European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Working in Europe: Gender differences

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Data from recent Eurostat publications show that, despite some convergence in employment patterns between women and men, considerable gender differences remain in relation to work. Women have caught up in educational qualifications and increased their employment rate, but family responsibilities are still the main reason for women's above average inactivity rate. Women also continue to be more concentrated in certain economic sectors. Moreover, a gender-based entrepreneurial gap remains and women remain underrepresented in labour market policy interventions.

Equality between women and men has been one of the fundamental principles of the European Union from its very beginning. Despite the fact that gender equality is embedded in the Treaty establishing the European Union, many EU policies and European law, as well as having been enforced by the **European Court of Justice** for several decades, gender inequalities are still widespread within EU Member States. This is the main reason why efforts to reduce gender inequalities have intensified over the past few years. Recent initiatives in this regard include the following:

- since 2004, the European Commission publishes an annual report on developments in relation to gender equality;
- in 2006, the Commission adopted the Roadmap for equality between women and men (212Kb PDF) for the period 2006–2010;
- the EU Member States approved a European pact for gender equality (253Kb PDF) at the European Council meeting on 23–24 March 2006;
- 2007 was designated as the European year of equal opportunities for all with gender being addressed as one of several underlying causes of discrimination;
- the European Institute for Gender Equality has been established by a Council regulation on 20 December 2006 and is supposed to become operational in 2008.

In the context of the European year of equal opportunities for all, Eurostat has focused in several of its publications on work-related differences between women and men in 2007. This article looks at eight *Statistics in focus* publications in 2007 which had a clear 'work and gender' focus (see references list at the end). The publication series Statistics in focus is known for its up-to-date, high-quality analysis of EU statistics, concentrating on specific topics in each issue. Overall, Eurostat data confirms work-related gender inequalities within and across EU Member States. The following sections will summarise the main findings of these reports.

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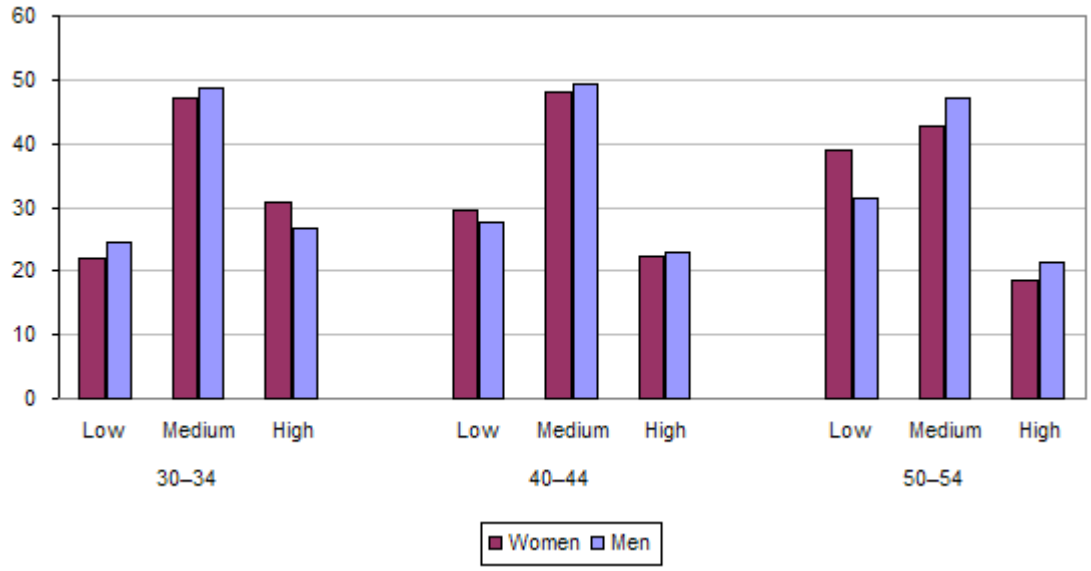
Narrowing of the educational gap

The report on The narrowing education gap between women and men (160Kb PDF) shows how young women have not only caught up with men in their age group in terms of formal educational qualifications, but that they have even surpassed them. Figure 1 outlines three levels of educational attainment which are based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED): 'low' refers to a basic education, 'medium' includes upper secondary education and 'high' is reserved for third-level or tertiary education.

