RESEARCH REPORT

Eurofound

Working conditions and sustainable work

European Working Conditions Survey 2024 Overview report



European Working Conditions Survey 2024
Overview report

Eurofound

European Foundation
for the Improvement of
Living and Working
Conditions

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Authors: Agnès Parent-Thirion, Jorge Cabrita, Franz Ferdinand Eiffe, Sara Riso, Christopher White, Karel Fric and John Hurley

Research managers: Agnès Parent-Thirion and Jorge Cabrita

Research project: EWCS 2024 overview report

Peer reviewers: Francis Green, Isabelle Niedhammer and Evangelia Demerouti

Contributors: Barbara Gerstenberger, Gabriela Sampaio-Soares, Daphné Chédorge-Farnier and Cosimo Frontera

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The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite European Union Agency established in 1975. Its role is to provide knowledge in the area of social, employment and work-related policies according to Regulation (EU) 2019/127.

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Tel. (+353 1) 204 31 00
Email: information@eurofound.europa.eu
Internet: https://www.eurofound.europa.eu

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Abbreviations used in the report

AI	artificial intelligence
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
EU-LFS	European Union Labour Force Survey
EU-OSHA	European Agency for Safety and Health at Work
EWCS	European Working Conditions Survey
ICT	information and communication technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISCE	International Classification of Status in Employment
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ISCO	International Standard Classification of Occupations
NACE	Nomenclature statistique des activités économiques dans la Communauté Européenne (Statistical classification of economic activities in the European Community)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
WHO	World Health Organization

Sectors of economic activity used in the EWCS 2024

Sectoral analysis of EWCS 2024 data was carried out based on the NACE Rev. 2 classification. In this report, the 21 NACE sectors have been condensed into 10 categories.

Sector	Corresponding NACE Rev. 2 sectors
Agriculture	A Agriculture, forestry and fishing 01–03
Industry	B Mining and quarrying 05–09 C Manufacturing 10–33 D Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply 35 E Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities 36–39
Construction	F Construction 41–43
Commerce and hospitality	G Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles 45–47 I Accommodation and food service activities 55–56
Transport	H Transportation and storage 49–53
Financial services	K Financial and insurance activities 64–66 L Real estate activities 68
Public administration	O Public administration and defence; compulsory social security 84
Education	P Education 85
Health	Q Human health and social work activities 86–88
Other services	J Information and communication 58–63 M Professional, scientific and technical activities 69–75 N Administrative and support service activities 77–82 R Arts, entertainment and recreation 90–93 S Other service activities 94–96 T Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of households for own use 97–98 U Activities of extraterritorial organisations and bodies 99

Occupational groups cited in the report

The occupational groups mentioned in this report are based on the ISCO-08 categories; shortened forms of these categories have been used throughout the report. The ISCO group 'armed forces occupations' has been excluded when breaking down by ISCO group because of insufficient observations. The respondents in this group have been included when presenting a total for all occupations.

Occupational group	Corresponding ISCO-08 group
Managers	1. Managers
Professionals	2. Professionals
Technicians	3. Technicians and associate professionals
Clerical workers	4. Clerical support workers
Services and sales workers	5. Services and sales workers
Skilled agricultural workers	6. Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers
Craft workers	7. Craft and related trades workers
Plant and machine operators	8. Plant and machine operators and assemblers
Elementary occupations	9. Elementary occupations

Note on EU Member States and other country data

By default, results are presented for the EU Member States as a whole. Results presented graphically by country include non-EU countries.

Note on numerical data

Due to rounding, percentages may not always add up to 100 %.

Note on weighting

In order to reduce sampling error, all results presented in this report are weighted with post-stratification calibration weights.

Note on gender

While Eurofound acknowledges that the concepts of gender and sex are different, in this report, unless otherwise stated, gender is used to denote female and male characteristics. The data collected by the EU-LFS (seen in Chapter 1) refer to sex. When data are displayed by gender in this report, non-binary individuals are excluded because their sample size is too small to provide reliable results. However, they are included in all other breakdowns – including by country, occupation and sector – when they provided an answer to the questions analysed.

Executive summary

Introduction

The European Working Conditions Survey 2024 (EWCS 2024) provides a comprehensive overview of job quality in Europe, examining the characteristics of the workforce, workplaces, job quality and the quality of working life. The EWCS 2024 is a crucial tool for policymakers, as it highlights the importance of job quality in achieving sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe. The survey's findings are based on 36 644 face-to-face interviews in 35 countries; each interview lasted about 45 minutes. They provide a unique insight into the state of work in Europe.

Policy context

The EU has had a long-standing commitment to improving working conditions and promoting job quality, an ambition that has been embedded in Europe's ambitions since the Treaty of Rome. The European Pillar of Social Rights devotes 6 of its 20 principles to fair working conditions, with its action plan highlighting the need to make 'work standards fit for the future of work'. The European Commission's publication of the Quality Jobs Roadmap in December 2025 further emphasises the importance of job quality in achieving sustainable and inclusive growth and supporting European workers and companies in the twin transition. The findings of the EWCS 2024 are also relevant to the ongoing debate on enhancing Europe's competitiveness, with the Competitiveness Compass establishing that quality jobs are a prerequisite for greater labour force participation and increased productivity.

Key findings

- The EU workforce continues to grow despite demographic challenges, with the increasing participation of women, migrant workers and pre-retirement-age workers contributing to the growth of aggregate employment.
- Four fifths of the EU workforce is in good or very good health, with 18 % of workers reporting health problems that limit their ability to do normal activities.
- Only one in four workers (23 %) in the EU work in a gender-balanced workplace, while roughly half of the workforce is female. Over the past quarter-century, there has been limited progress towards gender balance at management level.
- Algorithmic management practices, such as computer-based task allocation, work scheduling and performance monitoring, are reported by a minority of workers at the aggregate level. However, the prevalence varies significantly across occupations, sectors and workplace sizes.
- One fifth of employees in the EU (21 %) have neither formal representation nor meetings at the workplace where they can express their views.
- The EWCS confirms the positive association of some of the job quality indices with engagement, motivation, trust and cooperation, and the negative association with employees' intention to quit their job. This confirms the importance of job quality for companies' competitiveness.
- The distribution of job quality varies by gender, age, occupation, sector and country.
- Workers in occupations characterised by labour shortages experience poorer job quality in many domains.
- The wide range of differences in job quality between different groups of workers and work situations confirms the need to develop policies and practices that account for all seven job quality dimensions.
- Job quality has been improving in the last 15 years in all dimensions except Social environment and Work intensity. The Social environment index has decreased for women, while the Work intensity index has deteriorated for women but improved for men.
- The general improvement in the physical environment is due to a reduction in most physical risks and demands. However, exposure to high temperatures, chemicals and infectious materials has increased.
- While skills use, development opportunities and access to training have improved, there has been a decrease in workers' ability to influence collective work processes and apply their own ideas, which is concerning.
- Overskilling is reported by 30 % of workers in the EU, whereas 13 % report that they need more training to do their job well.
- Most workers in the EU (56 %) report that they would like to work the same number of hours that they are currently working, but the share of those preferring to work fewer hours increased from 27 % in 2015 to 33 % in 2024.

- Among EU workers, 14 % reported being ‘not very well informed’ or ‘not at all well informed’ about health and safety risks at work. An even higher share (29 %) reported being unaware of measures to prevent work-related stress.
- For most workers, their job is meaningful. More than 80 % of workers find their work useful and experience the feeling of work being well done. In addition, 85 % of employees feel fairly treated. Two thirds of employees agree that they receive the recognition that they deserve.
- It’s not all about the money: a safe working environment for mental and physical health and a trusting working environment are the most important aspects for the largest shares of workers in the EU.
- In the EU, around 1 in 5 respondents aged 45 years or over would like to work ‘as long as possible’, while 1 in 10 responded that they would like to retire ‘as early as possible’. For those who specified a concrete age, the average desired retirement age was 63.9 for men and 63.1 for women.
- The overall picture confirms that the job quality dimensions and their interplay are strongly related to workers’ well-being, health and engagement, confirming the importance of job quality in supporting a sustainable working life.

Policy pointers

- Job quality is multidimensional, and groups of workers fare differently in the various dimensions. There is a multitude of ways to improve job quality. All seven dimensions should be considered.
- Many actors and channels contribute to the improvement of job quality. The social partners and collective bargaining are among the most important of these.
- To make progress in job quality, the gender differences across men’s and women’s working careers need to be considered.
- Faced with a shrinking and ageing working-age population, Europe needs to provide good job quality to more people to allow a larger share of a more diverse population to join the labour market and stay in employment for longer.
- The twin transition brings challenges but also opportunities for job quality. Progress in job quality should be supported as the twin transition unfolds.
- Job quality supports the performance of companies through a motivated and engaged workforce, openness to innovation, less absence from work and providing a better social climate. Improvements in job quality can clearly support policies aiming to achieve sustainable and inclusive work.

Introduction

Policy context

The EU [1] faces profound structural transformations driven by the twin – green and digital – transition. The commitment to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 has an impact on what is produced and consumed and how this is done. This offers new economic opportunities but also requires adjustments in traditional industries. An impact on employment is to be expected, as is an impact on the quality of jobs.

In parallel, the rapid progress in digital technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), is redefining work. Tasks are changing, as are the skills required to perform them. The potential to augment work while achieving productivity gains is significant, but the risks to workers' health and well-being and the potential widening of the digital divide cannot be overlooked.

Compounding these transitions are demographic shifts. The proportion of people of working age is declining in the EU, and persistent labour shortages are reported for key sectors and a wide range of occupations. Creating the conditions to motivate and enable workers to stay in employment for longer and to bring in groups that are under-represented in the labour market is an urgent objective.

The European Pillar of Social Rights devotes 6 of its 20 principles to fair working conditions. The action plan, drawn up by the European Commission in 2021 to complement national actions and contribute to the Pillar's implementation, highlights the need to make 'work standards fit for the future of work'. It is in this context that the Platform Work Directive (Directive (EU) 2024/2831) was adopted in December 2024. This directive aims to improve working conditions in platform work by facilitating the determination of the correct employment status of people performing platform work and by promoting transparency, fairness, human oversight, safety and accountability in algorithmic management in platform work. The 2019 Work–Life Balance Directive (Directive (EU) 2019/1158) addresses the need for flexibility among parents and people with caring responsibilities, the lack of which might otherwise prevent them from (full) labour market participation. Enabling and prolonging participation in the labour market also requires a high level of protection of workers' health and safety at work and the right to have the working environment adapted to their professional needs. This is taken up in the EU strategic framework on health and safety at work for 2021–2027. The 2022 Minimum Wage Directive (Directive (EU) 2022/2041) acknowledges the right to fair wages that provide for a decent standard of living. Fair working conditions require transparency about employment conditions. This is addressed by the 2019 Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions Directive (Directive (EU) 2019/1152).

The role of fair working conditions as a contributor to an innovative and competitive EU economy has been acknowledged in the debate on enhancing Europe's competitiveness. In her State of the Union address in September 2025, while announcing the Quality Jobs Act, Commission President von der Leyen pointed out that talking about competitiveness means talking about jobs. The Competitiveness Compass, presented by the European Commission in January 2025, has already established that quality jobs are a prerequisite for greater labour force participation and increased productivity. The Quality Jobs Roadmap, which the European Commission prepared in consultation with the social partners and published in December 2025, also acknowledges this relationship (European Commission, 2025). This flagship initiative aims to contribute to the competitiveness of European industries by supporting EU Member States and industry in providing quality jobs characterised by fair wages, good working conditions, training and fair job transitions for workers, including employees and self-employed individuals.

To foster a common, agreed understanding, the Employment Committee (EMCO) has adopted an opinion that defines the dimensions of job quality, which it presented to the June 2025 Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council. Based on this opinion, the Indicators Group of EMCO was invited to update the job quality monitoring framework published in 2017. The aim was to help identify the challenges related to quality jobs and monitor progress related to them. Importantly, the EMCO framework differs from the Eurofound framework on job quality with regard to the level of analysis. Whereas the EMCO framework predominantly aims to assess job quality at the labour market level, in the Eurofound framework, indicators and indices measure job quality at the level of the job.

(1) In this report, 'EU' refers to the EU-27, that is, the 27 Member States that make up the European Union as of 2026.

The discussions on the Quality Jobs Roadmap highlight the role of social dialogue and collective bargaining in ensuring better working conditions for all. In 2023, the European Commission presented an initiative to further strengthen and promote social dialogue, renewing the strong commitment to social dialogue as a cornerstone of the EU social market economy and its competitiveness. Social dialogue is acknowledged as a key instrument to support adaptation to the changing world of work and contemporary trends on the labour market, against the backdrop of the twin transition.

Fostering innovation and competitiveness fundamentally requires a skilled, adaptable and well-supported workforce, as the report of Enrico Letta on the future of the internal market establishes (Letta, 2024). It is in this context that the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) provides crucial evidence to policymakers on trends in job quality, the issues of concern and the groups of workers who require specific attention. It feeds into a number of monitoring frameworks, including the framework of the EMCO Indicators Group.

European Working Conditions Survey series

Since 1991, Eurofound has been monitoring progress on improvements in working conditions in Europe through the EWCS. The objectives of the survey are to:

- measure working conditions across European countries on a harmonised basis;
- analyse relationships between different aspects of working conditions;
- identify groups at risk and any issues of concern and areas of progress;
- monitor trends over time;
- contribute to European policy development on quality of work and employment issues.

As the EU has grown, the number of countries covered by the survey has been increasing. The new edition covers 35 countries: the 27 Member States, Norway, Switzerland and the 6 Western Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo ([2]), Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia).

The EWCS 2024 is a high-quality, representative, probability-based survey. A total of 36 644 face-to-face interviews were conducted in people's homes. Each interview lasted for about 45 minutes, and the sample size was 1 000 in most countries.

Contemporary challenges for work in times of transition

The green, digital and demographic transitions, together with societal change, are affecting the world of work.

Climate change has a direct impact on the workforce through growing environmental risks such as exposure to rising temperatures, increased air pollution and greater frequency of extreme weather events. They make work harder, especially for workers who spend a lot of time outdoors. The need to adapt and the mitigating policies introduced to address climate change require a change in working methods in some sectors, which is likely to have an impact on job quality and requires training, retraining or job transition.

The growing digitalisation of activities, the introduction of AI and automation are changing the organisation of production, management methods, the task content of occupations and employment conditions. This transition offers opportunities for less strenuous and more human-centred work, but it also carries risks, such as job fragmentation and deskilling.

Demographic ageing is having an impact on the composition of the workforce in companies and organisations. For the first time in history, companies manage up to four generations of men and women in work. Developing sustainable work practices that support workers through their working lives remains a necessity, especially in the current context of labour – and skills – shortages. As the working population is declining, supporting the inclusion of a diverse workforce, including migrant workers, is essential.

Societal change – such as changing family structures and relationships, the increase in single-person households, more diversity in individual life courses, the surge in the interconnectedness of the world and the confluence of risks of different natures (such as the climate crisis, the cost-of-living crisis and geopolitical tensions) – has an impact on the world of work. Expectations regarding work are changing, with more emphasis on a better work–life balance (i.e. the fit between working hours and family and social commitments) and workplace practices that contribute to workers' well-being during their working life.

Paid employment takes up a lot of people's time in their lives. It provides earnings, future financial safety, opportunities to apply and develop skills, opportunities to socialise and opportunities for people to find meaning in their lives. Understanding how people are

([2]) This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

working, how work is changing and what kind of job quality and working lives workers are experiencing is key to supporting policymakers in their role in shaping and regulating work.

Structure of the report

The report is organised into six chapters. Chapter 1 describes the characteristics of the workforce using data from the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) and the EWCS 2024. Employment levels are described and broken down by occupation, sector and employment status, sex, age and educational attainment. To this is added information on country of origin, seniority, the holding of multiple jobs and workplace size. The chapter also includes a section on gender segregation.

Chapter 2 explores the workplaces in which workers perform their work. The main characteristics of workplaces are described, such as the use of technology for work, the physical location of work and social relationships at work. The chapter also examines how workplaces cater for the needs of workers with health problems and the extent to which they provide means for employee representation and voice at work.

Chapter 3 shows how job quality can be measured. It presents the job quality framework developed by Eurofound since 2012. It goes on to provide a picture of job quality in 2024, breaking down data by standard sociodemographic classifications such as gender, age, occupation, sector and country.

Chapter 4 investigates trends in job quality in the EU. Based on the seven job quality indices, developments in job quality are described for Earnings, Working time quality, Prospects, Skills and discretion, Work intensity, Social environment and Physical environment.

Chapter 5 examines workers' experience of their working life and analyses the role of job quality in contributing to a positive experience of work. Taking the individual job holder as the starting point, the chapter investigates how their skills match their job and how this is linked to career and employment security. It analyses work–life balance and the work–household interface. It also looks at workers' health and well-being, their engagement and motivation and how meaningful work is. Under the heading of sustainable work, the chapter also looks at workers' preferences and priorities regarding their working lives. The final chapter presents conclusions.

1 Workforce

This chapter outlines the structural trends in labour market supply and demand that determine who works, when they work and the activities or functions in which they work. By characterising the workforce in terms of occupation, employment, health status and household composition in a context of gender-segregated labour markets, the chapter supports the contextualisation and interpretation of the findings on workplace practices, job quality and quality of working life. The time analysis covers 2010 to 2024 with a view to aligning with the 2010, 2015 and 2024 editions of the EWCS.

Summary

- The EU workforce continues to grow despite demographic challenges.
- The increasing participation of women and pre-retirement-age workers has contributed to the growth of aggregate employment. Migrant labour – from other Member States but mainly from non-EU countries – has also boosted employment, as has the higher average skills level of the workforce.
- Nearly three quarters of the EU workforce worked in service sectors in 2024. The largest and fastest-growing occupational group was that of professionals.
- The fact that traditionally male-employing sectors such as construction, agriculture and industry were reducing in size at the same time as many female-majority service sectors were expanding contributed to a narrowing of the gender employment gap, although not to an attenuation of gender occupational segregation.
- The prevalence of non-standard employment in the EU has tended to diminish more recently; the share of part-time workers has been stable, while those of temporary employment and self-employment have declined.
- Only one in four workers (23 %) in the EU work in a gender-balanced workplace, where women account for roughly half of the workforce.
- Nearly two thirds of EU workers have a male boss.
- Over the past quarter-century, there has been limited progress towards gender balance at management level. Female managers are most common in female-dominated workplaces.
- Among male workers, 20 % have people working under their supervision, while the same was reported by only 12 % of women.
- The share of workers living in households with children has stayed relatively stable at around 32 %.
- As regards health, 80 % of the workforce is in good or very good health, while 2.5 % is in bad or very bad health.
- In terms of well-being, men at work have a higher score on the World Health Organization (WHO)-5 Well-being Index (71) than women (68). Younger and post-retirement-age workers have the highest scores, while prime-age and pre-retirement-age workers have the lowest scores.
- As regards illness, 12 % of EU workers have a chronic illness (any illness or health problem that has lasted, or is expected to last, for more than six months) that limits their ability to do normal activities. In addition, 5 % said that, while not having a chronic illness, they had a health problem limiting their ability.

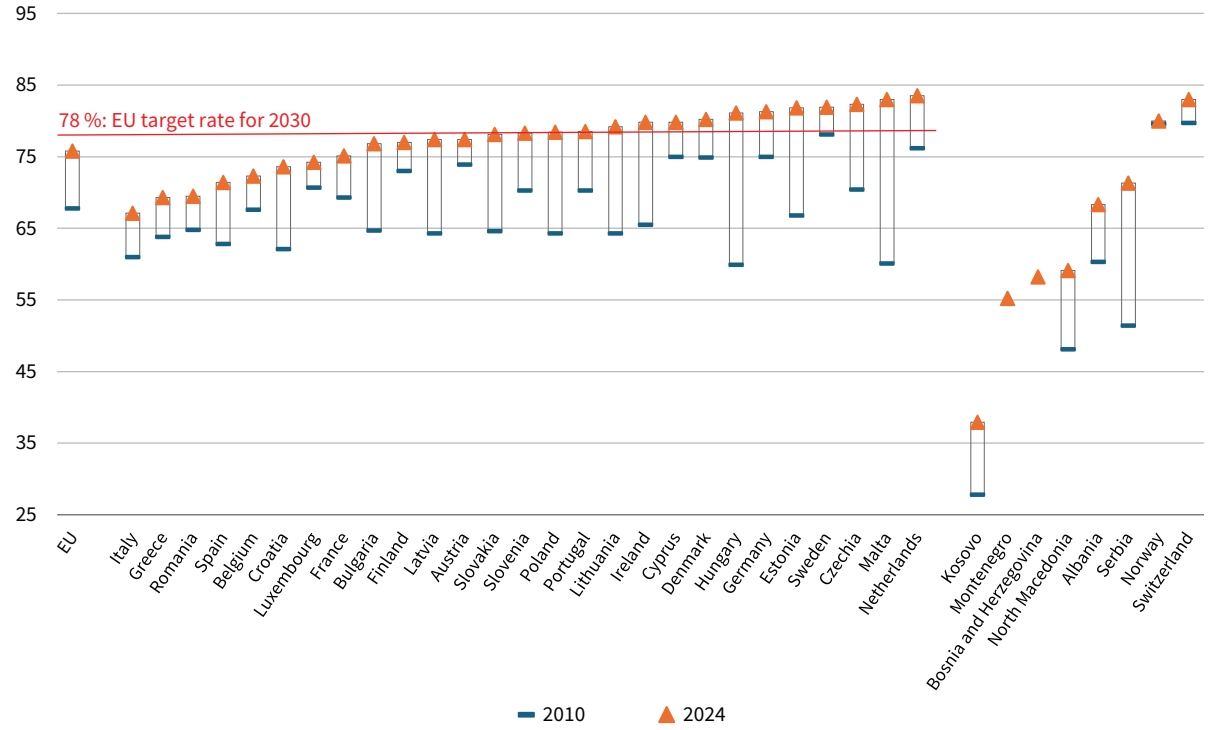
Sociodemographic change and increased employment [3]

Employment levels

There are more adults employed in the EU currently than at any time in the past: 207.8 million in 2024, of whom 200.7 million were of working age (15–64 years old) and 206.5 million were in the 15–74 years age bracket. The unemployment rate is at its lowest in a generation (5.8 % in the EU in 2024). The employment rate is rising (75.8 % in 2024, an increase of 8 percentage points (pp) compared with 2010 (Figure 1)) and is on a path to meet the EU target employment rate (78 %) by 2030. This headline 2030 EU target rate (78 %) applies to the share of individuals aged 20–64 years in active employment. There are also national 2030 employment rate targets set by individual Member States that reflect labour market conditions at the beginning of the decade, which range from 71.1 % in Greece to 85 % in Hungary.

[3] In this report, 'EU' refers to the EU-27, that is, the 27 Member States that make up the European Union as of 2026.

Figure 1: Employment rates of those aged 20–64 years, by country, 2010 and 2024 (%)

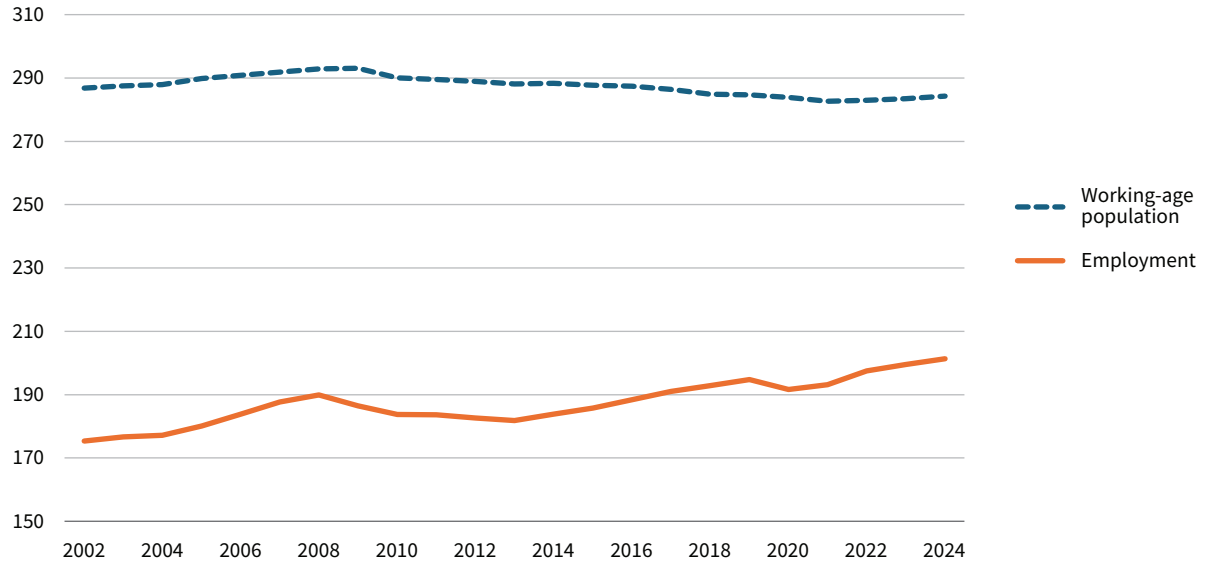


Note: The most recent values for Montenegro and North Macedonia are from 2020. There is no 2010 data available for Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina.
Source: EU-LFS.

The rising employment rate contrasts with the more challenging macroeconomic context of the earlier EWCS editions in 2010 (in the immediate aftermath of the global financial crisis) and 2015 (soon after the EU sovereign debt crisis).

The increase in the employment level has happened despite the significant demographic headwind of a declining working-age population (Figure 2). The working-age population (15–64 years) actually contracted by around nine million in the EU between 2009 and 2024. The main projections (Eurostat, Europop2023 (proj_23n)) indicate that the EU population as a whole will begin to decline in the late 2020s and that the pace of decline will be notably sharper in the working-age population.

Figure 2: EU working-age population and employment levels, 2002 to 2024 (millions)



Source: EU-LFS.

Main vectors of change in employment

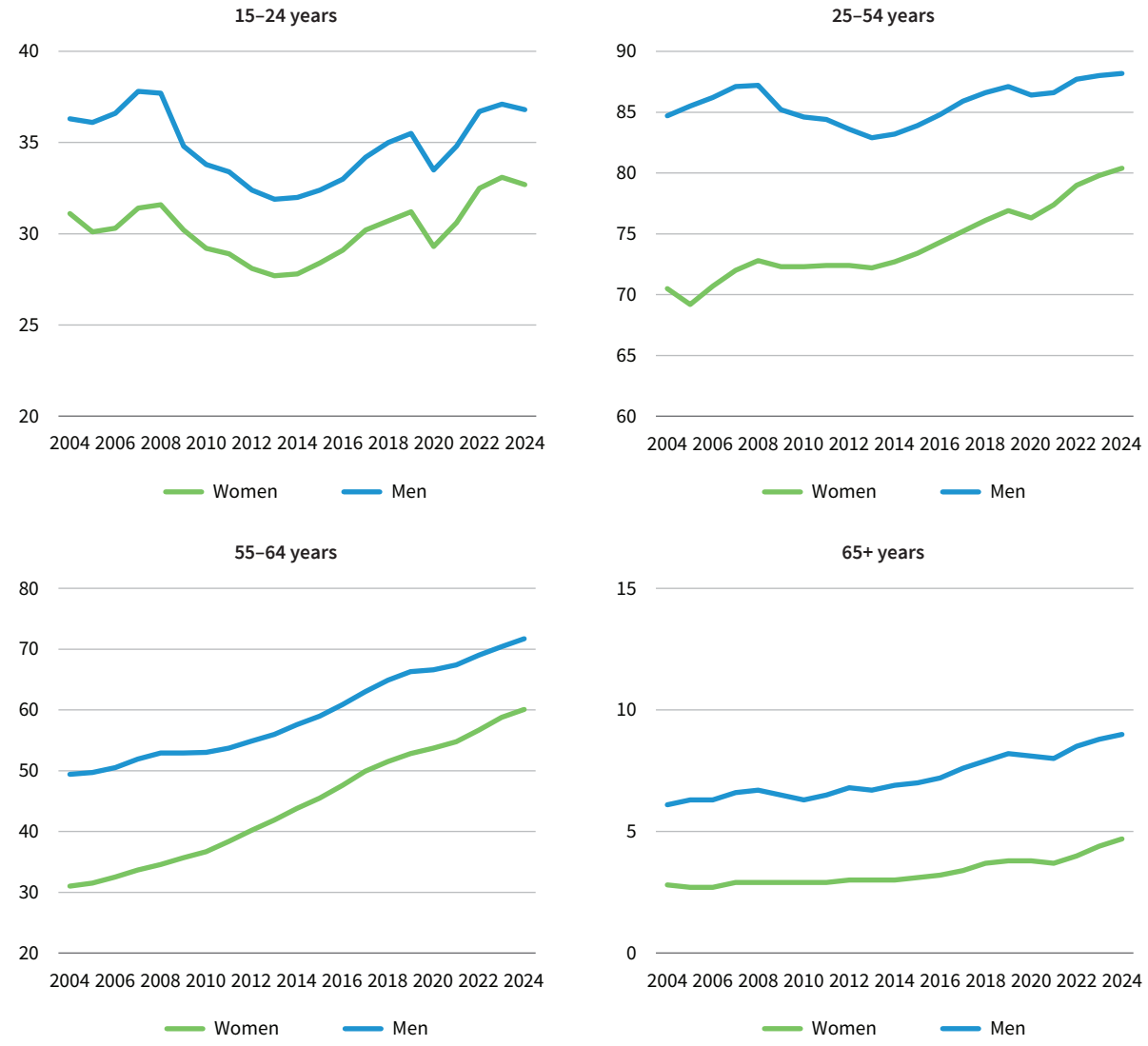
The main contributing factors on the supply side to the growth in employment have been increased female participation (and the concomitant growth in the share of dual-working-parent households), a much greater likelihood that older adults (55+ years) will be in employment, increased immigration and the increased educational attainment levels of the workforce.

Workforce structure – sex and age

Figure 3 illustrates that employment rates remain higher for all broad age cohorts for men than for women. However, it also shows that the gender employment gap is contracting, in particular for the most numerous group, the core-age group (25–54 years of age), in which the gap almost halved from 14.2 to 7.8 pp over the two decades studied (2004–2024). The pre-retirement age group (55–64 years) has seen the most dramatic rise in employment rates, for both women and men, with the rate for men up by over 20 pp (from 49.4 % to 71.7 %) and that for women up by nearly 30 pp (from 31 % to 60.1 %). This development has been encouraged by policy (Eurofound, 2025a), by increasing longevity (and healthy longevity) and by structural labour market changes that have reduced the share of employment in agriculture, construction and manufacturing.

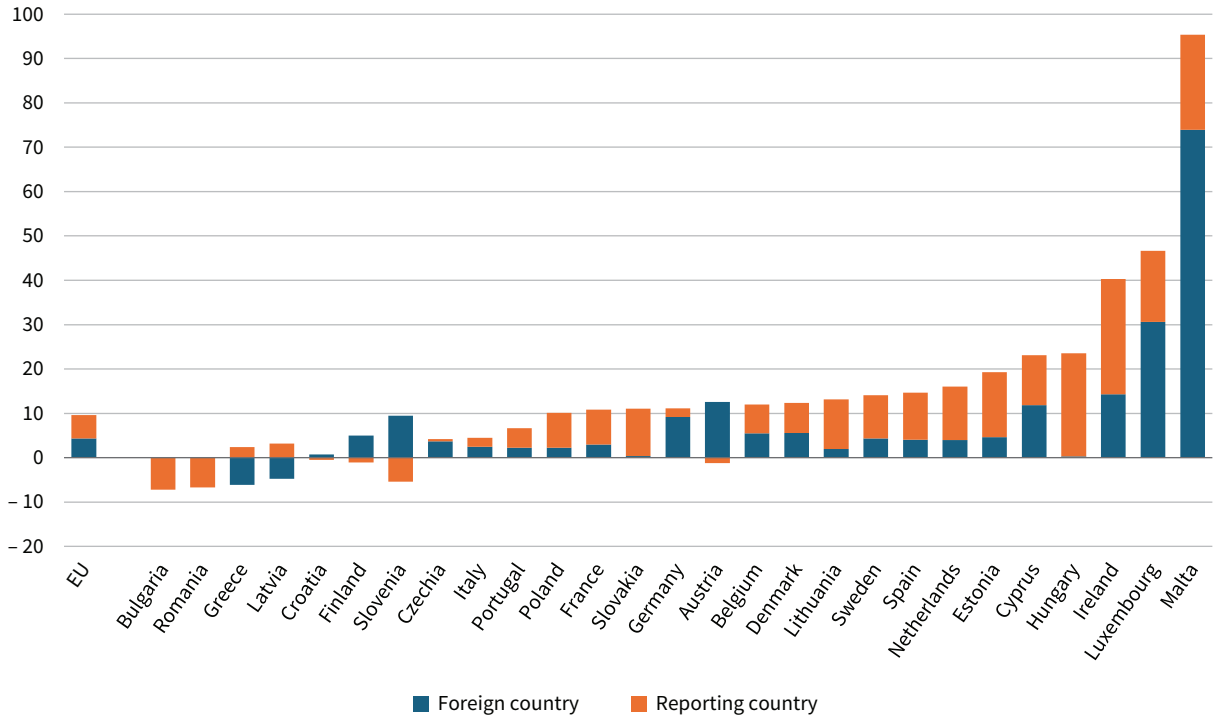
Low employment rates among younger workers are partly due to a growing share in full-time education, but here too there has been a narrowing of the employment gap. Only among those aged 65 and over, among whom fewer than 1 in 10 remain actively working, has the gap between male and female employment rates grown.

Figure 3: Employment rates in the EU by age group and sex, 2004–2024 (%)



Source: EU-LFS.

Figure 4: Change in employment by country of citizenship, 2010–2024 (%)



Note: 'Foreign country' refers to all countries other than the reporting country, that is, it includes both other Member States and non-EU countries.
Source: EU-LFS.

Similar trends can be observed in Norway and Switzerland. Owing to data availability issues, it is not possible to map these developments with the EU-LFS in the Western Balkans.

Migration

Migration has been an important factor contributing to the growth of employment in the EU. Since 2010, around 45 % of net new employment in the EU (8 million of a total increase of 17.6 million) has been among foreign nationals. Figure 4 breaks down the wide variety of national changes in employment between 2010 and 2024 (from a contraction of 7 % in Bulgaria to a gain of 94 % in Malta) into two components: foreign nationals and reporting-country nationals. In Austria, Finland, Germany and Slovenia, nearly all net growth in employment over the period is accounted for by foreign-born workers. In the two smallest Member States, both of which have very fast-growing labour markets (Luxembourg and Malta), immigration has contributed two thirds or more to net employment growth.

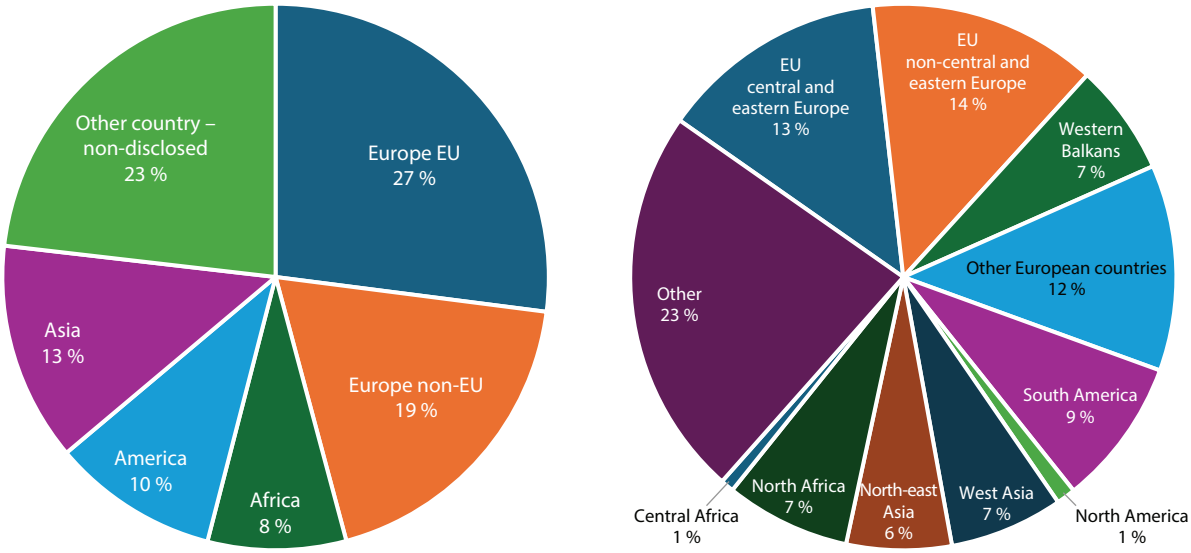
Overall, in 20 of the 27 Member States, immigration has made a non-trivial, positive contribution (> 1 pp) to employment growth.

The EWCS allows workers of foreign origin to be further characterised in terms of their background. Across the EU as a whole, 10.6 % of workers are first-generation migrants (neither they nor their parents were born in the country where they replied to the survey), with a further 5.6 % being second-generation migrants (with one or both parents born outside the country).

As shown in Figure 5, some 27 % of first-generation migrants were born in another Member State. These are considered to be 'mobile EU workers' and, of them, some 50 % were born in a central or eastern European Member State.

Some 19 % of the first-generation migrants were born in non-EU European countries, of which around 35 % were born in a Western Balkan country (representing 7 % of all first-generation migrant workers). The remaining workers were born in Asia (13 %, with more than half from West Asia), the American continent (10 %, mostly from South America), and Africa (8 %, mostly from North Africa).

Figure 5: Country of origin of first-generation migrants in the EU by continent and subcontinent



Source: EWCS 2024. Unless otherwise specified, the source for all figures and tables is the EWCS 2024.

According to EWCS 2024 data, a higher proportion of first-generation migrant workers than native workers (individuals born in the country in which they are employed) work in other services, health, commerce and hospitality, and construction. The proportion of first-generation migrants born outside the EU working in elementary occupations (e.g. as cleaners, labourers or food preparation assistants) is close to three times that of native workers.

Education

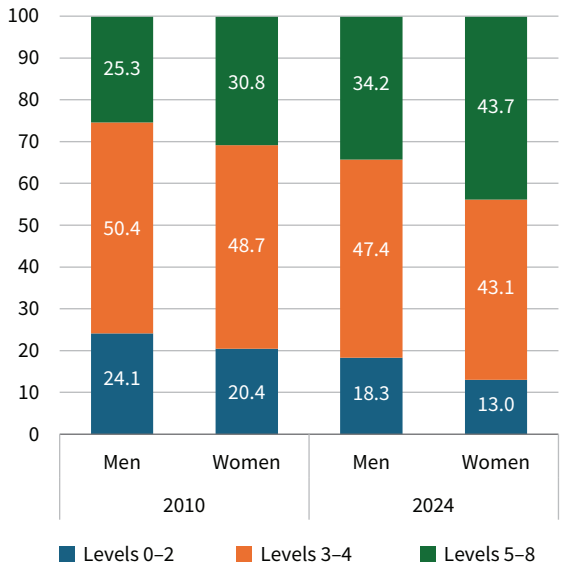
Another important dimension in which the workforce has changed relates to the increased educational attainment levels of the workforce. There was a doubling of the number of graduates among workers of working age from 2002 to 2024 (from 37.6 million to 77.9 million). At the same time, the share of the workforce with a basic education only (International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level 1 or 2) or with an upper secondary education (ISCED 3 or 4) has declined as older cohorts have retired or left the labour market (Figure 6).

In 2024, 39 % of all EU workers had completed tertiary education, compared with 28 % in 2010. The gap in educational attainment between men and women has grown over the period. Among working women, 44 % were graduates in 2024, compared with 34 % of men, equating to a 10 pp gap (in comparison with the 6 pp gap observed in 2010).

Occupations and sectors

The principal structural changes in recent decades have been the 'services transition' and occupational upgrading (i.e. a generalised move towards better-paid jobs) in the services sector.

Figure 6: Educational attainment level by gender, 2010 and 2024 (%)



Note: ISCED levels 0–2 correspond to less than primary, primary and lower secondary education; levels 3 and 4 correspond to upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education; and levels 5–8 correspond to completed tertiary education.
Source: EU-LFS [egaed].

Since 2010 (Table 1), the professional ranks in the EU have grown by over 20 million (from 27.1 million to 47.5 million in 2024). Professionals are now the largest broad occupational category, accounting for 22.9 % of EU employment in 2024 (compared with 14.5 % in 2010). The only other broad occupational category to have grown its share of total employment over the same period is that of services and sales workers (from 13.5 % to 15.9 %). The shares of managers, skilled agricultural

Table 1: Change in the occupational share of total employment in the EU, 2010–2024 (%)

Occupational category	2010	2024	Difference: 2010–2024 (pp)
Managers	7.3	5.3	– 2.00
Professionals	14.5	22.9	8.38
Technicians	17.1	16.0	– 1.07
Clerical workers	10.3	9.6	– 0.71
Services and sales workers	13.5	15.9	2.37
Skilled agricultural workers	4.9	2.6	– 2.26
Craft workers	13.4	11.2	– 2.26
Plant and machine operators	8.4	7.2	– 1.15
Elementary occupations	9.6	8.2	– 1.33

Source: EU-LFS.

workers, craft workers, plant and machine operators and workers in elementary occupations have declined in both absolute and relative terms.

Nearly three quarters of the employment headcount is now involved in the provision of services as opposed to the extraction of primary materials or the production of goods. As Table 2 shows, the largest gains have been observed in health (+ 1.5 pp) and in the broad, catch-all category other services (+ 2.8 pp). If this last statistic is disaggregated, the two specific sectors contributing most to the growth of 'other services' are professional, scientific and technical activities (+ 1.3 pp) – including legal, advertising, research, management consultancy and architectural services – and information and communication (+ 1.1 pp), which includes information technology, media and publishing. Most employment growth has therefore been concentrated in 'knowledge-intensive services'.

The largest contraction of the employment share has occurred in agriculture (– 2.5 pp).

Table 2: Change in the sectoral composition of employment in the EU, 2010–2024 (%)

Sector	2010	2024	Difference: 2010–2024 (pp)
Agriculture	5.8	3.3	– 2.51
Industry	18.5	17.3	– 1.19
Construction	7.6	6.8	– 0.80
Commerce and hospitality	18.4	18.1	– 0.25
Transport	5.1	5.4	0.27
Financial services	3.6	3.6	0.05
Public administration	7.3	7.0	– 0.32
Health	9.8	11.3	1.45
Education	6.9	7.5	0.61
Other services	16.5	19.3	2.75

Source: EU-LFS (authors' calculations).

Varied employment picture

This section outlines how employment was distributed in 2024 across work statuses and how this has changed over recent decades in the EU. The principal structural change in this respect has been around the 'de-standardisation' or 'flexibilisation' of the employment relationship.

Employment status

The majority of workers in the EU continue to work in what can be described as the 'standard employment relationship', that is, full-time, permanent, dependent employment (62 % in 2024, which is an increase of 2 pp since 2010). However, there are significant minorities of self-employed workers (12.9 %), part-time workers (17.8 %) and employees with temporary contracts (12.8 %) (Figure 7).

The variation across Member States is largest for the prevalence of part-time work. Five Member States have very low levels (< 5 %) – Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Slovakia and Hungary – while, in four, over a quarter of workers work part time: Denmark, Germany, Austria and the Netherlands.

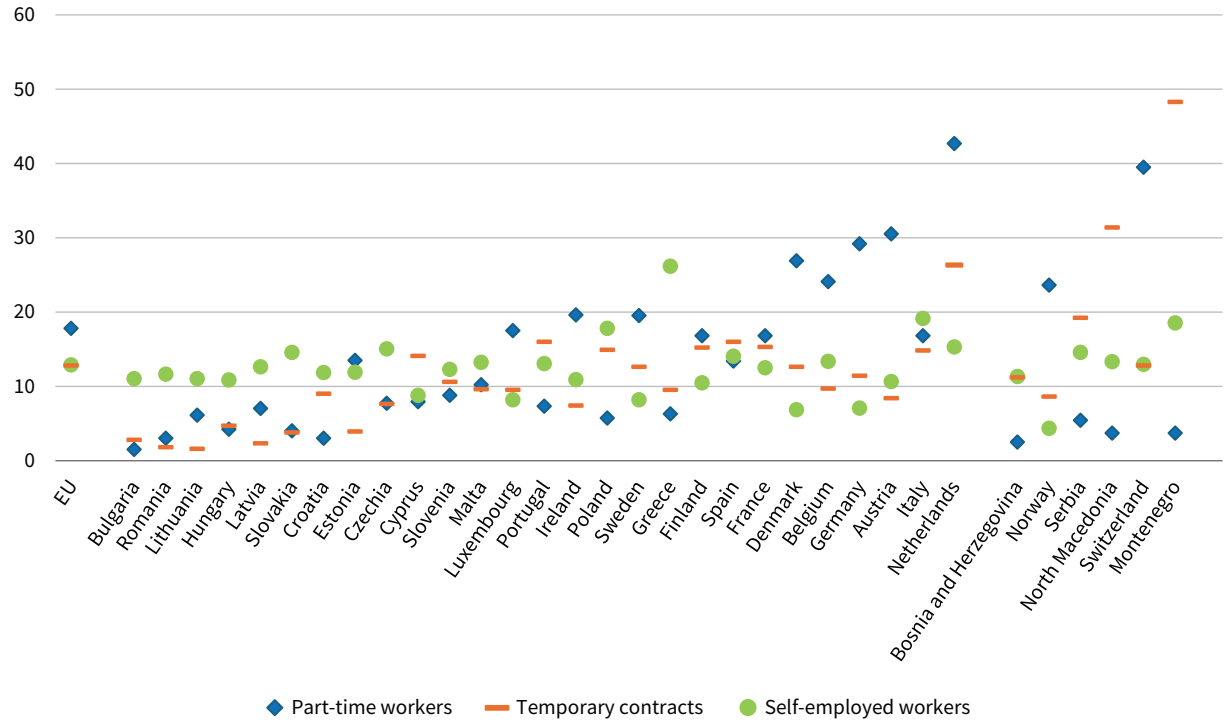
The prevalence of temporary work follows a similar pattern, with very low rates in many of the post-2004 accession Member States (exceptions include Cyprus and Poland) and higher rates in older Member States.

For self-employment the range is narrower, with no countries having a share less than 5 % of employment and only one (Greece) having a share greater than 20 % of total employment.

Austria and Germany are distinctive in their high shares of part-time employment combined with below-EU-average shares of self-employment and temporary employment; one in two women work part time in both countries. The Netherlands maintains its position as an outlier in terms of labour market flexibility and high shares of non-standard employment, with markedly high prevalences of part-time work (where the share is approaching half of the workforce (43 %)) and of temporary employment.

The above figures relate to the main employment types identified in the EU-LFS. They do not cover newer forms of employment or types not categorised in official labour statistics, although these may be increasingly important (Eurofound, 2015a). These include on-call work, casual work, intermittent or seasonal work and job-/employee-sharing arrangements. It is also worth noting that, according to the EWCS 2024, 3 % of employees reported having no employment contract in 2024.

Figure 7: Employment in three main forms of non-standard employment by country, 2024 (%)



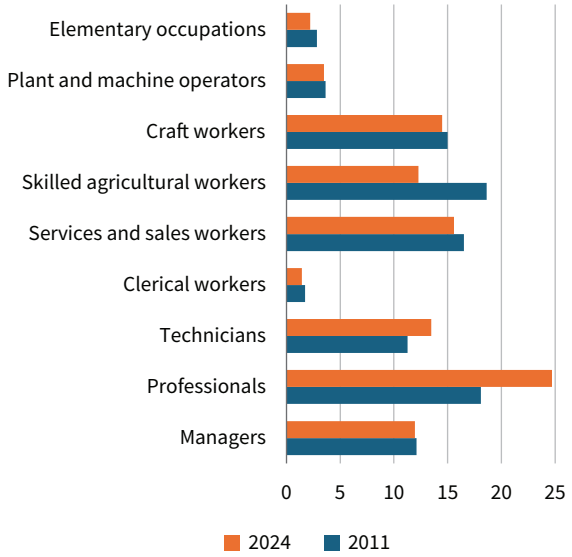
Notes: There is some overlap between the three categories: shares of temporary work are of those in dependent employment, that is, employees only, while shares of part-time and self-employed workers are of all people in employment. Only the working-age population (15–64 years) is considered. No data were available for Albania or Kosovo. Data for Montenegro and North Macedonia are for 2020, except the share of self-employment in Montenegro, which is for 2016.
Source: EU-LFS (authors' calculations).

Self-employment

One factor contributing to the increase in the 'core' or standard employment share is the decline in both self-employment and the share of 'contributing family workers', that is, those working in a family business or farm but not paid for such work (Table 3). The share of self-employed people who employ others has declined by 0.6 pp since 2010, while that of own-account workers has declined by 1.4 pp. The share of self-employed workers in dependent employment has increased by 3 pp since 2010. Box 1 provides an overview of the differences between genuinely independent self-employed workers and those who are economically dependent.

There were 28.3 million self-employed workers (aged 15 and over) in the EU in 2024, 700 000 fewer than in 2010. Furthermore, the occupational composition of self-employment has changed (Figure 8). Professionals, services and sales workers and craft workers make up about half of those who are self-employed.

Figure 8: Changing composition of self-employment in the EU by occupation, 2011 and 2024 (%)



Note: The earlier dataset is from 2011 due to a classification break in occupational data in 2010–2011.
Source: EU-LFS (authors' calculations).

Table 3: Professional status of those in employment in the EU, 2010–2024 (%)

Professional status	2010	2024	Difference: 2010–2024 (pp)
Employees	83.5	86.5	2.98
Self-employed people with employees (employers)	4.6	4.1	– 0.56
Self-employed people without employees (own-account workers)	10.2	8.9	– 1.35
Contributing family workers	1.6	0.5	– 1.08

Source: EU-LFS (authors' calculations).

Box 1: Economically dependent self-employed workers

Previous research has highlighted the increasingly blurring boundaries between the status of a subordinated employee and that of an independent self-employed person (Eurofound, 2024a). Despite a formal classification of self-employment, certain settings lack the key features that characterise independent and autonomous employment relations (European Commission, 2016).

The International Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE-18) sets out dichotomies based on two key factors: (1) authority, which distinguishes between independent workers and dependent workers, and (2) economic risk, which differentiates between self-employment and paid employment (ILO, 2023). Employees in paid employment typically have limited authority but face lower economic risks than those in self-employment. Using these criteria, own-account self-employed individuals can be categorised into two groups: those who are genuinely independent (have control over their work and face various risks) and those who are economically dependent (resemble employees in terms of their limited autonomy but face greater economic risks).

