Living and working in Europe
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This year’s Living and working in Europe brings together Eurofound’s work on the living and working conditions of Europeans over 2015–2018, the last four years of the outgoing European Parliament and Commission. It has been a period of economic expansion and employment growth. But averages hide significant differences between countries and population groups, and developments across the continent, originating in the crisis and other factors such as identity and security, have induced EU leaders and policymakers to take stock. Electoral support continues to rise for populist political movements, demonstrating citizens’ dissatisfaction with traditional parties and institutions, and their questioning of some established principles of the EU. The refugee and migration crisis of 2015 exposed the weaknesses of concerted action by the EU in this field, with decisions taken without sufficient coordination at national level. In 2016, the United Kingdom voted to end its membership altogether and has undertaken a tortuous process to extract itself. Amidst calls for renewal and reform, this Commission has sought to re-establish the relevance of the EU for its citizens. The legitimacy of the EU is based on its ability to deliver for them – better living standards, higher employment, good quality of work, robust social protection. The main approach has been through the promotion of economic growth. That focus has not been wrong – the first chapter of this review highlights the link between economic prosperity, well-being and social cohesion. But the post-recession economic bounce has not fully redressed the social impact of the crisis for many. The European Pillar of Social Rights, proclaimed in November 2017, is a comprehensive policy response that tries to recover a central role for social issues in the policy agenda. It focuses Member States collectively on delivering better quality of life and quality of work for all citizens. It looks beyond today: implementing its principles should build resilience for when the next downturn inevitably comes.

In these four years, Eurofound has answered some key questions about the living and working conditions of Europeans and highlighted where policymaking needs to target its efforts if it is to be seen to deliver.

This yearbook summarises the main themes where the Agency provided answers. The chapters that follow are arranged in two sections.

The first section addresses living conditions. Eurofound showed how Europeans feel about their lives and societies, whether their living standards are decent and improving, to what extent the state has been active in enhancing their lives by providing effective and wide-ranging public services. It also addresses societal themes that the EU has confronted in this period: progress on gender equality in employment and how the EU has reacted to the sudden inflow of asylum-seekers.

The second section addresses employment and working conditions. Eurofound provided critical evidence on the shifting nature of employment – its changing structure, where jobs are being created and being lost and what types of job they are. It has highlighted how work is being shaped by demographic, economic and technological shifts. It has surveyed the European workforce to discover how ready it is for the challenges ahead and continues to monitor where social dialogue stands as a force of workplace and social change.

Across its activities Eurofound has homed in on the question of how evenly the spoils of EU membership are shared, by looking into patterns of convergence between the Member States across a number of key social indicators. The EU is based on the promise of upward convergence in living and working conditions as much as in economic growth and rising GDP. As part of its work during this period, Eurofound has defined upward convergence as the improvement of the EU average in an indicator alongside a reduction in the disparities between Member States regarding that indicator. For instance, upward convergence in the gender employment gap is signified by an annual reduction in the size of gap (currently 11.5 percentage points) combined with a reduction in the considerable differences between the Member States. Improvement on average is of only partial value to the Union if Member States become more different from each other; likewise, reductions in disparities between Member States are little to celebrate if convergence takes place around a deterioration in progress.

There has been consistent upward convergence since the big EU enlargement of 2004, as the newer Member States caught up with the other 15, in areas such as labour market participation, the NEET rate and risk of poverty rate. But progress on other indicators – including involuntary part-time and involuntary temporary employment – has been negative overall for over a decade, and disparities between countries on these indicators are increasing. Tackling these areas will be among the key challenges for the incoming European Parliament and Commission.
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How we live today
The role of survey data for evidence-based policymaking on working time in the EU: experiences and ways forward

[Handwritten notes]

A joint event organised by Fondazione E. Borrione and SIAA
European states of mind
By all the indicators, Europe is a good place to live. When asked by Eurofound’s European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS), in 2016, Europeans rated their life satisfaction and happiness highly, with average scores of 7.1 and 7.4, respectively, out of 10. Other measures of well-being bear out this positive assessment: 78% feel what they do in life is worthwhile, 76% feel they have autonomy over their lives, 64% are optimistic about the future. But these averages, as averages often do, obscure highs and lows across the Member States that make up the Union.

Mixed levels of well-being
Life satisfaction, for instance, is high in Scandinavia, but the Mediterranean and eastern European Member States generally rank below the EU average, with particularly low ratings in Bulgaria and Greece (Figure 1). These ratings signify the major bearing that a country’s economic circumstances have on how its citizens regard their lives. The impact of the crisis and severe public spending cutbacks in Greece during the euro crisis continue to depress well-being, while Bulgaria’s GDP per capita is still barely half the EU average.

Not only are there differences between the Member States, those differences, at least for some aspects of well-being, are widening. Take life satisfaction, for instance. Up to 2011, countries with low scores were catching up with countries with higher levels of life satisfaction, but more disparities emerged with the crisis. And while life satisfaction has remained stable for the last decade in the EU on average, levels have fallen in Greece, Italy and Spain with each Eurofound survey of quality of life across 2007, 2011 and 2016.
Uneven living standards, but upward convergence resumes

The mixed picture of well-being in the EU is not unrelated to the difficult economic circumstances that people find themselves in. Despite the economic recovery, 39% of Europeans reported having at least some difficulty making ends meet in 2016, with the figure ranging from 15% in Denmark to 83% in Greece, 66% in Romania and 71% in Croatia. While most countries have seen the level of difficulty fall since 2011, the situation has worsened in both Italy (rising from 44% to 53%) and Croatia (rising from 63% to 71%) and has not changed in Greece and Spain (51%). More than half the population in 11 Member States still said they have some difficulty making ends meet in 2016, which is down on the 13 Member States in 2011, but still more than the 2007 level.

An alternative measure of the population’s financial circumstances – material deprivation – tells a similar story. This measures a household’s ability to afford six basic necessities: 1. keeping the home adequately warm; 2. a week’s annual holiday; 3. replacing worn-out furniture; 4. a meal with meat, chicken or fish every second day; 5. new, rather than second-hand, clothes; 6. having friends or family for a drink or meal at least once a month.

Two out of five Europeans say that their household cannot afford all six items. The countries with the poorest scores are Greece, where households cannot afford 2.9 items, Romania (2.4), Bulgaria (2.2) and Hungary (2). And while there has been an improvement for the EU as a whole since 2011, in five countries – Austria, Croatia, Greece, Italy and Luxembourg – affordability decreased, and in a further six, it remained unchanged.

Quality of society

A recent study by Eurofound found, not unexpectedly, that citizens of the wealthier Member States experience greater happiness and life satisfaction and have better psychological functioning than their fellow Europeans in less prosperous Member States. This provides a clear rationale for the emphasis placed on upward economic convergence in EU policy, through the promotion of economic growth and high employment, as a means of improving the well-being of its people. But economic prosperity is not the only factor at play. The same study found that people’s well-being is strongly related to the quality or cohesiveness of the society in which they live – as manifested through low levels of social exclusion, high levels of trust of other people and high levels of civic engagement. The charts in Figure 2 show the levels of each of these in the Member States, which are ranked from top to bottom by GDP per capita – Luxembourg at the top and Bulgaria at the bottom.

Social exclusion: The sense of being socially excluded is low among Europeans as a whole: on a scale of 1–100, the average score is 28.4. As might be expected, this average conceals considerable divergence across the Member States. Social exclusion is lowest in wealthier Member States – Sweden, Austria and Denmark – and highest in the less prosperous – Bulgaria, Cyprus and Greece. However, lower prosperity does not necessarily mean higher social exclusion: levels in Slovakia (25.1), Estonia (25.2), Slovenia (27.4) and Portugal (27.9) are similar to that of Luxembourg (26.4), the richest Member State. The Netherlands has exactly the same level as Latvia (22.2), while the level in Greece (35.6) is comparable to that in Belgium (34.7) and Italy (34.2), more affluent Member States.

Citizens of the wealthier Member States are happier and more satisfied with their lives than their fellow Europeans in less prosperous Member States.

Nevertheless, living standards have been rising with the recovery. In the longer time span of 2007–2016, differences in material deprivation levels between Member States diminished, but the EU average level rose – what Eurofound describes as downward convergence. However, if we look just at the period from 2011 to 2016, the pattern is one of upward convergence – a fall in material deprivation on average and a narrowing of the disparities between countries. On a different measure – Eurostat’s risk of poverty rate, which was at 22.4% in 2017 – the pattern has been one of upward convergence since 2007. The improvements in living standards have been experienced most strongly in eastern European Member States – the Baltic states, Bulgaria and Poland – providing evidence that they are catching up with their longer-established EU counterparts. Greece, Italy and Spain, however, do not reflect this trend, indicating that the repercussions of the crisis in these countries continue to be felt.
Interpersonal trust: As the chart illustrates, aside from the highest scorers (Finland, Denmark and Sweden) and the lowest (Cyprus), levels of interpersonal trust in the Member States track their economic prosperity to a certain extent. Hence people in western European Member States, for example the Netherlands, Ireland and Luxembourg, have the highest levels of trust in other people, while people in central and eastern Europe – in Bulgaria, Croatia and Slovakia – as well as Cyprus and Greece have the lowest.

Civic engagement: The rates for civic engagement – in other words, unpaid voluntary work for the common good – in several Member States, as well as the EU overall, are disturbingly low, and these have changed little over time. Roughly one in six EU citizens regularly undertakes voluntary work. The pattern by Member State and economic prosperity is quite clear: once again, the northern and western European countries have the highest rates, countries that are also the richest in terms of GDP. The two extremes are Sweden, where the rate is more than double the EU average, and Bulgaria, with a rate three to four times lower than the EU average.

Is it all about the money?
It is clear that good performance on all these aspects of social cohesion goes hand in hand with economic prosperity. Citizens of more affluent countries tend to be more trusting and are more active in their communities. However, there is some nuance to the picture.

The fact that social exclusion is lower in countries such as Estonia and Latvia than in Luxembourg and Ireland – the countries with the highest GDP per capita in the EU – indicates that economic prosperity is not the only factor determining whether people feel part of society. Further analysis of the data found that for social exclusion, particularly, the correlation with GDP is moderate. Somewhat more important is the rate of severe material deprivation, higher rates being linked to higher levels of...
social exclusion. So it appears that a country’s economic prosperity alone, although generally conducive to lower social exclusion, cannot fully mitigate the negative impact of inability to afford basic necessities.

Government spending on public services has a significant positive influence on social cohesion.

This analysis also showed that government spending on public services (health, social protection and education) has a significant association with all three indicators – social exclusion, interpersonal trust and civic engagement – whether in richer or poorer countries. Income inequality, surprisingly, has a limited impact on how citizens feel about their society.

One unexpected factor emerged as having a significant association with social cohesion: the level of digital skills acquisition in a country. It seems that countries that have undertaken to become comprehensive knowledge societies, with a strong emphasis on digital awareness, are also better places to live.

Are Member States becoming more alike?

This brief tour through a handful of social indicators has revealed a broad east–west divide in the quality of society. The lower levels of social cohesion in the eastern European Member States are generally consistent with the lower economic base from which they started on joining the Union. But differences in quality of society across the Member States are perhaps not as important as whether these differences are reducing. The newer Member States for the most part are catching up economically: GDP per capita in the Baltic states, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, in particular, has been growing faster than countries with higher initial GDP levels, especially since 2010.

Is there a corresponding convergence in social cohesion?

On social exclusion, the EU average decreased marginally since 2007 (from 28.9 to 28.4), and more robustly over 2011–2016 (from 29.4 to 28.4). And, as Figure 3 shows, social exclusion has declined over 2007–2016 in all the eastern European Member States apart from Czechia, where it increased, and Hungary and Slovenia, where it has been unchanged. It has decreased in other Member States too, so the overall pattern is one of upward convergence in the EU as a whole.

A similar trend is not evident in interpersonal trust. It has remained stable in the EU on average over 2007–2016, but decreased significantly in eight countries, most of which are eastern European. Data on civic engagement has been gathered since 2011, and this has been stable at EU level since that time. And while there have been significant fluctuations across countries, there is no particular east–west divide.

Regardless of where you live, though, economic hardship is going to diminish your quality of life. Across the EU, the unemployed and people in lower income groups, as well as people in poor health and with low educational attainment, consistently score low on these and other indicators.

Figure 3: Member States where social cohesion indicators have increased and decreased

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Source: EQLS 2016
Insecurity persists

While Europe grows more prosperous, the aftertaste of the crisis lingers for some. Its residual effects are manifested in the levels of insecurity in Europe’s population around different risks. Even people who were not significantly affected in the bad years are not entirely confident that they won’t suffer in the years to come. Being economically secure is no guarantee against other insecurities; even with good incomes, for instance, some people may be at risk of losing their homes due to debt problems.

Just over 1 in 10 workers feels completely secure in their employment, confident that they won’t lose their job, and if they did, they would easily find a new one. That means the remaining 9 out of 10 have some level of insecurity around their employment. Even among workers on permanent contracts, who have the highest levels of employment security, almost a quarter do not rule out losing their job in the next six months.

There is insecurity around the affordability of healthcare in a number of Member States: 17% of the EU population would find it difficult to pay for primary care at short notice. In some countries, these responses come not only from people in low-income groups, but also many people in middle-income groups and people who appear not to have had any problems previously covering healthcare costs.

Concerns over the sustainability of pension systems in the context of demographic ageing, due to falling fertility rates and much longer life expectancy, has filtered across the EU population. Many are unsure that they will have enough income to live on in old age, underlining the widely held concerns people have over the size of their pensions, both public and private, when the time comes to draw them down. Over half the EU population (56%) worry that their income in old age will not be adequate, while 13% are extremely worried; levels in Portugal, Spain and Greece are especially high (Figure 4). The age group with the most concern are 35–49-year-olds, 65% of whom are likely to worry that their income in old age will not be sufficient. People in long-term unemployment are also particularly likely to worry about this issue.

Do Europeans love the EU?

Europeans are feeling more positive towards the EU. Trust in EU institutions started to decline in 2007 at the outset of the downturn, reaching its lowest point in 2013, when less than a third of EU citizens surveyed reported that they had trust in the EU (Figure 5). That percentage remained stable for a few years and started to rise again. At the beginning of 2017, nearly 42% of EU citizens reported having confidence in the EU.

The level of trust is not the same for all EU institutions, though it tends to change over time in a similar way to trust in the EU overall. Citizens tend to have more trust in the European Parliament than, for instance, in the European Commission or in the European Central Bank.
The sharpest reductions in trust in the EU between 2004 and 2016 occurred in countries most severely affected by the economic downturn: Greece (-43 percentage points), Cyprus (-31 percentage points) and Spain (-26.5 percentage points). In Ireland, trust in the EU declined dramatically when the country was hit by the crisis (-34 percentage points between 2004 and 2011; with just one person in four having confidence in the EU in 2011), but confidence rallied as the country recovered, with almost half of the population expressing trust in the EU in 2016.

Despite the increase in trust in the EU on average after 2011, by 2016 it had not returned to pre-crisis levels in the majority of Member States. There were just five where over half of the population expressed confidence in the EU (Finland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta and Romania) compared with six Member States where less than a third had confidence in the EU (Czechia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy and the UK).

