Main trends:

■ Average weekly working hours have been consistently falling over the last 15 years. This is due to higher percentages of part-time work but also because of a reduction in the proportion of people working very long hours.

■ The proportion of workers with atypical work schedules (night, evening and weekend work) remains very low, with no significant change over the last 15 years.

■ Most workers still have fixed work schedules, although the proportion of workers with flexible schedules is slowly increasing.

■ For most workers, the pace of work depends directly on demands from customers, reflecting the predominance of the service sector.

■ EU workers report increasing levels of work intensity since 1991.

■ Autonomy at work in the EU is relatively high, but it seems to be on the decline.

■ The percentage of people regularly using computers at work has increased significantly, from 31% to 47% in 15 years. However, a substantial proportion of the workforce never uses computers at work (44% overall).

■ Around one in four workers considers their health and safety to be at risk because of their work, a proportion that has been consistently declining over the last 15 years. In the 10 new Member States (NMS) which joined the EU in 2004, the reported levels of risks at work are higher. 40% of all workers in the NMS consider their health and safety to be at risk because of their work.

■ Women are slowly moving into managerial roles: the proportion of workers with female bosses has been steadily growing over the last 10 years.
The changing European workforce: 1991-2005

To understand the changes in working conditions in Europe over the last 15 years or so, one needs to look at the change in the composition of the workforce. In absolute numbers, the EU workforce (employed persons) has increased from 150 million to almost 200 million workers, mainly because of the impact of the two EU enlargements in this period, but also because of increasing employment rates (particularly for women). Figures 1 and 2 show the changes in the composition of the workforce in terms of gender and age, and the patterns are quite clear: the EU working population is ageing (the age distribution of EU workers in 2005 peaked at 40 years of age compared to 25 years of age 15 years ago), and women represent a growing proportion of workers (40% in 1991, 44% in 2005).

In terms of economic sectors, the main changes in the last 15 years have been a substantial reduction in the proportion of the workforce in manufacturing and an important increase in the business, social and community services. These changes reflect the trend in most advanced economies. The decrease in the proportion of manufacturing workers is the result of technological change and productivity enhancements, and not so much due to a real decrease in the economic importance of that sector. The last EU enlargement has slightly increased the total proportion of workers in agriculture and manufacturing, and has decreased the proportion of workers in community and social services.

Finally, the other big change in the composition of the EU workforce in the last 15 years is the increase in so-called ‘atypical’ employment, particularly part-time and temporary employment. Overall in Europe, the proportion of part-time work has increased from 13% to 18% in the last 15 years (in the EU15, the proportion of part time has risen to more than 20%). The increase in temporary employment was also quite steep from 1991 to 2000, but this seems to have slowed in the last five years. The proportion of people with more than one job has slightly increased, but it is still very low. As for the proportion of self-employed, it decreased until 2000 and increased afterwards, following the usual counter-cyclical pattern.

Data source: EU Labour Force Survey (LFS).

Working time

There has been a clear trend towards shorter weekly working hours in the European Union, largely due to the big increase of part-time work, but also because of a general reduction in the number of workers working very long hours (the proportion of employed persons working more than 48 hours has decreased from 19% to 14% in this period). The trend towards the reduction of weekly working hours has somewhat slowed in the last five years, but this is mainly because of the impact of last enlargement, with working hours being substantially higher in new Member States. In the EU15, the trend towards shorter working hours has kept pace over the last five years (see Figure 4).

Although the same patterns can be observed for both sexes (a reduction in working hours until 2000, and a certain reversal in the trend by 2005 because of the impact of longer working hours in the 10 new Member States), the differences in working hours of men and women in Europe remain significant. Whereas almost 36% of EU women work less than 35
hours a week according to the most recent figures (and 57% less than 38 hours), only 10% of men work less than 35 hours a week (30% less than 38 hours). This is due to the much higher proportion of female part-time workers in the European Union. On the other hand, men are much more likely to work very long hours (more than 48 hours per week). And although in both sexes there has been a reduction in average hours for the period from 1991 to 2000, the gap has not reduced.

The proportion of workers with atypical schedules has remained stable over the last 10 years (there is no data for 1990). Around 80% of the workforce never works at night, more than 40% never works on Saturdays and more than 70% never works on Sundays. If anything, there has been a small decrease in the proportion of people working atypical schedules, notably in the case of Saturday work.