The EWCS 2024 collected information that is used to determine the degree of economic dependence of own-account workers in this regard. They were classified as economically dependent if they fulfilled at least two of the following three criteria:

- the proportion of the revenue that they receive from their most important client is greater than 75 %;
- they have no authority to hire or dismiss employees;
- they do not agree with the statement that the most important decisions on how the business is run are taken by them.

Based on this, 15 % of solo self-employed individuals (19 % of women and 13 % of men) or 1.5 % of the overall workforce in the EU are economically dependent own-account workers.

The results for 2024 also show that only 48 % of solo self-employed individuals fulfil none of the three criteria outlined above and are hence genuinely independent, while 36 % fulfil one of the criteria. This shows that there is a substantial grey zone between the categories 'genuinely independent' and 'economically dependent'.

Temporary work

As with self-employment, the share of EU workers in temporary employment has also declined more recently. Accounting for 15.2 % of dependent employment in 2010, the share of those in temporary or fixed-term contracts is now 12.8 %.

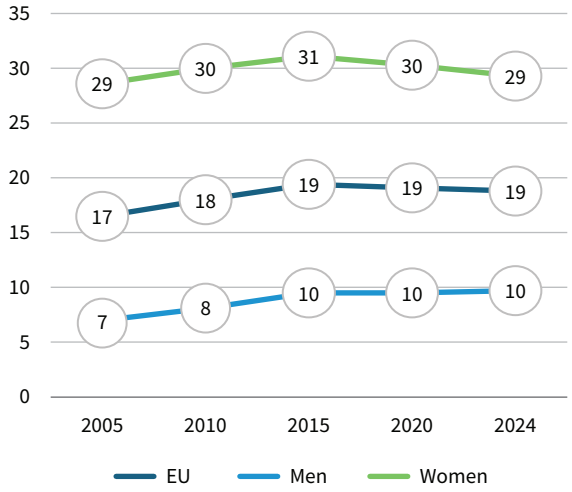
In the majority of Member States, the share of employees with temporary contracts is higher among women than men (exceptions to this are Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Germany, Hungary Latvia, Lithuania and Malta). For men in the EU, this share was 12 % in 2024 (13.6 % for women). It was also much higher for younger workers (15–24 years of age, 47.2 % in 2024) than for core-age (25–54 years, 10.4 %) and older workers (55–64 years, 5.6 %).

The sectors with the highest shares of temporary work include commerce and hospitality, education and health, all at about 11 %, which is about double the shares in financial services, construction and agriculture (4–5 %). In terms of occupation, the highest shares of temporary work are in elementary occupations (15 %) and services and sales (12 %).

Part-time work

The proportion of part-time workers in the EU as a share of total employment (19 %) has been stable since 2015 (Figure 9), and this trend is similar for men and women, although at different levels: in 2024, this proportion was 10 % for men and 29 % for women.

Figure 9: Part-time employment as a proportion of total employment in the EU by gender, 2005–2024 (%)



Source: Eurostat, LFS series.

The EWCS captures the part-time status of employees. According to the EWCS data, part-time work is more common among employees in the health (38 % of women and 24 % of men), commerce and hospitality (38 % of women and 23 % of men), other services (43 % of women and 17 % of men) and education (31 % of men and 27 % of women) sectors. It is also more frequent in elementary occupations (38 %) and among services and sales workers and clerks and technicians (both 30 %) and is least common among skilled agricultural workers, managers and craft workers (all about 6 %).

Multiple-job holders

According to the EWCS, around 5 % of workers in the EU have additional jobs, with large variations between countries. The highest proportions are in Norway and Sweden, where one in six workers has an additional job, followed by Czechia, Estonia, Denmark, Finland, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Switzerland (around 1 in 10). The shares of multiple-job holders are notably lower than average in southern Europe (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain), Hungary, Ireland, Romania, Slovakia and the Western Balkans.

The share of workers with several jobs has decreased since 2015, dropping from 8 % to today's 5 %. At the same time, the proportion of regular additional jobs has remained relatively stable, suggesting that the decrease occurred mainly in occasional additional jobs. Overall, in the EU, 24 % of multiple-job holders have occasional additional jobs. In 66 % of the cases of multiple-job holders, the additional jobs are regular and the remaining 10 % of workers with multiple jobs report having both occasional and regular additional jobs.

The share of individuals with additional jobs varies little by age or sex, except for one demographic, namely men aged 65+ who have more than double the rate of multiple-job holders than other groups (12 % versus 5 %). The share of multiple-job holders is notably higher in the residential care and social work sector, where 7 % of workers have an additional regular job and 2 % have an occasional additional job.

Most of the multiple-job holders in the EU say they have more than one job to have additional earnings (33 %) or to make ends meet (22 %). However, some invoke non-monetary reasons: 23 % do it for enjoyment, 10 % do it to build up their own business, 5 % do it to gain experience and 8 % do it for other reasons.

Seniority

The number of years one has worked in one's company/organisation is a determinant of job quality. Workers acquire experience and know-how in jobs over time, making them valuable to their employers. In many cases, labour law affords greater protections – against involuntary dismissal, for example – to workers with longer tenure than to recent entrants. Longer tenure is associated with higher earnings and greater work life stability. Despite long-standing narratives regarding greater labour market mobility (the 'end of the job for life'), data on job tenure in Europe tend to show relative stability over time.

The EWCS data show that the proportion of EU workers (aged over 25) with 10 years of tenure or more has been around 47 % since 2005 and was 45 % in 2024. The share of those having worked for less than one year in their current company or organisation has contracted over the same period (from 12 % to 9 % in 2024).

Although gender differences have tended to narrow over time, women are still over-represented in short-tenure positions (namely those of less than one year and those of one to four years) and men are over-represented in longer-tenure positions (10+ years).

By occupation (Figure 10), the highest share of short-tenure workers in 2024 was observed among elementary occupations (47 %) and services and sales workers (40 %) and the lowest share was in the structurally declining skilled agricultural workers category (19 %). Managers and skilled agricultural workers were the occupations with the longest tenure profiles in 2024.

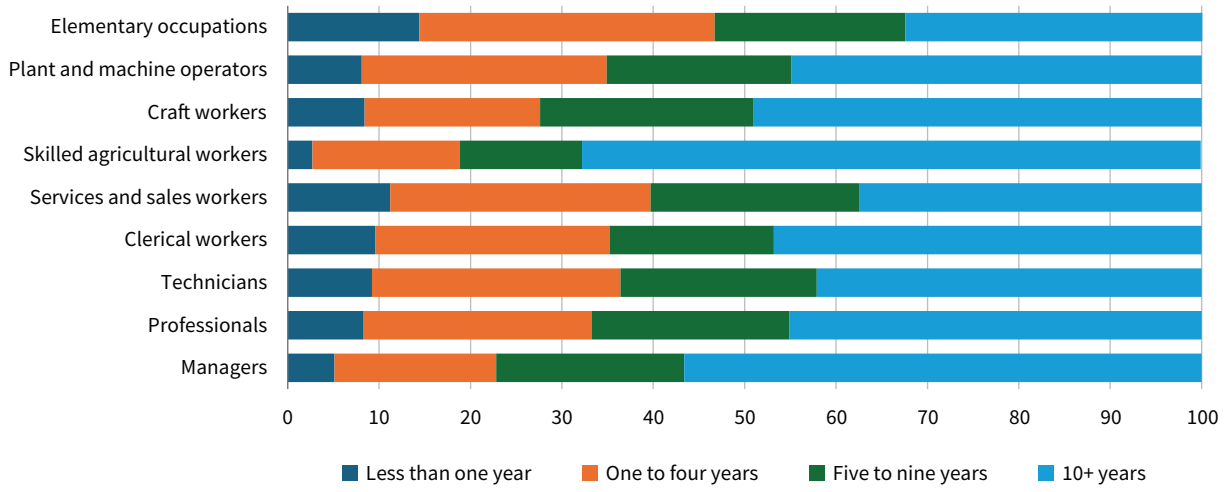
Native workers on average have six years more seniority than first-generation migrants and two years more than second-generation migrants.

Hours specified in work contract

About 90 % of employees in the EU have the hours they are expected to work specified in their employment contract. However, 11 % of male and 8 % of female employees do not have such specification. The Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions Directive (2019) has extended the provision of information on their employment situation, including working hours, to workers in more precarious employment situations.

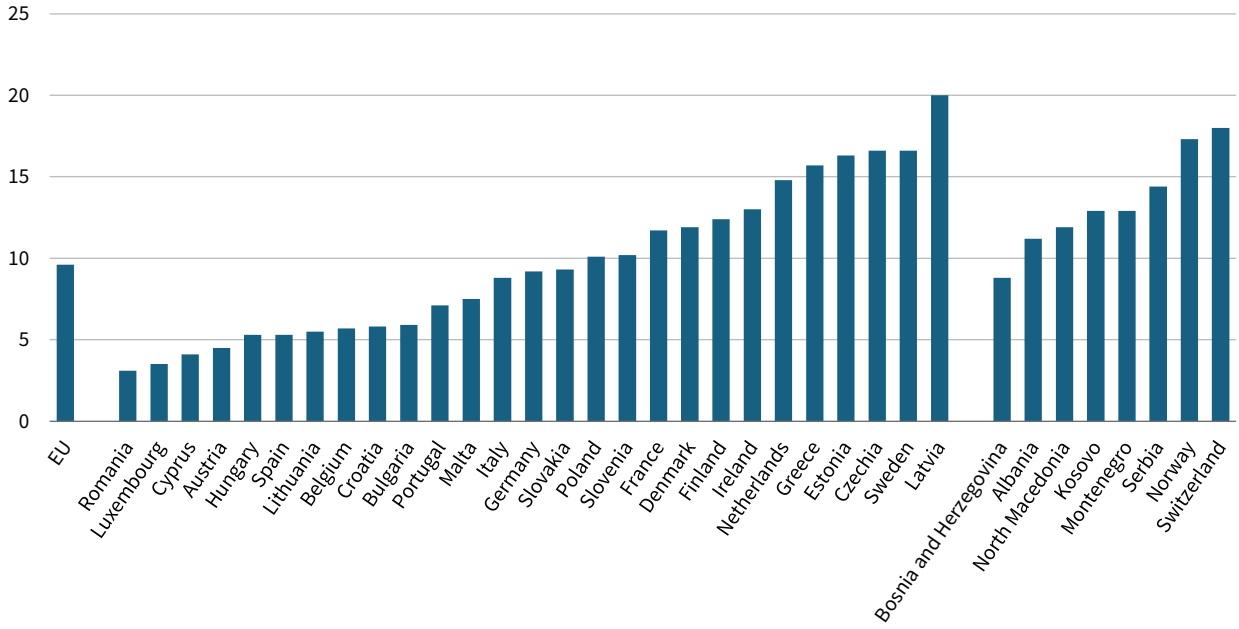
There are significant variations across countries. In the Netherlands, Greece, Estonia, Czechia, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland and Latvia, 15 % or more of employees report that their number of working hours is not specified in their contract (Figure 11).

Figure 10: Years of seniority among workers aged 25+ years in the EU by occupation (%)



Source: EU-LFS.

Figure 11: Share of employees reporting that hours are not specified in their work contract by country (%)



The share of employees who do not have their working hours specified is greatest among skilled agricultural workers (22 %), workers in elementary occupations (17 %) and managers (15 %) and among those working in the sectors of agriculture (25 %), transport (14 %) and other services (13 %). High proportions of young employees (25 % of those under 25 years of age) and older employees (36 % of those aged 65 and over) also report not having their working hours specified in their contract.

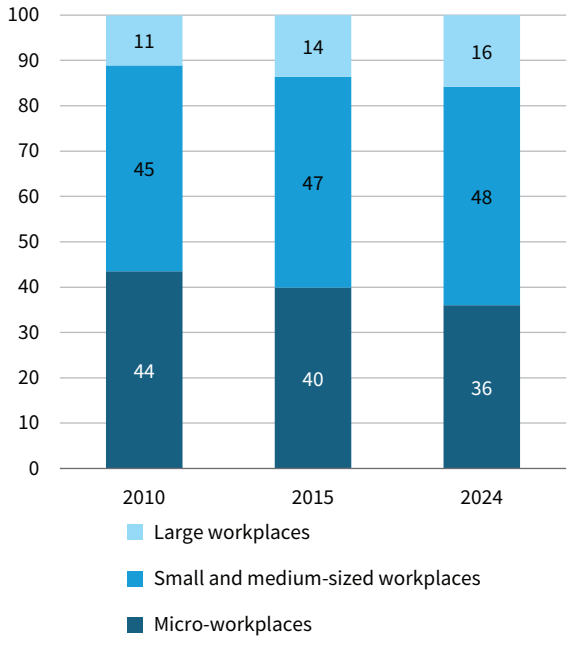
Among those employees whose hours are not specified in the employment contract, respondents were asked to give more details about their contract conditions: 41 % said they were paid upon completion of tasks or activities, 19 % stated that they were not guaranteed any hours of work, another 19 % stated that they were paid for a minimum number of hours for a defined period (even if these hours were not worked) and the remaining 21 % were in none of the previous circumstances.

Being paid upon the completion of tasks or activities is reported by a relatively larger share of women (46 %) than men (37 %). Across sectors, being paid upon the completion of tasks or activities is reported by 12 % of all employees in agriculture, 7 % in other services and in transport and 6 % in construction. Those who are not guaranteed any hours represent 12 % of all employees in agriculture, but only 3 % or less in all other sectors. Those reporting being paid for a minimum number of hours for a defined period, even if these hours are not worked, represent 3 % or less of all employees, depending on the sector.

Workplace size

In 2024, there were relatively more workers in small and medium-sized workplaces (with 10 to 249 workers) and in large workplaces (250 workers or more) than in the past, and there were fewer in micro-workplaces (with up to 9 workers) (Figure 12). The share of workers in large workplaces increased to 16 % from 11 % in 2010, while the share of those in small and medium-sized workplaces showed a smaller increase, from 45 % to 48 % in the same period. The proportion of workers in micro-workplaces decreased substantially, from 44 % in 2010 to 36 % in 2024.

Figure 12: Shares of workers by workplace size in the EU, 2010–2024 (%)



Source: EWCS series.

About 50 % or more of workers in the agriculture (80 %), commerce and hospitality (51 %) and construction (49 %) sectors work in micro-workplaces. In addition, 20 % of workers or more work in large workplaces in financial services (19 %), health (21 %), transport (22 %), public administration (28 %) and industry (29 %).

Gender segregation

EU labour markets continue to be highly gender segregated across sectors and occupations, despite some progress over recent decades in the reduction of the gap between men's and women's participation in employment. The persistence of this issue resulted, in 2025, in the European Commission adopting the Roadmap for Women's Rights, outlining goals to be achieved once the Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 had come to an end. The key objectives of the roadmap include closing the gender pay gap, addressing the undervaluation of jobs predominantly held by women and eliminating the gender employment gap, with a particular focus on occupational segregation. Overcoming gender segregation is crucial for creating a more flexible labour market and promoting inclusive economic development. See Box 2 for a note on how gender identity is addressed in this report.

Sectoral and occupational segregation

As shown in Figure 13, many sectors and occupations continue to be predominantly occupied by men or by women in 2024. Health and education are sectors in which most jobs are predominantly performed by women, whereas in industry, agriculture, transport and construction most jobs are predominantly occupied by men. The remaining sectors have a relatively balanced composition.

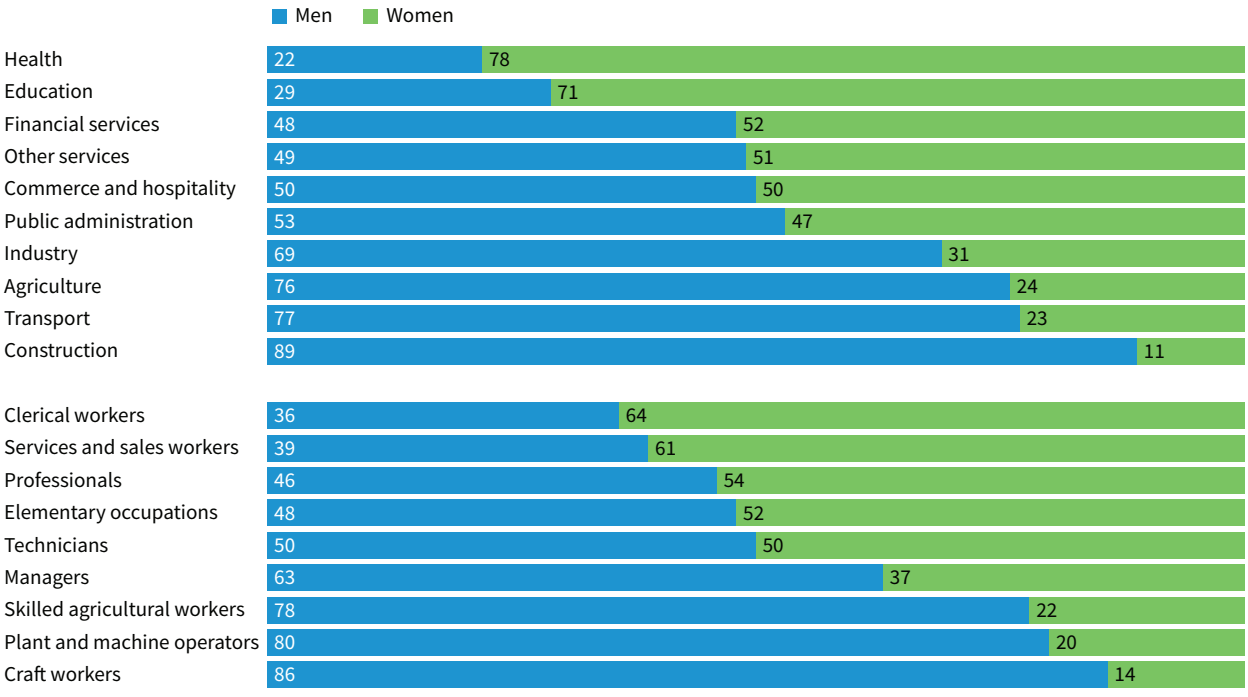
As also shown in Figure 13, in terms of occupation, women predominate among clerical workers and services and sales workers but are in the minority among managers, skilled agricultural workers, plant and machine operators and craft workers. Professionals, elementary occupations and technicians are the most balanced occupational groups in terms of gender composition. Box 3 looks at gender segregation from the standpoint of skills level.

Box 2: Gender identity

A question on gender identity (asking if respondents identified as male, as female or in another way) was included in the EWCS 2024. A total of 26 individuals across all countries covered identified as non-binary (of whom 19 were in the Member States). When data are displayed by gender in this report, non-binary individuals are excluded because their sample size is too small to provide reliable results. However, they are included in all other breakdowns – including by country, occupation and sector – when they provided an answer to the questions analysed.

While Eurofound acknowledges that the concepts of gender and sex are different, in this report, unless otherwise stated, gender is used to denote female and male characteristics. The data collected by the EU-LFS refer to sex and this terminology has been maintained in this report for EU-LFS-related analysis.

Figure 13: Gender composition of sectors and occupations (%)



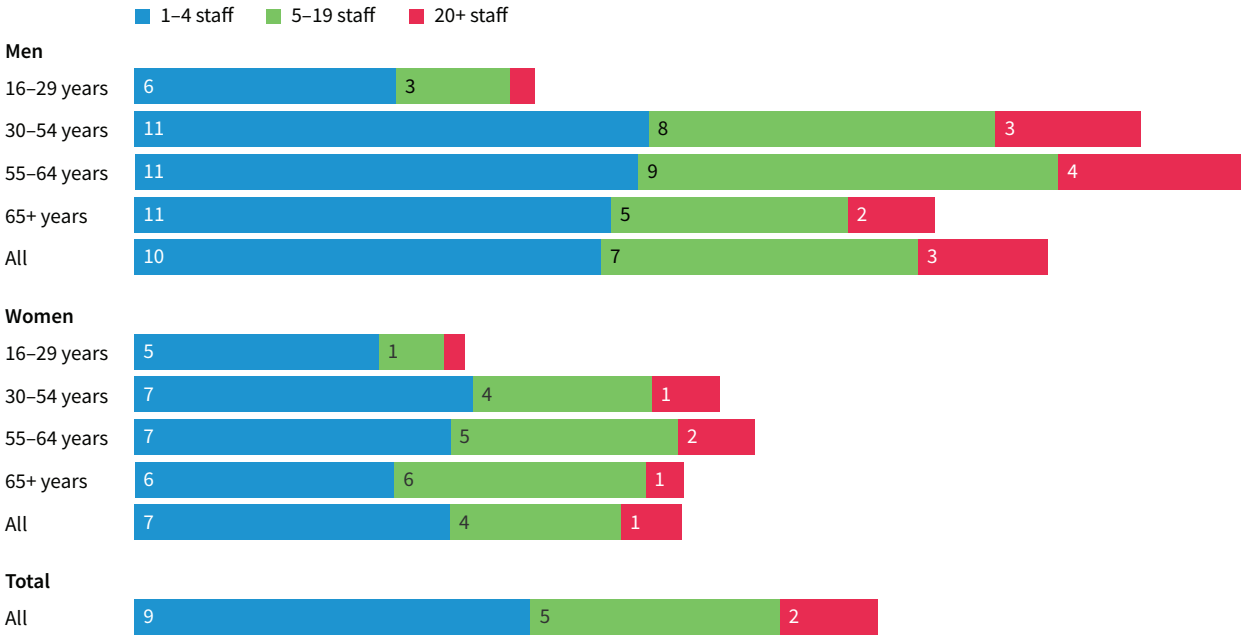
Gender-segregated management

The fact that most workers in the occupational group of managers in each Member State are men is the first indication of pervasive vertical segregation: men and women are unevenly distributed across jobs of different levels, grades or responsibilities, with men predominantly occupying top jobs. The EWCS provides two additional ways to look at vertical segregation – whether workers have a supervisory role and the gender of employees' boss, manager or direct supervisor.

The Roadmap for Women's Rights aims to promote gender balance in management and decision-making at all levels, across both the public and private sectors. In 2022, the European Commission adopted the Gender Balance Directive (Directive (EU) 2022/2381), setting a minimum threshold for the under-represented gender on the boards of listed companies in the EU. EWCS 2024 data confirm that the glass ceiling was still a reality for female workers in 2024.

In the EU, 20 % of male workers had people working under their supervision, while the same was reported by only 12 % of women. When in supervisory positions, men tend, on average, to oversee more employees than women (15 and 9, respectively). The gender gap in supervisory roles is smaller among younger respondents: 9 % of men and 7 % of women aged 16–29 years hold supervisory positions. In contrast, 24 % of men aged 55–64 years are in supervisory roles, which is noticeably higher than the proportion of women in the same age group (14 %) (Figure 14a).

Figure 14a: Shares of workers with supervising responsibilities in the EU by number of people supervised, gender and age group (%)



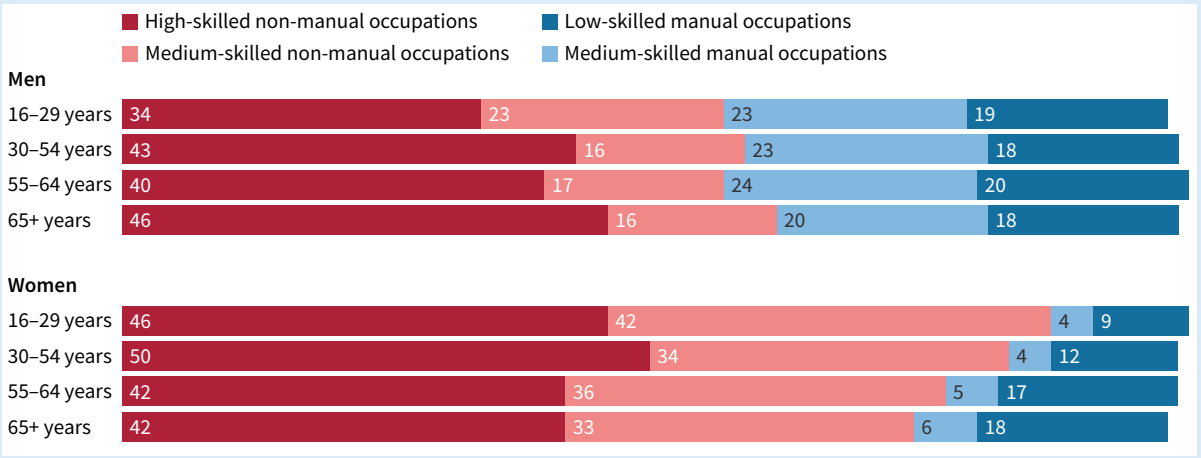
Box 3: Gender segregation in the labour market

Across all age groups, men are more likely than women to be employed in low-skilled or medium-skilled manual occupations (Figure 14b). Notably, while the share of workers in manual occupations has declined among younger generations of women, no similar trend is observed among men. As a result, among workers aged 16–29, the proportion of men in manual occupations is three times higher than that of women.

At the other end of the occupational spectrum a different trend becomes apparent. Among workers aged 30 and over, men are more likely to hold managerial positions. However, this gender gap nearly disappears among younger workers aged 16–29. When considering all high-skilled managerial, professional and technical occupations, young women are more likely than young men to be employed in these roles.

These patterns point to a generational shift: women are increasingly concentrated in higher-skilled, education-intensive positions while men dominate lower-skilled roles that typically require a lower level of education.

Figure 14b: Occupational distribution in the EU by gender and age group, 2024 (%)

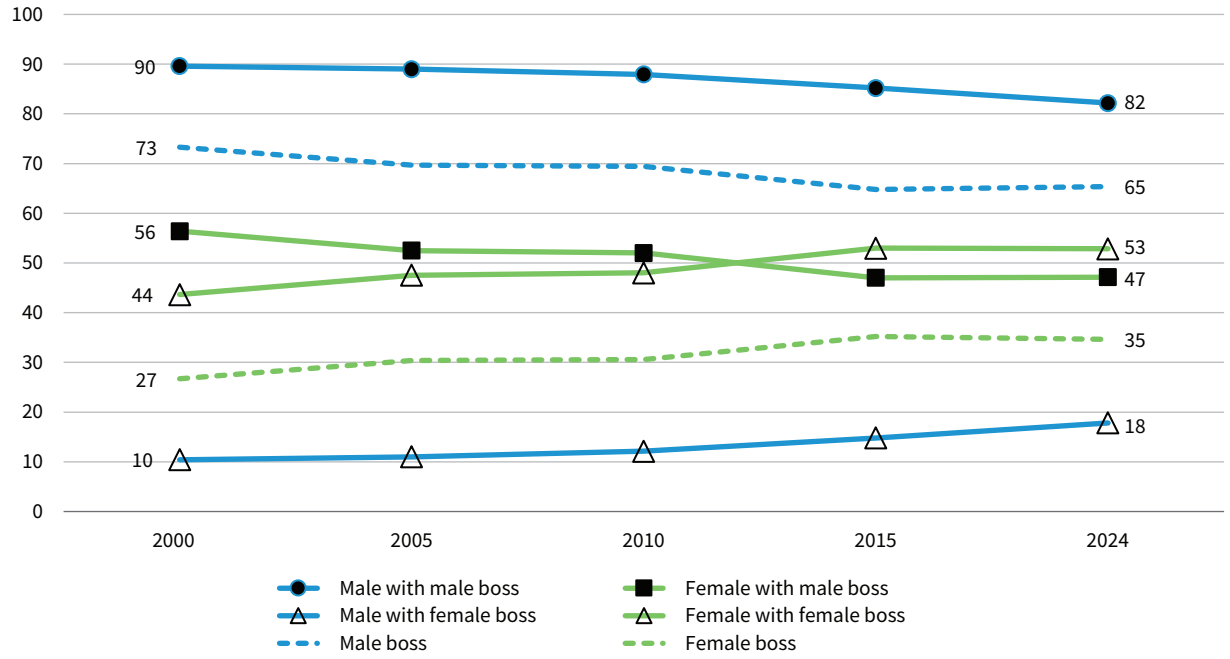


Note: The occupations and skills levels shown here are based on the classifications used by the International Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08).
Source: EU-LFS.

The proportion of EU employees reporting having a female boss has increased over the years, rising from 27 % in 2000 to 35 % in 2024. Although the increase appears to have stalled overall between 2015 and 2024 (Figure 15), the share of men reporting having a female boss has continued to increase. In 2024, nearly 1 in 5 (18 %) male employees reported having a female boss, up from 1 in 10 (10 %) in 2000. The majority of female employees now report having a female boss (53 % in 2024 compared with 44 % in 2000).

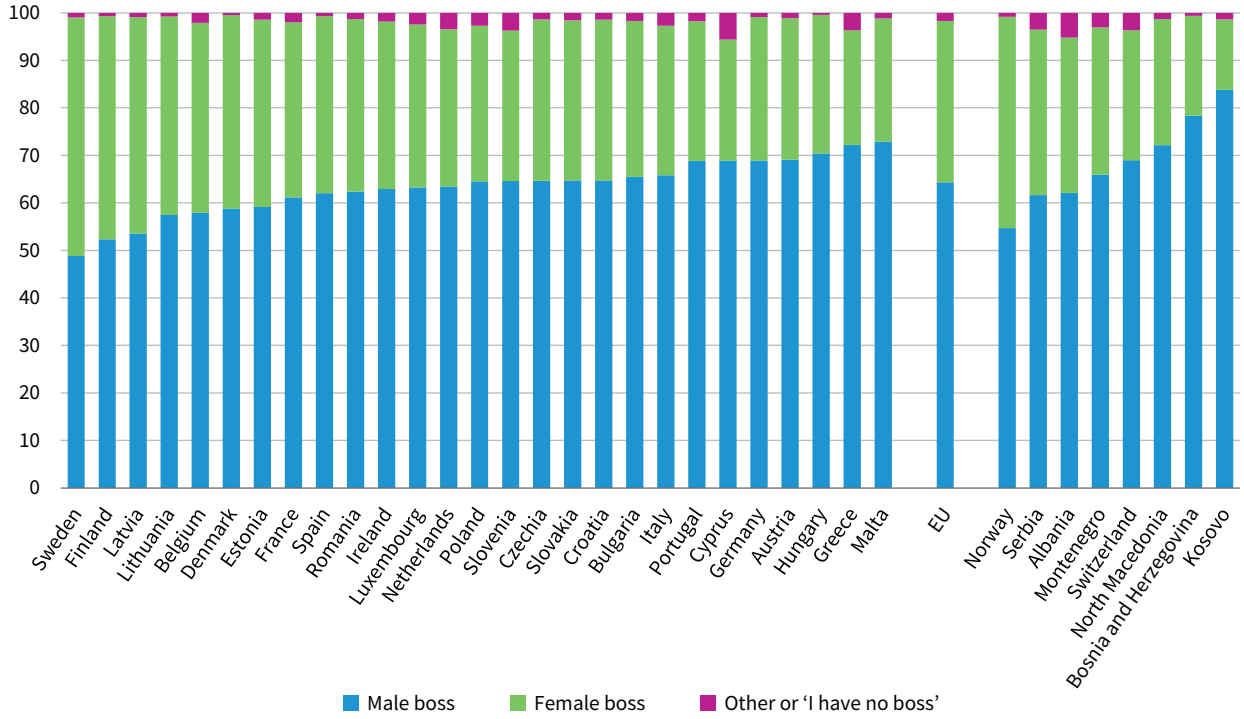
Two thirds of EU employees have a male boss, but this share varies significantly between countries (Figure 16). Finland and Sweden are the only Member States in which similar proportions of employees report having a female or a male boss. In all other countries, the majority of employees have a male boss. In Malta, Greece and Hungary, 70 % or more of employees have a male boss.

Figure 15: Shares of employees with a male or female boss in the EU by gender of employee, 2000–2024 (%)



Note: The data cover the EU, except 2000, for which data for Croatia are missing.
Source: EWCS series.

Figure 16: Gender of boss by country, 2024 (%)

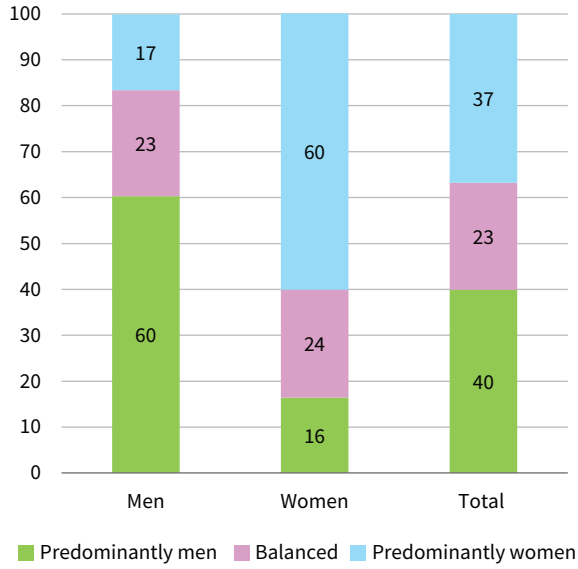


Such gender disparities are also evident across sectors and occupational categories. The sectors and occupations with a majority of female workers tend to also have higher shares of female bosses. Employees in the health and education sectors have the highest proportions of female bosses (63 % and 58 %, respectively), whereas the construction and agriculture sectors have the highest proportions of male bosses (95 % and 86 %, respectively). Services and sales workers is the occupational group with the greatest proportion of workers with a female supervisor (46 %), followed by professionals (43 %) and clerical workers (39 %). The share of part-time workers with a female boss was 45 %, but only 31 % of full-time workers reported having a female boss. Similarly, employees on fixed-term contracts were more likely to have a female boss than those on a permanent contract (38 % versus 33 %, respectively).

Segregation in the workplace

Even workers who are in gender-balanced occupations and sectors may not necessarily work in gender-balanced workplaces. To capture gender balance at the workplace level, the EWCS 2024 asked respondents to provide an estimate of the share of female co-workers in their workplaces. As shown in Figure 17, gender segregation persists at the workplace level: most men and women work surrounded by colleagues exclusively or mainly of the same gender as their own. Less than a quarter of all workers are in gender-balanced workplaces.

Figure 17: Predominant gender in the workplace in the EU by gender (%)

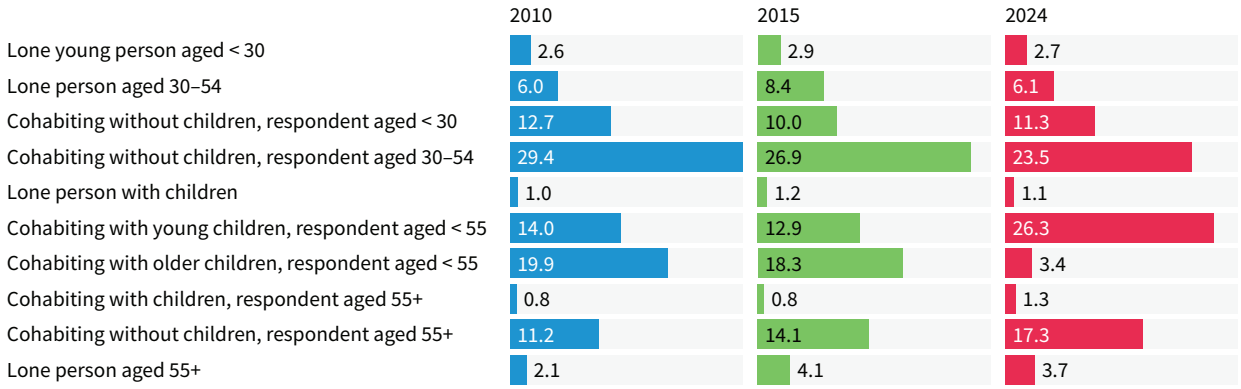


Household composition

The size and composition of the household, including the numbers of earners and dependants, influence how work, both paid and unpaid (carried out in the private domain), is organised and affects the reconciliation between work and private life – an important element of the quality of working life.

In 2024, the average worker's household in the EU consisted of 2.9 people.

Figure 18: Shares of workers in different household composition–life-stage groups, 2010–2024 (%)



Source: EWCS series.

Households can be categorised by the age of the worker, the number of adults and children and their ages. Such categories can be used as groups to represent various stages of people's lives, including living alone, family formation, caring for children and other family members, and so forth. As shown in Figure 18, there has been a notable decrease in the share of workers aged 30–54 years cohabiting in households without children – from 29 % in 2010 to 24 % in 2024. There has also been a large increase in workers aged 55+ years cohabiting without children, reflecting the ageing of the workforce. The share of workers living in households with children has stayed relatively stable at around 32 %. The distribution across such household composition–life-stage groups is similar between women and men, with two notable exceptions. The share of lone-person households among men aged 30–54 years is larger (8 %) than that of women in the same age group (4 %), and the share of lone-person households with children is larger among women (2 %) than among men (< 0.5 %).

Workforce health and well-being

The health status of individuals is a strong determinant of their capacity to participate and remain in employment. Employment regulations play a role in supporting the employment of workers despite poorer health. A person's health affects their work and a person's work affects their health.

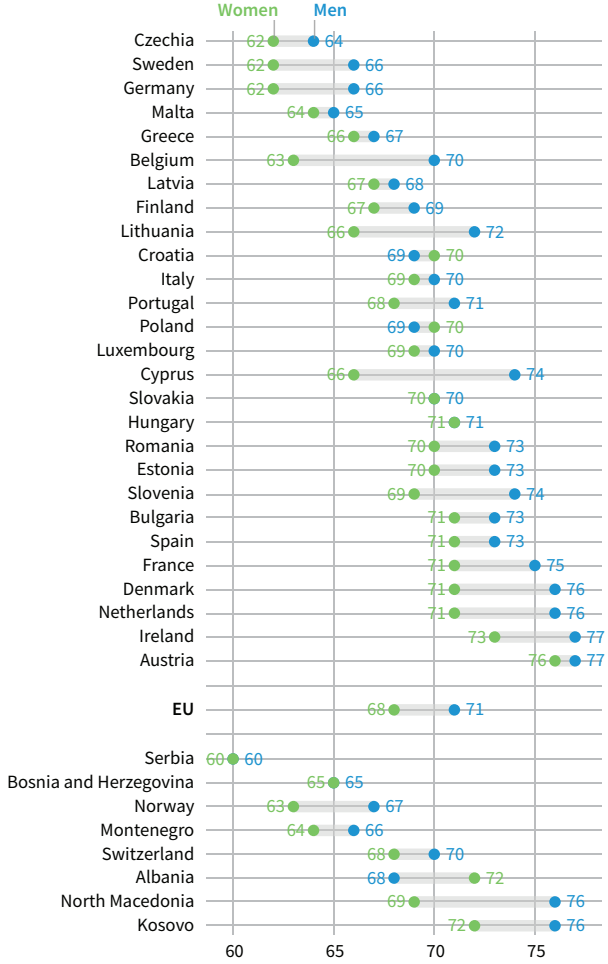
Most of the EU workforce reports good or very good health, and this share has been slowly increasing over the years: 77 % in 2010, 78 % in 2015 and 80 % in 2024. The share reporting bad or very bad health at the time of the survey has been stable, at around 2.5 %. Overall, the proportion of men in good health is higher than that of women, but there is some variation by country (Figure 19).

Subjective well-being is measured through the WHO-5 Well-being Index, in which survey respondents are asked to indicate how often, over the previous two weeks, they felt cheerful and in good spirits, felt calm and relaxed, were active and vigorous, and woke up feeling fresh and rested, and whether their daily life was filled with interesting things. In doing so, this index captures positive well-being, which the WHO considers to be another term for mental health. Scores range from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating greater psychological well-being. The indicator can be used as a screening tool for depression (Winther Topp et al., 2015) (more in Chapter 4).

Figure 19: Shares of workers reporting good or very good health by country and gender (%)



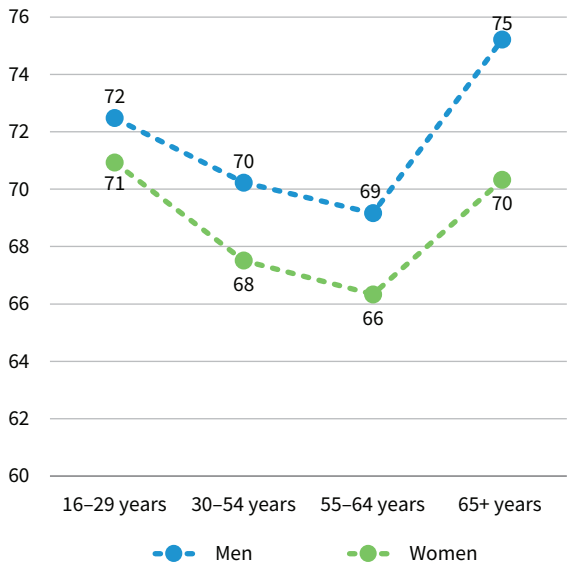
Figure 20: Scores on the WHO-5 Well-being Index by country and gender



The level of subjective well-being in the EU (Figure 20) remains quite high and has increased by 0.5 pp since 2015, with an average EU score of 69 in 2024 (71 for men and 68 for women). With very few exceptions, the score for men across countries is very close to or higher than that of women. Younger and post-retirement-age workers have the highest scores, while prime-age and pre-retirement-age workers have the lowest scores. This U-shape of subjective well-being scores by age categories is observed for both men and women (Figure 21).

Some 12 % of EU workers stated that they had a chronic illness (any illness or health problem that has lasted, or is expected to last, for more than six months) that limited their ability to do normal activities. In addition, 5 % said that, while not having a chronic illness, they had a health problem that limited their ability. Another 7 % stated that they did have a chronic condition, but that this did not come with any limitation.

Figure 21: Scores on the WHO-5 Well-being Index by gender and age



2 Workplace practices

Now that the characteristics of the workforce have been examined, Chapter 2 turns to describing the workplace practices and task characteristics that shape the experience of work, that is, ultimately, the context in which job quality operates. Unlike job quality, these characteristics are neither intrinsically good nor intrinsically entail risks to a person's health; instead, they contribute to defining the (work) activity that is undertaken and the conditions under which it is carried out.

This chapter focuses on some of the main characteristics of workplaces, such as the use of technology for work, the physical location of work (including telework and hybrid work) and collective work practices, including dealing with third parties like customers or patients and working in teams. The chapter also examines the extent to which workplaces accommodate the needs of workers with health problems (including specific disruptive health situations of women) and provide means for employees' collective representation and voice at work.

Polarisation in the use of digital devices

Summary

- Despite women reporting higher frequency of computer use, men are more likely to use emerging technologies like generative AI tools and to report a greater impact of technology on their tasks in terms of both task removal and task creation.
- The higher frequency of computer use among women is mainly related to the nature of occupations in which women are over-represented, such as clerical work, which often requires extensive computer use.
- In addition to gender disparities, there are also age and education gradients in the use of most digital workplace technologies, particularly generative AI. Older workers and those with lower levels of education are less likely to use such tools.
- EWCS data show that technology is more likely to create new tasks than remove existing tasks. Workers are also more likely to report that technology facilitates increased interaction among colleagues.
- Algorithmic management practices, such as computer-based task allocation, work scheduling and performance monitoring, are reported by a minority of workers at the aggregate level. However, the prevalence varies significantly across occupations, sectors and workplace sizes, with workers in low- to medium-skilled clerical occupations, those in financial services and the transport and storage sector and those in large workplaces being more likely to experience algorithmic management.

The use of digital technologies in the workplace is reshaping working conditions in multiple ways. Digital technologies support telework and remote collaboration, enable the use of algorithmic management and increasingly automate cognitive tasks through the use of generative AI tools (Table 4). The EU AI Act defines an AI system as 'a machine-based system that is designed to operate with varying levels of autonomy and that may exhibit adaptiveness after deployment, and that, for explicit or implicit objectives, infers, from the input it receives, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments'.

Table 4: Definitions of workplace technologies in the EWCS 2024, based on survey question wording

Technology	Definition
Wearables	Devices worn on the body, such as smartwatches, smart glasses or other sensors
Cobots	Robots that collaborate with workers
Electronic workspaces or cooperation platforms	Tools that allow multiple users to edit data or documents (such as Google Docs, OneDrive and customer relationship management tools (such as Salesforce))
Online meeting and teleconferencing tools	Software that enables online meetings or teleconferences
Generative AI	AI that simplifies complex mental tasks or makes recommendations on how a worker should work (such as ChatGPT, Llama, Dall-E, Midjourney and Jasper)

Technology use

The EWCS includes questions on the use of specific technologies at work. A question regarding the use of computers, networks or mainframes at work was included until 2010, and this was slightly rephrased in 2015 to reflect the increasing use of information and communication technology (ICT) devices such as laptops and smartphones, as well as computers.

According to the EWCS 2024 data, computer usage is highly polarised, with 41 % of workers using computers all of the time and 23 % never using them. The proportion of workers who use computers, laptops, tablets, smartphones or any other mobile digital devices at least a quarter of the time increased in the EU from 55 % to more than 70 % between 2015 and 2024.

The intensity of workers' use of computers (with 'high intensity' referring to the use of ICT at least three quarters of the time, 'medium intensity' referring to such use half or a quarter of the time and 'low intensity' referring to such use (almost) never) varies by gender and age group. Overall, women are more likely to use computers at least three quarters of the time (62 %) than men (54 %), reflecting their relatively larger representation in office-based work. Younger age categories exhibit larger shares of frequent computer use, whereas a significant proportion of older workers report either never or almost never using computers (Figure 22).

Figure 22: Intensity of use of computers, laptops, tablets, smartphones or any other mobile digital devices in the EU by age group and gender (%)

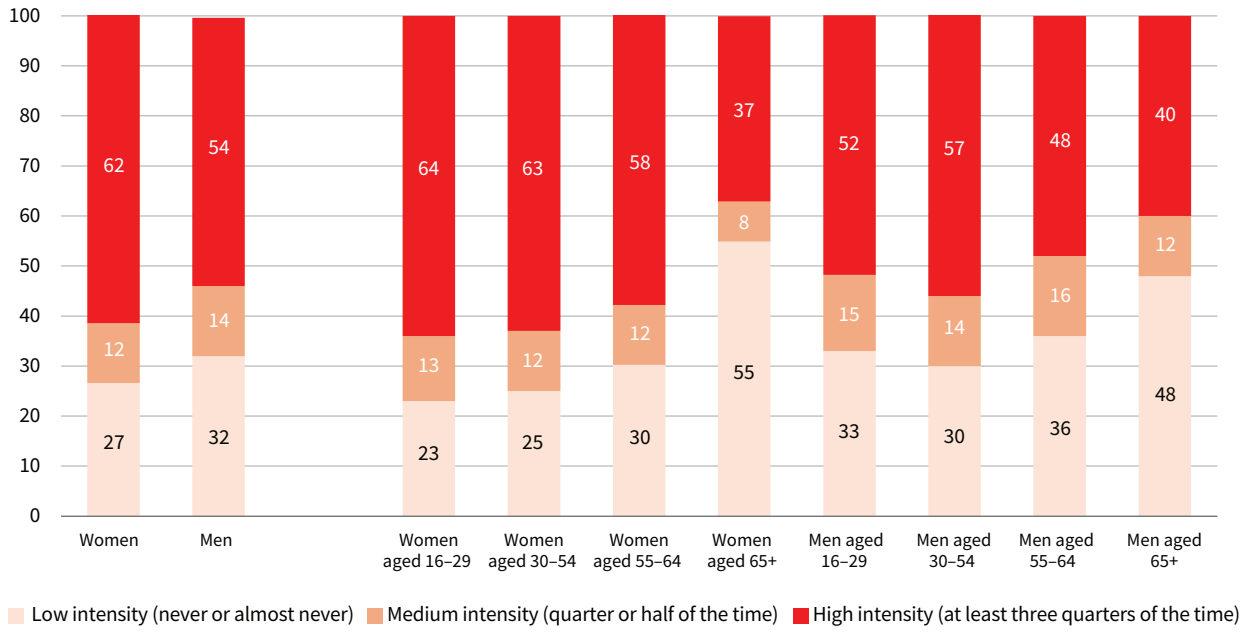
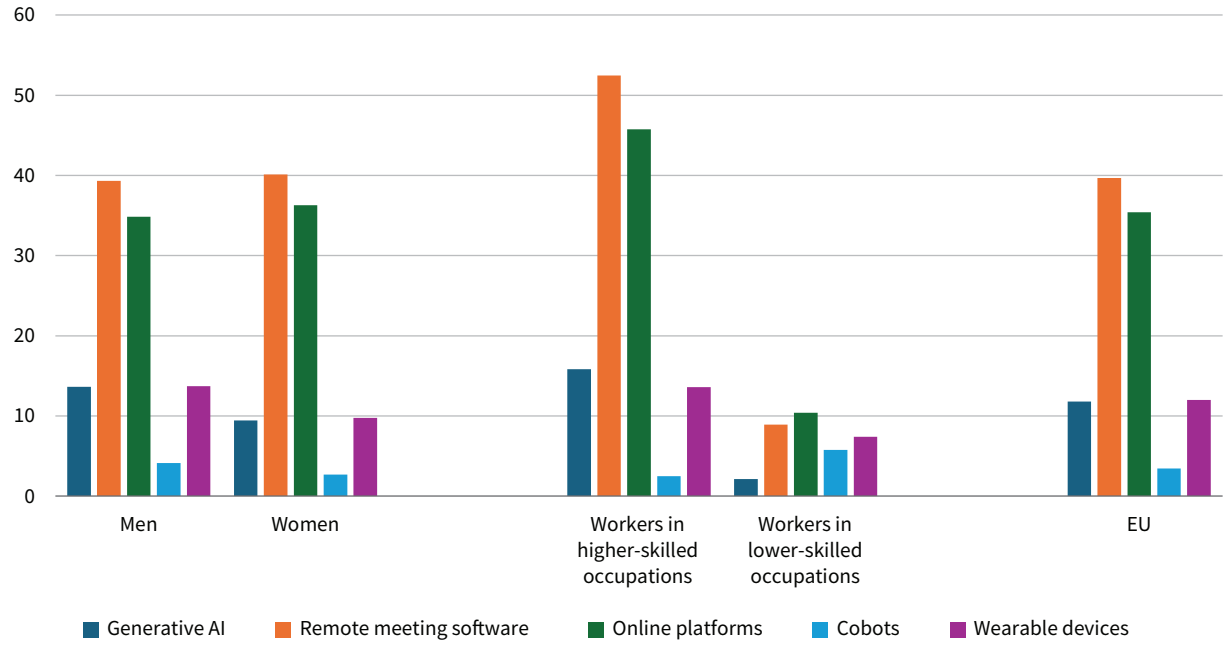


Figure 23: Prevalence of the use of different technologies by gender and broad occupation (%)



Notes: The percentage for wearable devices corresponds to those reporting their use at least a quarter of their working time. Workers in higher-skilled occupations are those in International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) categories 1–5 and workers in lower-skilled occupations are those in ISCO categories 6–9.

