculture, men in construction, and women in transport (as well as men in terms of their job preventing them from giving the time they would like to their family). The conflicts in the opposite direction – family responsibilities impacting on work – do not vary substantially across the sectors. The exception is agriculture, in which women are more likely to state that their families prevent them from giving the time they would like to their job (7% versus an average of 3% in the EU as a whole).

## Barriers to employment

While research about work-life balance usually focuses on those who are currently in paid employment, it is important to think about those who are not. It is crucial to not only consider how the reconciliation of work with the private life of workers can be improved, but also to determine whether creating better conditions in terms of work-life balance might enable more people – and especially women – to enter the labour market.

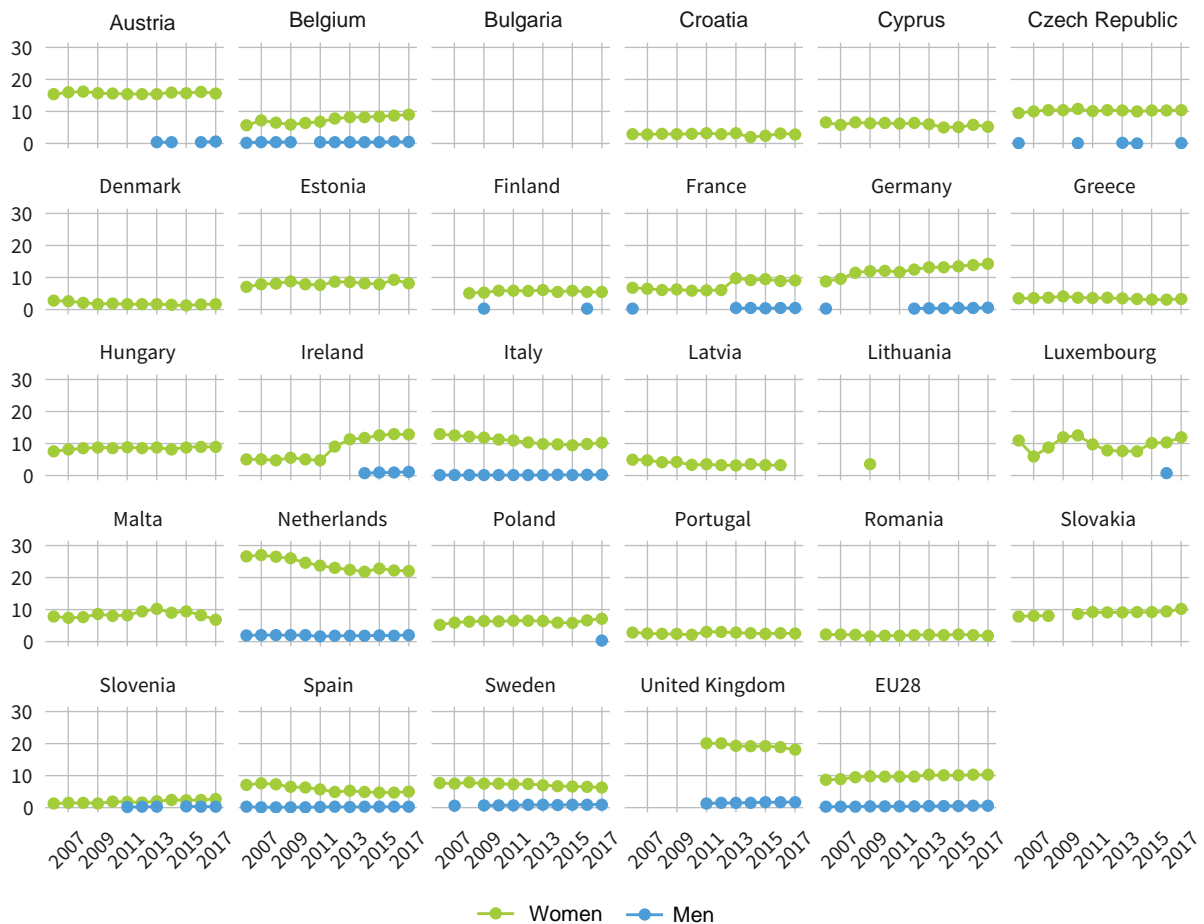
The EWCS and EQLS ask respondents only in paid employment about the fit and the conflict between work and non-work. However, work-life balance considerations can be very important in decisions about whether to work or not. The European Skills and Jobs Survey of 2014 from the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) shows that work-life balance is the third most important reason for accepting a job (Figure 5), topped only by the interest in the nature of the work itself and job security. Pay and benefits is actually given less importance. This holds for both men and women, although for women, work-life balance is relatively more important than for men.

Figure 5: Reasons for accepting current job by sex, 2014



Note: Question asked 'Before you started working for your current employer, how important, if at all, were the following factors in your decision to accept the job?' Ratings range between 0 and 10.  
Source: Cedefop European Skills and Jobs Survey, 2014

Figure 6: Care responsibilities preventing employment or full-time work by country and sex, 2006–2017 (%)



**Note:** Percentages indicate the proportion of the population not seeking employment or not working full-time because of 'looking after children or incapacitated adults'. Bulgaria and Lithuania are excluded because of a lack of reliable data.  
**Source:** Eurostat (EU-LFS)

Some people might not take a paid job because it is too difficult to reconcile paid work with unpaid work. This is especially problematic from a gender perspective, as it is more often women who perform unpaid work (see Introduction) – caring for children, caring for relatives and household tasks. Some women or men might not be in paid employment at all because of work-life balance reasons, while others may revert to part-time work despite actually preferring to work full-time.

Eurostat's European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) measures the proportion of men and women not seeking employment or full-time employment and asks why this is the case. In 2017, roughly 9% of the total female population aged 15–65 years in the EU reported that they were not seeking employment or were not working full-time because they were looking after children or 'incapacitated' adults. This has been consistently the case since the question was first asked

in 2006; it is almost never the case for men (Figure 6). In some countries, the shares are higher: in the Netherlands, it is 25% of women (mostly working part-time); it is about 15% in Austria, Germany and Ireland; and it is reported by less than 5% of women in Romania, Portugal, Denmark, Slovenia, Greece and Croatia.

Not all women and men would choose, if able, to be in (full-time) paid employment if they have care responsibilities. Some may choose to care for children or incapacitated adults themselves, even if there are affordable services available that could take over the caring responsibilities. Those who indicate in the EU-LFS that they do not seek employment or work part-time because of caring responsibilities are asked whether this is due to a lack of available or affordable services. Overall in the EU, some 5.5% of the population do not seek employment or work part-time because of

caring responsibilities. About one-fifth of that group (1.2% of the population) say that this is due to a lack of available or affordable services for children, or ill, disabled or elderly adults. This indicates that almost 4 million people in the EU would consider full-time employment if affordable services were made available to them.<sup>2</sup> Almost all of these 4 million people are women, and the lack of services for children is mentioned more often than services for ill or disabled elderly people.

This figure has been constant for the EU as a whole for at least the last decade (Figure 7), but there are significant differences across the Member States.

Despite having the highest level of user satisfaction with childcare (Eurofound, 2017b), Ireland is also in first place with 3.4% of the population (over 100,000 people) not seeking full-time employment because of a lack of affordable services. The proportion has been steadily increasing over the last decade (in 2006, it was less than 1%). This is likely linked to the high cost of childcare in Ireland, which is among the highest in the OECD countries (OECD, 2016) and is a significant contributor to reduced maternal employment (Russell et al, 2018). In contrast, the availability of affordable services is a barrier for almost no one in Denmark, Finland, Malta and Sweden, all countries with a strong public involvement in the delivery of childcare.

**Figure 7: Care responsibilities and issues with services preventing employment or full-time work by country, 2006–2017 (%)**



**Note:** Percentages indicate the proportion of the population aged 18–64 not seeking employment or not working full-time because of ‘looking after children or incapacitated adults’ and a lack of available or affordable services. Bulgaria and Lithuania are excluded because of a lack of reliable data.

**Source:** Eurostat (EU-LFS)

<sup>2</sup> The EU-LFS does not include the lack of quality services as a reason for not seeking (full-time) employment.

## 2 Working time and flexible work

Working time is likely to be an important factor in work–life balance. Before the connection between working time and work–life balance is analysed in Chapter 4, this chapter aims to characterise how much, when and where work is performed. It addresses not only paid work but also unpaid work, such as housework and care of children and/or relatives, as well as workers’ preferences regarding time spent in paid work. Additionally, it considers workers’ discretion over the time and place of their work.

### Working time patterns

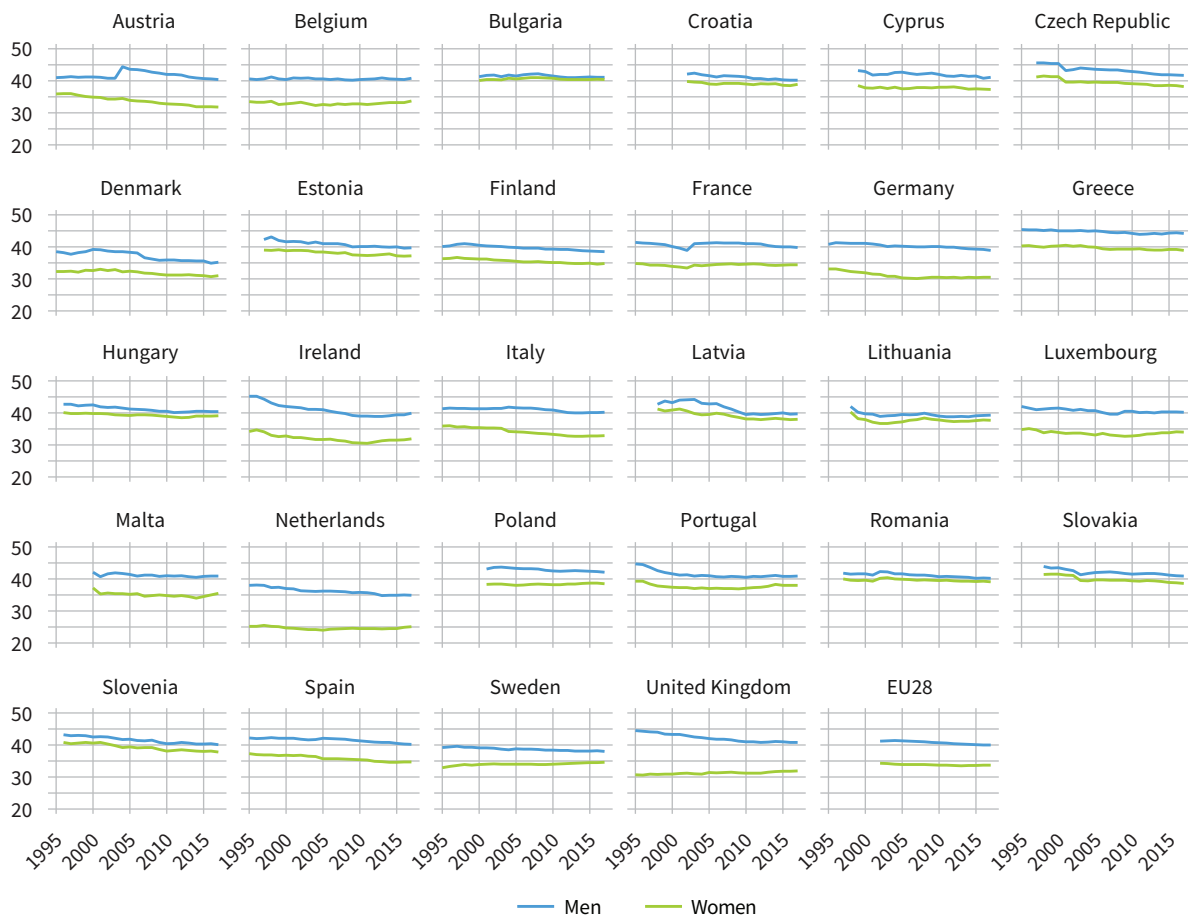
#### Paid working hours

Weekly paid working hours of those in employment are decreasing. Figure 8 shows that, in all EU countries, the usual weekly number of working hours has been in decline over the last two decades at least. On average in the EU, normal weekly hours amounted to 41.2 for men and 34.3 for women in 2002, falling to 40 for men and

33.7 for women in 2017. Gender differences in weekly working hours vary across the EU. In some countries, employed men and women work nearly the same number of hours. This is most notably the case in eastern European countries and the Baltic states. The largest differences between men and women are seen in the Netherlands, UK, Germany and Belgium, and these gender gaps seem persistent.

Working fewer hours a week makes balancing work and private life easier, as Chapter 4 will demonstrate. However, while those who currently have a job work fewer hours per week on average, the fact that more and more people take up employment makes balancing work and life more difficult for individual households. Many governments, as well as the EU itself, promote employment, with a particular emphasis on encouraging women to take up paid employment. According to Eurostat, the employment rate of women in the EU rose from 54.4% in 2002 to 62.4% in 2017. For men, it increased from 70.3% to 72.9%. Nevertheless,

Figure 8: Usual weekly working hours of employed persons by country and sex, 1995–2015



Source: Eurostat (EU-LFS)

significant gender employment gaps remain, and Eurofound (2016a) estimates the cost of this gap to be around €370 million or 2.8% of the EU's GDP. Therefore, policy continues to aim for higher employment rates.

Weekly working hours of those in work are thus decreasing on average, while increasing numbers of people are taking up employment. If the average weekly working hours in each EU country over time are plotted against the employment rate in each country, the pattern as shown in Figure 9 becomes evident. This shows that each percentage point increase of female employment rates is associated with a roughly 10-minute decrease in the length of their average working week. For men, the correlation is slightly weaker, but also negative. In the bottom right, a range of data points is visible, showing a relatively low number of usual weekly working hours for women; these represent the Netherlands, where a relatively high employment rate for women is combined with a low number of working hours.

**Figure 9: Correlation between employment rate and working hours of workers by sex, 1995–2017**



**Note:** The data points in the figure represent an average for a country in a given year.

**Source:** Eurostat (EU-LFS), 1995–2017

What does this mean for work–life balance? On the one hand, the fact that weekly working hours decrease can be assumed as beneficial for work–life balance; on the other hand, more and more people are in work, which begs the question: how can other commitments be reconciled with not one, but two jobs in a couple household?

The extent of labour market attachment, as well as the allocation of time to the different spheres of life over the different phases of the life course, depends very much on decisions made at household level, as well as in the labour market, social infrastructure and organisation of society (Eurofound, 2017a). Previous research conducted by Eurofound showed that, in a majority of European countries, balancing motherhood and labour market participation is particularly difficult due to two key factors:

- cultural factors such as traditional gender roles and scant participation of male partners in some of the non-work spheres of life such as caring
- structural constraints, including limited supply of public childcare, the rigidity of the labour market, and a lack of working time flexibility and reversible time options (Eurofound, 2012);

The structural constraints are more changeable than cultural factors and thus provide scope for policy intervention.

Working time – including volume and scheduling – is a critical factor for work–life balance; and sex is a strong determinant of working time. The most striking feature in terms of time spent in paid work in the EU is that, according to the EWCS, men spend more time in paid work (39.7 hours per week) than women (33.2).<sup>3</sup> This gender gap is roughly the same for employees (39.1 hours for men and 32.9 for women) and the self-employed, who tend to spend more time in paid work (43.2 hours for men and 36.7 for women).<sup>4</sup>

As already mentioned above, the country in which people live is strongly related to the number of hours that people devote to paid work. This is due to not only the different traditions and other national cultural aspects but also because of the different regulations in place and the different ‘institutional regimes’ (Eurofound, 2016b). The average time spent in paid work varies considerably across the EU Member States: people in Austria, Italy, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands dedicate fewer than 36 hours per week to paid work. In contrast, in Greece, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Croatia and Malta, the averages are above 40 hours per week.

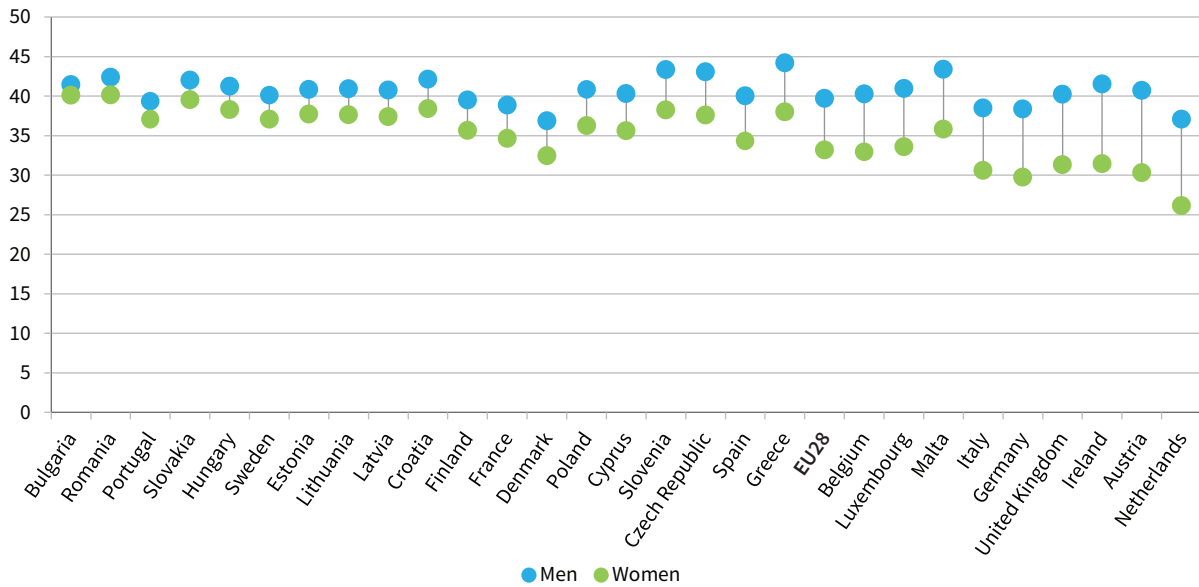
It is important to look at the differences between men and women in terms of time allocated to paid work in order to better understand the so-called gender division of labour and how this might be related to work–life balance. As can be seen in Figure 10, those differences vary greatly across the Member States. The smallest gaps between men and women can be found in Bulgaria, Romania, Portugal and Slovakia, where men

<sup>3</sup> Usual weekly working hours. For those who report having more than one job, this includes the usual hours spent in job(s) other than the main job.

<sup>4</sup> Working hours are much longer for self-employed with employees (49 hours for men and 43.3 for women) than for self-employed without employees (40.3 hours for men and 35.5 for women).



Figure 10: Average weekly working hours by country and sex, 2015



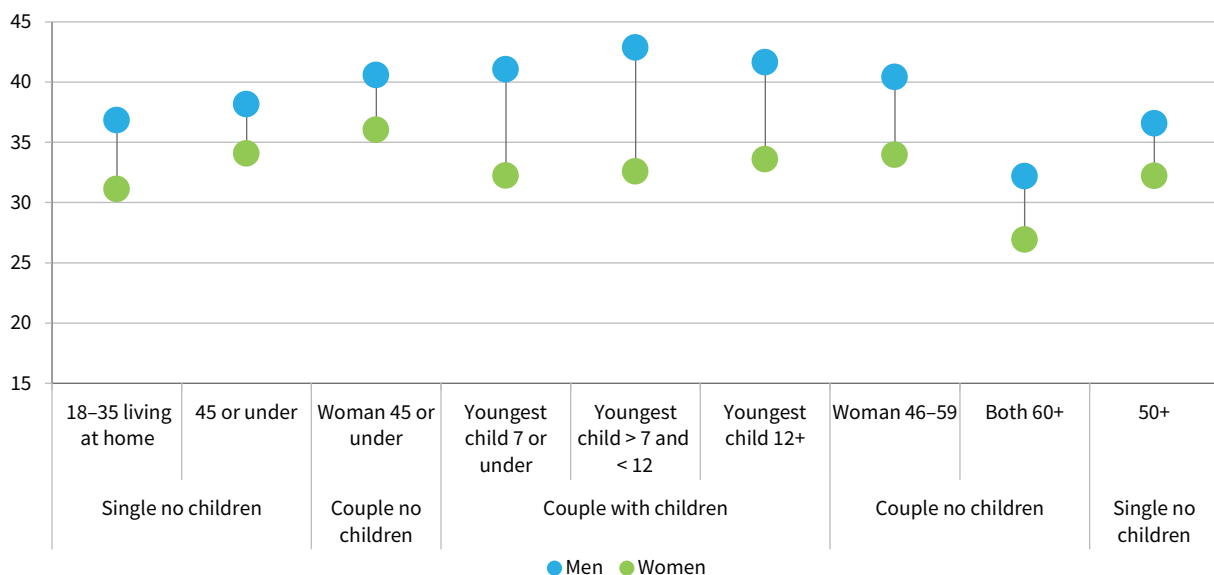
Note: Average weekly hours comprise both the worker’s main job plus any other job they may hold.  
Source: EWCS 2015

work up to 2.5 hours per week more than women. The largest gaps are found in the UK and Germany, where men devote nearly nine hours more to paid work than women, and in Austria, Ireland and the Netherlands, where the gap is more than 10 hours a week.

The gaps between the working hours of men and women are strongly associated with the share of part-time work among women (see Figure A3 in the Annex): the larger the share of women working part-time in the country, the larger the gap between working hours reported by women and men.

The gender gap in working time can be observed across all stages of life, but is more prominent in the stages where people tend to be more pressed for time, that is in the parenting phases of life (Figure 11). Women exhibit a higher degree of variability in working time across their life course, which corresponds to the variability of caring responsibilities. Men’s working time, in contrast, appears to be less affected by the respective life stages, although there is a slight tendency towards longer working time during the parenting phase. In the early stage of the life course, when individuals have

Figure 11: Average weekly working hours by life stage and sex (employees and self-employed), 2015



Note: Average weekly hours comprise both the worker’s main job plus any other job they may hold.  
Source: EWCS 2015

fewer family/caring commitments, the gender gap is also large, amounting to nearly six hours for single people living with their parents and more than four hours for young single people living on their own (see also Eurofound, 2017a). This suggests that caring for children is an important explanatory factor for the gap between men and women in paid working hours, but not the only one.

For the EU as a whole, women’s working times peak during the phase of union formation (young cohabitating women without children), with the corresponding peak for men happening later on – when they have children aged between 7 and 12. Not surprisingly, the largest gender gap in working hours occurs during the parenting phase. Some women withdraw from the labour market completely; this is not

reflected in Figure 11 since it only includes people in paid employment. While, on the whole, the reduction in working time for employed mothers is most important during the early phase of childhood, the working time gap between men and women remains roughly the same as long as children are living in the household. In contrast, the parenting phase for fathers is marked by a slight but continuous increase in working time, perhaps because households are more reliant on the father’s income as the working hours of the mother’s decrease, or because of increasing workplace demands associated with promotions at this career stage. Working time starts declining again for men and women during the ‘empty nest’ phase of life and reaches a minimum level among older cohabiting couples without children in the home (Eurofound, 2017a).