Takeaways

- There are large disparities in the well-being of citizens across the EU. Life satisfaction, one of the main subjective measures of well-being, is low in many eastern and southern European Member States in comparison to the high levels experienced in Scandinavia and several western European Member States. Differences in well-being to a large extent correspond to the differences in standards of living across the Member States.
- Living standards are improving now that Europe is in a phase of economic expansion; the upward convergence of the eastern European Member States towards the EU average has resumed.
- Southern Europe for the most part remained outside the post-crisis upswing up to 2016: living standards were static at best and life satisfaction continued to fall. But sustained economic growth is contributing to a turnaround, and with rising employment, income is recovering and poverty rates falling.
- Economic prosperity has a clear positive impact on the quality of society, which justifies the EU prioritisation of economic growth. However, it is also important to share that prosperity among citizens, reaching all groups in all countries.
- Trust in the EU has increased with the recovery but has not regained pre-crisis levels in most Member States. Inequality and pervasive negative narratives on the EU possibly continue to influence public opinion.

Read more
European Quality of Life Survey 2016: Quality of life, quality of public services, and quality of society eurofound.link/ef1634
Social cohesion and well-being in Europe eurofound.link/ef18035
Upward convergence in the EU: Concepts, measurements and indicators eurofound.link/ef18003
Social insecurities and resilience eurofound.link/ef18019
Societal change and trust in institutions eurofound.link/ef18036
Balancing life and work
Balancing life and work

The great social movement towards gender equality, ongoing for over a century and reinvigorated of late by the #MeToo movement, is by no means complete. Not even in employment is there parity between the sexes, despite the introduction of an EU directive on the equal treatment of women in employment over 40 years ago and much more legislation since. Significant progress has been made, but there is still abundant scope for the numbers of women in the workforce to grow further and for much better balance in the gender make-up of sectors, occupations and organisational hierarchies. Why is progress so gradual? While fathers are increasingly sharing domestic responsibilities and childcare, the slow pace of role transformation may be an inhibiting factor. Perhaps initiatives like the directive aimed at improving the work–life balance of parents and carers will prove a catalyst for further change.

Stubborn employment gap

The number of women in paid work is rising continuously, narrowing the employment gap between women and men over the years. In 2001, 57.9% of women aged 20–64 were working outside the home; by 2017, the percentage had risen to 66.5%. The comparable 2017 figure for men is 78%, meaning a gender employment gap of 11.5 percentage points persists (Figure 6). During the crisis, the gap narrowed more quickly, mainly due to men losing their jobs and not to an acceleration of women entering the labour market. Since the recovery, the gap has not changed. Part of the explanation is the rebound from job loss among men rather than a decrease of female participation, but the trend demands further research. Moreover, the gap remains even though women’s educational attainment – that much-lauded passport into work – outstrips men’s: 57.6% of those who graduated from third level in 2016 were women, according to Eurostat.

Cultural factors are partly to blame – traditional gender roles are tenacious across Europe, so women continue to bear most of the burden of domestic responsibilities, particularly care, and often opt to stay at home, while male partners fulfil the role of main breadwinner and go out to work. But the gender employment gap is clearly not immutable, if you consider that it is quite small in some EU countries – just 0.4 percentage points in Latvia and 2.9 percentage points in Finland and Sweden.

Solving the work–life balance challenge

Care responsibilities are the main problem for work–life balance, the difficulty people face, once they have children – or, increasingly, once their older relatives become incapacitated – to provide care and to work simultaneously. Work is usually not structured to accommodate the demands of life outside work.

Figure 6: Gender employment gap, EU, 2002–2017, percentage points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>-17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>-16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>-16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>-16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>-15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>-15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>-15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>-13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>-13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>-12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>-11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>-11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>-11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>-11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>-11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>-11.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Eurostat
The difficulty parents face combining work with raising a family is easy to illustrate. Figure 7 plots the percentage of male and female workers reporting poor work–life balance across stylised life stages; these life stages show the typical transitions and phases in people’s lives over the life course. Among women, poor work–life balance peaks among those with young children and then drops dramatically with the next life stage, indicating that women have tackled the work–life balance issue by either reducing their working hours (see Figure 8) or dropping out of work altogether.

Research by Eurofound has found that motherhood is a major factor determining women’s participation in the labour force, and the younger the child, the lower the probability that its mother is working outside the home. In most Member States, having a child aged under three reduces the likelihood of a woman having a job; it halves the likelihood in Austria, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Hungary and Slovakia.

Plainly, a contributory factor to women’s decisions regarding work is another gender gap, the pay gap between men and women. Women’s gross hourly earnings are 16% less than those of men on average in the EU, which may guide family decisions. It ‘makes more sense’ for a woman in a couple to reduce their working time than for a man. However, these decisions may have a career-long impact on pay, extending even as far as a pension gap.

Consistently more men than women report poor work–life balance at each life stage, peaking when their children are aged between 7 and 12. The reason in large part is because they spend more time at work. Men work six more hours on average than women each week – 39.1 hours compared to 32.9. In fact, their working hours increase slightly once children arrive (Figure 8). So are men getting a raw deal?
Making choices and decisions

Not really. Many women anticipate motherhood and base their career decisions on the latitude to combine work and family – they often choose jobs, occupations and sectors guided by their perception of how flexible the working time might be. These decisions result, for instance, in the underrepresentation of women in the management tier, where they are outnumbered two to one by men. Women are doubtless put off by perceptions of the extra time commitment to work associated with rising through the workplace hierarchy.

Nearly one-third of female workers (32%) works part time compared to 9% of male workers.

Women also reduce their hours – Figure 8 illustrates the difference in working hours between women in a couple with children and without children. The increase in part-time work is one of the most striking developments in European labour markets in recent decades, coinciding with women’s increased workforce participation. Nearly one-third of female workers (32%) works part time compared to 9% of male workers. When asked why, the most common responses from women are the care of children or incapacitated adults and other family or personal responsibilities; for men, the reasons are being in education or training and inability to find a full-time job.

Men, in contrast to women, are more likely to make career and work choices that conform to the dominant model of a full-time, long-term employee. The parenting phase coincides with the time that they are most productive at work, and the pressure to maintain that momentum can make it difficult to cut back. Ironically, in this gender-unequal situation, it is men who are most unhappy with their working time arrangements, as illustrated by the much larger gap between the actual and preferred working hours among men compared to women (Figure 9).
If women are not able to combine a job with the demands of a family, they are likely to drop out of work altogether. Roughly 9% of the total female working-age population are not searching for work or are not working full-time because they are looking after children or dependent adults. In some countries, the figure is much higher: 25% in the Netherlands (most of these work part-time), and 15% in Austria, Germany and Ireland. And in other countries, the percentage is much lower: 5% in Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia. Almost no men give this as a reason for not seeking employment.

Rising work–life conflict

More people are reporting conflict between their working and private lives. For instance, a common sign of conflict – being too tired after work to do household chores – was reported by 24% of workers in the EU in 2003, and while the percentage fell to 22% in 2007, it rose to 25% in 2011 and rose again to 32% in 2016. There have been increases in other types of conflict too: the proportion of workers who have trouble fulfilling family responsibilities because of work rose from 10% in 2003 to 17% in 2016, while the percentage who have trouble concentrating at work because of family responsibilities increased from 10% to 19% in the same period.

Source: EWCS 2015
Sharing the burden

Better sharing of the unpaid work of care would help to level the playing field in the labour market for women. In the home, the positions of the sexes are reversed, with working women spending around 22 hours per week on average on care and on housework, while men spend just 9, a gap of 13 hours. This gap exists in all Member States but is narrower in the Nordic countries (where it is 6–8 hours) and wider in several, including Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta and Slovenia (over 15 hours in all cases). One change that would help to eliminate the gap would be for fathers to spend more time on care, and that would entail adjusting their working time arrangements.

This is not to assume that fathers are necessarily reluctant to make such changes, but conditions need to be favourable. While all Member States have granted fathers a right to some period of extended leave to spend time with their children, that leave is often either unpaid or paid at a rate well below their salary, which means uptake is low. Efforts to encourage broader participation of men in care duties are unlikely to meet with success if the leave can be transferred and if they are not compensated at an acceptable level.

Recognising this, the EU directive on work–life balance of parents and carers 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. It is accompanied by non-legislative measures to ensure protection against discrimination and dismissal for parents; encourage a gender-balanced use of family-related leave and flexible working arrangements; make better use of European funds to improve care services; and to remove economic disincentives for second earners.
work–life balance, with little cost. But here there is clear room for improvement: 65% of employees in the EU (and 56% of all workers) have no say over their work schedules.

What impact on well-being?

Still, a major obstacle to achieving a work–life balance is volume of work: the higher a person’s usual weekly working hours, the worse the fit between work and other commitments. And a good work–life balance matters for all workers. Figure 10 shows the associations between it and factors that affect well-being at work. Workers with better work–life balance are more satisfied with their working conditions and find their work more meaningful. They are more engaged in their work, which is particularly important from an employer’s perspective, as research has linked it to better job performance. Workers are also healthier, both physically and mentally, when there is harmony between their home and working lives.

While women’s decisions on combining work and care may arise from a mutual agreement with their partners, there are trade-offs. One is with the future – having a shorter working life will have knock-on effects further down the line: lower contributions reduce the value of a worker’s pension when they retire. Part-time workers are also at a disadvantage in the workplace compared to their full-time colleagues, having less access to training and less autonomy in decision-making, and experiencing a less supportive social environment at work. Women who drop out of work usually have difficulty re-entering the labour market, and usually do so at a lower level than when they left.

Combined policy action facilitating part-time work, leave and public childcare could markedly increase the numbers of working women.

Wider implications

From a societal perspective, improving the capability of workers to balance work and life is critical to securing higher employment rates, which is linked to the future viability of welfare states. A growing older population dependent on pensions funded by a shrinking labour force threatens the long-term sustainability of pension systems. Bringing more women into the labour force would boost revenues to the state. But to do so, they need to be given the means to reconcile their care responsibilities with holding down a job – as noted earlier, nearly 1 in 10 of working-age women are not working because of these responsibilities.

Entrenched social norms around family roles continue to have a significant influence on how women and men share paid and unpaid labour, and policy does not easily change extant social values. However, action by the state, employers and the social partners can create the conditions to open up the labour market for women. The state has a role in the provision of affordable childcare and training opportunities for women seeking to re-enter the workplace, as well as enacting anti-discrimination legislation. A study by Eurofound found that combined policy action facilitating part-time work, leave and public childcare could markedly increase the numbers of working women. And it would be particularly beneficial for women of childbearing age with low levels of education, whose participation rates could rise by as much as 10 percentage points.

A strong political will is needed to back the provision of childcare services and compensation for parental leave, which are costly for the public budget and require long-term investment. The cooperation of employers is also necessary to accommodate both mothers and fathers without penalising their careers – incentives and support from governments are clearly needed for this.

While greater gender equality in the labour market is a sign of social progress, the implications must be recognised. Given the pressures on public finances, increased state investment in formal care to provide for an expanding dependent older population is not guaranteed. This may mean that families have no choice but to provide this care themselves, which could be in conflict with the policy objectives of achieving a better work–life balance to enhance labour force participation and gender equality.

Figure 10: Correlation between work–life fit and different factors affecting workplace well-being

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with working conditions</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to make ends meet</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental well-being</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finds work meaningful</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to work until 60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to make ends meet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of health symptoms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Based on positive responses to the question ‘How do your working hours fit in with your family or social commitments outside work?’

Source: EWCS 2015
Takeaways

- The gender employment gap narrowed significantly over the past two decades but has stalled recently – it has remained at roughly 11.5 percentage points for the past four years.
- A significant factor sustaining the gap is women’s continuing role as primary care-givers in the household, which limits their equal participation with men in employment.
- Better sharing of care responsibilities between women and men would help to redress the imbalance. Parental leave, non-transferable and compensated at a reasonable level, would support this shift; so too would more accessible and affordable care services and flexible working arrangements.
- Increasing women’s participation in paid work is crucial from a societal perspective, to counteract the contraction of the labour force due to an ageing population and falling fertility rates.

Read more

Striking a balance: Reconciling work and life in the EU  [ eurofound.link/ef18065 ]
Working time patterns and sustainable work  [ eurofound.link/ef1720 ]
Work–life balance and flexible working arrangements in the European Union  [ eurofound.link/ef1741 ]
The gender employment gap: Challenges and solutions  [ eurofound.link/ef1638 ]
Women in management: Underrepresented and overstretched?  [ eurofound.link/ef18018 ]
Parental and paternity leave – Uptake by fathers  [ eurofound.link/ef18087 ]
Delivering quality public services
Delivering quality public services

The messages emanating from EU policymaking in recent years are giving more space to public services – specifically the need for more accessible, more affordable and better quality public services for citizens. At its base, doubtless, is an increased political will to rebalance EU policy priorities and give equal weight to the social dimension of the EU. Advancing the goals of social Europe depends upon the strategic deployment of public supports. Gender equality in employment, for instance, could be accelerated through the provision of high-quality, affordable childcare. Social cohesion, as Chapter 1 noted, is enhanced through government spending on public services. Moreover, Eurofound has consistently found in its studies of public trust in the EU and national institutions (government, police and the press) that the perceived quality of public services is highly correlated with that trust.

Several of the principles laid down in the European Pillar of Social Rights are underpinned by public services, and this manifesto repeatedly refers to the need for good quality in these services. Chapter III of the Pillar states explicitly the rights of Europeans to good-quality healthcare, long-term care and childcare. The EQLS gathers extensive information from Europeans about their experiences of using these services, providing insights into the extent to which they are meeting citizens’ needs.

Healthcare

Use

In a single year, 9 out of 10 people in the EU have some contact with healthcare services – either by themselves or through someone close to them – which underlines how relevant healthcare is to most people.

Primary care – from a family doctor or local health centre – is the most commonly used type of healthcare, with two-thirds of people in the EU reporting using primary care in 2016 (Figure 11). One-third used hospital or specialist care, while 1 in 10 used emergency care services.

There are differences in the use of these services across the Member States. For instance, 5% of people in Bulgaria and 6% of people in Poland used emergency services in 2016, compared to 21% of people in Luxembourg and 20% of people in Spain. These differences arise to some extent because certain services are easier to access and not because they are the most appropriate. Low usage of a particular type of care may indicate problems in accessing it. Conversely, in the case of emergency care, high levels of usage suggest that the service is being used for non-emergencies, possibly because it is available after hours or free of charge. This is a concern for several reasons: emergency care tends to be more costly than non-emergency provision, it may not be the most appropriate type of service for non-emergencies, and it could become less accessible if overused.

Figure 11: Percentage of people using different healthcare services, EU, 2016

Source: EQLS 2016
The EU Member State average percentage of people who did not have medical treatment because of cost, a waiting list or having too far to travel fell from 3.5% in 2010 to 3.1% in 2016, according to Eurostat data. At the same time, Eurofound’s analysis has shown that differences between the Member States regarding unmet medical need have increased, so although the EU trend is upward, it is also divergent.

While unmet medical need across the EU is low, many people have problems accessing treatment for various reasons. Figure 12 shows the extent to which five different factors made it difficult for people to see or be treated by a doctor the last time they needed to; waiting time is by far the most common obstacle, both to get an appointment and at the doctor’s premises.

Cost is the least common of the five factors, but it does prevent some people from getting medical care. Of the 30% of people who did not use any healthcare in 2016, 6% did not do so in order to economise, while an additional 7% delayed receiving care.

And cost is a significant barrier in several Member States, especially in south-eastern Europe. It made access difficult for 62% of the population in Cyprus and Greece and 51% in Malta, but for just 3% in Denmark and 5% in Spain and the United Kingdom. Financial barriers like this are particularly likely to occur when there are limits to public coverage and when users have to pay out-of-pocket expenses.