Figure 1: Level of educational attainment, by sex and age group, EU25, 2005 (%)



Level of educational attainment, by sex and age group, EU25, 2005 (%)

Source: Eurostat, 2007, p. 1

In 2005, in the EU25, 30.9% of women in the 30–34 age group attained a high level of education, compared with only 26.8% of men in the same age group. Only four EU countries show the opposite pattern – of having a smaller proportion of highly qualified women than men in this age group: Germany (24.1% compared with 27.9%), the Netherlands (34.7% compared with 35.1%), Austria (20.4% compared with 20.7%) and the Czech Republic (13.0% compared with 13.1%).

In 24 out of the 25 Member States, as well as in the two new Member States Bulgaria and Romania that joined the EU in January 2007, the general trend towards the increased participation of women in third-level education continues and is confirmed. When comparing the level of educational attainment between the 30–34, 40–44 and 50–54 age groups, a continuous increase in the proportion of women with third-level educational qualifications emerges with decreasing age among women. In general, the younger the women, the higher their level of formal educational qualification. While only 18.5% of women in the 50–54 age group in the EU25 attain a high educational level, this proportion rises to 22.4% in the 40–44 age group and, as already mentioned, reaches 30.9% in the youngest age cohort.

Overall, these findings reveal a narrowing of the education gap between women and men and indicate a foreseeable new gender disparity in education: according to data, a significant underrepresentation of men will arise in the group of higher-educated people in the future.

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Increasing labour market participation of women

Eurostat data also confirm the continuing trend towards increased female employment rates. The report entitled People outside the labour force: the downward trend continues (93Kb PDF) reveals that the share of inactive women of the working age population (15–64 years) has declined from 40.5% to 36.7% between 1999 and 2006. Nevertheless, these rates are still much higher than the almost stable level of inactive men which stood at 22% in 2006 (Figure 2).

*Figure 2: Inactivity rates, by sex, EU25, 1999–2006 (%)**

Inactivity rates, by sex, EU25, 1999–2006 (%)

Notes: * Persons aged 15–64 years living in private households.
Source: Eurostat, 2007a, p. 1; see also Eurostat, Population and social condition data

According to the Labour Force Survey (LFS), there are three main reasons for the difference in levels of economic inactivity between women and men:

- the participation of women aged 15–24 years in education, especially in tertiary education, is higher than that of their male counterparts;
- women retire at a younger age than men do. In 2005, the average age of retirement for women in the EU25 was 59.4 years, while that for men was 60.7 years (see also Eurostat, The transition of women and men from work to retirement (120Kb PDF), 2007b);
- the most important reason in this respect relates to family responsibilities of women: in 2006, 3% of women in the 15–24 age group, 10.1% in the 25–54 age group and 9.7% in the 55–64 age group indicated that family responsibilities were the main reason for them being economically inactive. Statistically, marked differences exist in the activity level of mothers in relation to the number and age of their children: the more children a woman has and the younger the children are, the more likely it is that a woman is not economically active. A factor contributing to this situation may be the fact that flexible working time arrangements which might improve the chances of combining parenthood with work are still not as widespread in Europe as one might think. The report on The flexibility of working time arrangements for women and men (97Kb PDF) shows that, in 2004, in the 20 Member States for which data were available, only a quarter of the employees aged 25–49 years (the age

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group most likely to have to reconcile work with family responsibilities) enjoy some flexibility in their working time schedules (Eurostat, 2007c). The report found that 'employees with children seem to be less likely to work in jobs with flexible working arrangements than those without children' (*idem*, p.4) – a fact for which the report does not provide a plausible explanation.

Moreover, a correlation emerges between the level of educational qualification and labour market participation: the higher the educational attainment, the higher the employment rate. This finding holds true for both sexes; the correlation, however, is much more significant for women than for men (Table 1). As the educational qualification level of women is increasing, female employments rates are also expected to rise in the near future.

Table 1: Employment rates of women and men, by level of educational attainment, EU25, 2005 (%)

Educational attainment	Employment rate	
	Women	Men
Low	43.8	69.7
Medium	65.6	79.7
High	80.4	87.4

Source: Eurostat, 2007, pp. 3–4

Female employment and labour market policies

Despite the fact that labour market policies in the EU Member States generally aim to achieve gender equality, and despite the positive development of the overall female employment in the EU, gender-based differences still persist in the labour market and even in labour market policy interventions.

