



Working conditions in the European Union: The gender perspective

Executive summary

Introduction

The fourth *European Working Conditions Survey* (EWCS) conducted in 2005 by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) addresses topics that figure high on the European Union's employment policy agenda. The overall aim of the EWCS is to provide an overview of the state of working conditions throughout Europe, and an indication of the extent and type of changes affecting the workforce and the quality of work. Following the 2005 survey, Eurofound carried out further in-depth analysis of its findings on key themes relating to working conditions in the EU. The similarities and differences in men's and women's working environments was one of the themes explored.

The research looked at many specific aspects of job quality – including working hours, job satisfaction, work–life compatibility and work-related health outcomes – in order to gauge the experiences of women and men in an ever-changing workplace. It analysed the gendered division of labour from the perspectives of both working life and home and provided insights into the working conditions of men and women in the 27 EU Member States. This leaflet summarises the main challenges posed by the gender dimension at work and presents a snapshot of the main results of the research.

Policy context

One of the commitments of the European Employment Strategy is to raise the female employment rate to 60% and to promote gender equality through gender mainstreaming of all policy objectives. The approach based on gender mainstreaming in EU policies is also affirmed in the Commission's *Roadmap for equality between men and women 2006–2010*. In this context, key priority areas for EU action are to reduce the gender pay gap, promote entrepreneurship among women and equal

participation in decision-making, enhance work–life balance for both men and women, and eradicate all forms of gender-based violence and stereotypes.

Men and women continue to be segregated by occupation, working time, seniority, industrial sector, employer and some forms of contractual status. Women are more often than men engaged in lower-paid jobs, which in turn gives an economic rationale for women to be responsible for unpaid household work, and which places women at a greater risk of poverty compared to men. In order to identify gender differences in working conditions, it is essential to take into account the highly segregated pattern of men's and women's employment. Moreover, a gender impact assessment of policies should be carried out to ensure that the measures do not contribute to gender inequality but instead foster equality between men and women.

Key findings

Women work shorter hours in employment than men. In the EU27, 29% of employed women work part time (30 or less hours per week) compared with only 7% of employed men. Men tend to work long working hours – including 20% who work more than 48 hours per week, almost twice the rate for women (12%). While part-time employment is not common among women in eastern Europe, more than one in three employed women in western Europe works part time.

As women carry out the bulk of housework and care work for children and adult dependents, they have the longest total working week, particularly if they are employed full time. The primary cause is the unequal gender division of unpaid domestic work. Although part-time employment provides some respite for women, they still have longer composite working hours than men employed full time. Hence, while part-

time employment is often advocated as a work–family reconciliation measure, women who have this working-time arrangement generally have a longer composite working week than men.

There is considerable evidence of a polarisation in the working hours of men and women in the new Member States, where men are more likely to work long hours and part-time work is increasingly associated with women's employment.

Employment is highly gender-segregated: women are over-represented in some types of jobs and under-represented in others relative to the overall proportion of jobs they hold. Women's occupations typically involve caring, nurturing and providing services for people. Men tend to dominate at the two extremes of the occupational ladder: in senior management and manual jobs.

Overall, women earn less than men. Men employed full time are most likely to have earnings in the medium-to-high or highest segment of the earnings distribution, with 70% having a high income. Women employed full time are much less likely to have earnings in the highest income bracket, with just 47% having a high income. Women employed part time are even more likely to be lower paid than men employed part time (78% of women and 61% of men).

Differences in working conditions (working environment, nature and organisation of tasks and exposure to physical risks) between men and women stem from the gendered division of labour and from the fact that women work part time more often than men. For example, part-time workers do not get as much assistance and social support as full-time workers and are less likely to be involved in teamwork. Women in blue-collar occupations are significantly more likely to be exposed to monotonous tasks compared to others. Also, while blue-collar workers in general are the least likely to have training opportunities, women in this category are most affected: nine out of 10 women in blue-collar occupations reported that they received no training in the previous year.

Just over one in five men employed full time (23%) have some supervisory responsibilities, compared with just 15% of women employed full time. From the other vantage point, this means that three-quarters of the workforce are managed by men. It is more common for women to be managed by other women. Female managers and supervisors are more prevalent at the lower ranks of organisational hierarchies.

The rate of long hours worked by women and men is shaped by the requirements and norms of their occupations. A factor that helps to preserve the male domination of managerial positions is that such jobs typically involve long hours, which are often unsocial.

Furthermore, in the managerial and professional positions occupied by women, women have less autonomy than men at this occupational level to draw upon in order to mitigate the demands of long and unsocial working hours.

Overall, there are no gender differences in workplace violence or threats of violence or discrimination linked to age, nationality, ethnic background, religion, disability or sexual orientation. Women are, however, more likely to experience bullying or harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual discrimination. The risks of violence are particularly high for women in white-collar professional and managerial positions and for men in white-collar clerical positions. Similarly, the risks of sexual discrimination and unwanted sexual attention for women are higher in white-collar occupations, particularly in management.

Policy recommendations

- The gender policy focus should be widened to find ways of promoting gender equality in the unpaid domestic workload, still largely undertaken by women.
- Efforts should be made to curb long full-time working hours in order to promote a more equitable pattern of paid and unpaid working time.
- Fathers should be encouraged to make more use of parental leave and other measures to adapt their working hours.
- Specific reconciliation measures are needed to address the particular demands of care of elderly dependents, a sizeable burden for older women workers, such as new forms of leave and working time arrangements.
- In order to tackle the segregated nature of women's employment, efforts should be made to enhance the quality of part-time work, to improve the pay and status of female-dominated jobs, and to reduce the under-representation of women at senior grades and managerial levels.
- The gender impact of rapid changes in the new Member States in particular needs to be monitored carefully in order to avoid the risk of wider gender inequality.

Further information

The report on *Working conditions in the European Union: The gender perspective* is available at <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef07108.htm>

The fourth *European Working Conditions Survey* report and secondary analysis of survey data are available on the *European Working Conditions Observatory* website: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/surveys/>

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