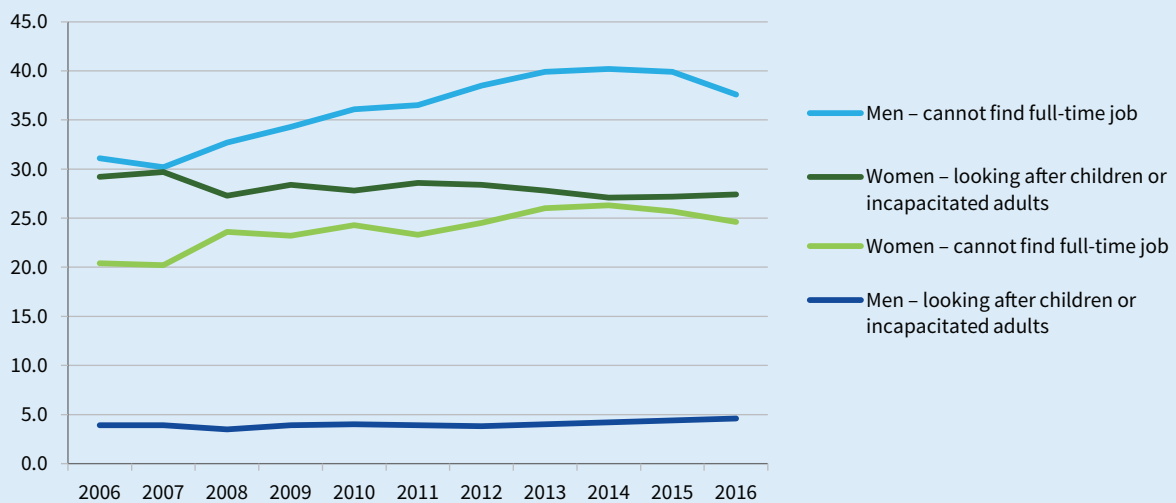
### Box 3: The paradox of (involuntary) part-time work

The reasons why individuals take up part-time work are varied. EU-LFS data list the following:

- ‘could not find a full-time job’ (reported by 35% of men and 25% of women working part-time in 2015)
- ‘own illness or disability’ (6% of men and 4% of women)
- ‘other family or personal responsibilities’ (11% of men and 16% of women)
- ‘looking after children or incapacitated adults’ (4% of men and 26% of women)
- ‘in education or training’ (17% of men and 7% of women)
- ‘other’

The considerable differences between men and women are very telling: for women, ‘looking after children or incapacitated adults’ and ‘other family or personal responsibilities’ have most importance, whereas being ‘in education or training’ and ‘could not find a full-time job’ are more important for men. While working part-time can be seen as a tool to improve an individual’s work–life balance, the EU-LFS data actually show that the share

**Figure 12: Part-time work as response to care responsibilities and lack of full-time opportunities by sex, EU 2006–2016 (%)**



**Note:** Average weekly hours comprise both the worker’s main job plus any other job they may hold.  
**Source:** EWCS 2015

of those working part-time because they ‘could not find a full-time job’ (also designated as *involuntary part-time*) has increased in the past decade for both men and women in the EU (Figure 12). At the same time, the shares of those working part-time because they are ‘looking after children or incapacitated adults’ remained relatively stable for women (between 27% and 28%) and men (between 4% and 5%).

The EWCS data also show that ‘short part-time’ (defined as up to 20 hours of work per week in the main job) is slowly becoming more prevalent than ‘long part-time’ (between 21 and 34 hours of work per week): between 2000 and 2015, the incidence of short part-time work increased from 10% to 15% of workers, whereas long part-time part increased from 11% to 13% over the same period.

Workers reporting ‘short part-time’ are more likely to report a better work–life balance, and generally find it easier to take time off to attend to family/personal issues (Eurofound, 2017c). As such, this schedule can work as an option to adjust the balance between family responsibilities and work. However, the EWCS data also show that this situation is associated with lower earnings and with a preference for working longer hours, which suggests that this type of schedule might not necessarily suit all individuals. Indeed, those working very short working hours are more likely to report job insecurity and less likely to report good career prospects. According to EWCS data, the countries with the greatest growth in the share of short part-time work are:

1. Austria (from 9% in 2005 to 20% in 2015)
2. Germany (from 10% in 2005 to 21% in 2015)
3. Portugal (from 3% in 2005 to 12% in 2015)
4. Italy (from 10% in 2005 to 19% in 2015)
5. Poland (from 8% in 2005 to 15% in 2015)
6. Spain (from 8% in 2005 to 15% in 2015)

## Working time preferences

The working hours of men and women change over the life course, but does this pattern follow their preferences? The EWCS data show that a majority of economically active individuals seem overall to be satisfied with their current working time. Provided that they could make a free choice regarding working hours and taking into account the need to earn a living, 58% of men and 58% of women report that they prefer their current working hours. Most of those indicating a preference for a change in working time said they would like to reduce the working hours in their main job at the time of the survey: 32% of men and 28% of women. These shares are slightly higher for men working in the transport sector (35%) and financial services (36%), and much higher among managers (48% of both men and women) and professionals (39% of men and 35% of women). Only a minority – 11% of men and 16% of women – would like to increase their working hours. These shares are larger in the sectors of education (14% of men and 17% of women) and commerce and hospitality (13% of men and 19% of women); they are much larger in the occupational groups of services and sales workers (16% of men and 25% of women) and elementary occupations (25% of men and 31% of women).

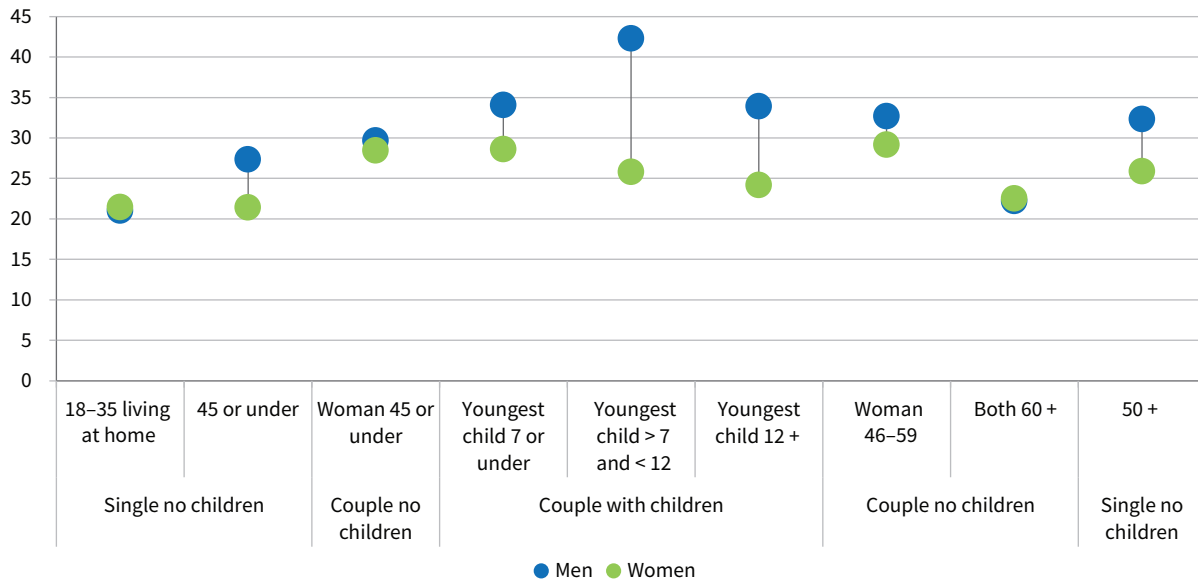
Working time preferences vary across the life course – in particular, during the parenting phase. The preference for working less is strongly related to work–life balance: as we can see, Figure 13 nearly mirrors Figure 2, which

plots a poor fit over the life course. In particular, fathers in couples with children living in the household have a strong preference for reducing their working hours; they also report a poor fit of their working hours, which is notable given that they take up longer working hours during the parenting phase (Figure 13). For mothers, the proportion seeking a reduction is lower and more in line with the preferences of women without children in the household. For both sexes, a poor work–life balance is strongly associated with a preference for reduced working time: those who report that their working hours do not fit very well with their family/social commitments outside of work are twice as likely to prefer reduced working time.

## Unpaid working hours

Apart from the time spent in paid work, the EWCS also provides information on the time spent in other activities which, although not paid, constitute responsibilities that require time. Certain tasks, such as domestic work or caring for a child or relative, have to be performed by someone and this influences the division of work within the household. For this analysis, unpaid work is considered as all the activities related to: caring for or educating children or grandchildren; caring for elderly relatives or relatives with disabilities; cooking and housework, taking training or education courses; political or trade union activity; and voluntary or charitable activities.

**Figure 13: Preference for fewer than current weekly working hours by life stage and sex (employees and self-employed), 2015 (%)**

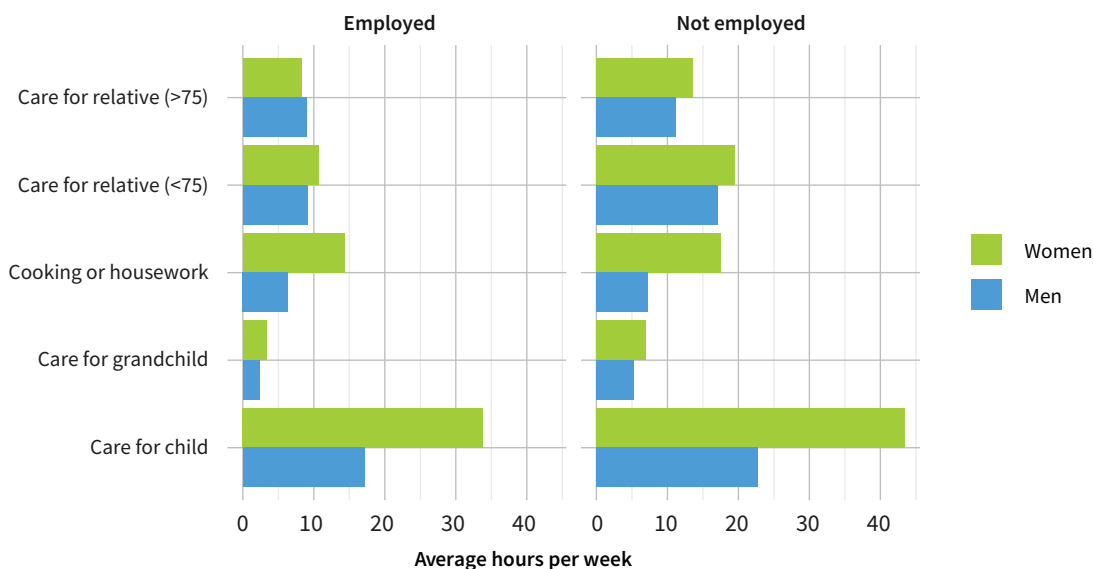


**Note:** Percentages are the shares of workers preferring to work fewer hours than currently.  
**Source:** EWCS 2015

Data from the EWCS and the EQLS show that women, employed or not employed, spend significantly more time than men on activities related to the caring of children/grandchildren or elderly relatives/relatives with disabilities, and on domestic tasks such as cooking and housework. Data from the EQLS also show that, while the average time spent by non-employed people

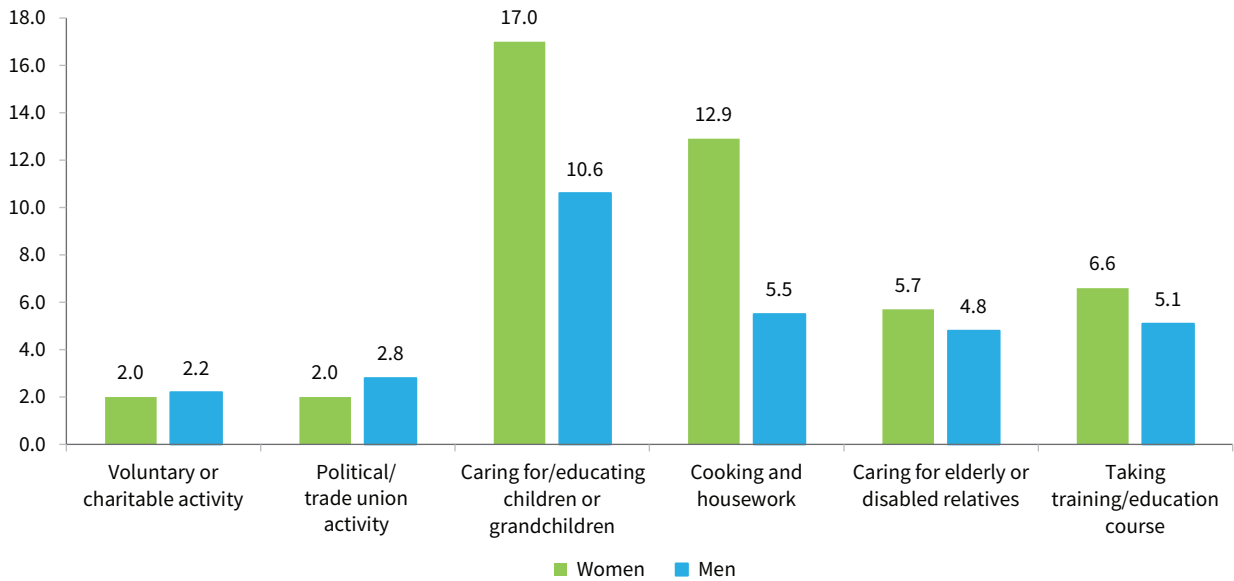
is, as expected, higher than that of employed people, the gendered pattern is seen among both employed and non-employed men and women, the differences being starker in relation to caring for children. The only notable exception is that employed men report a slightly larger average time spent caring for a relative over 75 years of age than their female counterparts providing the same type of care (see Figure 14).

**Figure 14: Average weekly hours spent in unpaid work by sex and employment situation, 2016**



**Note:** Figures presented refer only to individuals who report caring for a relative or for a child or grandchild at least once or twice per week.  
**Source:** EQLS 2016

Figure 15: Average weekly hours spent in unpaid work by sex, 2015



Source: EWCS 2015

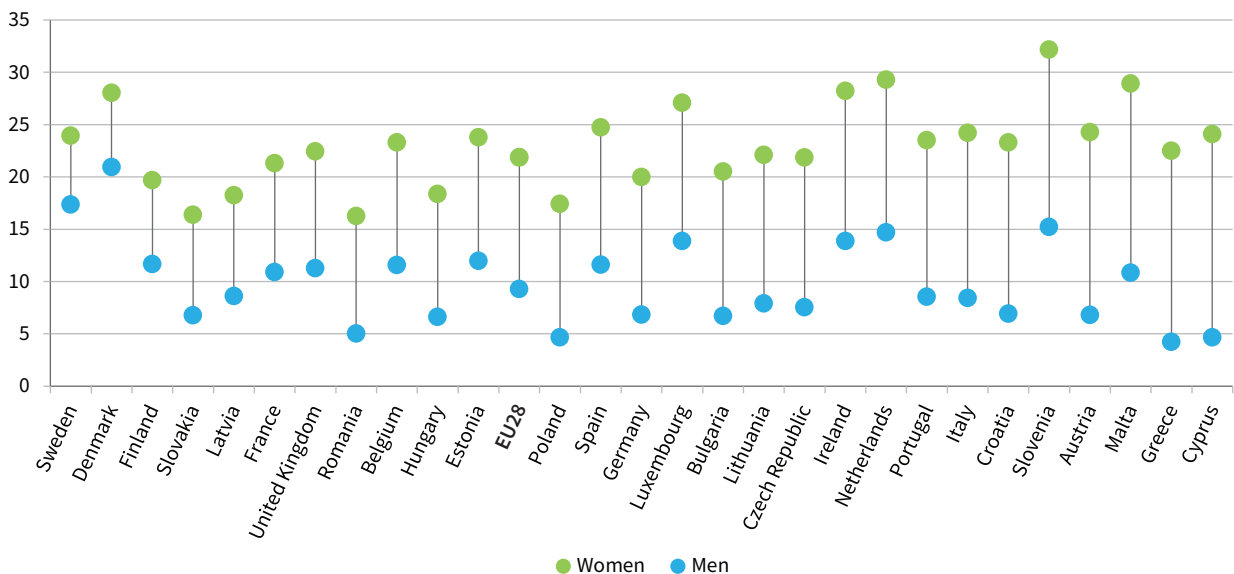
Focusing on employed people by looking closer at the EWCS data, we see that employed women also spend, on average, more time taking training or education courses than employed men, while the latter spend, on average, slightly more time in political or trade union activities than their counterparts. There is no significant difference in terms of time spent volunteering (see Figure 15).

This confirms the assertion that a division of unpaid work based on gender relies more on women, particularly for tasks related to care and domestic work: if, on average, men tend to spend more time in paid

work than women, the latter spend much more time in unpaid work than the former.

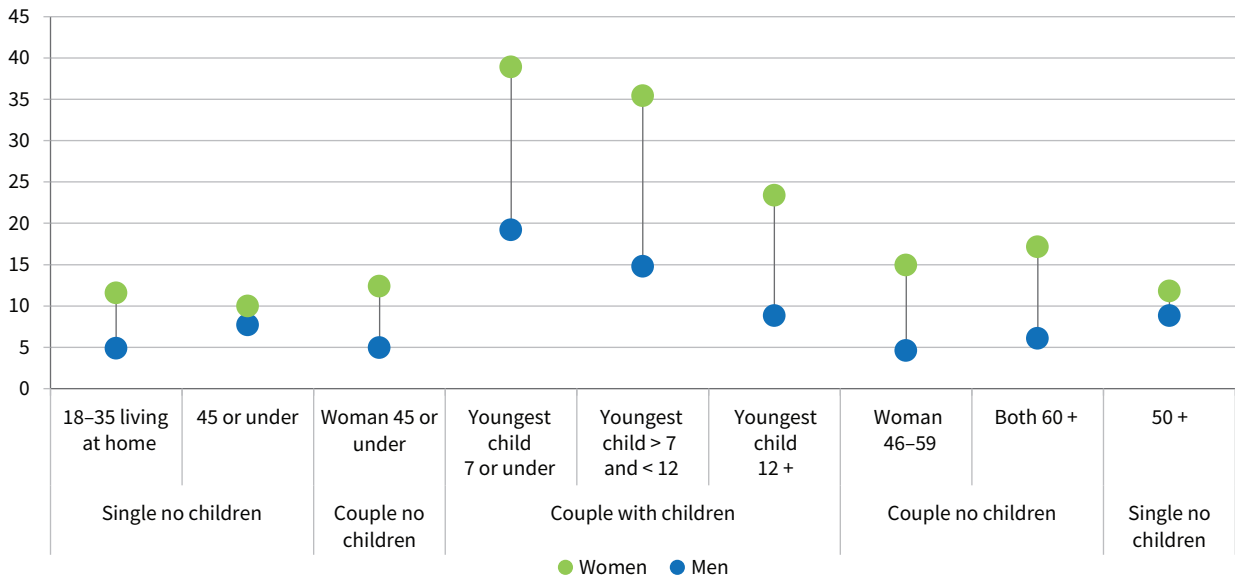
One of the most striking features of unpaid work – as measured through the EWCS – is that it functions almost like a gendered mirror of paid work. Working women spend much more time on average in unpaid work (around 22 hours per week) than men (only nine hours). This is the case across all EU Member States, although with gaps that vary from six to eight hours in the Nordic countries to over 15 hours in Italy, Croatia, Slovenia, Austria, Malta, Greece and Cyprus (see Figure 16).

Figure 16: Average weekly hours spent in unpaid work by country and sex, 2015



Source: EWCS 2015

Figure 17: Average weekly hours spent in unpaid work by life stage and sex (employees and self-employed), 2015



Source: EWCS 2015

Unpaid working hours of women and men also vary through the life course. Not surprisingly, the phase of life in which there are young children in the household is the one in which unpaid work peaks for both men and women, with the latter particularly affected. The number of hours spent in unpaid work reported by women with a partner and young children (39 hours per week) is more than double the hours reported by men in the same situation (19 hours) (see Figure 17).

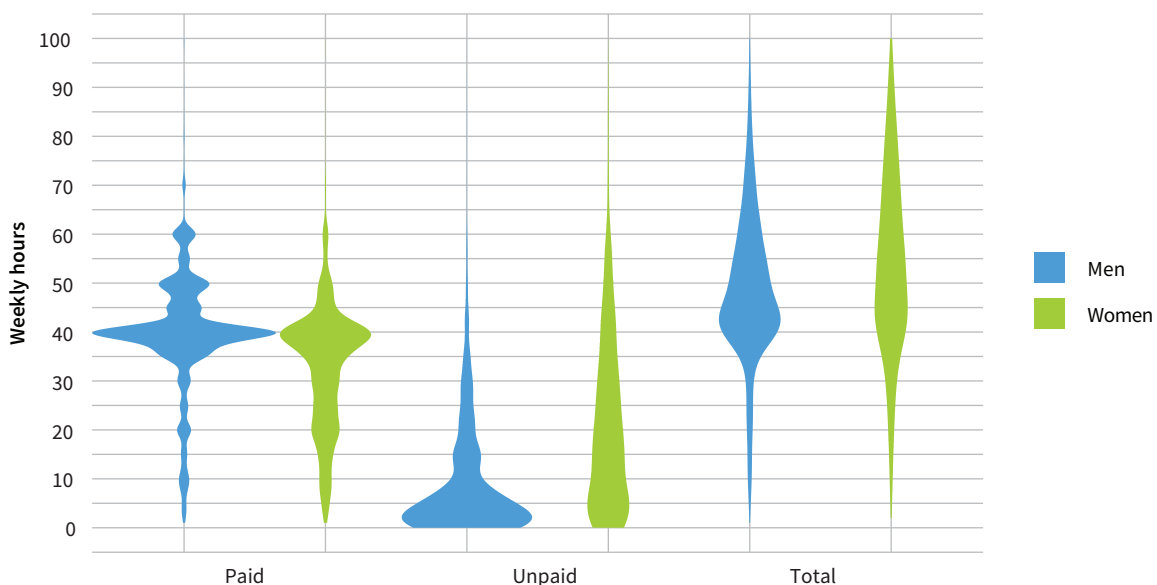
### Total time devoted to work

All things considered, employed women work more than employed men once unpaid work is added in. The

EWCS shows that, in 2015, men spent nearly 53 hours on average, per week, in paid work, unpaid work and commuting, while women spent over 58 hours, which represents a difference of nearly five hours per week between women and men. This means that when all types of work are considered (paid and unpaid) in the EU, employed women worked, on average, over four weeks more than men in 2015.

This is illustrated by Figure 18, which shows that the most common length of the paid working week is around 40 hours and where women are more strongly represented below the 40-hour mark than men. For unpaid work, however, women are much more strongly

Figure 18: Distribution of paid and unpaid working hours by sex, 2015



Source: EWCS 2015

represented in the longer time period, while men's distribution is widest in the shorter time period. To sum up, paid and unpaid work results in a total that is distributed more towards the higher end for women than for men.

Workers in the age cohort of 35–49 years have the longest working weeks – 64 hours for women and 57 for men, including paid and unpaid work. And in this cohort, the gender gap is largest: on average, women work seven hours more per week than their male counterparts, or the equivalent of nearly six weeks of work over a year. The total hours worked per week also varies significantly according to the type of employment relationship. As expected, given the longer hours in paid work reported, self-employed workers report a longer working week than employees and an even larger gender gap. This is particularly apparent among self-employed with employees – 69 hours for women and 58 hours for men. This translates into a gap of more than 10 hours per week or the equivalent of nearly eight weeks of work over the course of a year.

