



GENDER AND WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

This summary is based on an analysis of the findings of the Second European Survey on Working Conditions conducted in 1996 by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (see page 7).

- Women make up **45% of the employed population** in the EU, although there are wide differences between countries – over 50% in Finland and France, around 35% in Spain and Greece.
- **Gender segregation at work** is strong: women are less likely to be working in senior/managerial positions than men. It seems there is a “glass ceiling” which stops qualified women from advancing to higher organisational positions (17% of women as opposed to one third of the men are in supervisory positions).
- **Job profiles:** female jobs (66%) are more open to contacts with people outside the workplace – patients, pupils, customers – than male jobs (51%). Female jobs are also characterised by elements of caring, nurturing and support, while male jobs tend to monopolise technical and managerial tasks. The use of computers is also more widespread among women (31%) than men (26%).
- **Working hours are gender shaped:** 26% of women work less than 30 hours a week, as opposed to 5% of men. Female work is responsive to the family situation (working hours shorten when the number of children increase), while men’s working hours are more rigid and even monolithic. Across the EU it seems difficult for employed women to combine full-time work with raising a family.
- Male workers are much more exposed to **traditional risk factors** – exposure to noise, heat, chemicals, etc. – due to the fact that blue collar worker jobs are generally held by men.
- **Organisational issues:** while male workers are more exposed to high time constraints, they have more control over their time schedule than female workers.
- Female workers are less likely to be involved in **decision making and participation in the workplace**. But there is better communication, participation, team work and less immediate managerial control in workplaces supervised by female managers.
- Female workers (40%) are more likely to be in **hectic jobs** – jobs with high demands and low control over work – than male workers (36%). But they are less likely (22%) to be in **active jobs** – jobs where demands are high and control is also high –, than their male counterparts (29%).
- **Sexual harassment and unfair treatment** are not isolated phenomena affecting some individual women in the workplace: a good 3% (2 million) of women have been subjected to sexual harassment and 4% to sexual discrimination over the last 12 months. Women in precarious employment are more often subjected to sexual harassment than those in permanent employment. Health disorders – fatigue, headaches, stress – are more likely to occur in these situations.



Higher activity rates for women

Around the EU, women are forming an ever growing proportion of the working population, and women's employment rates continue to increase. Women's foothold in the European labour market is different today than 10 or 20 years ago. The change has been dramatic, however, inequality of wages and lack of career opportunities for women are still big problems.

Women make up about 45% of the employed population across the Member States. Higher rates are found for women in Finland (52%), France (51%), Sweden (50%), Denmark (49%), and Portugal (48%), while lower rates can be found in Spain (33%), Luxembourg (35%), and Greece (36%).

Gender segregation of work

Gender segregation of work is strong and it extends both across and within occupations. Women are less likely to be in senior/managerial positions than men (*Figure 1*). There is a risk for increased gender segregation in working life.

Two female occupations, clerks and service/sales workers, employ half of the female-employed population in Germany, France, Belgium, and Austria. In some countries – e.g., Portugal, Denmark and Ireland considerably lower rates are found, while women are more often employed in elementary occupations or as crafts/trades workers.

Men's employment is more evenly divided between the

occupations, but crafts/trades workers, as well as plant/machine operators are male-dominated.

Women's jobs are characterised by elements of caring, nurturing and supportive roles, while men monopolise the 'heavy' manual, technical and managerial tasks. However, important national differences in these broad patterns exist. Gender-segregated working life must be taken as a starting point for identifying psychosocial risks in the work environments of women and men.

Forms of employment

Two-thirds of the total EU working population are employed on a permanent basis. The proportion of self-employment is somewhat higher among men (21%) than among women (14%). In the Southern Member States self-employment is more typical. In Greece, about half of both women and men are self-employed.

The proportion of precarious work (fixed term contracts and temporary agency contracts) is overall only slightly higher among female employees (18%) than among male employees (14%). But in some countries the proportion of women in precarious employment is considerably higher – e.g. Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden. (*Figure 2*).