Women and fixed-term employment contracts

One of the labour market policies to create a more flexible labour market was the introduction of fixed-term employment contracts. In reality, such fixed-term contract work has a certain but not dramatic gender bias as the Eurostat publication on Men and women employed on fixed-term contracts involuntarily (110Kb PDF) shows:

- in 2005, 14.9% of all female workers were employed in jobs with fixed-term employment contracts, compared with 13.9% of all male workers;
- some 50.3% of women and 48.2% of men with fixed-term contracts are employed on such employment contracts involuntarily; almost half of those have contracts of a duration of less than six months;
- a considerable age effect emerges in relation to fixed-term employment contracts, which affects women and men similarly: in 2005, almost a third of both male and female workers aged under 30 years held fixed-term employment contracts in the EU25, about 40% of them involuntarily;
- more women than men work involuntarily on fixed-term contracts across all occupational groups, with the exception of elementary occupations. Figure 3 highlights the gender distribution of workers who are involuntarily employed on fixed-term contracts in each

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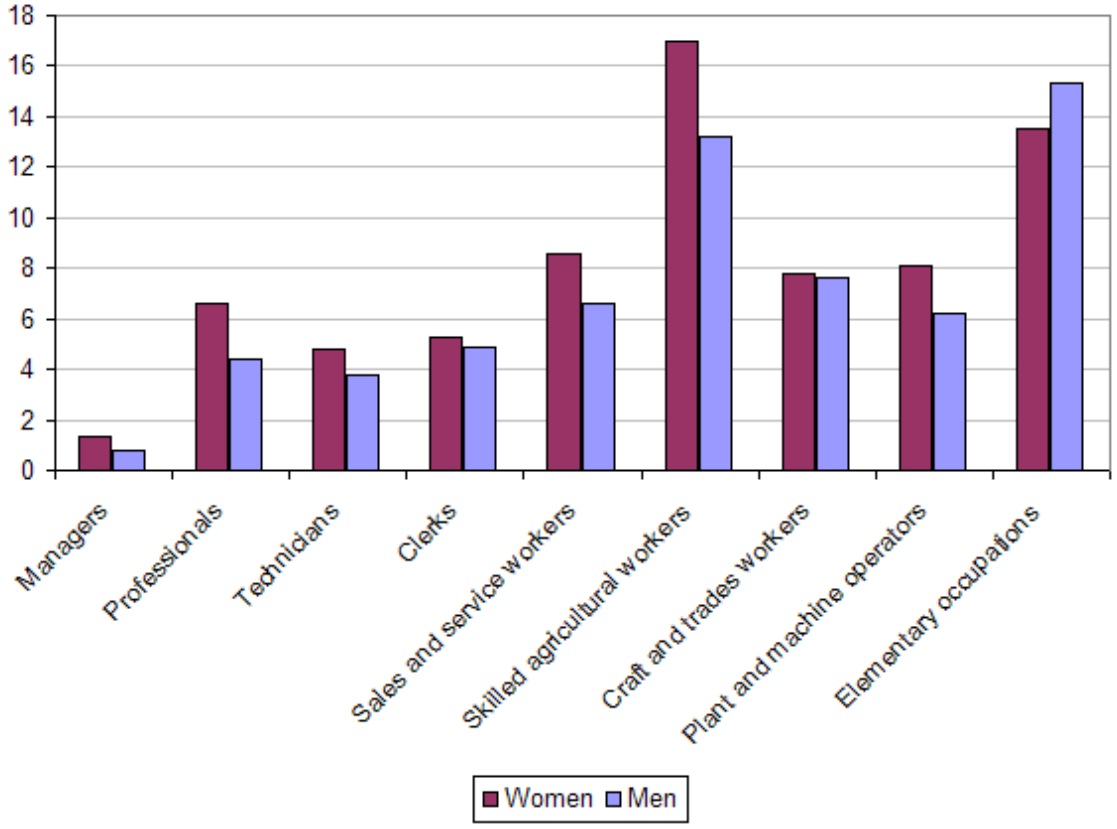
occupational category; for instance, involuntary fixed-term work is widespread among skilled agricultural workers, regardless of the fact that only a very small proportion of the EU's total workforce work as skilled agricultural workers.