In many countries, cost is the most commonly cited obstacle to seeing a doctor for people on low incomes, and in some, middle-income groups have equal difficulty accessing certain types of care. They may even fare worse because their income is too high to entitle them to co-payment exemptions or publicly funded insurance coverage, but too low for healthcare services and private insurance to be affordable.

Substantial numbers of people are concerned about their ability to cover healthcare costs if the need arose (Figure 13). Mental health and dental care, services usually less well covered by national health systems, are most commonly seen as unaffordable. But 17% would find even the most basic healthcare provision – primary care – difficult to cover. Over one-fifth (22%) of people say it would be very difficult to cover expenses for at least one of the five healthcare services listed.

Healthcare insecurity is not limited to people on low incomes: while 35% of people in the bottom income quartile would find it difficult to cover the cost of healthcare services, so too would 22% in the top income quartile.

**Figure 12: Percentage of people who encountered five selected barriers to primary healthcare, EU, 2016**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>EU 2016 Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance to doctor’s office</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding time</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delay in getting appointment</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiting time to see doctor</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** EQLS 2016

**Figure 13: Percentage of people who doubt their ability to afford different healthcare services, EU, 2016**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>EU 2016 Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dental care</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health services</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital or specialist services</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency care</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary care</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** EQLS 2016
Quality
Broadly speaking, EU citizens are satisfied with the quality of healthcare in their country, giving it a rating of 6.7 on average on a scale of 1–10. This is a considerable increase on previous ratings from 2011 (6.3) and 2007 (6.1). Although this rise in people’s assessment of quality does not apply in all Member States, it is particularly evident in countries where ratings were low in 2011 – Bulgaria and Romania, in particular, but also Ireland and Lithuania.

Still, a quarter (27%) of respondents rate healthcare in their country at 5 points or below. A majority of people give low ratings in Greece (65%), Latvia (63%), Cyprus (58%), Poland (54%) and Slovakia (51%). Even in some of the best-performing countries – Belgium, Finland, Luxembourg, Malta and the Netherlands – one-tenth or more of respondents give healthcare a quality rating of 5 or less.

More affluent people tend to rate healthcare services more highly than people with low incomes. This is possibly related to the real quality of services available to the less affluent in society, who lack the financial means to circumvent waiting lists, for instance, or to get a single-occupancy room. Or there could be a concentration of low-income groups in locations where services are worse.

Long-term care
With an ageing population and more women taking up paid employment, demand for formal long-term care services for dependent older people is predicted to increase for the foreseeable future. The Commission’s 2018 ageing report estimates that public spending on long-term care will rise from 1.6% of GDP in 2016 to 2.7% of GDP by 2070, a 73% rise. Already the lack of availability of services is an issue across Europe – at the low end, 44% of respondents to the 2011 EQLS in Denmark said that they or someone close to them had difficulties affording long-term care services; at the high end, the figure reached 86% in Greece and Slovakia.

Access
In 2016, 14% of people asked by the EQLS said that they or someone close to them had used some type of long-term care service, whether home help, nursing care in the home, or residential care. Approaches to funding these services are diverse across the EU. Of this group of users, nearly one-third (32%) used services without having to pay. The remaining two-thirds paid either fully or partially for the service. As Figure 14 shows, nursing care in the home is more often free of charge, while residential care is paid for mostly by the users of such care.

Event: Access to and quality of public services in the EU: A debate on improving quality of life
On 8 March 2018, Eurofound and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), in cooperation with the Bulgarian Presidency of the EU, organised a debate on the role of public services in improving quality of life and making the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights a reality. The event brought together over 80 representatives of the social partners, EU institutions, national and regional representatives, practitioners, civil society and academics to debate the key themes highlighted in Eurofound’s 2016 European Quality of Life Survey.
Cost is a barrier for over one-third of users: 28% found that cost made access a little difficult, while 9% found it made access very difficult. However, the cost barrier is encountered more evenly across the income quartiles for long-term care than for other public services. Around 40% of those in the lowest income quartile had some level of difficulty in accessing long-term care services due to cost, compared to 30% in the top income quartile. One of the reasons may be the higher take-up of services free of charge by those in the lowest income quartile.

If in the future public funding were to cover fewer long-term care costs – which could happen due to escalating demand – this would have an impact on equal access to services by different income groups. Cuts would affect people in the lowest income quartile, clearly, but could also be an issue for people in higher income groups who had too high an income to be eligible for free services but who could not afford private services without difficulty.

Quality
The average quality rating for long-term care services given by all respondents in 2016 was 6.2 out of a maximum of 10, which is a substantial improvement on the 2011 figure of 5.2. Service users tend to give higher overall scores to the quality of public services than the rest of the population, and a breakdown of respondents confirms this to be the case too with long-term care. While non-users rated services at 6.1, people who had used the services themselves gave the highest quality rating, 6.8, and people for whom someone close was a user gave a rating of 6.2.

Delving deeper into the quality ratings given by the latter two types of users shows significant differences depending on funding. Those who used services free of charge gave a higher overall rating (6.7) than those paying partially for services (6.3), while those having to pay in full gave the lowest overall quality rating (5.9).

The fact that people using services free of charge were more satisfied than users making some type of payment deserves further research at national level to identify whether this is influenced by differences in ownership. The private sector is making increasing inroads into the provision of long-term care, but concerns have been raised about the ability of private providers to deliver a high quality of care given the high costs involved. Specialist services in particular are expensive as they demand more medical care and higher numbers of nurses.

Eurofound researchers investigating care home provision in the EU came to no definitive conclusion about differences in the quality of services depending on ownership, with results differing from country to country. They did, nevertheless, identify in some countries aspects of quality that may be affected by differences between types of provider, including: having a single room; hygiene; the residents’ choice of food and activities; attitude of staff; nutrition; continuity of care; and preventive health services. Jobs in the long-term care sector have a poor image – pay levels tend to be low and the work is demanding – and the sector is beset

Those who used services free of charge gave a higher overall rating (6.7), while those having to pay in full gave the lowest overall quality rating (5.9).
by staff shortages. Even though it is difficult to establish a clear link between the working conditions of staff and user satisfaction, any shortages in qualified staff are likely to decrease the quality of care.

Childcare

The EU has long recognise the role of quality childcare in achieving several social goals, and the Commission continues to urge Member States found wanting in this area to improve provision. The availability of formal childcare facilities is an essential component of work-life balance policy, enabling parents of young children to combine work and care responsibilities, which has a ripple effect on the labour market, as described in the previous chapter. But policymakers have also sought to extend such services in the knowledge that high-quality education and care in early life is particularly beneficial to children in vulnerable circumstances, be it from disability or household situation.

Use

In the EU as a whole, according to the EQLS, 70% of households with at least one child aged 12 or under use some type of childcare provided by someone other than the parents, either informal or formal. For individual Member States, the average ranges from 88% in Sweden to 45% in Belgium. In the 30% of households with children that did not have any childcare arrangement, care presumably was fully provided by the parents or guardians.

Eurostat gathers data on the percentage of children under age three in formal childcare. Analysis of this indicator shows that the proportion of children in formal childcare increased from 24.3% in 2010 to 28.0% in 2015. Just like unmet medical need, however, the upward trend is divergent, as differences between the Member States have increased over that period.

Informal childcare arrangements are still more widely used than formal arrangements, according to the EQLS. Care for the youngest child in the household – which is the measure applied to gauge the types of arrangement people use – is provided by the child’s grandparents in 36% of cases and by other household members or relatives in 22%. The remainder use formal childcare services: 29% used childcare facilities (kindergarten, crèche, nursery, playgroup, day-care centre or after-school care), while 5% have a formal agreement or contract with a childminder, and 7% have some other type of childcare.

Use of formal childcare is highest in Denmark and Sweden, where 81% of households with children under 12 use formal childcare, followed by Finland (70%) and Luxembourg (64%) (Figure 15). Conversely, less than one-fifth of respondents in seven countries in southern Europe made use of formal services, with the lowest rates in Romania and Spain (both 13%) and Greece (10%).

Funding

Nearly three-quarters (74%) of people in the EU who use formal childcare for their youngest child pay for this service in full (39%) or in part (35%), with the remaining 26% using the service without having to pay. Figure 15 shows how childcare is funded across the Member States. (The number of responses to this question was

![Figure 15: Percentage of households with children under 12 years that use formal childcare and type of funding, Member States, 2016](image-url)

Note: * Member States with low response numbers.
Source: EQLS 2016
low in several Member States, marked by an asterisk, so the results for these should be interpreted with caution.) These funding arrangements have obvious implications for the affordability of services. Those who pay in part or in full are much more likely to encounter difficulty with costs than those for whom services are fully funded (Figure 16). But even in the latter group, some report difficulty, due perhaps to payments associated with additional activities, such as trips and meals.

**Quality**

At 6.7, the overall rating given by EQLS respondents to the quality of childcare in their country in 2016 is similar to the rating of healthcare and higher than the rating of long-term care. The figure represents an increase on the 2011 rating of 6.2. Rises in quality assessments were particularly visible in Bulgaria, Hungary and Poland – perhaps reflecting real improvements in service quality, or perhaps the greater availability of services due to a decline in birth rates and the emigration of people of child-rearing ages.

If we focus on the overall quality rating given by service users only, the average goes up to 7.0. As in the case of healthcare, one-third of respondents rated the quality of childcare services low, at 5 or less.

The quality rating people give to the childcare services in their country is related to the affordability of services (both in the case of ratings by all respondents or those given by service users only). Higher overall quality ratings are associated with fewer difficulties in access due to cost. For example, Ireland – where cost makes access to services difficult for the highest share of users in the EU – ranks very low in the general quality of services (a rating of 5.9). At the other end, Swedes report fewer difficulties due to cost than any other country and give the third-highest overall quality rating (8.1).

**Takeaways**

- More accessible, more affordable and better-quality public services for citizens are essential to achieving an equitable and socially cohesive European Union. The quality of public services is correlated with public trust in institutions.
- The quality and accessibility of healthcare, long-term care and childcare varies enormously across the Member States.
- The main barrier to accessing primary healthcare in the EU is waiting times, which indicates insufficient capacity and resourcing to meet demand. While cost is less commonly a barrier, it is a problem for large proportions of the population in several Member States and for particular services, such as mental health and dental care.
- User ratings on the quality of healthcare have risen since 2011, but a quarter of Europeans continue to rate the quality as low.
- Over two-thirds of people pay partially or fully for long-term care of dependent adults. People who use these services free of charge are more satisfied than users who make some type of payment, which raises the question of whether quality differs depending on whether the service is provided by the public or private sector.
- Informal childcare provided by family members is more widely used than formal arrangements in the EU. It suggests that formal provision may not be sufficiently affordable or accessible or of sufficient quality in a number of countries.
Wages, income and inequality
Living and working in Europe 2015–2018

Are wages rising?

While there were clear signs of recovery from the crisis in Europe in 2013, with economic growth and falling unemployment in most Member States, this was not reflected in the place where it mattered most to people – their pay packets. Sluggish growth in real wages raised doubts about the strength of the recovery in income levels for significant segments of the workforce, let alone for the population at large. The release of microdata from the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) for 2015, however, showed a decisive upturn, with average real wages increasing in more than two-thirds of EU countries.

As Table 1 shows, wages grew most strongly, by 4–12%, in much of eastern Europe. This wage growth was greatest among the lowest-paid employees (Quintile 1), in the Baltic states, Czechia, Poland and Romania. In Bulgaria, especially, and Hungary, however, wages grew more among the highest-paid employees (Quintile 5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Quintile 1</th>
<th>Quintile 2</th>
<th>Quintile 3</th>
<th>Quintile 4</th>
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<td>0.30</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: EU-SILC, Eurofound calculations
In a second group of countries – Denmark, Ireland, France, Italy and Finland – wage growth was more moderate (1–3.6%), mostly due to larger wage increases among the highest-paid employees than in other pay quintiles. Germany is in this group too because real wages grew significantly (3.5%), but in its case, wages increased disproportionately among the lowest-paid employees (by almost 20% in Quintile 1). This was a result of the introduction of a minimum wage in 2015, a major policy decision aimed at fighting the rising numbers of employees not covered by wage floors and the growth of low-paid work in the country. It is worth noting that this beneficial effect of the minimum wage policy seems to have come with no significant impact on employment. Data show no loss of employment among low-paid workers, which some were concerned would be a result of the policy.

In the remaining Member States, wages declined or stagnated, mainly due to wage reductions among the highest-paid. The table shows this pattern in most countries from Croatia down, most significantly in Sweden and the United Kingdom.

The latest data indicate that wages have been converging upwards across Member States between 2011 and 2015.

Wage inequality declines
Alongside the growth in wages, there has been a fall in wage inequality in most EU countries, as shown in the last two columns of Table 1. Generally, wage inequality has declined in countries where wages increased most for the lowest-paid and has risen where wages grew most for the highest-paid. Germany, where wage inequality had expanded in 2014, registered the largest reduction in wage inequality among all EU countries in 2015.

Are wage levels converging in the EU?
These latest data signal a return to a pattern of upward convergence in wages seen in the EU prior to the crisis. Strong convergence occurred between 2004 and 2008, driven mostly by the new Member States as they integrated economically into the Union, as well as the Mediterranean countries to a lesser extent. Wages generally rose much more in these countries with lower average wages, while growth was more moderate elsewhere.

The Great Recession disrupted the trend. Between 2008 and 2011, wage growth weakened or declined in many eastern European Member States and even more so in southern Europe, while the northern and western European Member States for the most part were barely affected.

The latest data indicate that wages started to converge again across Member States between 2011 and 2015. This is due once more to sizeable wage growth in eastern Europe and more moderate progress among the other Member States, with several Mediterranean countries still diverging from the European average.

Wage inequality trends
The increases in the lowest wage levels prior to 2008 resulted in a clear reduction of wage inequality in the EU. Figure 17 shows the Gini values – a measure of inequality – for wages in the EU for 2004–2015.

Figure 17: EU wage inequality as measured by the Gini index, 2004–2015

Note: Figures reflect EU inequality in the purchasing power of full-time equivalent wages.
Source: EU-SILC, Eurofound calculations

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Between 2004 and 2008, the Gini values fell substantially, indicating a fall in wage inequality. The trend reversed somewhat up to 2010, after which wage inequality fell once more and then flattened. The spike in 2014 is due to rises in wage inequality in the biggest Member States – Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom, while the decline the following year is down to reductions in inequality in those same countries, especially in Germany, as noted earlier, and the United Kingdom.

What about income inequality?

Wages are not the same as income. But if one is interested in social inequality, the focus needs to turn to income. States to a greater or lesser extent seek to tackle inequalities arising from wealth and the earning power of individuals through the tax and benefit system. Low pay need not equate with poverty if benefits and tax exemption can raise household income.

There is persistent concern, however, that rising prosperity is not being equally shared. The question has been raised whether the Great Recession exacerbated existing inequalities and increased the gap between rich and poor. What evidence is there that this is case?

The most widely used and general measure of income inequality is household disposable income, which is the total income received from any source by all members of a household, minus taxes and social contributions. As Figure 18 shows, inequality in household disposable income for the EU as a whole, as measured by the Gini index, fell over the decade from 2005 to 2015, the year of most recent available data, although the trend was reversed for a period during the crisis. Income inequality declined significantly up to 2010, almost entirely due to intense income convergence between the Member States. This convergence was driven by the relative catch-up of incomes in the eastern European countries as well as income deterioration or stagnation in several high-income countries in the European core, such as Germany, the United Kingdom and other continental countries. Some Mediterranean countries failed to converge even in the initial years.

