



# Women, men and working conditions in Europe

## Executive summary

### Introduction

This report underlines the case for a gender-sensitive analysis of employment patterns and trends on European labour markets. Despite many years of legislation, gender gaps still persist across many aspects of the labour market: women and men are employed in different occupations and industries, and under different contracts, their pay is often different and they spend different amounts of time on paid work. Furthermore, in the context of the economic crisis, gender differences are evident in both the initial impact of the downturn and the unfolding austerity measures, putting at risk the progress so far made in closing gender gaps. This study is based on findings from the fifth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), conducted in 2010. Its rich set of data – encompassing some 44,000 workers across 34 European countries – was used to explore gender differences across several dimensions of working conditions, and to look at relevant country differences.

### Policy context

Clearly, a major increase in both women's and men's employment rates is needed if the EU is to achieve the 75% employment rate target set out in the Europe 2020 strategy. The closing of gender gaps in labour market variables, such as employment and unemployment rates and pay levels, has been one of the main objectives of EU policy. However, discrimination by gender is still evident in the differences in access to the labour market and varied employment patterns and associated working conditions, reflective of persistent gender segregation. In relation to the current crisis, it is clear that pressures on jobs and pay are very much concentrated on the public sector, where many women are employed.

### Key findings

Just five of the 20 occupational groups employing the highest number of workers can be considered to have a balanced gender mix: food, wood and garment workers; numerical clerks; legal, social and cultural professionals; business professionals; and personal service workers (groups based on the International Standard Classification of Occupations).

The public sector is important for female-dominated occupations – within male-dominated occupations, female employees are more likely to work in the public sector than their male counterparts. Workplaces provide another layer of segregation, with employees often working in same-sex environments, particularly women. Even when women and men are employed in mixed occupations, they are often working in same-sex workplaces.

Gender differences in time spent in paid and unpaid work are important in shaping working conditions for women and men. When paid working hours, hours spent in commuting to and from work and unpaid work time are all combined, the EWCS data found that women work, on average, 64 hours a week compared to the 53 hours worked by men. This can be explained by the fact that women spend 26 hours, on average, on caring activities, compared with the 9 hours spent by men, even though men devote more time to paid work (41 hours, compared with 34 hours spent by women).

One of the main issues related to gender and paid work involves the prevalence of part-time work, which can be viewed both positively and negatively. Certain female-dominated occupations like personal

care, cleaning and personal services have particularly high shares of part-time work. However, part-time work is often found at the lower end of the occupational distribution, with employees often excluded from benefits and disadvantaged in terms of access to promotion.

Men are much more likely than women to work longer than the 48 hours set out by the EU Working Time Directive, with the exception of those in teaching and clerical jobs. However, there are also many women who work long hours – for example, in sales, hospitality management, agriculture and the service industry. Men in the public sector are around half as likely to work long hours as their counterparts in the private sector and for women the effect is even stronger. Most people in full-time work would like to work less, with men declaring a preference for a 38-hour week, and women a 33-hour week.

Men's monthly earnings are higher in every occupation but gaps are wider in white-collar male-dominated occupations. In contrast, gender differences in intrinsic job quality across occupations are relatively small when compared to other job quality dimensions. Women tend to report higher satisfaction in terms of job quality than men. Interestingly, working time quality for men is particularly poor for those who have a male boss, while for women it remains almost exactly the same regardless of the sex of their boss. In some countries, women's working time quality improves when they have children but this is at the cost of a lifelong penalty in monthly earnings.

Well-being is, on average, significantly higher for men than for women. This gender gap exists across sectors and in the majority of occupational groups. Only in the service sector and shop and sales work is the well-being of women at a similar level to that of men. However, both women and men in mixed workplaces report higher well-being, with both men and women reporting this when they work for a boss of the opposite sex. The study also provides clear evidence that the well-being of women who have exited the labour market is lower than that of those remaining in employment.

## Policy pointers

The findings underline the importance of a coordinated and comprehensive policy approach to gender equality, both on and off the labour market. This approach would include the following concerns.

- Measures to address desegregation should consider the undervaluation of women's work and the processes by which stereotyping channels both girls and boys into certain types of work.
- Measures to address working time inequalities need to take into account the job quality effects of long hours and part-time hours, as well as inequalities around unpaid work in the home.
- Measures to improve job quality are needed for both women and men – and particular attention needs to be paid to the risks of low-quality job creation for new entrants to the labour market.
- Measures to improve well-being should recognise the benefits for mothers of integration into rather than exit from the labour market, as well as recognising the positive well-being effects from limiting desegregation and long hours of work.

Overall, the report points to the on-going relevance of gender-sensitive monitoring of the labour market, in particular at a time of significant change. The findings presented capture the initial impact of the crisis and point to the medium and long-term risks for gender inequalities. In particular, austerity measures may be clawing back advances achieved through social policies or services that support higher levels of participation or longer hours for women. For men, a key issue is whether, at least for the lower skilled, some potential convergence with women's employment experiences can be expected, with more men engaged in temporary or part-time employment and receiving pay at lower wage rates.

### Further information

The report, *Women, men and working conditions in Europe*, is available at <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1349.htm>

For further information, contact Sophia MacGoris, Survey Officer at [smg@eurofound.europa.eu](mailto:smg@eurofound.europa.eu)