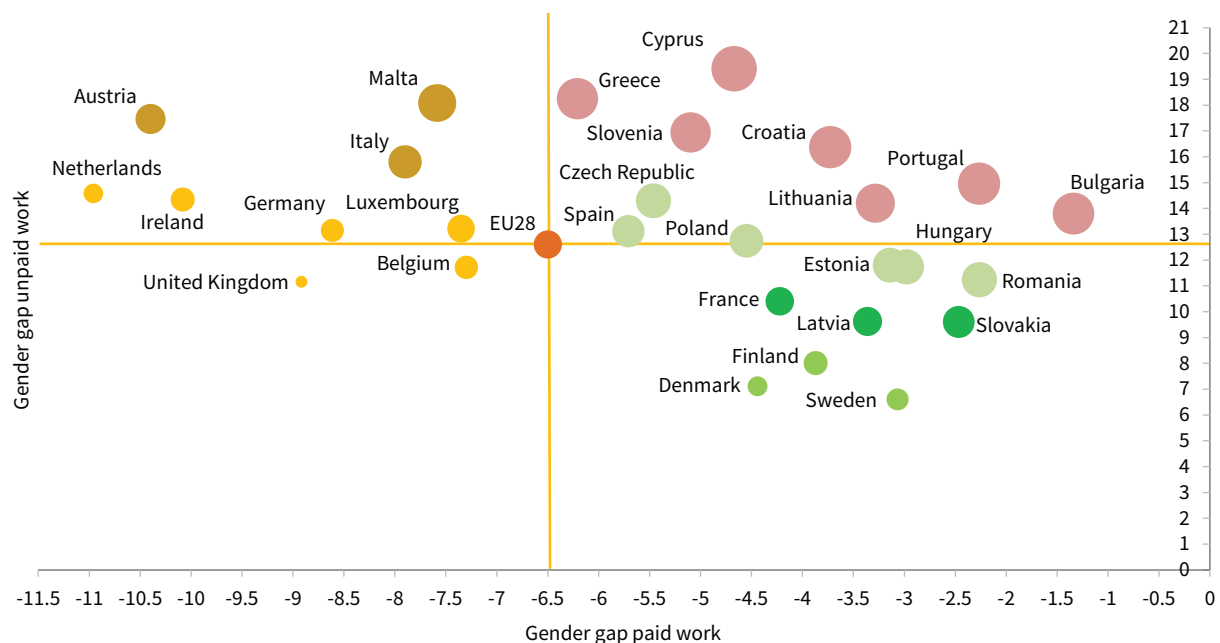
The total time spent in paid work, unpaid work and commuting time varies across the EU Member States, as does the gap between women and men in each of them. Figure 19 plots each country according to the gender time gaps in paid work and in unpaid work. The size of the circles correspond to the gender gaps of the total average time reported by women and men, including in paid work, unpaid work and commuting time. The position of the countries in the different quadrants

represents the situation of each country relative to the EU average, which allows important observations to be made.

First, there is a group composed of the Nordic countries, characterised by relatively small gaps in paid work, unpaid work and in work overall. France, Latvia and Slovakia can also be included here because both their gaps in terms of paid and unpaid work are smaller than the EU average, but in terms of total time they have similar or larger gaps than the EU average. These countries (in green) display the most equal distribution of working time between men and women in the EU.

Second, there is a group of countries that, although showing a relatively smaller gap between women and men in terms of *overall* weekly time, display large gaps in paid work and in unpaid work. The UK is perhaps the most extreme case. While in total, on average, women only work one hour more per week than men, they work nearly nine hours less in paid work and 11 hours more in unpaid work. This denotes an overall apparently equal situation but where there is, in reality, a gender 'division of labour' in which men mainly perform the paid work while women tend to undertake unpaid work of domestic tasks and care of children or relatives. The situation is similar in Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. To some extent, Austria, Italy and Malta can be also included in this group, but here all three gaps – paid work, unpaid work and total – are larger than the EU average.

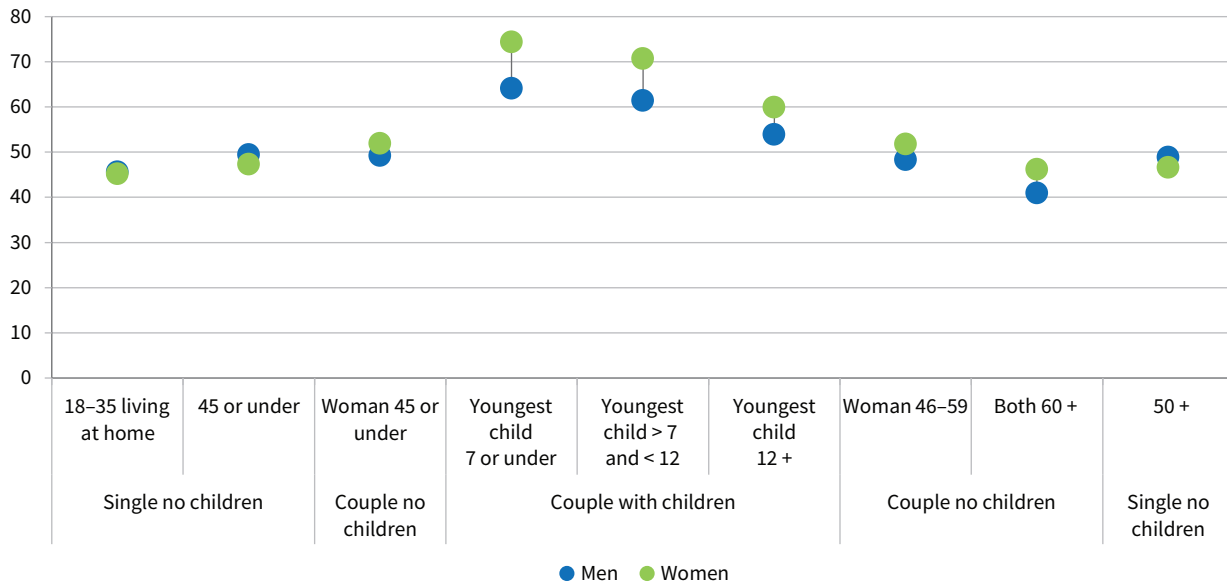
**Figure 19: Gender gaps in average weekly time spent in paid work, unpaid work and total (employees and self-employed), by country, 2015**



**Note:** The size of the circles corresponds to the gap between women and men in terms of total time spent in paid and unpaid work, including commuting. The gender gaps are the difference between the average hours spent per week in paid, unpaid and total (including commuting time) reported by women and men. The total time includes time spent commuting.

**Source:** EWCS 2015

**Figure 20: Average weekly hours spent in paid work, unpaid work and commuting by life stage and sex (employees and self-employed), 2015**



Source: EWCS 2015

Third, there is a group of countries where, despite a relatively small gender gap in paid working hours, the gap in terms of unpaid work is around the EU average, leading to a relatively large gap in the average total time spent at work per week. For example, in Poland, where the paid work gap is 4.6 hours (well below the EU average of 6.5 hours), the unpaid work gap is nearly 13 hours and, in the end, women work, on average, eight hours per week more than their male counterparts. Other countries in this situation are Estonia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Spain.

Finally, there is a group of countries displaying relatively smaller gaps in paid work but larger gaps in unpaid work, resulting in very large gaps in terms of total time spent working. For example, in Bulgaria, men spend on average only 1.3 hours more than women in paid work (the smallest gap in the EU). However, women spend on average nearly 14 hours more per week in unpaid work than men in Bulgaria, resulting in an overall gap of nearly 12.5 hours. Other countries in this group are Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Lithuania, Portugal and Slovenia. In all these Member States, while there is a relatively more equal situation in terms of paid work, the bulk of unpaid work falls on women’s shoulders.

As was the case for paid work and unpaid work, the total time spent in work by men and women in the EU varies throughout the various stages of the life course (Figure 20). The total time spent in work is higher during the parenting phase for both men and women: it is

greatest when children are young (up to seven years of age) and decreases as the children get older. The parenting phase is also when the gender gap reaches its peak, with women, on average, working over 10 hours more per week than men when they are in a couple with a child less than seven years old, nine hours more when the child is seven to 12 years old, and six hours more when the child is 12 or over.

## Role of working time arrangements

Work–life balance is affected both by the number of hours spent in paid work and by when and how those hours are worked. Fagan et al (2011) reviewed international evidence on the influence of working time arrangements on work–life balance for the ILO. Their work highlighted that ‘work–family’ incompatibility is more likely to be reported if individuals work in ‘atypical’ arrangements, such as long days, evenings/nights, shifts, or on Saturdays or Sundays, or if they have considerable variability in their working hours. It is important to scrutinise the role of working time arrangements, because these do not necessarily affect overall working hours. Therefore, it is not surprising that the organisation of working time often takes a central role in the policy debate: for example, in the proposal set out by the European Commission for a directive on work–life balance that ensures the ‘right to request flexible working arrangements’ (European Commission 2017a).



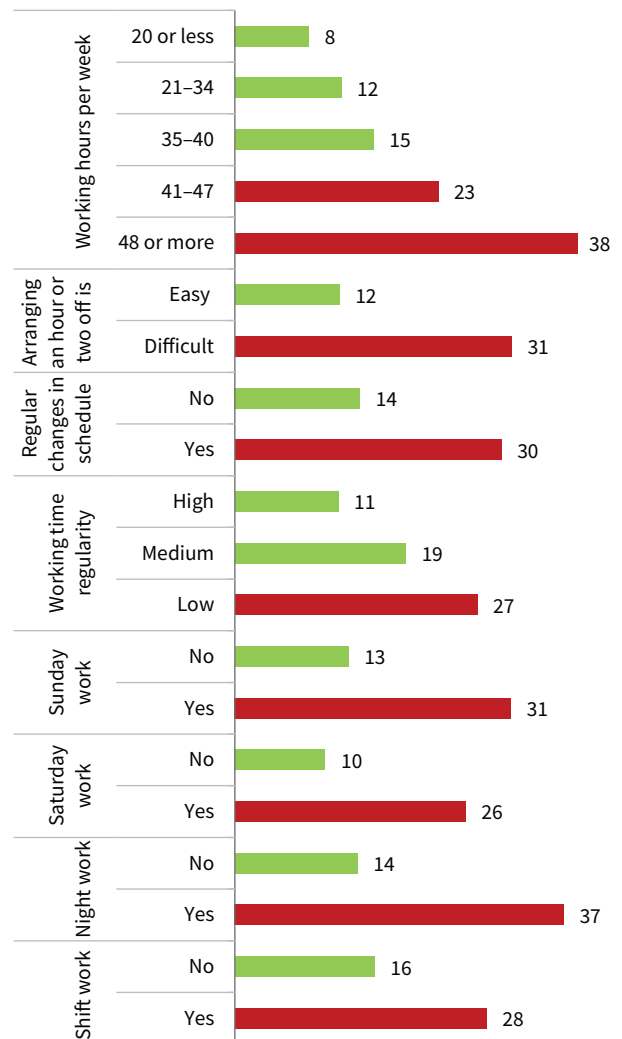
The EWCS 2015 data confirm the findings by Fagan et al indicating that workers are more likely to report a better fit between their working hours and other commitments outside work if one or more of the following conditions is present:

- short(er) working hours
- arranging an hour or two off from working hours to take care of personal or family matters is easy
- regular working hours (same number of hours per day and per week, same number of days per week and fixed starting and finishing times)
- predictable working hours (not having regular changes in the schedule)
- not working ‘atypical’ hours such as weekends, nights and shifts (see Figure 21)

While working time arrangements partly depend on the nature of the work (for example, emergency work is carried out at any time, including weekends and nights), they also depend on the autonomy that workers have over their working time. For the vast majority of employees in the EU (nearly 65%), working hours are set by the organisation they work for, without possibilities for change. Less than one-third has some autonomy over their working hours as they can adapt working hours within certain limits (20%) or can choose between several fixed schedules determined by the employer (10%). Only 6% of employees report having full autonomy over working hours. (Differences between men and women are not significant.)

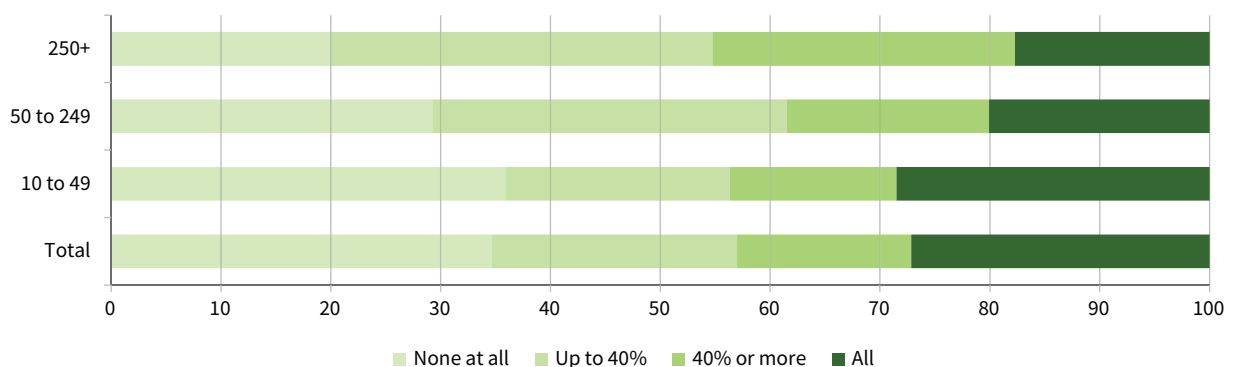
Data from the European Company Survey (ECS) 2013 show that over one-third of the companies surveyed do not provide the possibility for employees to adapt – within certain limits – the time when they begin or finish their daily work according to their personal needs or wishes. Additionally, more than half of those companies that provide this possibility do not extend it to all their employees. Large companies are more likely to provide this possibility to their employees but are also less likely to extend it to all of them (see Figure 22).

**Figure 21: Poor fit between working hours and family/social commitments by working time arrangements, 2015 (%)**



**Note:** Figures are percentages of workers reporting a poor fit between working hours and family/social commitments. Working time regularity is deemed ‘high’ if workers work the same number of hours per day and per week, the same number of days per week, and have fixed starting and finishing times.  
**Source:** EWCS 2015

**Figure 22: Company-facilitated limited working time flexibility by company size, 2013 (%)**



**Note:** Figures are percentages of employees covered by company policies that give employees the possibility to adapt – within certain limits – the time when they begin or finish their daily work, according to their personal needs or wishes.

**Source:** ECS 2013

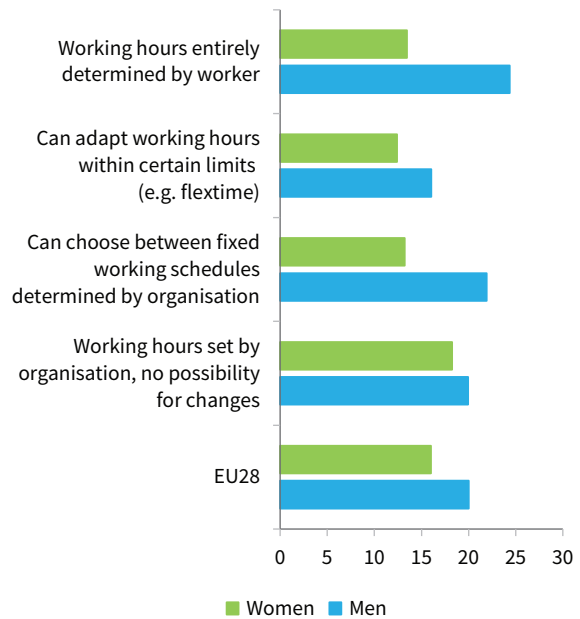
According to EWCS data, being able to adapt working hours within certain limits (e.g. flexitime) is associated with a lower likelihood of reporting a poor fit between work and family/social commitments. At the same time, being able to determine one’s working hours completely or having the choice between fixed working schedules determined by the employer seem to be positive regarding work–life balance – for women, but not for men (see Figure 23).

In principle, flexible working time arrangements may offer some control and autonomy to workers and thus have a positive impact on work–life balance but, as Fagan and colleagues suggest, in reality, this might not be the case. Flexitime may become a means for employers to secure longer hours from workers during busy periods, while employees are able to bank them and use them later. ‘Working long hours during seasonal peaks and short hours during quiet periods does not help much in integrating employment with year-round activities, such as childcare or eldercare’ (Fagan et al, 2011).

The review by Fagan et al (using EWCS data prior to 2015) also underlined that full autonomy over working hours might be counterproductive for work–life balance: the analysis showed that work–life balance is better for workers who have no control over their schedules and who work atypical schedules, compared to workers with more discretion over their working time but who work more hours or very often at unsocial times (Fagan et al, 2011).

This observation is confirmed by data from the EWCS 2015 data: 76% of workers who have no control over their working time arrangements and/or who work ‘unsocial’ hours, report that their working hours fit with their family/social commitments. However, only 55% of

**Figure 23: Poor fit between working hours and family/social commitments by setting of working time arrangements and sex, 2015 (%)**



**Note:** Figures are the percentages of employees reporting a poor fit between their working hours and family/social commitments.  
**Source:** EWCS 2015

those who have complete self-determination over their working hours and/or who work unsocial hours more extensively report this fit between work and life outside it. Given the ambiguity of the relationship between the level of autonomy over working hours and the level of work–life balance, Chapter 3 will go into more depth, separating the effect of working hours from working time arrangements.

### Box 4: Examples of collective agreement clauses regarding flexible working time arrangements

Eurofound research has shown that, in addition to legislative measures aimed at facilitating work–life balance, collective bargaining has also played a role as a regulatory instrument by addressing the same issue. Given the scarcity of hard data, Eurofound’s Network of European Correspondents provided information on the extent and content of clauses aiming to improve work–life balance through flexible working time arrangements. This information is based on available studies and, predominantly, the national correspondents’ own assessments. Boxes 4, 5 and 6 (on pp. 28, 32 and 34) present some of the main findings regarding flexible working time arrangements, protection of employees from unsocial hours, and telework and similar practices.

#### Flexible working time arrangements

Clauses on flexible working time arrangements are widespread. In **Denmark**, the pace-setting Industrial Agreement 2017-2020 allows special working time arrangements at the company level if agreed by both social partners. In **Spain**, flexible working time arrangements have been implemented through the promotion of a

continuous working day, instead of the traditional working day with a long lunch break (*jornada partida*). In **Slovenia**, employers in the metal and electro industry are obliged to permit workers with family responsibilities to work according to their most favourable schedule, taking into consideration the needs of the working process. In **Malta**, flexitime is permitted where it is deemed feasible and appropriate. Flexible working arrangements have also been implemented in **Germany, Slovakia, Latvia, Estonia, the Czech Republic and Italy** (see Box 6, entry on ‘smart working’ projects in the Italian banking sector).

### Flexibility in start and finish times

Flexibility in starting and finishing times has been made available in **Spain** and also in **Greece**, where the National General Collective Labour Agreement entitles working mothers – during the period of 30 months from the end of maternity leave – to either arrive later or leave earlier by one hour each day from work. In **Romania**, similar flexibility has been made available to employees caring for preschool children.

### Possibility of reducing hours

In **Malta**, collective agreements for parents in the public services sector provides the possibility to work on a reduced timetable until the child reaches the age of 12 years. In **Hungary**, collective agreements typically top up provisions stipulated in legislation; for example, providing the possibility of part-time employment on request for a wider range of workers and for parents with older children. A similar situation also exists in **Romania**.

Based on Eurofound (2017d).

As shown in Figure 24 (p. 30), the different working time arrangements are not equally available to all occupations and sectors of activity. Clerical employees, technicians, professionals and managers are more likely to have some autonomy over working time than elementary occupations, operators, and craft and trade employees. Financial services, public administration and ‘other services’ are the sectors in which more employees report having some autonomy over their working time. Construction, transport and, to some extent, agriculture are the sectors in which it is less likely for employees to have access to flexitime or to be able to adapt their working hours.

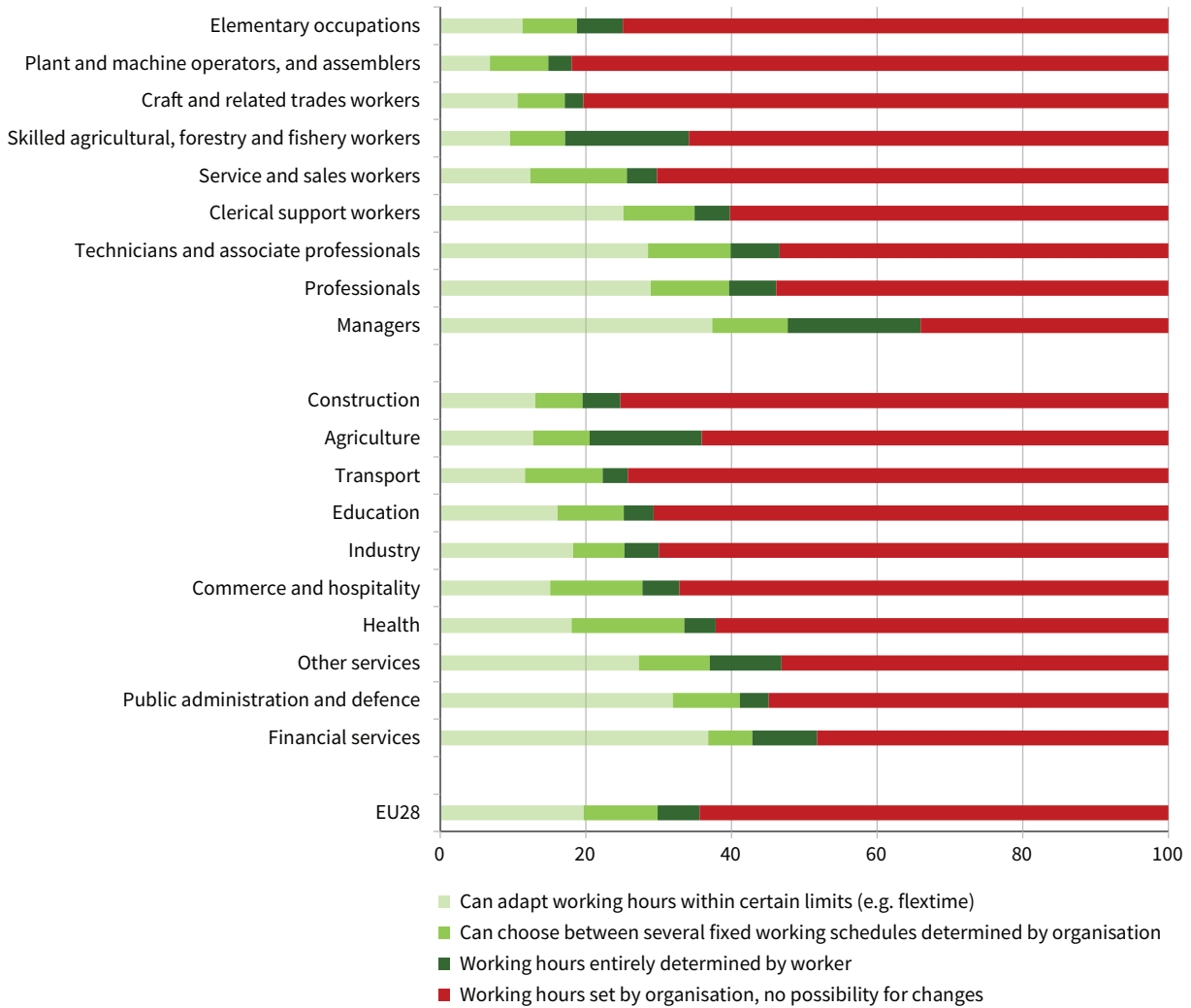
It seems that there is a negative association between occupational and sectoral gender predominance, and the shares of employees reporting some form of autonomy over their working hours. The occupations that are gender balanced (managers, professionals

and technicians) and the sectors that are gender balanced (financial services, public administration and ‘other services’) have the largest shares of employees reporting some autonomy over their working hours.<sup>5</sup> Predominantly male occupations (such as plant operators and craft workers) and sectors (such as construction or transport) have the lowest shares of employees who enjoy some level of working time autonomy.