Temporary work is most widespread in Spain, where one-third of women work on

Figure 1. Employed men and women in the Member States according to occupation, %

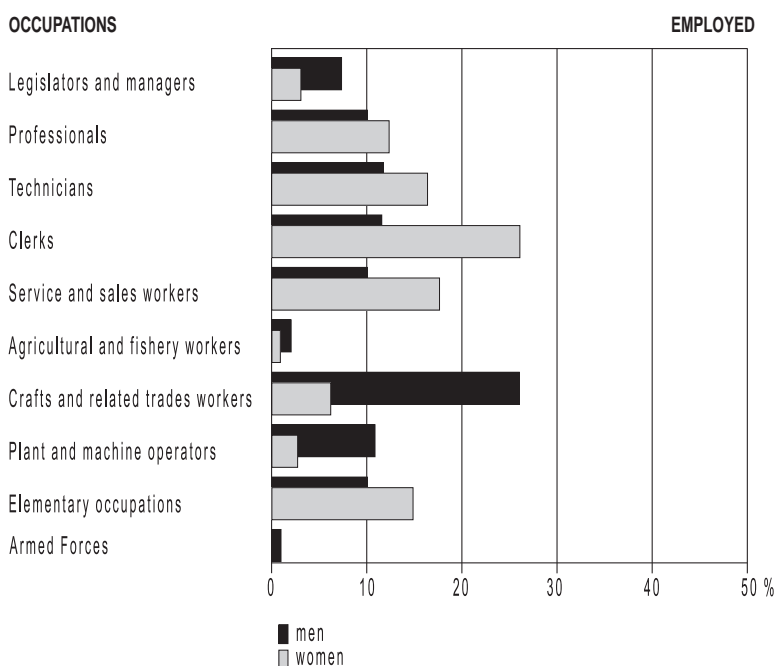
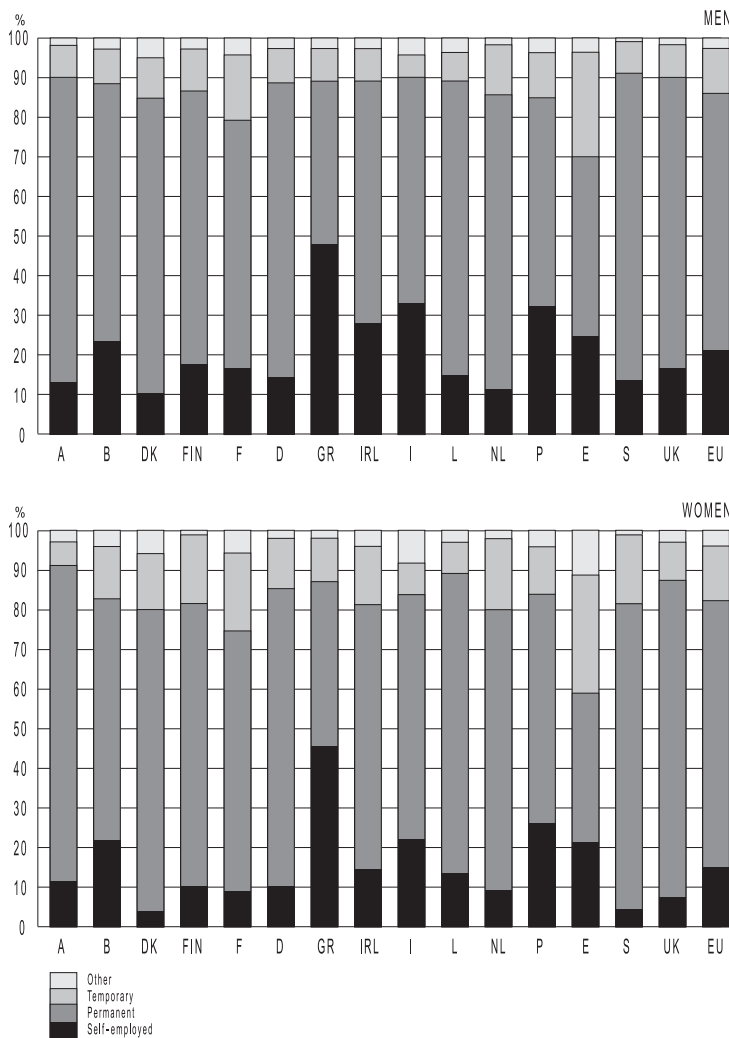




Figure 2. Total working population in different forms of employment according to Member State, %



temporary contracts, while another 11% are employed in apprenticeships and other training schemes.

Quality of work and stress
Men are more exposed to physical/chemical constraints than women. But fast pace and monotony present a problem for both women and men.

23% of men and 13% of women are exposed to noise so loud that they have to raise their voices to communicate. (The exposures which were half

of the working time or more are included).

48% of men and 41% of women are working according to tight deadlines. Around 40% have jobs involving monotonous tasks.

66% of women and 51% of men are dealing with other people – patients, pupils, customers, and others. In parallel, 72% of women and 62% of men state that their work rate is dependent on the demands of customers or other people.

31% of women and 26% of men are working with computers – PCs, networks, mainframes.