The EWCS 2024 also asked workers about the use of other technologies, including wearables, collaborative robots (cobots), electronic workspaces or cooperation platforms, tools for online meetings and teleconferences, and generative AI tools.

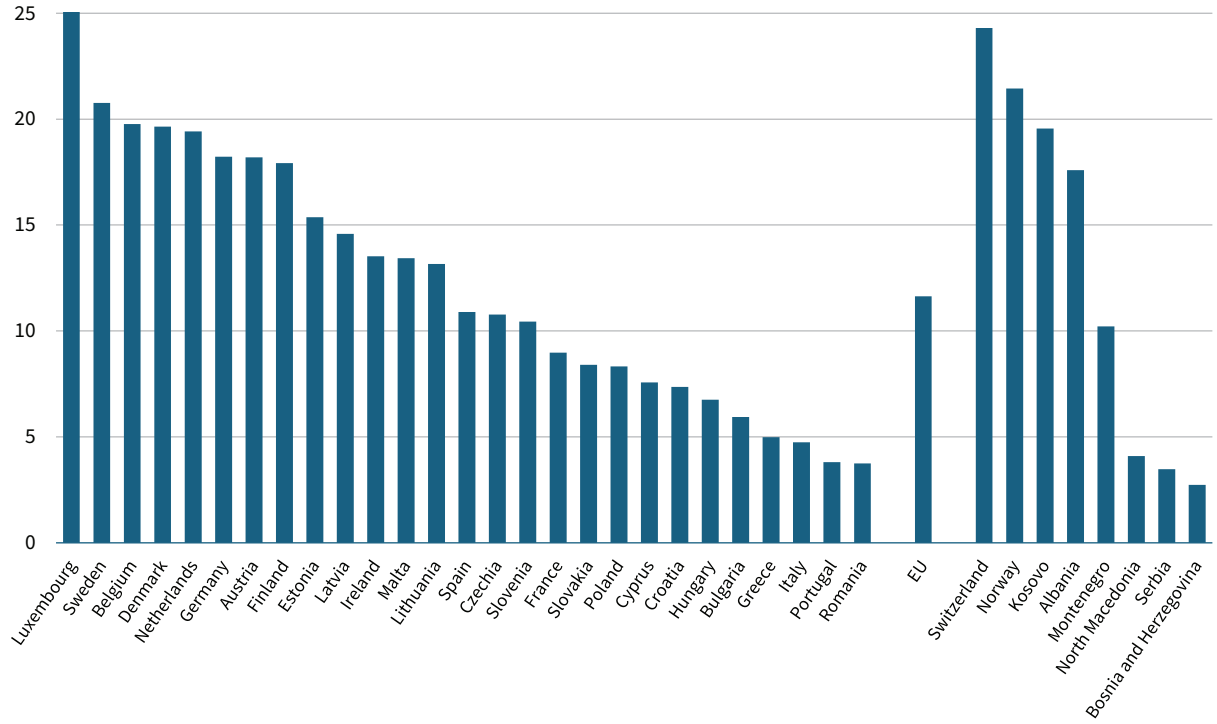
As shown in Figure 23, a relatively small proportion of workers (12 %) report using wearables at least a quarter of the time. The prevalence of using wearables is higher among workers in higher-skilled occupations (14 %) than among those in lower-skilled occupations (7 %) and is higher among men (14 %) than among women (10 %).

Despite the potential advantages of cobots – including their low cost, lightweight design, high mobility and ease of installation and programming, which make them suitable for adoption across various industries, including a variety of service sectors (Eurofound, 2024b) – they are used very little in the EU. Only about 3 % of workers report using them, and these are largely concentrated in industry: over half of the workers who report using cobots are in industry (51 %). This sectoral concentration is mirrored in the spread across occupations, with plant and machine operators – an occupation that is typically male dominated – reporting higher prevalence (11 %).

By contrast, the use of electronic workspaces or cooperation platforms, and tools for online meetings and teleconferences, is significantly more prevalent. Around 35 % of workers report using electronic workspaces or collaboration platforms, and another 40 % use tools for online meetings and teleconferences. Unsurprisingly, the use of such tools tends to be more concentrated in higher-skilled occupations – especially among professionals and managers – and knowledge-intensive sectors, particularly financial services and public administration. They can be seen as a lasting legacy of the pandemic, during which they became necessary to facilitate remote work and virtual collaboration for more workers, and they have since become an integral part of the modern work environment for a large share of the workforce.

As of 2024, the use of generative AI tools at work is reported by 12 % of workers in the EU. There are, however, notable differences in the prevalence rates across Member States, with higher rates reported in Luxembourg, Sweden, Belgium and Denmark, where at least one in five workers report using generative AI tools in their work (Figure 24). Other Member States, such as Greece, Italy, Portugal and Romania, have much lower rates (5 % or lower).

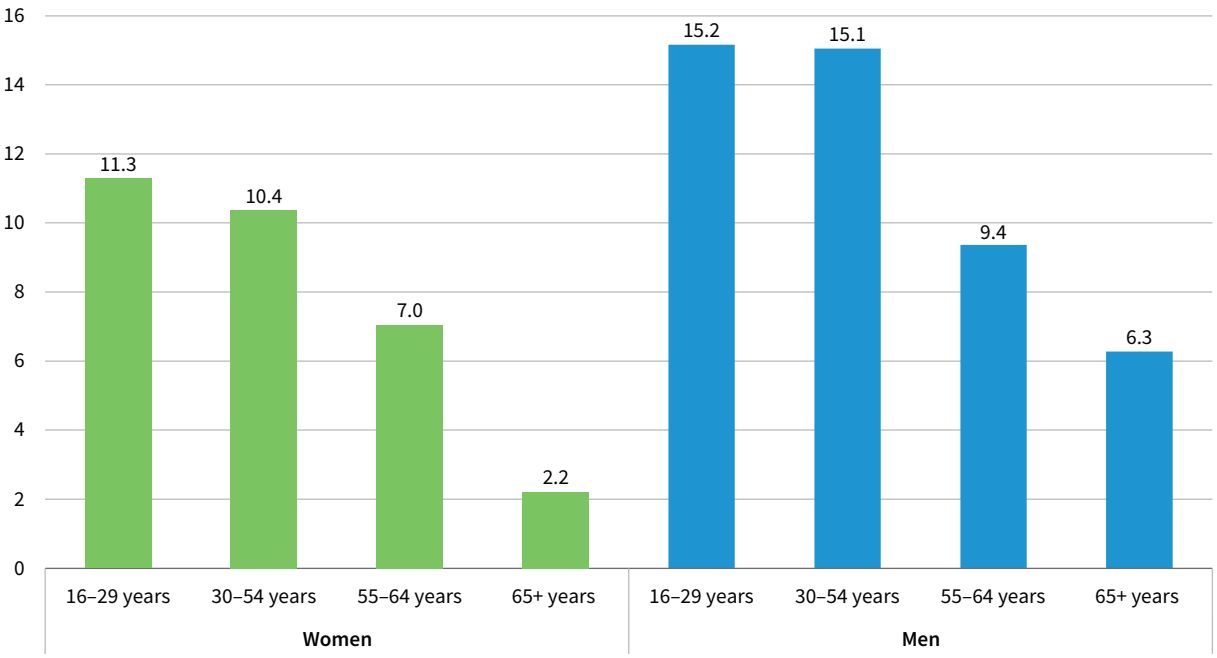
Figure 24: Prevalence of the use of generative AI tools by country (%)



Generative AI tools are also more likely to be used by men than women and by workers in younger age categories than older workers (Figure 25). Younger workers often exhibit greater familiarity with emerging technologies, including generative AI, due to growing up in a digital environment. Recent Special Eurobarometer (No 554) data also show that younger people (aged 15–24) consistently view workplace technologies, including AI, more positively than their older counterparts (European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2024). This trend highlights a digital divide along generational lines, with older workers potentially encountering challenges in adopting these new tools and integrating them into their workflows.

The education gradient found in the use of generative AI tools is also observed to varying extents in the use of other technologies covered in the survey.

Figure 25: Prevalence of the use of generative AI tools in the EU by gender and age group (%)



While there is growing evidence that generative AI tools can significantly enhance productivity in knowledge-intensive roles (Brynjolfsson et al., 2023; Dell'Acqua et al., 2023; PwC, 2024), they may also contribute to increased job monotony, for instance by producing large volumes of content that require extensive review and quality control. However, a preliminary descriptive analysis of the EWCS data suggests the opposite: the use of generative AI is associated with a lower level of monotonous tasks and a greater likelihood that workers will assess the quality of their own work as part of their job. This pattern may reflect the nature of the occupations where generative AI is most widely adopted, namely among professionals and managers, who typically possess higher levels of education and generally enjoy greater discretion in their work.

Algorithmic management

According to Kellogg et al. (2020), algorithmic technologies are 'computer-programmed procedures that transform input data into desired outputs'. This definition underpins the concept of algorithmic management, which involves using such computer programs to control, coordinate and oversee organisational activities, especially in managing workers.

Algorithms, which are increasingly powered by AI technologies, have reshaped labour relations, particularly in the context of platform work for location-based services such as food delivery and ride-hailing. These algorithm-based systems manage and monitor workers in real time, often with minimal human oversight. In response to the challenges posed by platform work, such as a lack of transparency, job insecurity and weakened labour protections, at the end of 2024 the EU adopted the Platform Work Directive, aimed at improving working conditions in platform work by, among other things, promoting transparency, fairness, human oversight, safety and accountability in algorithmic management in platform work.

As the use of algorithmic management tools for allocating and scheduling tasks and monitoring performance are spreading outside platform work, they are increasingly coming under scrutiny from EU policymakers. The prevalence rates of algorithmic management vary significantly depending on the conceptualisation and measurement methods used in surveys (Eurofound, 2025b).

The EWCS 2024 includes a new battery of questions to assess the prevalence of algorithmic management practices in European workplaces, including the extent to which computer programs (1) allocate work tasks, (2) determine work schedules and (3) monitor worker performance. The EWCS also asked the workers who replied positively to these questions whether they had a clear procedure for raising issues in the event of a disagreement with such automated decisions (Box 4).

According to the data, 16 % of workers report that computers allocate their work tasks to a large or some extent (Figure 26). The share is higher among employees (18 %) than among self-employed individuals (9 %). The allocation of work tasks by computer programs (to a large or some extent) tends to be more prevalent in countries with a high intensity of knowledge-based industries, such as Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, in sectors like financial services (33 %) and transport and storage (25 %). The prevalence is higher in low- to medium-skilled, non-manual occupations (notably clerical workers, 26 %), in which employees tend to have less autonomy over their work.

In terms of automated work scheduling, some 10 % of workers report that a computer program determines their work schedule to a large or some extent. A somewhat lower prevalence was reported by self-employed individuals (6 %, versus 10 % for employees). Denmark is the country with the highest prevalence of this form of algorithmic management (26 %), followed by Ireland (20 %). In contrast, Lithuania and Greece have the

Box 4: Recourse for disputing automated decisions

Among the 26 % of respondents who reported that some aspects of their work are decided by a computer program, 57 % stated that there is a clear procedure for raising issues in the event of a disagreement with automated decisions. However, there is significant country variation, with some countries – such as Greece, Hungary, Romania and Spain – having a higher share of workers reporting not having this right to appeal. Workers reporting the existence of a trade union or an occupational health and safety delegate in their workplace are somewhat more likely to indicate a clear procedure for when they disagree with automated decisions. Some 60 % of workers in unionised workplaces report having such recourse, versus 53 % in non-unionised workplaces; 62 % of those reporting the presence of an occupational health and safety delegate report having such recourse, versus 47 % of those indicating no presence of an occupational health and safety delegate in their workplace. The lack of a procedure for disputing automated decisions is more likely to be reported by older workers, women and those working in micro-, small and medium-sized workplaces.

smallest shares, at 5 % and 6 %, respectively. The transport and storage sector (18 %) has the highest share of workers experiencing automated work scheduling to a large or some extent (Figure 26).

Some 18 % of workers in the EU report that their work performance is monitored to a large or some extent by a computer program, again with lower prevalence among self-employed individuals (10 %) than among employees (19 %). However, there is considerable variation in the extent of computer-based performance monitoring across countries. It ranges from relatively low rates in countries such as Greece, where only 8 % of respondents reported having their work performance monitored by a computer program to a large or some extent, to much higher rates in countries like Belgium, where 30 % of respondents reported such monitoring. Countries with a greater presence of knowledge-intensive sectors tend to have higher rates of computer-based work performance monitoring.

As shown in Figure 26, financial services stand out as a sector where computer-based performance monitoring is more common, with 35 % of workers reporting this practice to a large or some extent. This may be driven by regulatory requirements in the sector aimed at preventing insider trading and ensuring compliance with industry standards (Abikoye et al., 2024). The issue of performance-linked pay in banking and insurance is relatively underexplored in the academic literature.

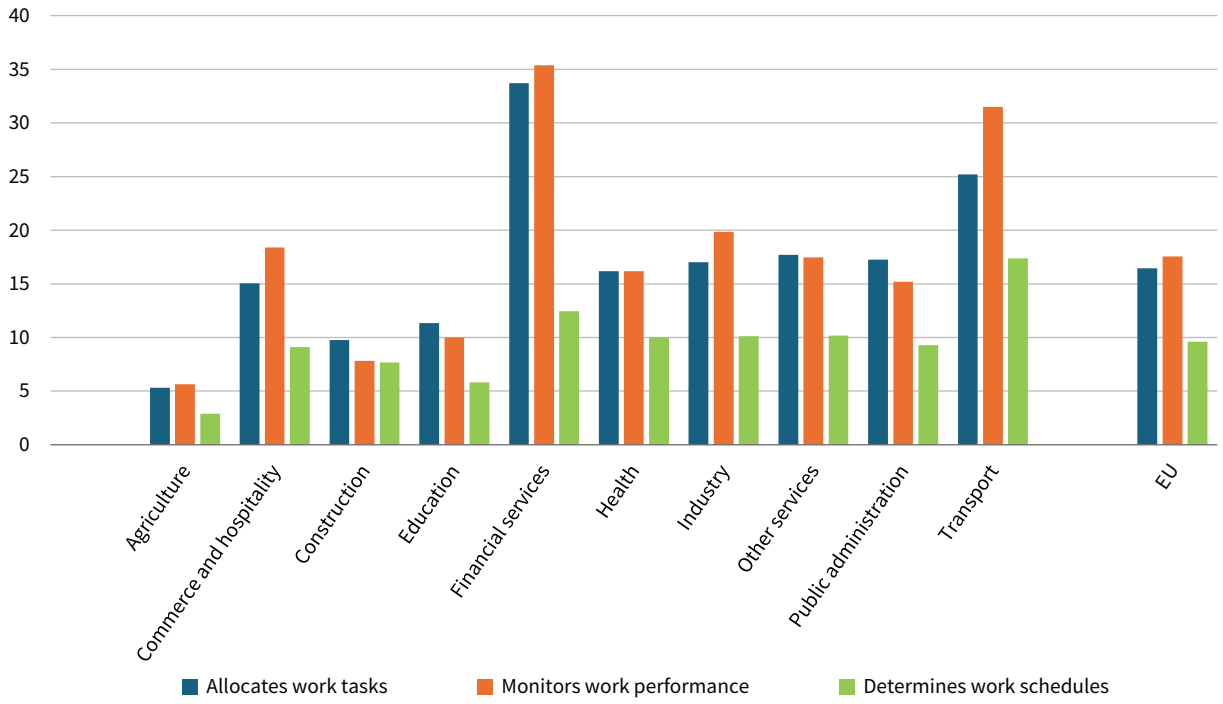
However, there is emerging evidence that, in the context of the growing adoption of digital technologies, such practices are becoming increasingly common. Employees are often required to meet predefined performance targets in order to qualify for incentives (Lehmann et al., 2025). This may lead to the intensive monitoring of performance indicators such as sales volumes, call frequency, client satisfaction scores and conversion rates.

Transport is another sector with a high prevalence of performance monitoring by means of computer programs to a large or some extent (31 %). In part, this may be driven by the need to enforce legal compliance to ensure the safety of passengers and drivers.

Younger workers are somewhat more likely to experience computer-based performance monitoring. In terms of occupation, computer-based work performance monitoring is more prevalent in routine clerical and production line occupations, with around a quarter of both clerical workers (27 %) and plant and machine operators (26 %) reporting that they experience this to a large or some extent.

In terms of establishment size, all three forms of algorithmic management are more prevalent in large establishments; this pattern is somewhat more pronounced in the case of work scheduling and task allocation by computer program.

Figure 26: Prevalence of algorithmic management in the EU by sector (%)



Note: Percentages refer to workers reporting that a computer program undertakes the task in question to either a large extent or some extent.

Technology impact on tasks

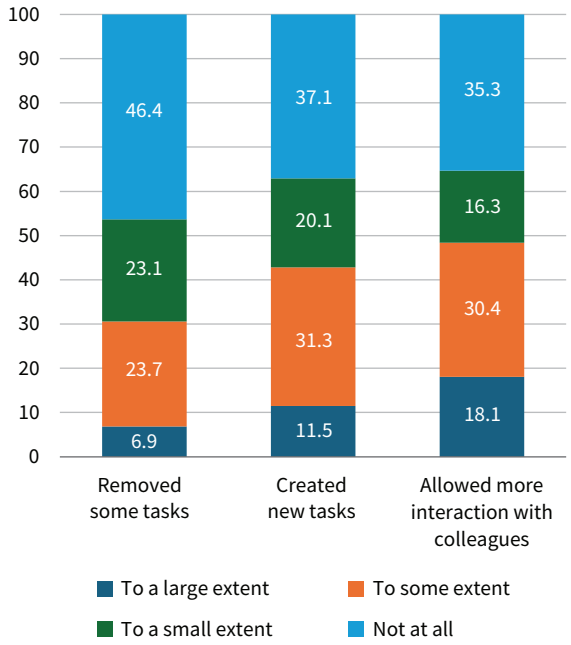
Although past predictions that technological change would lead to widespread unemployment (see, for example, Frey et al., 2013) have largely not materialised, the rapid progress of AI has sustained fears that it may increasingly displace tasks and potentially entire occupations. However, emerging research suggests that AI can augment work, reshaping roles by automating routine tasks while creating new ones that require human oversight, creativity or technical skills (OECD, 2024).

The EWCS 2024 includes new questions on the impact of the technologies that respondents reported using in the survey (these include computers, laptops, tablets, smartphones or any other mobile digital devices, as well as the technologies listed in Table 4). This aligns with the experiences of over three quarters of the respondents, with 78 % reporting at least one type of technology use in their main job.

According to the survey data, 31 % of workers report that technology has removed tasks in their job to a large or some extent. A larger proportion of workers (43 %) report that technology has created new tasks in their job to a large or some extent (Figure 27).

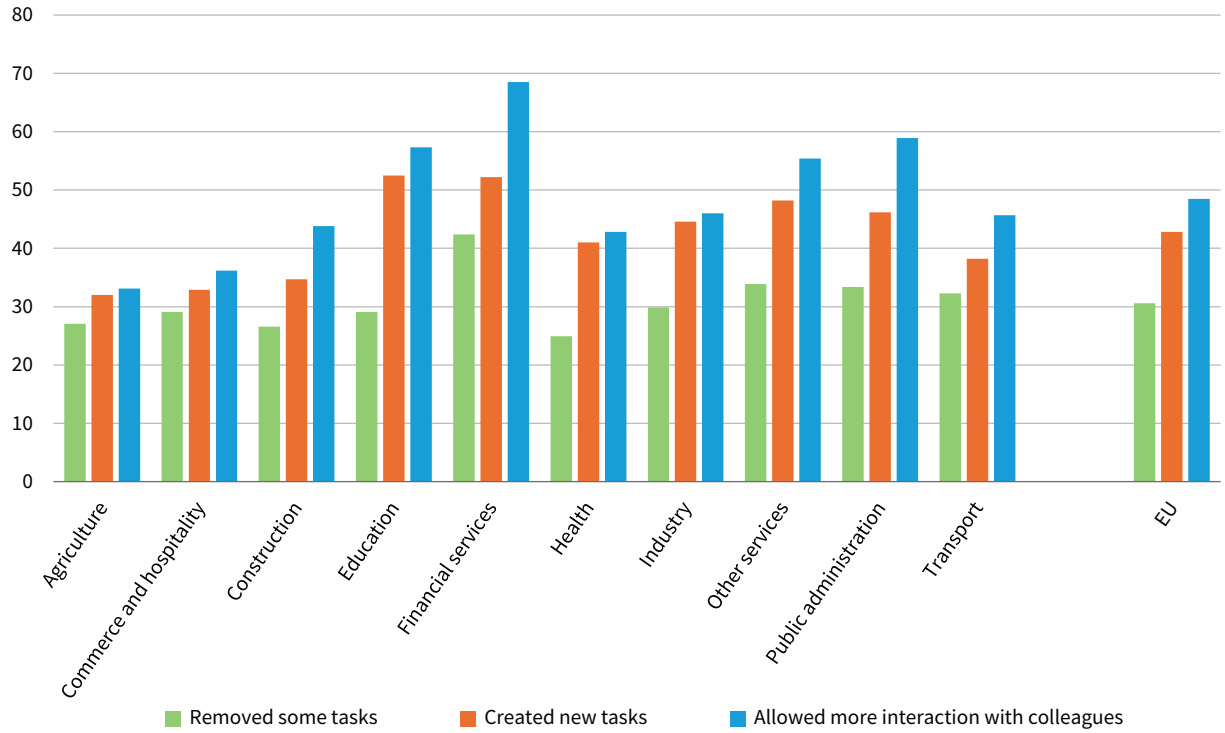
The survey data reveal that both the removal and the creation of tasks due to technology are highly prevalent in financial services (Figure 28). Conversely, the health sector has seen relatively little impact from technology in terms of task removal. Higher-skilled occupations –

Figure 27: Prevalence of different impacts of technology on tasks in the EU (%)



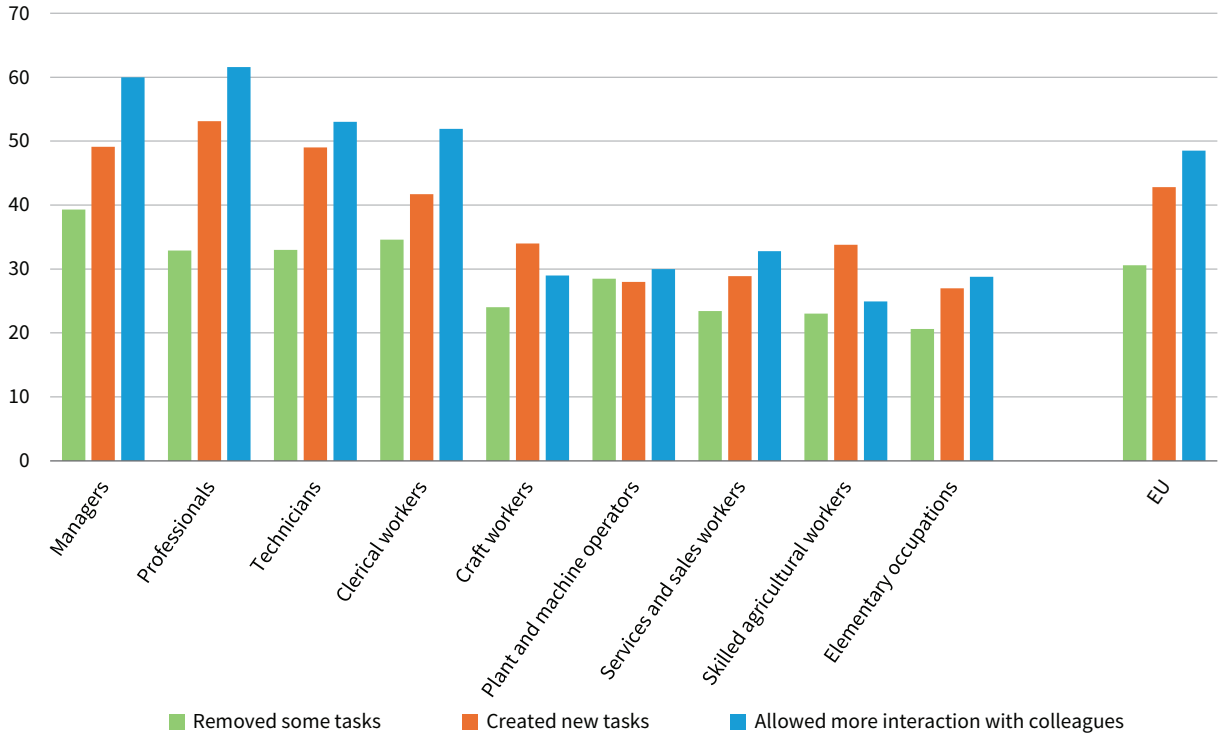
Note: Percentages are of those respondents who indicated that their job involves the use of a computer or wearable devices at least a quarter of the time or who answered positively to any of the other technology use questions (cobots, platforms, generative AI and remote meeting software).

Figure 28: Prevalence of different impacts of technology on tasks in the EU by sector (%)



Note: Percentages are of those respondents who reported experiencing these impacts to a large or some extent.

Figure 29: Prevalence of different impacts of technology on tasks in the EU by occupation (%)



Note: Percentages are of those respondents who reported experiencing these impacts to a large or some extent.

managers, professionals, technicians and clerical workers – are most likely to report experiencing both the removal and the creation of tasks due to technology (Figure 29). Men are somewhat more likely to report technology impacts to a large or some extent than women, in terms of both removing tasks (32 % of men versus 28 % of women) and creating new tasks (44 % of men versus 41 % of women). This finding is noteworthy because, although women report a higher percentage of computer use, men are more likely to report a more significant impact of technology on their tasks.

Recent studies show that AI use at work can intensify alienation and loneliness (Tang et al., 2023; De Cremer et al., 2024; Hai et al., 2025), raising questions about the mechanisms through which technology shapes workplace relationships. The EWCS 2024 data show that technology facilitates increased interaction among workers, with 18 % of respondents reporting a large increase in interaction and 30 % reporting some increase. Once again, knowledge-intensive sectors, such as financial services, public administration and education, are more likely to experience increased interaction as a result of technology use. The quality of interaction, however, remains critical, as frequent contact with colleagues does not inherently foster meaningful connection.

Multiple work locations – rise of the extended workplace

Summary

- Combining different work locations is common among workers in the EU. Only 4 in 10 workers in the EU carry out work exclusively from one location.
- The employer's premises or own business premises are by far the most common place of work, but more so for women than for men.
- While not all jobs are teleworkable, almost 3 out of 10 employees telework from home, on a full-time, regular or occasional basis.
- Dedicated offices are the most common workplace setting for workers in the EU, closely followed by shops, schools or spaces shared with patients, customers or students.
- Half of workers who work at least sometimes from home do not have a dedicated room (alone or shared) in which to work.

People in Europe work in various environments, all of which may have important implications for workers' health and job quality. To gain insight into where people work and what combinations of different workplaces exist, the EWCS asked respondents how often they work from (1) their employer's premises (in the case of employees) or their own business (in the case of self-employed individuals), (2) their home, (3) a car or other vehicle, (4) locations assigned by their employer or client or (5) other work settings.

Number of work locations

In 2024, 42 % of workers in the EU carried out work exclusively from one location, 23 % worked from two locations, 17 % worked from three locations, 12 % worked from four locations and 6 % reported working from all five locations listed in the questionnaire. Women are more likely to work from just one location (50 %) than men (35 %), and employees are more likely to work from just one location (44 %) than self-employed individuals (28 %). Looking at occupations, managers are those with the highest share of workers who work from three or more locations (55 %), followed by professionals (48 %). In contrast, the lowest share is found among those in elementary occupations (19 %), followed by services and sales workers (20 %). Note that the armed forces were excluded from these comparisons due to the small sample size, as were workers who indicated that they work from none of the locations listed in the questionnaire.

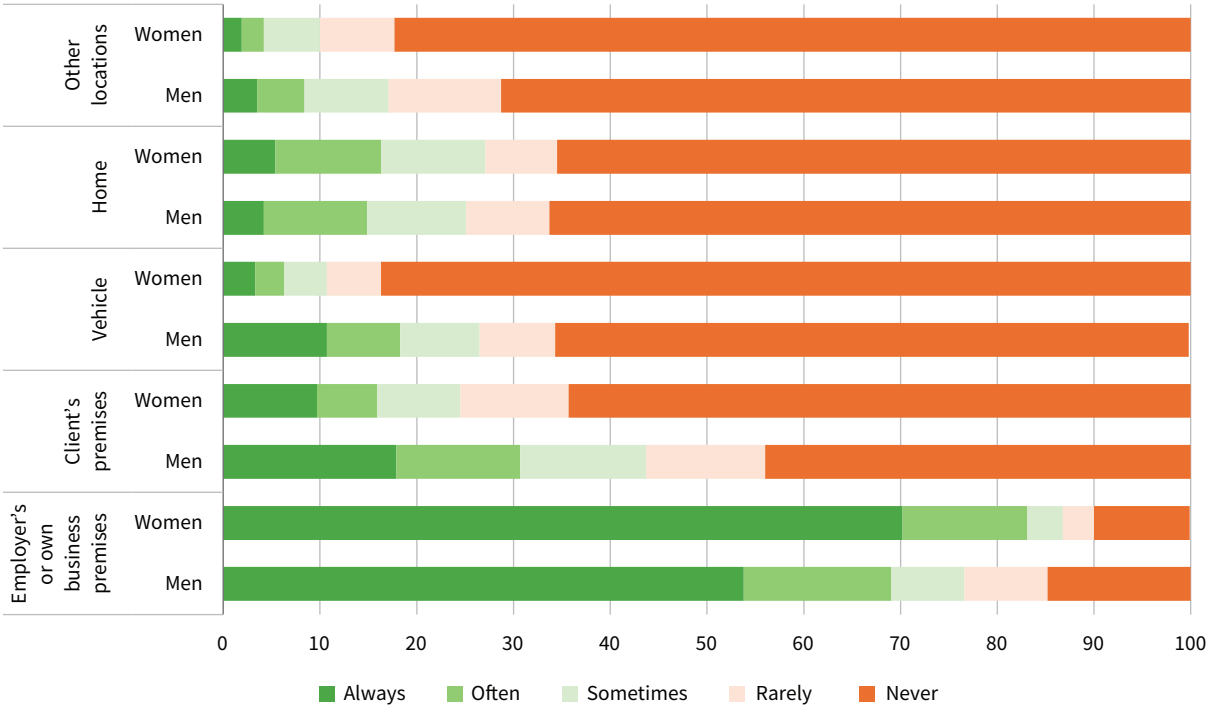
Type of work locations

Among the locations, the employer's premises or own business premises are by far the most common place of work in the EU: 7 out of 10 men (69 %) and 8 out of 10 women (83 %) always or often work from this location (Figure 30). Almost one in three men (31 %) always or often work from a client's premises, while one in five men (19 %) always or often work in a vehicle and 9 % always or often work from other locations. Among women, these shares are substantially lower: 16 %, 6 % and 4 %, respectively. The shares of men and women who always or often work from home are comparable (15 % and 16 %, respectively).

Telework

In addition to the main place of work, employees can be further classified according to the extent to which they telework from home. Eurofound defines telework as a work arrangement in which work is performed outside the default place of work, normally the employer's premises, by means of ICT. The characteristic features of telework are the use of computers and telecommunications to change the usual location of work, the frequency with which the worker works outside the employer's premises and the number of

Figure 30: Prevalence of different places of work in the EU by gender (%)



Notes: The answer categories 'don't know' and 'refused' are not displayed.

places where workers work remotely (mobility) (Eurofound, 2022a). Employees can be grouped into the following five categories.

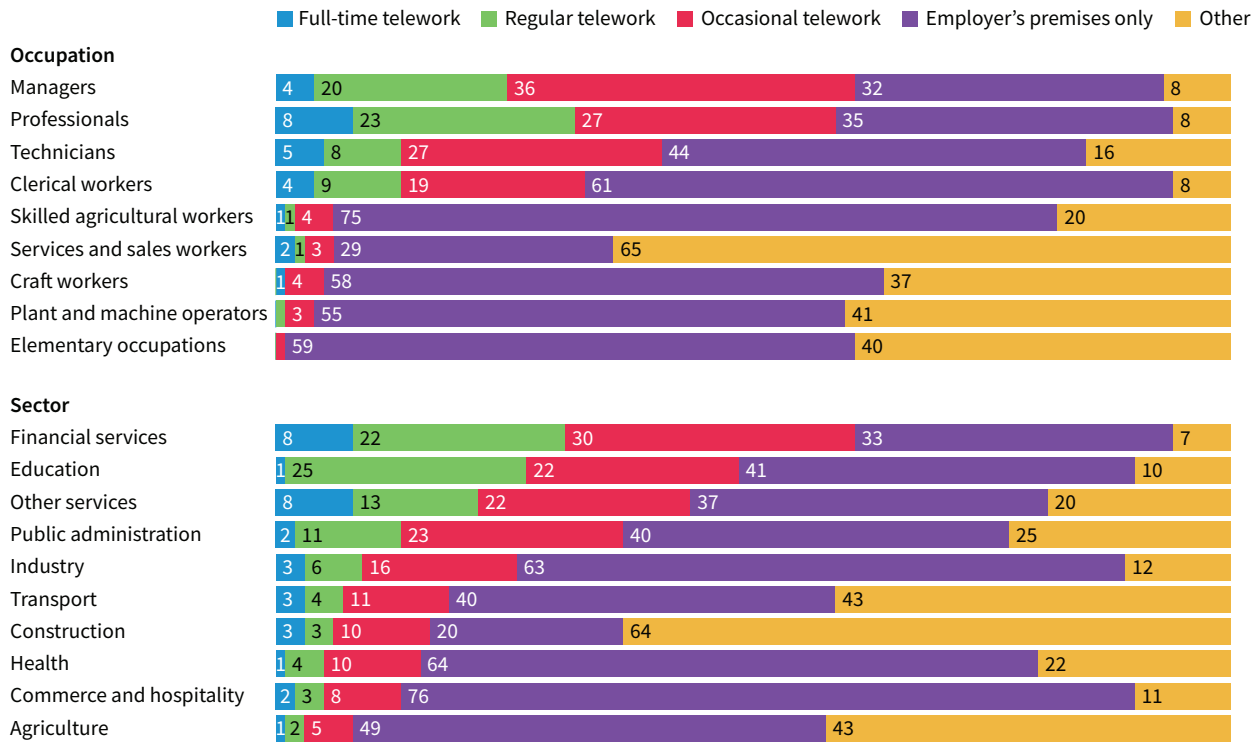
- **Full-time telework.** These are employees who use ICT (computer, laptop, tablet, smartphone or any other mobile digital device) at least half of the time and work always from home and sometimes, rarely or never from the employer's premises or work often from home and rarely or never from the employer's premises. About 3 % of employees in the EU do full-time telework.
- **Regular telework.** These are employees who use ICT at least half of the time and work always from home and always or often from the employer's premises or work often from home and always, often or sometimes from the employer's premises. This form of telework, also labelled as hybrid work, is carried out by around 9 % of employees.
- **Occasional telework.** These are employees who use ICT at least half of the time and work sometimes or rarely from home. This group makes up approximately 16 % of employees.
- **Employer's premises only.** These are employees who use ICT at least half of the time and work always from their employer's premises and never from home. This is the most common arrangement, accounting for about 52 % of employees.
- **Other.** These are employees whose work location patterns do not fit into any of the categories above, for example because they switch frequently between different locations and/or spend much of their working time at neither the employer's premises nor home but instead at clients' premises or sites. This category covers around 21 % of employees.

The total prevalence of telework from home is similar between women (28 %) and men (27 %). There are also no considerable gender differences in the prevalence of full-time (women 3 % and men 4 %), regular (women 9 % and men 8 %) and occasional (women 16 % and men 15 %) telework.

Employees aged 30–54 years are more likely to telework from home (31 %) than those in other age groups (16–29 years, 20 %; 55–64 years, 26 %; 65+ years, 24 %). While age does not strongly affect the prevalence of full-time telework, employees aged 30–54 years are considerably more likely to engage in regular (10 %) or occasional telework (17 %) than employees aged 16–29 years (5 % and 13 %, respectively), 55–64 years (8 % and 15 %, respectively) or 65+ years (8 % and 13 %, respectively).

The prevalence of telework across sectors and occupations is determined by the teleworkability of jobs, that is, the technical possibility of providing labour input remotely (Sostero et al., 2020). The prevalence of telework (whether full-time, regular or occasional) ranges from 8 % in agriculture to 60 % in financial services (Figure 31). The highest share of employees teleworking from home is observed among managers (60 %), while the lowest is found among elementary

Figure 31: Prevalence of teleworking from home among employees in the EU by occupation and sector (%)



Notes: The occupation category 'armed forces' was not included due to the small sample size.

occupations (1 %). The prevalence of telework from home also increases with workplace size, from 16 % in micro-workplaces and 23 % in small workplaces to 34 % in medium-sized workplaces and 47 % in large workplaces.

Household composition is linked to the prevalence of telework from home. Workers living in households with two adults and children report the highest rates of teleworking (35 %), followed by those in single-adult households and those in two-adult households without children (both 28 %).

Workplace settings

Workers who always or often work from their employer's premises (in the case of employees), their own business (in the case of self-employed individuals), locations assigned by their employer or client or other work settings were asked whether they work in:

- a dedicated office (alone or shared);
- an open-plan office;
- a shop, school or space shared with patients, customers or students;
- a warehouse, workshop or factory; or
- no fixed workplace (e.g. fields or construction sites).

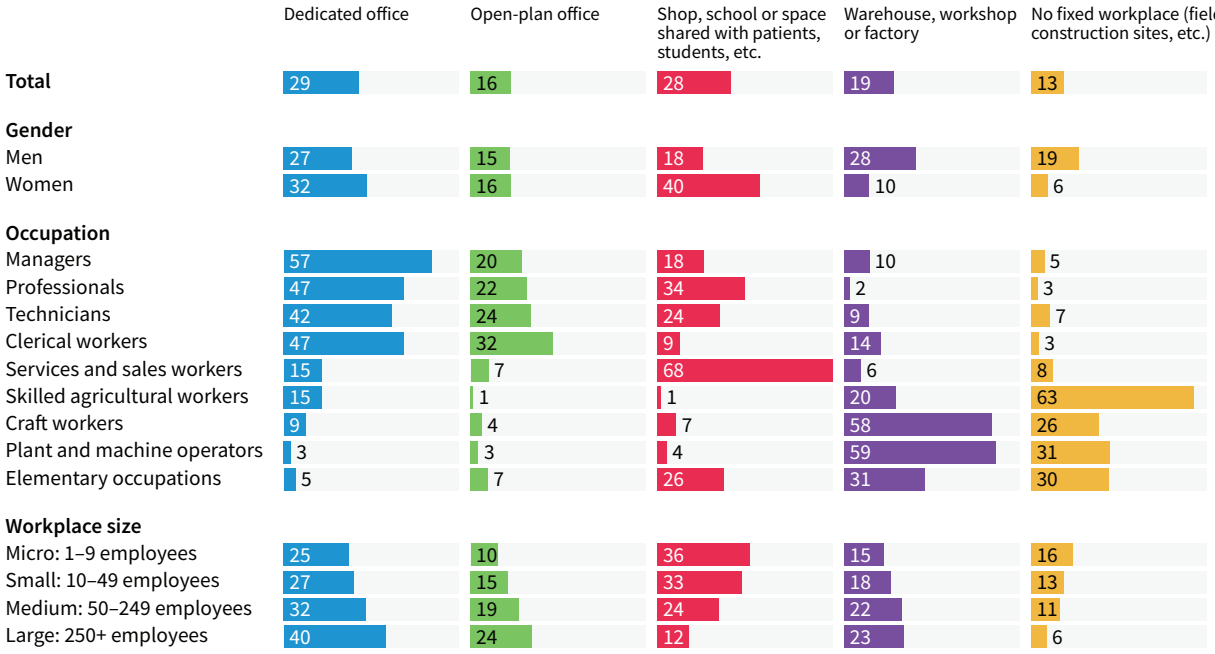
Dedicated offices are the most common workplace setting among workers in the EU (29 %; Figure 32), followed by shops, schools or spaces shared with patients, customers or students (28 %). Around one fifth of workers work in warehouses, workshops or factories (19 %), and 16 % work in open-plan offices. Around 13 % of workers report having no fixed workplace. The way the workplace is set up, however, varies according to worker and contextual characteristics, such as gender, education level and occupation.

Home office – dedicated space

Workers who work sometimes, often or always from home were asked whether they have a dedicated space in which to work. Half have a dedicated room (alone or shared) in which to work, one third (33 %) work from a room that is also used for other purposes and less than a fifth (18 %) have no dedicated space in which to work. Younger workers (under 30 years) and workers in less skilled occupations are less likely to have a dedicated room. As regards teleworkers (those working remotely using ICT for more than half of the time), a dedicated workspace is also more common among employees who telework full time from home (58 %) than among those who telework regularly (52 %) or occasionally (44 %).

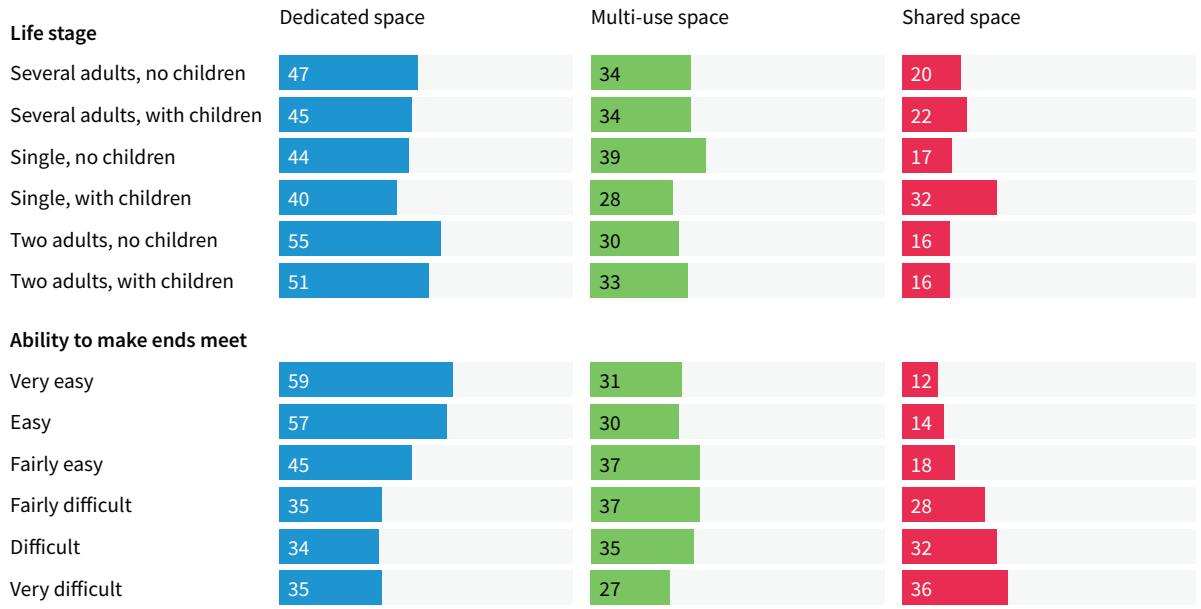
Having a dedicated workspace is linked to the household's financial situation. For example, 59 % of workers in households that make ends meet very easily have a dedicated workspace, compared with just 35 % of those in households that find it very difficult to make ends meet. When it comes to household composition, dedicated workspaces at home are most common among workers living in households with two adults and no children (55 %) and are least common among those in single-adult households with children (40 %) (Figure 33).

Figure 32: Prevalence of different workplace settings in the EU by gender, occupation and workplace size (%)



Notes: Only respondents who provided a valid answer are included in the figure. The question was multiple choice, so totals may exceed 100 %.

Figure 33: Shares of workers with a dedicated space for work when working from home in the EU by life stage and ability to make ends meet (%)



Notes: The question was asked only among respondents who reported working from home at least sometimes. Only respondents who provided a valid answer are included in the figure. The question was multiple choice, so totals may exceed 100 %.

Interactive service workers – backbone of the economy

Summary

- A large share of workers in the EU (44 %) are in jobs dealing directly with service recipients (all or almost all of the time), such as clients, customers, patients and pupils. Most of these 'interactive service workers' (57 %) are women.
- Interactive service work is most prevalent among services and sales workers, but it is also prevalent among professionals and technicians. Health, education, and commerce and hospitality are the sectors with the largest shares of interactive service work.

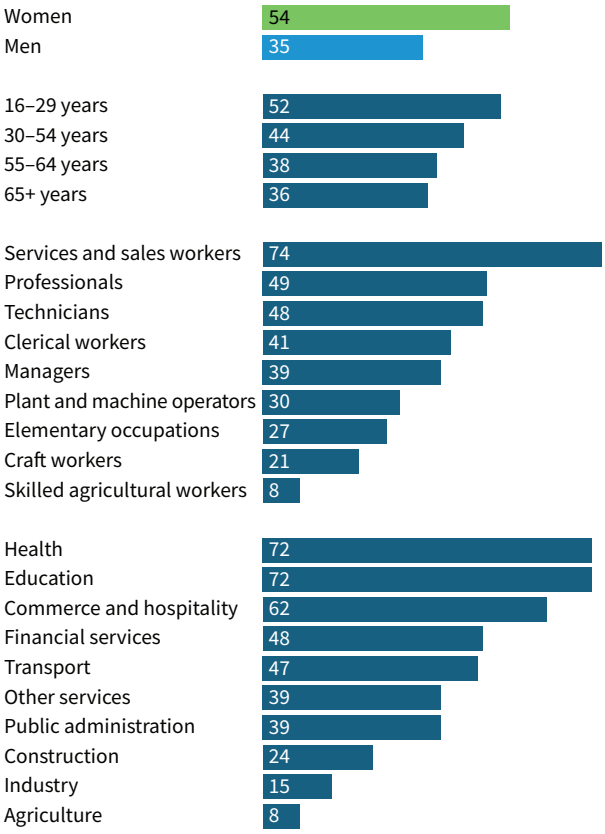
The relationships and dynamics that may exist between workers and their clients, customers or service recipients can have a profound impact on how they experience work (Eurofound, 2020).

Around 44 % of workers in the EU work in jobs dealing directly with service recipients, such as clients, customers, patients and pupils, all or almost all of the time. This figure is marginally higher than in 2015 (41 %). The proportion also differs in individual Member States, ranging from 30 % in Hungary to 57 % in Spain.

Interactive service work is predominantly female: 57 % of all interactive service workers are women. Within the broad group of interactive service workers, almost one fifth (19 %) are frontline health employees – this is the term used by Eurofound (2020) when referring to workers in direct contact with patients/clients in the health sector. This subgroup is even more gender imbalanced than interactive service workers as a whole, comprising 81 % women.

Figure 34 provides a brief profile of interactive service workers, highlighting their demographic characteristics, occupations and main sectors of activity. There are larger proportions of interactive service workers among women and young workers (under 30 years). Relatively larger proportions of interactive service workers are also observed among services and sales workers (74 %), followed by professionals (49 %) and technicians (48 %). At a more granular level (the ISCO three-digit level), the occupations in which the proportion of interactive service workers exceeds 90 % include travel attendants, street vendors, cashiers and ticket clerks, hairdressers, waiters, sports and fitness workers, and nursing and midwifery professionals and associates. Almost 74 % of interactive service workers provide their services either at their employer's premises or at the homes, sites or workplaces of their clients. The sectors in which the majority of workers are interactive service workers are health, education, and commerce and hospitality.

Figure 34: Proportions of interactive service workers across different sociodemographic and employment-related groups in the EU (%)



Note: Percentages are of those respondents who indicated that their job involves 'dealing directly with people who are not employees at your workplace such as customers, passengers, pupils, or patients', all or almost all of the time.

Teamwork for learning and engagement

Summary

- Working in teams is widespread in the EU. In 2024, almost 6 in 10 workers (59 %) reported working in teams that share common tasks and can plan their work, with men and women participating in teams to similar extents.
- The share of workers working in teams had decreased between 2010 and 2015, but in 2024 levels were slightly above 2010 levels (56 %).
- The level of autonomy afforded to teams differs. Around one fifth of workers working in teams (in both single and multiple teams) report having the freedom to decide in all three of the categories of autonomy distinguished in the EWCS: task division, team leadership and schedules.
- Employees in autonomous teams tend to exhibit a greater propensity for learning and development and for applying their own ideas. Teamwork also fosters a supportive work environment, with employees in teams reporting higher levels of support from colleagues. Among the drawbacks are higher exposure to longer working days (especially among those working in multiple teams) and a higher work intensity in terms of pace determinants.

Much of people's work takes place in teams (Box 5). The type of teams and their composition are important determinants of how workers experience work. Teamwork is another way in which workers are involved in decisions affecting their work. This section looks at the prevalence of teamwork, examines some of the forms it can take and describes workers' experience of it.

In 2024, more than half (59 %) of all workers in the EU worked in a group or team that has common objectives and can plan its own work. The prevalence of teamwork varies significantly across countries. At the lower end of the spectrum, countries such as Hungary, Italy and Portugal report a teamwork prevalence of around 40 %. In contrast, Finland and Sweden have notably higher rates, with around 77 % or more of their workforce engaged in teamwork.

The data also reveal that men and women participate in teamwork to similar extents, with 60 % of men and 58 % of women working in teams. However, age plays a factor in teamwork participation, with both younger and older workers being less likely to work in teams than those of prime working age.

Occupation is another significant factor influencing teamwork participation. Managers, professionals and technicians are the most likely to work in teams, with 66 % or more of these occupational groups working in teams. Conversely, workers in elementary occupations (38 %), skilled agricultural workers (40 %) and plant and machine operators (48 %) are the least likely to organise in teams.

The financial services and public administration sectors have the highest rates of teamwork, with 68 % and 70 %, respectively, of workers in these sectors reporting that they work in teams. Teamwork is less prevalent in agriculture (40 %) and transport (47 %).

Approximately three quarters (73 %) of workers in the EU who work in teams do so always within the same team or group (single team). The remaining individuals (27 %) are part of multiple teams or groups, an arrangement characteristic of a matrix-type organisational structure, team-based organisations or network organisations, where employees may report to multiple lines of authority.