**Figure 4** Evolution of weekly working hours

![Bar chart showing the evolution of weekly working hours by gender and EU region from 1991 to 2005.](image)

**Figure 5** Evolution of weekly working hours, by gender

![Bar chart showing the evolution of weekly working hours by gender and EU region from 1991 to 2005.](image)

**Pace of work**

The determinants of the pace of work in the European Union reflect the predominance of the service sector. In almost 70% of cases (a figure which has remained stable over the last 10 years), the pace of work is directly determined by people's demands, whereas the movement of a machine (typical of mechanised industry) only determines the pace of work of around 20% of the working population, a percentage which is clearly decreasing. Work pace depending on colleagues, work and the use of performance targets seem to be increasing.

It is also interesting to note the differences between the EU15 and NMS: in the former, direct people's demands are more important determinants of the pace of work, whereas in the NMS the direct control of workers' pace by the boss is more prevalent.

**Figure 6** Factors determining pace of work

![Bar chart showing the factors determining pace of work by year and region.](image)
**Work intensity**

One of the most consistent findings of the EWCS is the relative intensification of the pace of work over the last 15 years. An increasing proportion of EU workers report working at a very high speed or to tight deadlines (see Figures 7 and 8). It is important to note the substantial reduction in the proportion of people reporting never working at very high speed (from 36% to 21%) and never working to tight deadlines (from 31% to 19%).

**Figure 7 Working at a very high speed**

**Figure 8 Working to tight deadlines**

---

**Flexibility of work schedules**

Flexibility of work schedules seem to be slowly increasing, although two thirds of employees still have fixed schedules. This percentage has decreased from 71% to 67% in the last 10 years. The proportion of self-employed workers with fixed schedules is obviously much lower, but is still a sizable proportion: around one third of the self-employed in Europe works with fixed start and finishing times.

**Figure 9 % of employees with fixed schedules**

**Figure 10 % of self-employed with fixed schedules**

---

**Autonomy at work**

In general, the levels of autonomy at work in the EU are relatively high, according to the EWCS. Around two thirds of employees are able to choose or change the order of tasks, speed and methods of work, a proportion that reaches almost 90% in the case of the self-employed. But these high levels of autonomy seem to be slowly reducing in the case of employees: there has been a reduction of 2% to 5% in the proportion of employees reporting them in the last 10 years. In the case of the self-employed, there has been no noticeable change in recent years according to results from the EWCS.

**Figure 11 Employees – Are you able to choose or change …?**

**Figure 12 Self-employed – Are you able to choose or change…?**
Use of information technology

One of the most important changes in the content of work over the last 15 years is the increasing importance of information technology in the workplace. The proportion of workers who use computers at least a quarter of the time in Europe has increased from 31% in 1991 to 47% in 2005. But it has to be noted that there is still a very significant proportion of EU workers who do not use computers at their work at all (44%). The difference between the EU15 and the NMS in this particular respect is remarkable: whereas only 42% of the EU15 workers never use computers at work, this percentage reaches almost 60% in the NMS.

Training

Overall, around 30% of the EU workforce has been involved in training provided by the employer in the last 10 years, according to the responses to the EWCS. This proportion seems to have reduced slightly from 2000 to 2005. In 2005, some new indicators of training were included in the survey that enrich the information previously available on this issue. It is interesting to note that around 6% of EU workers report having undergone training paid for by themselves.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the last 12 months, have you undergone …?</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EU15</td>
<td>EU15</td>
<td>EU25</td>
<td>(EU15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training paid for or provided by your employer, or by yourself if you are self-employed?</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of days per worker</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training paid for by yourself</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of days per worker</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-the-job training (co-workers, supervisors, etc.)</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other forms of on-site training</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
gender differences in the workplace

One of the main changes in the EU workforce in the last 15 years is the increasing proportion of female workers. But are they working in the same posts as male workers? The results of the survey show that women continue to move into certain categories of the occupational scale, especially into medium- or low-skilled occupations in the service sector (clerks, service and sales workers and elementary occupations). The proportion of women in managerial positions and in more traditional industrial occupations is much smaller.

It is important to note that the increase in the numbers of women in the workforce over the last 10 years has tended to reinforce these patterns: the occupations in which there is an increasing proportion of women are occupations in which women were already predominant. However, female representation has increased significantly in the categories of ‘professionals’ and ‘technicians and associate professionals’, indicating that women are slowly climbing up the professional ladder.