37% of women and 33% of men regard their opportunities for decision making, consultation and communication with their immediate superior as poor. In this regard, great differences between the Member States exist.

29% of women and 27% of men feel stress is affected by work, another 20% feel overall fatigue, 7% have anxiety, and 11% feel irritable.

37% of women and 34% of men feel very satisfied with job.

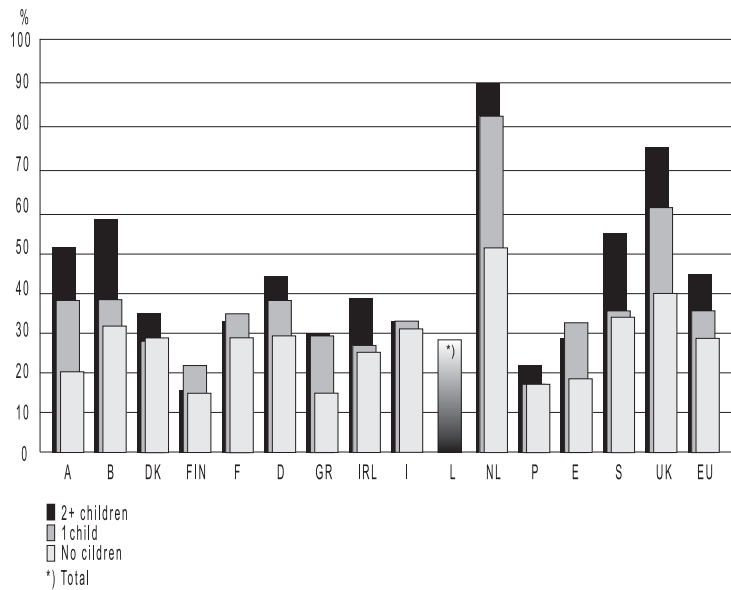
Diversity in women’s working hours

Working hours are strongly shaped by gender. One-fourth of women work less than 30 hours per week in waged work, while 56% work the standard 35-40 working week, another 9% work 30-34 hours per week, and 11% work more than 40 hours per week. The situation is quite different for men; 65% work the standard working week, and 5% work less than 30 hours per week, but 27% work more than 40 hours per week.

The number of children a woman has regulates her working hours in waged work. (Figure 3). One-third of women with one child, but nearly half with two or more children work less than 35 hours per week in waged



Figure 3. Part-time working (less than 35 h/week) among the employed women according to the number of children, %



work. Even in this regard, considerable differences exist between the Member States.

In the Netherlands, 83% of women with one child, but nearly everyone with two or more children are engaged in part-time work. In the UK, 62% of women with one child and 76% with two or more children have part-time work. But in Finland and Portugal relatively low percentages of employed women with children have part-time work.

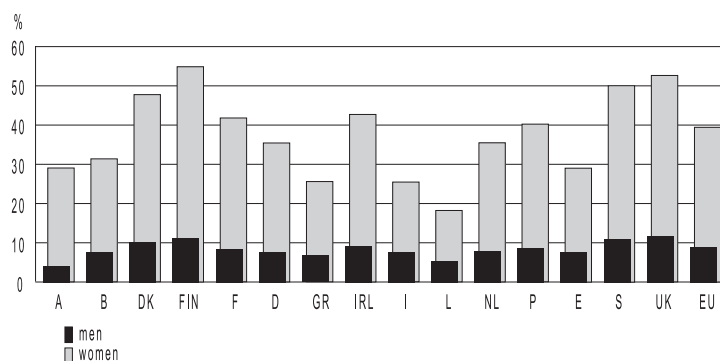
Across the EU countries, it seems to be difficult for employed women to combine full-time working with raising a family.

Men's working hours are more rigid and less responsive regarding their family situation, if there is any responsiveness it points into the opposite direction. Making longer working hours the standard for men

does not further gender equality. This standard is in sharp conflict with the gender ideology that aims to further men's participation in their family roles.

In most Member States – e.g. Denmark, France, Germany and the UK – long working hours for employed women with children are linked with higher stress and lower job satisfaction, while short working hours are associated with better job satisfaction and lower stress.

Figure 4. The immediate supervisor is a woman for the employed men and women according to Member State, %



Thus, employed women regulate their own well-being and health by working short hours while combining the demands of their work/career with domestic responsibilities.

As this type of compromise may threaten women's position at work, there should be other strategies to deal with the problem of combining work and family life. These strategies should be attractive and available for both men and women.

Gender, supervision, and workplace interaction

Altogether 17% of employed women and one-third of men hold supervisory positions. Women usually supervise small work units with 1-5 persons, while men also supervise bigger units.