There is also a large variability across EU Member States in how working time arrangements are set in terms of employees’ autonomy over their working time (Figure 25, p. 31). The Nordic countries and the Netherlands have the largest shares of workers reporting some degree of autonomy over working time (above 50%), whereas in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Lithuania and Portugal, this is less than 15%.

<sup>5</sup> An occupation or sector was considered as gender-balanced if the respective shares of women and men are between 40% and 60%. If one of the shares is above 60%, it is considered as predominantly female or male.

Figure 24: Setting of working time arrangements by sector and occupation (employees), 2015 (%)



Note: The graph covers working time arrangements in main job only.  
 Source: EWCS 2015

One would expect that existing regulations would influence the extent to which some sort of flexible working time arrangements are available to employees in different countries. Recent Eurofound research has shown that some Member States have introduced important legislative changes since 2015 regarding working time and place of work, in the context of working parents and caregivers (Eurofound, 2017e).

However, the relationship between the existence of legislation and the availability of flexible working time arrangements is not completely straightforward. In Figure 25, Member States are grouped according to the legal gap analysis carried out by the European Commission in an impact assessment of the proposal for a directive on work–life balance in relation to the right to a request for flexible schedules for parents with children up to 12 years (European Commission, 2017a).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The assessment was also carried out for the right to a request for a flexible schedule for carers, which is part of the directive proposal. With the exception of the Netherlands (which exceeds the requirements) and the UK (which meets the requirements), none of the Member States have such regulations in place.

Figure 25: Setting of working time arrangements in main job (employees) by country, 2015 (%)



**Note:** The countries are grouped according to the legal gaps identified in the impact assessment of the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on work–life balance for parents and carers (European Commission, 2017a) regarding the right to a request for a flexible schedule for parents with children up to 12 years. Graph covers working time arrangements only in main job.

**Source:** EWCS 2015

Meeting or exceeding the legal requirements seems to be associated with relatively higher shares of employees reporting some autonomy over their working time. However, there are a few Member States – among those currently without provisions regarding the right to a request for flexible schedules – with relatively high shares of employees who can adapt working hours within certain limits (flexitime) or can choose between several fixed working schedules outlined by the employer. That is the case of Sweden, Finland, Luxembourg, France and Germany. What distinguishes these countries from the rest of the group is that, despite not having regulations in place, they are characterised by relatively strong social dialogue and/or collective bargaining structures and coordination that produces regulations other than national legislation. As shown in previous research, these countries have working time setting regimes characterised by strong participation of social partners

through collective bargaining at sectoral or company levels (Eurofound, 2016b).

This clearly means that there is more than one way to promote the implementation and encourage the use of working time arrangements that are potentially conducive to better work–life balance. In practice, it indicates that, in order to implement rules promoting more autonomy over working time for more workers, existing legislative gaps can be filled or complemented by social dialogue and/or collective bargaining. Indeed, this was somewhat demonstrated by recent Eurofound research (2017d), which looked into current collective agreements containing clauses about flexible working time arrangements, possibilities for reducing working hours, and protection of employees from unsocial hours and unsuitable places of work in the context of working parents and caregivers (see Boxes 4–6 for some interesting examples).

## Box 5: Examples of collective agreement clauses regarding protection of employees from unsocial working hours

In **France**, provisions on the avoidance of scheduling meetings after 16:00 or on Wednesdays (when part-time workers are often off as children do not have school) are typically found in company-level agreements; in the internet retail subsector, provisions encourage companies to fix the start and finishing times of meetings within the usual working hours. Clauses on the avoidance of overtime and night work are found in collective agreements in **Austria**, where the reconciliation of work and family is theoretically guaranteed in the distribution of the working hours (especially night and shift work) according to the collective agreements for the electronics and food industries. Similarly, in **Slovenia**'s trade sector (including retail), work on Sundays, at night and on statutory holidays is prohibited for workers who take care of children aged three or under.

Based on Eurofound (2017d).

## Place of work

In addition to flexibility regarding the time of work, flexibility regarding the place of work may also help in coordinating work and private life and reduce commuting time. In fact, one of the measures in the European Commission's work-life balance directive is to extend the right not only to request flexible working hours, but also flexibility in terms of the place of work. Developments in work organisation and in ICT, in particular, have facilitated working from places other than the employer's premises. The vast majority of workers in the EU (70%) have a single regular workplace; for most of these workers (78.6%), that place is their employer's premises, or their own business premises (in the case of the self-employed).<sup>7</sup> The remaining 30% of the workforce carries out its work in multiple locations; this proportion varies from less than 25% in Bulgaria, Italy, Portugal and Slovakia to over 40% in the Nordic countries (Eurofound, 2017c).

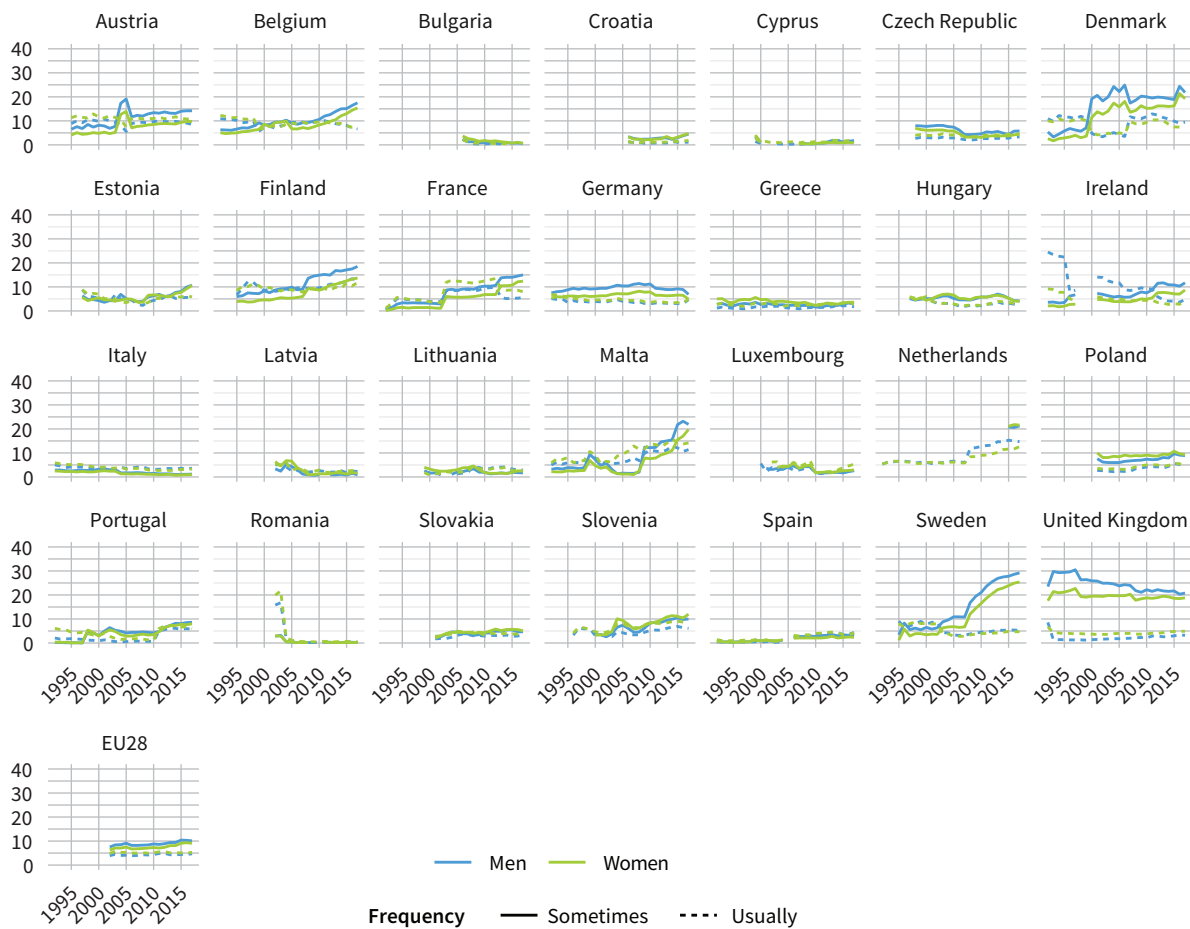
Having multiple places of work seems to be associated with a slightly poorer work-life balance: 22% of those who have multiple places of work report that their working hours do not fit very well or not all well with family/social commitments, compared to 16% of those with a single main workplace. The proportion of

employees working in multiple locations is larger for men than for women, and increases with age. By occupation, it is also larger for self-employed workers (with and without employees), agricultural workers and managers, and by sector is particularly prevalent in construction, transport and agriculture.

The 2002 cross-industry European Framework Agreement on Telework states that the signatory parties saw telework as a way for employers (in the private and public sectors) to modernise work organisation and as a means for workers to improve their work-life balance. In that context, the possibility to work with some regularity from home or at home should improve work-life balance. In the EU as a whole, the share of workers 'sometimes' working from home increased slowly in the last two decades, whereas the share of those 'usually' working from home remained stable over the same period of time. These shares – in particular, those 'sometimes' working from home – are on the rise in some Member States, including Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden and, to some extent, Portugal and Slovenia, whereas they are practically non-existent in Bulgaria, Cyprus, Croatia, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia and Romania (EU-LFS data, see Figure 26).

<sup>7</sup> 'Regular workplace' is defined by the location in which respondents indicated they worked daily or several times a week in the 12 months prior to the survey.

Figure 26: Share of workers working from home by country and sex, 1995–2015 (%)



**Note:** Percentages are those working from home 'sometimes' or 'usually'.  
**Source:** Eurostat (EU-LFS)

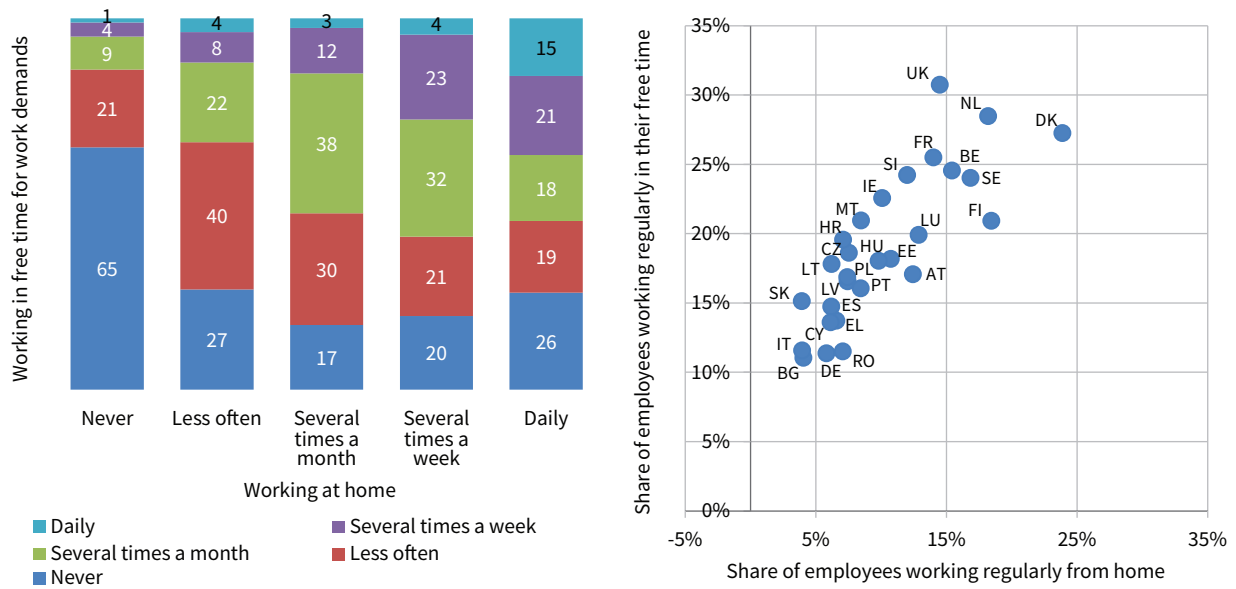
According to EWCS data, nearly 13% of workers in the EU work very regularly (daily or several times a week) in their employers' premises (or in their own business premises if self-employed), while also working with some regularity (at least several times a month) from their home. Not surprisingly, 33% of the self-employed with employees and 28% of the self-employed without employees report working regularly from home, while this is the case for only 11% of employees with indefinite contracts, 8% with fixed-term contracts and 6% with other types of contract or none.

Excluding the self-employed – since their home might actually be their 'own premises' – the share of employees working regularly from home reduces to 10% (about the same share of men and women). In terms of sector, this work arrangement is most common among employees in financial services (15% of men and 10% of women), education (39% of men and 34% of women) and other services (16% of men and 10% of women); all these sectors are either gender-balanced or predominantly female. Working from home is reported by about 10% of men and

women working in the public sector and 14% of women working in the construction sector. In terms of occupations, it is most common among managers (more than 25% of men and women), professionals (28% of men and 27% of women) and, interestingly, 14% of female skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers.

What does this mean for work–life balance? The employees who (can) work from home with some regularity report a slightly worse fit between work and family/social commitments: 24% of men and 18% of women say that their work fits 'not well' or 'not at all well' with family commitments, representing 4 and 2 percentage points respectively more than the overall EU average for men and women reporting a poor fit (20% and 16%). Working at home is also associated with a greater likelihood of employees reporting that they work regularly in their free time to meet work demands: nearly 30% of employees (25% of men and nearly 35% of women) report working in their free time several times a week or daily, which is much more than those who do not work from home (5% of men and 5% of women).

Figure 27: Relationship between working at home and working in free time to meet work demands, 2015



**Note:** Employees ‘working regularly from home’ are those reporting that they work very regularly, i.e. daily or several times a week, on their employers’ premises; employees working regularly in their free time are those who report doing so several times a month, several times a week or daily.

**Source:** EWCS 2015

The larger the share of workers working regularly from home, the larger the share working regularly in their free time to meet work demands (Figure 27). This probably means that the possibility to work from home is not necessarily good for work–life balance because, in those circumstances, people tend to work in their free time to meet work demands. Figure 27 shows that the

same association exists at country level. The shares of respondents stating that they work with some regularity from home vary across the Member States, from around 4% to 6% in Italy, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Lithuania, Spain and Germany, to 18% or more in Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands.

### Box 6: Examples of collective agreement clauses on flexibility of place of work

#### Teleworking

Collective agreements in a number of Member States provide the possibility to work outside the company’s premises (telework). It is quite rare in agreements in **Sweden**. However, in **Denmark**, in most agreements where it is physically possible, it is relatively widespread: according to Danmarks Statistik, 31.2% of employees surveyed in 2016 had worked from home at least once during the previous four years. In **Malta**, it is permitted where it is deemed feasible and appropriate. In **Italy**, up to eight days a month at the home office are provided for in the ‘smart working’ project (see below). In **Spain**, telework and videoconferencing are facilitated to avoid travelling. And agreements also enable teleworking in **Germany** and **Latvia**.

#### Protection of parents/carers in case of posting

Specific regulations on the place of work with regard to the **non-posting of workers** when care reasons are found exist in **Slovenia**, where 60% of collective agreements contain a provision limiting the posting of those taking care of preschool children. A similar situation exists in **Hungary**, where, according to collective agreements in the public sector, the employer cannot post a parent to another location without their consent until the child is 16 years old, or if the parent is a personal carer of a family member.



### **‘Smart working’ in Italian banking sector companies**

In Italy, recent pilot projects on ‘smart working’ have sought to improve work–life balance in the banking sector. Smart working is defined as work reorganisation based on new technologies in order to overcome the time and space constraints of traditional workstations. The projects aim to facilitate labour mobility and incentivise the hiring of women who want to work at home during pregnancy and after. In the pilot, workers were able to work from home a few days per month, and flexible working time did not have specific limits. The positive results of these pilot projects – in terms of employee satisfaction and productivity – led to the widespread diffusion of the initiatives during 2016. A law to regulate smart working was discussed in parliament and eventually approved in 2017.

Based on Eurofound (2017d).

Joint research by Eurofound and the International Labour Office on telework/ICT-mobile work (T/ICTM) also found a greater potential for work–home conflict among T/ICTM workers: a substantially higher percentage of both male and female workers engaged in T/ICTM work also use their free time to meet work demands (Eurofound and ILO, 2017).

The same study concluded that in the case of regular home-based teleworkers and those working only occasionally outside the employer’s premises, the greater working-time autonomy of such work had the potential contribute to improved work–life balance.

However, for those who frequently work in a range of places outside the employer’s premises, this beneficial effect on work–life balance does not seem to apply. There are also important differences between women and men: women tend to work fewer hours in T/ICTM, and seem to get slightly better work–life balance outcomes than men. And women are more likely to use regular home-based telework (rather than working in other places outside the office); it would seem that they do so mainly to balance work and family-related tasks (Eurofound and ILO, 2017).



# 3 Work–life balance and caring for dependants

Chapter 2 outlined the role of working time and flexible work in the context of work–life balance. It also showed that care takes up a large proportion of the time spent on unpaid work. This chapter deals with the specific needs of informal carers in balancing work and care duties.

## Policy, demographic change and long-term care

A new EU initiative to improve work–life balance, titled the ‘New start to support work–life balance for parents and carers’, was announced on 26 April 2017 as part of the European Pillar of Social Rights. It aims to promote a better work–life balance for workers providing care. The original Parental Leave Directive only had a clause for leave on grounds of *force majeure*:

*Workers [are entitled] to time off from work, in accordance with national legislation, collective agreements and/or practice, on grounds of force majeure for urgent family reasons in cases of sickness or accident making the immediate presence of the worker indispensable.*

(Council of the European Union, 2010, Clause 7, p. 19)

In the Commission proposal, family carers should benefit considerably more from measures including new rights to carer’s leave, pay during leave, and flexible working arrangements for parents and carers.

Care provision has become a highly important aspect of workers’ lives due to both demographic ageing and longer working lives. Also, more and more men and women are living on their own when they need or have to provide care. This chapter focuses on long-term care (LTC) systems and explains why it is important that policy supports carers’ work–life balance. This is particularly necessary since public provision of LTC is under pressure (European Union, 2014). Flexible working arrangements, for example, may support the work–life balance of family carers as well as parents with children. As Chapter 2 shows, most time devoted to caring is spent on children. However, this chapter mainly covers LTC of dependent individuals of all ages, since regular childcare has been covered abundantly in

other publications (Boddy et al, 2011; Eurofound, 2015d). The focal point of the analysis is to document the role of LTC in the context of the work–life balance of informal carers in employment.

The next section starts by explaining the definition of LTC, and deals with the relevant systems in the EU by taking into account formal arrangements of care provision, as well as the provision of informal care, before comparing the two. In this chapter, the terms ‘care’ and ‘LTC’ are used interchangeably. In the empirical part, care is understood as measured by the EQLS, i.e. caring for a disabled or infirm family member, neighbour or friend of any age, at least once or twice a week. In the EQLS, one of the responses changed from ‘elderly or disabled relatives’ in 2011 to ‘disabled or infirm family members, neighbours or friends’ in 2016 in order to reflect the range of relationships with people receiving care.<sup>8</sup>

## Organisation of long-term care

LTC provided by family members or friends can be considered as an informal economic sector and is estimated to be worth up to 90% of the overall cost of formal LTC in EU Member States (European Commission, 2016; Bouget et al, 2017). This chapter understands LTC on the basis of what Kröger once defined as social care:

*The assistance and surveillance that is provided in order to help children or adults with the activities of their daily lives. Social care can be paid or unpaid work provided by professionals or non-professionals, and it can take place within the public as well as the private sphere. Formal services provision from public, commercial and voluntary organizations as well as informal care from family members, relatives and others, such as neighbours and friends, are here included within social care.*

(Kröger, 2003, p. 17)

As such, an LTC system is understood as having a wider set of institutions and actors, including individuals that have an implicit or explicit impact on how care is provided.

<sup>8</sup> The question in 2016 is: ‘In general, how often are you involved in any of the following activities outside of paid work?’. The full option was ‘Caring for disabled or infirm family members, neighbours or friends under 75 years old.’

This definition goes beyond the persons and institutions directly providing LTC services. For example, working time flexibility, the existence of care leave schemes, financial support for carers, respite care, mobile nursing providers, household help, charities and neighbourhood support are all part of LTC. In addition, the attitudes, norms and values that govern the individual's behavioural choices when it comes to providing care within the family, as well as the legal obligation to provide care, are all part of the LTC system. For example, in Austria, France and Spain, there is a legal obligation for spouses to provide care for their partners. In these three countries – plus Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia – children are legally obliged to provide care for their parents when needed, be it to provide care themselves or contribute to the financing of care. The state or local authorities can legally prosecute adults who refuse to contribute or provide sufficient care for their parents. In the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK, the state or local authorities have to organise care provision, but informal care still predominates. There is no legal obligation for family members to provide care in the latter countries. Generally, in those countries where family support is a legal obligation for first-degree family members, there is also a strong social expectation to provide care (Lamura et al, 2006; Sundström et al, 2008).

Most countries lack strong formal care systems and, in general, the main informal carer is a family member. This person is most often a woman – particularly in places where the male breadwinner model still seems to be the norm – or the family member with the lowest opportunity cost. This is often the case for women because either they were not in employment in the first place, because of the gender-pay gap or because there was no other paid activity to give up. Sometimes, there is no other option for a woman than to leave her job to provide care to a disabled family relative and then attempt to return to an increasingly more competitive labour market (Norton, 2000; Pavolini and Ranci, 2008; Bouget et al, 2016).

A second provider of care is commercial service providers, who are either state-sponsored or have to be paid in full by the care receiver. This category has become increasingly important in recent decades (Pavolini and Ranci, 2008, Bouget et al. 2016). The third – and most crucial – actor providing care or financial support for dependents is the public authority, either at state or local level. The public provision of care is highly dependent on the form and ideology behind public services, where the social partners also play a key role. In some countries, the public actor is the main care provider, as is the case in Nordic countries. In some other countries, the public authorities only come into play as a last resort, if there is nobody else available to

provide care. This is the case in most eastern European countries, where the welfare state has become residual. In the remainder of EU Member States, public authorities help to varying degrees with provision of services or with the financing of care by either private services or family members.

The welfare state and social partners are considered fundamental for the reconciliation of work and care, since there is always a mix of actors – family, private service providers, voluntary organisations, employers and the local authorities or the central state – that are determinants for the provision of LTC. How much each actor is involved in the organisation and provision of LTC is different from country to country and depends on the underlying design of the welfare state.

### Long-term care systems across the EU

LTC is organised differently throughout the EU. It is important to take this into account when interpreting differences in care and work–life balance between countries. In order to make comparisons easier, a recent study sponsored by the European Commission (Bouget et al, 2016) has developed a typology to classify countries according to their LTC policies and features for family carers (see Box 7); this classification is used in subsequent tables in this chapter. The main aspects analysed were related to the coverage and take-up of benefits, and the impact of work–life balance policies on the employment situation of family carers and on the well-being of carers and the persons they care for.