Another way to look at gender differences within the workplace is to study the position of women in

information about risks

From 1991 to 2000, there was a clear improvement in workers’ level of information about risks, but from 2000 to 2005 the trend seems to have reversed. However, a small modification in how the question was phrased in 2005 has to be taken into account when looking at the figures: up to 2000, the question referred to ‘the risks resulting from the use of materials, instruments or products which you handle in your job’, whereas in 2005 it referred to the more general idea of ‘risks related to performance of your job’. The objective of this change was to broaden the scope of the original question, which was biased towards a traditional industrial-based concept of risks at work. Part of the reduction in the apparent levels of information about risks from 2000 to 2005 is likely to be due to this broadening of the concept. But because the question posed in 2005 is more adapted to the realities of work in Europe in 2005, it is arguably a better reflection of the real levels of information about risks in European workplaces.

Health and safety

Slightly more than one in four EU workers considers their health and safety to be at risk because of their work. This proportion has been consistently declining over the last 15 years (from 31% in 1991 to 27% in 2005). For this indicator, the difference between the EU15 and the NMS is particularly striking: whereas 25% of EU15 workers consider their health and safety at risk because of work, the percentage jumps to 40% in the NMS.

But when looking at specific job hazards and risks, the actual exposure to risks seems to have remained relatively stable or even increased slightly, especially in the case of physical strain factors (tiring or painful positions and carrying or moving heavy loads). The difference between the EU15 and the NMS already mentioned is also apparent in the levels of exposure to risks, especially in risks associated with heavy industrial work (e.g. noise, vibrations, breathing in smoke or use of chemicals).
hierarchical roles. According to EWCS figures, the proportion of workers whose immediate boss is a woman has consistently increased over the last 10 years, from 21% to almost 25%. In the NMS, the proportion of female bosses is significantly higher than in the EU15.

**Figure 16** Proportion of women in each occupational category

![Bar chart showing the proportion of women in different occupational categories over time (1995 EU15, 2000 EU15, 2005 EU25) and in the NMS (2005).]

**Workplace discrimination**

Although the overall proportion of European workers declaring some form of discrimination at the workplace is very low, it is important to keep track of changes in this area because of its effects on workers and because of its implications in terms of social justice. In general, the picture provided by the EWCS for the last 10 years seems quite positive. In most indicators on discrimination at the workplace there has been a small reduction, in spite of the very low starting point. In particular, there is a noticeable reduction in the reported levels of sexual discrimination. However, the levels of discrimination linked to nationality and ethnic background have not diminished in the last 10 years – although they have not increased either, in spite of the increasing levels of immigration throughout those years in many Member States.

**Job satisfaction**

In general, European workers report high levels of satisfaction with their working conditions. These levels are similar to those of workers in most other advanced industrial economies. In 2005, more than 80% of EU workers declared being either ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with their working conditions. The two middle categories (‘satisfied’ and ‘not very satisfied’) have grown in the last 10 years, whereas the proportion of those that declare high levels of satisfaction has decreased by 5%.

It is also interesting to note that, although the general levels of satisfaction are high in both cases, workers in the NMS declare considerably lower levels of satisfaction with their working conditions, a result which seems consistent with some of the earlier findings discussed in this paper.

**Figure 17** Gender of immediate boss

![Bar chart showing the proportion of women and men as immediate bosses from 1995 to 2005 for EU15 and NMS.]

**Figure 18** Satisfaction with the working conditions in main paid job

![Bar chart showing the satisfaction levels among EU15 and EU25 workers.]

![Bar chart showing the satisfaction levels in the NMS.]

Very satisfied Satisfied Not very satisfied Not at all satisfied
Methodology

The European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) is carried out every five years by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, a tripartite European Agency based in Dublin. The questionnaire is developed by the European Foundation team in close cooperation with an expert questionnaire development group. This group comprises representatives of the European social partners, other EU bodies (EU Commission, Eurostat, European Agency for Safety and Health at Work), international organisations (OECD, ILO), national statistical institutes, as well as leading European experts in the field. The sample of the EWCS is representative of persons in employment (according to the Eurostat definition this comprises both employees and the self-employed) in the countries covered for the respective periods. In each country, the EWCS sample followed a multi-stage, stratified and clustered design with a random walk procedure for the selection of the respondents at the last stage. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in the respondent’s own household.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Ten years of working conditions in the European Union

Copyright: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. Reproduction is authorised, except for commercial purposes, provided the source is acknowledged and a copy is sent to the Foundation.

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions
Wyattville Road, Loughlinstown, Dublin 18, Ireland.
Tel: (353 1) 204 31 00
Fax: (353 1) 282 64 56/282 42 09
E-mail: postmaster@eurofound.ie