The crisis halted convergence as incomes fell in the Baltic states, some Mediterranean Member States and Ireland, while incomes remained much more resilient in the European core. This was one factor that pushed income inequality in the EU as whole upwards during the crisis. The other factor was increasing income inequality within two-thirds of countries, which was driven by growing unemployment during the recession and the drastic reduction in the earnings of those who lost their jobs.

However, social protection systems helped to cushion the effects of rising unemployment on income inequality. When household market income – this is household income before it is adjusted by the tax and benefit system – is compared with household disposable income, it shows that European welfare states reduced market income inequality by almost 30% for the EU as a whole.

Convergence in income levels has resumed more recently mainly as a result of faster income growth in the eastern European Member States (especially the Baltic states) compared with other Member States. While it is weaker than prior to the crisis, it seems that the divergence during the Great Recession was a short-term drift from a longer-term trend towards income convergence between European countries.

Figure 18: EU income inequality, as measured by the Gini index, 2005–2015

Note: Household disposable income.
Source: EU-SILC, Eurofound calculations
The living wage: An answer to low pay?

Despite the prosperity of the EU, low pay is widespread. One in six employees was a low-wage earner in 2014, according to Eurostat, a low wage-earner being an employee earning less than two-thirds the national median gross hourly earnings.

Low pay increases the risk of in-work poverty, which has hovered around 9.5% for several years and has been rising since before the crisis. Even income from full-time work is no longer sufficient to protect many workers financially – 8% of full-time EU workers were at risk of poverty in 2015.

The main policy mechanism supporting wage levels among low-paid employees is the minimum wage. Statutory minimum wage floors are now in place in 22 of the 28 Member States and legally enforceable; the remaining six have collectively bargained sectoral minimum wages. Minimum wages are set conservatively to avoid the risk of discouraging employers from hiring at lower pay levels. However, this means that minimum wages might not always be sufficient to raise an individual earner above the poverty threshold (which is 60% of national median disposable income), and are lower than the low pay threshold defined by Eurostat.

It is in this context – the coexistence of widespread application of legal wage floors, the persistence of in-work poverty (often linked to part-time work) and the rise in the incidence of low pay that is inadequate for the local cost of living – that campaigns for a ‘living wage’ have emerged, mostly in English-speaking countries around the world. A living wage is a level of pay that allows a worker to attain a socially acceptable living standard. Living wages tend to be significantly higher than minimum wages.

The main concern of living wage campaigns is the cost of living rather than the cost of labour. They have tended to originate where living standards have been threatened by escalating costs, particularly in capitals and big cities, often where social provision of core services, such as housing and childcare, is limited.

Most living wage undertakings do not have the force of law. Where they have become operational, they rely on the voluntary cooperation of social partners, authorities and civil society groups. The most developed initiative in Europe is in the United Kingdom, where over 4,000 employers have received living wage accreditation from the Living Wage Foundation. These employers pledge to pay all their employees – as well as contracted workers regularly working on their premises – the living wage rate, which in London is 26% higher than the legal minimum for workers. It is estimated that this has resulted in direct pay increases for 120,000–150,000 workers, which represents less than 3% of the 5–6 million workers in the United Kingdom earning less than the living wage, underlining the limited reach of the voluntary system.

Takeaways

- The recovery appears to have spread to wages. Two-thirds of EU Member States saw wage rises in 2015. These rises were sizeable in eastern Europe and more moderate among other Member States. Wage convergence between EU Member States has restarted as a result.
- Wage inequality declined generally in countries where wages increased most for the lowest-paid and has risen where wages grew most for the highest-paid.
- Inequality in household disposable income for the EU as a whole fell over the decade from 2005 to 2015. The surge in unemployment during the crisis and the consequent loss of earnings was the main driver for increased inequality for a period; however, the effects were lessened by social protection systems.
- Income levels converged in the EU over 2005–2015, driven by the catch-up of incomes in the eastern European countries as well as income deterioration or stagnation in several high-income countries in the European core, such as Germany and the United Kingdom. Some countries in the Mediterranean region have failed to converge even in the initial years.
- Falling incomes in several Member States during the Great Recession stalled convergence, but it has resumed more recently, mainly as a result of faster income growth in the eastern European Member States (especially the Baltic states) compared with other Member States.

Read more

Germany’s minimum wage has reduced wage inequality; Wage developments in the EU and the impact of Germany’s minimum wage eurofound.link/ef18084
Recent developments in the distribution of wages in Europe eurofound.link/ef1510
Income inequalities and employment patterns in Europe before and after the Great Recession eurofound.link/ef1663
Concept and practice of a living wage eurofound.link/ef18064
Making migration a labour market resource
Making migration a labour market resource

The EU’s most troubling episode of the past four years has been the refugee and migration crisis – the flight of people from the war-torn Middle East and, to a lesser extent, Africa into Europe. This put new strains on a Union already polarised by the effects of the recent economic crisis and fuelled divisive political movements that the crisis had ignited. And while the number of first-time asylum applicants has dropped from a peak of 1.3 million in 2015, levels are still substantial, topping 580,000 in 2018.

The flow of so many displaced people across EU borders sparked anxiety about the lack of preparedness to provide for them and the drain on public resources as well as the potential threat to national security. Negativity towards the newcomers is pervasive as they are scapegoated for the societal ills of their host countries. Those who seek to quell such fears point to the potential boost to a dwindling labour supply in an ageing continent. Commission President Juncker himself remarked that migration should ‘change from a problem to be tackled to a well-managed resource’ that might be applied to address labour shortages.

Member States have faced a steep learning curve in dealing with high numbers of refugees and migrants and designing tailor-made integration measures that are not only appropriate for people from different cultural backgrounds but that also take account of the trauma they have undergone. Language barriers and low levels of literacy also hamper their integration. These issues have required capacity-building and increasing the resources of public services – such as public employment, healthcare and education – to meet specific needs.

How did Europeans react?

The integration of people with a foreign background is dependent not only on their willingness to integrate but also on the willingness of the native population to accept them, particularly where they end up in competition for welfare resources and public services not sized for greater demand. Public opinion across the Member States is increasingly resistant to assimilation efforts, however. For example, provision of housing has been opposed by local residents unwilling to host refugees in their communities. In the Netherlands, for example, local authorities have found it politically difficult to prioritise the housing of refugees over citizens currently on waiting lists, who might have been waiting for years.

The EQLS provides some evidence on the attitudes of Europeans to the arrival of migrants in their countries. It asks respondents about the level of tension they perceive between different groups in society, including different racial and ethnic groups and different religious groups. While this question does not directly capture attitudes to migrants, people’s responses to these questions in 2016 were likely to have been influenced by the refugee and migration crisis and the related concerns around terrorism and security.

The survey shows that, overall, 40% of EU citizens perceive a high level of tension between racial and ethnic groups. Moreover, as Figure 19 illustrates, this perception is more prevalent in western European Member States that experienced high levels of immigration in recent years: 4 to 5 out of 10 citizens in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom reported high tension levels. Comparable rates were also found in Czechia, Hungary and Malta.

Perception of high tension between religious groups is almost as prevalent, at 37% across the EU on average. There has been a marked increase in this indicator since 2011, when the percentage was 27%. Its prevalence in the Member States is very similar to that of racial and ethnic tensions, and the western European Member States again have the highest levels. However, in Bulgaria and Cyprus, which have the highest percentages of Muslims of all Member States, the perceived levels of religious tension were modest, at 16% and 17%, respectively. Rates increased significantly in 19 countries since 2011, with the largest increases in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands.

It does appear that ethno-cultural tensions are strongest in the Member States that have experienced high levels of migration in recent years. Further analysis confirmed that countries with a greater share of asylum-seekers have higher rates of perceived racial and ethnic tensions, and of perceived religious tensions. As we have seen, economic prosperity is associated with lower levels of social exclusion and higher rates of trust between people, but it is clearly not a preventative against the social friction caused by the large-scale inflow of asylum-seekers.

Assimilation of non-EU nationals is one of the key challenges that the EU as a whole must address to maintain social cohesion and equality. These findings underline the need for countries to scale up public services to support increased numbers of users. Countries must also continue to invest in measures for their smooth integration and for long-term interventions to promote intercultural understanding and reduce prejudice. Buy-in of local communities when measures are applied at local level will be a key component of success.
Enabling asylum-seekers to work

There is a strong political will to smooth the path into employment for refugees (displaced people who have been granted asylum) as well as asylum-seekers (those awaiting a decision on their application for asylum), particularly those who are likely to be granted permission to stay. At the same time, in a labour market increasingly requiring more technical skills, a lot of asylum-seekers are at a disadvantage due to their lower educational attainment and, in some cases, lack of formal schooling and certification.

A lot of asylum-seekers are at a disadvantage due to their lower educational attainment and, in some cases, lack of formal schooling and certification.

Sustainable labour market integration takes time. Data from the 2017 German Refugee Survey show that one in four refugees and asylum-seekers who arrived after 2013 were in employment after 2–3 years and about 40% after more than 3 years. According to Swedish administrative data, less than half of the country’s refugees were in the labour market 5 years after coming to Sweden. After 10 years, the share was about 60%.

While people granted refugee status have the same employment rights as the native population, the employment situation of asylum-seekers is more complicated. Table 2 shows how the numbers of asylum applications waiting for a decision has fluctuated in the seven main EU destination countries for asylum-seekers and the two entry-point countries over 2015–2018. While their numbers are falling, the figure remains high – nearly 880,000 at the end of 2018.
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Given that the asylum process tends to be lengthy, it can make sense to enable these people to work. From a societal perspective, it would help to bridge the insider–outsider divide that is so destructive to social cohesion. And from an economic perspective, it would reduce the costs to the social protection systems that support asylum-seekers and might bolster tax contributions to the state.

In principle, asylum-seekers are entitled to work in all but one of the Member States (Lithuania is the one exception), but the hurdles they confront can amount to an effective ban. To begin with, countries impose waiting periods before asylum-seekers are even permitted to work, although some, recognising the detrimental effect of a prolonged asylum procedure, have cut this period. It is typically 6–9 months but is as little as 1 day in Sweden and as much as 12 months in the United Kingdom.

Various national regulations pose further obstacles. Some countries apply a labour market test, meaning that other groups are prioritised in the labour market, and an asylum-seeker can be offered a specific job only if no suitably qualified person from those groups is available to fill the vacancy. To begin with, countries impose waiting periods before asylum-seekers are even permitted to work, although some, recognising the detrimental effect of a prolonged asylum procedure, have cut this period. It is typically 6–9 months but is as little as 1 day in Sweden and as much as 12 months in the United Kingdom.

Employment support

The provision of specific services to support asylum-seekers in the jobs market is variable. Some countries, such as Belgium and Denmark, offer a wide range of services, such as language training and help with recognition of their qualifications, while other countries provide virtually no support.

The public employment services are also available, which offer some additional supports such as job placement and job-related training. A number of services are mainstream programmes open generally to unemployed job-seekers and are not specifically designed for asylum-seekers. In Germany and Austria, some services are offered only to asylum-seekers who have a good prospect of remaining in the country over the long term because their home countries are not safe.

Several countries have reduced the services and allowances provided to refugees and asylum-seekers.

There can also be stark differences in the support given to refugees. Several countries offer wage subsidies to employers for hiring refugees but not for asylum-seekers. However, offering incentives to employers would enhance the employment prospects of asylum-seekers, as employers are often reluctant to employ them, given the uncertainty around the length of their stay. Prejudice among employers, as with the population in general, is not uncommon, especially if there are language and cultural barriers.

Reducing support

As political stances have shifted and new governments assumed power, several countries have reduced the services and allowances provided to refugees and asylum-seekers. It has been argued that this could...
motivate them to work and reduce criticism against them for being a burden on welfare systems, but it could also further impede their labour market integration since cuts in support could affect their living conditions.

There have been more proactive developments too, however: the social partners and the government in Sweden, for instance, came to an agreement in 2018 on the basic principles for a new form of employment in order to facilitate the labour market integration of people with a migrant background.

**How smooth is labour market integration?**

The traditional theory of integration is that successive generations of the population with a foreign background will assimilate gradually and come to resemble the native population. More recent thinking proposes that the process is not so linear and that cultural and societal factors, such as social capital, discrimination, and the opportunities and challenges presented by the host society, influence how well different groups are integrated.

Eurofound has looked at the integration of migrants in selected Member States, some with a long experience of immigration (Austria, Belgium, France, Sweden and the UK) and others with more recent experience (all from southern Europe: Italy, Portugal and Spain). To examine integration across generations, the analysis looked at four different migrant statuses, from the most clearly migrant to the most assimilated:

- born abroad and migrated as an adult
- born abroad and migrated as a child
- born in the host country but with both parents born abroad
- born in the host country and with one parent born abroad.

As Figure 20 illustrates, those who migrated as adults are significantly disadvantaged compared to nationals.

*Figure 20: Employment and activity status of people with a migration background and natives, selected Member States, 2014*

Source: EU-LFS ad hoc module ‘Labour market situation of migrants and their immediate descendants’, 2014; Eurofound calculations
of the country: more are unemployed (not working and looking for work) and economically inactive (not working and not looking for work).

Figure 21 shows that adult migrants are also more likely to occupy lower-paid jobs.

A linear pattern of integration across generations is not generally apparent: there is no consistent gradation across the employment or pay categories from adult migrant to native. For instance, in many countries, those born in the host country with one migrant parent fare better than the native working population in terms of generally occupying higher-paid jobs.

Furthermore, the biggest reduction in disadvantage tends to occur between the two first categories (adult migrant and child migrant). On the other hand, the differences between child migrant and those born in the host country with a migration background tend to be quite small. (Note that for the southern European countries, the share of second-generation migrants is quite small, which may lead to unreliable results for those categories.)

Only in the countries with a longer immigration tradition – Sweden and the United Kingdom, particularly – is there a smoother transition from the labour market pattern of adult migrants through to the pattern of the native population, which is somewhat consistent with the hypothesis of a linear process of integration.

The analysis also found a significant diversity in labour market integration patterns across the eight countries. Migrants to Sweden and the United Kingdom and their descendants have the best work prospects, in terms of both employment and occupational opportunities, while those who migrated to Austria, Belgium and France are in a middling position. As for the countries where immigration is a more recent phenomenon – the southern European Member States – employment is higher among immigrants, but they are also more likely to be in low-paid jobs. The economies of these countries grew rapidly between 1995 and 2007, with an expansion of low-skilled and low-paid sectors such as construction and personal services. The employment patterns of

Source: EU-LFS ad hoc module 'Labour market situation of migrants and their immediate descendants', 2014; Eurofound calculations
immigrants in these countries suggest that they participated in this fast economic growth, but they were often hired into jobs at the bottom of the occupational ladder in those low-paid sectors.

**Labour market integration not automatic**

The message from these results is that the labour market integration of people with a migration background will not come automatically over time through the assimilation of successive generations. The concentration of immigrants from certain regions of the world in low-paid jobs in most countries points towards the existence of ethnic segregation in occupations. Policies need to focus on reducing this segregation and to aim for the economic integration of immigrants with or without acculturation into the host society. For this to be effective, difficulties associated with specific regions of origin need to be better understood and tackled more specifically.

However, the evidence of better prospects for immigrants in some Member States is grounds for optimism: not only does this show that better integration is indeed possible, but it also provides good examples that can be studied and emulated. The factors that explain the better performance of Sweden and the United Kingdom should be isolated, to extract policy lessons that could be shared with other countries. Broader aspects of integration of foreign populations, however, are more complex.