According to Bouget et al (2016), the first category is represented by countries with universal and comprehensive LTC support schemes for family carers. Within this category, Denmark, Finland and Sweden have developed mature support schemes for family carers. These countries do not oblige relatives to provide care (except for spouses in Finland). They also offer a mix of legal entitlements for short-term leave, cash benefits and in-kind services targeted at the carer as well as a broad supply of respite care support. In-home services (medical and household-related) are common and accessible. Finally, there is also a generous support of LTC provisions in kind (for carers and the recipient of care). In combination with labour market flexibility, carers can stay in employment while providing care to a person in need, or drop out and get the needed support to later re-enter the market (also known as a flexicurity scheme). Often, family carers who stop working are employed and paid a minimum salary by the local authorities to provide care to a relative (Jolanki et al, 2013; Eurofound, 2015d).

A second subset of countries provide support mainly to the dependent person who can choose how to use the money: services may be purchased from a local provider or family members are paid to provide the care. There is also specific support for carers, such as relatively

## Box 7: Country clustering

In the analysis below, country clustering is used not only to gain more robust results but also to simplify the discussion. The basic assumption is that each country cluster is homogeneous but maximally different from other country clusters. Eight groups of countries were identified: Nordic countries; the western islands; continental countries; eastern and western Mediterranean countries; the Baltic states; central and eastern Europe; and the Balkan countries (Eurofound, 2014). Three ‘care regimes’ are used to highlight the differences of LTC systems affecting workers across the EU. The care regimes follow a typology recently elaborated on by Bouget et al (2016) and will be explained in more detail below.

**Table 1: Cluster typology used in the policy brief**

Country cluster	Sample (n) 2016	Countries comprising the cluster	Care regime
Nordic	3,125	Denmark, Finland, Sweden	Countries providing universal and comprehensive LTC support
Continental	7,058	Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands	Countries mainly providing support to the care receiver and offering specific support to the carer
Western islands	2,315	Ireland, United Kingdom	
Western Mediterranean	4,082	Italy, Spain, Portugal	Countries with underdeveloped support schemes for family carers
Eastern Mediterranean	3,105	Cyprus, Greece, Malta	
Central and eastern Europe	6,098	Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia	
Baltic states	3,006	Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania	
Balkan countries	2,020	Bulgaria, Romania	

**Note:** The clustering of countries follows the method presented in Eurofound (2014); the care regime typology is adapted from Bouget et al (2016).

**Source:** EQLS 2016

generous care leave, a legal provision that entitles family carers to go part-time without negative impacts on their job, and a right to go back full-time after care is no longer required. Alongside informal care, there is a well-developed residential care sector, day-care centres, mobile care providers and other institutions that support persons in need of care to varying degrees. Countries in this group are all the continental European states: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg and the Netherlands plus the UK and Ireland. In addition, the Mediterranean countries (Italy, Portugal and Spain) are part of this subgroup, with the exception of Cyprus, Greece and Malta. (France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Romania, Spain, Slovakia, Slovenia and the UK also have cash benefits targeted at carers under certain conditions.)

In the case of Ireland and the UK, the eligibility criteria for cash benefits are strict, being means-tested and subject to assessment based on caring needs and dependency. This means that few carers can meet these criteria. According to Yeandle (1999), middle-income families in the UK have been relying more on private or informal support to carers due to government policies introduced in the period 1979-1997, essentially changing the face of the UK welfare state towards a more economically liberal agenda (Price, 2006). More details are given in the reports from Eurofound (2015d) and Bouget et al (2016).

A third broad group of countries have underdeveloped support schemes for carers (Bouget et al, 2016) and follow the so-called ‘familistic model’: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Poland (Bouget et al do not include Slovakia, Slovenia and Romania as part of this grouping). Many of these countries provide benefits only to the dependant – often considered insufficient (Latvia and Lithuania). And in many of these countries, the formal institutional care sector is underdeveloped. This group of countries does not have well-developed legislation regarding workers’ entitlements to use flexible working time arrangements to make it easier to combine work and care.

### Supply of and demand for long-term care

Having presented a definition of LTC and described the actors and institutions involved, this chapter now looks at the development of care provision along with potential demands. In most countries where a solid formal infrastructure exists, formal care provision has been subject to cost constraints. In contrast, in countries where formal care support is underdeveloped, there is an unmet need for services to satisfy demand and prevent the burden of care being left to families.

One indicator of demand for LTC is the proportion of the population aged 65 and over, as illness and need for care tend to increase with age. The increase in this proportion between 2007 and 2017 has been greatest in Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Slovakia. This indicator may be limited in that it does not reveal anything about longevity or lifestyles of older people. Despite a widespread increase in demand for LTC due to demographic change and longevity, the supply of nursing jobs for LTC has increased only slowly or even been reduced over the years, thus putting more pressure on other parts of the care system (OECD, 2017b). There is no readily available data on the numbers of people providing social care in different Member States, so the OECD’s nursing care indicator is used as a proxy to measure part of the needs addressed by the formal care workforce. Nevertheless, there is a trend in most developed countries to expand formal care services in the community to meet the needs of older people (Kodate and Timonen, 2017).

OECD figures show a decline in the usage of LTC services in some countries where formal LTC has been most important (OECD, 2017b). There is substantial evidence from the EQLS that publicly provided formal LTC is too costly for users, meaning that the decline in the use of services does not mean a drop in the need for care. Rather, the need for care is likely to have been covered by informal care or remain unmet. This is the case in Portugal, where 67% of EQLS respondents who had used LTC services in the 12 months prior to the survey stated that the high costs of services made it difficult or

very difficult to continue using them. The corresponding figure for Estonia is 60%. In the Nordic countries – Sweden and Denmark – fewer than one in 10 respondents using LTC services find them too expensive. Similar results are observed for the Netherlands (13%); in Finland the figure is 23%. The number of formal paid carers per 1,000 inhabitants across all countries – with the exception of Luxembourg – has either stagnated or is starting to decrease. This evolution makes clear how important informal family care is, even in countries where there is, in principle, a strong commitment to formal care.

The European Commission argues that pressure for the provision and financing of LTC services publicly is likely to grow in the coming decades, with the increased prosperity of countries. This is especially the case for those Member States that currently rely heavily on the informal provision of care (European Commission, 2018b).

There is a need to increase the availability and affordability of formal care. The budgets for LTC have increased over time, but they may not meet the demands in many Member States. Moreover, it is unlikely that budgets will increase to meet the level prevailing in the Netherlands and Sweden. At some point in time, in a context of less or at least constant public financing, it is likely there will be pressure for more informal care. As more women work longer and have their own career, the need to balance the provision of care between men and women is crucial for the future. This calls for better enabling of workers to combine work and care, and for Member States as well as social partners to implement better reconciliation instruments and innovative workplace practices.

### Cost of providing formal and informal care

In the following section, the EQLS results will illustrate how much care is provided to children and to other dependants. The numbers will be used to calculate the expenditure on formal LTC. In Chapter 2, we saw that unpaid work mostly consists of care and that women perform care more than men. EQLS findings show that most people with children up to 18 years of age (77%) are caring for and/or educating their children every day. This represents 88% of mothers and 64% of fathers; among those caring for children, men reported that they are involved, on average, 21 hours a week compared with 39 hours for women. There is also a significant contribution to childcare from grandparents. Overall, among people with grandchildren, 29% of men and 35% of women report that they provide care and/or education to grandchildren at least once or twice a week; the rates are highest in Cyprus (56%),

Luxembourg (51%), Malta (51%), Spain (42%), Latvia (41%) and Romania (40%).

As the road map for work-life balance underlines (European Commission, 2015), provision of care is a challenge faced by people over the whole of their working life and indeed in older age. Altogether, 12% of EQLS respondents say they provide care at least once or twice a week to someone aged under 75 (11% of men and 13% of women), and 12% say that they are involved in caring at least weekly for someone aged 75 or over (10% of men and 14% of women). The main gender difference is in providing care every day, which involves twice as many women as men. The average number of hours spent providing care to disabled adults increases with the age of the care providers:

- care recipients under 75 years, carers aged 18–24 years: 10 hours per week
- care recipients under 75 years, carers aged 65+ years: 16 hours per week
- care recipients aged 75+, carers aged 18–24 years: 6 hours per week
- care recipients aged 75+, carers aged 65+ years: 13 hours per week

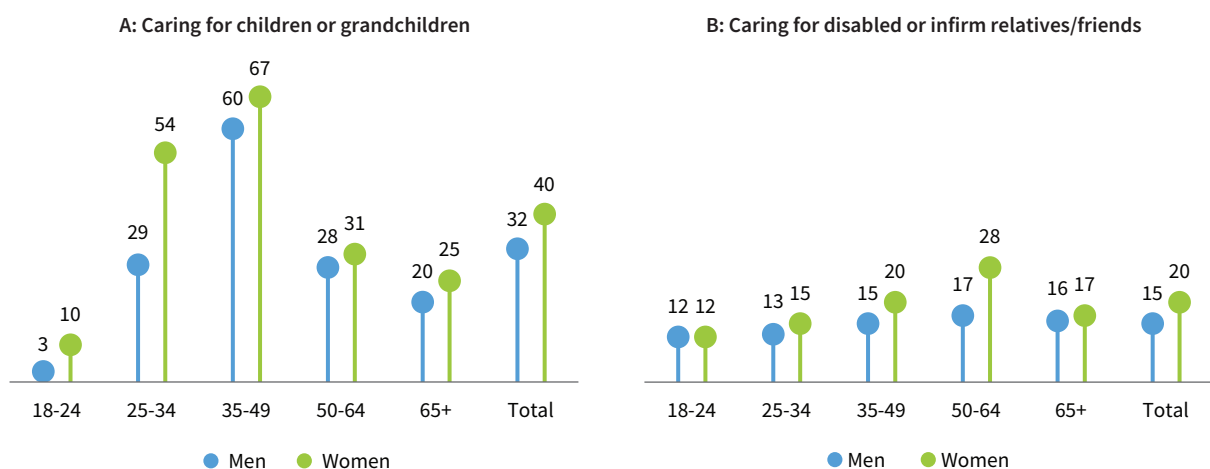
The responses to questions regarding the care of children/grandchildren and the care of disabled or infirm people (of all ages) are presented in Figure 28. It shows how caring is related to age and sex. Overall, women provide more care than men. This is particularly evident for women aged 25–34 years, with nearly twice as many women as men providing care to their children. At older ages, the figures tend to be similar. The number of carers for disabled or infirm relatives is lower than for children but in the 50–64 age group, some 28% of women were providing care compared with 17% of

men. In the 65 and over age group, the differences are no longer significant. The ratio of care incidence between men and women is about 3:4, regardless of the receiver of care.

In both 2011 and 2016, as EQLS figures show, it is evident that involvement in unpaid care is extensive and more common among women. The following section will concentrate more on care provided to disabled family members, friends and neighbours. To compare the resources spent on informal and formal care, healthcare expenditure data from Eurostat can be used. The importance of this comparison is to see what kind of support a country relies on to provide care to people in need. This has obvious consequences for policies on work-life balance in countries that rely a lot on informal or family care.

An indicator can be calculated with the data provided by the EQLS to compare formal and informal care across countries. To do this, two proxy indicators have been developed to assess the level of formal and informal care that is provided in each Member State. The indicator presented is the international standard HC.1.1 for inpatient curative care. The system of healthcare accounts defines inpatient curative care as follows: ‘Inpatient curative care comprises medical and paramedical services delivered to inpatients during an episode of curative care for an admitted patient’ (OECD, 2000, p. 115). And this is applied to LTC. Inpatient LTC is provided in institutions or community facilities. LTC is typically a mix of medical care – including nursing care – and social services. Only the former is recorded in the System of Health Accounts (SHA) under health expenditure (OECD, 2000, p. 118).

Figure 28: Involvement in care by sex and age (general population), 2016 (%)



**Note:** Q42 ‘In general, how often are you involved in any of the following activities outside of paid work? a. Caring for and/or educating your children b. Caring for and/or educating your grandchildren c. d. Caring for disabled or infirm family members, neighbours or friends under 75 years e. Caring for disabled or infirm family members, neighbours or friends aged 75 or over’. (Option C excluded). Answer categories are: ‘every day’, ‘several days a week’, ‘once or twice a week’, ‘less often’ and ‘never’.

**Source:** EQLS 2016

Since it covers only formally delivered care to LTC patients and does not represent the total of all expenditures for LTC, it is an underestimation of the real cost. However, it still serves to illustrate the differences in spending between countries in the EU. This indicator is only a proxy for formal care, as formal care can be provided in many other ways, including community services. The cross-national measurement of all forms of formal care is, however, very difficult due to comparability, measurability, etc. The dimension to be

illustrated by this indicator is not so much the absolute level of formal care, but more the relative share compared with informal care and the mix of both forms of LTC.

Table 2 presents the curative inpatient costs for LTC (health) in 2016 and the change between 2011 and 2016. This is compared with data from the EQLS on the prevalence of informal care and the average duration of care provision in each country of the EU, separately for

**Table 2: Provision of LTC in EU Member States (formal and informal) and financial costs**

Country	LTC (health) spending (% of GDP) in 2015	Average yearly change in LTC spending 2011–2015	Incidence of care by men 2016	Incidence of care by women 2016	Average weekly hours caring, men 2016	Average weekly hours caring, women 2016	Cost per week (€ million)	Percentage of 2016 GDP
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Austria	1.5	-0.3%	8.3%	11.6%	21:34	27:07	6.68	0.10%
Belgium	2.6	1.6%	22.3%	34.4%	09:36	12:12	46.69	0.57%
Bulgaria	0.0	0.0%	7.9%	12.0%	02:54	23:00	4.01	0.43%
Croatia	0.2	11.8%	16.6%	18.0%	17:36	14:46	4.64	0.52%
Cyprus	0.2	0.0%	12.8%	18.5%	12:50	17:32	0.36	0.10%
Czech Republic	0.9	4.0%	10.1%	19.3%	10:32	20:08	10.83	0.32%
Denmark	2.5	1.2%	12.8%	19.9%	04:45	07:53	3.69	0.07%
Estonia	0.4	11.1%	13.7%	16.4%	13:28	10:09	0.97	0.24%
Finland	1.6	-3.3%	19.7%	26.0%	05:42	09:04	4.50	0.11%
France	1.2	0.4%	28.6%	38.2%	11:33	14:53	367.00	0.86%
Germany	1.8	2.0%	9.4%	8.9%	10:50	10:04	101.34	0.17%
Greece	0.2	19.0%	9.7%	15.6%	13:56	25:23	17.30	0.52%
Hungary	0.3	-1.7%	9.3%	11.0%	14:24	20:12	6.78	0.31%
Ireland	1.8	-11.9%	15.6%	18.8%	17:00	25:49	21.75	0.41%
Italy	0.9	-0.5%	13.2%	19.7%	14:17	14:44	35.75	0.11%
Latvia	0.3	1.7%	24.8%	26.8%	17:52	13:40	2.93	0.61%
Lithuania	0.6	9.2%	11.0%	19.9%	19:39	17:36	2.89	0.39%
Luxembourg	1.4	-0.7%	18.9%	23.2%	13:07	14:37	2.76	0.27%
Netherlands	2.6	-5.4%	18.1%	21.2%	09:34	10:39	44.24	0.32%
Poland	0.4	-1.3%	8.5%	16.7%	20:01	29:28	55.04	0.67%
Portugal	0.2	4.7%	8.0%	9.8%	13:19	12:15	6.86	0.19%
Romania	0.3	6.9%	22.0%	16.6%	18:02	31:51	31.84	0.97%
Slovakia	0.0	0.0%	9.5%	14.6%	17:04	20:25	5:16	0.33%
Slovenia	0.8	0.0%	13.0%	18.5%	14:37	15:38	3:56	0.46%
Spain	0.8	-0.6%	12.9%	18.1%	16:01	24:21	111:52	0.52%
Sweden	2.9	-0.3%	13.5%	16.2%	06:04	10:16	4:35	0.05%
United Kingdom	1.8	-0.8%	16.1%	22.0%	22:06	17:20	287:84	0.62%

**Note:** Cost per week is calculated using the absolute number of carers at the time of the survey multiplied by the average time providing care multiplied by the minimum hourly wage in each country. The final figure is the cost per week in millions of euro. The share of GDP is calculated using the estimates in (10) multiplied by 52 (weeks) divided by the GDP according to national accounts at market prices.

**Source:** (2)–(3) Eurostat: Healthcare expenditure by function [hlth\_sha11\_hc], here long-term care (health) for curative inpatient care as a percentage of GDP (date: 24 July 2018); (4)–(7) author's calculations using Eurofound (2018), European Quality of Life Survey Integrated Data File, 2003–2016, [data collection], 3rd Edition; (8)–(9) author's calculations based on Eurostat: GDP and main components (output, expenditure and income) [nama\_10\_gdp] (date: 25 July 2018) and minimum wage information from Eurofound (2018). Alternative sources for lowest acceptable wage from diverse sources for countries where there is no minimum wage.



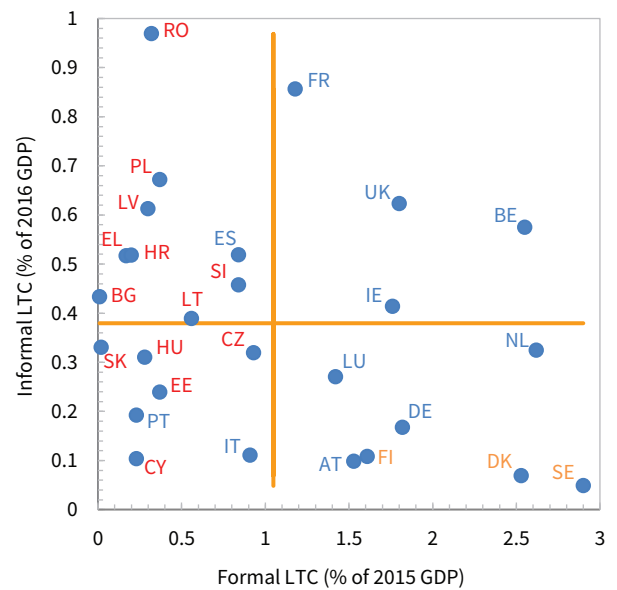
men and women. Women provide informal care more than men by an average of 5 percentage points. Lower incidence seems to be compensated for by more intensity; for example, in Austria, only 12% of women provide care, but they do this on average for 27 hours per week. Meanwhile in France, 38% of women provide care at least once a week, but spend only 11 hours on average. The situation is similar in Belgium, where 34% of women provide care once a week for about 12 hours on average, while in Greece, 15% of women provide care, but for 25 hours on average (see also Pommer et al, 2007).

The cost or expenditure for informal LTC delivered by relatives and friends is estimated as the incidence multiplied by the average time spent caring multiplied by each country's minimum wage (or the lowest wage estimated by other sources if there is no minimum wage). Both measurements are most likely to be underestimated. The relative spending as a percentage of GDP and the ranking of countries is crucial. Countries in the EU spend an average of around 1% of their GDP on inpatient curative LTC, with Sweden (2.9%), the Netherlands (2.6%), Belgium (2.5%) and Denmark (2.5%) topping the list. The expenditure for inpatient curative LTC dropped in 11 of the 28 Member States from 2011 to 2015, despite the expected increase of demand associated with demographic change. However, formal expenditure has increased on community care – social services and home help – moving away from inpatient curative long-term care.

As the number of people providing care in each country is known, as well as the number of hours they spend per week, it is possible to estimate the value of informal care. The weekly value in Austria, for example, is €6.7 million, while in France it is as high as €367 million per week. This does not, however, include any other costs or opportunity costs.

To compare the cost of formal inpatient long-term care with the value of informal care, the same standardisation as that for formal care is used, i.e. calculating the share of GDP spent on informal care each year (see Figure 29). For that, the informal value per week of informal care has been multiplied by 52 and divided by the GDP of the year in which the data was collected. The value of informal care ranges between 0.05% of GDP in Sweden to 0.07% in Denmark and 0.97% in Romania. A trade-off between both types of provisions becomes clear when plotting the cost for formal and informal care as a share of GDP. In most countries with underdeveloped support schemes for family carers (red country labels), formal care provision (inpatient health care) is below 1% of GDP; however, the estimation of cost for informal care is above average. In the countries providing universal and comprehensive LTC support (orange country labels) the opposite is true: more resources are spent on formal care provision and less time is spent on informal care by

**Figure 29: Relationship between formal and informal LTC provision, by country, 2018**



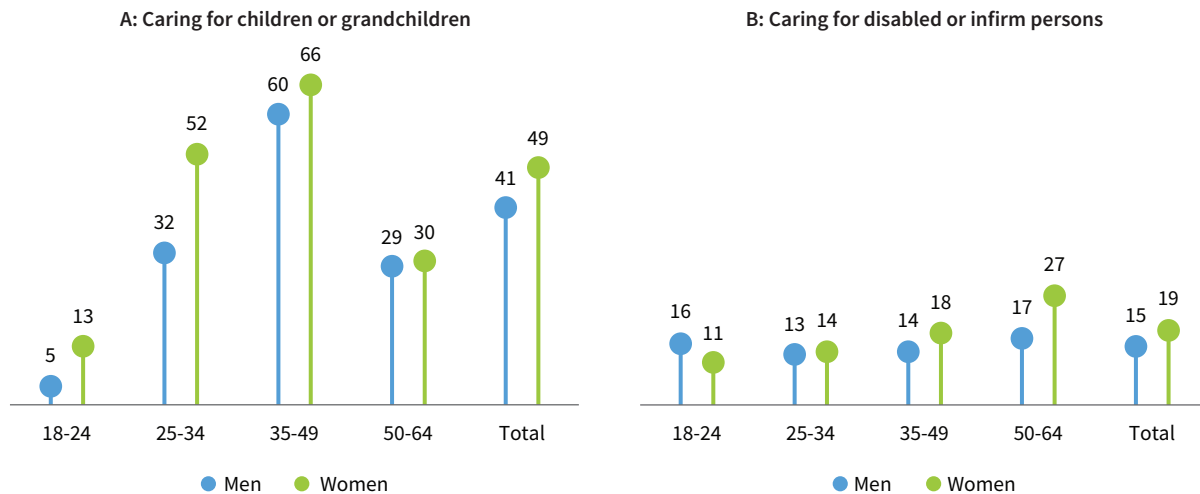
**Note:** The lines represent the averages across 28 EU Member States. Clusters are represented in orange for the countries providing universal and comprehensive LTC support, blue for countries mainly providing support to the care receiver and offering specific support to the carer and red for countries with underdeveloped support schemes for family carers.

**Source:** Formal LTC: Eurostat, Health care expenditure by function [hlth\_sha11\_hc], here long-term care (health) for curative inpatient care as percentage of GDP (date: 24 July 2018 13:56:19); informal LTC: own calculations using Eurofound (2018, EQLS Integrated Data File, 2003–2016, [data collection], 3rd Edition). The data used for the plot are Columns 2 and 9 from Table 2.

family members and friends. A few countries from southern Europe (Cyprus, Italy and Portugal) and central and eastern Europe (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary and Slovakia) spend below average on both dimensions of care provision, as evidenced by their positioning in the lower left quadrant of Figure 29. The countries with blue labels – those that mainly support the care receiver and offer specific support to the carer – are intermediate as they have a more balanced combination of formal and informal care.

How LTC is organised has an impact on work-life balance in each country. The provision of care should not be conceived of as two alternative options (formal or informal) with which to achieve the same result, but rather should be seen as complementary options. The most common situation would be where formal care provision – such as community social services and institutional care – supports the care provided by the family, being available to prevent overload or used in times of pressing needs. To achieve this however it is imperative that in many Member States reconciliation strategies be provided so that carers are able to balance work and care. The following section highlights the link between employment and care.