Organisational models involving working in multiple teams are more prevalent in certain countries, such as Sweden (57 %), Finland (48 %), Denmark (39 %) and the Netherlands (37 %), whereas work in multiple teams is less common in Hungary and Portugal, with fewer than 14 % of workers adopting this approach.

In terms of occupation, managers and professionals are more likely to work in a matrix structure (working in multiple teams), with approximately one third of employees in these roles doing so. Similarly, by sector, about one third of employees in the health sector work in a matrix structure.

Box 5: Working in teams in the workplace

Working in teams is linked to several benefits, including enhanced learning opportunities, the ability to implement innovative ideas, and access to support and guidance from colleagues. Notably, employees in autonomous teams tend to exhibit a greater propensity for learning and development, with those in matrix-type organisations (where employees frequently work in multiple teams) demonstrating an even higher inclination towards learning than those in single-team structures. Furthermore, working in teams allows employees to apply their own ideas and approaches to their work, although this is often contingent upon the team's level of autonomy. Interestingly, the degree of team autonomy does not appear to have an impact on the ability to apply one's own ideas when working in single teams with at least some autonomy, but it can have a more significant influence in multiple-team settings.

Working in teams also fosters a supportive work environment, with employees in teams reporting higher levels of support from colleagues than those who do not work in teams at all. This is likely to be due to the increased interdependence among team members in autonomous teams, which promotes mutual support. Employees who work in teams also report higher levels of engagement and well-being, especially when having at least some team autonomy. However, working in teams may have its drawbacks, including more stress, longer working days (especially in multiple teams) and a higher work intensity in terms of interdependency of pace determinants (see 'Pace determinants and interdependency' in Chapter 4). Table 5 shows selected aspects associated with working in teams.

Table 5: Working in teams across the EU (percentage deviation from the average), 2024

		Applying own ideas	Learning new things	Support from colleagues	Work engagement	Three or more pace determinants	Long working days
Not working in teams		-2	-2	-3	-2	1	1
Working in teams		1	1	1	1	-1	-1
Level of autonomy							
Single teams	None	-2	1	1	1	-3	1
	Some	1	1	1	1	0	0
	Full	2	1	1	2	-1	0
Multiple teams	None	-2	1	1	1	-3	-1
	Some	2	3	1	1	-1	-3
	Full	3	3	1	2	-2	-3

Autonomous teams, which have the freedom to decide on task division, team leadership and schedules, have been recognised for their potential to enhance organisational performance. These teams can leverage employees' tacit knowledge more effectively and foster improved communication with external stakeholders. By granting employees more autonomy and access to resources, this approach to work organisation can have numerous benefits (Box 5).

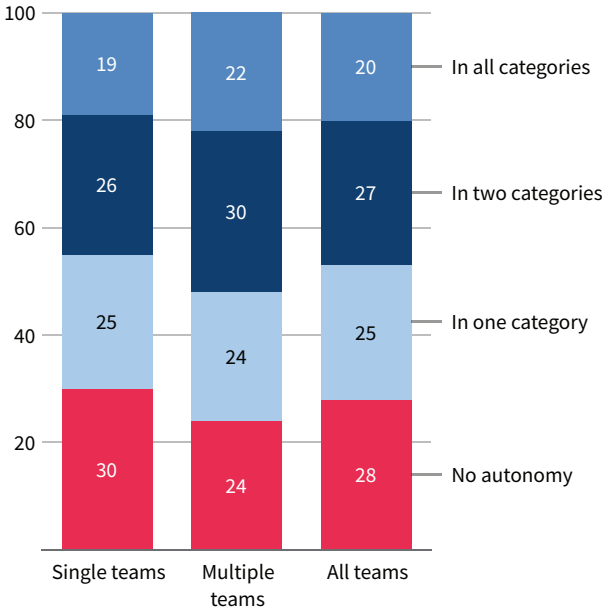
Members of the team decide on the division of tasks in two thirds (64 %) of cases. There are substantial country differences, the figure being 75 % or more in Austria, Finland and Sweden. By occupation, this freedom to decide is greatest for skilled agricultural workers (75 %) and professionals (72 %). By sector, it is greatest in agriculture (77 %) and education (73 %); it is lowest in transport (56 %).

Members can choose the timetable of the work in 49 % of cases; more than 60 % of the workforce involved in teamwork can decide on the timetable in Austria, Denmark, Hungary, the Netherlands and Poland.

Team members choose the head of the team in 27 % of cases; this rises to 37 % or more in Austria, Ireland, Finland, Slovenia and Sweden. Differences in terms of occupation and sector are noticeable, ranging across occupations from 17 % (elementary occupations) to 37 % (skilled agricultural workers) and across sectors from 23 % (commerce and hospitality) to 34 % (agriculture). Figure 35 provides an overview of the extent of teamwork autonomy in the EU.

Workers in multiple teams are slightly more likely to have at least some autonomy in one category or more (76 %) than those in single teams (70 %). Around one fifth of workers overall in both single and multiple teams report team autonomy in all three categories.

Figure 35: Prevalence of team autonomy in the EU by type of teamwork (%)



The EWCS 2024 asked for the first time how comfortable workers were with discussing problems in the team. Almost half of workers involved in teamwork (48 %) replied that they were largely comfortable and 39 % said they were comfortable to some extent. Only 5 % were not comfortable at all. There are very few differences across occupations, except for workers in elementary occupations, where 9 % felt not at all comfortable discussing problems in the team.

Adapting the workplace to workers' health situations

Summary

- Some 17 % of employees with somewhat limiting conditions as a result of long-standing health issues and 23 % of those with severely limiting conditions report that they need workplace accommodation but do not have it, whereas between 34 % and 36 % in each group report receiving accommodation, but only partially.
- Nearly half of respondents report that their employers do not provide accommodation for women's disruptive health issues (painful periods and menopause), while a large share of respondents (more than one third) report that they do not know whether or not their employers provide such accommodation. Full accommodation and partial accommodation by employers were reported by, respectively, 20 % and 15 % of respondents.
- The accommodation of women's health issues is more likely to be reported by employees in mixed and female-dominated occupations, which means that women working in male-dominated occupations have less chance of seeing their disruptive health issues accommodated.

This section addresses the accommodation of workers' health situations in the workplace, addressing two important aspects: the accommodation of the needs of workers with long-standing health issues and the accommodation of women's disruptive health situations. In an era of increasing female participation in employment, with tightening labour markets characterised by severe labour shortages in important economic sectors, the idea of sustainable work is becoming ever more important. An inclusive labour market, in which employers cater for the needs of a broader pool of the active population, is one of the most important strategies to ensure work sustainability, as a result of which more workers are able and willing to remain in employment for longer (see Eurofound, 2015b, 2021a, 2025).

Accommodation of the needs of workers with health issues

The urgency of creating the conditions to make work sustainable for those individuals living and working with a long-standing health issue has grown over recent years and will continue to grow, given the EU's demographic outlook for the next decades (Eurofound, 2014, 2019a).

The EWCS 2024 asked respondents who reported having health problems – including long-lasting health issues – if their employers accommodate their health situation:

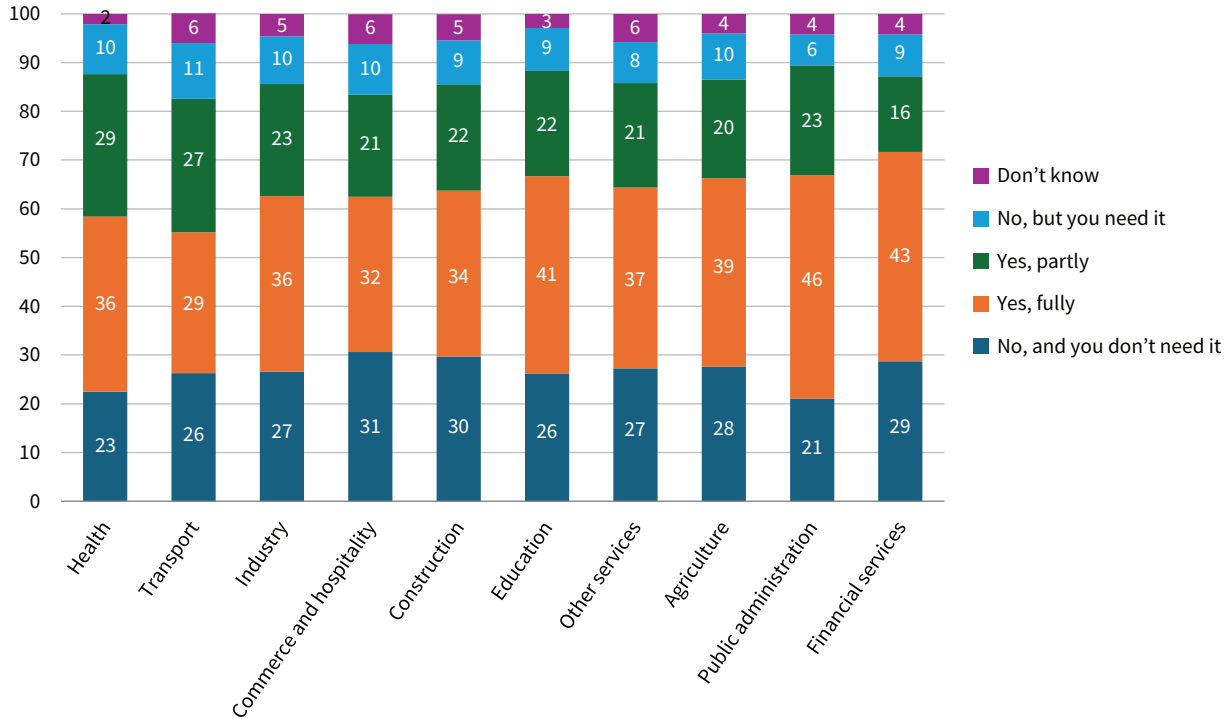
- about one third of respondents (38 %) stated that their employers fully accommodate their health issues;
- another 28 % stated that they do not get or need such accommodation;
- some 24 % stated that the accommodation takes place but is only partial;
- 10 % stated that they need such accommodation but do not get it.
- 5 % of employees with health problems do not know if their employers accommodate their health-related needs.

In 2015, close to 80 % of workers in the EU with an illness or health problem that lasted, or was expected to last, for more than six months (i.e. a chronic illness) had declared that their workplace or work activity had not been changed to accommodate their health problem. This seems to indicate an improvement over time.

Figure 36 sorts the sectors of activity according to the share of employees who need accommodation but do not get it or get only partial accommodation, from left to right. Full accommodation is more prevalent in public administration, education and financial services, whereas the aggregated shares of those reporting that they do not have such accommodation, get only partial accommodation or do not know if such accommodation is provided are larger in the transport, health, commerce and hospitality, and industry sectors.

More than one third of those with a limiting long-standing health problem – including somewhat or severely limiting – report that their workplace accommodates their condition. However, 17 % of those with somewhat limiting conditions and 23 % of those with severely limiting conditions report that they need such accommodation but do not have it, whereas between 34 % and 36 % of each group report receiving only partial accommodation of their health condition in the workplace.

Figure 36: Workplace accommodation in the EU by sector, ranked by unmet or partially unmet need (% of employees with declared chronic illness or health problem)



Accommodation of women's disruptive health situations

An increasing proportion of the working-age population consists of women. Menstruation and menopause are natural parts of women's lives. However, these issues have been noticeably absent from public discussion and policy (EIWH, 2015, 2018). Supporting the work ability of women over their professional careers is an important aspect of gender and age equality in the workplace and overall occupational well-being.

According to the European Institute of Women's Health (EIWH), an estimated 20 % of women suffer from pain that is severe enough to interfere with daily activities (dysmenorrhoea) and one in four experience heavy menstrual bleeding. About 10 % of people with a uterus are affected by endometriosis, a chronic illness that can have an impact on every aspect of life, interfering with health and well-being, relationships, work and family planning (EIWH, 2023).

A growing number of women in Europe will experience the menopause during their professional careers at a time when many of them play significant roles in the workforce. Symptoms such as hot flushes, sleep disturbances, mood swings and fatigue may impair work performance, concentration and the ability to manage tasks. Additionally, the menopause can cause physical symptoms such as joint and muscle pain, which may make working more difficult (Kausto, 2025). Supportive work environments, including flexible working hours, increased awareness, strong supervisor support and individual control over the work environment have been shown to attenuate the impact of menopause symptoms in the workplace (Safwan et al., 2024).

For the very first time, the EWCS, in the 2024 edition, asked the respondents identifying as employees if their employers accommodate, fully or partially, (1) painful menstrual periods and (2) disruptive menopausal symptoms.

Full or partial accommodation by employers for painful menstrual periods and for disruptive menopausal symptoms is reported by, respectively, 20 % and 15 % of all respondents. Nearly half of the respondents replied that their employers do not provide accommodation in either situation. A large share of respondents said they did not know whether or not their employers provide such accommodation.

Female employees are more aware of such accommodation than their male counterparts (Figure 37). Overall, more than half of female employees report that their workplace does not provide accommodation for these health situations.

Only 13 % of respondents report the accommodation of both types of symptom and a further 9 % report the accommodation of one type.

Accommodation for painful menstrual periods is more common than for disruptive menopausal symptoms in all sectors of activity, with the exception of agriculture, where both are equally low. Such accommodation is more common in public administration (26 % for painful menstrual periods and 21 % for disruptive menopausal symptoms). It is also more common in some Member States – Italy, Cyprus, Ireland and Estonia – and less so in others: Belgium, Luxembourg, Finland, Poland and Malta (Figure 38).

Looking at this kind of accommodation through the prism of gender segregation within occupations (see Chapter 1 on gender-segregated occupations) makes salient the fact that employees in mixed and female-dominated occupations are more likely to report such accommodation in their workplaces (Figure 39). This is certainly an aspect to bear in mind when devising approaches to make male-dominated occupations more attractive to women of different ages.

Figure 37: Prevalence of employers' accommodation of women's health issues in the EU by gender of employees (%)

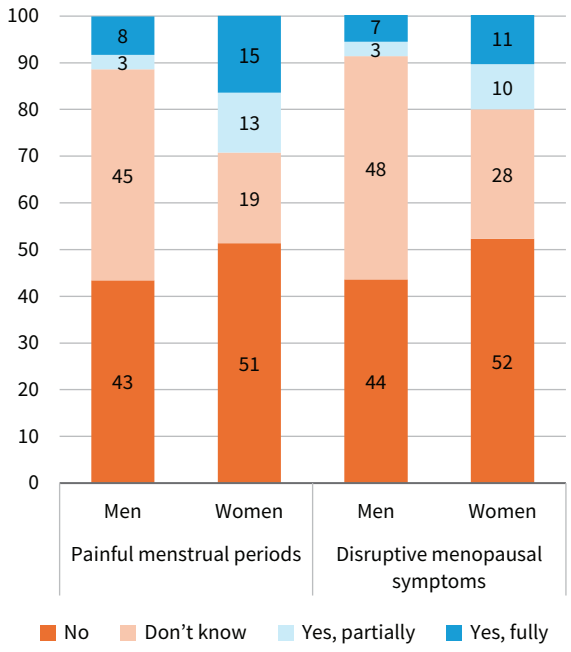


Figure 38: Shares of employees reporting full or partial accommodation of women's health situations by country (%)

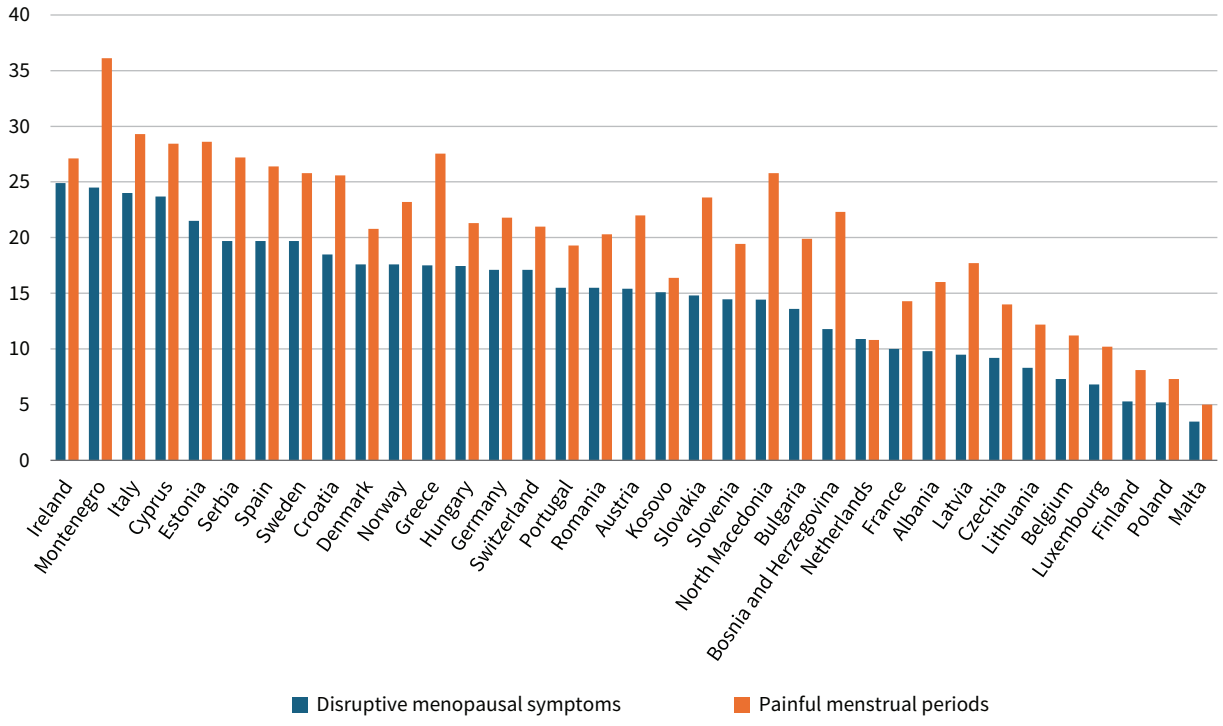
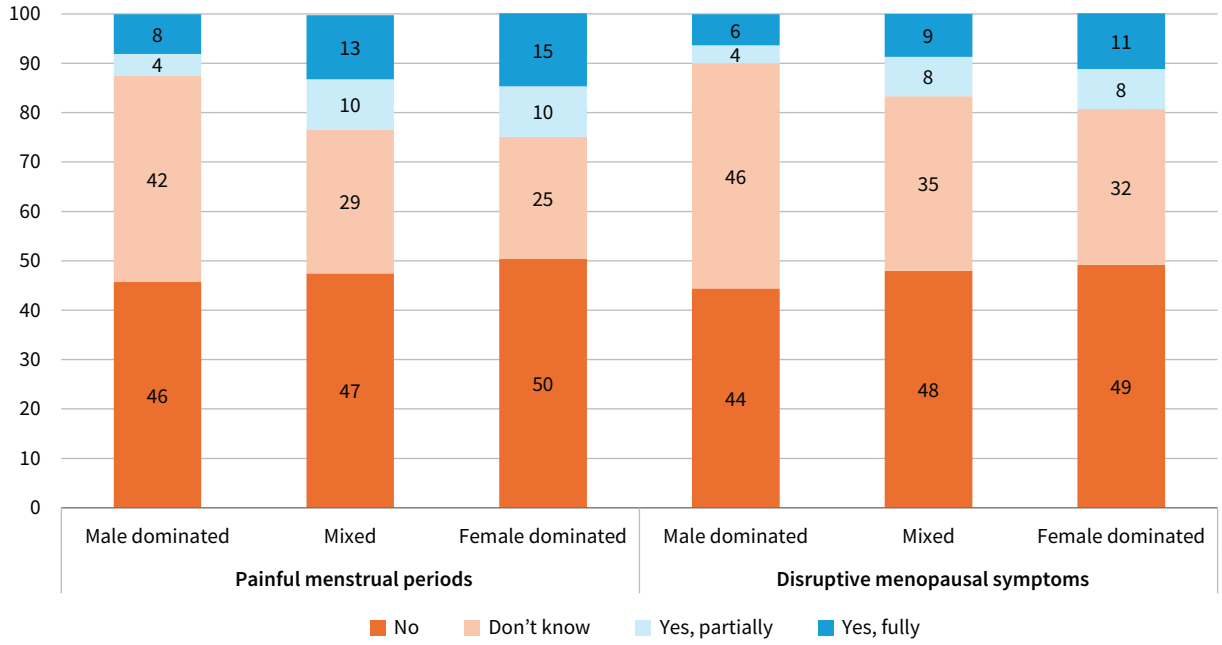


Figure 39: Prevalence of employers' accommodation of women's health situations by predominant gender in the occupation (%)



Employee representation and voice

Summary

- In 2024, one fifth of employees in the EU (21 %) had neither formal representation nor meetings at the workplace at which they could express their views. Another 11 % report the existence of such meetings but no collective representation in their company or organisation.
- The share of employees with neither collective representation nor meetings to express their views is much smaller in public administration, education and financial services (11 % or less) than in construction (28 %), commerce and hospitality (35 %) and agriculture (57 %).
- 36 % of employees say that both collective representation and meetings at which they can express their views exist in their workplace.
- The share of workers with trade union, works council or similar employee representation at the workplace is above 80 % in Norway and Sweden, but is only around 25 % in Albania, Bulgaria and Estonia.
- Some 85 % of employees in large workplaces (over 250 employees) report the existence of a trade union, a works council or similar employee representation, compared with 25 % in micro-workplaces (1–9 employees).

Eurofound defines employee representation as 'the right of employees to seek a union or individual to represent them for the purpose of negotiating with management on such issues as wages, hours, benefits and working conditions'. This includes negotiating the terms and conditions of employment, work practices, conduct at work, disciplinary and grievance matters, and health and safety. Research has established that the presence of employee representation at the workplace can be a determining factor in creating and improving working conditions (Eurofound, 2011, 2018a).

The EWCS asked its respondents about the presence of two types of collective employee representation at the workplace:

- representation that is strictly related to health and safety matters – a health and safety delegate or committee;
- other, broader, forms of representation such as trade unions, works councils or similar bodies.

In addition, respondents were asked if there is a regular meeting in their workplace 'in which employees can express their views about what is happening in the organisation'.

These variables must be interpreted with caution, as they signal only the existence of a representative body at the workplace, through which respondents can express or share their views to be considered and expressed collectively. This could take the form of a health and safety committee, and/or trade union or works council, and/or regular meetings in which respondents can participate. These variables do not provide any information on the nature, extent, impact, efficacy or efficiency of the functioning of these entities and meetings. However, they are a substantive indicator of the instruments at workers' disposal to discuss and follow up on the improvement of their working conditions. Workers indicating neither collective representation nor the opportunity to express their views are qualitatively disadvantaged compared with those with some or all such instruments.

Health and safety delegate or committee

The framework directive on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the health and safety of workers at work (Council Directive 89/391/EEC) sets out employers' obligations regarding worker representation on health and safety. The directive states that employers are to designate one or more workers to carry out activities related to protection from and the prevention of occupational risks. It defines a workers' representative with specific responsibility for the health and safety of workers as 'any person elected, chosen or designated in accordance with national laws and/or practices to represent workers where problems arise relating to the safety and health protection of workers at work'. The structures of representation, methods of selection and threshold in terms of workplace size for which such a body is required vary greatly across the EU (Fulton, 2018).

Overall, in 2024, about 6 in every 10 employees in the EU reported the existence of a health and safety delegate or committee in their company or organisation (59 % in 2015) while about 8 % replied that they do not know if such a role or body exists (6 % in 2015). The prevalence of this type of representation increases with workplace size, being greater (88 %) in large workplaces (with 250+ employees) (Figure 40). It also varies greatly with the sector of activity, being very high in industry (75 %) and public administration (79 %) and much lower in commerce and hospitality (42 %) and agriculture (33 %).

Figure 41 depicts the diverse European panorama regarding the presence of a health and safety delegate or committee at the workplace. The prevalence varies from below 25 % in Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina to more than 75 % in Finland, Norway and Sweden. This country variation must be interpreted considering national legal provisions (including different minimum thresholds for mandatory delegates and/or committees and exceptions for some sectors) and the specific economic structure in terms of sector and the size of firms and organisations.

Figure 40: Share of workers reporting having an occupational health and safety delegate at the workplace by sector and workplace size (%)

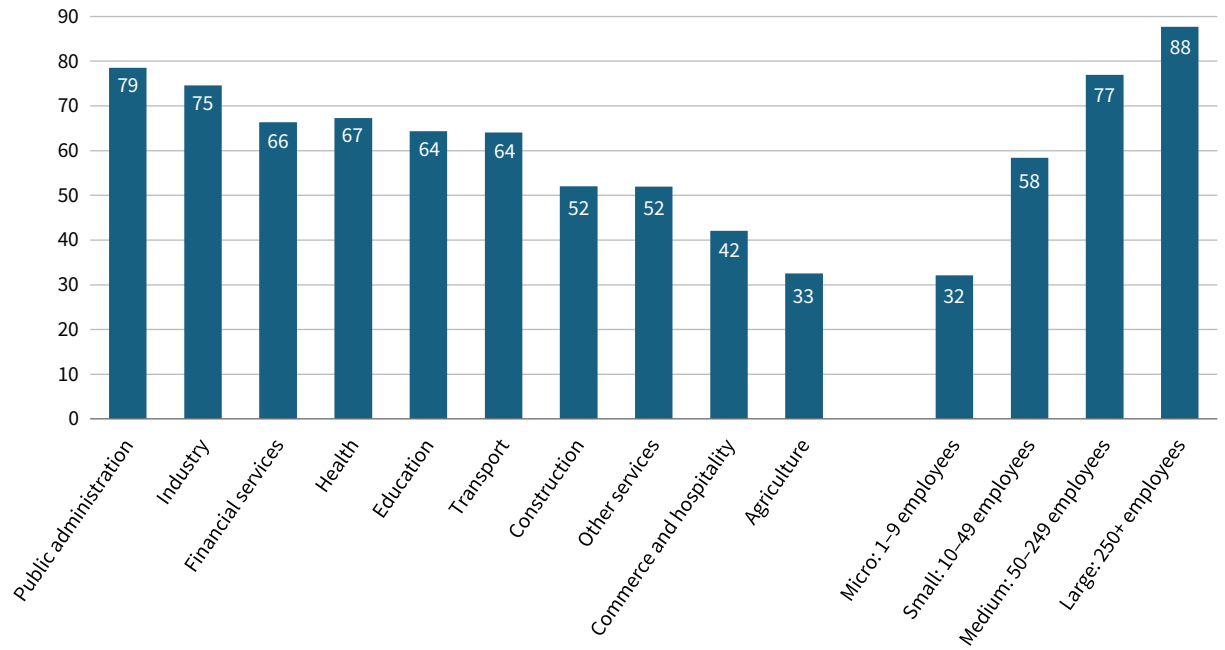
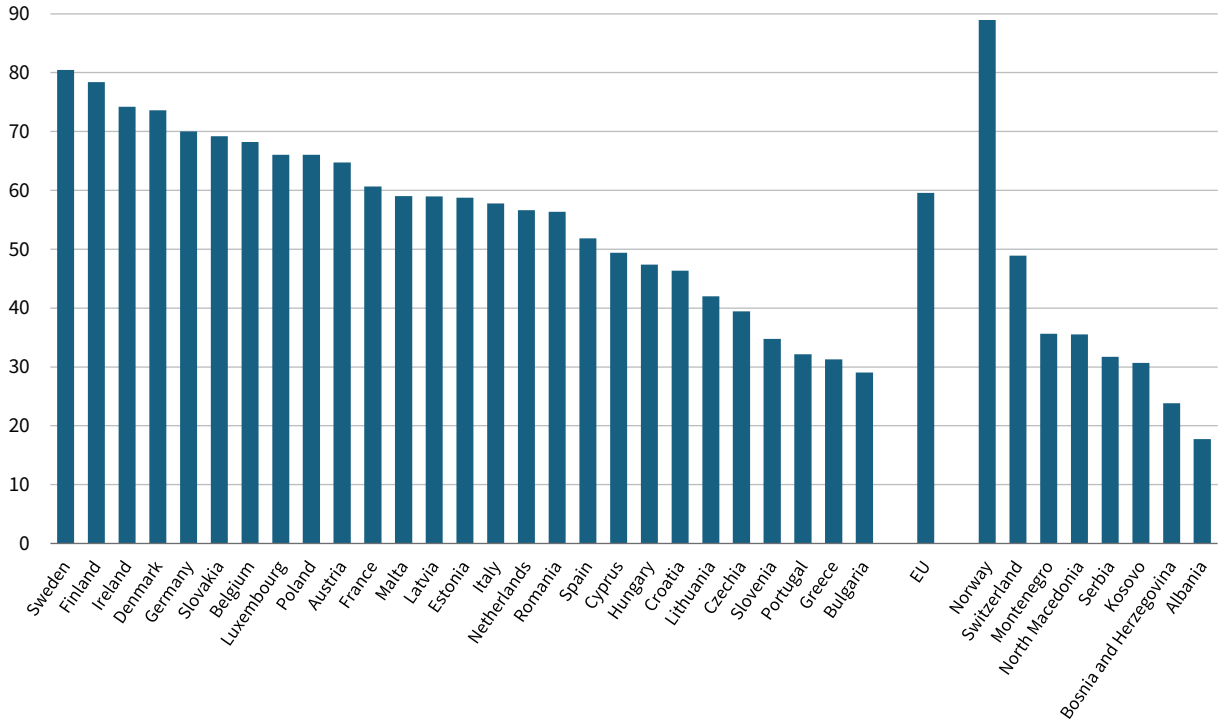


Figure 41: Share of workers reporting having an occupational health and safety delegate at the workplace by country (%)



Trade union or works council

Employee representation systems vary significantly across Europe, with local trade union branches sometimes combined with works councils or similar structures elected by the entire workforce (worker-participation.eu, undated). Such workplace representative bodies function differently depending on the predominant industrial relations systems and traditions, while different rules may apply according to the size of the company or establishment. The differences across workplace sizes result in part from the general framework directive for informing and consulting employees in the EU (Directive 2002/14/EC). Depending on the choice made by each Member State, the directive is applicable to either undertakings employing at least 50 employees in any one Member State or establishments employing at least 20 employees in any one Member State.

The EWCS asked employees about the existence of a 'trade union, works council or a similar committee representing employees' in the company or organisation they work for. Overall, 53 % of EU employees report such a representative body (an increase from 48 % in 2015), while another 5 % report that they do not know if such representation exists (4 % in 2015). The prevalence of employee representation in the EU is greater in public administration and education and comparatively lower in commerce and hospitality and in agriculture (Figure 42). The prevalence of such representation increases with workplace size, being much greater among workplaces with 250+ employees.

Figure 42: Share of workers reporting having a trade union, a works council or similar employee representation at the workplace by sector and workplace size (%)

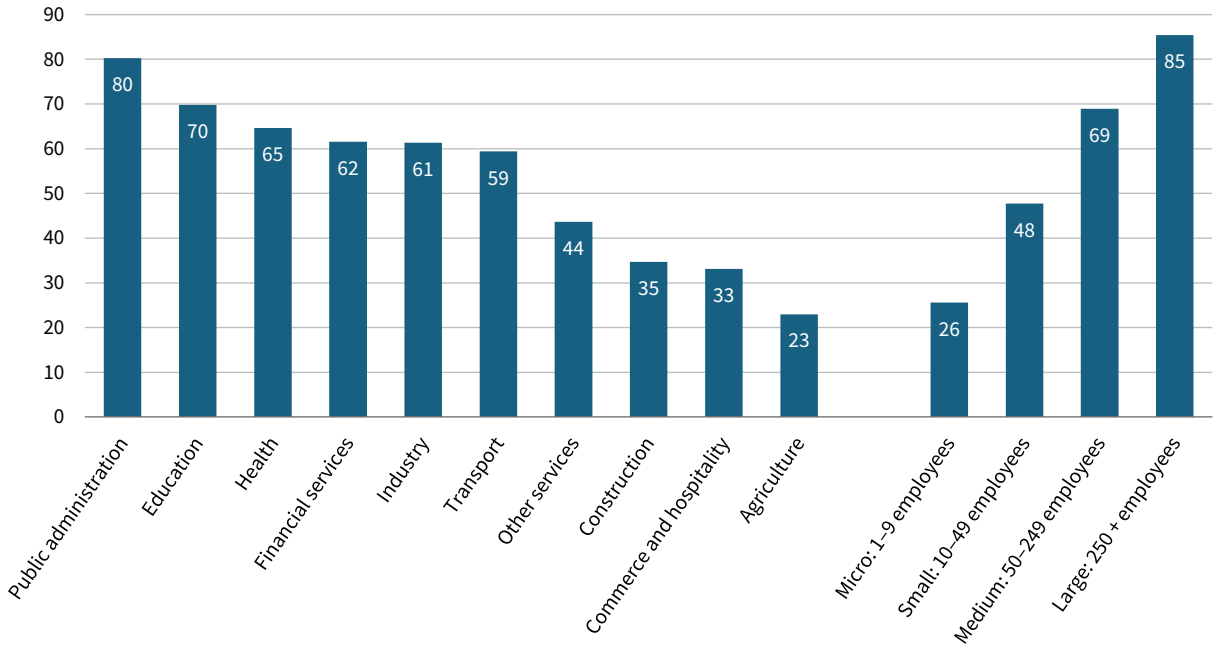
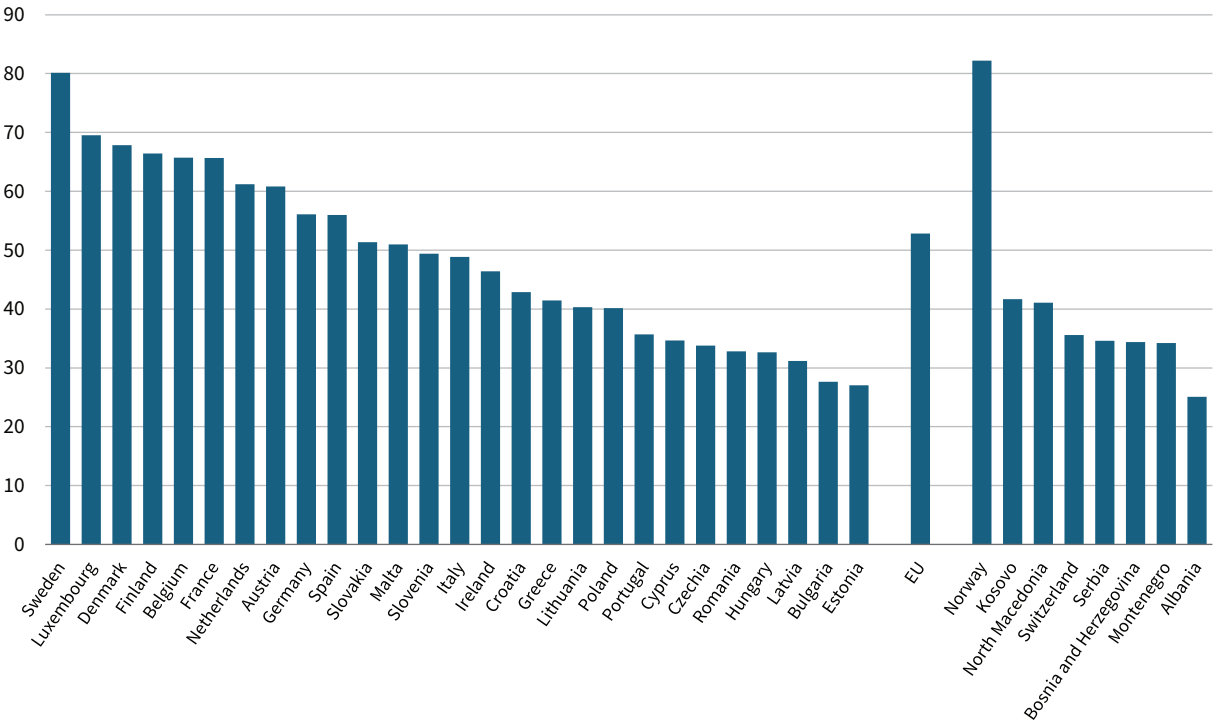


Figure 43 shows the shares of employees reporting the existence of a trade union, a works council or a similar committee by country. Latvia, Bulgaria and Estonia are the Member States with the greatest deficit of this kind of collective representation, with less than one third of employees reporting this in all three Member States.

In France, Belgium, Finland, Denmark and Luxembourg, two thirds or more of employees report a trade union or works council at the workplace. Sweden is the Member State with the largest share (80 %), but Norway has the largest share of all (82 %).

Figure 43: Share of workers reporting having a trade union, a works council or similar employee representation at the workplace by country (%)



Regular meetings

The respondents to the EWCS 2024 were also asked if they have a regular meeting in which employees can express their views about what is happening in their organisation. Overall, 62 % of employees reported having such an opportunity, showing a significant increase from the 53 % recorded in 2015. The share varies across countries, from 39 % in Hungary to 80 % in Sweden. The share is greatest among employees in public administration and education (more than 75 %) and much smaller in agriculture (31 %). The shares of employees reporting such meetings increase with workplace size, being more commonly reported among those working in large workplaces (79 %) than by those in micro-workplaces (46 %).

Representation and voice

When considering together the existence of collective representation and meetings in which employees can express their views, employees can be classified into the groups represented in Figure 44. The vast majority of employees in the EU have access to some sort of collective form of representation or, at least, to meetings at which they can express their views about what is happening in the organisation. However, in 2024, 21 % of employees in the EU had neither formal representation nor meetings at the workplace, and an additional 11 % reported the existence of meetings at which they could express their views but no collective representation in their company or organisation.

The shares of employees with neither collective representation nor meetings to express their views are much larger in construction (28 %), commerce and hospitality (35 %) and agriculture (57 %) than in public administration, education and financial services (11 % or less). This share diminishes as workplace size increases, being very small (3 %) in workplaces with 250 workers or more. It is larger in Portugal (48 %), Albania (45 %), Bulgaria and Hungary (both around 40 %), and is comparatively smaller in Denmark and Germany (both 12 %), Finland (11 %) and Sweden (6 %).

Figure 44: Prevalence of access to employee collective representation and meetings to express views in the EU (%)



3 Measuring job quality

This chapter examines the job quality of workers in Europe in 2024. It first describes the framework for measuring job quality and then presents results on the distribution of job quality in Europe.

Job quality – the framework

Summary

- Job quality is measured at the level of the job.
- The selection of the features that make up job quality was made on the basis of their proven causal impact on health and well-being, based on high-quality epidemiological studies.
- Job quality is captured using seven job quality indices. The correlation between the job quality indices is moderate to low, highlighting the multidimensionality of job quality.
- New research highlights the positive role that job quality plays in supporting quality of life, in political participation and in trust in democracy.
- The seven job quality indices are positively associated with health and well-being, confirming their validity.
- Empirical analysis of the EWCS data confirms the positive association of the seven job quality indices with engagement, motivation, and trust and cooperation, and their negative association with the intention to quit. This shows the importance of job quality for companies and organisations.
- Job quality is empirically positively associated with work–life balance and a positive work–life interface and negatively associated with difficulty in making ends meet.

This section addresses the relevance of job quality, its definition and operationalisation through the EWCS 2024 data and its validity through an examination of the association of job quality with health and well-being, work–life balance and outcomes of relevance to companies.

Job quality ranks highly on the policy agenda

Job quality is very high on the current European policy agenda. Social partners have been invited to contribute to the Quality Jobs Roadmap and the forthcoming Quality Jobs Act to complement and capitalise on the European, national, sectoral and company actions already implemented.

The expected benefits of increased job quality are that it will support both productivity increases and sustainable and inclusive growth in Europe. Furthermore, the creation of high-quality jobs was identified in the Draghi report as a key enabling action to improve the EU innovation model (Draghi, 2024). Previous work by Eurofound has indeed shown the association between job quality and motivation (Eurofound, 2012a, 2017a, 2021a) based on both the EWCS series and the European Company Survey, which examine the association between company practices supporting job quality and performance (Eurofound, 2015c; Eurofound et al., 2020).

Interest in job quality has been growing in recent years in response to the policy concern about how to increase the employment rate. This has led to policies supporting access to employment for groups in which the employment rate was lower than average, such as older workers, parents, workers with disabilities and migrant workers. At the same time, ensuring that workers can remain in employment as their work and personal circumstances change across their life course – in other words 'sustainable work over the life course' (Eurofound, 2015b) – has also been on the policy agenda. It is no wonder that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) amended its employment strategy in 2018 with the objective of helping countries to not only promote job creation but also foster job quality and inclusiveness as central policy priorities, while emphasising the importance of resilience and adaptability for good economic and labour market performance in a rapidly changing world of work (OECD, 2018). With the current decline in the size of the overall working-age population, the importance of job quality is even more significant, due to its positive impact on health and its role in supporting longer careers.

The twin transition draws attention to changes in work and jobs and the impact on job quality, and both the opportunities and the challenges in relation to job quality. For example, recent work on the impact of

climate change on job quality (Eurofound, 2024c) has shown that there has been an increase in risks to workers who are exposed to climate change; however, the predicted transformation of jobs in response to green policies is likely to provide more opportunities.

Eurofound's extensive work on job quality (Eurofound, 2002, 2012a, 2017a, 2021a) has demonstrated the key role played by job quality in supporting the physical and psychological well-being of the workforce, sustaining workers' participation in paid employment (Docherty et al., 2009a; Eurofound, 2015b), encouraging the inclusion of vulnerable groups in the workforce and supporting the development of an engaged, motivated and innovative workforce. The improvement in job quality could also help to address labour shortages (European Commission, 2023). These issues will be assessed empirically in the rest of the report.

The relationship between job quality and increased productivity and company performance is mostly indirect and is based on having a motivated workforce, a workforce that is more prone to innovation, less absence at work and a better social climate. There are very few empirical studies available, due to data constraints. A 2020 study (Dares, 2020) shed light on the link between working conditions, risk prevention and the economic and financial performance of companies. This study links the French working conditions survey conducted in 2013, covering about 34 000 employed workers, with several administrative sources related to companies. The results show a strong and positive correlation between risk prevention and the economic and financial performance of companies when considering companies with identical characteristics (sector of activity, workforce size, socio-professional structure, seniority and group membership). Company performance declines with a lack of recognition, constraints on working hours and the organisation of working time, economic insecurity and organisational changes. However, there is no systematic relationship between business performance and work intensity, emotional demands, autonomy, social relationships, value conflicts and physical constraints.

Lesser known are the benefits of job quality in terms of the quality of life of workers and democracy. Building on surveys carried out in Europe (such as the EWCS) and in Australia, South Korea and the United States, Green et al. (2024) found the following: 'the importance of job quality is everywhere of a similar magnitude to that of health, while both are far more important than other conventional determinants, including education, gender, marital status, parental status, age or household income. Job quality accounts for somewhat more of well-being's variation among men than among women.'

An empirical analysis of the 2016 European Social Survey in *Benchmarking Working Europe – 2019* (De Spiegelaere et al., 2019) concluded that 'employees who enjoy a high level of democracy at work (measured here as being involved in decision making and work organisation) tend to show much higher levels of general life satisfaction. … In short, democracy at work is clearly linked to good-quality, well-paid jobs and a high degree of life satisfaction.' The analysis also showed that employees in jobs with greater autonomy and involvement in decision-making are also more politically active and have greater trust in democracy. Similar findings were made in a recent study (Coutrot, 2024) evaluating the link between the degree of autonomy at work, the ability of employees to express themselves about their work and their voting behaviours. The results indicate that the absence of autonomy at work significantly increases abstention in elections while the presence of autonomy and the ability to express oneself at work, physical strain and working nights or early mornings are associated with different voting preferences. A recent systematic review confirms such findings (Selenko et al., 2025): 'Jobs that are enabling and of better quality … – for example, by allowing for more skill use, having more autonomy, being better paid, or offering good social relationships – are associated with (1) more political participation, (2) higher levels of political trust and (3) specific political attitudes… In contrast, jobs that create a grievance (e.g., because they are insecure) were also related to more political participation, but people tended to have lower political trust.'

This evidence shows the importance of job quality in supporting both workers' well-being and company performance, but also demonstrates its importance to key features of the European social model.

Job quality – key features

Job quality originally came to the forefront of the European policy agenda in the 2000s when the EU made a commitment to ensure more and better jobs, that is, to focus on quality as a complement to the more traditional interest in the quantity of jobs. This led to discussions about what constitutes a good job: is it a high level of satisfaction at work or quality employment? It also led to discussions on who defines job quality: job holders or other parties? By engaging with the research community and its tripartite stakeholders, and adapting such data sources to this end, Eurofound structured its approach to job quality around the following features.

- Job quality is measured at the level of the job, namely at the level of the agreement between a worker and the company/organisation. In the case of externalities (actions by one party that result in a cost or benefit for another party), governments have the right to intervene and regulate the issues at stake.
- Many characteristics of work and employment matter: both positive and negative features are considered.

- The selection of the features that make up job quality was made on the basis of their proven causal impact on well-being, in either a positive or a negative direction, as identified by high-quality epidemiological studies.
- Job quality does not include the means that support it (e.g. collective bargaining). There are many actors that contribute to the improvement of job quality, ranging from workplace staff to transnational institutions, and there are many ways to achieve job quality, ranging from actions by workers themselves to company policies, collective bargaining, regulations and standards, policies and funding mechanisms. Job quality is measured as the outcomes of all these actions and practices.

This definition of job quality has the following implications.

- Individual preferences are not accounted for in the definition of job quality. However, it is now possible to match jobs with workers' individual preferences, thanks to some of the new questions included in the 2024 edition of the EWCS.
- Job quality is distinct from quality of working life. Quality of working life depends on workers' personal circumstances and preferences; it is embedded in a specific company and national context. Quality of working life – which includes work–life balance, skills matching, engagement, sustainable work and the intention to leave one's company or retire – is discussed in Chapter 5.
- Job quality reflects company and organisational policies and practices, as it measures the net impact on people's work.
- Many job quality features are also beneficial for companies; for example, a skilled workforce that can use and grow their skills at work supports company performance.

The operationalisation of job quality developed by Eurofound is suitable for most occupations but may exclude specific concerns in certain occupations and work situations. The development of cohorts and longitudinal studies would support the development of a better understanding of the impact of job quality over time on the health and well-being of individuals.

The job features considered to be part of job quality are captured through the responses of the respondents to the survey. The questions in the EWCS aim to capture respondents' behaviours and experiences that could be confirmed by an external observer, rather than their perspectives and opinions.

The features were selected on the basis of high-quality epidemiological studies. However, these studies do not all cover all of the countries covered by the survey and do not all capture recent contemporary features of work.

The intention is not to identify good or bad jobs, but instead to rate jobs in terms of their quality and compare them with one another based on the same features.

The seven job quality indices

There are many ways that the elements of job quality could be aggregated together into one comprehensive index (Eurofound, 2021a) or more indices. In this report, building on the original work carried out in 2012 (Eurofound, 2012b), the aspects of job quality have been gathered thematically into seven dimensions.

- **Earnings.** This index measures the extent to which jobs meet the need to earn one's livelihood. The level of earnings, their predictability and their fairness in relation to the effort put in make up the index.
- **Working time quality.** This index addresses the quality of time spent at work. It focuses on the duration of working time, the timing of hours ('atypical' working hours), the flexibility and predictability of hours and the control that workers have over their working time.
- **Prospects.** This index addresses workers' need for safety and control over the future. It consists of subdimensions covering career prospects, job security, vulnerability and the employment status of workers, as this matters for access to social protection.
- **Skills and discretion.** This index addresses workers' need to use and grow their skills at work and develop through the experience of work. It considers the cognitive dimensions of work and opportunities for development, decision latitude, organisational participation and training.
- **Work intensity.** This index refers to the rhythm at which work is performed during working time. It considers the quantity of demands and the emotional demands of the work, and interdependency between pace constraints (limitations imposed on the rate or speed at which a task or job must be completed; such limitations may be imposed by people, such as clients or bosses, or by something like production targets). The more pace constraints there are, the more difficult it is to work at one's preferred pace and the greater the risk of conflicting priorities.
- **Social environment.** This index addresses workers' need for supportive relationships at work with colleagues and managers and the absence of adverse social behaviours, and includes the quality of management.
- **Physical environment.** This index captures exposure to physical risks and to physical demands.

Each dimension is captured by a numerical value, which allows trends in job quality to be tracked over time. Two series of indices have been developed:

- **trend indices**, which build on items collected since 2010 and allow changes to be tracked over time;
- **full indices**, which include more items than the trend indices thanks to the inclusion in the questionnaire of additional items as new epidemiological evidence has become available and/or new questions are included in the survey.

The indices were developed using the same methodology as that originally developed in 2012. The value assigned to each index ranges from 0 (the worst situation) to 100 (the best situation), which means that, for example, a job scoring 78 on the Physical environment index implies that there is less exposure to physical risks and demands than in a job with a score of 58. The scores on each index cannot, however, be compared with each other: for example, a result of 58 on the Skills and discretion index is not the same as a score of 58 on the Social environment index, as scores depend on the number and format of variables in each index.

The seven job quality indices are described in detail in Chapter 4.

Correlation between the job quality indices

There is little correlation between the indices (Figure 45). This acknowledges the multidimensionality of job quality and suggests that there are many possible configurations of job quality.

The Earnings index is moderately correlated with the Skills and discretion and Prospects indices, weakly correlated with Working time quality and Social environment and very weakly correlated with the Physical environment and Work intensity indices. This suggests that approaches that would equate job quality to earnings would overlook important dimensions of job quality.

Work intensity and Working time quality, on the one hand, and Physical environment and Work intensity, on the other, show the highest levels of correlation, suggesting that these characteristics tend to be found together in jobs.

The Skills and discretion and Work intensity indices are negatively correlated. This suggests that, as one increases, the other will tend to decrease, for example greater skills and discretion could be associated with poorer work intensity.