*Figure 3: Women and men employed involuntarily under fixed-term contracts, by occupation, EU25, 2005 (%)**



Women and men employed involuntarily in fixed-term jobs, by occupation, EU25, 2005 (% of female and male workers in each occupation)

Notes: * Proportion of female and male workers in each occupational category.
Source: Eurostat, 2007d, p. 5

Furthermore, it is worthwhile looking at the gender distribution of workers involuntarily employed on fixed-term contracts across the different occupational categories. This distribution also reflects the gendered division of work and the concentration of men and women in certain occupations (Figure 4). Therefore, it is not surprising that most women working involuntarily on fixed-term contracts can be found among sales and service workers and in elementary occupations, while most men in involuntary fixed-term jobs work as craft and trades workers and in elementary occupations. Interestingly, with the exception of the armed forces, some occupations show a disproportionally high level of involuntary fixed-term contract work for both sexes – such as elementary occupations or sales and service work – and some show a disproportionally low level of this contract type for both men and women – such as managerial or technical occupations.

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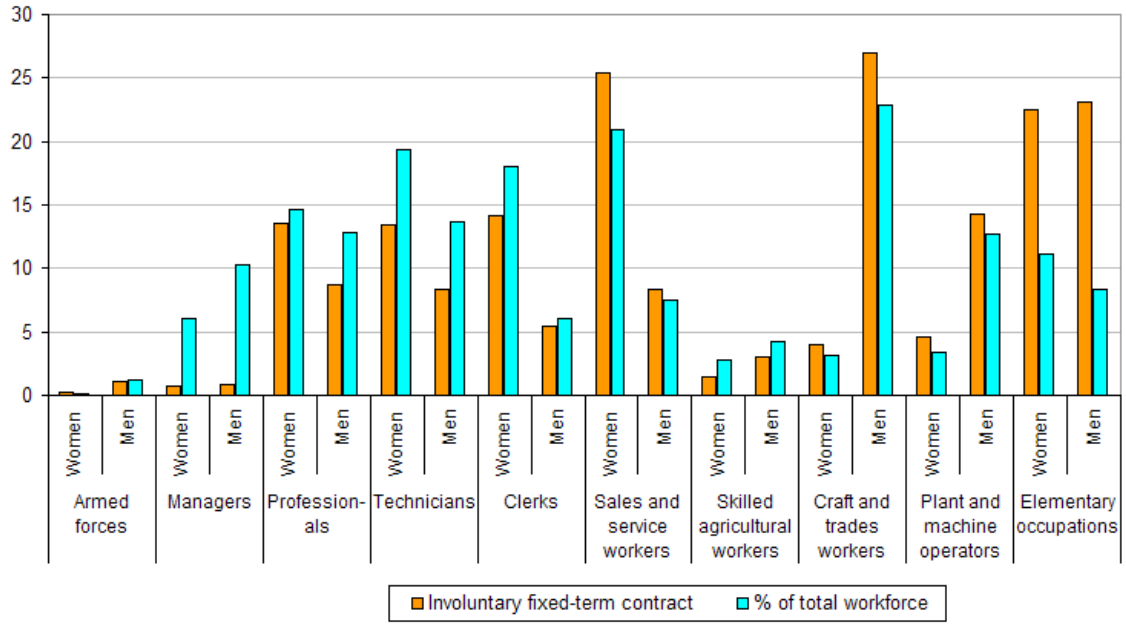
Figure 4: Employment levels of women and men as a proportion of total workforce, by occupation and involuntarily fixed-term contract, EU25, 2005 (%)



Levels of women's and men's employment as a proportion of total workforce, by occupation and involuntarily fixed-term contract, EU25, 2005 (%)

Source: Eurostat, 2007d, p. 6; see also Eurostat, Population and social condition data

Men and women participating in labour market policies

In general, labour market policies are designed to help people improve their employability, so that they can successfully integrate – or be reintegrated – into the active part of the labour market. Thus, two groups of people are the primary target of such policy measures: unemployed persons and those who have not yet been economically active but are willing to work; for example, this is often the case among mothers who wish to return to work after a family break.