Figure 30: Involvement in care by sex and age (workers), 2016 (%)



**Note:** Q42 'In general, how often are you involved in any of the following activities outside of paid work?' 'Involved in care' refers to those providing care at least once a week.

**Source:** EQLS 2016

## Caring for disabled dependants – reconciliation with employment

Previous chapters of this report have focused mostly on people in paid employment and the work–life balance issues that they face. However, for some people, a paid job might not be an option because of caring responsibilities. The likelihood of providing care to a disabled or infirm person and the probability of being a carer who is in employment varies from one Member State to another. This is most evident if people providing 'regular care' (several days a week or every day) are considered. Altogether, 12% of people of working age (18–64 years) are involved in providing regular care for a disabled or infirm person – 9% of men and 15% of women.

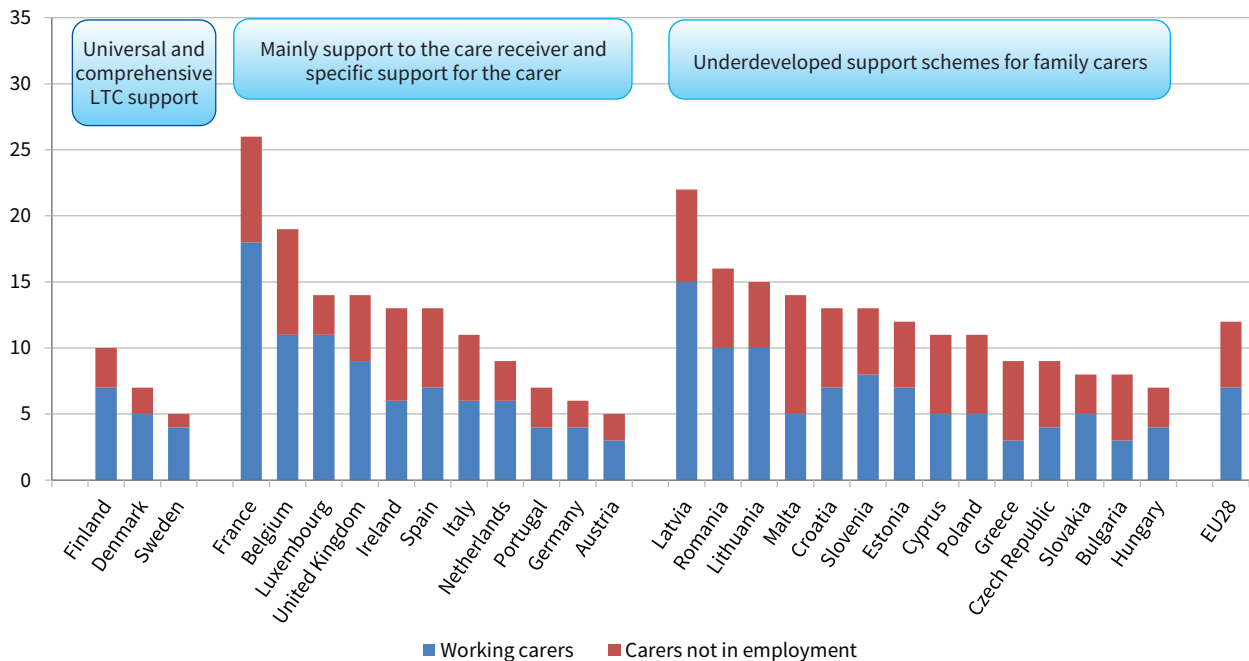
The involvement of workers in care can also be expressed in terms of the proportion of workers who are providing care at least once a week (Figure 30). There are high proportions of workers aged 35–49 who are also involved in care, especially women. Among workers aged 50–64 (whose employment rates have been increasing over the past 15 years) some 27% of women and 17% of men care for someone with a disability or illness. This compares with 29% and 30% of women and men in the same age group caring for children and grandchildren. Overall, nearly three times as many adults care for children as care for disabled persons, and the odds are reduced with age. While most care is provided to children by workers aged 35–49 years, most care for disabled adults is provided by workers

aged 50–64. The gender gap between employed carers is highest in the younger age groups when caring for children, as it is in later life when care is provided to the disabled.

In general, the proportions of regular carers would be expected to be negatively associated with the availability of formal LTC services; this appears to be relatively consistent with the figures from the Nordic countries, Baltic States, Ireland and the UK, but the relationship is less clear for the other country clusters (Figure 31). The lowest proportions of working carers are found in the Balkan and Mediterranean countries, and in a few central European Member States (Austria and Germany). The proportion of working carers is highest in France, Belgium and Luxembourg, but also in the Balkan countries. In general, the western European Member States have better policies in terms of reconciling work and care – leave entitlements, telework, flexible working hours – so care can be provided while working (Eurofound, 2015a). Due to the lack of formal care in the Balkan and Mediterranean countries, carers may be forced to give up employment altogether. In such countries, care is provided by fewer people but more intensively, as shown in Table 2. In Italy, families commonly pay individual carers, often migrants from outside the EU, to look after their family member(s) (Glucksmann and Lyon, 2006; Lyon and Glucksmann, 2008; Degiuli, 2010). Similar ideas are currently being discussed in Germany as a way to address the lack of care staff; however, there is a limited supply of migrant workers to meet this demand.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> At the end of 2018, the use of migrant carers is a much debated topic in Germany: e.g. Hanoversche Allgemeine (2018), Neue Westphälische (2018). Despite a relaxed migration policy for care workers, the inflow of care workers from third countries is low.

Figure 31: Regular care responsibilities by country, people of working age (18–64 years), 2016 (%)



Note: 'Regular care' means providing care several days a week or every day; here it covers adults with a disability or infirmity. Please see note to Figure 30 for details of EQLS, 2016, Q42.

The accessibility of formal care, as well as affordable or subsidised care support services, plays a major role in determining how many people in paid employment are able to provide care. By default, families will organise care themselves, often by choosing or delegating care to the members with the lowest opportunity costs. For example, earlier in the report it was shown that women take up caring responsibilities more often than men, which may have to do with their lower opportunity costs (i.e. the wage gap). Women often work part-time, have lower wages due to working in occupations that are remunerated less and, due to family breaks, have had less of a career, meaning their cost of leaving employment is lower than for their spouse (Carmichael and Charles, 2003; Österle, 2017). With the increasing participation in employment of men and women at older ages, carers are, however, more likely to be in paid work. This is exactly why policy innovation is important to support formal carers by ensuring the availability and affordability of care services, and by offering policies and entitlements that foster the reconciliation of work and care.

Women continue to do the main share of caring and, as a consequence, participate less actively in the labour market than their male counterparts. This affects women's present and potential opportunities for employment, thus increasing the risk of poverty and social exclusion now and in the future.

In sum, the countries that seem to perform best in the reconciliation of work and care are the Nordic countries, which have the most developed formal LTC systems,

though they do have the highest expenditures. People in western European countries (the continental countries and Ireland and the UK) mostly use leave entitlements and care insurance; hence, the connection with the labour market is maintained. In those countries where formal care is underdeveloped – when services are not easily available or affordable and the reconciliation effort is difficult – many family carers (especially women) have to leave the labour market to provide care. An alternative option is to seek employment for relatively short periods and secure income from unemployment in the intermediate periods. Another option used a lot in central and Eastern Europe is for carers to become self-employed to gain the flexibility they would not have in a regular job (Matysiak and Mynarska, 2013; Stypinska and Perek-Białas, 2014).

## Work-life balance and care responsibilities

Being a family carer has obvious consequences for the quality of life and well-being of the carers. Moreover, combining work and care means tight time schedules, having to continue looking after someone after a day's work is done, and less time for leisure. Also, carers have to manage relationships in their daily lives, at home, with the person cared for and at work if they are employed. This section illustrates the link between care and work-life balance by considering indicators on work-life conflict from the EQLS (see Box 2 in Chapter 1).

**Table 3: Work–life balance of working carers in different care regimes in the EU, 2016**

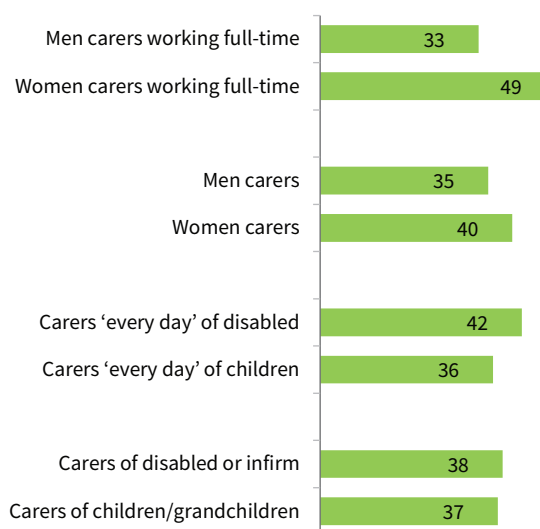
	Universal and comprehensive LTC	Mainly support to the care receiver	Underdeveloped support schemes
Working carer	108.8	102.4	90.7
Worker, no care responsibilities	110.6	104.3	93.9

**Note:** Care is defined as providing care to disabled or infirm family members, neighbours or friends of any age at least once a week. Workers are those respondents who work as employees, work as self-employed, are retired but still working or are family workers and also those who are absent from work or on leave, including parental or any other special leave. All measures are indexed on the population average, e.g. if the average satisfaction with life of people living in the EU is 6.93 and if the average satisfaction of workers without a care duty is 8.2, the indicator is standardised as  $8.2/6.93 \times 100 = 118.6$ .

**Source:** 4th EQLS survey (2016), own calculations, data weighted by within-country calibration.

The EQLS shows that a better work–life balance is reported in countries with more comprehensive LTC regimes, but within each cluster of countries the reported work–life balance of working carers is lower than that of workers without care responsibilities. The indicator of work–life balance presented in Table 3 is a summary of the indicators on work–life conflict included in the EQLS (see Box 2 in Chapter 1 indexed on the population average). The average work–life balance across the working population in the EU is measured as 6.35 on a scale from 1 to 10. As Table 3 shows, the average work–life balance of a working carer in the Nordic countries (with universal and comprehensive LTC) is 108.8 (the index is calculated as 6.91 divided by 6.35 yielding a resulting ratio of 1.088 and 108.8 when multiplied by 100). This means that the work–life balance of a working carer under a universal and comprehensive LTC regime is 8.9 percentage points higher than the EU average. This is still almost 2 percentage points lower than for workers without care duties in the same region. Workers who reconcile work and care in the western European Member States (mainly support to the care receiver) have a work–life balance which is around 6 percentage points lower than in the universal and comprehensive care regime, but still 2 percentage points above the EU average and only around 2 percentage points below workers without care duties in western Europe. Clearly worst off are working carers in the eastern Europe and eastern Mediterranean Member States, with underdeveloped support schemes. Their work–life balance is nearly 10 percentage points below the EU average and 18 percentage points lower than in the Nordic countries.

Another question in the EQLS asked how easy or difficult it was to combine paid work with care responsibilities. A majority of carers of both children and disabled people reported that it was ‘very easy’ (15%) or ‘rather easy’ (48%); only 31% replied ‘rather difficult’ and 6% ‘very difficult’. As Figure 32 shows, altogether there was no difference in reported difficulty between carers of children and carers of people with disabilities or infirmities. Among workers providing care ‘every day’, however, 36% of carers of children reported

**Figure 32: Difficulty combining work and care responsibilities, by type of care and by sex, 2016 (%)**

**Note:** Percentages cover those reporting that combining work and care was ‘very difficult’ or ‘rather difficult’.

**Source:** EQLS 2016

that combining paid work with care was ‘rather’ or ‘very’ difficult, compared with 42% of workers involved in the care of disabled or infirm people.

In general, women were more likely than men to report difficulties in combining work with care: 40% found this ‘rather’ or ‘very’ difficult, compared with 35% of men. One significant difference was among those working full-time (35 hours or more): in this group, 49% of women found it ‘rather’ or ‘very’ difficult, compared with 33% of men. Reconciliation of work and care is also related to income, being more difficult for workers in the bottom quartile of household income, among whom 40% found combining work and care to be ‘rather’ or ‘very’ difficult, compared with 35% of other workers.

It is evident that many factors influence the ease with which care and paid work can be combined, including the number of working hours and intensity of care work, as well as the availability of flexible working arrangements or formal care services. Not surprisingly,

**Table 4: Providing care and life satisfaction, social exclusion and difficulty making ends meet by activity status and care regime, 2016**

	Universal and comprehensive LTC	Mainly support to the care receiver	Underdeveloped support schemes
<b>Satisfied with life (average = 100)</b>			
Working carer	116.8	106.4	96.0
Inactive carer	116.3	101.0	83.8
<b>Feeling socially excluded (average = 100)</b>			
Working carer	77.6	100.6	101.0
Inactive carer	80.9	106.2	115.5
<b>At least some difficulties to make ends meet (average = 100)</b>			
Working carer	25.5	81.0	127.3
Inactive carer	37.0	97.2	157.4

**Notes:** Care is defined as providing care to disabled or infirm family members, neighbours or friends of any age at least once a week. Workers are those respondents of working age who work as employees, work as self-employed, are retired but still working or are family workers and also those who are absent from work or on leave, including parental or any other special leave. All measures are indexed on the population average, e.g. if the average satisfaction with life of people living in the EU is 6.93 and the average satisfaction of workers without a care duty is 8.2, the indicator is standardised as  $8.2/6.93 \times 100 = 118.6$ .

**Source:** EQLS 2016, author's calculations, data weighted by within-country calibration

there are large differences between Member States in the proportion of workers finding it more or less easy to combine paid work with care. The proportions of workers reporting that reconciliation was 'very difficult' were highest in Greece (22%), Cyprus (18%), Romania (13%) and the Czech Republic (13%), while the proportions reporting that combining work and care was 'very easy' were highest in Austria (27%), Ireland (26%), the Netherlands (26%) and the UK (25%).

Beyond its impact on quality of life, caring is also likely to affect working carers' material well-being, as time spent providing care is not remunerated, working hours may be reduced and so income is lower – although even lower for someone who cares full-time and does not work at all. As LTC can last a long time – sometimes over 10 years – it can completely change the carer's life. A recent report estimates that the average duration of care is 6.7 years and, for carers beyond the age of 60, it is 4.4 years (Rothgang et al., 2015, p. 17). Seven years' interruption of a career is likely to have a significant impact on pension entitlements, social embeddedness, savings and more.

Alongside these longer-term consequences are those that are immediate and can be measured in surveys such as the EQLS. Table 4 indicates that the level of life satisfaction does not differ significantly between working and non-working carers in universal and comprehensive LTC systems, but the differences are significant for all other care regimes. Overall life

satisfaction is lowest for inactive carers in countries with underdeveloped care schemes. The difference between inactive carers in universal and comprehensive LTC countries and countries with underdeveloped support schemes is more than 30 percentage points, which is highly significant.

In addition to work-life balance, having care responsibilities while also being in paid employment has implications for one's sense of social inclusion and capacity to make ends meet. Findings from the EQLS permit a comparison of carers' situations in different institutional regimes. For working carers in countries that offer support to the care receiver, the subjective feeling of being socially excluded hovers around the average (100.6), while working carers in the universal and comprehensive LTC cluster score about 23 points lower than this. The worst off are again inactive carers in the underdeveloped support cluster: they stand 15 points above the EU average in feeling socially excluded.

Struggling to make ends meet is most severely felt in this latter cluster: inactive carers in countries with under-developed support schemes are nearly 60 points above the EU average in this respect. The impact on the income situation is therefore most dramatic in eastern Europe and some of the Mediterranean Member States and fairly low in the Nordic countries. Not surprisingly, working carers are less likely than inactive carers to report difficulties in making ends meet.



# 4 Determinants and consequences of work–life balance

Chapter 2 outlined how much time workers spend at work and the degree of autonomy they have over their time and place of work, while Chapter 3 focused on care responsibilities and differences between those in employment and those not in employment. This chapter delves more deeply by analysing the importance of factors related to work–life balance, including the role of the workplace and the family. By considering these factors jointly, it is possible to isolate their individual association with the work–life balance measurements introduced in Chapter 1. This enables a wider range of variables to be taken into consideration. The results outline what matters most for how workers perceive the reconciliation of their work and private lives.

This chapter also makes the case for why improving work–life balance is a goal worth pursuing. One argument is that a better work–life balance is instrumental to labour force participation, as a lack of it may be a barrier to employment, as outlined in Chapter 1. The beneficial effects of a good work–life balance extend beyond employment, however. Striking a successful balance between work and private life has other consequences for workers, employers or society as a whole. This chapter shows that a better work–life balance is connected to improved mental well-being, more engagement at work and higher levels of satisfaction and happiness.

## Analysing differences in work–life balance

### Insights from the literature

The literature provides insights into what the analysis of the EWCS should focus on and whether the results of the analysis are consistent with the findings of other researchers. Because of the large body of research available, the focus now is on meta-analyses that comprehensively and systematically review the literature on this topic; the chapter thus summarises the findings of many publications.

Byron (2005) provides the most recent review by looking at the causes of work–life conflict. She considers work antecedents (e.g. working hours, working time flexibility), non-work antecedents (e.g. family characteristics, family support) and demographic or other characteristics (e.g. sex, income) and assesses their impact on work-to-non-work conflict and

non-work-to-work conflict. She finds that, generally, work antecedents have a stronger impact on work-to-non-work conflict and non-work antecedents have a stronger impact on non-work-to-work conflict. This is intuitive; for example, job stress seems more likely to lead to worrying about work when the person is not working and substantial care responsibilities at home may lead to a lack of concentration at work. Some of the most important effects were job stress (measured in various ways), family stress, family conflict, hours worked and schedule flexibility.

Contrary to what is often hypothesised, Byron (2005) finds that gender has hardly any influence on work–life conflict directly. She finds some evidence for gender as a moderator, meaning that gender may influence the size of the effect of certain work or non-work antecedents of work–life conflict. One particularly interesting finding is that the effect of working time flexibility on work–life conflict is found to be stronger for women, and Byron (2005) concludes that flexible schedules are more beneficial for women than for men. This is not confirmed by the later work of Michel et al (2011), however, which focuses more on work–family conflict.

Michel et al's review complements Byron's analysis by focusing on the narrower concept of work–family conflict, and at the same time updating the publications considered by Byron and presenting a more granular analysis. Michel et al (2011) confirm Byron's (2005) overall results and also include personality traits in their meta-analysis. They find that personality (and in particular neuroticism) has a strong impact on perceived work–life conflict as well.

While the above-mentioned studies focus on explaining differences in work–life balance, Ropponen et al (2016) focus on what concrete actions could be effective in improving work–life balance. They did so in their systematic review of initiatives, interventions or experiments that were implemented by employers at workplaces to promote work–life balance. In total, 11 studies satisfied the strict inclusion criteria and these studies focus mostly on examples of working time flexibility and training that are shown to have positive effects on work–life balance as well as on health outcomes. This is an indication that differences in work–life balance are not merely explained by circumstances that are difficult to change: policy can be effective too.

## Analysis of EWCS

Building on insights from the previous chapters and the literature, it is possible to analyse which working conditions are associated with the fit between working hours and other family and social commitments in the EWCS. The literature reviews reported above include broad categories of determinants because they summarise the literature and therefore have to generalise specific effects into broader concepts. With the EWCS, it is possible to build on these insights by more specifically assessing the association between the characteristics of the job, the workplace and the individual with various measurements of work–life balance, and then isolate their individual associations.

The first measurement of work–life balance was introduced in Chapter 1 and is based on the question in the EWCS: ‘In general, how do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work?’ Respondents can respond ‘very well’, ‘well’, ‘not very well’ and ‘not at all well’ (see Box 1 in Chapter 1, p. 10). The EWCS also includes questions on the conflict between work and private life (see Box 2 in Chapter 1). These questions can be summarised into two scales: one reflects the work–life conflict originating in the workplace and affecting the private life, while the other reflects work–life conflict in the opposite direction. For both scales, the other questions in the EWCS they are related to can be analysed. The statistical method for doing so is structural equation modelling (SEM; see Box 8 and the Annex for more details).

Figure 33 summarises the results of the regressions of the three measurements. The bars represent the size of the associations (coefficient) between the variable in the row and the measurement of work–life balance in the column. Note that the fit between working hours and other commitments is reversed (poor fit) for consistency with the presentation of the conflict measurements. More detailed descriptions of the determinants can be found in the Annex. All analysis in this section is restricted to employees only, because some of the variables included in the model are not available for the self-employed.

The first finding is that the higher the usual number of weekly working hours and commuting time, the worse the fit between working hours and other commitments. This finding confirms earlier analysis of the EWCS (for example in Eurofound, 2002, 2007). Working hours and commuting time are also associated with more conflict originating in the workplace and in the direction of private life and vice versa. When working hours are atypical (nights and weekends), work–life balance is also affected negatively. For shift work, the results show only an association with non-work-to-work conflict (especially daily split shifts and permanent shifts) and a weak association with the overall fit. One possible explanation for this is that shift work may occur more often at unsocial hours, making it more likely that the private life will spill over into work, rather than vice versa.

### Box 8: Structural equation modelling (SEM)

SEM is a statistical modelling technique that combines path analysis and factor analysis. SEM usually includes several regression equations in which the endogenous variable of one equation can also be the exogenous variable in another regression. These regressions are estimated simultaneously by minimising the difference between the sample covariance and the covariance predicted by the model (Bollen, 1989). A path diagram represents a system of equations and incorporates causal assumptions. SEM cannot be used to prove causality; it casts doubt on these causal assumptions if the model does not fit the data and makes them tentatively more plausible otherwise (Bollen and Pearl, 2013). Confirmatory factor analysis in SEM is used to incorporate latent variables. Latent variables are variables that cannot be directly observed in the data. Factor analysis is used to infer latent variables from sets of observed variables that are measurements of those latent variables. This process avoids having to rely on single indicators and therefore reduces error in the measurement of the latent variable. The model in this report has been estimated using the R package ‘lavaan’ (Rosseel, 2012).



Figure 33: Analysis of the relationship between different measures of work–life balance



**Note:** The ordered logit of Q44 of the EWCS is a regression of the question ‘In general, how do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work?’. Respondents can respond ‘very well’, ‘well’, ‘not very well’ and ‘not at all well’. For this regression, that order (from ‘well’ to ‘not well’) has been maintained for consistency with the conflict regressions. Non-work to work conflict and work to non-work conflict are latent variables in a larger structural model (see the Annex) based on the Q45 sub-questions of the EWCS (see Box 2 in Chapter 1). Coefficients for SEM regressions have been standardised. The fit of working hours is controlled for country and occupation, the conflict variables for country. The continuous variables in the models (working time, commuting time, autonomy, intensity and age) have been standardised. For a more detailed description of the determinants, see the Annex.

**Source:** EWCS 2015 (employees only)

### Working time flexibility

How is working time flexibility related to fit and conflict? Chapter 2 shows that workers who have no say over their working time tend to suffer a poorer fit between working hours and other commitments, although this is more consistently true for women than for men. The results of the multivariate analysis show that, controlled for the other variables, autonomy over working time arrangements has no effect on the perceived fit between working hours and other commitments.

Those with the flexibility to determine their working hours partially or entirely do not rate the fit of their working hours as better or worse than those who have no flexibility at all. Moreover, being able to choose between fixed schedules determined by the employer or adapt working time within certain limits seems to increase conflict in the direction of private life to work, although no association was found for those able to determine their working hours completely.