**Takeaways**

- The presence of large numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers within Member States has the potential to weaken social cohesion. Swift integration of the newcomers into the labour market is an important means of making them part of the host society and dispelling antagonism.
- Integration is not automatic, however. Public authorities from government to local level need to continue to develop, tailor and fund measures to enable integration. Barriers to employment include language and skills deficiencies as well as discrimination by employers.
- Public services and welfare systems need to be scaled up to avoid creating a type of competition for resources with the vulnerable native population. Public authorities also need to work on increasing public acceptance of migrants by actively engaging local communities in integration measures.
- In long-established destination countries – Sweden and the United Kingdom, particularly – the population with a migration background has transitioned relatively smoothly over two generations into a labour market pattern similar to that of the native population. In countries where immigration is a more recent phenomenon, however, migrants are disproportionately employed in low-paid jobs.

**Read more**

- Approaches to the labour market integration of refugees and asylum seekers [eurofound.link/ef1646](eurofound.link/ef1646)
- Role of public services in integrating refugees and asylum seekers [eurofound.link/ef19042](eurofound.link/ef19042)
- Social cohesion and well-being in Europe [eurofound.link/ef18035](eurofound.link/ef18035)
- Migrants in European labour markets are persistently disadvantaged by region of origin [eurofound.link/ef18056](eurofound.link/ef18056)
How we work today
Trends in employment
Employment trends have been positive throughout 2015–2018, driven by continuous economic growth. The employment rate reached an all-time high in the EU in 2018, rising to 73.2% of people aged 20–64 in the second quarter. Thirteen Member States passed the Europe 2020 target of a 75% employment rate, while another four (Ireland, Hungary, Malta and Cyprus) were within one percentage point of doing so. These high employment rates reflect not only economic growth but also longer-term trends of increased participation in the labour market by women and older workers.

Unemployment continues to fall, dropping to 6.6% in December 2018, the lowest rate recorded in the EU since Eurostat started its monthly unemployment series in January 2000. Yet it remains high in some Member States, especially Greece (18.0%), Spain (14.3%) and Italy (10.3%).

Long-term unemployment is falling too – 2.9% of unemployed people were out of work for more than 12 months in 2018 – although it is slower to improve and remains above the pre-crisis rate of 2.6%. Rates also remain higher than before the crisis in 13 Member States.

As for youth unemployment, it fell to 14.9% in December 2018 from 16.1% 12 months previously, although rates remain high in Greece (39.5%), Spain (32.7%) and Italy (32.5%). The percentage of young people classified in the broader NEET group (not in employment, education or training) fell to 10.5% of the population aged 15–24, down from a peak of 13.2% in 2012.

Positive convergence patterns

Both employment and unemployment rates have shown upward convergence in the EU since 2002. The crisis brought sharp divergence in the labour market performance of Member States, however, and the crisis and post-crisis periods were experienced very differently across the different labour markets. The pattern of upward convergence has resumed since 2013, with employment recovering faster in Greece and Spain and other countries badly affected by the crisis such as Ireland, Portugal and the Baltic states.

As Figure 22 confirms, employment rates have risen substantially from the minima of the past decade, even if for some countries, these are just the first steps towards the normalisation of labour markets.

Services dominate employment growth

Most of the employment growth over 2011–2018 has been concentrated in services, which now account for 73% of employment. The bulk of this growth has been in private sector services, although employment has

Figure 22: Employment rates, EU Member States, Q2 2008–Q2 2018

Note: Rates for workers aged 20–64 years.
Source: EU-LFS
expanded substantially too in higher-level occupations in healthcare, education and public administration. White-collar low-skilled employment (mainly in clerical and administration jobs) has declined in both public and private services.

Manufacturing, which shed employment during the crisis and has been in long-term structural decline, has shown some employment growth since 2014 in the EU as a whole and in several Member States, although this is partly a cyclical rebound from the recession. While the jobs lost up to 2014 were mainly middle-paying jobs, the new employment is skewed towards higher-skilled professional and managerial occupations. Employment in construction fell over 2011–2018, reflecting the very delayed recovery of employment in this typically cyclical sector in the aftermath of the Great Recession; employment levels have recovered more quickly in manufacturing than construction.

As the growing sectors tend to be predominantly high-skilled in terms of the qualifications and occupational profiles of employees, and the contracting sectors predominantly low- or middle-skilled, these employment shifts have been to the advantage of workers with higher qualifications. On the other hand, they have been especially damaging to those with lower-level skills. This is particularly true for predominantly male jobs in construction and manufacturing, which have traditionally enjoyed significant wage premiums.

A workforce reconfigured

The make-up of the workforce in the EU has changed following the crisis:

- It is older: the proportion of workers aged 55 and over has risen due to the fall in youth employment from 2008 to 2013, active ageing policies and later statutory retirement ages. The employment rate of 55–64-year-olds, which was 38.4% in 2002, rose to 58.2% in 2018.
- It is more part-time: part-time employment has risen steadily since the 1990s and into the recession, although it flattened in 2014 and has fallen somewhat subsequently.
- It is more female, mainly as a result of job losses in male-dominated sectors but also the expansion of services and the rising share of part-time work.
- It is more high-skilled and white-collar, reflecting the expansion of the services sector, an increasing share of employment in occupations requiring higher skills, and the replacement of retiring workers by a younger, better-educated cohort.

High-paying jobs on the rise

The greater demand for higher-skilled workers is apparent when the growth in employment is broken down according to wage category. Figure 23 shows net employment growth in the EU across five wage quintiles, from the lowest-paid 20% to the highest-paid 20%. It demonstrates that employment has risen disproportionately in higher-paid jobs over two decades, and during the crisis from 2008 to 2010, only the highest-paid jobs saw net employment growth.

Figure 23: Employment change (% per annum) by wage quintile, EU, 1998–2018

Source: EU-LFS, SES (Eurofound calculations)
Since the recovery, employment has spread out more across the five wage categories. But employment growth remains weighted in favour of the highest-paying jobs, such as ICT and health professionals.

A secondary recurring pattern across the four periods is the weak employment growth in the mid-low-paid quintile compared with the other quintiles, especially during the recessionary period. Jobs in this quintile are typically lower-skilled, such as agricultural workers, machine operators and care workers.

The quintile patterns differ across the Member States. For instance, the skew towards top-paying jobs is replicated in big Member States such as Germany, Poland and the United Kingdom as well as Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Portugal and Sweden. But most of the new jobs in Hungary and Italy are in the low-paid quintiles. Employment polarisation – where growth is higher both in the lower-paid and higher-paid categories than in the middle – has occurred in Denmark, France and Romania as well as in some of the countries where labour markets were most affected by the crisis, including Greece, Spain and Estonia.

Which jobs are growing and declining?

What do we know about the jobs that make up the quintile bars? A small number of jobs account for a very large share of employment in the EU, so shifts in headcount in these jobs to a great extent shape the patterns of change in the quintile charts. Table 3 lists the 10 jobs that employ the greatest numbers of people in the EU (in this context, a job is defined as a specific occupation within a specific economic sector).

The two jobs that employ the most people are sales worker in retail and teaching professional in education, which together represent over 1 in 10 jobs in the EU. The first is in the lowest wage quintile, the second in the highest, and both are female-dominated jobs.

The jobs that have grown most in recent years are also at opposite ends of the quintile range: at the low end, personal service workers in accommodation and food services, and at the high end, health professionals working in healthcare. The greatest employment decline occurred among building workers in the construction sector and skilled workers in agriculture.

### Table 3: Ten largest-employing jobs, EU, 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Numbers employed 2018 (millions)</th>
<th>% change 2011–2018</th>
<th>Wage quintile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sales workers</td>
<td>Retail trade</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching professionals</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building and related trades workers</td>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>-7.8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market-oriented skilled agricultural workers</td>
<td>Agriculture, forestry and fisheries</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>-14.4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health professionals</td>
<td>Human health and social work</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal service workers</td>
<td>Accommodation and food services</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal care workers</td>
<td>Human health and social work</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drivers and mobile plant operators</td>
<td>Transport and storage</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health associate professionals</td>
<td>Human health and social work</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal, machinery and related trades workers</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: EU-LFS, SES (Eurofound calculations)

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**Event: Informal meeting of employment and social policy (EPSCO) ministers**

Eurofound Executive Director Juan Menéndez-Valdés addressed an informal meeting of the ministers of the European Union responsible for employment and social affairs on 17 and 18 April 2018 in Sofia, Bulgaria, where he presented Eurofound findings on long-term unemployed youth. The meeting discussed the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights and how they can be applied in order to improve workforce skills and qualifications and ensure equal opportunities and access to the labour market. The programme also focused on active labour market policies regarding young people and the long-term unemployed.
The top 10 fastest-declining jobs, shown in Table 5, are dispersed across the wage quintiles and include construction labourers and clerical jobs in various sectors, as well as one of the large-employing jobs, agricultural labourers. Much of the decline in certain jobs is due to their replacement by technology: for instance, internet-based services and automatic teller machines have substituted customer service workers in banking.
Growing labour market participation

In the EU in 2018, there were 15.8 million unemployed people of working age (20–64 years), meaning they were not employed but were available for work and looking for work. An additional 65.1 million people of working age were economically inactive; these were also not in employment but were not officially classified as unemployed because they were either not seeking work or not available for work, or both.

Many, or even most, are inactive out of choice, being students, retirees and homemakers dedicated to domestic life, for instance. However, almost one in five inactive people – or 12.4 million working-age individuals – indicated a willingness to work in the 2018 EU-LFS. As they do not figure in the unemployment statistics, they have tended to remain below the radar of policymakers. But this is changing as leaders and governments come to recognise the economic need for all citizens to make better use of their productive potential. The EU working-age population is shrinking, and as this trend continues due to falling fertility rates, the EU and its Member States will not be able to afford to have so many people outside the labour force. Employment would also take more people out of poverty; rates of severe material deprivation among inactive people are much higher than the EU average; rates are highest among inactive disabled people and homemakers.

The inactivity rate is falling; it has decreased continuously from 26.9% in 2002 to 21.6% in 2018 among 20–64-year-olds even through the years of the economic crisis. This fall has been mainly due to the rising participation of women and older workers (aged 55–64) in the labour force. However, this trend needs to be maintained as substantial proportions remain outside the labour force: one-fifth of women in the prime age group (25–54 years) and one-third of older workers.

They do face many barriers. One of the big barriers is care responsibilities, which keeps homemakers, in particular, from seeking work. Many also lack the skills that employers are looking for; they have little work experience, poor educational attainment or obsolete skills. Physical and mental health problems also discourage job-seeking, as do attitudes – many inactive people feel socially excluded and that no place exists for them in the labour market. Introducing or re-introducing these people to the world of work requires comprehensive targeted programmes. More accessible formal care provision and tax incentives for second earners might attract more women to the jobs market, while older workers might be encouraged to participate if flexible working time arrangements and training opportunities were available.
Takeaways

- Employment has been rising in the EU since 2013 on the back of sustained economic growth and increasing participation of women and older people in the labour market.
- Upward convergence in both employment and unemployment has resumed. Employment rates have recovered faster in Greece and Spain and other countries badly affected by the crisis such as Ireland, Portugal and the Baltic states. Large disparities in unemployment rates persist across the Member States nevertheless.
- Employment has also been upgrading for the past two decades, meaning that most growth has occurred in high-paying, high-skilled jobs.
- This is a result of the expansion of service sectors that tend to be predominantly high-skilled in terms of the qualifications and occupational profiles of employees, and the contraction of sectors that are predominantly low- or middle-skilled.
- Despite the increasing participation of women and older workers, substantial proportions remain outside the labour market. More need to be attracted into employment to offset the declining European workforce.
Flexible working: A problem or a solution?
Flexible working: A problem or a solution?

A big theme of the past four years has been the future of work. While the story of automation and the prospect of robots taking over our jobs has grabbed most attention, another aspect of working life is being chipped away – the 9-to-5, office-bound job. The proportion of full-time permanent jobs is slowly diminishing, down from 59.5% of all jobs in 2009 to 58.2% in 2016. And more diversity is apparent in relation to workplace, working time, the employer–employee relationship and ways of cooperation at work.

Behind these trends, on the one hand, is an evolving economy. Activity is shifting away from manufacturing towards services. Globalisation is putting competitive pressure on business. So employers are talking about flexibility, seeking a workforce that can be adapted to demand, that can be there when needed and off duty when not.

The call for flexibility is coming from the other side, too. The push for gender equality in the workplace includes the demand for work arrangements to enable women, still the main carers of children, to combine work with family life, which rarely received much heed when it was the domain of men and single women. Part-time arrangements are becoming more available, enabling parents, still mostly women, to better combine work with the care of children.

The expanding services sector, which now accounts for 73% of all employment, is demanding more part-time too. For many service subsectors – retail and tourism are obvious examples – flexibility around staff working time has become critical for businesses’ capacity to adapt to variable demand, market competition and customer needs. The services shift has been as much a driver of part-time working as workers’ work–life balance needs.

One-fifth of the EU labour force now works part-time, and three-quarters of this segment are women. In the Netherlands, where flexible working time is more of a norm, part-time workers now outnumber full-time workers. The trend, however, is much weaker in the eastern European Member States.

How good is job quality?

While part-time has tended to be associated with lower-status work, the evidence suggests that it is not confined to poor-quality jobs. Figure 24 shows the growth in part-time employment across five pay quintiles – from the lowest to the highest paid jobs. In the lowest-paid jobs – jobs such as shop assistant and care worker – growth in part-time surpassed growth in full-time. However, part-time growth was greatest in the highest-paid quintile, in jobs such as health consultant and senior director.

Research by Eurofound has found that part-time workers take a hit on some aspects of job quality: they tend to have less autonomy at work, their skills development suffers, and the social environment at work is less supportive than for full-time workers. At the same time, their working time is better, their work is less intense and, contrary to common assumptions, their career prospects are not harmed.
How voluntary?

It is notable, though, that around a quarter of part-timers want to work full-time. The reason they most commonly give for working part-time (by 35% of men and 25% of women) is that they can’t find a full-time job. And this group is concentrated in the lower-paid, lower-skilled end of the economy. Over half of involuntary part-timers (57%) work in lower service occupations, such as sales and customer service work, a category that accounts for around one-quarter of total employment. Managers, on the other hand, are much less likely to be working part-time involuntarily.

The rate of involuntary part-time in the EU has followed the economic cycle. It was climbing for several years up to 2014, when 30% of part-timers were involuntary, but has dropped in the meantime, to 27% in 2017, as the economy has improved and employers’ confidence has grown. At the same time, the overall EU trend since 2005 has been one of downward divergence, meaning it has been rising overall (designated ‘downward’ as this is deemed undesirable), and Member States have been diverging on this trend. Rates have increased most in Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Italy and Spain, while they have decreased considerably in Bulgaria and Lithuania.

Temporary employment

Temporary contracts offer a different form of flexibility, enabling employers to hire labour for limited time periods when they have need of it. Like part-time, temporary employment has been increasing in the EU over decades, although the rate dipped during the crisis as many employers cut labour costs by not renewing the contracts of their fixed-term workers. With the recovery, growth in temporary employment resumed, rising from 10.9% of all employment in 2014 to 11.2% in 2018 among 20–64-year-olds.

Temporary contracts have clear benefits for employers, giving them greater flexibility to adjust their workforces as circumstances change without incurring high costs when letting staff go. Temporary staff can be terminated simply by non-renewal of their contracts and the costs may be zero in some Member States, whereas permanent employees can be much more difficult and costly to lay off.

Do employees benefit?