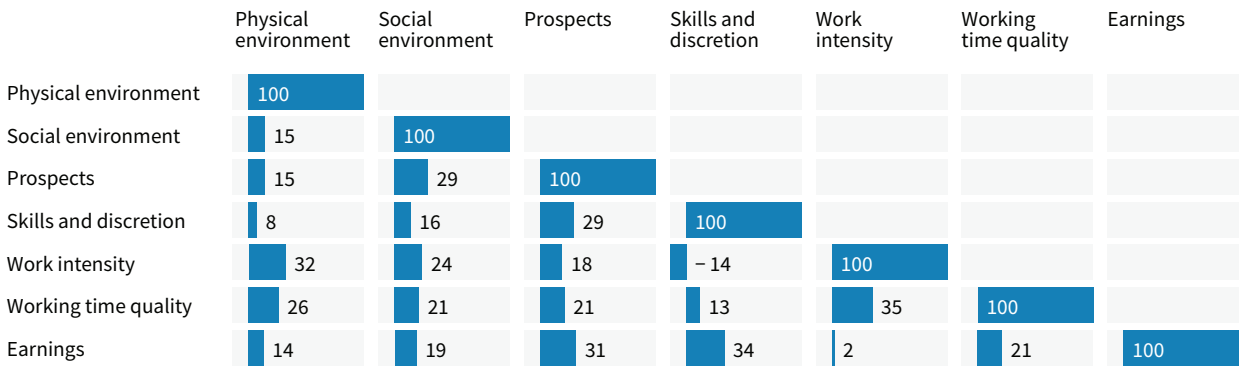
Job quality, well-being and a good working life

To validate the seven job quality indices used in this report, their association with health and well-being and working life was tested using the EWCS 2024 data. A variety of indicators measuring well-being and physical health at work, in addition to work–life balance, motivation and engagement at work and financial security, were examined. These indicators are of relevance to workers themselves but also to the companies and organisations that employ them and to members of their households.

The **well-being indicators** assessed were as follows:

- subjective well-being, as measured using the WHO-5 index (Chapter 1);
- emotional and physical exhaustion, which captures some symptoms of burnout (Chapter 5);
- the number of health problems, which was based on health issues reported by workers (Chapter 5);
- overall health score (Chapter 1), based on workers' self-reported level of health, ranging from very good to very poor;
- health and safety risks at work, based on workers' assessment of the health and safety risks they face at work (Chapter 5).

Figure 45: Correlations between job quality indices



As expected, the dimensions measured by the indices were all positively related to health and well-being, with the following exception: Skills and discretion was negatively related to physical and emotional exhaustion, the number of health problems and health and safety risks at work (Table 6). This can be explained by the fact that people with poorer health can perform certain types of skills-intensive work (e.g. less physically intense work) more easily than other jobs. The association of skills and discretion with exhaustion has been discussed in the literature and is ambiguous, with some empirical results showing a positive association and others not. The EWCS 2024 data (see the 'Skills and discretion' section in Chapter 4) show that there has been an increase in the opportunities to grow and use skills at work (a subdimension of the index); however, if such skills requirements are not matched by high enough levels of skills, this can increase job demands (Rafferty et al., 2001; Viotti et al., 2016).

Depending on which well-being variables are considered, the effects on well-being are stronger for the Physical environment, Social environment, Work intensity and Prospects indices. These job quality indices capture most of the elements related to physical and psychosocial risks at work, and these risks are well known for their effect on health and well-being.

Next, the association between job quality and engagement, motivation, trust and cooperation, and (non-)intention to quit was considered. These are 'outcomes' that make the experience of work more fulfilling. They are also of high relevance to employers.

- Engagement (Chapter 4) is made up of three components: vigour (where work is perceived as stimulating and energetic, involving tasks that employees are eager to invest effort and time in); absorption (where work is captivating and demands complete concentration of the worker); and dedication (where work is deemed a significant and meaningful pursuit) (Bakker et al., 2012). Engagement has been associated with individual behaviour and performance and with organisational performance (Kim et al., 2012); a high level of correlation with job commitment; moderate to high levels of correlation with quitting intention and job performance; a moderate to low correlation with physical health and life satisfaction; and a moderate to low negative correlation with mental distress (Mazzetti et al., 2023).
- Motivation captures the idea of workers' drive to give their best performance in their organisation (Chapter 5).
- Trust and cooperation is an index based on four items: management's trust in employees, employees' trust in management, fairness in conflict management, and prioritisation of employees' health and well-being. Being able to trust employees is more efficient for companies than setting up comprehensive control mechanisms. Trust in the workplace is essential because it boosts performance, strengthens collaboration and enhances employees' willingness to share knowledge and use their initiative. High-trust environments also improve engagement and well-being by fostering psychological safety and reducing stress (Edmondson, 1999). Furthermore, trust supports adaptability during organisational change.
- It is clear that workers' intention to quit (Chapter 5) can be costly to employers, as it is a strong predictor of actual turnover, leading to significant direct and indirect costs. Such costs include those related to recruitment, training, reduced productivity and lost organisational knowledge.

Table 6: Association of job quality with health and well-being

	Subjective well-being	No emotional exhaustion	No physical exhaustion	Overall health score	Health and safety risk	Higher number of health problems mentioned
Physical environment	0.04	0.05	0.14	0.08	−0.25	−0.21
Social environment	0.21	0.16	0.08	0.13	−0.10	−0.12
Prospects	0.13	0.14	0.11	0.08	−0.08	−0.08
Skills and discretion	0.11	−0.07	−0.04	0.05	0.03	0.11
Work intensity	0.16	0.29	0.22	0.07	−0.12	−0.14
Working time quality	0.05	0.08	0.11	0.02	−0.11	−0.01
Earnings	0.10	0.02	0.06	0.09	−0.07	−0.10

Notes: The estimates are controlled for sex, age, country, sector, occupation, workplace size, part-time work, supervisory positions, employment status, birth regions, the presence of children in the household and representation characteristics. The same model is used for all regressions in this chapter.

Table 7: Association of job quality with engagement, motivation, trust and cooperation, and workers' intention to quit

	Engagement	Poor motivation	Intention to quit	Trust and cooperation
Physical environment	0.02	0.00	− 0.01	0.05
Social environment	0.22	− 0.30	− 0.14	0.43
Prospects	0.17	− 0.17	− 0.28	0.18
Skills and discretion	0.26	− 0.21	− 0.02	0.12
Work intensity	0.09	− 0.09	− 0.06	0.12
Working time quality	− 0.03	− 0.01	0.02	0.01
Earnings	0.08	− 0.11	− 0.09	0.05

All the job quality indices have a positive relationship with these outcomes, except for the intention to quit and poor motivation. The association of these variables is strongest with the Social environment, Skills and discretion and Prospects indices (Table 7).

Finally, the association between job quality and the quality of working life was considered. The quality of working life is made up of:

- general work–life balance;
- the work–family interface;
- the ability to make ends meet.

All of the job quality indices influence work–life balance, but Working time quality and Work intensity have the strongest effect (Table 8). Prospects, Physical environment and Social environment play a role. Skills and discretion is negatively correlated with most aspects of work–life balance; this reflects the difficulties in setting boundaries in knowledge-based work. For an overall and comprehensive assessment of work–life balance, see Chapter 5.

Poorer earnings are, unsurprisingly, associated with difficulties in making ends meet. Being a young worker, having a lower education level, having children and working in agriculture increase the probability of difficulties in making ends meet.

Table 8: Association of job quality indices with work–life balance

	(Poor) work-life balance	No difficulty concentrating on the job because of family responsibilities	The job does not prevent time being spent with family	Too tired after work to do household chores	No worries about work experienced at home
Physical environment	− 0.02	0.04	0.06	0.17	0.04
Social environment	− 0.09	0.15	0.10	0.08	0.14
Prospects	− 0.05	0.10	0.07	0.07	0.10
Skills and discretion	− 0.02	− 0.10	− 0.08	− 0.03	− 0.21
Work intensity	− 0.12	0.16	0.24	0.23	0.17
Working time quality	− 0.33	0.09	0.26	0.13	0.13
Earnings	− 0.06	0.04	0.04	0.07	0.03

Job quality in the EU

Summary

- On average, men report higher job quality than women in all job quality dimensions with the exception of Working time quality and Physical environment.
- Younger workers (under 30 years of age), when compared with core-age workers (30–64 years old), score lower on most job quality indices except Social environment, raising concerns about their future labour market participation.
- The Prospects and Skills and discretion index scores of first-generation foreign-born workers are significantly lower than those of second-generation and native workers.
- There are important differences between occupations: managers, professionals and technicians have higher scores, on average, on the Earnings, Prospects, Skills and discretion and Physical environment indices than workers in other occupations.
- Job quality is lowest in very female-dominated occupations in all dimensions except Work intensity and Physical environment.
- Workers in occupations characterised by labour shortages experience poorer job quality in many domains.
- Workers experiencing health limitations report poorer job quality on all dimensions, less so on Skills and discretion. Workers with health limitations whose needs are accommodated report higher job quality.
- There are significant differences in job quality between sectors. Workers in the transport sector experience the poorest job quality in four dimensions: Prospects, Working time quality, Skills and discretion and Social environment.
- There are significant differences in job quality between countries, which reflect different workforce compositions, institutional frameworks and regulations. The job quality gaps between Member States are particularly significant in relation to Skills and discretion, but also Work intensity and Prospects, which suggests that more in-depth analysis is needed to assess how upward convergence could be achieved.
- The wide range of differences in job quality confirms the need to develop policies and practices that address all seven job quality dimensions.

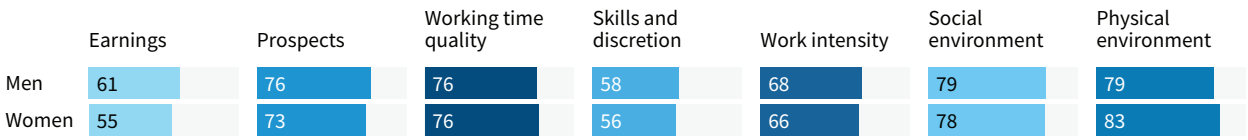
This section examines job quality in Europe and assesses which job quality concerns are more relevant than others to the groups of workers discussed. This section allows policymakers to quickly identify job quality issues of relevance when considering policies related to certain groups of workers.

Job quality by gender

On average, men report higher job quality than women in all job quality dimensions with the exception of Working time quality and Physical environment (Figure 46). Differences between men and women are largest in Earnings and Physical environment. In 2024, unlike the previous period, women recorded lower Work intensity scores than men, which means that they experience work intensity more than men (the lower the score, the greater the work intensity).

Since 2015, gender gaps have reduced in the Physical environment, Skills and discretion and Working time quality indices, but have increased in Prospects and Social environment.

Figure 46: Mean job quality scores in the EU by gender



Job quality by age

Both younger workers and older workers have lower employment rates than average. These groups are at different stages in their work lives. Younger workers are becoming socialised into work, either as a complementary activity to education or as they embark on the first steps of their careers. Older workers over the age of 65 make up a rather heterogeneous group of workers who are continuing to work either for monetary reasons or because they enjoy work.

When compared with core-age workers (30–64 years old), younger workers (under 30 years of age) have lower scores on most of the job quality indices, except Social environment (Figure 47). The poorer quality of their professional integration raises concerns over their future labour market participation.

Older workers aged 65 or more score well on Working time quality, Work intensity, Social environment and Physical environment but lower on Prospects, Earnings and Skills and discretion. Thus, they are experiencing work that is of quite good quality but lower-quality employment conditions.

Job quality by origin

As mentioned in Chapter 1, 45 % of the net new employment in the EU since 2010 has been among foreign nationals. Despite progress, the employment rate of foreign-born people remains lower than that of native people. The EWCS 2024 sheds light on the job quality of foreign-born workers (Figure 48). The scores on the Prospects and Skills and discretion indices of first-generation foreign-born workers are significantly lower than those of second-generation and native workers. The scores on the Earnings index of first- and second-generation immigrants are significantly lower than those of native workers. Social environment and Physical environment scores are lowest for first-generation immigrants but Work intensity is highest.

Job quality of workers with a chronic disease or health problem

An inclusive labour market calls for the integration and retention of workers with chronic illnesses or other health problems that limit their ability to do normal activities. As indicated in Chapter 1, significant shares of workers either have a chronic disease that limits their ability to do normal activities or, while not having a chronic disease, have some health problem that limits their ability to do normal activities. In this context, it is concerning to see that workers experiencing such health limitations report poorer job quality on all dimensions, less so on Skills and discretion (Figure 49).

Figure 47: Mean job quality scores in the EU by age group

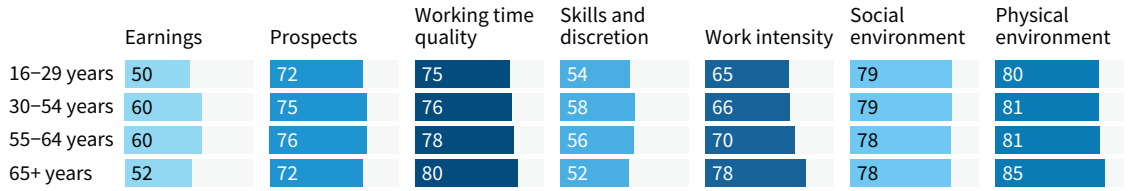


Figure 48: Mean job quality scores of foreign-born workers in the EU by generation



Figure 49: Mean job quality scores of workers with limits to their ability to do normal activities in the EU by extent of limitation

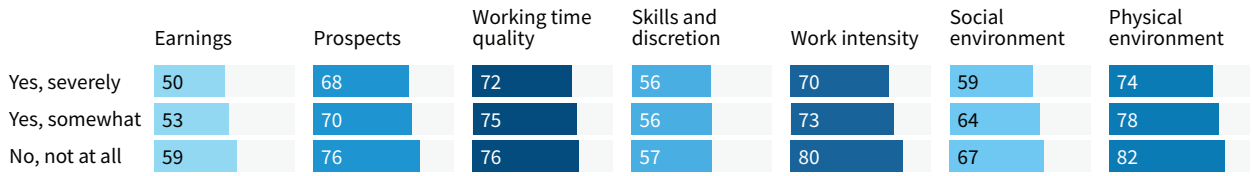


Figure 50: Mean job quality scores of workers with health issues in the EU by the degree of accommodation of their needs

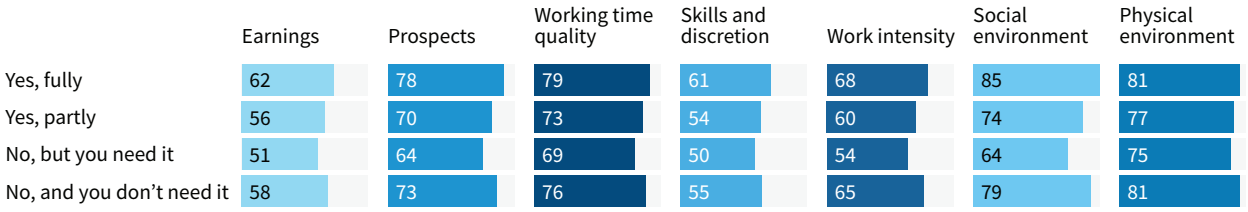


Figure 50 illustrates the benefits of adapting the work of these individuals to meet their needs, as workers whose work has been fully adapted to their needs experience greater job quality than those whose work has been only partly adapted.

A similar picture emerges in relation to accommodations for painful periods and menopause symptoms. The EWCS results illustrate the positive impact that making accommodations for the needs of workers with chronic diseases and for women's health issues has on the quality and sustainability of their work. It can also contribute to preventing the development of further health problems, such as those arising from stress.

Job quality by occupation

In terms of occupation, there is a clear job quality gradient (Figure 51). Managers, followed by professionals and technicians, experience on average higher scores on the Earnings, Prospects, Skills and discretion and Physical environment indices.

- Managers' score on the Working time quality index is moderately high. The lowest score on the Working time quality index is found among services and sales workers.
- Technicians and managers report the poorest scores on the Work intensity index, that is, the highest levels of work intensity.
- Skilled agricultural workers score lowest on the Earnings and Social environment indices.
- Craft workers have the lowest score on the Physical environment index.
- Workers in elementary occupations score lowest on the Prospects and Skills and discretion indices.

A persistent feature of EU labour markets, despite policy attention, is gender segregation. Job quality is higher in gender-mixed occupations in most dimensions, except Earnings and Work intensity (Figure 52).

Job quality is lowest in very female-dominated occupations in all dimensions except Work intensity and Physical environment. Earnings and Prospects are highest in very male-dominated occupations.

At the same time, scores regarding the Physical environment index are lowest for those in very male-dominated occupations, a group that is made up of high-status occupations such as ICT professionals and science and engineering professionals (who are not very exposed to physical demands and risks), but also protective service workers, drivers, mobile plant and machine operators and electrical workers, who are most exposed to physical constraints in their work.

Figure 51: Mean job quality scores in the EU by occupation

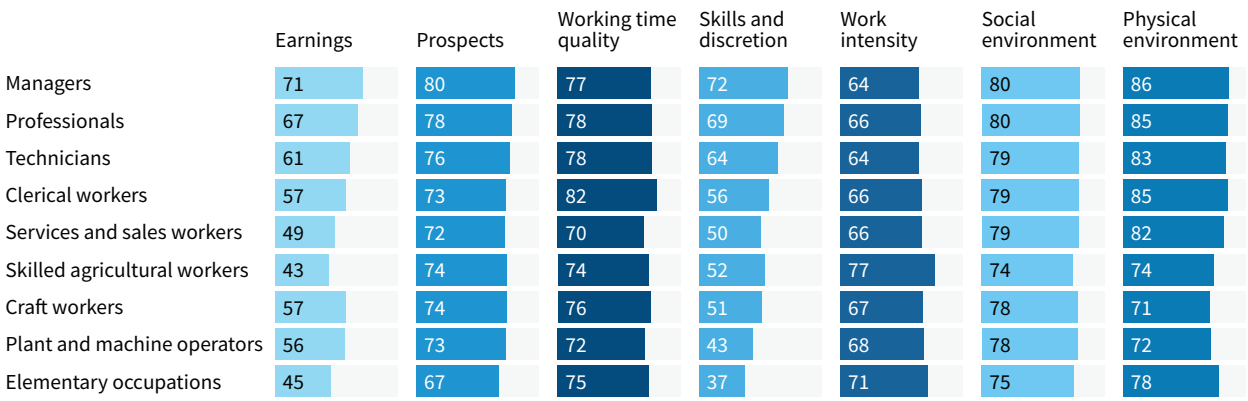
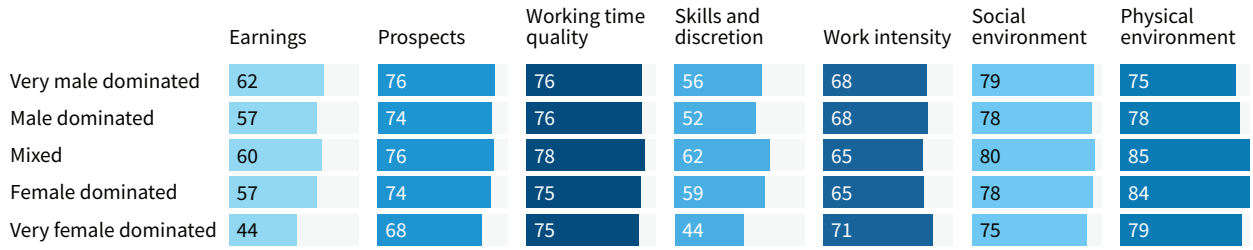


Figure 52: Mean job quality scores in the EU by predominant gender in the occupation



A regression analysis controlling for both job seniority and sector and accounting for unobserved heterogeneity across countries, genders, education levels and occupations reveals the nuances of the descriptive findings. In comparison with mixed-gender occupations, the following differences in job quality index scores are seen. Very male-dominated jobs have slightly worse scores on the Physical environment index (− 1.7 points) and higher scores on the Earnings index (+ 3.6 points). Male-dominated jobs also show lower Skills and discretion scores (− 1.7 points) but no difference in earnings. Female-dominated jobs perform worse across several dimensions, with lower scores on the Prospects (− 1.2 points), Skills and discretion (− 1.2 points), Working time quality (− 2.7 points) and Earnings indices (− 2.0 points). Very female-dominated jobs show higher Skills and discretion (+ 2.7 points) and Work intensity (+ 4.4 points) scores but slightly lower Earnings scores. Overall, mixed-gender occupations display the most balanced job quality outcomes, as they do not entail any of the job quality disadvantage of male- or female-dominated occupations, neither the lower scores on the Physical environment index (although combined with higher Earnings scores) of male-dominated occupations nor the lower scores on Prospects, Skills and discretion and Working time quality of female-dominated occupations.

When it comes to occupations characterised by labour shortages, workers in these occupations experience poorer job quality in many domains (Table 9).

Job quality by sector

Different profiles in terms of job quality emerge for sectors (Figure 53). Workers in the financial sector on average experience the highest job quality across all dimensions except for Work intensity. Workers in the transport sector experience the poorest job quality in four dimensions: Prospects, Working time quality, Skills and discretion and Social environment. Workers in agriculture report the poorest scores in terms of earnings, while workers in the health sector report the poorest scores in terms of work intensity. Workers in the

Table 9: Mean job quality scores in occupations with labour shortages

	Physical environment	Prospects	Skills and discretion	Social environment	Work intensity	Working time quality	Earnings
Medical doctors	75	77	72	71	52	67	72
Nursing and midwifery professionals	74	75	64	79	56	66	59
Cooks	79	73	50	79	61	65	53
Building finishers and related trades workers	70	77	55	80	66	76	60
Sheet and structural metal workers, moulders and welders	64	70	42	80	66	75	59
Blacksmiths, toolmasters and related trades workers	70	71	49	76	69	78	59
Electrical equipment installers and repairers	74	77	56	78	67	78	61
Food processing and related trades workers	77	76	42	78	64	71	55
Heavy truck and bus drivers	73	77	45	76	69	68	58
EU	81	75	57	79	67	76	58

Figure 53: Mean job quality scores in the EU by sector

	Earnings	Prospects	Working time quality	Skills and discretion	Work intensity	Social environment	Physical environment
Agriculture	45	74	73	52	76	77	75
Commerce and hospitality	52	73	73	51	65	79	83
Construction	60	76	77	57	67	80	73
Education	62	74	75	62	68	77	86
Financial services	68	78	82	67	64	82	89
Health	56	74	73	60	63	78	79
Industry	62	74	78	54	67	80	76
Other services	58	75	78	60	68	78	84
Public administration	64	77	79	61	68	80	83
Transport	58	73	72	51	65	76	78

construction sector report the poorest scores on the Physical environment index.

Job quality by workplace size

The overview of job quality by workplace size (Figure 54) shows that there are substantial and significant differences between micro-workplaces and larger workplaces in relation to earnings and skills and discretion. Workers in micro-workplaces have the highest scores on the Work intensity index, that is, they experience work intensity the least. Working time quality scores are highest in large workplaces (and this difference is significant).

Job quality by country

There are significant differences in job quality scores between countries, which reflect different workforce compositions, institutional frameworks and regulations (Figure 55). Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Norway report the highest job quality scores on the most dimensions, while the Western Balkan countries report the lowest job quality scores, on average.

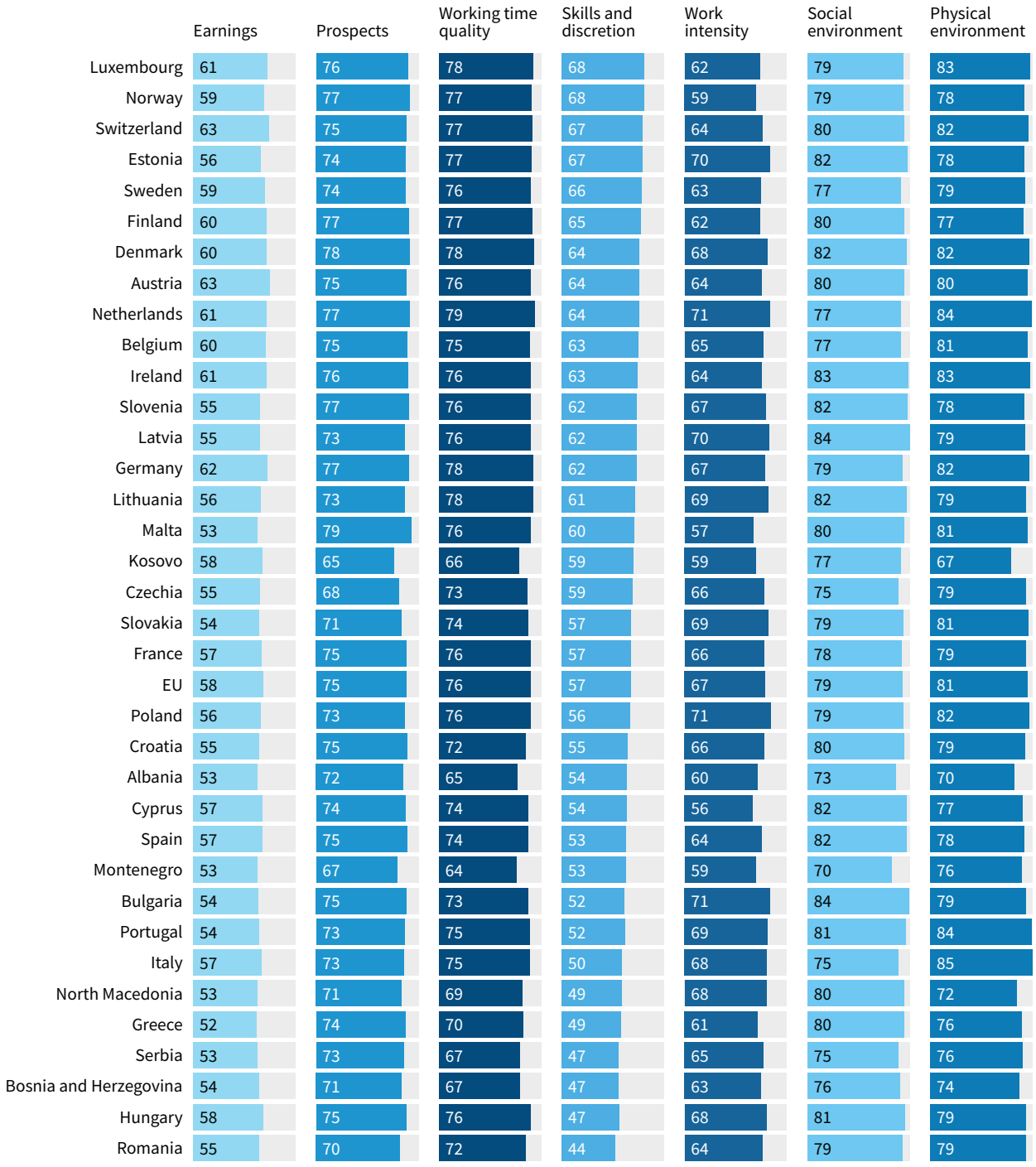
The highest Earnings score is reported in Austria, the highest score for Prospects is reported in Malta, the highest score for Working time quality is reported in the Netherlands, the highest score for Skills and discretion is reported in Luxembourg and Norway, the highest score for Work intensity is reported in Poland, the highest score for Social environment is reported in Latvia and the highest score for Physical environment is reported in Italy. The lowest Earnings scores are reported in Greece, the lowest scores for Prospects and Physical environment are reported in Kosovo, the lowest scores for Working time quality and Social environment are reported in Montenegro, the lowest score for Skills and discretion is reported in Romania and the lowest score for Work intensity is reported in Cyprus.

The gap between Member States is highest in relation to Skills and discretion (a difference of 24 points), followed by Work intensity (15 points), and the gap is lowest for both Physical environment and Working time quality (both 9 points). This indicates significant differences between Member States.

Figure 54: Mean job quality scores in the EU by workplace size

	Earnings	Prospects	Working time quality	Skills and discretion	Work intensity	Social environment	Physical environment
Micro: 1–9 employees	53	75	76	56	70	78	82
Small: 10–49 employees	58	74	75	56	65	80	81
Medium: 50–249 employees	62	75	76	58	64	78	80
Large: 250 employees	68	76	78	64	63	80	80

Figure 55: Mean job quality scores by country



4 Trends in job quality

In this chapter, each job quality index is discussed. For each index, the epidemiological rationale for constructing the index is described, the trends over time are presented, the 2024 scores are presented and the index's components are discussed.

Earnings

Summary

- The scores on the Earnings index reflect the pervasive gender pay gap that is seen across sectors and occupations.
- A majority of workers (85 %) can predict their earnings for the next three months, either accurately or approximately, while 15 % of workers cannot predict their earnings at all.
- In 16 of the 35 countries included in the 2024 survey, fewer than half of all workers are sure of how much they will earn over the next three months.
- The percentage of workers who feel they are not paid appropriately according to their performance and efforts has been decreasing since 2005, from 35 % down to 26 %.
- In 2024, more female workers (30 %) than male workers (24 %) reported not being paid appropriately according to their efforts and performance.

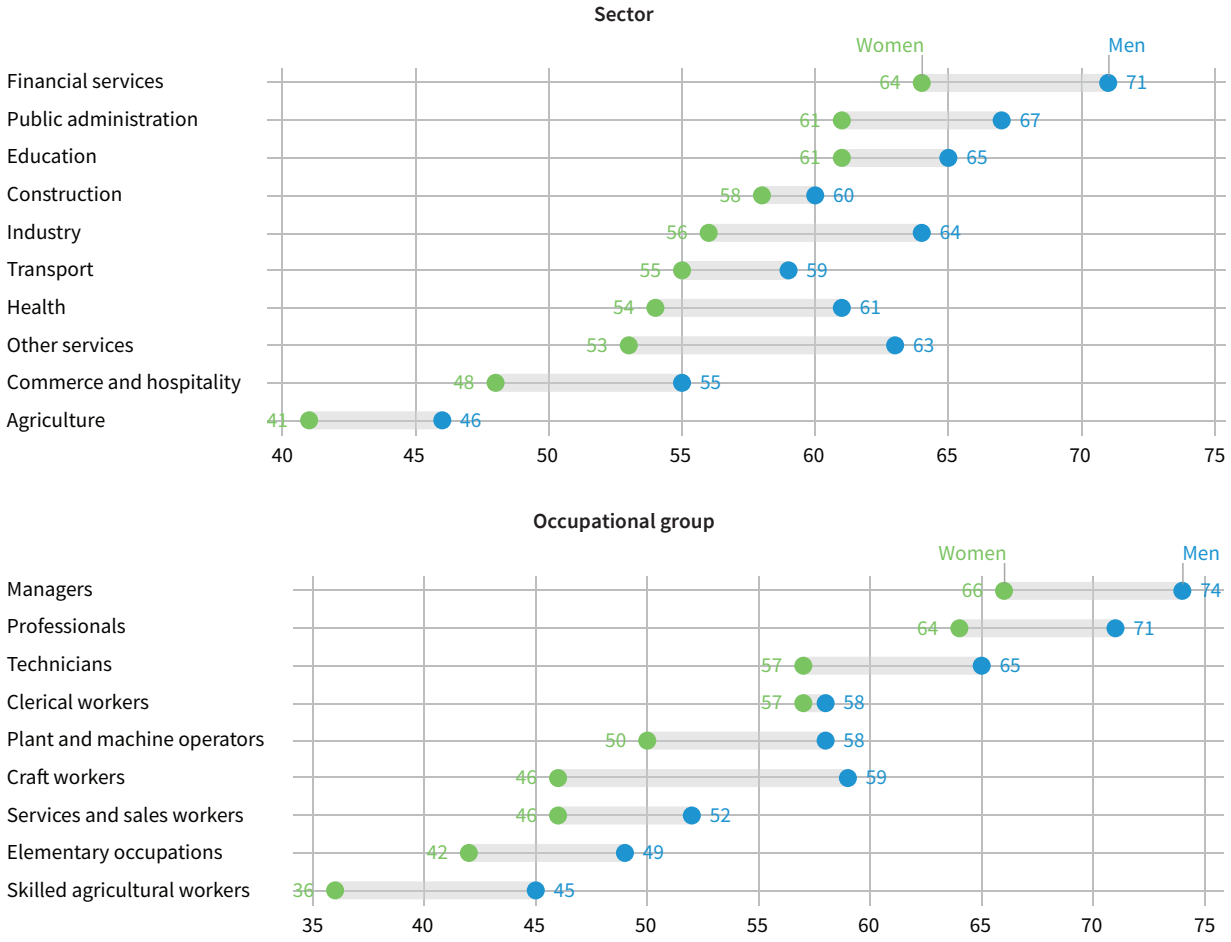
Earnings from work – salary for employees and revenue for self-employed individuals – provide workers with a means to make a living, support individual lifestyles and support their families. Securing earnings is an important reason why people join the labour market. When adequate, earnings provide financial security. Levels of earnings also matter, as they serve as a measure of recognition of one's worthiness and value. For companies, remuneration policies can incentivise performance and support employee retention. Other characteristics of earnings are also of importance to workers, such as fair earnings in relation to efforts and predictable earnings (that is, knowing in advance how much one is going to be paid). Earnings play a crucial role in health through both direct and indirect pathways, with higher earnings allowing greater access to resources like quality healthcare, healthier food and safer living conditions. On the other hand, lower earnings can cause financial stress, which has a negative impact on health and well-being. Income increases are related to improvements in an individual's mental health, and this is most true for those in the lowest income brackets (Thomson et al., 2022).

Earnings index

The Earnings index is a composite indicator based on the respondents' standardised and equivalised monthly earnings, the predictability of earnings and the effort–reward (im)balance (that is, the (mis)match between the efforts individuals put into their work and the rewards they receive in exchange). To give more importance to the strictly monetary aspects of this indicator than the other two aspects, monthly earnings contribute 50 % to the final score, whereas the other two aspects contribute 25 % each. The earnings of both employees and self-employed individuals are included in the index.

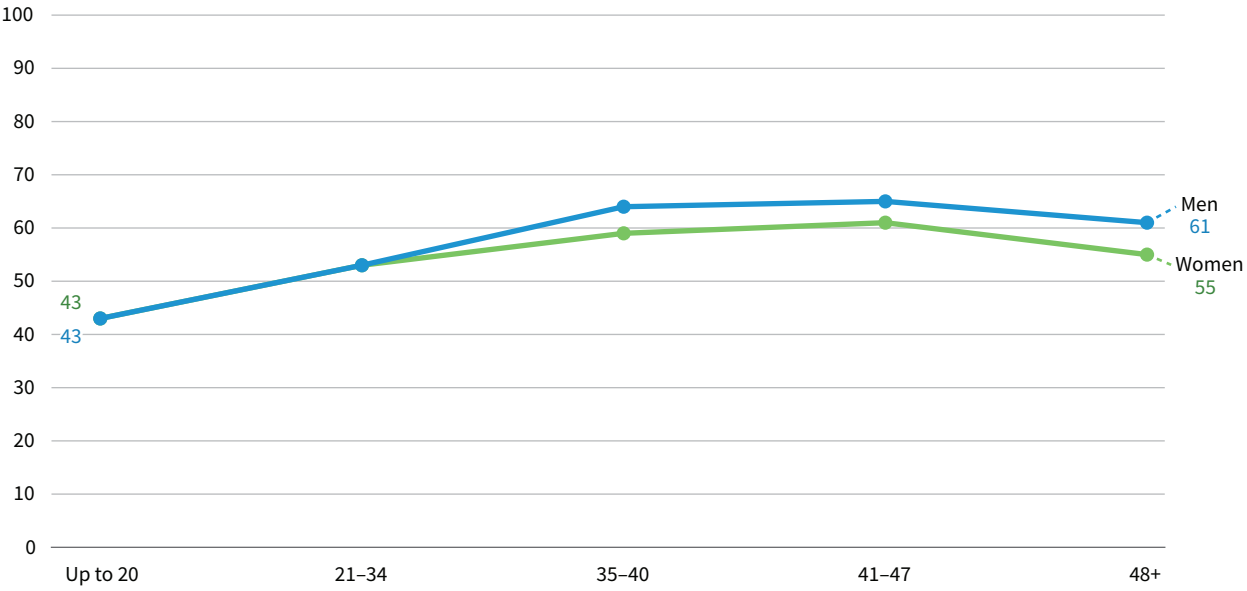
The scores on the Earnings index reflect the pervasive gender pay gap, which is associated with the undervaluation of some jobs that are predominantly done by women. As shown in Figure 56, which depicts the Earnings index scores of men and women by sector and occupational group, there is a clear gender gap across the board. The only exception is for clerical workers, a group that tends to have a relatively smaller gender pay gap than other occupational groups (Eurofound, 2021b) and also relatively larger shares of both men and women reporting that they are able to accurately predict their earnings.

Figure 56: Mean Earnings index scores of men and women in the EU by sector and occupational group



On average, the Earnings index scores are the same for men and women working up to 34 hours per week. For longer hours, however (that is, the situation of more than three quarters of the workforce in the EU), men seem to have higher earnings than their female counterparts. The gender gap in the Earnings index is largest among those working 48 hours or more per week (Figure 57).

Figure 57: Mean Earnings index scores in the EU by usual working hours and gender



Earnings predictability

It has been widely established that insecure and/or precarious working conditions can have a negative effect on physical and mental health. Research has shown that workers with financial insecurity are more likely to report depressive symptoms, higher levels of absenteeism, weaker innovative behaviours, higher levels of stress and greater work–family conflicts (see Odle-Dusseau et al., 2018; Sanchez-Gomez et al., 2021; McBride et al., 2023). The Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions Directive establishes that employers in the EU are required to inform workers of the essential aspects of the employment relationship, namely 'the remuneration, including the initial basic amount, any other component elements, if applicable, indicated separately, and the frequency and method of payment of the remuneration to which the worker is entitled'.

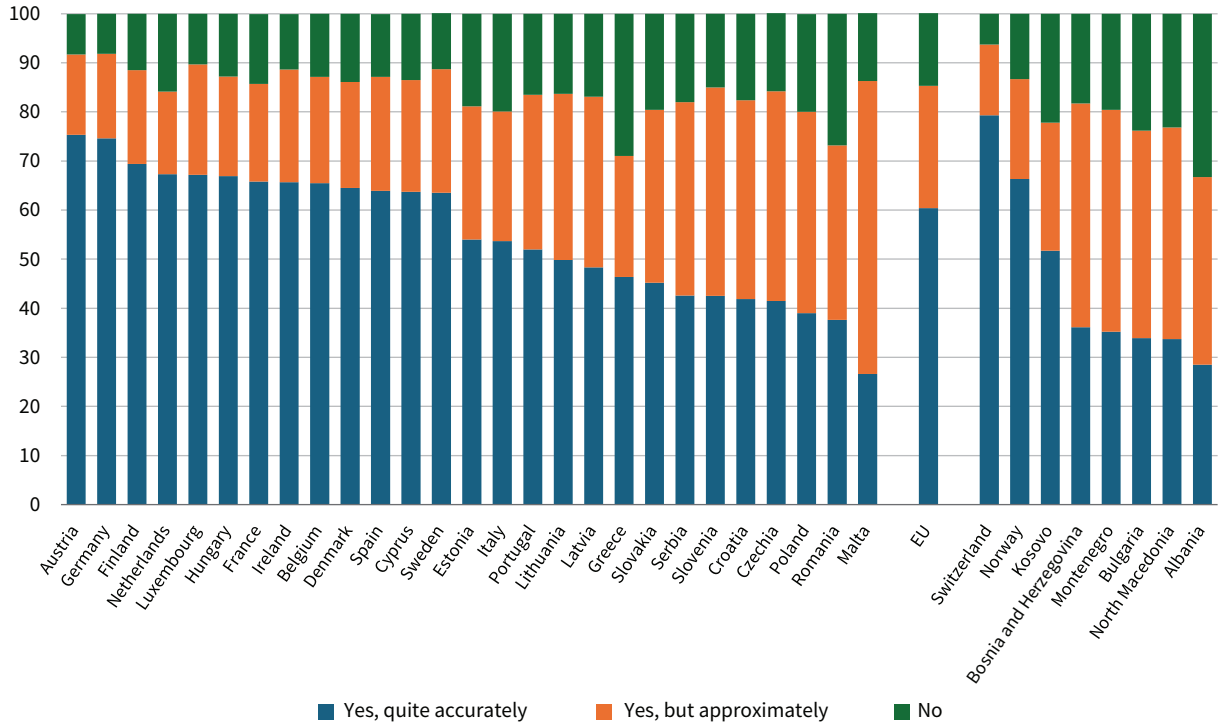
The EWCS 2024 asked respondents if they could tell in advance how much they were going to earn in the next three months. The majority, 6 in 10, replied that they could tell in advance how much they would earn quite accurately. A further 25 % also said that they could predict their earnings in advance, but only approximately. The remaining 15 % replied that they could not tell how much they would earn. There are many reasons why a worker may not be able to predict their earnings in the next three months, such as uncertainty about the continuation of their job or uncertainty about the turnover and sales they will achieve (with this latter reason more frequent among self-employed individuals). Earnings unpredictability is highest for solo self-employed individuals (53 %) and self-employed individuals with employees (39 %) but it is also high for workers with no contract or another type of contract (34 %). Whatever the reason for such unpredictability, and even if accepted by workers, it can be a source of stress.

Uncertainty about earnings is reported by relatively more male workers (17 %) than their female counterparts (13 %). It is also more prominent among older workers (over the age of 64), both male and female: 26 % and 20 %, respectively.

In terms of sector, this uncertainty is more prominent among workers in agriculture (50 %) and construction (24 %) and less so in education (6 %) and public administration (4 %). As regards occupation, skilled agricultural workers (49 %), workers in elementary occupations (20 %) and craft workers (19 %) are also more prone to report such uncertainty, whereas clerical workers (7 %) are less exposed to it.

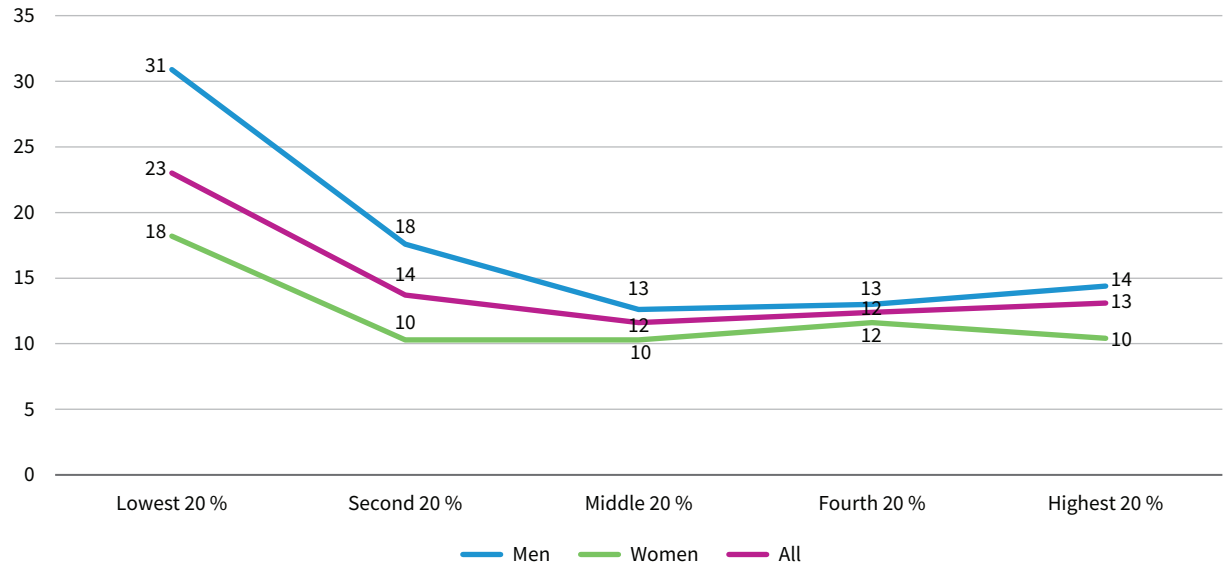
There is significant variation across countries regarding earnings predictability (Figure 58). On the one hand, in Switzerland, Austria and Germany, the vast majority of workers (75 % or more) know quite accurately how much they will earn in the next three months and less than 10 % report uncertainty. On the other hand, in Greece, Romania and Albania, more than 25 % report not knowing how much they will earn and less than half know accurately.

Figure 58: Earnings predictability by country (%)



Note: The legend shows the responses available to the respondents in answer to the question 'Can you tell in advance how much you are going to earn in the next three months?'

Figure 59: Inability to predict earnings in the EU by income level and gender (%)



Note: The figure shows the percentage of respondents stating that they cannot tell in advance how much they are going to earn in the next three months.

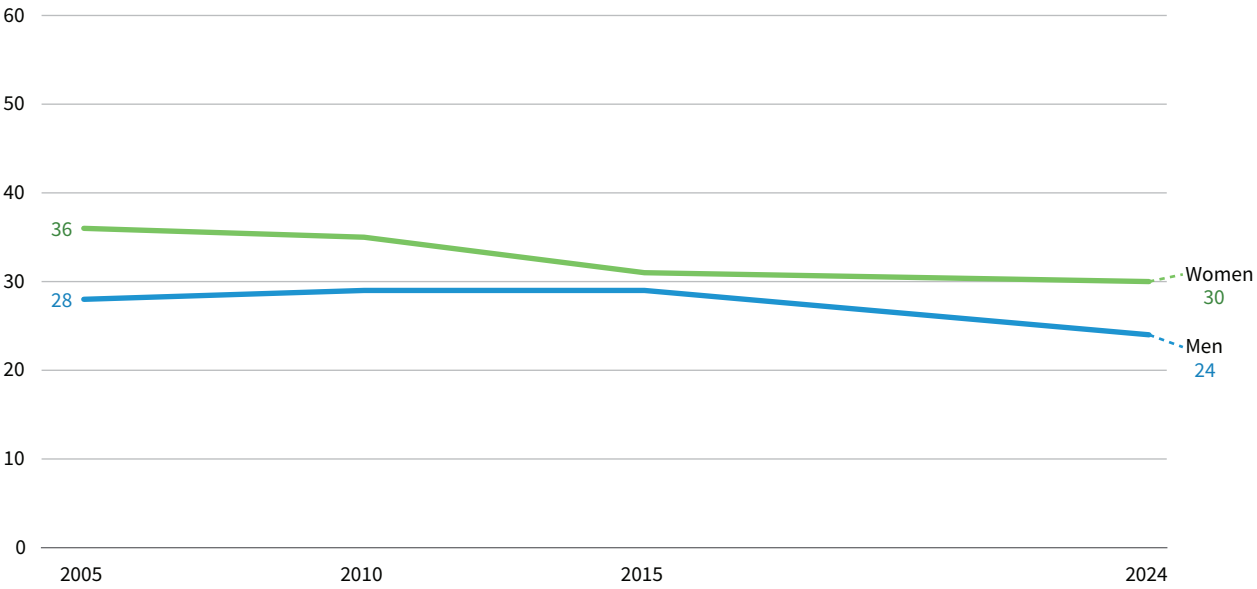
As shown in Figure 59, the predictability of earnings is associated with workers' income level. Earnings unpredictability is greater for those with lower income levels and lower for those with average earnings. Unpredictability is slightly greater for men in the highest income brackets.

Effort–reward (im)balance

Siegrist's effort–reward imbalance theory (Siegrist, 1996) postulates that the mismatch between the effort that individuals put into their work and the rewards they receive (including salary, recognition and career advancement) can lead to harmful health implications, such as coronary heart disease, depression-related outcomes, sleep problems and suicidal ideation (Niedhammer et al., 2021).

Some 16 % of the EU workforce disagree and 11 % strongly disagree that they feel they get appropriately paid when considering all of their efforts and achievements in their job. Overall, 24 % of male workers and 30 % of female workers disagree that they are paid appropriately, an improvement since 2010, when 29 % of male workers and 35 % of female workers did not think they were appropriately paid (Figure 60).

Figure 60: Shares of workers in the EU reporting that they are not paid fairly according to their efforts by gender, 2005–2024 (%)

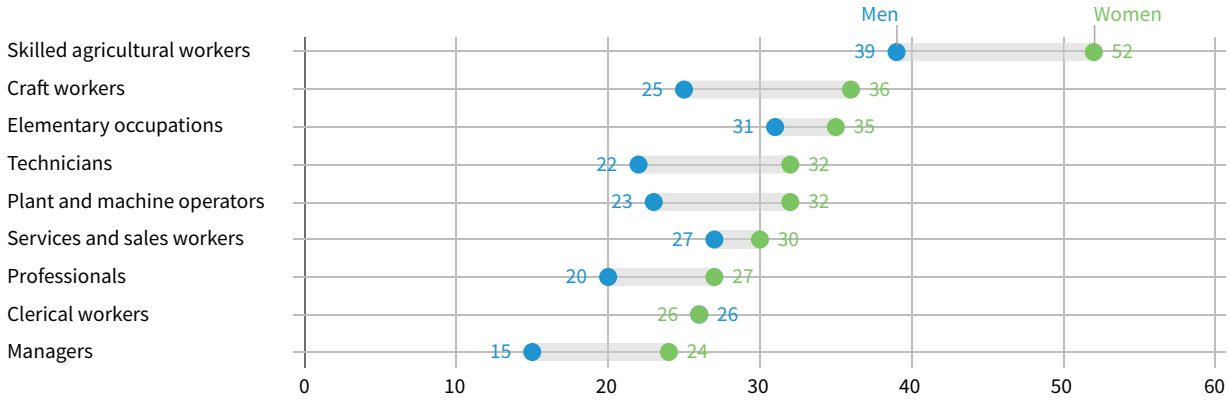


Source: EWCS series.

The share of workers reporting an imbalance between their efforts and earnings varies across countries, from about 15 % in Poland to 36 % or more in Cyprus, France, Latvia and Spain. In most countries, there are larger shares of women than men reporting such an imbalance, with the exceptions being Greece, Italy, Poland and Slovakia.

This imbalance is reported by larger shares of women in all sectors of activity, except construction. In this sector, where women tend to work in clerical jobs and men in operational jobs, an imbalance between efforts and earnings is reported by about 21 % of both men and women. In terms of occupation, the gender difference remains, except for clerical workers (imbalance reported by approximately 26 % of both men and women); clerical workers, together with professionals and managers, are the least likely to report an imbalance between effort and earnings (Figure 61).

Figure 61: Shares of workers in the EU reporting an effort–reward imbalance by occupation and gender (%)



Working time quality

Summary

- The overall trend is that scores on the Working time quality index have been improving for both men and women over the last two decades. The gender gap in this area has closed, with men's scores catching up to women's scores in 2024, thanks to positive trends in working hours and arrangements.
- The share of workers putting in long hours has decreased significantly. Since 2005, the percentage of workers sometimes putting in more than 10 hours a day has fallen from 37 % to 28 %, and the share of those working over 48 hours a week has reduced from 19 % to 11 %.
- Workers are gaining increased flexibility and more control over their hours. However, while half of men have some control, only 43 % of women do. The percentage of employees who are able to adapt their working hours has increased greatly since 2010.
- The share of workers on 'atypical' schedules, such as weekends or nights, has been decreasing since 2015. However, the share of people doing shift work has remained stable.

The duration and organisation of working time are important for job quality for two main reasons. The first is that working time plays a direct role in workers' health and well-being. Working time duration also has an impact on exposure to any workplace risks that are present in their job: the longer the working hours, the more exposed workers are to workplace risks. The second is that both the duration and the organisation of working time determine to a great extent how well working time and non-working time fit with each other. That fit, or the lack thereof, has an impact on workers' health and well-being while also determining workers' availability to work throughout their lives.