According to the report entitled Men and women participating in labour market policies – 2004 (126Kb PDF), 'women appear to be underrepresented in LMP [labour market policy] interventions, as compared with their share of those registered as unemployed and of the wider population of all those wanting to work' (Eurostat, 2007e, p. 1). This is one of the report's findings, despite some difficulties in comparing data across the EU, due to different definitions and regulations in the EU Member States.

Table 2 highlights the gender distribution of the population wanting to work and that of participants in labour market policy interventions; the latter include activation measures such as training, job rotation and job sharing, employment incentives, as well as the integration of people with disabilities and direct job creation and start-up incentives, and passive support measures such as income support for unemployed jobseekers and, to a lesser extent, early retirement benefits. In terms of the gender distribution, women account for the majority of the total population wanting to work, which is defined to be the sum of registered unemployed persons and the so-called 'labour reserve'. The labour reserve comprises all persons who were – for different

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reasons – inactive at the time and did not qualify to be counted as 'registered unemployed' but who wished to work.

Table 2: Men and women wanting to work and their participation in labour market policy interventions, EU25, 2004 and 2006 (% of total population)

	Women	Men
Registered unemployed persons	48.5	51.5
Labour reserve	62.5	37.5
Total population wanting to work	54.6	45.4
Actively looking for work in the last four weeks*	58.5	41.5
'Active' labour market policy measures	45.2	54.8
'Passive' labour market policy supports	44.2	55.8

*Notes: * Data from European Union Labour Force Survey (EU LFS) 2006.*

Sources: Eurostat, 2007e and Eurostat, 2007a

Among those who actively looked for work in the four weeks preceding the EU Labour Force Survey (EU LFS) in 2006, women account for 58.5%. Despite these facts, female participants remain underrepresented in labour market policy interventions: this is the case with labour market activation measures, which aim to help people who are out of work to prepare for or enter employment, and with passive support measures, which primarily provide income support for unemployed jobseekers.

When looking at the number of persons activated through labour market policy interventions, per 100 persons wanting to work, men have a nine percentage point higher probability of getting the chance to participate in a labour market activation measure than women belonging to the same primary target group of such measures.

Differences in economic activities of men and women

Gender distribution in certain areas of economic activity

Study fields and sectors of activity

Young women still cannot transform their advantages in terms of their formal educational qualifications into equal advantages in the labour market – despite the fact that the present change from industrial societies to knowledge-based societies creates the need for a maximum possible utilisation of high qualifications. LFS data indicates that this is related to women's choices in the course of their careers which are disadvantageous.

Firstly, women continue to study different subjects than men (Table 3). Women are more concentrated in the so-called 'soft' subjects while a greater proportion of men complete science and engineering programmes, thus placing themselves in different segments of the labour market. These differences in the typical gender-based selection of study fields are reinforced in the labour

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market: a greater proportion of women than men work in the generally non-market services sectors of education and health, whereas men prefer jobs in sectors such as industry, business and financial services.

Table 3: Women and men with high educational level, by study field and age, EU25, 2005 (%)

	Women		Men	
Field of study/Age group	**25–39**	**40–64**	**25–39**	**40–64**
Arts, humanities, languages	28.0	36.4	12.7	16.2
Social sciences, business, law	36.3	23.7	30.5	24.0
Mathematics, science, engineering	13.6	12.6	43.8	43.6
Health and welfare	17.1	23.3	6.0	9.1
Services, agriculture, other	5.1	3.9	7.9	7.1

Source: Eurostat, 2007, p. 6

Nevertheless, such gender differences have declined when comparing the older and younger generations of highly qualified women: relatively more of these women in the 25–39 age group work in the formerly male-dominated sectors such as industry, agriculture, business and financial services than women with high educational attainment in the 40–64 age group (Table 4).