The benefits for employees are less obvious. Precariousness plainly is a disadvantage. Temporary employees are generally paid less than their permanent counterparts in the same company, and their prospects for career advancement, including opportunities for training, are poorer. Even their working time arrangements and the flexibility to manage these arrangements are worse. And there are broader impacts: financial insecurity, lack of access to loans and, as a result, fewer housing options.

Temporary employees are generally paid less than their permanent counterparts in the same company.
Of course, there will always be people whose other pursuits in life make a temporary job eminently suitable, such as the actor waiting tables or the homemaker gathering census data. But it is usually involuntary – almost two-thirds of temporary employees in the EU say they have a temporary job only because they could not find permanent employment, according to EU-LFS data. Like involuntary part-time, involuntary temporary work has shown a pattern of downward divergence over 2002–2016. The level is rising across the EU – having increased especially in Croatia, Cyprus, Italy and Poland – while differences between the Member States have also risen.

**Out of office**

The proliferation of ICT and the digitalisation of tasks, whatever the impact on other aspects of life and work, have not had the expected transformational effect on work arrangements – within traditional companies, at any rate. In theory, once ICT reduced the tools of the worker to a computer, a phone and an internet connection, there was the potential for a large-scale abandonment of the office. But this has not happened: the majority of workers remain in their employers’ premises. Just 3% of EU workers telework regularly from home. A further 5% use ICT regularly while working on the move – many of whom would always have worked away from the office, such as salespeople – and 10% occasionally telework either from home or another location.

It is much more widespread in Scandinavia and much less so in eastern Europe, Greece and Italy (Figure 25), which suggests that the extent of ICT spread and internet connectivity have influenced take-up, as have the national work culture and economic structure, and business models.

Lack of enthusiasm among employers appears to be a big barrier. Prominent companies such as Yahoo! and IBM in recent years pulled the plug on teleworking and decided to restrict it or disallow it completely. Their feeling was that the dispersal of employees interfered with spontaneous interaction and sharing of ideas, stifling opportunities for development and innovation. Yet a survey by HR services company Randstad from 2018 found that 60% of EU workers would like to telework but cannot because their employer doesn’t permit it.

Telework signifies more than a change of location. It amounts to a shift in attitude, a recognition that workers can be self-motivating and productive in the absence of close managerial supervision. This may be a readjustment too far for some employers. One might speculate that employers haven’t seized this flexibility tool because it apparently benefits them much less than their workers – on the surface at least.

However, while the evidence is fairly scant, the bulk of it suggests that the productivity of teleworkers can be higher than that of employees based in an employer’s premises. Several factors contribute to this, including greater autonomy, fewer interruptions and improved efficiency due to the use of ICT. Another factor is that teleworkers put in longer hours on average, a finding that suggests flexibility does not necessarily improve work–life balance.

**Figure 25: Percentage of workers teleworking in Member States, by type, 2015**

Just 3% of EU workers telework regularly from home.
Sharing Eurofound’s findings on work in the digital age

Over the course of 2018, Eurofound participated in several events, including informal EPSCO meetings of the EU Presidencies, to share the evidence it has gathered on the evolution of work in the digital age.

Informal meeting of employment and social policy ministers (EPSCO)

On 19 and 20 July, the employment and social policy ministers gathered in Vienna, Austria, to discuss the challenges posed by new forms of work arising from the increasing digitalisation of European labour markets. The informal meeting took place under the auspices of the Austrian Presidency of the European Council. Eurofound Executive Director Juan Menéndez-Valdés contributed to the first session New forms of work with a focus on platform work – social and legal protection, presenting Eurofound’s findings on the different types of platform work and the working conditions of platform workers.

Informal meeting of the EU Social Protection Committee

On 19 September, Irene Mandl, Head of Unit, delivered a presentation to the Social Protection Committee (SPC), also on the topic of platform work, linking with the Austrian Presidency’s Digitalisation of Work conference. The presentation highlighted the complexity of social protection for platform workers and the lack of clarity over their employment status.

Making the platform economy work well for workers

Eurofound hosted its second live webinar on 8 November in Brussels on the topic Making the platform economy work well for workers. During the two-hour event, participants shared their experiences of platform work, concerns about its impact on workers and insights into its benefits. They also examined possible solutions to tackle the work- and employment-related implications of this new type of work.
Platform work: Flexibility, digital style

Where technology-driven flexibility has really come into its own is with the online platform, the digital upstart that is disrupting conventions of work that we assumed to be perpetual.

The most visible manifestation of these platforms has been the appearance on our city streets of the Just-Eat and Deliveroo riders delivering meals or the Uber drivers providing lifts. But food-delivery and taxi rides are just two of an ever-widening range of services on offer through platforms. You can hire someone for almost any task, from transcribing interviews (Amazon Mechanical Turk) to teaching Chinese (Guru) to providing expert business advice (Toptal). Platform work is an all-encompassing term for any type of work where an online platform matches the supply of and demand for paid labour.

For the moment, it is still marginal. Statistics are scarce but a study of 14 Member States published by the Commission’s Joint Research Centre in 2018 estimated that 2% of the working-age population do platform work as their main job, while a further 8% engage in it occasionally (at least once a month). There is reason to believe, however, in the high potential for expansion of this type of work, as platforms are incredibly efficient in matching supply and demand. They also allow for one-off trades and unbundling of individual tasks typically grouped into full jobs.

Why choose it?

Workers are attracted to this type of work because the entry barriers are low, and it appears to offer a level of flexibility and autonomy not available from traditional ways of working. It offers the prospect of working when they want and as much as they want. They are not tied to a workplace: the platform worker works at home, on the street, or at a place chosen by the client. Gone, too, is the line manager, although how liberating this is is questionable, as platforms have other means of monitoring and incentivising performance. Some gather data by tracking their workers and the progress of tasks through their smartphones; if the data indicates poor performance, workers may see assignments dry up and contracts end. Other platforms rely on client ratings to keep their workers in check; a rating of less than four stars out of five can end a career.

Then there is the question of who the employer is, the answer to which will say a lot about the independence of platform workers and the flexibility of the job. The platforms by and large insist that they are simply digital intermediaries, facilitating genuinely self-employed workers or freelancers to secure work. But not all are. There is great diversity among platforms and in the work associated with them. A key distinction is whether they are matching or managing work. Some operate in an employer-like capacity, dictating schedules, setting prices, allocating tasks, determining the place and manner of work, even requiring workers to wear uniforms with their branding. Workers might not be called again if they turn down jobs or are unavailable when the platform demands them to be. The people working for these platforms occupy a twilight zone somewhere between self-employed and employee. The platform designates them as self-employed, but in many ways, they lack the autonomy that is a key characteristic of self-employment. A string of legal cases has been taken by platform workers in recent years challenging self-employed status, and some have won, such as the case taken by drivers based in London against Uber in 2016.

These are not the only concerns raised about platform work. Questions also surround issues like the social protection of workers, health and safety, taxation and unionisation.

Workers might not be called again if they turn down jobs or are unavailable when the platform demands them to be.

Plus ça change

This prompts one to ask whether platform work might not be something old and familiar dressed up as something new and pioneering, or at least those forms where the platform acts in an employer-like capacity. Take away the technology and from a worker’s perspective, it closely resembles more conventional types of work arrangements where a pool of workers can be called on as needed and paid only for the work they do. It is just another form of ‘work on demand’, already manifested in temporary agency work, on-call work and casual work such as zero-hours contracts. It may even be worse, given the higher level of business risk offloaded onto workers.

Flexibility in the work relationship is the key reason for all types of on-demand work. In competitive markets, these non-standard contracts enable employers to adapt to demand. Adaptable labour markets are defended as having benefits for both workers and employers. In some cases, doubtless, on-demand work enables workers to mesh work with other personal goals. It offers opportunities for people who have difficulty operating or do not want to operate in the conventional labour market such as students, carers and people with poor mobility. And the provisional nature of some types of work is unavoidable – fruit is ripe and in
need of picking for a limited period in the year, for example. But employers seem to be the real winners, whether they are old-fashioned businesses fine-tuning their labour costs or new-fangled platforms taking a cut from each job. For workers at the lower-skilled end of platform work, pay is low, prospects are few and no benefit safety net exists.

The EU directive on transparent and predictable working conditions is an attempt to take some of the uncertainty out of diverse types of work. It will require employers to inform workers on essential aspects of their working conditions from day one on the job and prevent them from requiring employees to be available at short notice. It also includes some basic entitlements bringing various forms of work often excluded from this type of regulation within the scope of the directive, including platform workers.

This is a step towards tackling some of the negative consequences of the growth of a two-tier labour market in the EU, where one part is subject to insecure employment contracts, low pay and poor working conditions while the other has full-time, permanent contracts and enjoys the range of benefits accruing from that status.

**Takeaways**

- Various societal forces are driving more flexible ways of working and greater diversity in employment relationships – these include the shift to a predominantly services economy, global competition, rising female participation in the labour force and the increasing penetration of ICT.
- Increasing flexibility is potentially beneficial for workers, giving them greater scope to successfully combine work with other aspects of their lives. But when flexible working is a euphemism for insecure and unpredictable work, it severely disadvantages workers. Concern is widespread that involuntary part-time and temporary work is making employment more precarious for people.
- Platform working is flexible work in a digital context and is expected to grow as consumer demand rises for the services that platforms provide. Not all platforms and types of platform work are equal. Some types of platform work exhibit the typical features of dependent employment, providing less social protection and job security. It will be important for policymakers to accompany the development of these business models with approaches that effectively address the issues that they give rise to.

**Read more**

- Occupational change and wage inequality: European Jobs Monitor 2017  eurofound.link/ef1710
- Recent developments in temporary employment: Employment growth, wages and transitions eurofound.link/ef1554
- Upward convergence in the EU: Concepts, measurements and indicators eurofound.link/ef18003
- Does employment status matter for job quality? eurofound.link/ef18021
- Regional shifts in the employment structure: European Jobs Monitor 2019 eurofound.link/ef19036
- Estimating labour market slack in the European Union eurofound.link/ef1711
- Working anytime, anywhere: The effects on the world of work eurofound.link/ef1658
- Employment and working conditions of selected types of platform work eurofound.link/ef18001
- Platform economy repository eurofound.link/platformeconomy
Strengthening social dialogue in social reform
A ‘new start for social dialogue’ at EU level was announced in 2015, aimed at revitalising the contribution of the social partners to policymaking and to get their buy-in on reforms to address weaknesses within Member States’ economic and social structures. It was an acknowledgement of the key role that social dialogue plays in building up the single market and, broadly speaking, bringing the European project forward. The then President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, expressed his dissatisfaction with the limited input of the social partners to EU economic governance and emphasised that ‘to ensure a social market economy in Europe, we need a European social dialogue on the European level’. Hence, the Commission has promoted an enhanced role for European and national social partners throughout the stages of the European Semester.

Social partner input to the European Semester

National Reform Programmes

Eurofound has monitored the involvement of the social partners in the European Semester since 2016 and has detected limited change in their contribution and their assessments of that contribution over that period. From the start, the depth of the social partners’ participation has varied enormously depending on the country. This is apparent in the development of the National Reform Programmes (NRPs) by Member States, a key stage of the European Semester, which sets out national strategies to implement employment and economic policies in line with Commission guidelines.

Social partner organisations in most of the EU Member States are formally involved in the development of the NRPs, but the intensity and effectiveness of that involvement varies a great deal. In the Nordic countries, for instance, the social partners make limited direct input to Semester policy documents. They do not regard this as exclusion from the process, however, because social dialogue institutions and practices are well-established, and their contribution to the NRPs is an integral part of the overarching industrial relations framework where they have a significant influence over national policymaking.

The social partners in other countries, however, are dissatisfied with the process, complaining that consultation is purely a formality, that their involvement is insufficient or that the procedures are inadequate. They criticise the national authorities, for instance, for substituting a proper and meaningful consultation process with provision of information or arranging consultations ad hoc. The social partners in Italy, Hungary, Romania and Spain have repeatedly complained about the lack of opportunity to make a meaningful contribution. The social partners in Poland and, to a lesser extent, in Austria say their involvement in the preparation of the NRP deteriorated in 2018.

The social partners in many Member States continue to say that their views have little or no influence on final NRPs.

Some progress was reported in 2018 regarding one of the most frequent sources of complaints: the lack of time to properly analyse the content of the NRP proposed by government. The social partners in Czechia, France, Italy, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia reported having more time for consultation. Despite these improvements, the lack of sufficient time for consultation is still an issue raised by most social partners and to some extent shared and acknowledged by national authorities.

The social partners in many Member States also continue to express frustration that their views have little or no influence on the final NRPs, and employers and trade unions in some countries hold different opinions on their level of influence. Table 6 shows the social partners’ views regarding the degree of influence they have over the final version of the NRPs. These assessments should be treated cautiously as they may reflect not only subjective opinions but also other factors influencing the operation of social dialogue. The assessments are closely linked to the expectations raised and the quality of the national social dialogue in terms of the effective involvement of the social partners in policymaking. Lack of influence is stressed particularly by the social partners in those countries where they consider that their involvement is perceived as a formality. The national context in terms of social partners’ limited technical capacity to be fully and properly involved must be also considered. On the other hand, many governments argue that social dialogue consultation does not imply that take-up of social partners’ suggestions is mandatory, as democratically elected governments and parliaments have the legitimacy and sovereignty to approve reforms.
Country-specific recommendations

With the 2018 country-specific recommendations (CSRs) – which follow upon an assessment of each Member State’s plans – the Commission, for the first time, put an explicit focus on the role of social dialogue in ensuring sustainable outcomes in policy design. This acknowledges the social partners at national level as core stakeholders, able to assess work-related policy needs on the ground and provide constructive contribution to the design and implementation of the reforms.

Eurofound’s evaluation of the social partners’ involvement in policymaking at national level in 2018, both within and outside the context of the CSRs, found widespread participation in the labour and social policy fields as well as contributions to other economic and fiscal areas, although to a lesser extent. Involvement usually takes the form of consultations, most of which lead to legislation. Due to the significance of the reforms, which often require complex negotiations and long political discussions through the national policy framework, the social partners’ involvement usually has a multiannual timespan.

The quality of involvement varies hugely across countries depending on the institutional setting and the effectiveness of the practices applied. Overall, the involvement of the social partners in the design and implementation of reforms and policies has remained stable in most Member States since 2017. This was particularly true for those Member States with well-established social dialogue and mechanisms to allow the participation of social partners in policymaking.

Slight improvements in social partner involvement were reported in Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania, Serbia and Spain, whereas Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Romania and the United Kingdom reported gaps in their participation. The reasons are various, some of them relating to structural factors that impede their effective involvement, while others seem to be based on deficits in procedures and practical arrangements. The social partners in Austria, Belgium and Poland expressed concerns regarding their involvement in reforms. In Poland, for instance, the social partners saw a general deterioration of the quality of involvement due to an erosion of the role of the Social Dialogue Council in the review of legislation.

The unions are more critical than the employer organisations of the quality of their involvement in the reforms, particularly in the context of the Semester. Besides claiming that the procedures and practices do not facilitate their participation, unions usually take a more critical stance towards the government’s economic policies.

Social dialogue in working life

A more detailed perspective on the contribution of social dialogue to policymaking on working life is provided by Eurofound’s Annual review of working life 2017. This gathered details of 184 cases of national-level social dialogue in 2017, recording the topics, the form of social dialogue and the outcomes.