Does this mean that flexible working arrangements are not beneficial for work–life balance? The answer is that flexible working time arrangements help reconciling work and private life when the arrangements actually lead to the worker being able to use this flexibility. Looking at working time arrangements in more detail, it becomes clear that working time arrangements are strongly related to another variable in the model: ‘Would you say that for you arranging to take an hour or two off during working hours to take care of personal or family matters is...?’ Among those who can ‘entirely determine working hours by themselves’, half find it ‘very easy’ to arrange an hour or two off, while the figure stands at only 16% among those who have their working time arrangements set solely by the company. This shows that flexible arrangements make it more feasible for workers to take an hour or two off and thus actually increase their ability to use the flexibility when needed. For some, however, flexible arrangements do not guarantee the ability to take time off when needed.

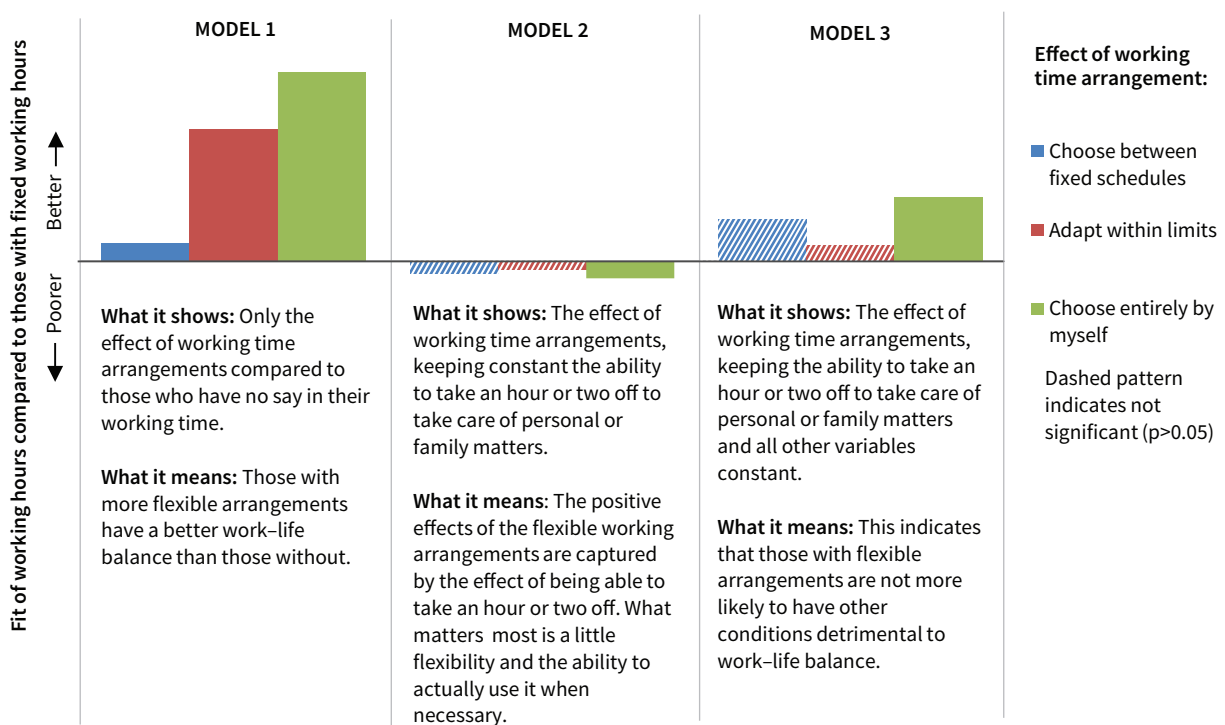
Being able to take an hour or two off is very strongly related to work–life balance measures (Figure 33). Figure 34 shows that if we use only working time arrangements to explain the fit between working hours and other commitments, more flexibility is beneficial. When the ability to take an hour or two off for personal or family matters is added to the model, the positive effect of working time arrangements shrinks and is no longer significantly different from zero. This implies that

flexible working time arrangements improve work–life balance insofar as they increase the ability to take an hour or two off when needed to take care of personal or family matters. In other words, a little flexibility goes a long way. In the third model, all other control variables shown in Figure 33 are included and this has little effect on the results.

These findings are in line with Fagan et al (2011), who report that the existence of schedule flexibility does not necessarily imply that workers can actually use these to improve work–life balance – for example, when workload is heavy. Being able to take an hour or two off implies flexibility in practice rather than on paper, and this may also explain why the effects are stronger than the effects of working time arrangements.

The link between working time arrangements and work–life conflict is more ambiguous. Clearly, being able to take an hour off for personal or family matters reduces conflict between work and life (Figure 34). However, it is still evident that flexible working time arrangements increase conflict, even when the ability to take an hour off and other control variables are controlled for, especially for conflict that originates in the private domain and affects work. One explanation for this could be that – although flexible working time makes it easier to find a better fit between working time and other commitments – the lines between work and private life are being blurred at the same time. This does

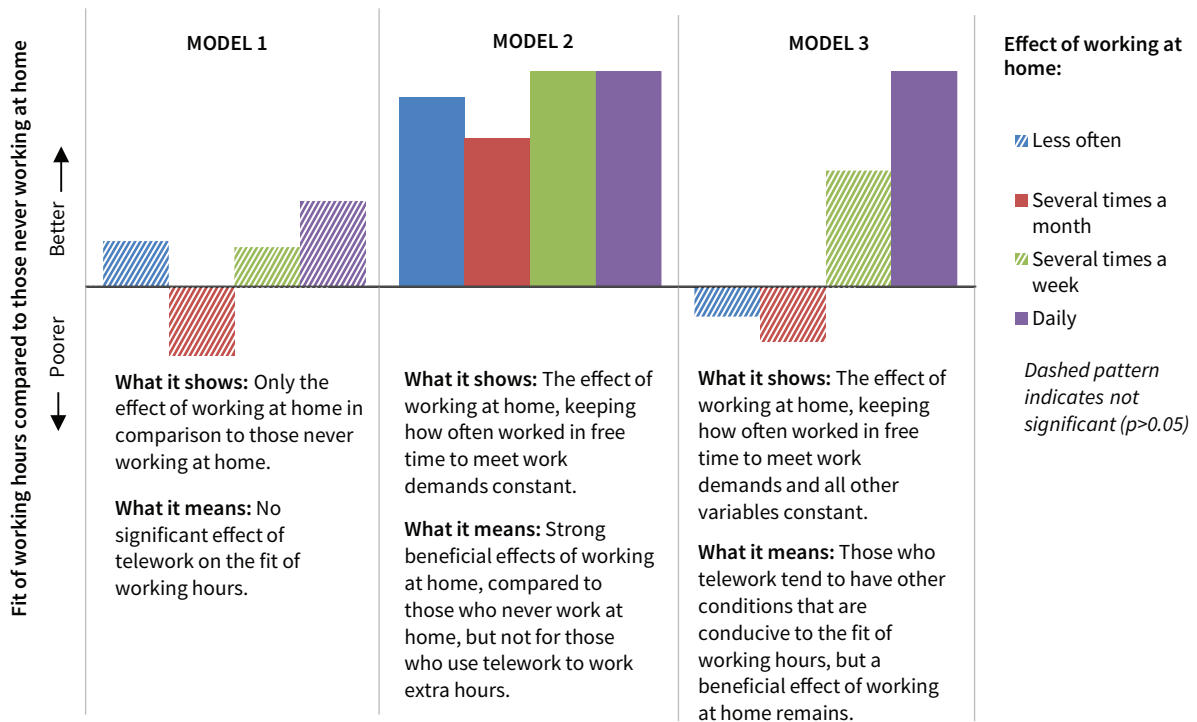
Figure 34: Flexible working time arrangements and work–life fit by model



Note: All three models are an ordered logit of EWCS Q44: ‘In general, how do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work?’

Source: EWCS 2015 (employees only)

Figure 35: Working from home and work–life fit by model



**Note:** All three models are an ordered logit of EWCS Q44: ‘In general, how do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work?’.

**Source:** EWCS 2015 (employees only)

not apply to those who can fully determine their working hours themselves.

### Telework

In a similar way to flexibility in working time, it can be argued that spatial flexibility has a positive impact on work–life balance. In fact, the proposed EU directive on work–life balance (European Commission, 2017a) includes a legislative measure that aims to extend the right to request flexibility in the place of work. When the results of the analysis are examined (Figure 35), it can be seen that, keeping other variables constant, the frequency of working at home is not associated with the fit between working hours and other commitments, except for those who work from home daily. This would suggest that working from home is only conducive to work–life balance if practised extensively.

On closer examination, however, it appears that the relationship between teleworking and work–life balance is more nuanced. The main factor that determines whether teleworking is conducive or detrimental to work–life balance is the reason why people telework: if teleworking substitutes working hours otherwise spent at the workplace, teleworking is linked to a better work–life balance, but when teleworking supplements hours already spent at the workplace, it worsens work–life balance because it increases working time. The substitutional effect can be separated from the supplemental effect by considering the EWCS

question: ‘Over the last 12 months, how often have you worked in your free time to meet work demands?’ This is an indication of the degree of work beyond normal expectations. Working in ‘free time’ does not necessarily imply that this happens at home, but the EWCS shows that the two are strongly connected: those who work more in their free time to meet work demands are more likely to work at home more frequently, or vice versa (Figure 27, p. 34).

The implication of this is shown in Figure 35: the Model 1 shows how working at home is associated with the working hours fit in comparison with those who never work at home. The differences are not significant, so there seems to be no strong connection between the two. This changes to a very large extent when the question on working at home to meet work demands is added to the model: this has a negative impact on work–life balance (Figure 35). When controlling for this variable, the effect of working at home becomes very positive, indicating that working at home is very beneficial for work–life balance, except when it is done in order to work more hours. Working at home often goes hand in hand with working in free time to meet work demands, and this impacts work–life balance negatively. In Model 3, all the other variables of Figure 33 are included and now the positive effect of flexible working arrangements remains only for those who do so on a daily basis. This means that the positive effects in Model 2 for those working at home several times a

week, several times a month or less often actually reflect that people who telework with this frequency also have other characteristics conducive to work–life balance, which explains the effects of Model 2, which does not control for these conditions.

When we consider reported conflict between work and private life rather than the working hours fit, we find a similar pattern. The exception is that flexible working arrangements make it more likely that work–life conflict will occur, even when the effect of working from home to meet work demands is controlled for. This might indicate that even though workers perceive the fit between work and private life to be better when they work from home, unless it is for additional work, private matters will impede the carrying out of job responsibilities because, at home, the boundaries between work and private life are blurred.

### Other important factors

Working time and flexible work are important for work–life balance and the policy discussion around the topic, but other factors are as well. The remainder of this section will review the associations found for regularity of working hours, job intensity, job autonomy, social support and personal characteristics.

Regularity of working hours is important for achieving a good work–life balance. The greater the extent to which workers work the same days in a week, the same hours a week and the same hours in the day, the more they can mark the boundaries of work and organise their lives around it. Conversely, being requested to come into work at short notice is detrimental for work–life balance as it decreases the perceived overall fit and increases conflict in both directions.

Eurofound’s job quality index of work intensity broadly measures labour effort during work time and includes the following: quantitative demands (working fast), time pressure (having tight deadlines, not having enough time to do the job), frequent disruptive interruptions, pace determinants and interdependency and emotional demands (Eurofound, 2017c). Work intensity at high levels is considered to be a stressor associated with increased (mental) health risks. Byron (2005) refers to work intensity as ‘job stress’ and finds a strong negative connection with work–life balance in the meta-analysis. The EWCS analysis confirms this (Figure 33) and shows that work intensity is linked to a worse fit of working hours and more conflict between work and private life. This indicates that work–life balance is affected by more than just factors related to time: stress in the workplace may be taken home by workers.

Job control is said to limit the negative effects of job demands such as job intensity in a high-demand situation (Karasek, 1979). Having more discretion over the order, methods or speed of work (job autonomy) may be conducive to balancing work and private life.

Eurofound (2017c) shows a positive connection between job autonomy and work–life balance. However, the results of this analysis show only a weak association with work–life balance measures (Figure 33). As with working time arrangements, job autonomy is related to being able to take an hour off for family/social commitments outside work; the association of job autonomy and working time fit decreases after controlling for this variable. In other words, job autonomy is helpful for achieving a better work–life balance, mostly if it means more autonomy over working time.

Social support at work, from managers and colleagues, increases working time fit and reduces work–life conflict. This relationship has been well documented in the literature. A recent meta-analysis by French et al (2018), which focuses on this topic confirms the negative relationship of social support and work–life conflict and points out that supportive behaviour is more important than perceptions (a manager supporting the employee by giving them the day off in case of a family emergency is an example of supportive behaviour). The EWCS asks workers directly about their perception of social support in the workplace and therefore probably underestimates the impact of social support on work–life balance. In addition, the EWCS does not include support from the family, which has also been shown to reduce work–life conflict (French et al, 2018). In accordance with the literature, the EWCS shows a stronger association between social support at work and work-to-non-work conflict than for social support and non-work-to-work conflict. Exposure to adverse social behaviour is an indicator of a bad social environment at work and is linked with a worse fit between work and private life and more work–life conflict.

Some family and personal characteristics also show a connection with work–life balance for those in paid employment. Most clearly, being a single parent is associated with a worse work–life balance on all measures. More generally, those caring for children have a poorer work–life balance and are – especially – more likely to experience spillovers from the private life to the workplace. Conflict originating in work and spilling over to the family is also greater for workers with children, but to a lesser extent. Caring for relatives other than children is linked to a higher degree of work–life conflict originating in the workplace, but no significant differences were detected for the other measures. Controlling for all other variables, gender is not associated with work–life balance, except for work–life conflict originating at work. For both gender and care responsibilities, it should be noted that the results are based on an analysis of cross-sectional data and therefore it is not possible to control for the fact that, for example, women are more likely to work fewer hours than men in paid employment. In this analysis, the effects of this gender difference on work–life balance

are captured in the effect of working hours, not in the gender effect as such. In addition, people with care responsibilities and women are less likely not to be in paid employment at all, and those without paid employment are not covered in the EWCS sample.

### Variation in perceived work–life balance

The section above outlined how strongly certain factors are associated with work–life balance. However, some effects may be large for a few people, while others may be small for many people. Therefore, this does not tell us what explains most of the differences in work–life balance as measured in the EWCS. If all the variation in EWCS respondents' reports of the fit between working hours and other family/social commitments is taken together, the estimations from the model presented above can be used to explain the greatest variation. It should be noted that this is limited to the variables included in the model; other factors not included in the analysis may play a role as well.

Figure 36 shows that usual weekly working hours are by far the most important factor in explaining variation in work–life balance. This makes sense, because not only are working hours significantly related to work–life balance, but there is also considerable variation between people in terms of the hours they work every week. This implies that making changes in working hours might result in the biggest change in work–life balance. After working hours, the most important factors are being able to take an hour off, job intensity, and commuting time.

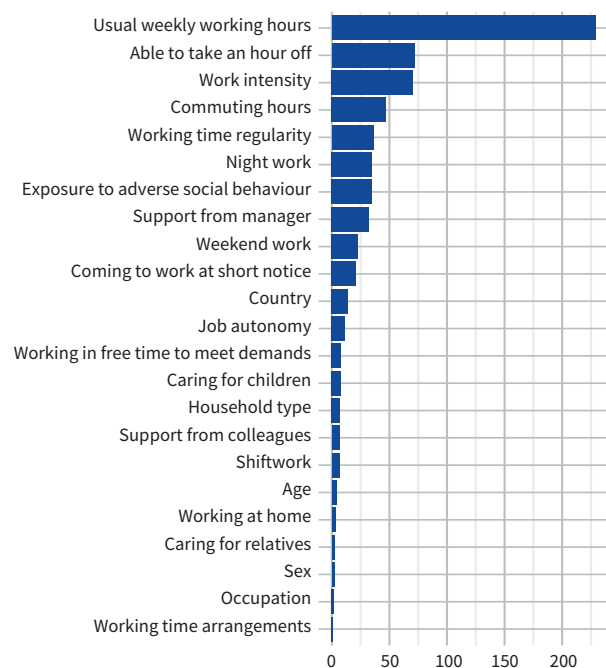
When looking at the variation in reported fit of working hours, the least important are working time arrangements, occupation and sex, because the associations of these variables with working hours fit were found to be low. It is also important to note that having care responsibilities does not explain a high proportion of variance; this is not necessarily because care is not relevant to work–life balance, but because a large share of people do not have care responsibilities. Furthermore, the EWCS does not measure the intensity of care, which might make a difference as well.

In addition, some variables may be related to each other, and this could obscure their association with work–life balance outcomes. The examples described above with regard to flexibility in working time and place show this. Another example is job intensity: Piasna (2018) shows through analysis of the EWCS that more working hours, atypical work (nights, weekends) as well as the lack of working time flexibility (unless employer-induced) is associated with higher job intensity.

Gender is also an important predictor of some of the factors that influence work–life balance, despite its not having a direct effect on work–life balance after other variables are controlled for. Chapter 2 shows that men and women's working patterns differ greatly. Eurofound

(2017e) found that women are more likely to work shorter hours, especially during the parenting life stage, and are less likely to work atypical hours than men. Eurofound (2017c) found that women also have more regular working hours than men. The effects of these working time patterns are already reflected in the models directly, and will therefore not be picked up by the effect of gender.

**Figure 36: Importance of variables in explaining variance in working hours fit**



**Note:** Percentages cover those reporting that combining work and care was 'very difficult' or 'rather difficult'.

**Source:** EQLS 2016

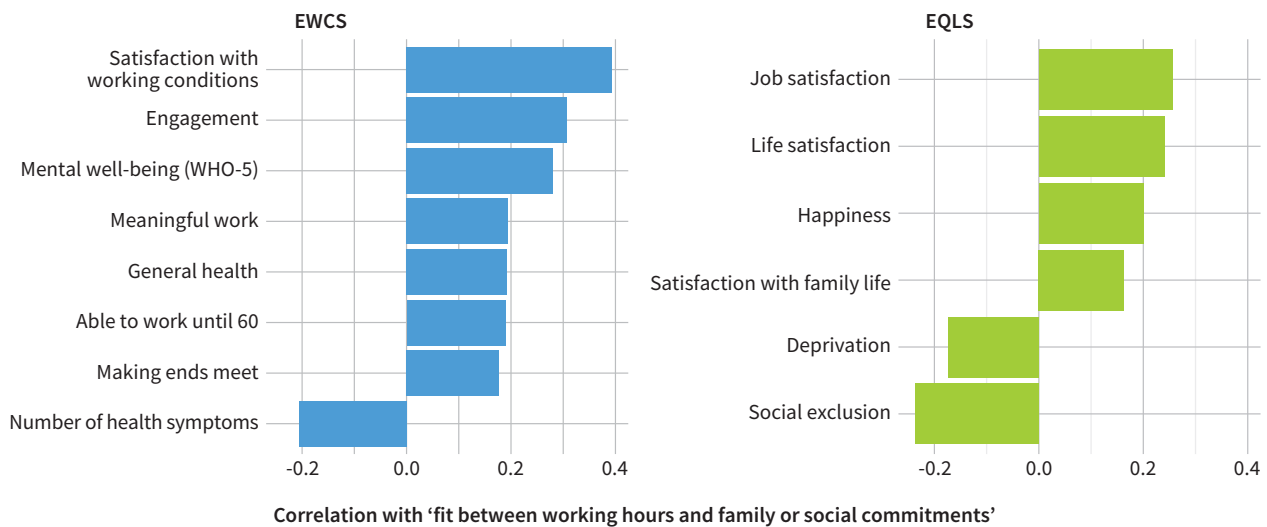
## Benefits of work–life balance

The previous section outlined what is important for work–life balance and what explains differences between workers in how they perceive their work–life balance. This is crucial for understanding how work–life balance can be improved, but why is it important to aim for a better work–life balance? Chapter 1 has already shown that issues surrounding work–life balance may be a barrier to taking up paid work, especially for women. This section explains that the benefits of striking a better balance go beyond employment.

### Literature on work–life balance

There is an extensive body of research that has looked into the effects of work–life balance, by either focusing on work–life balance, work–life conflict or both. Among publications that have systematically reviewed the academic literature, the study of Amstad et al (2011) summarises 427 effect sizes found in the literature.

Figure 37: Correlation between work–life fit and other variables, 2015 and 2016



**Note:** ‘Subjective well-being’ refers to the WHO-5. ‘Number of health problems’ is based on a calculation of workers’ health issues. ‘Meaningful work’ is based on a scale made up of questions relating to workers’ perceptions of ‘doing useful work’ and a ‘job well done’. ‘Able to work until 60’ is based on questions around workers’ assessment of their ability to work until the age of 60 and beyond (in the current job or a similar one). ‘Ability to make ends meet’ is a measure of one’s finances. ‘Engagement’ is based on a series of questions on workers’ relationship with their work. Deprivation is an index measuring the number of items a household cannot afford and social exclusion is an index based on a set of questions measuring social exclusion. Depending on the variable type, correlation coefficients are polychoric or polyserial correlations calculated with the ‘polycor’ package for R.  
**Source:** EWCS 2015; EQLS 2016

This study found that work–life conflict is associated with a range of consequences that can roughly be divided into three categories. The first category includes effects related to engagement at work and performance. Amstad et al (2011) find negative effects of work–life conflict in terms of organisational commitment, intention to quit the job, work-related performance and organisational citizenship behaviour. Generally, the effects are larger when the work–life conflict originates in the work domain and affects the private domain than vice versa. A second group of effects is related to satisfaction: many studies show that work–life conflict decreases satisfaction with work, family, marriage and life in general. The final category of effects relates to health and includes negative effects of work–life conflict such as burnout, exhaustion, absenteeism, stress, health in general, depression, anxiety, substance abuse and physical health problems.

These results show that the consequences of work–life balance reach beyond individual well-being or health: work–life balance has an effect on the individual’s health, well-being and satisfaction, and it affects performance and commitment to the organisation. Work–life balance is, therefore, vital for workers, employers and the wider society.

### Analysis of EWCS and EQLS findings

What can the EWCS and EQLS tell us about the effects of work–life balance? Both surveys are looked at because each uses a different set of indicators that may be related to work–life balance. Positive responses to the question ‘How do your working hours fit in with

your family or social commitments outside work?’ (see Box 1 in Chapter 1, p 10) are correlated with a range of well-being indicators in the EWCS and EQLS, and these are summarised in Figure 37. This indicates that those with a better fit between working hours and other commitments outside work generally enjoy better overall well-being. People with a better work–life balance are more satisfied with working conditions, the job in general, family life and life in general. Their health and mental well-being are also better, they are more engaged at work, they find their jobs more meaningful, they are better able to make ends meet, they are less deprived in material terms and they are less socially excluded. These associations are in line with findings in the academic literature.

It is important to note that neither survey repeatedly asked respondents questions at different points in time: the data were collected on a single occasion (a cross-sectional survey) and therefore it is not possible to establish whether a better work–life balance leads to better mental well-being or whether better mental well-being leads to a better work–life balance, for example. One possible explanation for the strong correlations presented above is that those who are healthier, happier or more affluent may be more likely to secure an employment relationship that enables a better work–life balance. However, the body of research supporting the beneficial effects of work–life balance makes it plausible that the correlations at least partly reflect a causal link.