Numerous studies have examined the impact of working time (and the different subdimensions of it) on health. It is important to note that there are more studies on working time risks and demands than on resources.

Long working hours increase the risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, obesity, depression, sleep problems,

burnout and breast cancer, but also miscarriage, preterm delivery and low birth weight (Niedhammer et al., 2021). Short working hours that are not aligned with workers' preferences have been associated with an increased risk of depression (Nielsen et al., 2023). Short recovery times between working periods, for example less than 11 hours (Vedaa et al., 2016), have detrimental effects on acute health problems. Night work has been widely studied and its effects on cardiovascular health, poor mental health (Torquati et al., 2019), diabetes, being overweight/obese and hypertension are well documented (Boini et al., 2022; Silva et al., 2023). Research has also established the link between night work and breast cancer (Lin et al., 2015). Working in one's free time entails some health risks, particularly when it is combined with long hours (e.g. long days, evening work or long weeks) (Bernstrom et al., 2025). There is evidence that exposure to instability in work schedules and routines is associated with psychological distress, poor sleep quality and even unhappiness (Schneider et al., 2019). Research has confirmed some increased risk of weekend work in terms of, for example, poorer mental health and lower sleep quality (Weston et al., 2024). Working at weekends may deprive workers of the chance to recover from fatigue and it also decreases time with friends and family.

On the other hand, employee-friendly flexibility and work time control are resources for workers that support their health and well-being and better reconciliation between work and non-work time (Costa et al., 2006). They support opportunities for recovery. These arrangements allow workers to take a break or stop work before they are too fatigued. Working time control can lessen the build-up of health problems, particularly regarding mental health (Albrecht et al., 2020). It can also help to prevent burnout (Albrecht et al., 2024) and can provide a buffer against developing depression (Albrecht et al., 2017). Changes in working time arrangements, especially those that give employees more influence on scheduling their working time, have positive effects on work–life balance and can support health and well-being (Aust et al., 2023).

The Working time quality index covers the typical aspects of working time duration and scheduling, but also more contemporary issues such as autonomy over working time arrangements, predictability of working hours and flexibility (Table 10).

Table 10: Proportions of EU workers reporting the subdimensions of the Working time quality index (%) and mean index scores, 2010–2024

Subdimension	Item	2010	2015	2024
Duration	Long working hours (48 hours or more a week)	16	15	11
	No recovery period (less than 11 hours between 2 working days in the past month)	*	23	20
	Long working days (10 hours or more per day)	32	31	28
	Non-voluntary short working hours (less than 20 hours in main job and preferring longer hours)	5	6	6
Working time organisation	Weekend work (usually working for at least one hour, at least one weekend per month)	52	52	47
	Night work	17	19	17
	Shift work	17	21	21
	○ Daily split shift (with a break of at least four hours in between)	8	7	6
	○ Permanent shift (morning, afternoon or night)	38	40	38
	○ Alternating/rotating shifts	50	50	53
	○ Other type of shift work	4	4	3
Flexibility	Can take a break when you wish (always or most of the time)	47	47	51
	Very easy to arrange to take an hour or two off during working hours to take care of personal or family matters	*	24	28
	Work in free time to meet work demands (several times per month or more)	31	21	20
Working time arrangements	Control over working time arrangements			
	○ Set by the company/organisation	60	56	53
	○ Can choose between different schedules	7	9	9
	○ Can adapt working hours (flexitime)	16	18	22
	○ Entirely determined by self	18	17	16

Working time arrangements	Changes in working time arrangements			
	○ No change	65	69	61
	○ Yes, informed the same day	8	5	6
	○ Yes, informed the day before	9	8	10
	○ Yes, informed several days in advance	13	14	16
	○ Yes, informed several weeks in advance	4	5	7
Predictability	Working hours in the next month are quite accurately predictable	*	*	59
	Working hours in the next month are approximately predictable	*	*	23
Overall index score	*Trend of index score*	*74*	*75*	*76*
	Full index 2024 score			*76*

* Question not asked at this time.
Notes: Italic text indicates mean index scores, not proportions (%). The trend of the index score includes all items covered by the survey since 2010, while the full index 2024 score includes all items available in 2024. This explains possible discrepancies between the figures reported. The percentages shown for the various types of shift indicate the proportions of the total number of respondents reporting shift work.
Source: EWCS series.

Working time quality over time

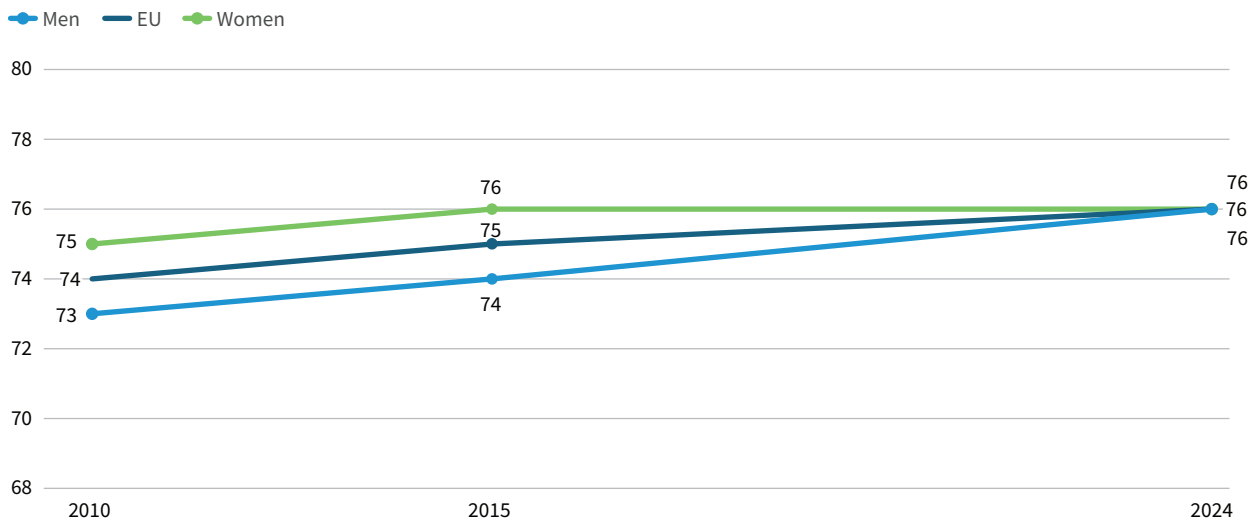
Overall, working time quality has improved across the board over the last decade and a half. There are fewer workers reporting working long days (10 hours or more per day) and long weeks (more than 48 hours per week). Similarly, there are fewer workers reporting weekend work. At the same time, the share of workers reporting not having enough rest time between working days has decreased, while an increased share find it very easy to arrange to take an hour or two off during working hours to take care of personal or family matters. However, in 2024, there were relatively more workers saying that they worked in their free time to meet work demands than in 2015. Working time control has also been improving.

This progress is reflected in the Working time quality index, which has been improving over the last two decades for both women and men, with the latter catching up with their female counterparts in 2024 (Figure 62).

Working time quality index

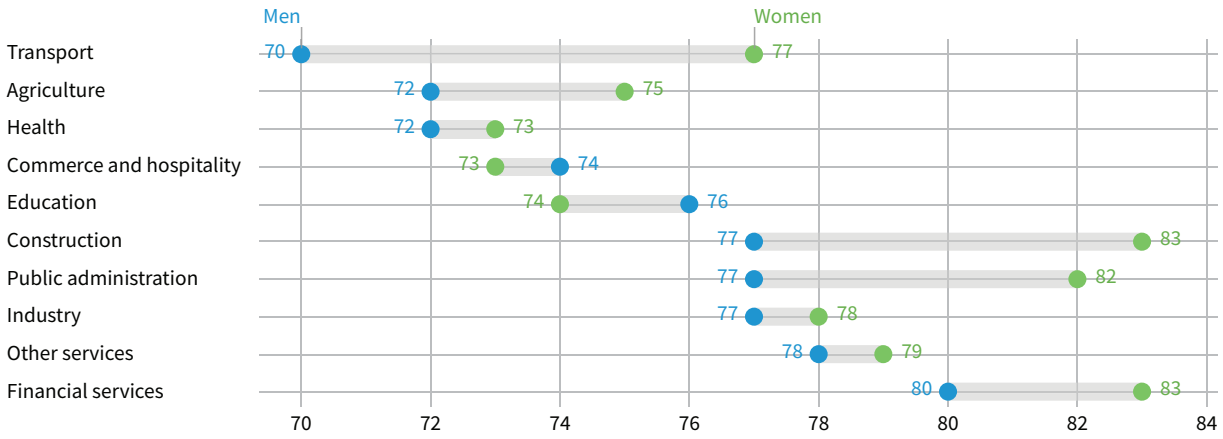
In 2024, the mean Working time quality index in the EU reached 76 points for both women and men. Across occupations, Working time quality is lower for services and sales workers (70 points) and plant and machine operators (72 points) and much higher for clerical workers (82 points). Working time quality also varies across sectors of activity, with large gender gaps in some of them (Figure 63). Male workers in transport, construction, public administration, agriculture and financial services display much worse Working time quality scores than their female counterparts. Education and Commerce and hospitality are the only sectors in which women's Working time quality scores are worse than those of men. All other sectors display a small or no gender gap.

Figure 62: Mean Working time quality index scores in the EU by gender, 2010–2024



Source: EWCS series.

Figure 63: Mean Working time quality index scores in the EU by sector and gender



Paid working hours per week

Between 35 and 40 hours of paid work in the main job over 5 days per week was the predominant working pattern in the EU in 2024, being reported by 51 % of workers (56 % of men and 46 % of women). This share was larger than in 2015 (43 %). This pattern varies across the Member States, being more prominent in Lithuania and Poland (60 %), Portugal (63 %), Romania (65 %), Bulgaria (68 %) and Hungary (74 %) and less so in Greece (39 %) and Italy (40 %). In the Netherlands, where part-time arrangements are more common than elsewhere, half of the respondents reported working fewer than 35 hours during 5 or fewer days of the week in their main job.

Working 6 or 7 days per week is most common in Romania (19 %), Portugal (20 %), Cyprus (21 %), Croatia (29 %), Italy (34 %) and Greece (38 %). In Greece, those reporting 6 or 7 usual working days and 41 hours or more per week represent 30 % of all workers, while in Italy they represent 16 % of all workers and in Romania they represent 13 %. In Denmark, this pattern is reported by only 3 % of workers.

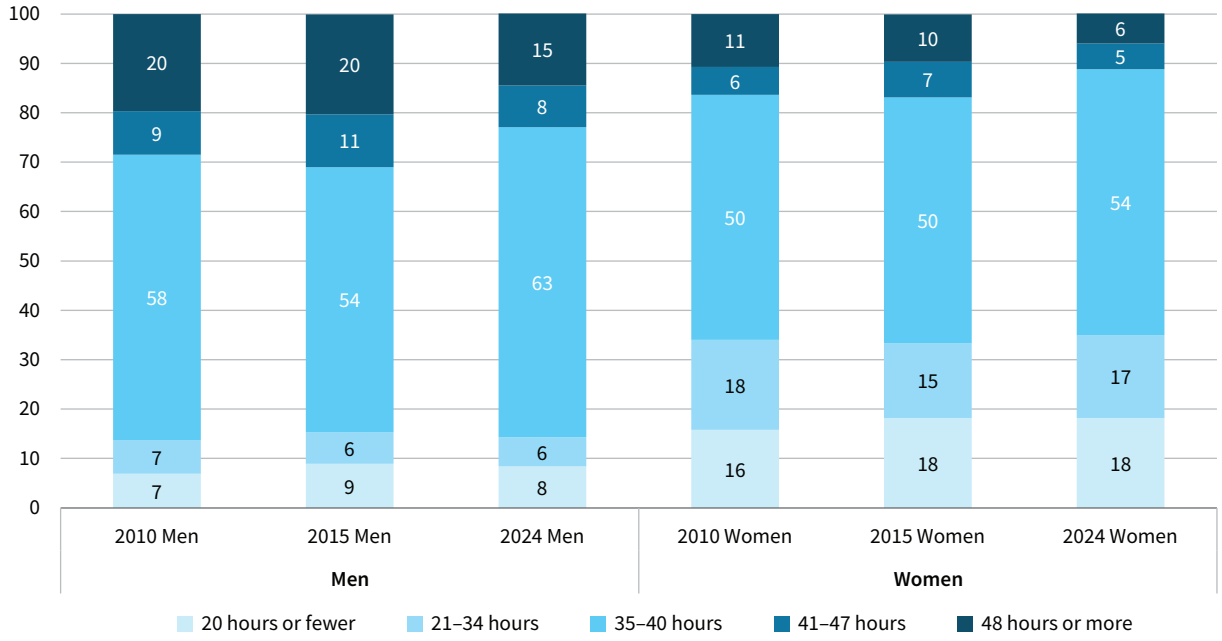
Working four days per week in their main job is reported by 8 % of all EU workers (5 % of men and 11 % of women). This work pattern is more common in the Netherlands (reported by 26 % of workers) and in Belgium (13 %); since 2022, employees in Belgium have had the legal right to condense their full-time hours into a four-day work week. In Portugal and Spain, where there have been recent attempts to promote a four-day week, only 2 % of workers report this pattern.

The average usual weekly hours (Box 6) for men and women continue to decrease (Figure 64): in 2024, the average was 38.8 hours for men and 33.8 hours for women, down from 39.9 and 34.5 hours, respectively, in 2015. In 2024, there were relatively more men and women working between 35 and 40 hours per week than before. At the same time, the share of workers working fewer than 34 hours has decreased slightly to return to its 2010 level (24 %), while the share of those working more than 41 hours per week decreased from 24 % in 2015 to 18 % in 2024.

Box 6: Usual hours versus contractual hours

The vast majority of employees whose expected working hours are mentioned in their employment contract usually work those same hours in practice (84 % of all employees: 86 % of women and 82 % of men). A small proportion reported usually working fewer hours (approximately 3 % of both men and women) while about 14 % reported working longer hours than those mentioned in their contract (15 % of men and 12 % of women). Working beyond contractual hours is more common among those working in education (26 % of men and 19 % of women) and among men working in agriculture (19 %), other services (19 %) and transport (18 %). Working beyond contractual hours is also more prominent among managers (33 % of men and 26 % of women) and professionals (21 % of men and 16 % of women).

Figure 64: Prevalence of different numbers of usual weekly working hours in main job in the EU by gender, 2010–2024 (%)



Source: EWCS series.

Very short working hours

Overall, 13 % of EU workers reported very short working hours (20 hours or less per week) in their main job, with a larger share among women (18 %) than among men (8 %). Very short weekly working hours are more common in Denmark (19 %), Germany (19 %) and the Netherlands (23 %) and less so in Hungary (4 %), Croatia (5 %) and Bulgaria, Lithuania and Slovakia (6 %). Very short weekly working hours are more common among workers in elementary occupations (35 %), services and sales workers (18 %) and skilled agricultural workers (16 %) and in the education (20 %), other services (18 %) and health (17 %) sectors. Most workers working very short hours are happy with their current hours but about 45 % would like to work longer hours, possibly indicating that their current situation is non-voluntary. This share is largest in other services (52 %), industry and transport (both 48 %) and construction and health (both 47 %). Workers with short non-voluntary working hours represent approximately 6 % of the total workforce, and this is accounted for in the Working time quality index.

Very long working weeks

According to Article 6 of the EU Working Time Directive (Directive 2003/88/EC), the average working time for each 7-day period, including overtime, must not exceed 48 hours. In 2024, 11 % of the EU workforce reported that they usually work 48 hours or more per week in their main job; that percentage has nearly halved since 2005 (19 %). The share of workers usually working 48 hours or more per week is larger among men (15 %) than among women (6 %). Long working weeks are more common in Greece (reported by 33 % of all workers), Poland and Romania (both 16 %) and Cyprus, Italy and Slovakia (15 %) and less so in Germany and the Netherlands (7 %) and Denmark (5 %). They are also more common among workers in agriculture (38 %), construction (17 %) and transport (15 %) and among skilled agricultural workers (37 %) and managers (27 %). Very long working weeks are reported by much larger shares of self-employed individuals with employees (51 %) and own-account self-employed individuals (30 %) than employees with permanent or fixed-term/temporary contracts (around 7 %).

Long working days

About 27 % of respondents in the EU (44 % of men and 21 % of women) reported working more than 10 hours a day at least once in the month prior to the interview (down from 31 % in 2015). Among those reporting working long days at least once in a month, on average, men worked approximately 6.6 long days per month and women worked 6 long days per month. Workers aged 30–54, who are more likely to have substantial care responsibilities than other age groups and are building their working career at the same time, are also those with the greatest prevalence of long days. The average number of long days varies by country, being larger in Greece, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal and Romania, with 8 or more long days per month, and smaller in Denmark, Kosovo and the Netherlands, with an average of 5 long days or less per month.

Self-employed workers, who tend to work longer hours than employees, are more likely to report long working days: 56 % of self-employed individuals with employees and 41 % of those without employees reported working at least one long day in the month prior to the survey.

A higher proportion of employees with permanent contracts work long days (27 %) than those with fixed-term contracts (19 %) or with no contract (22 %).

Managers, skilled agricultural workers and professionals are the occupations with the largest proportions of individuals reporting long working days, while clerical workers and elementary occupations have the smallest proportions.

Rest between working days

A lack of rest between working days can cause significant damage to workers themselves, the people they work with and the people they work for (Eurofound, 2019b). The Working Time Directive establishes that all workers should have adequate rest periods, which must include minimum daily, weekly and annual periods of rest and adequate breaks. Some exceptions to this rule have been included in the legislation applicable in Member States.

In 2024, 1 out of every 5 workers in the EU reported not having 11 hours between 2 working days at least once over the month prior to the survey, which is a slightly smaller share than in 2015 (23 %). Male workers (22 %) are more likely than their female counterparts (17 %) to report not having such a rest period, representing a large decrease compared with 2015 (27 % in the case of men).

The share of workers reporting not having the minimum period of rest at least once over the month prior to the survey increases with the usual number of days worked per week in their main job, and with weekly working hours (including secondary jobs): 40 % of those usually working 6 or 7 days per week and 45 % of those usually working 48 hours or more per week reported lacking proper rest at least once over the previous month. Self-employed individuals are more likely to report a lack of rest than any category among employees, although those with a contract of fixed but unknown duration and those with no contract are also prone to reporting the same.

The share of workers without such a period of rest between two working days is larger among those working in micro-establishments (one to nine employees; 24 %) than those working in larger establishments (18–19 %). Agriculture, transport, other services, health, and commerce and hospitality are the sectors of activity with the largest proportions of workers reporting having fewer than 11 hours between 2 days of work. Skilled agricultural workers, managers, and services and sales workers are the occupations with above-average proportions of workers reporting the same.

Bulgaria, Cyprus, Hungary, Malta and Poland display smaller shares (10–12 %), while shares are larger in Belgium, Finland and Sweden (24–25 %). Spain continues to display an exceptionally large share (40 %) compared with other countries, but this share is, nevertheless, smaller than in 2015 (when it was close to 50 % of all workers).

Working time organisation

In certain circumstances, work is performed at times that are usually reserved for other activities or resting, including nights and weekends. The literature shows that the negative impacts of working shifts and nights can also have effects on family and social life and the organisational context of work.

In the family and social domain, shift work sometimes requires work to take place during periods that are highly valued from a family and social point of view, such as evenings, nights and/or weekends. This can trigger conflicts between work and family, which in turn can lead to problems in family relationships and/or consequences for other members of the household. In terms of the organisational context, the literature has found an association between shift work, especially if carried out at night, and aspects such as safety (greater risk of accidents), (lower) productivity and (greater) worker absenteeism (Silva et al., 2023).

Shifts

According to the Working Time Directive, '"shift work" means any method of organising work in shifts whereby workers succeed each other at the same work stations according to a certain pattern, including a rotating pattern, and which may be continuous or discontinuous, entailing the need for workers to work at different times over a given period of days or weeks'.

The share of workers reporting working shifts in 2024 was 21 %, roughly the same as in 2015. Over this period, there was a change in the most prevalent types of shifts, with alternating/rotating shifts becoming somewhat more prominent (53 %) than in 2015 (50 %), while permanent shifts (38 %), daily split shifts (6 %) and other types (3 %) reduced slightly in importance.

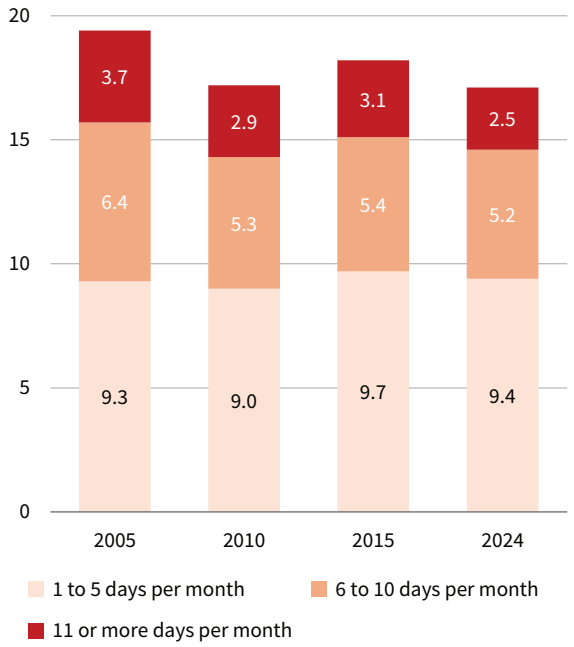
Working in shifts is particularly prevalent in the health (34 %), transport (32 %), commerce and hospitality (31 %) and industry (30 %) sectors and among services and sales workers (41 %) and plant and machine operators (40 %). Alternating/rotating shifts are the most common shift type in most sectors of activity. In agriculture, daily split shifts – with a break of at least four hours in between the two daily periods of work – are more common than in any other sector of activity (15 %), and, in construction, education, financial services, health and industry, permanent shifts (morning, afternoon or night) are the most common type among shift workers.

Nights

In 2024, some 17 % of workers in the EU reported working two or more hours between 22:00 and 05:00 at least once a month, a share that is marginally lower than in 2010 and 2015 (18 %). Working nights is more

common among men (21 %) than women (12 %), especially among men who work in transport (39 %), public administration (31 %) and health (33 %). A relatively large share of female workers in the health sector also report night work (24 %). Figure 65 shows the numbers of days per month that workers are engaged in night work.

Figure 65: Prevalence of different numbers of days per month working nights in the EU, 2005–2024 (%)



Source: EWCS series.

Weekends

Work at the weekend is often part of weekly work schedules that are themselves 'atypical' (such as shift work, staggered days in the mornings or evenings, long weeks or short weeks). Overall, in 2024, 47 % of workers reported working at weekends at least once a month for at least one hour (50 % of men and 45 % of women), which is a smaller share than in 2015 (55 % overall: 59 % of men and 52 % of women). In 2015 (and previous editions of the EWCS), respondents were asked separately about how many times per month they worked on Saturdays and on Sundays while, in 2024, respondents were asked how many times per month they worked, for at least one hour, at weekends.

The share of those working weekends is much larger among those working 48 hours per week or more (83 %), with more than half of these working every weekend. Weekend work is prominent in agriculture (74 %), commerce and hospitality (67 %), health (52 %) and transport (51 %) and is reported by more than three quarters of both skilled agricultural workers and services and sales workers.

Working hours predictability

Unpredictable and irregular working hours, limited autonomy over working time arrangements and short advance notice of changes are different dimensions of what are considered to be precarious working time arrangements (Lambert et al., 2019).

Most workers in the EU know in advance how many hours they will work the following month (59 %), while 23 % know only approximately and 18 % do not know at all.

Working time unpredictability is greater among younger workers (under 25 years of age): 31 % of young female and 22 % of young male workers know their upcoming working hours only approximately and an additional 17 % and 27 %, respectively, do not know their upcoming hours at all. Some 41 % of skilled agricultural workers, 27 % of managers and 22 % of plant and machine operators do not know in advance how many hours they will work the following month. In terms of sector, this is the case for 42 % of workers in agriculture, 26 % in construction and 24 % in transport.

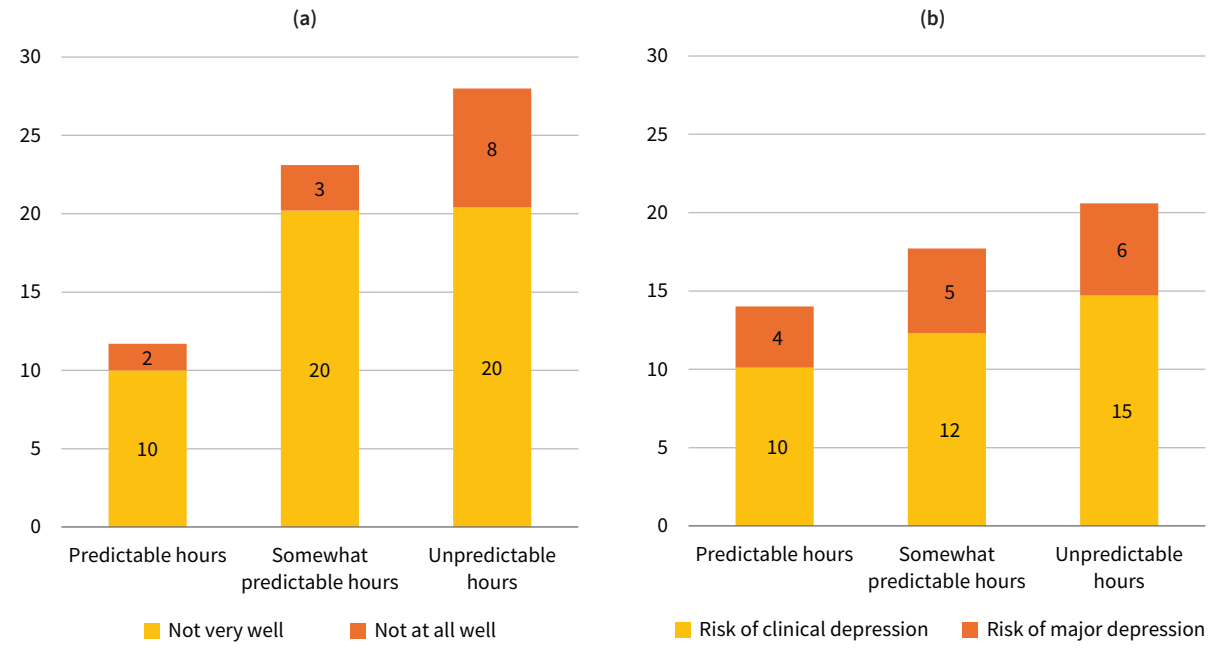
Unpredictable hours are reported by a larger share of own-account self-employed individuals (47 %) than of self-employed individuals with employees (39 %), and also by considerable shares of temporary agency workers (27 %) and workers without an employment contract (31 %).

Work–life balance improves with predictability, as does workers' self-reported well-being (Figure 66).

Working time arrangements

About half of the EU workforce (53 %) have their working time arrangements set by the organisation they work for with no possibility of change. Some 9 % say they can choose between several fixed schedules, while 22 % report they can adapt their working hours within certain limits. For the remainder (16 %), working hours

Figure 66: (a) Degree of fit between working hours and family and social commitments (work–life balance) and (b) risk of depression by working hours predictability in the EU (%)

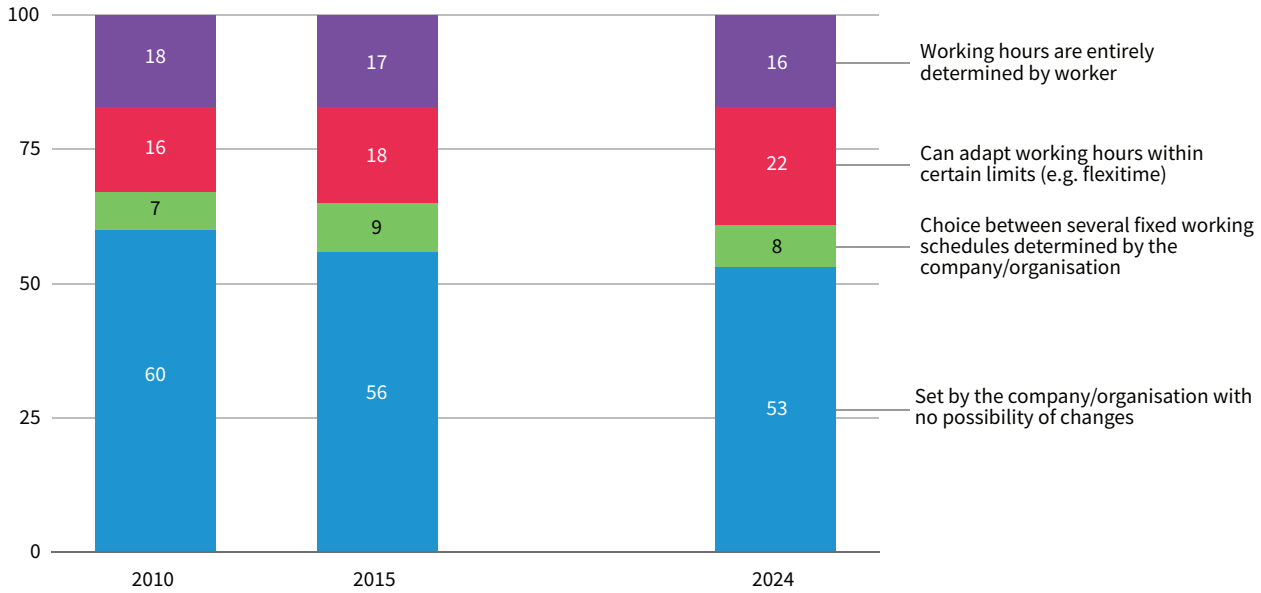


are entirely determined by themselves. Figure 67 shows that, since 2010, there has been a reduction in the share of workers reporting that their working time arrangements are set by their organisation without the possibility of change. This is accompanied by an increase in the share of workers reporting flexible working time arrangements in which they can adapt their working hours within certain limits.

Working time arrangements are, of course, different for employees and self-employed individuals. In the case of employees, more than 61 % of them have working time arrangements set by the organisation they work for.

Flexitime is available to 24 % and a choice of fixed schedules is reported by 9 %. Only 6 % of employees report having full autonomy over their working hours. Legally speaking, self-employed individuals should have full autonomy over their working hours and, indeed, 75 % of the self-declared self-employed individuals reported having full autonomy over their working hours. An additional 14 % reported working in a flexitime regime. The others reported that working time is fully set by the organisation they work for (7 %) or that they can choose between certain parameters determined by the organisation (4 %).

Figure 67: Prevalence of different working time arrangements in the EU, 2010–2024 (%)



Note: Figure shows percentages of workers (employees and self-employed individuals).
Source: EWCS series.

Managers and skilled agricultural workers are the least likely to have their working hours determined by their company or organisation, whereas plant and machine operators and those in elementary occupations are most likely to have their working hours determined by their company/organisation. Larger shares of workers reporting flexitime or full autonomy over their working hours are found in agriculture, financial services and other services. Some 60 % or more of workers in the education, industry and transport sectors have their working hours set by their organisation.

Workers whose working time arrangements are set by the company or who can choose between several fixed schedules were also asked if there are regular changes to these arrangements and, if so, how long in advance they are informed about those changes. Most of them (61 %) reported that they do not experience regular changes to their working time arrangements. If changes happen, many workers are informed days (16 % of the total) or even weeks (7 %) in advance. However, notice can be short for others: 10 % stated that they are informed the day before and another 6 % stated that they are informed on the same day. Short notice of changes to working time arrangements (on the day or the day before) is more common in the agriculture and health sectors and among skilled agricultural workers and services and sales workers in terms of occupation. Workers reporting changes to working time arrangements at short notice are more likely to report having a poor work–life balance.

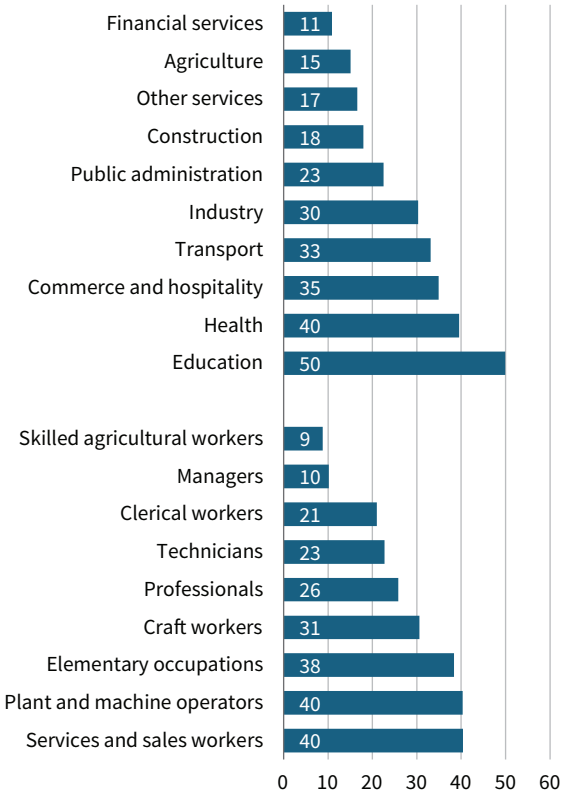
Flexibility

Breaks

It is generally acknowledged that all types of rest from work, including breaks during the working day, are crucial for workers' health and well-being. If structured appropriately, they can have positive effects on workers' health, safety, performance and productivity in the workplace (ILO, 2016). The Working Time Directive stipulates that all workers are entitled to a rest break from work when the working day is longer than six hours. Overall, the share of workers who are rarely or never able to take a break from work when they wish has been decreasing since 2010, but it is still greater among women (33 %) than among men (24 %).

In principle, self-employed workers should have full control over their working time arrangements and indeed close to three quarters can always or most of the time take a break when they wish. Still, about 10 % stated that they can never or only rarely take such a break, whereas this was the case for nearly one third of employees in the EU in 2024. The difficulty in taking a break from work is greater among employees working as services and sales workers and plant and machine operators (40 %) and in elementary occupations (38 %) (Figure 68). The difficulty is particularly prevalent among those working in the education (50 %), health (40 %) and commerce and hospitality (35 %) sectors, which are characterised by direct contact with third parties such as clients, customers, patients and pupils.

Figure 68: Shares of employees rarely or never able to take a break when they wish in the EU by sector and occupation (%)



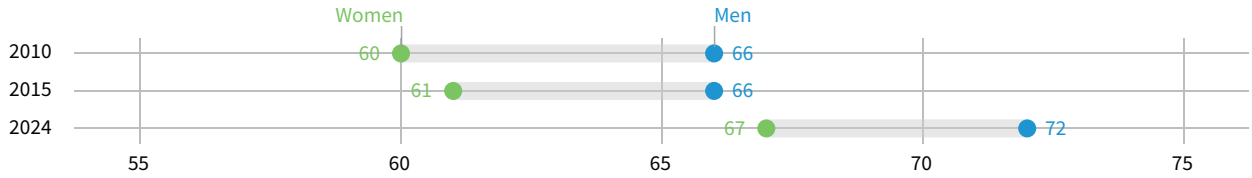
Employees who have the possibility of working remotely are more likely than those in other work arrangements to be able to take breaks from work when they wish. However, there is a large gender gap. The shares of female employees stating that they are rarely or never able to take breaks are much greater than those of their male counterparts. For instance, 19 % of female employees regularly teleworking from home (or undertaking hybrid work) stated that they can never take a break, whereas this was stated by only 7 % of their male counterparts.

Arranging to take an hour or two off during working hours to take care of personal or family matters

Eurofound research has confirmed that even a little flexibility goes a long way: those who can take an hour off to take care of personal or family matters are much less likely to report a poor work–life balance than those who cannot do so (Eurofound, 2018b).

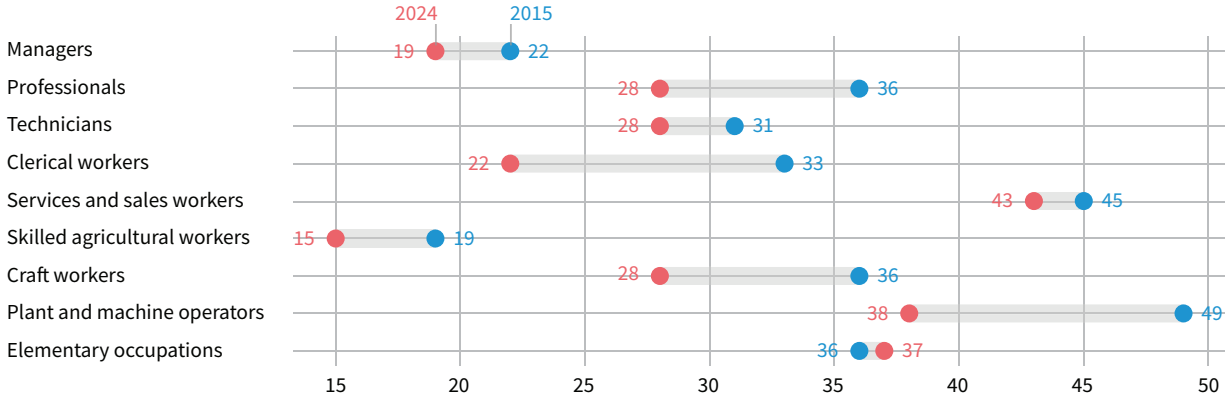
The majority of workers report that it is easy for them to take an hour or two off during working hours to attend to personal or family matters, and this share has

Figure 69: Shares of workers reporting that it is very or fairly easy to arrange to take an hour or two off during working hours in the EU by gender, 2010–2024 (%)



Source: EWCS series.

Figure 70: Shares of workers reporting that it is very or fairly difficult to arrange to take an hour or two off during working hours in the EU by occupation, 2015 and 2024 (%)



Source: EWCS series.

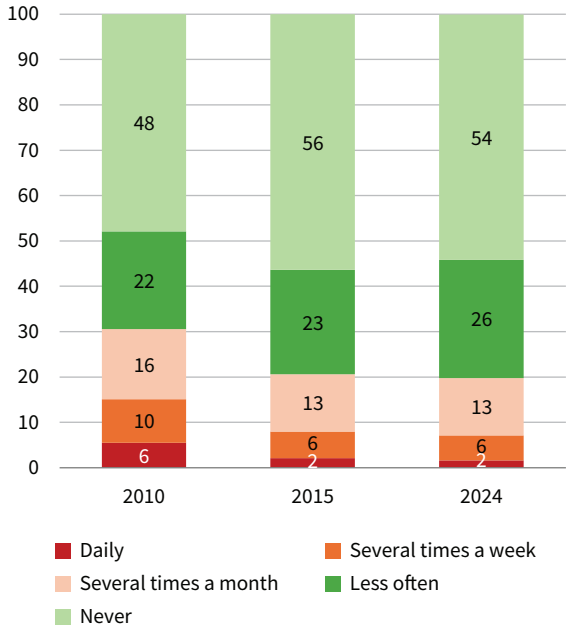
increased over the years (Figure 69): it is fairly easy for 41 % (similar to the share in 2015: 40 %) and very easy for 28 % (slightly more than in 2015: 24 %). This kind of flexibility is available to more men than women: a gender gap of 5 pp existed in 2024, when 72 % of men and 67 % of women said it was easy to take an hour or two off during working hours to attend to personal or family matters.

The possibility of taking time off during working hours to attend to personal or family matters varies greatly according to the worker's occupation: it is fairly difficult or very difficult for 43 % of services and sales workers, 38 % of plant and machine operators and 37 % of those in elementary occupations (Figure 70). Most occupational groups recorded a reduction in the shares of workers experiencing difficulties in making use of this kind of flexibility, with the exception of workers in elementary occupations.

Working in free time to meet work demands

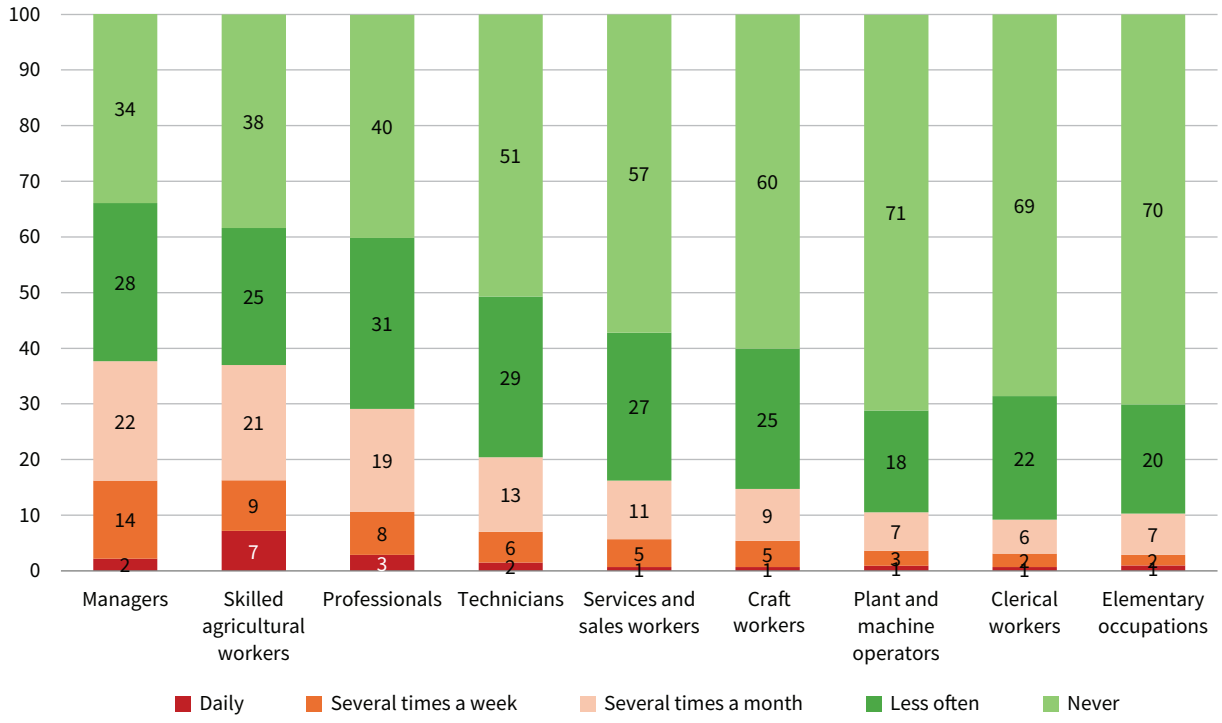
In 2024, 1 in every 5 workers reported working in their free time at least once a month over the previous 12 months in order to meet work demands (19 % of men and 20 % of women), representing a steep decrease compared with 2010, when 31 % reported the same (33 % of men and 28 % of women). An additional 26 % stated that they did it but less often, while 54 % said that they never worked during their free time, 6 pp more than in 2010 (Figure 71).

Figure 71: Shares of workers working during their free time to meet work demands in the EU by frequency, 2010–2024 (%)



Source: EWCS series.

Figure 72: Shares of workers working during their free time to meet work demands in the EU by occupation and frequency (%)



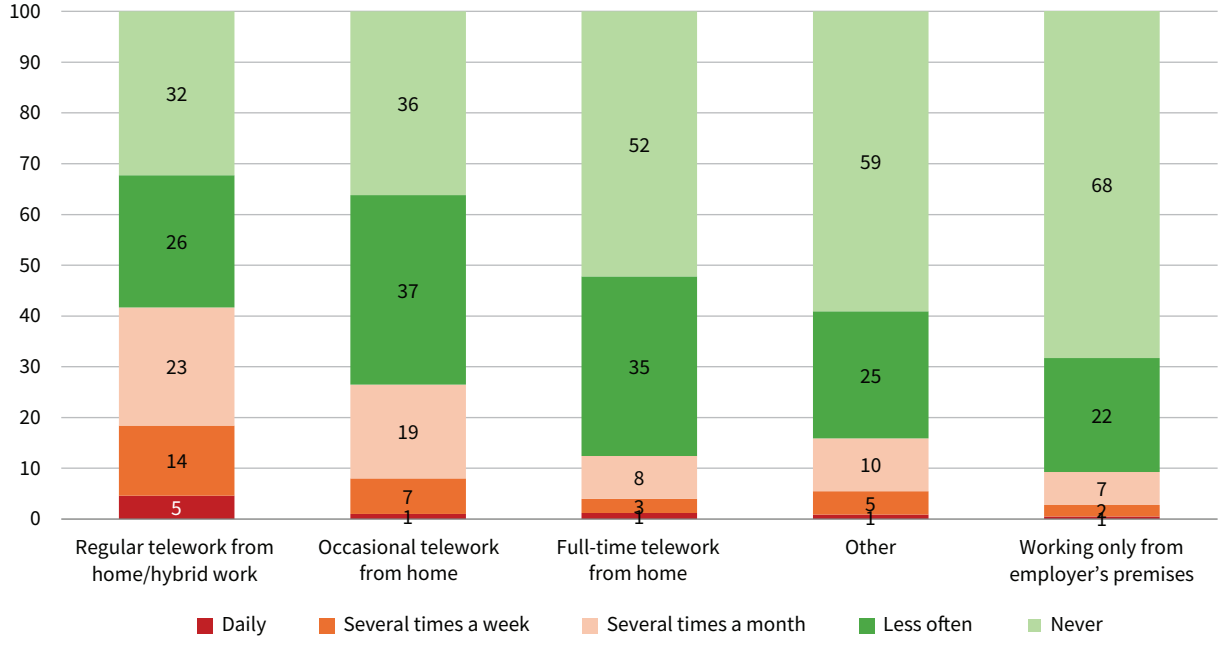
The shares of workers who never work during their free time increased the most among workers aged 16 to 29 – from 54 % in 2010 to 61 % in 2024 – and workers aged 65 or over: from 57 % to 62 %.

The prevalence of working during free time varies greatly with the hours that workers usually work: the longer the hours, the more likely it is that workers will report working in their free time.

It also varies across the occupational groups, being much more common and frequent among managers, skilled agricultural workers, professionals and technicians and less prevalent among plant and machine operators, clerical workers and those in elementary occupations (Figure 72).

As shown in Figure 73, working during free time to meet work demands is much more prominent among those

Figure 73: Shares of workers working during their free time to meet work demands among workers teleworking from home and other workers in the EU by frequency (%)



regularly or occasionally teleworking from home, confirming, once more, that employees working remotely are more likely to work in their free time than those who work only at an employer's premises (Eurofound, 2021c).

Prospects

Summary

- Scores on the Prospects index have been increasing over time for both men and women, reflecting stronger labour market prospects. The gender gap has widened since 2015.
- An increasing number of workers agree that their job offers good career prospects. Since 2010, there has been a 17 pp increase for both men and women. Nevertheless, the gender gap of 6 pp persists.
- Higher-skilled occupations like managers, professionals and technicians are more likely to report good prospects, while those in elementary occupations and skilled agricultural workers report the lowest levels of good prospects.
- The fear of job loss is relatively low overall (affecting 12 % of women and 10 % of men) and was less prevalent in 2024 than previously. Younger workers (15 %) and those in elementary occupations are more likely to report job insecurity (17 %).
- Uncertainty about the future is reflected in workers' fear of an undesirable change in their work situation without losing their job: 15 % of both men and women are expecting such a change, with larger shares of workers in the agriculture, health and transport sectors reporting this. In addition, 25 % of women and 21 % of men report that, if they wanted better working conditions, they would be afraid to ask.

The Prospects index addresses workers' need for safety and control in the future. Prospects matter for workers' families and their communities – poor prospects have a negative impact on family formation and fertility, for instance. Prospects are a key determinant of workers' health. Prospects also matter for public finances, as social protection systems address the risks associated with poor prospects, including unemployment or early retirement. From an organisational perspective, ensuring good prospects means investing in the development of the workforce and better economic performance as a consequence.

The Prospects index consists of subdimensions covering employment status, career prospects, job security and working conditions prospects (Table 11).

- The **type of employment and contract** held by workers matters for prospects, as this determines access to social protection.
- Good **career prospects** provide recognition of a person's good work and contribution to the success of the organisation. They are associated with increased earnings and more security in the future. In addition, the job is likely to become more skilled and interesting and it will fulfil the expectation of being a vehicle for growth and development.
- The lack of **job security** is an occupational stress. Employment insecurity raises a fear of income loss and loss of other benefits associated with holding a job, such as social relationships in the workplace, opportunities to grow and serve a purpose, and professional identity. The risk of income loss is mediated by personal savings for self-employed individuals and social security (e.g. unemployment schemes) for employees.
- Aspects covered by **working conditions prospects** include the fear of asking for better working conditions. They also include qualitative job insecurity, that is, workers' fear of losing some characteristics of work that they value very much, for example tasks that they enjoy and have mastered.

Three main mechanisms linking job insecurity and health have been suggested.

- Strenuous jobs are more frequently held by workers with low employment security.
- Low employment security may lead to adverse health outcomes by limiting workers' control over their professional and personal lives; they may, for example, report having less information about their health and safety at work. Together with their inexperience and lack of seniority, this can result in higher numbers of occupational injuries.
- Low job security is associated with lower earnings, which may consequently affect various social determinants of health (e.g. housing quality, poorer-health-related behaviours such as smoking, and lower access to healthcare).

Table 11: Proportions of EU workers reporting the subdimensions of the Prospects index (%) and mean index scores, 2010–2024

Subdimension	Item	2010	2015	2024
Type of employment and contract	Self-employed individuals with employees	4	5	5
	Solo self-employed individuals	11	10	8.5
	Economically dependent self-employed individuals	*	*	1.5
	Employees with a permanent contract	65	66	71
	Employees with a temporary contract (fixed-term contracts, temporary agency work and apprenticeships)	12	13	11
	Employees with another contract or no contract	4	6	3
Career prospects	Job offers good prospects for career advancement – (strongly) tend to agree	29	37	46
Job security	Might lose my job in the next six months – (strongly) tend to agree	17	17	11
	Change in employment in the workplace – decrease in the last three years	*	22	18
Working conditions prospects	Afraid to ask for better working conditions – (strongly) tend to agree	*	*	23
	Expecting an undesirable change in work – (strongly) tend to agree	*	*	15
Overall index score	*Trend of index score*	*51*	*53*	*67*
	Full index 2024 score			*74*

* Question not asked at this time.
Notes Italic text indicates mean index scores, not proportions (%). The trend of the index score includes all items covered by the survey since 2010, while the full index score includes all items available in 2024. This explains possible discrepancies between the figures reported.
Source: EWCS series.