Women's roles typically refers to middle-management positions. There is a 'glass ceiling' which stops qualified women from advancing to higher organisational positions.

Only 8% of men but 39% of women have a female superior (Figure 4). In the



Nordic Member States and the UK men work rather more often under female supervision, but in Austria, Greece and Luxembourg it is most unusual for a man to have a female supervisor.

There is more communication, participation, team-work, and less immediate managerial control in female-supervised than in male-supervised workplaces.

More well-educated and qualified women should have access to supervisory roles in the work organisations around the EU. The existing barriers prevent important female resources from being developed.

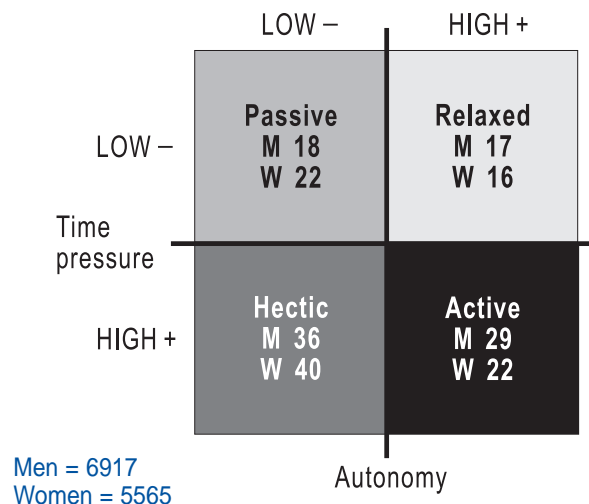
Workplace conflicts, discrimination and harassment

Workplace violence, sexual harassment, intimidation and unfair treatment present a major personal tragedy. The attacked persons report health disorders, fatigue, headaches, and stress. For millions of women around the EU, sexual harassment is an unpleasant and unwanted part of their work lives creating intimidating, hostile and unfriendly working environment.

Sexual harassment and unfair treatment

Sexual harassment is not an isolated phenomenon affecting some individual women in the workplaces across the EU. A good 3% have been subjected to sexual harassment over the past 12 months at the workplace, while 4% have

Figure 5. Distribution of employed men and women according to Job stress-model, %



been subjected to sexual discrimination.

Men report significantly lower incidences (less than 1%). Women with non-permanent work contracts are somewhat more vulnerable to sexual harassment than are women with permanent work contracts.

Age discrimination.

3% of both women and men report age discrimination at work.

Physical violence and intimidation

4% of women and 3% of men have been subjected to physical violence at work. In addition, 8% of women and 7% of men have been subjected to intimidation at work. Intimidation is referred to as mobbing or bullying or even 'psychological terror'.

These destructive elements should be eliminated from the workplaces across the EU. The classical measures

are not necessarily effective, while more participatory approaches with greater gender sensitivity are in order.

Increase in negative stress/hectic work or active work

Job demands and freedom to make one's own decisions are important psychosocial factors at work.

Negative stress arises when the demands at work are too high and freedom/autonomy is too low – hectic work. Active work is defined as high psychological job demands in combination with high control over the work situation (Figure 5).

36% of men and 40% of women are in hectic work; while 29% of men and 22% of women are in active work.

40% of women and 36% of men report work stress – a combined variable with fatigue, stress, anxiety and irritability – in hectic work.

In some Member States – Denmark, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, the UK – a gender difference is found showing that men significantly more often have active jobs, while women more often hold hectic jobs in these countries.

Women’s working conditions, even in the same occupation, significantly differ from those of men with respect to autonomy over work pace, planning, and the scheduling of work hours and breaks. This concerns both blue-collar as well as white-collar occupations (Figure 6).

61% of male senior officials/managers – vs. 44% of women – are in active work, while 28% of women – vs. 16% of the men – are in hectic work.

68% of female plant/machine operators fall into the hectic work category, while the corresponding figure for men is 52%.

Regarding organisational issues, 37% of women and 37% of men regard their opportunities for decision making, consultation and communication with their immediate superior as poor. In this regard, women are particularly critical in Belgium, Austria, Greece, Portugal and Spain.

Policy implications

Every effort should be made to narrow these differences. Otherwise the gap between persons with privileged jobs

– much autonomy, participation and challenges – and those with less privileged ones – high demands, low freedom and participation – will widen alarmingly.