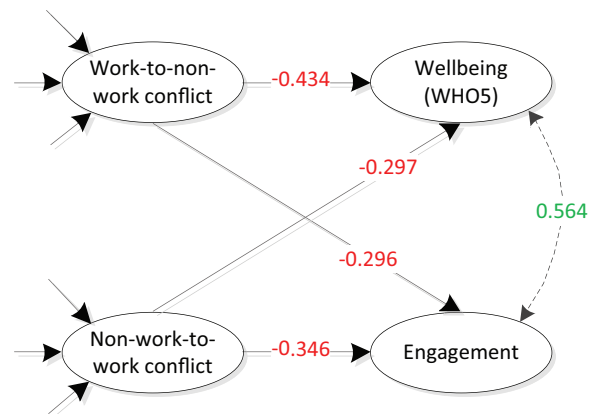
The analyses of work–life conflict in the previous section can be extended further, by including variables on

which the indicators of work–life balance may have an effect. There are numerous variables that could potentially be included, but for the analysis of the EWCS, two outcome variables were considered because they are particularly important for employers and employees respectively. It is hypothesised that a better work–life balance is conducive to the subjective well-being of workers, and also to engagement while at work. Engagement can be described as a ‘positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption’ (Schaufeli and Salanova, 2007). Engagement is particularly important from an employer’s perspective, because it is positively related to job performance (Christian et al, 2011). Subjective well-being is measured using the World Health Organisation’s Well-Being Index (WHO-5), which is based on five survey questions and is particularly important for the mental health of the employee because it has been proven to be a valid screening tool for depression (Topp et al, 2015). Indirectly, better mental health on the part of employees is also beneficial for employers as it can prevent burnout, for example.

The results show that both work-to-non-work conflict and non-work-to-work conflict are negatively associated with well-being (WHO-5) and engagement (Figure 38). This finding is important because it indicates that reconciling demands from the workplace and the private sphere is a goal towards which both employees and employers should strive.

Conflict originating at work is more strongly related to well-being, whereas conflict originating outside the workplace is more strongly related to engagement. This implies that although the two types of conflict are detrimental for both well-being and engagement, the direction seems to have an impact as well. These results confirm both the ‘cross-domain’ and ‘matching’ hypothesis found in the academic literature (Amstad et al, 2011). The former states that conflict originating in one domain will affect the other: for example, too many working hours will reduce time spent with the family and hence satisfaction with family life. The matching hypothesis suggests the opposite: the origin of the conflict matches its consequences. For example, a worker may be less engaged at work because they are

Figure 38: Summary of structural equation model for work–life conflict

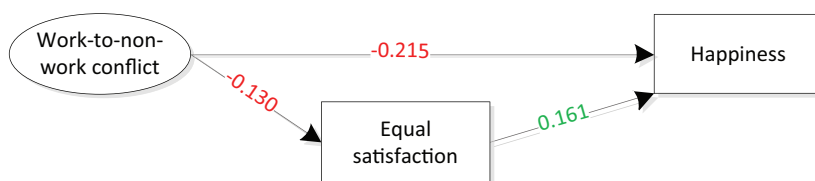


Note: All coefficients are standardised and significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). Solid lines represent regressions and dotted lines covariances. Variables influencing work-to-non-work conflict and non-work-to-work conflict have been left out for reasons of presentation. Source: EWCS 2015 (employees only)

unsatisfied with the negative consequences of overtime on family life.

The EQLS contains three questions on work–life conflict that can be summarised into one variable using SEM. The EQLS also includes questions on satisfaction with the ‘present job’ and ‘family life’. Some scholars argue that being equally satisfied with one’s work and private life is the very definition of work–life balance (Casper et al, 2018). An analysis of the EQLS shows (Figure 39) that those experiencing work–life conflict are more likely not to be equally satisfied with ‘the present job’ and ‘family life’. The higher the level of conflict, the likelier it is that there will be a disparity between a respondent’s level of satisfaction with their job on the one hand and their family life on the other. In the same analysis of the EQLS, we see that those who are as satisfied with their work as they are with their family life report higher levels of overall happiness. Altogether, this supports the idea that reducing conflict between work and life makes it more likely that people value both equally, which in turn increases their happiness.

Figure 39: Conflict, satisfaction and happiness



Note: All coefficients are standardised and significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). Source: EQLS (2007, 2011, 2016) (EU28 workers)





# 5 | Conclusions

How to achieve a better work–life balance is a fundamental question. Against the backdrop of an ageing society, lengthening working life, and the increasing number of women in paid work and technological change, the issue of work–life balance is becoming more salient and finds itself at the centre of policy debate. The revived interest in the EU social policy addressing this issue is creating the momentum required to reignite debate on how policy can help people in the EU juggle their professional and private spheres at all stages of their lives. This includes debate and reflection about policies to increase the quality of work and the lives of those who currently have a job, to create greater opportunities for those without a job by removing barriers to the labour market, and to ensure greater equality between men and women. This report aims to contribute to that debate and reflection by examining the role of work and care in work–life balance using Eurofound’s key surveys: the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) and the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS).

## Importance of work–life balance

Work–life balance is important, given its broad implications: being able to strike a balance between work and private life is important for accessing employment, remaining in work, being more engaged and productive at work and living a happy and healthy life. This broad focus is reflected in the various definitions and interpretations of the term and its application in diverse contexts. The EWCS and EQLS track work–life balance by asking respondents how they perceive the fit between working hours and family or social commitments outside work. In addition, respondents report on the prevalence of a range of spillovers, interdependencies and conflicts that they may encounter between their work and private lives. The EWCS shows that the reported fit of working hours with workers’ private life has remained stable over the last decade but varies between Member States. The EQLS shows a slight increase in the reported prevalence of work–life conflicts over time.

## Gender gaps in paid and unpaid working hours

The unpaid working hours of women in paid employment are higher than those of men. After the first child is born, the number of unpaid hours increases further (being largely devoted to care). This clearly indicates that individuals’ preferences and needs in terms of the allocation of time in the private and work spheres vary throughout their lives and according to the different circumstances within the household. This can be addressed by policies that consider the different needs throughout the life course. In all EU Member States, women spend more hours in unpaid work and men more hours in paid work. However, there are differences in the gender gap in the hours spent on both types of work. While some countries have relatively small gaps in both paid and unpaid work, others show large gaps only in unpaid work. A gendered division of paid and unpaid labour, with men being more occupied in paid work and women in unpaid work, is also common in a number of Member States.

Average figures regarding the difficulty in reconciling work and care often conceal differences between women and men – or the even higher rates of difficulty experienced by male workers. Working hours are the main reason for these differences, and problems reported with work–life balance are more common for women after working hours are taken into account; this can be seen, for example, when comparing male and female carers who work full time.

## Number of hours and working conditions

The number of weekly working hours is central to explaining the differences in perceived work–life balance. Factors such as the work intensity of the job, the regularity and flexibility of the working hours and the support provided by management and colleagues also play a pivotal role. Flexibility of working hours is important: being able to take an hour or two off makes a big difference in creating a better balance. This shows that it is not necessarily only flexible working policies that improve work–life balance, but also the ability to avail of these arrangements. This can be aided by a supportive stance on the part of management and a favourable company culture. The effects of teleworking are ambiguous: working at home rather than in the workplace might be helpful, but working at home after already having worked a full day is not. Ever-evolving technology enables both, and the challenge is to strike a balance between employee-friendly flexibility and employer-friendly flexibility.

## Care responsibilities and work–life balance

Care responsibilities account for most of the time spent on unpaid work. Caring responsibilities affect work–life balance, especially for workers with children and those spending more time providing care. Taking care of children peaks among workers aged 35–49, while taking care of dependent adults peaks among those aged 50–64. Care undertaken by people in employment is a feature of all stages of working life. For women, average working hours drop when children are born and some women exit the labour market completely. (This dynamic is observed exclusively among women.)

There is no indication that the number of family carers is declining; on the contrary. With demographic change, an increasing number of elderly individuals will have to be taken care of by ever-decreasing numbers of younger family members. Formal support services may help, but they are not available or affordable for everyone; the sizeable share of women not in employment because of care responsibilities indicates that a lack of affordable care services is the reason for not seeking employment. There are clear indications that the demand for formal long-term care (LTC) is rising and will continue to do so in the future, but an increase in its supply puts pressure on government budgets, and reliance on informal care is likely to increase. This problem will not disappear without policy action.

Reconciliation of work and care is related to occupation and also to income, being more difficult for workers in the bottom quartile of household income who are less likely to be able to afford support services. Where care of dependants is concerned, both the likelihood of being a carer and that of being a carer in employment varies between Member States, and is associated with the characteristics of welfare systems and the availability and accessibility of services. Policies to support working carers need to consider their specific situation, as well as the circumstances of those who are receiving care. There is a need to put in place a range of employment and social policies that can contribute to promoting a good work–life balance for carers. This includes measures to boost the recognition of the value of caring, and to combat gender stereotypes.

## Role of policy in work–life balance

Work–life balance involves many aspects in and outside work, and there is a role for policy at different levels. In addition to the services provided by state actors, such as local councils and national service providers (healthcare, care support), it is important that work–life balance be at the centre of policy design. Currently, EU-level policy essentially addresses the problem of women's underrepresentation in the labour market and the lack of work–life balance as a barrier to entering it. The Working Time Directive limits the negative impact of one of the most important determinants of work–life balance – long working hours; and one of the goals of the European Commission's proposed Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions is greater clarity for workers on working time schedules. The proposal for a work–life balance directive puts family leave entitlements and flexible working arrangements on the agenda. The effectiveness of these regulations, however, is strongly dependent on the implementation of measures at lower levels of policymaking.

The implementation of EU directives at Member State level further sets the boundaries and the framework in which social partners and companies operate. With regard to care, formal services provide the infrastructure for many parents and carers who look after their relatives; the lack of affordable services can be a reason not to enter the labour market. Ageing populations and pressures on public finances may make sustained investment in formal care more challenging, but further reliance on individuals for providing care is in conflict with the policy objectives of achieving a better work–life balance to enhance labour force participation and gender equality.

Social partners can be involved in all stages of policy, but play an especially important role when it comes to further implementing and adjusting measures to suit the specific characteristics and needs of different companies or sectors of activity. Many collective agreements throughout the EU already include elements related to work–life balance that go above and beyond existing legislation. In the last five years, the issue of working carers has moved higher up the agenda of social partners and the European Commission. Policy responses include measures that can be taken by companies, more general development of care services in the community, and better-adapted social protection benefits. When it comes to working time flexibility, the workplace level is crucial, because this is where flexibility on paper can be transformed into flexibility in practice. This goes well beyond implementing policies set out by governments or agreements reached by social partners. This report has shown that a more supportive work environment is a

critical determinant of work–life balance. In addition, other factors such as the work intensity of the job and working time regularity are important for work–life balance and these are largely determined at workplace level.

### Importance of workplace and household levels

A balance between employer-friendly and employee-friendly flexibility is also struck at the workplace level. This does not mean that there is a strict trade-off. Many companies in the EU already promote workplace policies that are conducive to work–life balance, in order to attract and retain workers. Modernised work practices such as teleworking, part-time work and flexible working time must be considered as instruments to improve work–life balance, so that reconciliation becomes feasible. This report shows that work–life balance is linked not only to increased well-being for workers, but also to greater engagement while they are at work, which is in turn

linked to higher levels of productivity. Improving the interface between work and private life is beneficial for both workers and employers, and promotes sustainable work throughout an extended life course for a larger and more gender-balanced workforce.

Finally, a better work–life balance is also in the hands of the individual and their household. This report shows that working hours and preferences in this regard differ between men and women, which raises the question as to why more households do not opt for a more equal division of paid and unpaid work. Although many women have entered the labour market, there has not been a corresponding rise in the share of men taking on the responsibilities of unpaid work and, particularly, care. Work–life balance policies must also create the mechanisms and conditions required to promote men’s participation in aspects of their private life, such as the care of children or elderly or disabled relatives. These should be defined and implemented in such a way that the rights are not only theoretically available but are also put into action.



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# Annex

Figure A1: Results of the structural equation model for work–life conflict

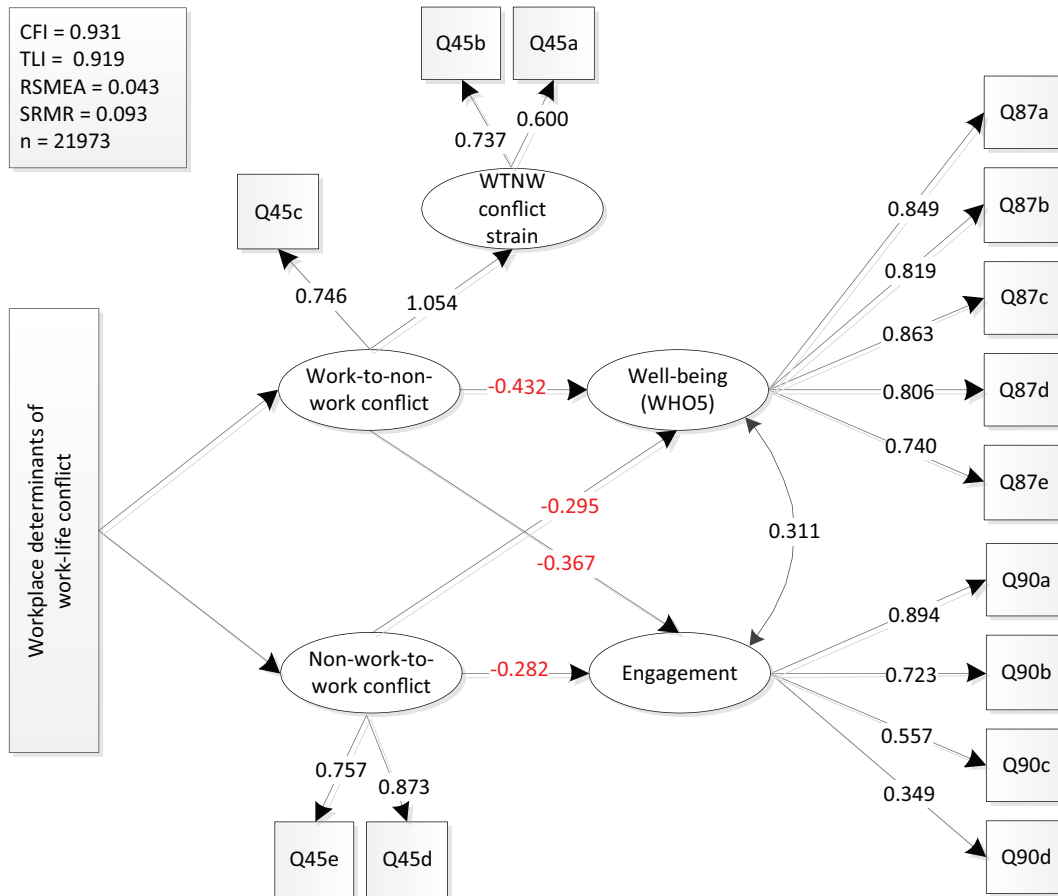


Table A1: Variables used in the analysis

Variable	Question number	Description
Usual weekly working hours	24	The usual weekly working hours spent in the main job, according to the respondent. Expressed in standard deviations.
Commuting time	36	Time spent travelling from home to work and back. Expressed in standard deviations.
Working time arrangements	42	The options are ‘they are set by the company/organisation with no possibility for changes’, ‘you can choose between several fixed working schedules determined by the company/organisation’, ‘you can adapt your working hours within limits (e.g. flexitime)’ or ‘your working hours are completely determined by you’. This indicates the degree to which employers provide policies on flexibility in working time.
Hour off	47	Would you say that for you arranging to take an hour or two off during working hours to take care of personal or family matters is ...? The answer scale ranges from ‘very easy’ to ‘very difficult’. This question reflects actual flexibility perceived rather than policies in place.
Night work	37a	Working at night at least once a month
Weekend work	37b/c	Working on Saturdays or Sundays at least once a month
Coming to work at short notice	40	Over the last 12 months, how often have you been requested to come into work at short notice?

Variable	Question number	Description
Working time regularity	39a-d	Scale of working time regularity. This includes items on working the same numbers of hours every day, the same number of days every week, the same number of hours every week and fixed starting and finishing times.
Shift work	41	Working shifts and the type of shift work, which can be daily split shifts, permanent shifts or alternating/rotating shifts.
Working at home	35e	The frequency of working in 'your own home'
Working in free time	46	Over the last 12 months, how often have you worked in your free time to meet work demands? Scale ranges from 'daily' to 'never'.
Job autonomy	54a,b,c	Scale ranging from 0 to 100 based on the ability to change the order of tasks, methods of work, speed or rate of work. Expressed in standard deviations.
Work intensity	range of variables	Job quality index of work intensity. Work intensity measures not the amount of time spent at work but the workload during that time. For more details, see Eurofound (2017c). Expressed in standard deviations.
Support from colleagues	61a	Your colleagues help and support you. Scale ranging from 'always' to 'never' that has been transformed to a numerical scale ranging from 0 to 4.
Support from manager	61b	Your manager helps and supports you. Scale ranging from 'always' to 'never' that has been transformed to a numerical scale ranging from 0 to 4.
Exposed to ASB	80a-d, 81a-c	Having been exposed to any type of adverse social behaviour, such as bullying, intimidation or violence.
Household type	Household grid	Household structure
Caring for children	95c	Caring for children daily or several times a week
Caring for relatives	95d	Caring for relatives daily or several times a week
Woman	2a	Sex of the respondent, equal to 1 if woman and 0 if man.
Age	2b	Age of the respondent. Expressed in standard deviations.

Figure A2: Results of the structural equation model for work–life conflict, satisfaction and happiness

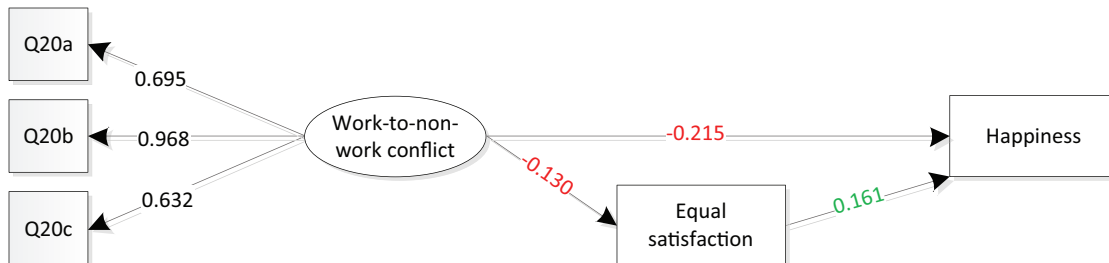
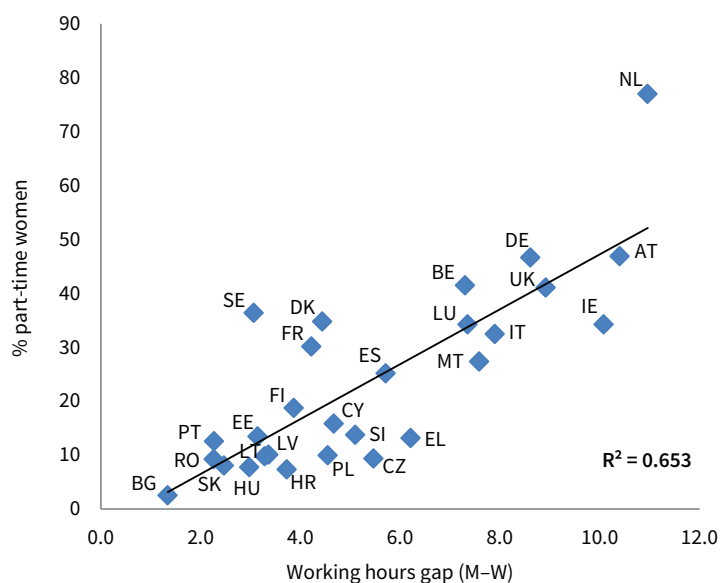


Figure A3: Paid working hours gender gap and share of part-time work among women by country, 2015



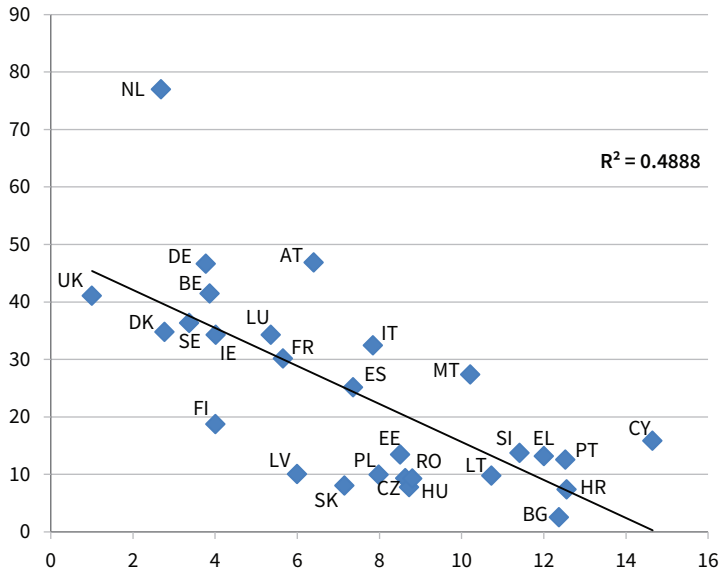
**Note:** Working hours gap is calculated as the difference between the average weekly hours worked in main and other job(s) (if applicable) reported by men and women, on the basis of the EWCS (2015); the source for part-time employment as a percentage of the total employment for women (from 15 to 64 years) is Eurostat, EU-LFS, 2015 [lfsa\_eppga].

Table A2: Average time spent in unpaid work activities by sex (hours)

Activity	Women		Men	
	Mean	Confidence interval 95%	Mean	Confidence interval 95%
Voluntary or charitable activity	2.0 (N=2082)	1.8268–2.0913	2.2 (N=2101)	2.0324–2.3360
Political/trade union activity	2.0 (N=364)	1.6559–2.2737	2.8 (N=874)	2.4032–3.1581
Caring for and/or educating your children or grandchildren	17.0 (N=8399)	16.6965–17.3694	10.6 (N=7653)	10.3536–10.8978
Cooking and housework	12.9 (N=15428)	12.7987–13.0762	5.5 (N=12257)	5.3765–5.5761
Caring for elderly/disabled relatives	5.7 (N=2843)	5.3439–6.1154	4.8 (N=2276)	4.4503–5.1363
Taking a training or education course	6.6 (N=1482)	5.9028–7.2696	5.1 (N=1386)	4.6044–5.6658
Unpaid working hours, total	21.9 (N=18690)	21.5891–22.1772	9.3 (N=18690)	9.1015–9.4614

Source: EWCS 2015

Figure A4: Working hours gender gap (paid, unpaid and commuting time ) and share of part-time work among women, 2015



**Note:** Working hours gap is calculated as the difference between the average weekly hours worked in main and other job(s) (if applicable), unpaid work and commuting time, reported by women and men, on the basis of the EWCS (2015); the source for part-time employment as a percentage of the total employment for women (from 15 to 64 years) is Eurostat's EU-LFS (2015) [lfsa\_eppga]



How to combine work with life is a fundamental issue for many people, an issue that policymakers, social partners, businesses and individuals are seeking to resolve. Simultaneously, new challenges and solutions are transforming the interface between work and life: an ageing population, technological change, higher employment rates and fewer weekly working hours. This report aims to examine the reciprocal relationship between work and life for people in the EU, the circumstances in which they struggle to reconcile the two domains, and what is most important for them in terms of their work–life balance. The report draws on a range of data sources, in particular the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) and the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS).

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