Table 4: Employed men and women with high educational level, by sector and age, EU25, 2005 (%)

	Women		Men	
Sector of activity/Age group	**25–39**	**40–64**	**25–39**	**40–64**
Industry and agriculture	11.3	7.3	28.2	26.1
Business and financial services	19.6	11.4	26.4	20.7
Public administration	9.0	10.0	9.1	11.2
Education and health	39.7	56.7	15.0	24.2
Other services	20.6	14.6	21.2	17.8

Source: Eurostat, 2007, p. 8

Sectors of activity and occupations

In a more detailed analysis, the Eurostat publication on The concentration of men and women in sectors of activity (127Kb PDF) reveals that more than 60% of all women active in the labour market in the EU25 in 2005 are concentrated in only six out of the 62 economic sectors defined at the NACE (*Nomenclature statistique des activités économiques dans la Communauté européenne*) 2-digit level: healthcare and social services (17.2%), retail trade (12.5%), education (11.4%), public administration (7.3%), business activities (7.3%), and hotels and restaurants (5.1%). On the other hand, men are less concentrated in certain economic sectors with 'only' 42% of men working in the top six sectors of economic activity which are construction, public administration, retail trade, business activities, agriculture and land transport. Interestingly,

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employment levels in the top six economic sectors rose slightly for both sexes in recent years: women's employment level increased from 58.6% in 2000 to 60.8% in 2005 while that for men increased from 41.2% to 42% over the same period.

The analysis of the occupational pattern of women's and men's employment shows a similar picture of women concentrating to a higher degree in certain jobs than men do. In 2005, 35.7% of women worked in the following six of the 130 occupational 3-digit categories defined by the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO): shop salesperson and demonstrators (8%), domestic and related helpers, cleaners and launderers (7.6%), personal care and related workers (6.6%), other office clerks (5.2%), administrative associate professionals (4.4%), and housekeeping and restaurant services workers (3.9%). The six occupational categories in which men were most employed in the EU25 were not only markedly different to those of women but also accounted for 25.4% of all men in employment: motor vehicle drivers (5.2%), building frame and related trade workers (4.7%), managers of small enterprises (4.4%), building finishers and related trade workers (4.0%), physical and engineering science technicians (3.6%), and machinery mechanics and fitters (3.5%). The distribution of men and women across these occupational categories obviously reflect gender-specific processes of self-selection or selection in the labour market.

Differences in entrepreneurial activities

The Eurostat paper on The entrepreneurial gap between men and women (120Kb PDF) highlights that there is a considerable difference between men and women acting as entrepreneurs in the EU25, with virtually only little signs of this gap narrowing. The paper distinguishes between entrepreneurial tasks with which a salaried employee or a self-employed person without employees may deal and those with which 'real' entrepreneurs – a self-employed person with employees – may have to deal. It should be noted that a considerable number of self-employed persons without employees actually carry out similar tasks as salaried employees. Overall, the paper found that 'many more men than women are managing businesses, irrespective of whether they own them or not' (Eurostat, 2007g, p. 1). The analysis further reveals that:

- 8.6% of the total number of women working in industry and services (thus excluding agriculture with its traditionally large proportion of self-employed people) were self-employed, compared with more than 16% of men;
- only 2.5% of women in industry and services were self-employed with employees, compared with 6.4% of men;
- the level of self-employed women in industry and services increases to 3.5%, if, in addition to agriculture, those sectors are excluded in which a high proportion of women work and which usually are public sector activities (thus reducing the chance to become self-employed), such as public administration, education, and health and social work. This proportion is still only half of that of self-employed men in theses sectors (7%);
- as for all women in employment, the sectoral concentration of self-employed people with employees is higher for women than for men, although the difference is not significant. In 2005, 76.5% of all 'real' female entrepreneurs had their businesses in only four sectors of the economy – distributive trades, especially retail, financial and business services, hotels and restaurants, and community and personal services – while 75.4% of male entrepreneurs can be found in the four top economic sectors – construction, industry, distributive trades, and financial and business services. What seems to be more significant is the fact that female and male entrepreneurs are to a considerable extent distributed in typical gender patterns across these sectors: the proportion of self-employed women with employees is larger in community

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and personal services (14.2% of women compared with 3.4% of men), distributive trades (32.7% compared with 23.5%), and hotels and restaurants (14% compared with 9.2%). Male entrepreneurs are to a higher proportion active in agriculture, industry, construction, transport and communications, and financial and business services;

- women are also underrepresented among salaried entrepreneurs. The analysis of the gender distribution among company directors or senior executives and managers of small enterprises shows that 3.2% of women in employment can be attributed to these occupational categories, compared with 5.3% of men.