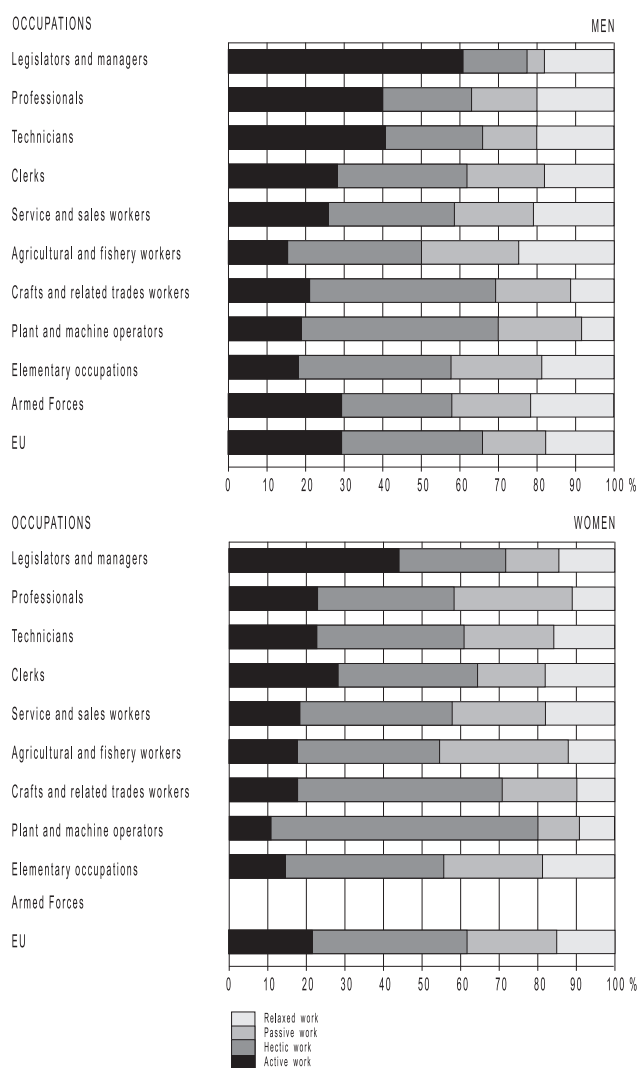
The changing working conditions, with heated competition and ‘atypical’ work forms are leading to a harder working life. These tendencies have been intensifying rather than decreasing during the 1990s,

and they seem to be continuing to intensify.

These changes affect both women and men, but women are particularly vulnerable. The risk is that differences in psychosocial working conditions between women’s and men’s jobs increase.

Both preventive measures and greater gender sensitivity are needed. New forms of work organisation with increased autonomy and participation may improve the situation. In this

Figure 6. Distribution of employed men and women in Job stress-model according to occupation, %





study a new tool, that of equality plans, is presented as a measure to counterbalance these tendencies.

Increasing gender sensitivity

Figure 7 presents a scheme according to which work environment policies and measures can be evaluated from a gender perspective.

Figure 7. Four approaches to treatment of gender equality and gender differences at work

		NO	YES
Equality actively promoted	NO	Gender insensitive -- --	Gender stereotyping -- +
	YES	Gender neutral + --	Gender sensitive + +
		Gender differences accepted	

Gender insensitive approach

Gender differences are not accepted and equality as a norm is not actively promoted. The attitude is purely individualistic.

Gender stereotyping approach

Gender differences are accepted or even exaggerated, but equality as a norm is not actively promoted. Women are seen as targets for special protective measures.

Gender neutral (gender blind) approach

Gender differences are not accepted but equality as a norm is promoted. This attitude may lead to women being offered equality on male terms while equality is defined as sameness.

Gender sensitive approach

Gender differences are accepted and equality as a norm is actively promoted. This approach may represent new and more diverse attitude to gender issues in working life. Gender differences are not seen as a disadvantage but as an added richness to workplace activity and policies.

A new tool: equality plans

With equality plans, work organisations become better sensitised to gender issues, and the policies to promote gender equality become more naturally incorporated or 'mainstreamed' into their normal personnel strategies.

The purpose is to reduce differentiation of jobs according to gender, to promote women's and men's career development, and to

improve working conditions for both women and men.

Equality plans could be introduced in workplaces around the EU with the cultural traditions and policies practised in each country taken into account. At their best, equality plans can offer a new forum for dialogue on gender and diversity between different partners in work organisations across the EU.

Research Team

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EUROPEAN SURVEY ON WORKING CONDITIONS

As social integration moves forward, and as the number of initiatives dealing with the work environment at Community level increase, more comprehensive and homogeneous data on the working conditions in the Community is required. The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions has carried out two surveys (1991, 1996) on the working environment in Europe. These surveys have formed an important part of the Foundation's work in the area of its programme concerned with improving the quality of employment and of working conditions.



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