The volume of cases where national-level social dialogue happened is impressive, and those cases where governments took unilateral decisions with little...
or no prior social dialogue, or against strong opposition from both sides of industry, are much rarer than they have been previously. Yet such cases were still reported in nearly half of the Member States, and in Greece, major and wide-ranging measures are still implemented where social dialogue is limited to the issuing of written opinions by the social partners.

In the course of examining the cases, researchers detected some return to pre-crisis practices or rules – if not fully, at least partially – in countries that had experienced the greatest amount of change during the crisis. This was reflected, for instance, in the reinstatement of the cost of living allowance in Cyprus and a reintroduction of the extension of sectoral agreements in Slovakia. The major collective labour conflicts ‘of national significance’ were demands for reversing austerity measures and grievances over wages.

The vast majority of social dialogue debates ended up contributing in one way or another to legislative changes: in 9% of cases, legislation was in preparation, and in 26% of cases, it had been passed during 2017 (Figure 26). In an additional 5% of cases, legislation followed bipartite or tripartite social dialogue outcomes, while in 9% of cases, legislation was passed following unilateral government decisions. Only 5% were dropped without any concrete outcome. Nearly one-third of the reported cases were still ongoing at the end of 2017.

Figure 26 also shows how the 184 cases break down in terms of topics covered. The most common topic of social dialogue was employment related, including job creation and the reduction of unemployment as well as active labour market policies. Examples include activation measures for the unemployed in Finland, integration of refugees and migrants in Denmark and Sweden, and quotas for foreign workers in Czechia and Estonia.

Dialogue around different aspects of wage setting (beyond the regular increases of statutory minimum wages) was the second most frequently addressed topic and was dealt with mostly by tripartite debates and negotiations. Examples include setting a decent level for minimum wages (Romania), the possible

![Figure 26: Outcomes of social dialogue across different topics, EU, 2017](image-url)

Source: Network of Eurofound Correspondents
introduction of new sub-minima rates (for younger workers in Belgium and graduates in Hungary) or the gradual removal of sub-minima rates for younger workers in the Netherlands.

To a lesser extent, social dialogue addressed cases around terms and conditions of employment, pension reforms, skills, training and employability, as well as work-life-balance-related themes. The main working-time-related debate in industrial relations in 2017 focused on flexibilisation and lengthening working time, with employers seeking to extend working time in peak periods.

In many countries, originating from ongoing EU-level negotiations, debate revolved around new regulations in the area of work-life balance for working parents and caregivers. In 2017, many Member States continued revisions of family leave regulations, including special leave for carers and more flexible working time arrangements.

### Measuring the performance of industrial relations

A higher-level perspective on the performance of social dialogue in the EU is provided by Eurofound’s Industrial Relations Index. This index is the outcome of a project undertaken by the Agency over the past four years to assess the functioning of industrial relations in the EU in post-crisis times. It can be applied at national level to measure the performance of industrial relations systems in the Member States and to understand how they are evolving in response to political and economic developments.

The starting point of the project was to establish the key objectives of industrial relations. Four were identified: industrial democracy, industrial competitiveness, social justice, and quality of work and employment.

**Industrial democracy**: The rights of employers and employees to participate in the decision-making defining the employment relationship. The concept acknowledges the autonomy of both sides of industry as collective organisations and their collective capacity to influence decision-making.

**Industrial competitiveness**: The ability of an economy to achieve a consistently high rate of productivity growth and good performance among its small and medium-sized enterprises.

**Social justice**: The fair and non-discriminatory distribution of opportunities and outcomes within a society, in order to strengthen the capabilities of each individual for self-determination and self-realisation.

**Quality of work and employment**: Employment and working conditions that provide career and employment security, health and well-being, the ability to reconcile working and non-working life, and the opportunity to develop skills over a lifetime.

The framework provides a structure for analysing industrial relations at national level, with the underlying assumption that a balanced pursuit of the four objectives is the most desirable industrial relations strategy at national and European levels. It must be understood, however, that many outcomes from these different objectives do not depend only on industrial relations.

Based on the four objectives, an Industrial Relations Index was developed and applied to the Member States for the period 2013–2017. Figure 27 (overleaf) shows the results. Eleven countries score above the EU average on the performance of their industrial relations systems. Denmark, Sweden and Austria are the three best-performing countries, while Romania, Poland and Bulgaria are ranked at the bottom.

Generally, the countries at the top and the bottom of the table perform in a balanced way in all dimensions – either high or low across all four. However, there are countries with prominent imbalances. Czechia and Slovakia, for instance, score comparatively highly on social justice but low on the remaining three dimensions, particularly industrial competitiveness. Estonia scores comparatively highly on quality of work and employment, and very low on industrial democracy. The United Kingdom also scores very low on industrial democracy.
Overall, the functioning of industrial relations has improved in the period, although the change is slight (Figure 28). In seven countries performance has decreased: Denmark, Slovenia, Spain, Cyprus, Hungary, Greece and Poland. Except for Denmark and Slovenia, all these countries score below the EU average, with Cyprus and Spain recording the biggest decreases. Improvements were most pronounced in Bulgaria, Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania and Austria. All these countries except Austria perform below the EU average, which means that they are catching up with better-performing Member States.

### Figure 27: Industrial Relations Index scores, Member States, 2013–2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Industrial relations</th>
<th>Industrial democracy</th>
<th>Industrial competitiveness</th>
<th>Social justice</th>
<th>Quality of work and employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>70.65</td>
<td>73.25</td>
<td>62.83</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>69.41</td>
<td>80.95</td>
<td>60.29</td>
<td>79.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>69.07</td>
<td>79.21</td>
<td>57.02</td>
<td>78.13</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
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<td>80.27</td>
<td>58.95</td>
<td>80.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>68.47</td>
<td>75.64</td>
<td>64.41</td>
<td>72.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>68.26</td>
<td>68.17</td>
<td>61.49</td>
<td>80.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>64.82</td>
<td>71.53</td>
<td>57.12</td>
<td>72.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>63.57</td>
<td>58.49</td>
<td>58.37</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>59.22</td>
<td>55.54</td>
<td>52.86</td>
<td>73.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
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<td>46.05</td>
<td>53.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
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<td>56.98</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>51.82</td>
<td>44.20</td>
<td>70.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>51.96</td>
<td>73.42</td>
</tr>
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<td>Spain</td>
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<td>53.37</td>
<td>42.11</td>
<td>62.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
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<td>44.20</td>
<td>40.86</td>
<td>75.65</td>
</tr>
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<td>69.96</td>
</tr>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Italy</td>
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<td>50.64</td>
<td>39.99</td>
<td>61.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>49.01</td>
<td>44.00</td>
<td>40.75</td>
<td>62.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>48.54</td>
<td>37.78</td>
<td>40.72</td>
<td>68.33</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Croatia</td>
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<td>53.84</td>
<td>31.72</td>
<td>66.71</td>
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<td>Cyprus</td>
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<td>45.22</td>
<td>35.71</td>
<td>67.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>46.13</td>
<td>46.11</td>
<td>32.16</td>
<td>72.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Hungary</td>
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<td>35.05</td>
<td>33.37</td>
<td>69.88</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>43.56</td>
<td>41.16</td>
<td>35.36</td>
<td>58.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Lithuania</td>
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<td>32.03</td>
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<td>66.59</td>
</tr>
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<td>34.27</td>
<td>30.47</td>
<td>66.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
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<td>40.46</td>
<td>24.83</td>
<td>60.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>39.19</td>
<td>28.91</td>
<td>29.95</td>
<td>68.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>36.87</td>
<td>36.94</td>
<td>22.44</td>
<td>58.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Eurofound
Figure 28: Change in Industrial Relations Index scores, 2013–2017

Source: Eurofound
Decentralisation and the performance of industrial relations

Advocates of industrial relations reform have argued that decentralisation of collective bargaining leads to more effective results and better industrial relations performance. This claim was not confirmed by investigation.

Figure 29 plots national industrial relations systems along two axes: score on the Industrial Relation Index (x-axis) and predominant level of collective bargaining (y-axis), which goes from 0 (single employer only) to 100 (multilevel collective bargaining only). The analysis shows a positive correlation, suggesting that performance in industrial relations goes hand in hand with the centralisation of collective bargaining systems.

Figure 29: Relationship between the performance of industrial relations and level of collective bargaining, Member States

Source: Eurofound
Is there convergence in the performance of industrial relations?

The Industrial Relations Index was applied to assess whether there has been upward convergence in the performance of industrial relations over 2013–2017, meaning a general improvement combined with a reduction of disparities between countries. This exercise did indeed detect progress overall in industrial relations but the picture is more complex when the four key dimensions are examined. Industrial competitiveness and quality of work and employment show upward convergence. Social justice has shown upward divergence, meaning that there has been an average improvement across the EU, but an increase in disparities between countries. The trend for industrial democracy is more disappointing, however, one of downward divergence – falling performance and rising disparities.

The erosion of industrial democracy is a cause for concern. Cross-national differences have been accentuated, deepening previous inequalities in the role of employers and employees in decision-making regarding working life. Overall, those countries that already performed above the EU average (mainly Nordic and central European) show more stability and continuity in industrial democracy when analysed comparatively. In parallel, industrial democracy has eroded in a group that includes several countries already performing below the EU average. This is particularly the case for associational governance – the organisational strength of each side and their involvement in the governance of employment relationships through collective bargaining and social dialogue.

Takeaways

- Social dialogue at national level is showing signs of healing from the corrosive effects of the crisis and made a substantial contribution to policymaking in 2017. The vast majority of the 184 social dialogue debates examined by Eurofound ended up contributing in one way or another to legislative changes. Governments to a much lesser extent than previously took unilateral decisions with little or no prior social dialogue, or against strong opposition from both sides of industry.
- Despite the European Commission’s efforts to promote greater involvement of the social partners in the European Semester, procedures at national level seem to limit their participation and influence in the development of the National Reform Programmes and the implementation of reforms.
- The performance of industrial relations improved over 2013–2018, based on an index developed by Eurofound, although the change is marginal. High-scoring Member States in northern and western Europe pulled up the EU average; 17 countries scored less than the average.

Read more

- The involvement of social partners in national policymaking 📌 eurofound.link/ef18106
- Annual review of working life 2017 📌 eurofound.link/ef18031
- Measuring varieties of industrial relations in Europe: A quantitative analysis 📌 eurofound.link/ef18033
Building a 21st-century workforce
Building a 21st-century workforce

Recent panic in some media about the takeover of work by robots and the lack of jobs for people appears to be misplaced, or at least premature; it seems we should be worrying instead about the lack of people for jobs. Already in some parts of Europe companies are feeling the demographic pinch and vacancies stay unfilled. While jobs are not disappearing, they are certainly being transformed as the economy moves relentlessly on, fuelled by ever-changing technology. In a tightening labour market, companies are realising they need to rethink how to manage their talent and labour requirements.

On this issue of a shrinking labour supply, the concerns of employers coincide with broader concerns over the implications of population ageing, which boil down to this: the fear that the future healthcare and social security costs of an expanding older population will either place an unbearable tax burden on a shrinking working population or render social protection systems unviable.

Both of these unconscionable outcomes might be avoided by a societal approach to work that would

1. bring more people into the labour market (a quarter of the working-age population in the EU is outside the labour market), and
2. enable those already in work to remain over a longer working life – ‘making work more sustainable’, as Eurofound describes it. Meeting the second part of this goal – keeping people in work – means ensuring that workers are in good health, are motivated, and have the skills and competences their organisation needs.

How fit are 21st-century workers for the future of work?

How engaged are workers?

By several measures, most workers are motivated by their work. They are engaged – Figure 30 shows how respondents to the 2015 European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) assessed different aspects of their engagement: 71% feel full of energy at work, for instance, and the same proportion is enthusiastic about their jobs. Nevertheless, 1 in 10 doubts the importance of their job, and one-third are exhausted at the end of the day.

Figure 30: Engagement at work in several dimensions, % of workers, EU, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At work I feel full of energy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am enthusiastic about my job</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time flies when I am working</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel exhausted at the end of the day</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I doubt the importance of my work</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: EWCS 2015
In a sustainable workplace, engagement is not an accessory – workers who are engaged in their work perform better, can tap into their creative resources and are more committed to their job. Losing engagement can lead to burnout, causing workers to become consumed by exhaustion and cynicism.

Eurofound looked further into the workplace factors that nurture engagement and found that it is boosted especially by the quality of management, the ability to participate in organisational decision-making, and a good social climate. Other important factors are fair pay, being able to easily take time off to deal with personal issues, and having a supportive manager.

There is a gradation in levels of engagement according to occupation. Figure 31 illustrates this, showing engagement scores in the nine main ISCO-08 occupational categories, based on an index with a range of 0–100. As you move down the hierarchy from higher-skilled occupations to lower-skilled and manual occupations, engagement deteriorates.

Workers also believe that their work is meaningful. The great majority (82%) have a sense of work well done; a similar proportion report that they feel that the work they are doing is useful. And only 5% rarely or never feel this way. There has been little change in workers’ responses to these questions over time, with similar percentages in 2010 and 2005.

Analysis of what makes work meaningful found a link between meaningfulness and work that demands higher skills levels and offers scope for autonomy. A good social environment at work and favourable job prospects are significant too.

Are workers’ skills keeping up?

21st-century workers need to be concerned about their employability – it is increasingly less feasible to be employed in an organisation and not to change as it changes around one. And workers need to be prepared in the event of losing their job, to have the skills to find a new one. As Europe shifts to a high-skills economy, the opportunities for low-skilled workers are diminishing. There are now three low-qualified adults on average for every job requiring only a low-level qualification, according to Eurostat.

Training provision

The provision of training at work is increasing: in 2015, 38% of workers had received training paid for by their employer (or by themselves if self-employed) in the year before the survey, a rise of 12 percentage points on 2005. More are also benefiting from on-the-job training, given by co-workers or supervisors (Figure 32).

Figure 31: Scores on engagement, by occupation, EU, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technicians</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU average</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craft workers</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural workers</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service and sales workers</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant and machine operators</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary occupations</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Identical values are not fully aligned because of rounding. Source: EWCS 2015

Figure 32: Percentage of workers who received work-related training, EU, 2015

Source: EWCS 2015
While the trend is positive, it is probably not enough. Two-thirds of this training is of short duration, lasting five days or less, which may be sufficient time to build upon existing skills, but not for developing comprehensive sets of new skills.

Another issue is who is receiving the training. Workers who perhaps have greatest need of training have the least access to it: those in lower-level occupations and with lower levels of education (Figure 33). In general, workers who report less access to training also report a shorter duration of training.

It is also problematic that training declines with age (Figure 34). Understandably, young employees often need more training to develop the right skill set for their jobs and to grow within the organisation. But older workers who are given opportunities to learn new skills tend to stay longer with their employers. Moreover, of all age groups, workers aged over 55 are least likely to report that they learn new things on the job.
Digital skills

Digital skills are the bedrock for work and employment in a high-skilled economy, and these skills are becoming more prevalent. In 2010, 26% of workers reported high intensity of ICT use at work; by 2015, that figure had climbed to 37% (Figure 35). Simultaneously, the proportion using ICT at low intensity, or not using ICT at all, declined from 56% to 43%.

As Figure 36 illustrates, there is a distinct divide in the occupational hierarchy when it comes to digital skills. Managers, professionals, technicians and clerks are intensive users of ICT at work, whereas use in the blue-collar occupational categories is low. Hence a large group of workers who rarely or never use ICT coexists with an increasing number of workers for whom ICT is integral to their jobs. These two groups have very different experiences of work, with potentially profound impacts on career development, occupational mobility and working life.