Commentary

The situation of working women in Europe has genuinely improved in many areas. Nonetheless, major challenges remain. Some of the labour market deficiencies in relation to gender equality, such as the underrepresentation of women in labour market policy measures, may possibly be remedied by political intervention only. Other deficits will require the support of the social partners as, for example, the improvement of flexible working time arrangements to allow for a better **work-life balance**. Other gender-specific aspects of work, such as the concentration of women and men in certain occupations and economic sectors, are the combined result of selective pull-factors in the labour market, as well as of a certain self-selection of women and men into specific fields of the economy. This phenomenon can be explained as an effect of a gender-specific socialisation process. To successfully counteract these gender-specific modes of action is far more difficult as they are – although to a different extent – deeply rooted in the structures of modern societies, as well as in everyday routines and habits of their members. However, the ongoing demographic change, which results in a shrinking workforce across Europe, combined with the increased level of education among women will change gender patterns in European societies faster than one might think today. Women's higher educational attainment will make them an even more needed human resource in Europe's knowledge-based societies.

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Annex: Data sources

The main data source used in the Eurostat publications cited in this report is the European Union Labour Force Survey (EU LFS).

The EU LFS is a quarterly large sample survey covering the population in private households in the EU Member States, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries (except Lichtenstein) and the candidate countries. It provides quarterly results on labour participation of people aged 15 years and over, as well as on persons outside the labour force. People enrolled in military or community services are not included.

The EU LFS micro data collection began in 1983. From 1998, the EU LFS has progressively become a continuous quarterly survey. This transition from a yearly to a quarterly survey was completed in 2005. The national statistical institutes are responsible for selecting the sample, preparing the questionnaires, conducting the direct interviews among households, and forwarding the results to Eurostat in accordance with the common coding scheme. The sampling rates vary between 0.2% and 3.3% across the countries. To ensure that comparable data are produced by the national statistical institutes the following measures are taken:

- same concepts and definitions are used;
- the guidelines of the International Labour Organization (ILO) are followed;
- common classifications are used – NACE (Rev. 1, from 2005 Rev. 1.1), ISCO 88(COM), ISCED 1997 and NUTS;
- the same set of characteristics in each countryare recorded (for more information, see The European Labour Force Survey. Methods and definitions – 2001 (778Kb PDF)).

The data for the paper on The flexibility of working time arrangements for women and men (97Kb PDF) (Eurostat, 2007c) are from the ad hoc module on work organisation and working time arrangements which was included in the EU LFS carried out in 2004 (for further information, see the Final report of the task force for evaluating the 2004 LFS ad hoc module on work organisation and working time arrangements (1.2Mb PDF)). Ad hoc modules have been added to the EU LFS every year since 1999.

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Table A1: Ad hoc modules to the EU LFS, 1999–2009

Year	Topic	Commission regulation (EC)
2009	Entry of young people into the labour market	In preparation
2008	Labour market situation of migrants and their immediate descendants	No. 102/2007
2007	Accidents at work and work-related health problems	No. 341/2006
2006	Transition from work to retirement	No. 388/2005
2005	Reconciliation between work and family life	No. 29/2004
2004	Work organisation and working time arrangements	No. 247/2003
2003	Lifelong learning	No. 1313/2002
2002	Employment of disabled people	No. 1566/2001
2001	Length and patterns of working time	No. 1578/2000
2000	Transition from school to working life	No. 1925/1999
1999	Accidents at work and occupational diseases	No. 1571/98

Source: Eurostat, EU LFS ad-hoc modules, 2007

Data for Men and women participating in labour market policies – 2004 (126Kb PDF) are from the Eurostat labour market policy database. The new European database on labour market policies was initiated in 1996 by a small task force, comprising seven Member States and two Commission directorates. The aim was to develop a database that would provide the Commission with comparable data on expenditure on and participation in labour market policy interventions, which each Member State implemented to combat unemployment. The data collection on labour market policy interventions was launched jointly with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for the first time in 2005.

The statistical unit in this data collection is the labour market intervention, as defined in the labour market policy methodology. For each intervention, the labour market policy database collects quantitative data on expenditure and participants together with qualitative data, which apply to and describe the intervention. The data sources used are administrative sources on labour market policy expenditure and participants, which are usually provided by the Ministry of Labour, public employment services agencies and in a few cases from a national statistical office of a Member State (for more information, see Labour Market Policy. Eurostat metadata in SDDS format: Summary methodology and Labour market policy database – methodology. revision of June 2006 (2.5Mb PDF)).

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