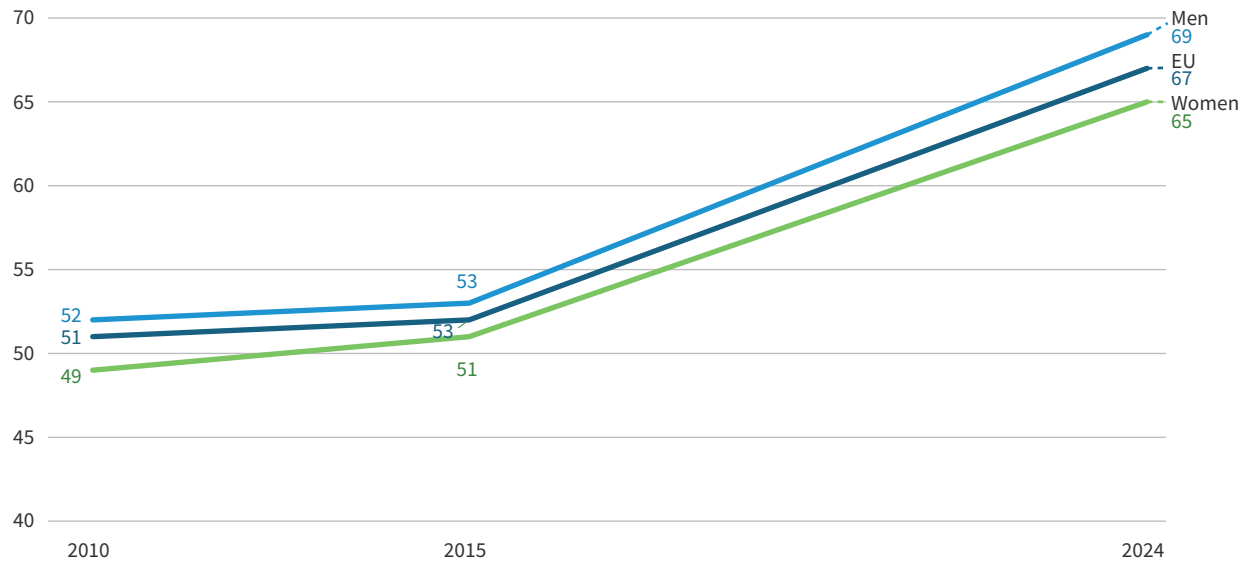
As companies adapt and restructure, they may lay off some of their staff. For those who remain (the 'survivors'), their sense of safety may be affected and the conditions in which they perform their work are likely to change, requiring adaptation.

Poor prospects are also related to the discussion around 'precariousness'. A dimension of precariousness is workers' vulnerability to unacceptable work practices, as they fear that they can be easily replaced. All of these elements are captured in the Prospects index. Systematic reviews show that various dimensions of precarious employment may be linked to an array of health issues, including mental and physical ill health (Bodin et al., 2020; Badarin et al., 2024) and occupational injuries, health-related behaviours such as higher levels of smoking and lower access to healthcare.

Prospects over time

In the context of a more favourable labour market, as discussed in Chapter 1, the Prospects index has improved since 2010 for both men and women (Figure 74). However, the gender gap has widened since 2015.

Figure 74: Mean Prospects index scores in the EU by gender, 2010–2024

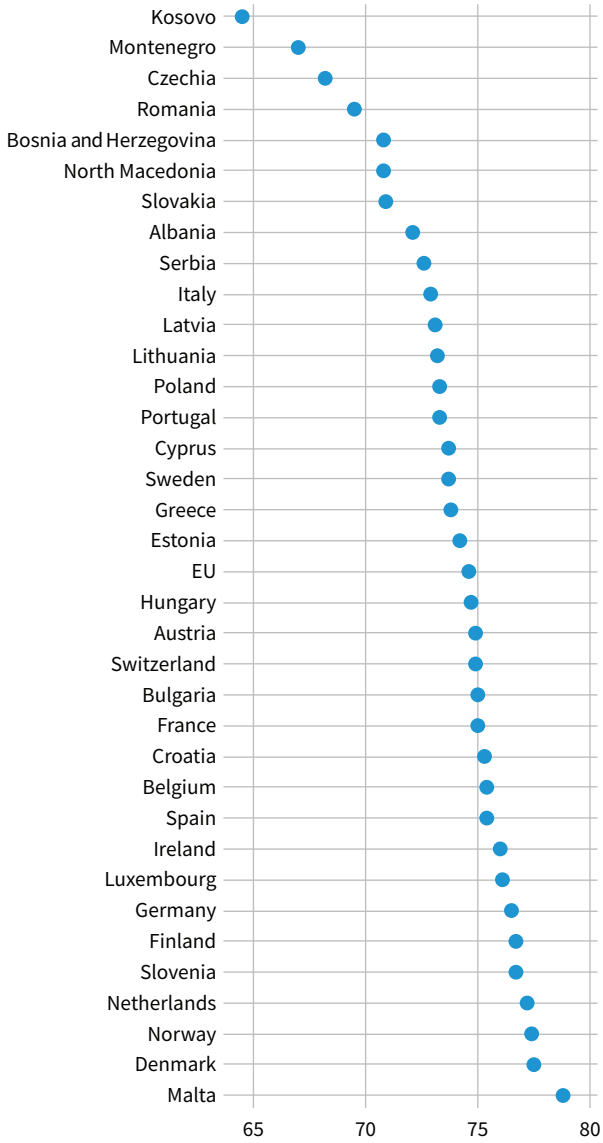


Source: EWCS series.

Prospects index

As national regulations and labour markets play a strong role in setting rules and expectations for prospects, important differences are apparent between countries in terms of prospects. Malta, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Finland, Germany and Luxembourg report the highest average Prospects scores, while Kosovo, Montenegro, Czechia, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Slovakia have the lowest (Figure 75).

Figure 75: Mean Prospects index scores by country



Employment status

Employment status captures the 'objective' side of prospects. The nature and consequences of a given employment relationship may differ depending on national contextual factors such as regulatory protection (labour legislation, collective agreements and health and safety standards), access to social protection and insurance. They may also differ across different sociodemographic groups and workers' social contexts, such as access to resources (e.g. a working partner, home ownership or savings) and social support (e.g. emotional support, the feeling of being valued). The type of contract indicates the degree of continuity of employment. Temporary arrangements include a wide range of employment statuses, and their impact on health is stronger for the most precarious ones.

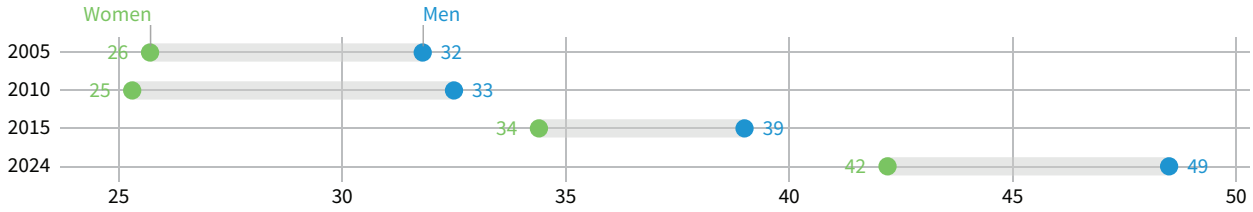
Short-term jobs and self-employment can challenge workers, as they may not necessarily provide for unemployment benefits in the case of loss of employment. Workers without a contract are less likely to have formal work arrangements and are therefore more likely to lack decent working conditions, adequate social security and 'voice' through effective representation by trade unions and similar organisations.

In a prospective study, temporary employment was associated with slower return to work, indicated by longer depression-related disability episodes, especially among older workers and those with a low level of education (Ervasti et al., 2014). It hampers workers' ability to make key decisions about their personal lives and family formation. Precarious employment can have economic costs for families, who bear some of the financial burden of precariously employed family members. Underemployment and discontinuity of employment increase the risk of lower incomes in the short term but also in the longer term (through lower contributions to pension funds and unemployment insurance), which in turn may affect various social determinants of health (such as access to healthcare and unhealthy housing conditions).

Career prospects

The proportion of workers agreeing or strongly agreeing that their job offers good prospects for career advancement increased by 17 pp between 2005 and 2024 for both men and women, but the gender gap remains relatively stable, at 6 pp (Figure 76). Over the same period, good career prospects have improved most for plant and machine operators (19 %) and least for clerical workers and those in elementary occupations (11 % and 9 %, respectively).

Figure 76: Shares of workers agreeing or strongly agreeing that their job offers good career prospects in the EU by gender, 2005–2024 (%)



Source: EWCS series.

Some 45 % of workers tend to agree or strongly agree that their job offers good prospects for career advancement. This is more frequently the case for men (49 %) than for women (42 %).

There are significant differences between occupations, with better career prospects reported by those in higher-skilled occupations (Figure 77). Some 61 % of managers and 56 % of professionals and technicians report good career prospects. This is the case for only 23 % of workers in elementary occupations. Good prospects are more common in finance (62 %) and public administration (56 %) and less so in agriculture (32 %), education (37 %) and transport (39 %).

There is great variation between Member States in terms of career prospects. The largest share of workers reporting good career prospects is almost double the smallest: 63 % in Ireland and 32 % in Slovakia.

Job security

Job insecurity increases the risks of coronary heart disease, diabetes, depression, burnout, anxiety, suicidal ideation, musculoskeletal disorders, lower back pain and the use of psychotropic substances (Rönnblad et al., 2019; Niedhammer et al., 2021).

Major organisational restructuring and downsizing events have an impact on health and well-being during the anticipation phase (work insecurity) and after job loss, but they also affect 'stayers' or 'survivors' (Benach et al., 2014). They have a negative impact on physical health (including a decline in self-reported health status and an increase in body mass index), cardiovascular health and mental health (anxiety, psychological distress, suicidal ideation and sleep disorders) but also on occupational health and safety outcomes such as presenteeism (working while sick) and longer spells of sickness absence. A smaller workforce is associated with increased workload and reduced work control.

The proportion of workers reporting that they fear losing their job in the next six months has decreased from 17 % in 2010 to 11 % in 2024. A larger share of women than men now report that they fear losing their job in the next six months (Figure 78). The proportion of workers reporting that they fear losing their job in the next six months has decreased most among craft workers (– 11 pp), plant and machine operators (– 10 pp) and those in elementary occupations (– 9 pp) and least among technicians, skilled agricultural workers and professionals (– 2 pp).

Figure 77: Shares of workers reporting good career prospects in the EU by occupation and gender (%)

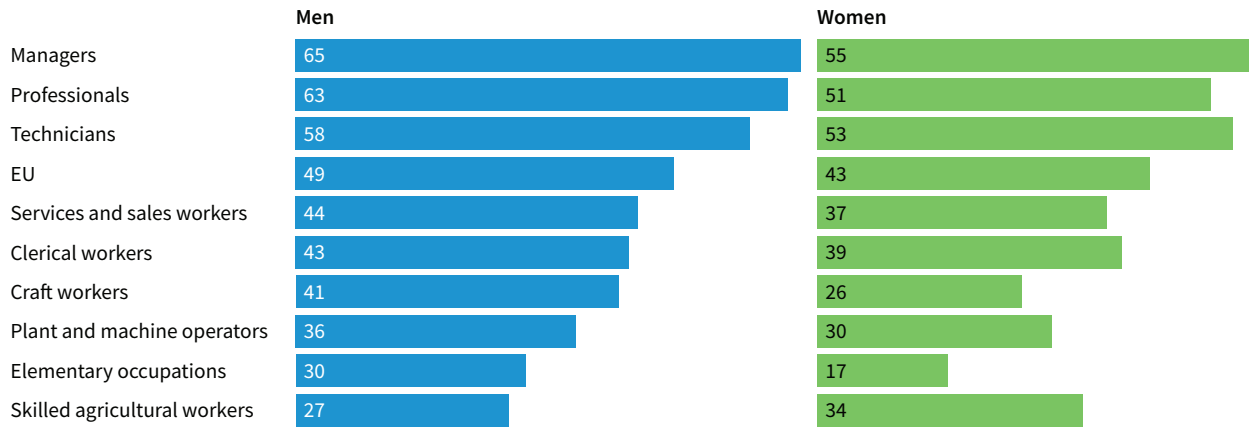


Figure 78: Shares of workers in the EU who fear losing their job in the next six months by gender, 2010–2024 (%)



Source: EWCS series.

Younger workers (15 %) and those in elementary occupations (17 %) have larger shares reporting job insecurity than other age groups and occupations. Some 28 % of workers with less than a year of seniority report job insecurity (more than double the average). When differences across countries are considered, the largest shares of job insecurity are reported by workers in Lithuania (17 %), Spain and Romania (both 16 %) and Estonia and Austria (both 15 %).

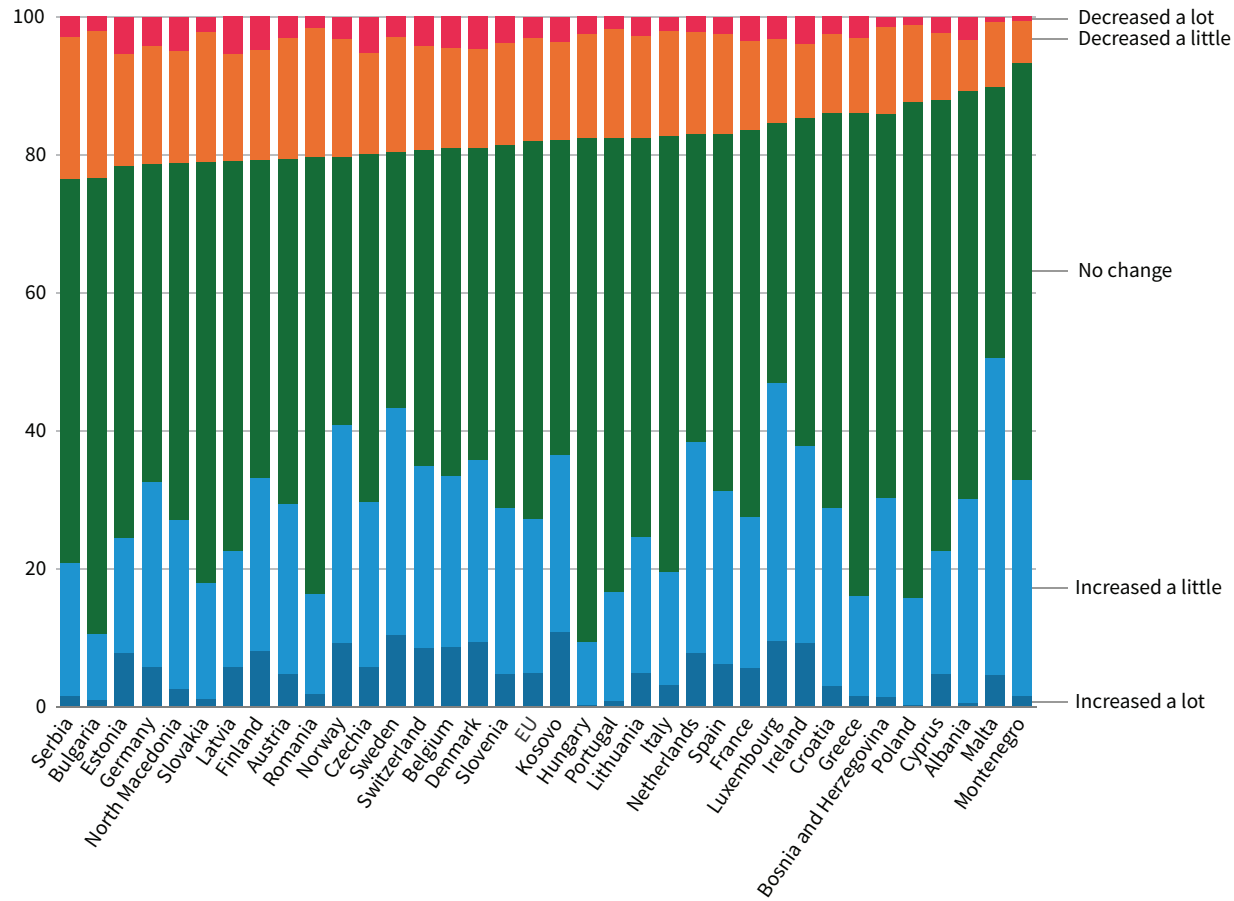
Some 18 % of workers (the same proportion for men and women) have experienced downsizing. This experience is reported most by workers in large companies (27 %). One in five workers in Austria, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, North Macedonia, Norway, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia have experienced downsizing (Figure 79).

Working conditions prospects

In some cases, workers are not afraid of losing their employment; rather, they fear losing aspects of work that they value (work insecurity) or are afraid to ask for better working conditions.

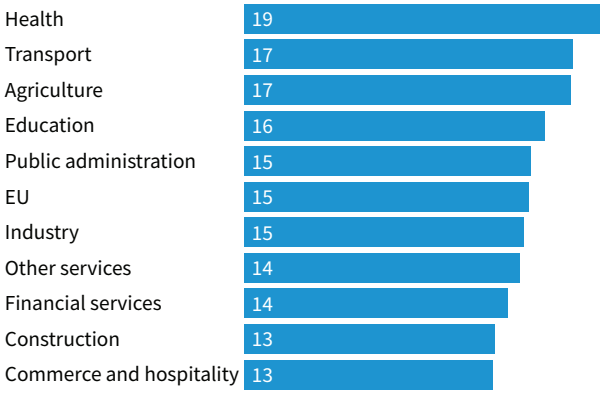
Some 15 % (the same proportion for men and women) report expecting an undesirable change in their work situation. The largest shares of workers reporting work insecurity are among skilled agricultural workers (21 %); in terms of countries, the largest shares are in Austria (28 %), Denmark and Romania (both 23 %), Ireland

Figure 79: Employment change in the workplace in the last three years by country (%)



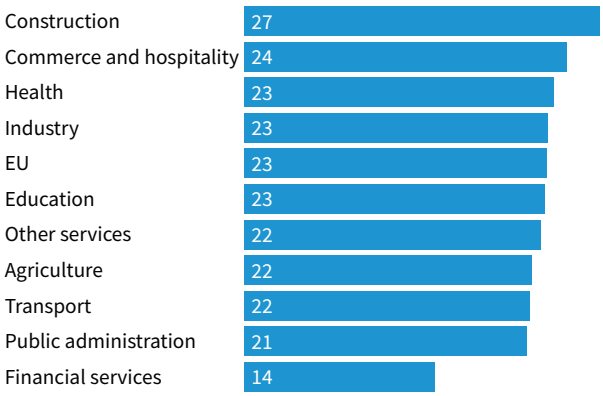
(22 %) and Estonia (21 %). Close to 20 % of workers in the health sector are also in this situation (Figure 80).

Figure 80: Share of workers in the EU expecting an undesirable change in their work situation by sector (%)



A new question in the EWCS 2024 asked workers to what extent they would be afraid to ask if they wanted an improvement to their working conditions. Some 25 % of women and 21 % of men reported that, if they wanted better working conditions, they would be afraid to ask. This situation is more often reported by workers in lower-skilled occupations. In all occupations, with the exception of skilled agricultural workers (among whom the proportion of women is very low), women report poorer working conditions prospects than men. A quarter of workers in the construction and commerce and hospitality sectors reported that they would be afraid to ask for better working conditions (Figure 81).

Figure 81: Share of workers in the EU who are afraid to ask for better working conditions by sector (%)



The smallest shares of workers reporting a fear of asking for better conditions are observed in Finland (13 %), Germany (15 %), Estonia (16 %) and Denmark, Greece and Spain (17 %). Some 30 % or more report being afraid to ask for an improvement in their working conditions in Czechia, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia.

Skills and discretion

Summary

- Since 2010, workers have increasingly reported that they have more opportunities to use and develop their skills, but the gender gap persists, with men scoring higher than women on the Skills and discretion index, although it has narrowed slightly.
- While skills use, development opportunities and access to training have improved, there has been a concerning decrease in workers' ability to influence collective work processes and apply their own ideas.
- Despite overall positive developments, less than half of all workers (43 %) report having enough opportunities to use their skills and knowledge in their work.
- About a quarter or fewer of workers always exercise various facets of autonomy. The area in which this is least frequent is having a say in the choice of work colleagues.
- Inequalities remain among occupational and age groups in terms of access to training: workers in higher-skilled occupations report more frequent, paid training opportunities; older workers (aged 55 or over) report less access to training than their younger colleagues.
- Some sectors with the largest shares of workers reporting that they receive training (health, public administration and financial services) also have the highest unmet training needs.
- Worker participation in organisational development varies significantly by sector. Employees in financial services, education, public administration and other services are more likely to be consulted on and involved in improving work processes, while those in agriculture, commerce and hospitality, and transport have fewer opportunities.

The Skills and discretion dimension captures how workers develop and grow through their experience of work. This includes access to training; opportunities to use and develop skills while performing work tasks; the autonomy (or discretion) given to workers in the choice of methods, order of tasks and speed of work; and participation in organisational development that allows workers to feed back their knowledge of work to the organisation. All these features can be seen as skills-enhancing work and call for the autonomy to address unforeseen and complex tasks, and this learning can be leveraged by the organisation/company when workers' perspective is integrated into work processes. A key attribute of human-centred work is the ability of workers to influence their work processes. Skills and discretion have a strong impact on workers' health and well-being. A highly skilled workforce that is able to apply its skills is also a key component of EU competitiveness. This dimension of job quality is clearly supportive of the development of a skilled workforce and thus of performance and competitiveness.

The Skills and discretion index consists of four subdimensions: learning opportunities at work, the autonomy given to workers, organisational participation (in the case of employees) and training. It comprises the indicators listed in Table 12.

Skills and discretion consist of job resources, that is, job-related aspects that allow employees to cope with the demanding aspects of their work and stimulate their learning and development. According to the job demands–resources model (Demerouti et al. 2001; Bakker et al., 2023), job resources have two roles: they motivate, as they promote mastery and knowledge by fulfilling needs for autonomy and competence, and they help workers in performing their work.

From a health perspective, low 'decision latitude' has long been identified as a stressor. Low decision latitude refers to a worker having a lack of control over their tasks and the way the tasks are performed. Three components make up low decision latitude: low skill discretion, when the job offers little opportunity for creativity and learning new skills or using existing abilities; low decision authority, when the worker has little or no say in how their work is planned, executed or scheduled; and low autonomy, when employees cannot make decisions about their own work. Low decision latitude increases health risks in itself. Low decision latitude combined with high job demands results in job strain, and both have been identified as work characteristics that increase the risk of coronary heart disease, weight gain, physical inactivity, depression-related outcomes, suicidal ideation, burnout, sleep problems and musculoskeletal disorders (Niedhammer et al., 2021).

More recent evidence points to the risks of 'too much' autonomy, that is, when workers are confronted with jobs that are poorly regulated by the company/organisation (Dettmers et al., 2020). Another concern is 'too much learning', which would constitute a challenge stressor (Kubicek et al., 2023). Both of these aspects can be beneficial for learning, skills acquisition and personal growth when employees have the resources and level of control required and do not have too high a workload. The evidence on having 'too much' of these aspects is not conclusive and this report's empirical assessment of the job quality indices in Chapter 3 confirms that there is a positive relationship between them and health and well-being. While there is a small negative relationship between these aspects and physical and emotional exhaustion, skills and discretion remain a positive resource for workers that supports their health and well-being. This dimension of work also shows a strong association with motivation and engagement.

Table 12: Proportions of EU workers reporting the subdimensions of the Skills and discretion index and mean index and subdimension scores, 2010–2024 (%)

Subdimension	Item	2010	2015	2024
Learning opportunities at work	Handling unforeseen problems	81	83	86
	Undertaking complex tasks	57	60	64
	Learning new things	67	70	76
	Applying own ideas	77	79	77
	Computer use – at least a quarter of the time	51	55	71
	Having enough opportunities to use skills and knowledge – strongly agree and tend to agree	*	*	82
	Making difficult decisions	*	*	45
	Working in a foreign language	*	*	38
	Trend of subdimension score	*53*	*55*	*62*
Autonomy	Ability to choose or change order of tasks ([1]) – always or often	*	*	53
	Ability to choose or change methods of work – always or often	*	*	51
	Ability to choose or change speed or rate of work – always or often	*	*	50
	Having a say in choice of work colleagues	29	30	26
Organisational participation (employees only)	Consulted before objectives are set for own work – always or most of the time	47	46	40
	Involved in improving the work organisation or work processes of own department or organisation – always or most of the time	48	49	41
	Ability to influence decisions that are important for your work – always or most of the time	46	49	46
	Trend of subdimension score	*50*	*52*	*50*
Training (all workers)	Training paid for or provided by employer over past 12 months – employees	*	36	42
	Training paid for by self – self-employed	*30*	*31*	*44*
	On-the-job training (all workers)	30	31	44
Overall index score	*Trend of index score*	*52*	*53*	*57*
	Full index 2024 score			*57*

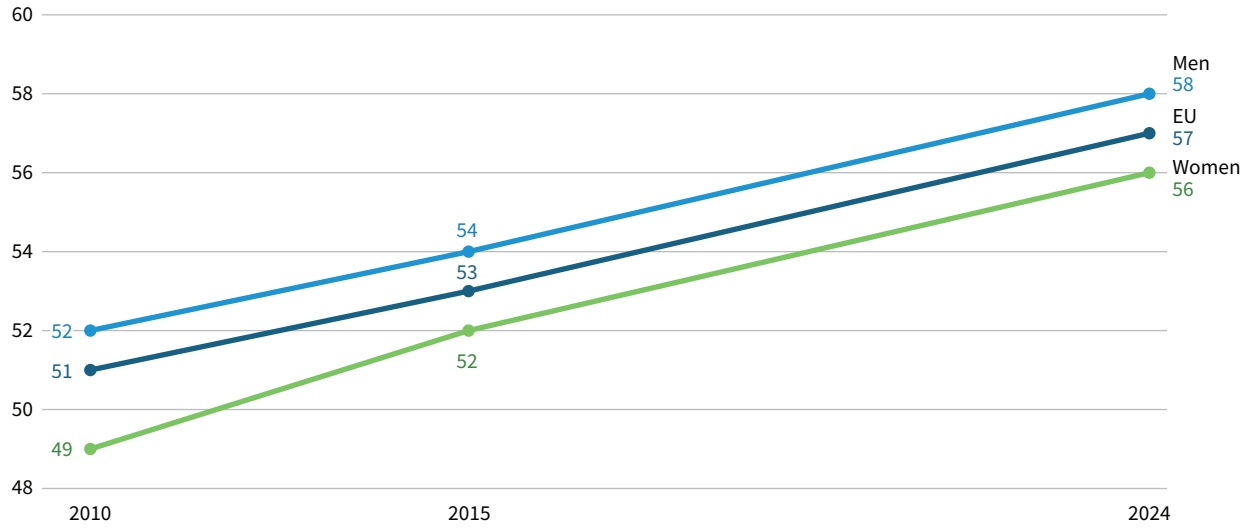
* Question not asked at this time.
([1]) The choice of answers to questions on decision latitude was changed in 2024.
Notes: Italic text indicates mean index scores, not proportions (%). The subdimensions cover all workers, except for organisational participation, which covers only employees. The trend of the index/subdimension score includes all items covered by the survey since 2010, while the full index score includes all items available in 2024. This explains possible discrepancies between the figures reported.
Source: EWCS series.

Skills and discretion over time

The Skills and discretion index shows clear improvements since 2010 (Figure 82). Men continue to achieve higher scores than women, but the gender gap has reduced since 2010 by 1 point.

The gap between countries has been increasing in this dimension. Skills and discretion have increased in all countries except Denmark, Hungary, Malta, Romania and Spain.

Figure 82: Mean Skills and discretion index scores in the EU by gender, 2010–2024

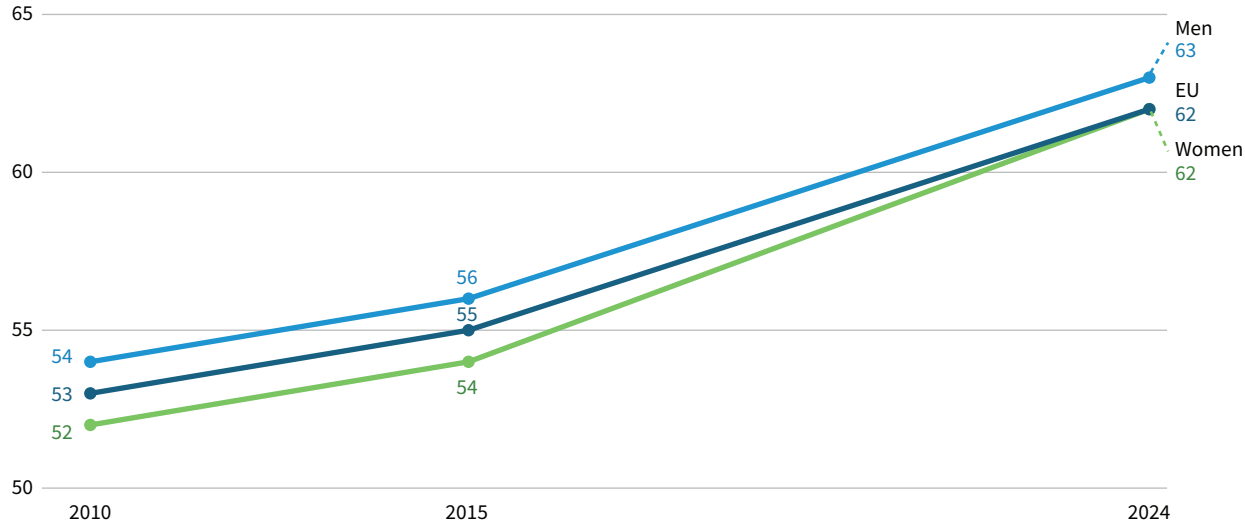


Source: EWCS series.

However, the overall improvements hide diverging trends between two subdimensions of the index: while learning opportunities at work have increased considerably since 2010 (Figure 83), the organisational participation subdimension has decreased since 2015, returning to the 2010 levels (Figure 84).

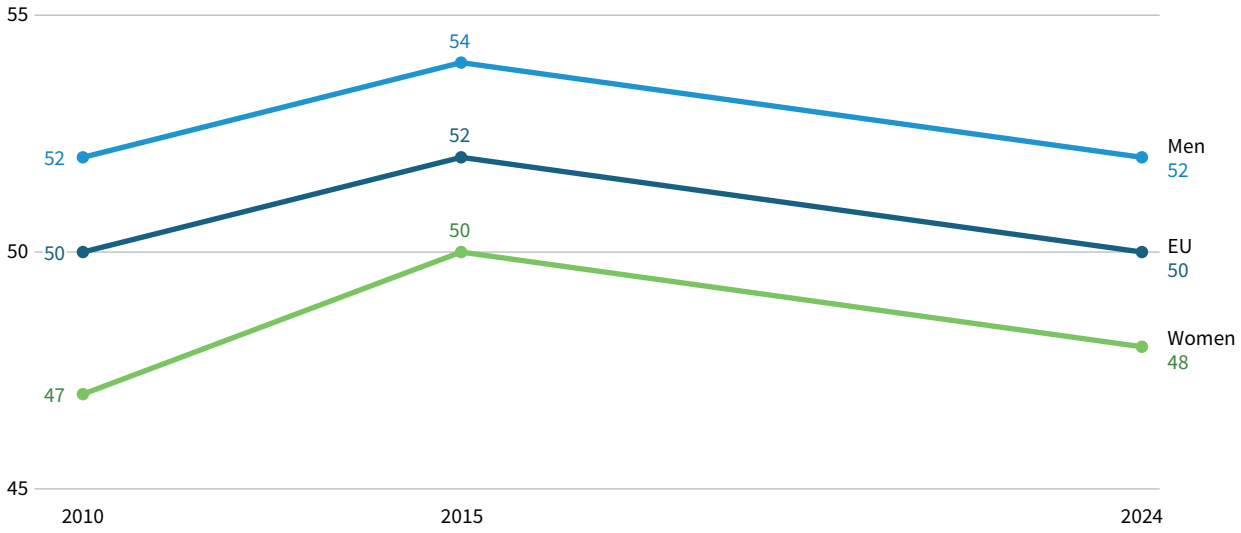
This development means that workers have gained opportunities to learn and develop their skills in work but also that they are given fewer opportunities to be consulted and/or involved in the improvement of work processes. This is a cause of concern for the future. Workers learning without opportunities for them to suggest improvements and for companies to benefit from workers' tacit knowledge could result in less efficient work processes and more intense work.

Figure 83: Mean score on the learning opportunities at work subdimension in the EU by gender, 2010–2024



Source: EWCS series.

Figure 84: Mean scores on the organisational participation subdimension in the EU by gender (employees only), 2010–2024



Source: EWCS series.

Skills and discretion index

In 2024, the mean index score was 58 for men and 56 for women.

The greatest differences in the Skills and discretion index can be observed between occupations (Figure 85). The mean Skills and discretion index score of those in elementary occupations (37) is nearly half that of managers (72). Women fare less well than men in most occupational groups, with the exception of clerical workers and skilled agricultural workers, among whom women score higher, and those in elementary occupations, among whom men and women score almost the same.

There are also significant differences between countries and between genders within countries (Figure 86). The gap between the highest and lowest performers in the EU highlights the strong need for upward convergence in this area.

When all countries included in the survey are considered, Luxembourg, Norway, Switzerland, Estonia and Sweden report the highest Skills and discretion scores, while Romania, Hungary, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina report the lowest scores. In most cases, the gender gap is to the detriment of women.

Figure 85: Mean Skills and discretion index score by gender and occupation

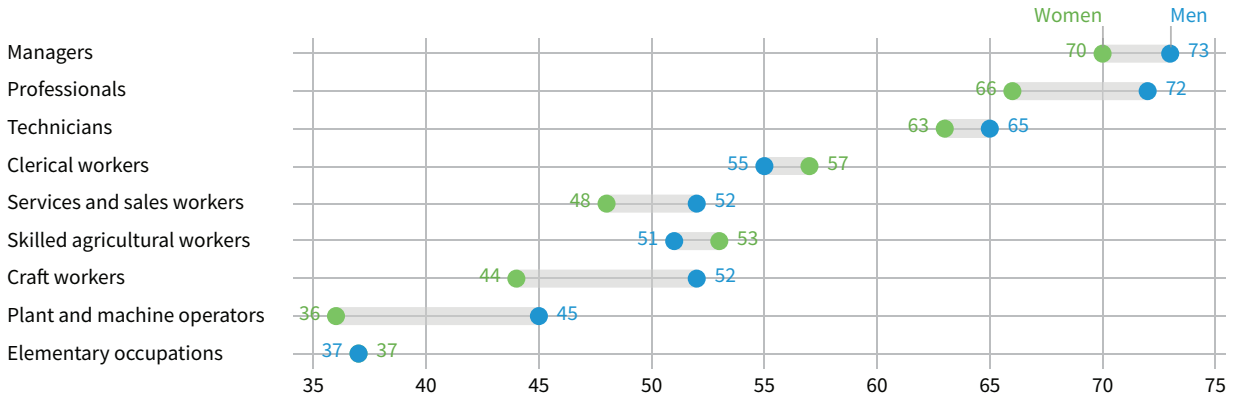
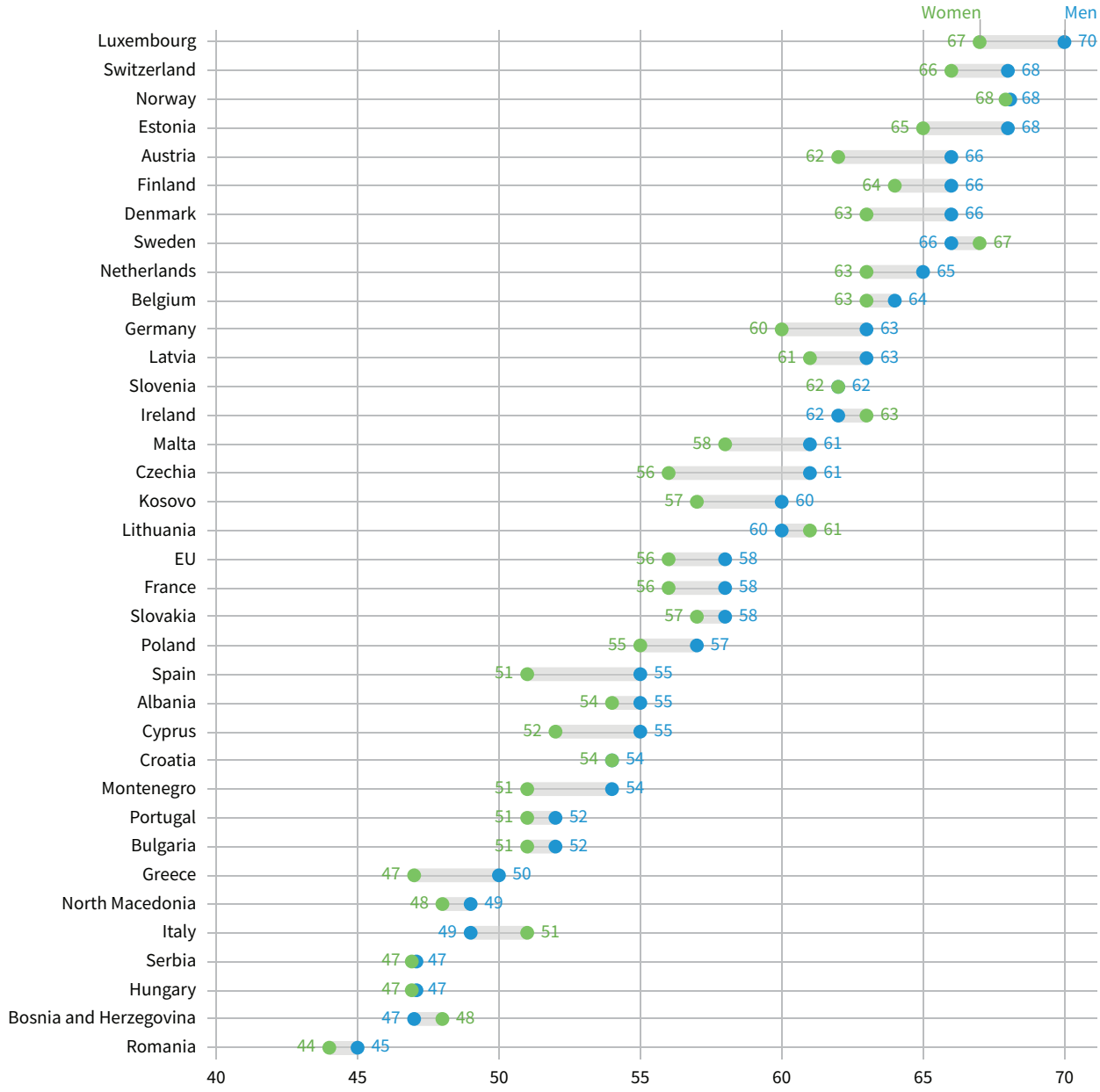


Figure 86: Mean Skills and discretion index scores by gender and country



Learning opportunities at work

This subdimension measures how workers are being challenged in their tasks and can grow their skills while working. Learning by doing in work is an important way to develop new skills. A recent meta-analysis (Kubicek et al., 2023) confirms that cognitive demands contribute to workplace learning, but also to motivation, while the association with strain is negative.

Learning opportunities at work include solving unforeseen problems, performing complex tasks, being able to learn new things, being able to apply one's own ideas and using computers or similar digital technology on a regular basis. The 2024 edition of the EWCS included three new questions in this subdimension, capturing the extent to which workers have enough opportunities to use skills and knowledge, to make difficult decisions and to work in a foreign language.

The current context of transitions and change calls for employees and organisations alike to continuously learn and simultaneously adapt and be creative. The EWCS 2024 confirms that workers are exposed to a wide range of work situations that support the use and development of their skills in work. However, such opportunities hide significant differences among groups of workers.

Workers in higher-skilled occupations report more opportunities to practise and learn new skills in their work (Figure 87). The differences between occupations are largest in terms of making difficult decisions (62 pp) and performing complex tasks (49 pp), which could be a source of strain for workers.

Figure 87: Prevalence of selected items in the learning opportunities at work subdimension in the EU by occupation (%)

	Handling unforeseen problems	Having enough opportunities to improve one's skills	Learning new things	Undertaking complex tasks	Applying ideas	Making difficult decisions	Working in foreign languages
Managers	95	91	84	78	78	77	50
Professionals	93	91	92	82	68	67	54
Technicians	92	88	88	76	58	54	43
Clerical workers	87	78	79	61	38	33	38
Services and sales workers	84	78	65	45	43	32	36
Skilled agricultural workers	88	75	63	54	69	46	12
Craft workers	85	82	74	69	48	34	22
Plant and machine operators	76	76	58	45	29	27	24
Elementary occupations	66	64	39	29	36	15	19

There are also significant differences by employment status. Self-employed individuals with employees and solo self-employed individuals experience more learning in their job than employees, particularly temporary employees and employees with no contract or another type of contract (Figure 88). The largest gap by employment status is in applying one's own ideas: less than half of employees have the opportunity to do this.

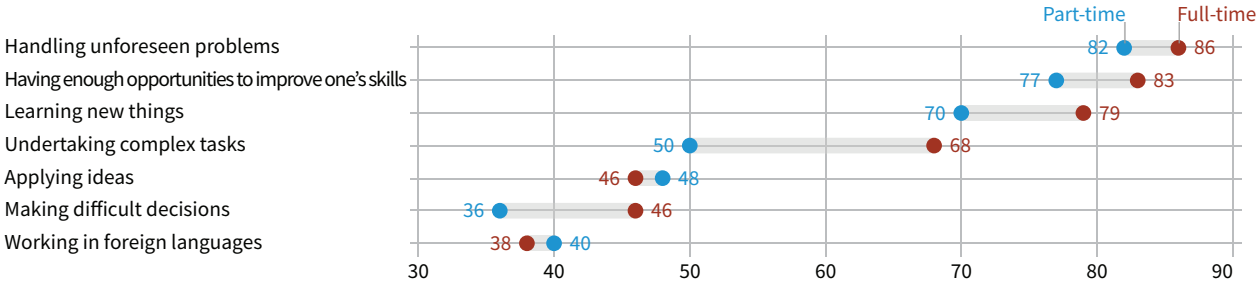
This pattern by employment status does not apply to the opportunity to work in a foreign language: 43 % of employees with a temporary contract use a foreign language at work.

Part-time workers are given fewer opportunities to learn than full-time workers, with the exception of the opportunity to apply one's own ideas at work and working in a foreign language, which are more frequently reported by part-time workers (Figure 89). Box 7 discusses how working in a foreign language varies by gender, sector and country.

Figure 88: Prevalence of selected items in the learning opportunities at work subdimension in the EU by employment status (%)

	Handling unforeseen problems	Having enough opportunities to improve one's skills	Learning new things	Undertaking complex tasks	Applying ideas	Making difficult decisions	Working in foreign languages
Self-employed individuals with employees	95	93	75	70	91	64	38
Solo self-employed individuals	90	88	71	62	83	50	34
Employees with a permanent contract	87	83	78	67	48	46	37
Employees with a temporary contract (fixed term, temporary agency workers, apprenticeship)	79	74	73	53	41	32	43
Employees with no contract or another type of contract	72	72	52	33	43	27	28

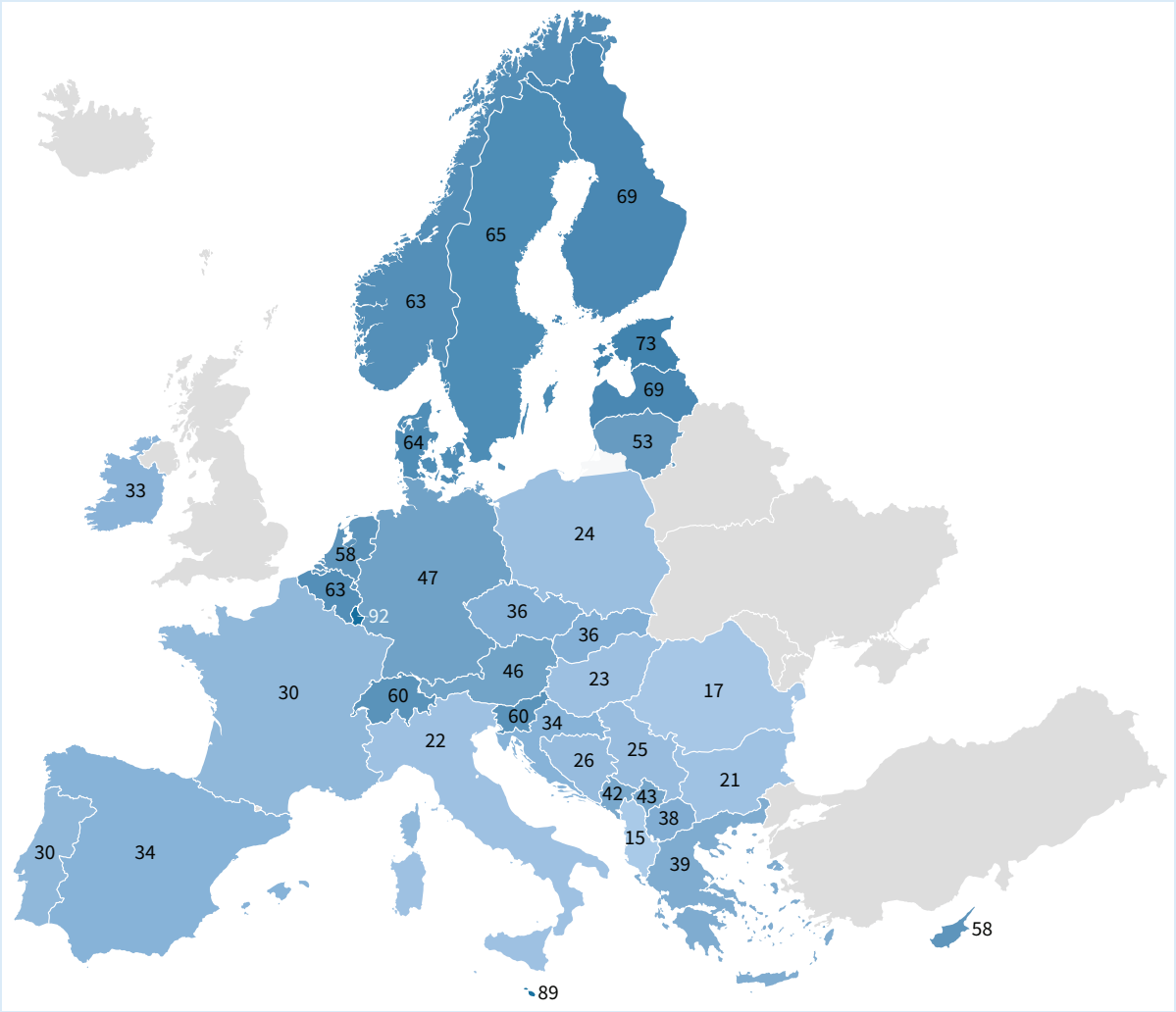
Figure 89: Prevalence of selected items in the learning opportunities at work subdimension in the EU by full-time and part-time work (%)



Box 7: Working in a language different from one's mother tongue

Overall, 39 % of men and 36 % of women speak a foreign language in their work. Working in a language different from one's mother tongue is more frequent for supervisors, younger workers and workers with less seniority. Across sectors, 45 % of workers in other services, 41 % in financial services and 40 % in commerce and hospitality use a foreign language at work. The prevalence is also higher in countries where more than one language is spoken (Figure 90).

Figure 90: Prevalence of working in a language different from one's mother tongue by country (%)

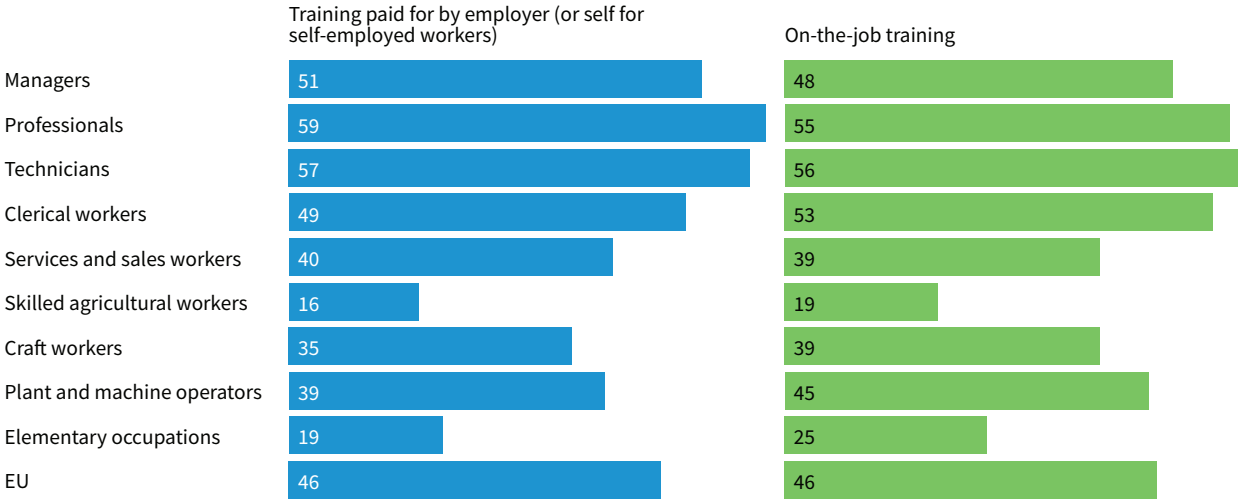


Training

The European Pillar of Social Rights has reaffirmed the importance of lifelong learning, which has been a long-standing priority in European employment policy. Its first principle is that 'everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills than enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market'. Consistent with this principle, the Union of Skills (2025) affirms that:

Europe's competitive strength lies in its people … and investing in skills pays off many times over. In the context of the global competition for talent, and a shrinking working age population in the EU, Europe's competitiveness relies on future-oriented skills, contributing to economic social and territorial cohesion. Human capital is also essential to promote preparedness and security in the present geopolitical situation.

Figure 91: Prevalence of training paid for by employer (or self for self-employed workers) and on-the-job training in the EU by occupation (%)



The Draghi report confirms that skills shortages and gaps are barriers to productivity growth and innovation and reiterates the importance of adult learning, which is crucial for a company's performance (Draghi, 2024). The EWCS 2024 indicates that access to training has been increasing over time.