High use is most common among clerks, much of whose ICT use is on routine tasks that are likely to be automated by technology in the coming years. Meanwhile, some jobs that were traditionally classified as manual and semi-skilled are upgrading in different sectors as use of digitally controlled equipment increases. Workers in these jobs need more developed ICT skills, as well as intellectual skills to perform tasks requiring literacy and numeracy, such as following technical documentation or dealing with numerical information. At the same time, increasing automation reduces the amount of physical work, and this combined with improving intellectual skills could have some impact on job quality in the lower-skilled occupational categories. However, such developments are likely to be limited as automation technology is far from becoming mainstream in many jobs where human labour is still preferred, mainly due to the comparatively low costs and the still very significant technical challenges involved in their automation.

Figure 35: Intensity of ICT use at work (%), EU, 2005–2015

Source: EWCS 2015

Figure 36: Intensity of ICT use at work (%), by occupation, EU, 2015

Source: EWCS 2015
Workers’ perspectives

Workers themselves are not entirely confident about their employability, as illustrated when asked by the EWCS about finding a job with a similar salary if they lost their current job. Just 37% of respondents think it would be easy, which suggests that the remaining 63% suspect that there is low demand among employers for their skills. A large proportion of older workers feel this way – 57% aged over 55 think it would be difficult, while just 30% of workers under the age of 35 feel the same, a finding that underpins the argument for increased training opportunities for older workers.

In terms of occupations, workers in elementary occupations report relatively low employability compared with professionals, managers and technicians.

Skills for the future

Globalisation and technology are driving change in labour markets. New technologies are replacing humans for the performance of routine tasks, eliminating some jobs and altering the content of others. Global competition shifts production around the world, destroying jobs in one region while creating them in another. These developments have implications for the types of jobs created in Europe now and into the future and the skills content of those jobs. What changes are we likely to see?

Eurofound conducted an exercise to forecast the future structure of the labour market up to 2030 to discover where job growth is likely to be concentrated across the five wage quintiles examined in Chapter 6, ‘Trends in employment’. Then, using a skills-forecasting model developed by sister agency Cedefop (the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training), it examined the likely impact of this on tasks in European workplaces.

The exercise predicted polarisation across the wage quintiles for the EU as whole, meaning the most growth in the highest-paid jobs and lowest-paid jobs, with less growth in the middle quintiles, especially in the mid-low-paid and mid-paid jobs.

What are the implications for the types of tasks in European workplaces? This question was examined along two main dimensions: the content of the tasks and the methods and tools with which tasks are performed. Figure 37 illustrates the results in terms of change in indices constructed to measure tasks.

Figure 37: Change in task indices, EU, 2015–2030
Are workers in good health?

The workforce needs to be healthy – poor health is a significant cause of labour force exits – and it is healthy overall. Nearly 8 in 10 say their health is good or very good, although absenteeism due to ill-health is substantial: 28% of workers were absent for health reasons for five or more days in the 12 months prior to the survey.

The mental health of the working population is good too – scored on a scale of 1–100, the overall average score is 68, 2 points higher than in 2010. Just 6% have a score of less than 28, which indicates risk of mental health problems. There are differences across occupations: for example, the proportion of workers at risk is greater for elementary occupations (9%) and service and sales workers (7%).

While these statistics are positive, it should be borne in mind that many workers with health problems may have dropped out of work and would not have been included in the EWCS sample, skewing these results.

Figure 38 shows the proportions of workers suffering from 10 common ailments. Backache is the most common, followed by muscular pain in the neck or upper limbs.

Workers in different occupations suffer from these complaints to varying degrees (Figure 39). Manual workers are most affected by musculoskeletal disorders – agricultural workers especially, but also workers in elementary occupations, craft workers, and plant and machine operators. More workers in these four occupational groups also have hearing problems and have experienced injuries. White-collar workers, on the other hand, are most likely to report headaches and eyestrain. Fatigue is fairly evenly distributed across all.

While the prevalence of these ailments is not necessarily related to work, work can affect one’s health, either positively or negatively. Most workers – 63% – believe it has no effect, although this is a drop from 2010, when the percentage was 68%. Over the same period, the proportion declaring that work affects their health positively has risen from 7% to 12%. There has been no change in the proportion who think that work has damaged their health (25%).

This figure is higher among manual occupations – plant and machine operators (38%), craft workers (35%) and agricultural workers (32%). Conversely, around 15% of agricultural workers, managers and professionals report that work has a positive effect on their health.
Do workers think their working conditions are sustainable?

How do workers themselves feel about their ability to remain in work as they age? The EWCS captures workers’ own perceptions of the sustainability of their working conditions by asking respondents aged under 55 whether they feel they could do their current job up to age 60. Some 73% answered ‘yes’. Occupation again makes a difference: more than 75% of clerks, professionals and managers believe they could do their current job up to 60, compared with less than 60% of elementary workers and service and sales workers, well below the average.

The physical work environment has a strong influence on people’s perceived capacity to work longer: the more that workers are exposed to physical risks, the more likely it is that they will not envisage being able to do the same job at 60. Posture-related risks – which include exposure to vibrations, tiring positions, repetitive movements, lifting people and carrying heavy loads – are the type of physical risk most strongly related to the perceived unsustainability of the job.

Are low-skilled occupations the least sustainable?

The middle- and low-ranking occupations of the ISCO-08 hierarchy have repeatedly come out worse in the different working conditions touched on here. In general, the lower the status of the job, the lower the levels of engagement, employability and health of the workers occupying those jobs. And the more pessimism about the sustainability of their jobs up to age 60.

This dichotomy between the higher-ranking occupations and the rest extends to other aspects of work. From the accumulated data of the EWCS, Eurofound produced five job quality profiles that represent groups of jobs that share similar features. The least desirable is the poor quality profile – characterised by low pay and limited career prospects, and lacking the training opportunities that would facilitate mobility into better jobs. Figure 40 shows the proportion of workers from each occupational group to whom this job profile applies. It demonstrates that over half of workers in elementary occupations are in poor-quality jobs, as are a considerable proportion of workers in the other lower categories.
Occupation is a fundamental determinant of the type of working conditions a person experiences during their working life, and these have cumulative effects on their health and well-being, income, working time, job security and career prospects. Many occupations fall well short of sustainable work. While there is evidence of a trend of upgrading of the occupational structure in Europe, meaning there are increasingly more jobs in the upper occupational groups, low-skilled jobs will continue to constitute a large share of employment for some time to come. Shop assistant was the job that employed the most people, 13.5 million in total, in the EU in 2018. Sales assistants and food preparers in hospitality were two of the fastest-growing jobs.

Figure 40: Percentage of workers in each occupational category classified as having a poor quality job, EU, 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technicians</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerks</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craft workers</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service and sales workers</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant and machine operators</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural workers</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary occupations</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: EWCS 2015

Event: Future of work: A lifecycle approach

Barbara Gerstenberger, Head of Unit, delivered a presentation on the different dimensions of job quality at the Bulgarian Presidency conference Future of work: A lifecycle approach in Sofia, Bulgaria on 22 March 2018. Takeaway points from her presentation were: job quality is multidimensional; different instruments and actors are required to push job quality to the top of the EU agenda; and the role of social dialogue in improving job quality is crucial.

Takeaways

- Maintaining the level of participation by workers in work longer will be a major challenge as the population ages; it will be increasingly important to ensure that people currently in work are fit and motivated to remain in work.
- Good quality of work is a cornerstone to the sustainability of work for workers: it raises workers’ engagement, keeps them skilled and employable, and avoids damage to their physical and mental health.
- Quality of work is fundamentally determined by occupations, tending to be high in high-skilled, white-collar occupations and poor in low-skilled occupation. Over half of workers in elementary occupations fitted Eurofound’s poor-quality job profile, as well as substantial proportions of service and sales workers, agricultural workers and machine operators.
- Despite the upgrading of employment in the EU, low-skilled jobs will continue to constitute a large share of employment for the foreseeable future: the job that employs the highest number of workers in Europe is retail sales assistant.

Read more

Sixth European Working Conditions Survey – Overview report (2017 update) eurofound.link/ef1634
Working conditions of workers of different ages: European Working Conditions Survey 2015 eurofound.link/ef1747
Are blue-collar jobs turning white? eurofound.link/ef18088
Wage and task profiles of employment in Europe in 2030 eurofound.link/ef18085
Regional shifts in the employment structure: European Jobs Monitor 2019 eurofound.link/ef19036
Looking forward
Looking forward

EU citizens will elect representatives to a new European Parliament in 2019, and a new Commission will take up the reins for the coming five years. The new European Labour Authority is planned to be up and running, tasked with supporting labour mobility in the EU. Eurofound will see changes too as it begins to work under the guidance of a new Founding Regulation, which revises and enlarges the Agency’s objectives and states more explicitly the tasks it is mandated to undertake. Eurofound will continue to support policymaking through its research and communication in the areas of employment, working conditions, quality of life and social dialogue for 2019 and into the future. This work is organised into 10 activities:

- Working conditions and sustainable work
- Social dialogue
- Reporting on working life developments
- Well-functioning and inclusive labour markets
- Monitoring structural change and managing restructuring
- Innovation and job creation in companies
- Quality of life and quality of society
- Public services
- The digital age: Opportunities and challenges for work and employment
- Monitoring convergence in the European Union

The planned outputs from each of these activities in 2019 are described below.

Working conditions and sustainable work

Analysis of data from the 2015 European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) continues, aimed at providing evidence on working conditions and their implications for sustainable work. The theme of gender equality, already pursued in investigations of work–life balance and women in management, will be developed further in a report on differences in the working conditions of men and women. The findings will help to inform policies aimed at closing gender gaps in the areas of job and employment quality. Another important dimension of sustainable work will be explored in a study of employee engagement and the development of workers’ knowledge and skills.

A series of shorter analyses of EWCS 2015 data will begin and will be the basis of two policy briefs, one on the impact of chronic disease on ability to work, the other on the working conditions experienced by workers with a foreign background.

Eurofound will also expand its outputs on precarious forms of employment with research into casual work, focusing specifically on zero-hour and very-short-hour contracts, and the risks and opportunities associated with it.

Understanding the conditions experienced by workers outside the EU is increasingly relevant in a globalised economy, and Eurofound will publish a joint report with the ILO analysing working conditions in a global perspective.

Social dialogue

In 2019, Eurofound will organise an exchange seminar for stakeholders on capacity-building for social dialogue. This builds upon exploratory work undertaken in 2018 on the capacity needs of social partners in relation to national frameworks for autonomous collective bargaining; involvement in European social dialogue; and developing membership. The seminar should develop a joint commitment to follow-up action.

The Agency will continue to assess the representativeness of EU-level sectoral social partner organisations and launch six new studies in 2019. These support the European Commission in assessing which European social partners to consult under Article 154 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

It will also continue its project of monitoring the role of national social partners in the European Semester, to analyse the quality and effectiveness of their involvement, and to report on how their involvement is evolving.

Reporting on working life developments

The European Observatory of Working Life, EurWORK, will continue to provide systematic and comparable data on national industrial relations systems and developments in working life through its monitoring and reporting tools. The profiles of working life in the Member States and selected other countries will also be updated, and the regular updates on statutory minimum wages in 2019 and on developments in working time in 2017–2018 will be published.

The aim of this work is to inform initiatives aimed at a better functioning of social dialogue at European and national levels. The comparative nature of the information provided can also support initiatives for mutual learning.
Well-functioning and inclusive labour markets

A study on labour market segmentation started in 2017 will be finalised and published in 2019. This will provide a quantitative indication of the scale and scope of segmentation in selected Member States, as well as pointers on approaches to measuring it in specific contexts. It will also provide an assessment of the effectiveness of instruments aiming to mitigate the negative consequences of labour market segmentation. This will provide pointers for policymakers that take into account regulatory frameworks or institutional settings that influence both the specific manifestation of labour market segmentation and the policy approach considered.

Monitoring structural change and managing restructuring

The biennial European Jobs Monitor report will be published in 2019, providing updated information on structural shifts in employment, deepening contextual information on the quality as well as the quantity of jobs created or destroyed. The thematic analysis will look at ‘the new geography of jobs’, in particular the extent to which there has been a concentration of jobs of good-quality jobs in large, metropolitan and capital city areas. Earlier predictions were that ICT developments would render place of work irrelevant and reduce the importance of proximity to cities as a condition of access to good-quality employment. The analysis will provide evidence on whether there are indications that this is the case.

The European Restructuring Monitor (ERM) will continue to update the only available European data source mapping large-scale restructuring activity, as well as related legislation and support instruments.

Innovation and job creation in companies

Eurofound will publish the results of a study exploring social enterprises, such as cooperatives, and what motivates them to create jobs as well as the constraints upon this. It also looks at the recruitment and employment strategies of this type of organisation and their use and need for public support. As far as the qualitative approach allows, the characteristics of the jobs created will be explored.

This work will contribute to a better understanding of the factors influencing job creation and job retention, as little is known about the reasons for hiring and what organisations require to avoid job losses. Such information is essential for the design and implementation of targeted public support in order to ensure its effectiveness, particularly when public budgets are tight.

Quality of life and quality of society

Following its reporting on findings from the 2016 European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS), Eurofound will extend the analysis to specific groups in society. This will include the exploration of diversity in household types, such as multigenerational households and single-person households, and the differences in their well-being, social support and vulnerability.

The results of a study on the quality of life in the EU candidate countries will be published, as will policy briefs on the living conditions of people in rural Europe and in major European cities.

Building on in-house work establishing the scope and relevance of local factors for quality of life, an exploration of the empirical data on neighbourhood quality and services from the EQLS and other available European data sources will be conducted.

Public services

Public services continue to be affected by the consequences of the economic crisis and the ongoing challenges that most of the European societies face, including low levels of trust, the rapid pace of technological development and the increasing diversity of the European population. Activities in 2019 will focus on access to and quality of public services, based on analysis of the 2016 EQLS and other survey data, exploring differences in access across Member States and across groups in society. This investigation will be informed by work carried out in Eurofound’s research on convergence.

The research will emphasise responses to new social and demographic realities, not only ageing societies, but challenges around children and young people, with in-depth case studies to examine robust and evaluated policies and measures that address the particular needs of disadvantaged groups. Measures to reduce the barriers encountered by refugees and new migrants in accessing services will also be examined, taking into account the perspective of the service providers.

The digital age: Opportunities and challenges for work and employment

Eurofound will publish the results of research on ICT-based mobile work, looking at the employment and working conditions of workers who work in this way. Quantitative analyses have been conducted based on EWCS data in relation to career prospects, earnings, skills development, participation and autonomy. This research has been complemented by case studies from five Member States.
The web resource set up in 2018 on platform work will be extended to include other forms of digital platforms. The material compiled here aims to provide a continuously updated ‘one-stop-shop’ for information on the platform economy and will lead to short analyses on various aspects of platform work. The results of further analysis of platform work will be published in a policy brief.

Monitoring convergence in the European Union

Eurofound aims to become a point of reference in the ongoing debate on convergence in the EU and provides up-to-date information and evidence on Member States’ convergence trends and performance. This year, the Agency will publish reports on convergence in employment and socioeconomic circumstances and in working conditions, the latter making use of the latest EWCS data as well as other sources.
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Eurofound’s brief

What does Eurofound do for you?

- We benchmark good practice in industrial relations, living and working conditions, employment and competitiveness
- We make key actors aware of challenges and solutions
- We support policymaking by monitoring the latest developments in living and working conditions

Eurofound, a tripartite European Union Agency, provides knowledge to assist in the development of social, employment and work-related policies.