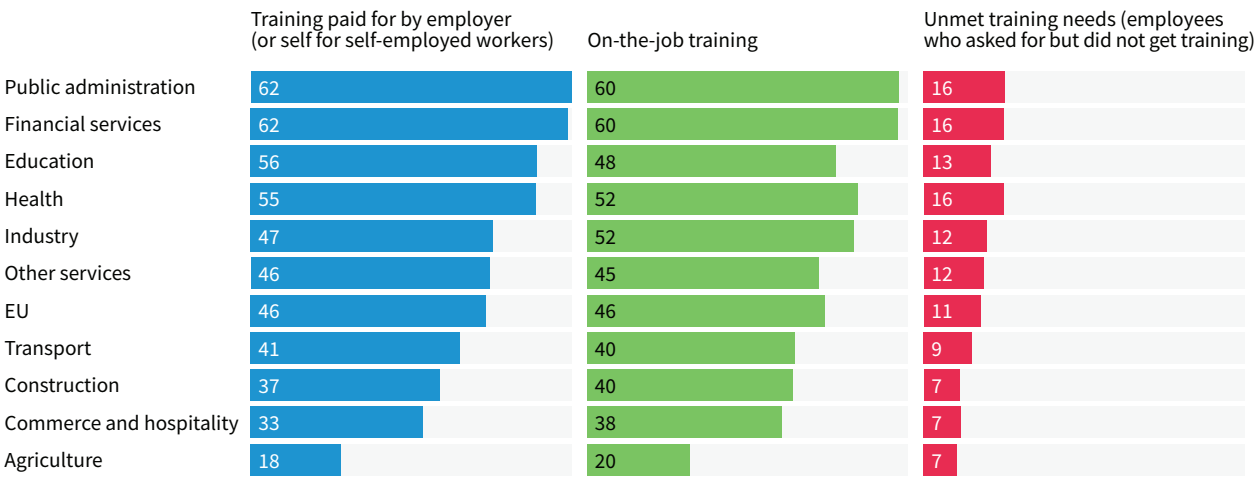
Training is highly valued by workers: 75 % of workers who have undertaken any type of training agree to some extent or to a large extent that the training they received improved their prospects for future employment. It is important to quantify unmet requests for training: 11 % of employees report having asked for training but not having got it.

Inequalities in age, for instance, have reduced over time, but remain persistent: access to training among older workers (those aged 55 to 64 years in particular) increased between 2005 and 2024: 45 % of employees in this age group in 2024 had received training, a 19 pp increase compared with 2005; 39 % of them had also received on-the-job training, a 15 pp increase since 2005.

Those in elementary occupations and skilled agricultural workers report the least on-the-job training and the least training provided by employers, while professionals report such training the most. Workers in higher-skilled occupations clearly receive the most training (Figure 91).

There are significant differences in access to training across sectors (Figure 92). Around 6 in 10 employees received training that was paid for by the employer in the health sector (55 %), education sector (56 %), financial sector and public administration (both 62 %), but a third or less received such training in commerce and hospitality and in agriculture. Unmet training needs are highest in sectors where training is more frequent, but 7 % of workers in agriculture, commerce and hospitality, and construction wish to have more training.

Figure 92: Prevalence of training in the EU by sector (%)



In the context of the flexibilisation of the labour market, it is interesting to examine access to training by type of employment and contract, noting that these types are governed by different constraints: employees with a permanent contract are those who report the greatest access to training (51 %), while only 41 % of employees in temporary employment and 16 % of employees in other situations had access to training. In the case of self-employed individuals, the question was asked differently to account for their different circumstances: 42 % of self-employed individuals with employees reported having access to training that was paid for by themselves, while this was true of 26 % of solo self-employed individuals. This suggests that policies and practices focusing on adult learning and the lifelong learning of employed workers should facilitate access to training for all, whatever their type of employment and contract.

More than half or close to half of employees with a temporary (56 %) or permanent (51 %) contract have received on-the-job training, while about one in five employees with no contract or another type of contract have received on-the-job training. On-the-job training is close to twice as frequent for self-employed individuals with employees (30 %) as for solo self-employed individuals (17 %). Often taking a more hands-on approach, on-the-job training is directly relevant to the job role and helps employees to quickly address the immediate needs of the organisation.

Autonomy

A key element of the ability of workers to exercise and grow their skills is the degree of influence they have on the processes and results of their work. The EWCS captures workers' ability in this area, such as having the discretion to change or choose their methods of work, the order of tasks and the speed or rate of work, and having a say in the choice of their work colleagues.

About a quarter or fewer of workers are always able to exercise various facets of autonomy. The area where this is least frequent is having a say in the choice of work colleagues: 26 % of women and 24 % of men are always able to change or choose their methods of work; 25 % of women and 23 % of men can always change or choose the order of their tasks; 24 % of women and 24 % of men can always choose or change their speed or rate of work; and 12 % of women and 18 % of men always have a say in the choice of their work colleagues (employees) or working partners (self-employed).

Discretion over work methods clearly varies according to type of employment and contract. The circumstances of self-employed individuals differ in this respect from those of employees. Close to half of self-employed workers can always choose or change their methods of work, but only 21 % of employees report the same possibility. About 11 % of self-employed individuals with employees and 17 % of solo self-employed individuals report rarely or never having discretion over their methods of work, while this is the case for more than a third of temporary employees and employees with no contract or another type of contract (Figure 93).

Having a say in the choice of work colleagues is very infrequent for employees: only 9 % of employees with a permanent contract and 7 % of temporary employees say they always have such a choice.

Having discretion over work methods is more frequent for older workers than younger workers: 30 % of 55- to 64-year-olds can always choose or change their methods of work, while this is the case for 20 % of workers aged 16 to 29. It is more frequent among managers (34 %) and less so for plant and machine operators (15 %).

Figure 93: Prevalence of the ability to choose or change one's method of work in the EU by employment status (%)

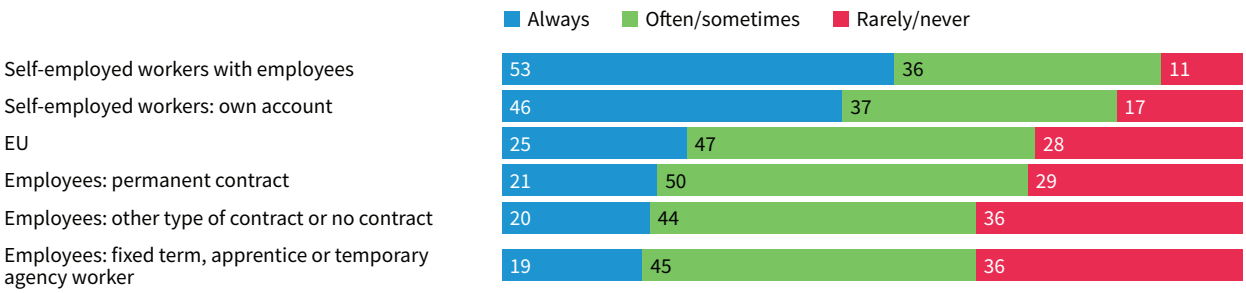
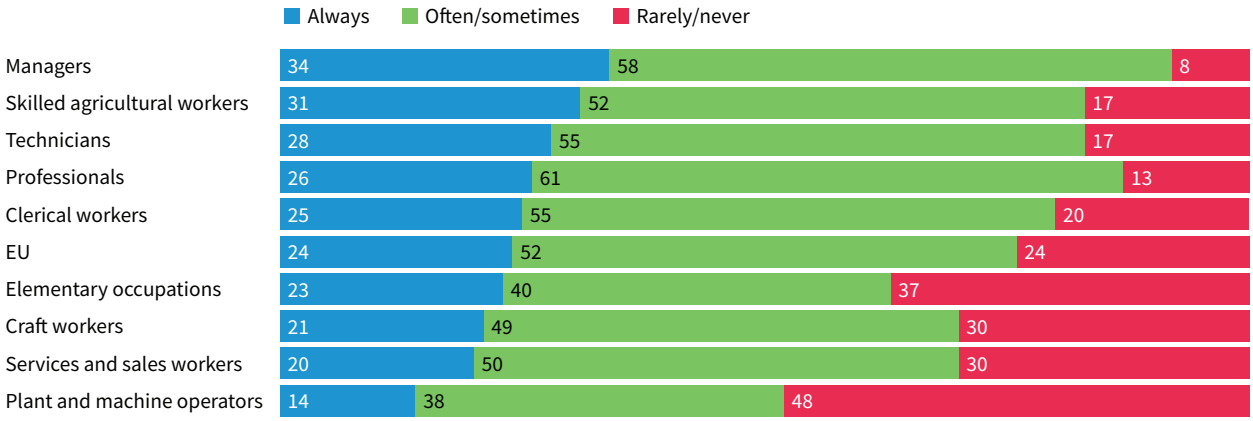


Figure 94: Prevalence of the ability to choose or change the order of tasks in the EU by occupation (%)



The ability to always choose or change the order of tasks (Figure 94) varies from 14 % for plant and machine operators to more than double that for managers (34 %). This autonomy is also higher than average for skilled agricultural workers and technicians. Close to half of plant and machine operators and nearly 4 in 10 of those in elementary occupations are never or rarely able to choose or change the order of their tasks.

While 33 % of managers report being able to choose or change their speed of work, this is the case for only 17 % of plant and machine operators and 19 % of services and sales workers. Having discretion over speed of work is less prevalent in industry (19 %) but much more prevalent in agriculture (32 %) and financial services (31 %) (Figure 95).

Organisational participation

As discussed previously in this section, when organisational participation is low, the risks increase of a negative impact on health and well-being. High organisational participation increases the ability of companies to use the experience, tacit knowledge and practical solutions developed by workers. When employees share their knowledge, and identify and (where possible) solve problems, the whole organisation learns and develops. Organisational participation supports the efficiency of the work done and thus productivity, while sustaining motivation. Many innovations come from employees who develop ideas about how to work better or improve the quality of goods and services.

Fewer than half (46 %) of employees can always or most of the time influence decisions that are important for work, but about 40 % are consulted always or most of the time before objectives are set for their work and are involved in improving work organisation or work processes in their department.

While there are few differences by gender as regards consultation and opportunities to improve work organisation, there is a 9 pp difference to the advantage of men in relation to having an influence on important decisions for work.

Younger workers (33 %), temporary employees (33 %) and workers with less than a year of seniority (34 %) are consulted least. Part-time workers and younger workers

Figure 95: Prevalence of the ability to change or choose speed of work in the EU by sector (%)

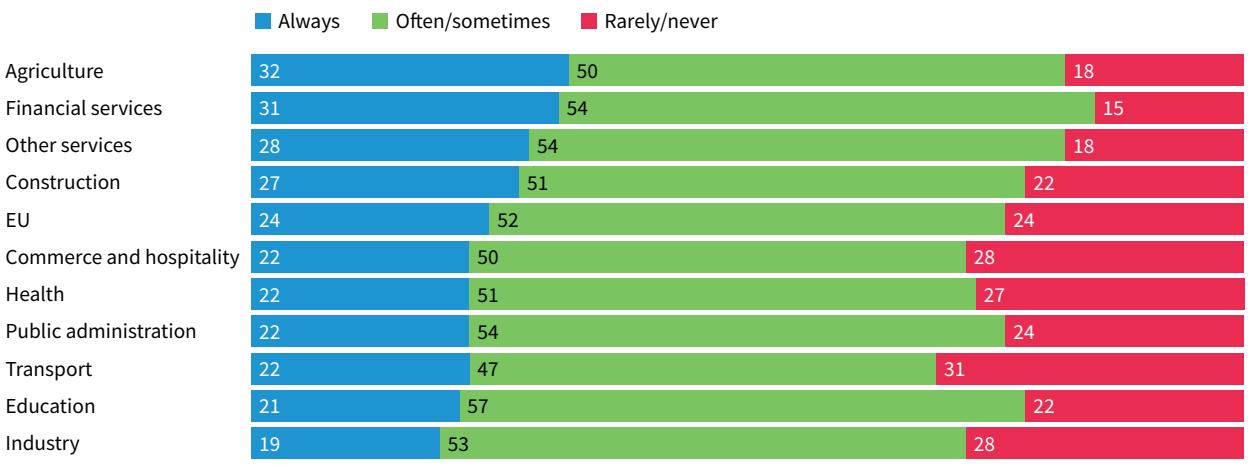
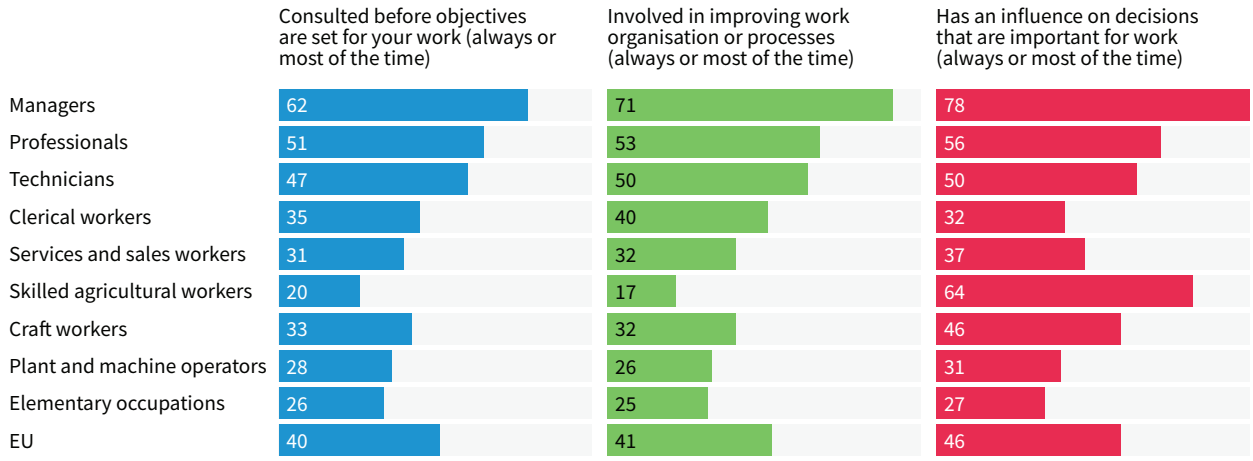


Figure 96: Prevalence of different aspects of organisational participation in the EU by occupation (%)



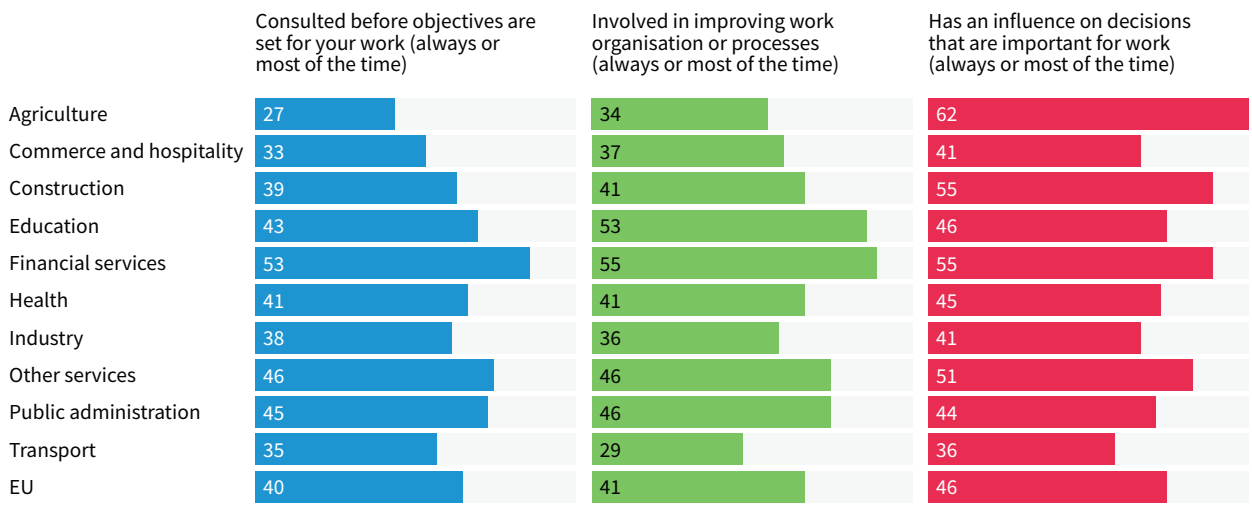
(both 35 %), workers with less than a year of seniority (32 %) and temporary workers (31 %) are least involved in improving work organisation.

A similar pattern appears when it comes to having an influence on decisions that are important for their work: younger workers (37 %), part-time workers (36 %), employees with less than a year of seniority (33 %) and temporary employees (31 %) report the lowest levels of having an influence on decisions that are important for their work.

The gap in organisational participation by occupation is wide, with about a quarter of workers in elementary occupations reporting opportunities for organisational participation, while 60 % or more of managers report such opportunities (Figure 96). While they are least consulted (20 %) and least involved in improving work processes (17 %), 64 % of skilled agricultural workers report that they can influence decisions that are important for their work always or most of the time.

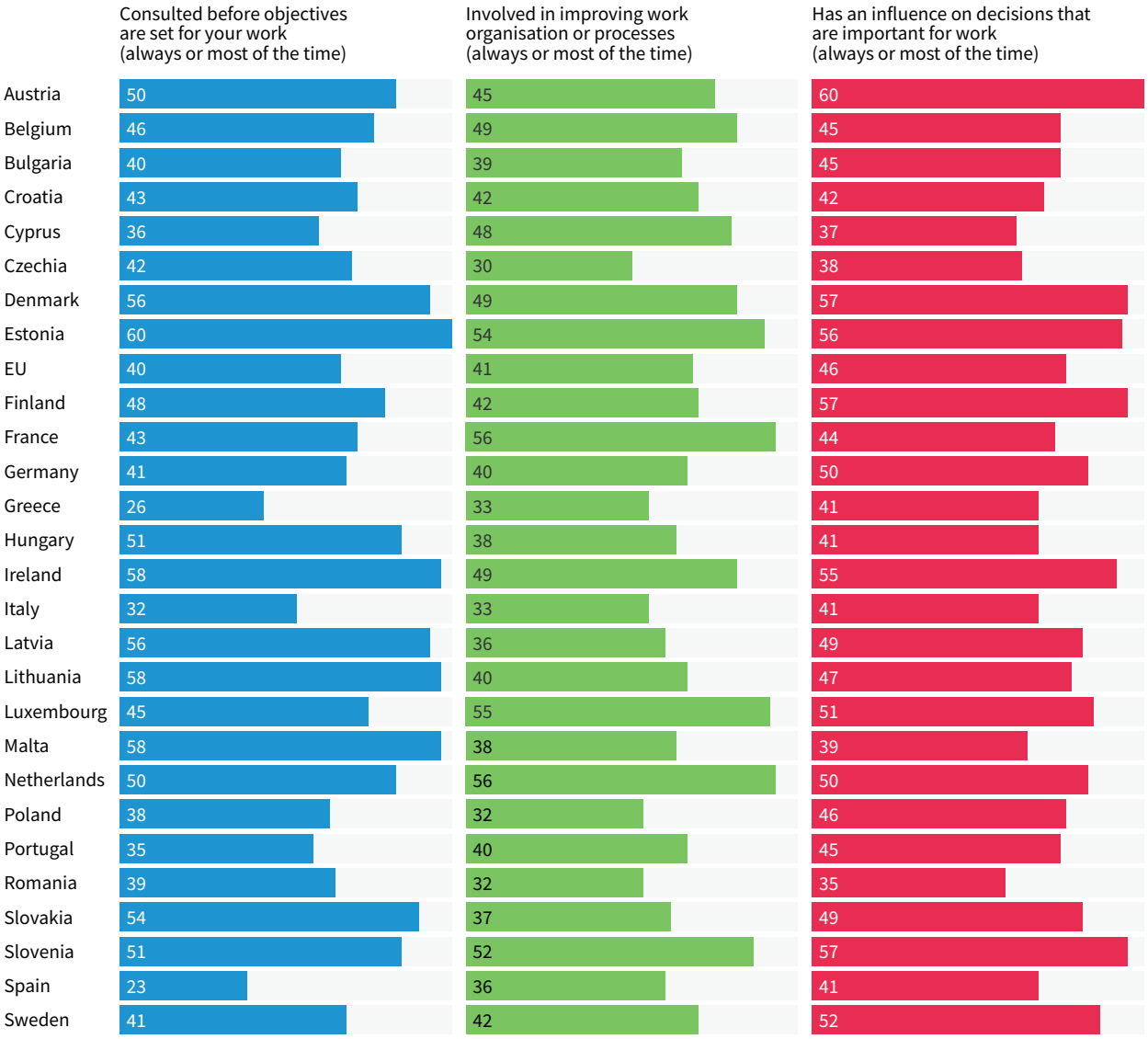
There are significant differences between sectors (Figure 97). Close to 50 % of employees in financial services, education, public administration and other services report being consulted and involved in improving work organisation or work processes (always or most of the time). In contrast, about one third or less of employees in agriculture, commerce and hospitality, and transport have these opportunities. As regards the opportunity to influence decisions that are important for their work, more than half of employees in agriculture, construction, financial services and other services report being able to do so always or most of the time. This opportunity is least frequent for employees in transport.

Figure 97: Prevalence of different aspects of organisational participation in the EU by sector (%)



Member States have different regulations, cultures and work practices in relation to organisational participation; they also have different occupational and sectoral structures. Differences between Member States are quite significant (Figure 98). It would be interesting to explore these differences in more detail and assess their impact on job quality.

Figure 98: Prevalence of different aspects of organisational participation in the EU by Member State (%)



Work intensity

Summary

- The Work intensity index shows diverging trends for men and women: it has deteriorated for women but improved for men.
- By sector, the best score is seen in agriculture (76 index points), while the health sector reports the poorest score (63 points), followed by financial services (64 points) (note, the lower the score, the higher the levels of work intensity).
- By occupation, skilled agricultural workers score the highest (77 points), followed by those in elementary occupations (71 points), while managers and technicians (both at 64 points) score the lowest.
- Women are more likely than men to face high-speed work, frequent interruptions and higher emotional demands. This is largely because they are over-represented in professions that require extensive public interaction, such as health and education.
- The industrial sector has the highest number of workers with three or more factors determining their work pace, often driven by automatic systems.
- The health sector has the highest emotional demands, linked to frequent public interaction. These workers often have to hide their feelings, deal with angry clients and handle emotionally disturbing situations.
- Despite the increasing penetration of technology in the workplace, the pace of work is primarily driven by human factors, with 62 % of workers reporting that their pace is driven by direct customer demands; 50 % report that it is driven by the work done by colleagues and 38 % state that it is driven by direct hierarchical control from their supervisor. All of this highlights the importance of social and organisational factors in shaping the pace of work.

Work intensity refers to the amount of effort – mental, emotional or physical – that a worker must exert to meet the expectations of their job role. Work intensity is typically considered a job demand that, if too high and prolonged, depletes employees' mental and physical resources, leading to negative consequences for workers' health, well-being and overall job quality. Work intensity is not necessarily linked to better performance for companies: working too fast may not be the most effective way to work. It can be associated with poor planning and communication and can lead to reduced quality.

Influential theoretical models – such as the demand–control model of occupational stress (Karasek, 1979; Karasek et al., 1990) and the job demands–resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker et al., 2023) – link work intensity to health outcomes through its interaction with key dimensions of work. Such dimensions include job control (skill discretion and decision latitude) and social resources (social support from colleagues and supervisors). These models postulate that the negative effects of high work intensity are amplified when workers lack sufficient job resources, such as job control and social resources. The effort–reward imbalance model (Siegrist, 1996) further emphasises the negative health impact of high effort – or 'overcommitment' (akin to the notion of job demand) – when it is not matched by adequate rewards, such as fair pay, recognition, career opportunities or job security. This model thus positions work intensity as a key component of occupational stress and strain.

Numerous epidemiological prospective studies have confirmed its negative impact on health and well-being, with high work intensity linked to an increased risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, weight gain, physical inactivity, depression-related outcomes, burnout, sleep problems, suicidal ideation and musculoskeletal disorders (see the review by Niedhammer et al., 2021). Risks increase when it is sustained and chronic and combined with other work-related stressors.

The Work intensity index includes several indicators that measure job demands (Table 13):

- quantitative demands (working at a fast pace, having tight deadlines, lacking sufficient time to complete tasks and experiencing frequent and disruptive interruptions);
- interdependency between work pace determinants (captured by the presence of three or more pace determinants) – pace of work is influenced by production targets, machinery, customers, colleagues or supervisors;

Table 13: Proportions of EU workers reporting the subdimensions of the Work intensity index (%) and mean index scores, 2010–2024

Subdimension	Item	2010	2015	2024
Quantitative demands	Working at high speed (three quarters of the time or more)	33	33	35
	Working to tight deadlines (three quarters of the time or more)	33	34	34
	Enough time to do job (rarely/never)	9	10	10
	Frequent (very or fairly often) and disruptive interruptions	13	15	19
Interdependency of pace determinants	Three or more pace determinants	31	32	32
Emotional demands	Hide feelings (always or most of the time)	25	31	25
	Handling angry clients (three quarters of the time or more)	10	16	15
	Emotionally disturbing situations (a quarter of the time or more)	*	31	31
Overall index score	*Work intensity index*	*70*	*68*	*67*
	Full index 2024 score			*67*

* Question not asked at this time.
Notes: Italic text indicates mean index scores, not proportions (%). The trend of the index score includes all items covered by the survey since 2010.
Source: EWCS series.

- emotional demands (hiding one's feelings at work, dealing with angry clients or third parties and being exposed to emotionally distressing situations).

Research on work intensity and its effects has grown significantly over the past decade or so (Ulferts et al., 2013; Chesley, 2014; Mauno et al., 2021). One common hypothesis is that technological advancements contribute to increased work intensity, with the COVID-19 pandemic further accelerating technological change in the workplace and heightening it.

To maintain consistency with the interpretation of other indices, the greater the score on the Work intensity index, the more favourable it is for workers.

Work intensity over time

The score for Work intensity has decreased over the last three survey editions, indicating the intensification of work (Figure 99). Although men previously reported worse scores for work intensity, in 2024 women surpassed their male counterparts (that is, they reported lower scores on this index, which are less favourable).

Workers working between 40 and 48 hours a week experienced a strong degradation in their Work intensity score (– 6 index points). Strong degradation was also reported by workers in the 20–35 hours bracket (– 6 points) and in the bracket of 48 hours or more (– 5 points). Across sectors, the degradation in work

Figure 99: Mean Work intensity index scores in the EU by gender, 2010–2024

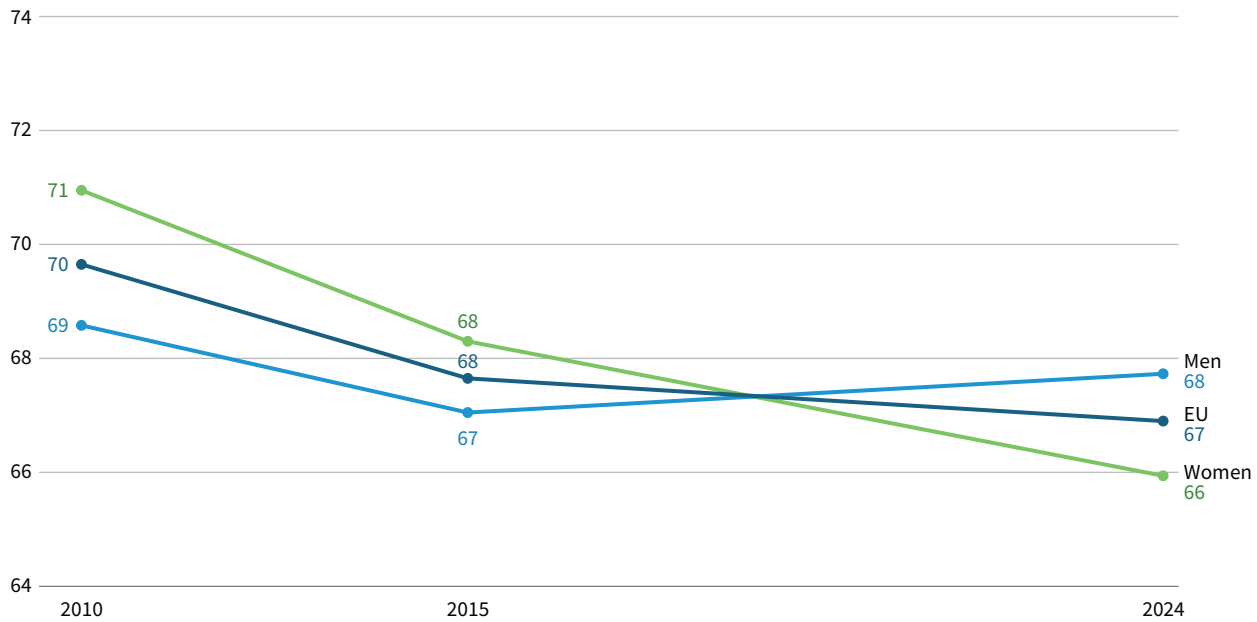


Table 14: Prevalence of selected items in the Work intensity index (%) and mean index scores in the EU by sector

Sector	Prevalence (%)								Mean Work intensity score
	Working at high speed (three quarters of the time or more)	Working to tight deadlines (three quarters of the time or more)	Three or more pace determinants	Enough time to do job (rarely/never)	Hide feelings (always or most of the time)	Handling angry clients (three quarters of the time or more)	Emotionally disturbing situations (three quarters of the time or more)	Frequent (very or fairly often) and disruptive interruptions	
Agriculture	23	20	19	9	10	2	4	9	76
Commerce and hospitality	42	35	34	8	29	19	7	17	65
Construction	34	34	33	8	15	8	5	15	67
Education	23	25	22	12	31	22	14	22	68
Financial services	31	34	40	8	30	17	6	25	64
Health	37	36	26	11	39	28	29	29	63
Industry	37	37	41	10	16	6	7	17	67
Other services	33	34	28	9	22	12	7	19	68
Public administration	24	28	30	9	34	16	12	20	68
Transport	42	45	32	9	25	14	10	13	65
EU	35	34	32	10	25	15	10	19	67

intensity was experienced most by workers in education (– 7 points), commerce and hospitality (– 6 points) and health (– 3 points), while it improved the most in construction (+ 3 points).

Work intensity index

There is a large gap between Member States in Work intensity, with the best scores seen in Bulgaria, the Netherlands and Poland (71 points) and the lowest scores seen in Cyprus and Malta (56 and 57 points, respectively).

Across sectors, the best score is seen in agriculture (76 points), while the health sector reports the poorest score (63 points), followed by financial services (64 points). As indicated in Table 14, workers in the health sector report a high level of emotional demands (hiding their feelings, dealing with angry clients and finding themselves in emotionally disturbing situations the most) but also work at high speed, work to tight deadlines and experience the most frequent and disruptive interruptions.

Across occupations, the variation is similar in amplitude to across sectors: skilled agricultural workers score highest (77 points), followed by those in elementary occupations (71 points), while managers and technicians (both at 64 points) score the lowest (Table 15).

Managers combine high quantitative demands (above or close to average) with a high level of frequent and disruptive interruptions. In addition, 28 % of them also report hiding their feelings always or most of the time. Technicians' work intensity is not very different from that of managers, but they also report being more frequently in contact with angry clients (19 %).

Table 15: Prevalence of selected items in the Work intensity index (%) and mean index scores in the EU by occupation

Occupation	Prevalence (%)								Mean Work intensity score
	Working at high speed (three quarters of the time or more)	Working to tight deadlines (three quarters of the time or more)	Three or more pace determinants	Enough time to do job (rarely/never)	Hide feelings (always or most of the time)	Handling angry clients (three quarters of the time or more)	Emotionally disturbing situations (three quarters of the time or more)	Frequent (very or fairly often) and disruptive interruptions	
Managers	36	36	36	10	28	15	7	27	64
Professionals	28	34	27	10	27	17	14	25	66
Technicians	34	36	35	10	29	19	13	25	64
Clerical workers	33	34	33	8	23	13	7	19	67
Services and sales workers	39	30	33	11	34	23	12	18	66
Skilled agricultural workers	20	16	15	11	10	2	3	9	77
Craft workers	38	37	39	9	17	7	5	14	67
Plant and machine operators	41	40	42	7	22	9	9	8	68
Elementary occupations	40	34	25	10	17	8	8	10	71
EU	**35**	**34**	**32**	**10**	**25**	**15**	**10**	**19**	**67**

Quantitative demands

In the EWCS, high quantitative demands relate to jobs that involve working at a very high speed and meeting tight deadlines for three quarters of the time or more, experiencing frequent and disruptive interruptions and never or rarely having enough time to get the job done.

Intensive work is fairly common in EU workplaces: 34 % of workers in the EU report working to tight deadlines and another 35 % report working at high speed around three quarters of the time or more.

There are no differences between men and women (34 %) in terms of deadline pressure, but women tend to experience a higher work pace than men. Some 36 % of women report working at high speed three quarters of the time or more, compared with 33 % of men.

The Member States with the highest percentages of workers reporting that they work to tight deadlines around three quarters of the time or more are Malta (54 %), Ireland (48 %), Cyprus (47 %), Austria (46 %), Romania and Spain (both 45 %). Most of these Member States also have a high share of workers who report working at high speed with the same frequency, including Cyprus (55 %), Malta (50 %), Greece and Romania (both 48 %), Spain and Austria (both 46 %).

One in 10 workers (10 %) report 'never' or 'rarely' having time to do their job. Romania (15 %) and Greece (14 %) are the Member States with the highest share of workers reporting this.

Only 19 % of workers report never experiencing interruptions at work, while 33 % experience frequent interruptions at work, either very often or fairly often. Of those reporting interruptions, one in two (50 %) believe that these interruptions have no significant consequence, and a much smaller proportion (10 %) view them as beneficial. Another 40 % consider interruptions to be disruptive. Women are also more subject to disruptive interruptions than men (43 % versus 37 %, respectively).

Managers (27 %), services and sales workers (18 %) and workers in commerce and hospitality (17 %) and health (29 %) are more likely to report experiencing frequent and disruptive interruptions.

Pace determinants and interdependency

Factors that influence the pace of work include client demands, performance targets, the speed of automated machines or systems and direct instructions from supervisors. The greater the number of these overlapping determinants, the higher the resulting level of what is known as the 'interdependency rate'. This provides a more objective measure of the experience of demands reported by workers. When workers are experiencing multiple pace determinants, it becomes more difficult to implement anticipation strategies that are suitable for the pace determinant (such strategies could include, when customer demands set the pace, workers preparing for rushes when there is less work). Horizontal demands, that is, demands from colleagues and managers, are also not easy to accommodate, as both relationships are of importance

Table 16: Prevalence of pace determinants in the EU, 2010–2024 (%)

Pace determinant	2010	2015	2024
Work done by colleagues	37	38	50
Direct demands from people such as customers, passengers, pupils and patients	65	67	62
Numerical production targets or performance targets	39	43	31
Automatic speed of a machine or movement of a product	17	19	13
Direct control by manager	35	34	38
Interdependency: three or more pace determinants	31	32	32

Source: EWCS series.

to workers. Both demands from colleagues and demands from managers have increased since 2010 (Table 16).

One in three workers (32 %) were exposed to three or more pace determinants in 2024; men (34 %) are more likely to be exposed to multiple pace determinants than women (31 %). There is also a steep age gradient: younger workers are much more likely to be subject to a higher number of pace determinants than older workers (38 % of 16- to 29-year-olds, 33 % of 30- to 54-year-olds and 27 % of 55- to 64-year-olds).

In terms of specific pace determinants, 62 % of workers report that their pace of work is driven by direct customer demands. This is particularly pronounced among services and sales workers (78 %), managers and professionals (both 70 %), who all report a high level of customer-driven pace.

More than 3 in 10 workers (31 %) report that their pace of work is dependent on numerical production targets or performance targets. This proportion has decreased from 42 % in 2015. Looking at occupations, 44 % of craft workers and 41 % of plant and machine operators report this pace determinant.

The pace of work is also significantly influenced by the work done by colleagues, with an average of 49 % of workers reporting this as a key determinant. Managers (61 %) are the most likely to report that the work of their colleagues affects their own pace of work.

Direct hierarchical control from one's supervisor remains an important aspect of work organisation: 38 % of workers report that their pace of work depends on direct control by their boss. This form of control is more prevalent among certain occupational groups, including plant and machine operators (47 %) and clerical workers (46 %). For this pace determinant, there is a strong age gradient, with younger workers aged 16–29 years (46 %) more likely to report it than core-age and older workers.

Only 13 % of workers report that their pace of work is determined by an automatic system or machine speed. This type of pace determinant is more commonly reported in industry (31 %), where a significant proportion of workers have their work pace dictated by automated systems or machine speed. This pattern is also reflected across occupations and genders, with men (17 %) more likely than women (9 %) to be subject to this type of work pace determinant, and plant and machine operators (38 %) and craft workers (27 %) being the most affected.

Emotional demands

Emotional demands in the context of work relate to the psychological and emotional effort required to manage both one's own feelings and those of others in the performance of one's job. While all jobs involve some degree of emotional effort, these demands are particularly relevant in roles that involve frequent interaction with clients, patients, customers, students or colleagues, where effectively managing emotions is essential for professional performance.

Previous empirical studies have shown that high emotional demands in the workplace are a significant predictor of mental health issues, fatigue and burnout (Zapf, 2002; Hulsheger et al., 2011; Jeung et al., 2018), an increased risk of long-term sickness absence (Framke et al., 2021), a heightened risk of hospital-treated depressive disorders (Madsen et al., 2022) and an increased likelihood of receiving a disability pension (Framke et al., 2024).

A quarter of workers (25 %) report hiding their feelings always or most of the time.

The proportion of workers who face angry clients three quarters or more of the time has fluctuated over the past decade. After increasing from 10 % to 16 % between 2010 and 2015, the percentage stood at 15 % in 2024.

Another indicator of emotional demands is being in situations that are emotionally disturbing: 1 in 10 workers (10 %) on average in the EU report being in such situations three quarters or more of the time.

Women are more likely than men to report hiding their feelings always or most of the time (29 % of women and 22 % of men), dealing with angry clients three quarters or more of the time (18 % of women and 12 % of men) and being exposed to emotionally disturbing situations

with the same frequency (13 % of women and 8 % of men). The gender differences in emotional demands can be attributed, in part, to the gendered distribution of occupations and sectors. Women are over-represented in public-facing professions, such as health, education and social services, where jobs often entail high levels of emotional labour.

Consistent with previous survey editions, the health and education sectors exhibit frequent exposure to emotional demands, largely due to the frequent interactions that workers in these sectors have with the public. Nearly two in five workers (39 %) in the health sector report hiding their feelings always or most of the time. The health and education sectors have the highest proportions of workers who report dealing with angry clients three quarters or more of the time, at 28 % and 22 %, respectively. Workers in these sectors are also more likely to report being in emotionally disturbing situations, with 29 % of workers in the health sector and 14 % in the education sector reporting such experiences three quarters or more of the time. When looking at the occupational breakdown, the largest shares of regular exposure to emotional demands at work are found among services and sales workers, especially as regards the proportion of workers reporting having to hide their feelings always or most of the time (34 %) or handling angry clients three quarters of the time or more (23 %).

Social environment

Summary

- The overall Social environment index score decreased by 1 point between 2010 and 2024. The decrease was experienced by women. Consequently, the gender gap widened in this period.
- Women's Social environment index scores are consistently lower than men's, due mainly to a greater exposure to adverse social behaviour.
- Despite relatively low overall prevalence, adverse social behaviours – such as verbal abuse, unwanted sexual attention and bullying – remain a significant concern, with certain Member States (including Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden) reporting higher than average rates of these behaviours. This partly reflects the awareness of the problem and a culture of reporting in these Member States, rather than necessarily indicating a higher actual prevalence of such behaviours than in countries with low prevalence rates, which may be due to under-reporting or a lack of recognition of these issues.
- The reported experience of adverse social behaviours varies significantly across different demographic groups, with women and younger workers (16–29 years old) being disproportionately affected, and certain sectors, such as health, education and public administration, being particularly vulnerable to most of these behaviours.
- Direct and frequent interaction with the public (customers, patients and pupils) increases the likelihood of experiencing adverse social behaviours, particularly verbal abuse, threats and physical violence.
- Social support is generally high. Colleagues provide more support than managers, with 73 % of employees reporting support from colleagues, compared with 64 % of men and 65 % of women reporting support from managers.
- Social support from managers has increased since 2010 by 7 pp.
- The transport sector shows the highest proportion of workers who report receiving support rarely or never. This lack of support may worsen the effects of high job demands in this sector.

Employment holds significant importance in people's lives, providing avenues to form social connections. A supportive social environment at work is crucial for individual well-being and supporting task performance. It can also foster inclusion and enhance self-esteem through recognition from colleagues and supervisors (Krauss et al., 2022).

Human resources management policies and practices acknowledge that promoting strong social integration, fostering inclusivity and maintaining a positive social environment are critical strategies for meeting employee expectations – strategies that contribute to improved productivity, stronger commitment and higher levels of engagement (Dollard et al., 2010; Eshete et al., 2024). Central to this is the concept of psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), that is, the shared belief that the workplace is a safe place for interpersonal risk-taking, where individuals feel comfortable discussing ideas, concerns or mistakes without fear of negative consequences. Conversely, when social integration is weak and psychological safety is lacking, the likelihood of adverse social behaviours such as bullying and harassment increases, undermining workers' well-being, organisational cohesion and the overall social climate.

A large body of research has documented the negative consequences of adverse social behaviours at work, particularly bullying and harassment, which can occur both face to face and through digital means, and affect both individuals and organisations (Eurofound, 2024d). For individuals, these behaviours can have severe physical and psychological health consequences such as depression (Niedhammer et al., 2021).

Workplace bullying also has serious and wide-ranging negative effects on organisations. It has been associated with increased employee turnover (Hoel et al., 2003), higher rates of absenteeism and reduced efficiency (Kivimäki et al., 2000) and lower levels of employee engagement and organisational commitment (Nielsen et al., 2012). Financially, bullying can lead to substantial legal costs, settlements and reputational damage, especially when organisations are seen as failing to act (Rayner et al., 2005; Einarsen et al., 2011).

Several theoretical models that explore the relationship between the psychosocial work environment and employee outcomes emphasise the critical role of social support – particularly from colleagues and supervisors – as a buffering or protective factor against workplace bullying and other forms of harassment. These models include the job demand–control–support model (Karasek et al., 1990), the job demands–resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker et al., 2023) and the organisational justice framework (Elovainio et al., 2010). In all of them, social support is conceptualised not only as a job resource that promotes well-being, but also as a protective mechanism that buffers the negative effects of job stressors.

A positive and harassment-free social environment in the workplace can also be fostered through good-quality management practices. Past research consistently highlights the critical role of managerial behaviour and leadership style in shaping the social climate of an organisation. A systematic literature review of empirical studies found a consistent association between transformational and supportive leadership styles and positive health outcomes, including higher job satisfaction, greater work engagement and improved perceived well-being (Swedish Agency for Work Environment Expertise, 2020). These leadership styles are characterised by leaders who motivate, act as role models, encourage innovation and provide individual support. Organisational studies have also found that positive leadership styles correlate with psychological empowerment among employees, a state in which individuals experience a sense of meaning, competence, self-determination and impact in their work (Schermuly et al., 2022). Fair, transparent and supportive management is also associated with lower levels of workplace bullying and harassment (Einarsen et al., 2007; Hoel et al., 2010).

In the EWCS, key dimensions of the social environment are captured through a composite measure – the Social environment index (Table 17). This index assesses, at the job level, the quality of management and the extent to which workers experience positive social interactions with both managers and colleagues; conversely, it also measures the extent to which workers experience feelings of loneliness at work. It also comprises exposure to adverse social behaviours at work, including harassment or bullying (and cyberbullying), sexual harassment and unwanted sexual attention, physical violence, verbal abuse, threats, humiliating behaviours and various forms of discrimination. Comparison over time using the full index is not possible, as some questions were revised or added across different survey editions.

Table 17: Proportions of EU workers reporting the subdimensions of the Social environment index (%) and mean index scores, 2010–2024

Subdimension	Item		2010	2015	2024
Adverse social behaviour	In the last month	Exposure to verbal abuse	10	11	11
		Exposure to unwanted sexual attention	2	2	2
		Exposure to threats (1)	5	4	5
		Exposure to humiliating behaviours (1)	*	6	7
	Over the last 12 months	Exposure to physical violence	2	2	2
		Exposure to sexual harassment	1	1	1
		Exposure to bullying/harassment	4	5	4
		Exposure to cyberbullying (2)	*	*	2
Discrimination (1)	Over the last 12 months	Discrimination at work	6	7	6
Social support	Support from manager (employees only)	Help and support from your manager (most of the time/always)	58	56	65
	Support from colleagues (employees only)	Help and support from colleagues (most of the time/always)	71 (3)	69 (3)	73
	Support from colleagues or peers (self-employed workers only)	Help and support from colleagues or peers (most of the time/always) (2)	*	*	59
	Loneliness	Lonely at work (most of the time/always/sometimes) (2)	*	*	30
Management quality (employees only)	Respect	Your immediate boss respects you as a person – strongly agree or tend to agree	*	89	90
	Cooperation	Your immediate boss is successful in getting people to work together – strongly agree or tend to agree	*	73	77
	Approachability	Your immediate boss makes you feel comfortable about discussing personal and family issues – strongly agree or tend to agree (2)	*	*	70
	Feedback	Your immediate boss provides useful feedback – strongly agree or tend to agree	*	70	76
	Development	Your immediate boss encourages and supports your development – strongly agree or tend to agree	*	66	74
	Transparency	Your immediate boss clearly explains decisions that affect you and your work – strongly agree or tend to agree (2)	*	*	79
Overall index score	*Trend of index score*		*79*	*77*	*78*
	Full index 2024 score				*79*

* Question not asked at this time.
(1) Modified trend.
(2) New question.
(3) The question about social support was asked in 2010 and 2015 to both employees and self-employed individuals. In the EWCS 2024, the question about social support was adapted to suit the specific circumstances of the respondent (i.e. whether they were an employee or self-employed.
Notes: Italic text indicates mean index scores, not proportions (%). The trend of the index score includes all items covered by the survey since 2010, while the full index score includes all items available in 2024. This explains possible discrepancies between the figures reported.
Source: EWCS series.

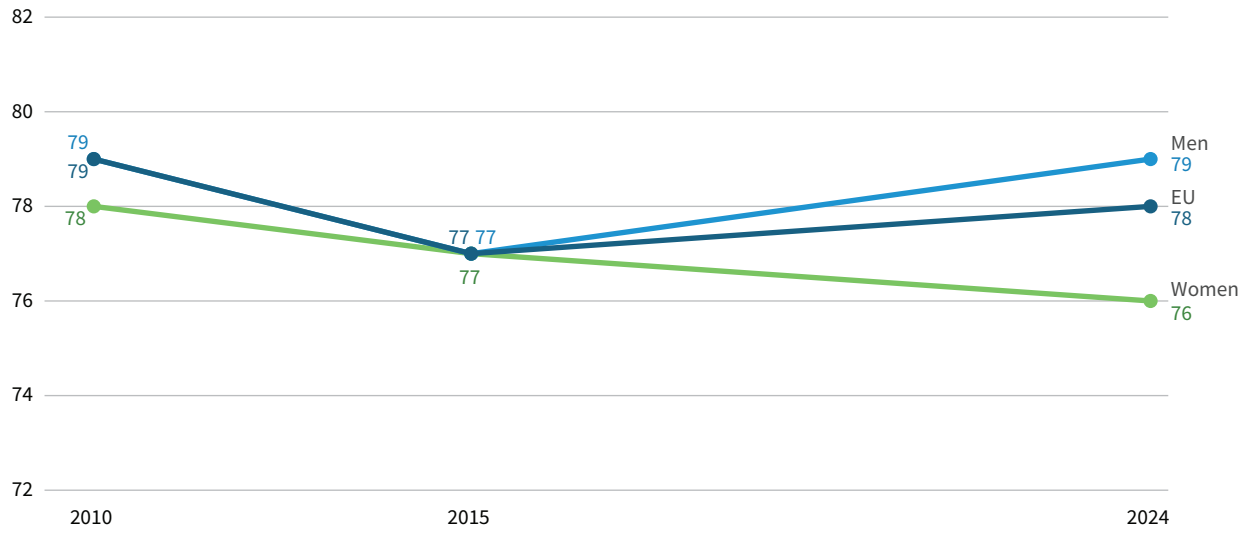
Social environment quality over time

The mean Social environment index score in the EU has decreased slightly, by 1 point, since 2010, but has improved since 2015. While it remained stable for men over the period (with a dip in 2015), it declined by 2 points for women. The gender gap in 2024 is 3 points in favour of men (Figure 100).

The quality of the social environment has remained relatively stable in most Member States over the same period, with some experiencing slight improvements and others slight declines. The Netherlands recorded the largest decline, with its score dropping from 78 in 2010 to 69 in 2024, while Austria saw the largest increase, with its score rising from 74 in 2010 to 78 in 2024.

In terms of occupation, skilled agricultural workers' scores declined from 87 in 2010 to 78 in 2024. The

Figure 100: Mean Social environment index scores in the EU by gender, 2010–2024



Source: EWCS series.

quality of the social environment also declined for managers and those in elementary occupations (by 2 points each). The score for plant and machine operators increased by 4 points.

Across sectors, agriculture recorded the highest score in 2010 but it had declined by 2024. Transport and health have remained below average throughout the three survey editions. By 2024, financial services registered the highest score on the index and also saw the greatest progress (+ 6 points).

Adverse social behaviours

The EWCS 2024 asked respondents whether they had been exposed to various forms of adverse social behaviour in the month prior to the study. Such behaviour included verbal abuse (11 % reporting this), unwanted sexual attention (2 %), humiliating behaviours (7 %) or threats (5 %). Respondents were also asked whether they had been exposed to the following within the 12 months prior to the study: physical violence (2 %), sexual harassment (1 %), bullying/harassment (4 %) and cyberbullying (2 %). See Box 8 for more on the finding on sexual harassment. The final item was a new addition to the 2024 edition and was accompanied by a definition of the term: 'bullying or harassment that took place through digital technologies e.g. emails, instant messages or social media'.

Although the overall prevalence of adverse social behaviours is relatively low, it remains essential to identify specific at-risk groups to enable targeted interventions and effective support. Exposure to such negative behaviours can have significant and lasting consequences for an individual's physical and mental health (Niedhammer et al., 2021), diminishing their overall quality of life and potentially compelling them to exit the workforce prematurely. This, in turn, can result in substantial societal costs in terms of lost productivity, increased healthcare expenditures and greater demand on social support systems.

Age and gender differences

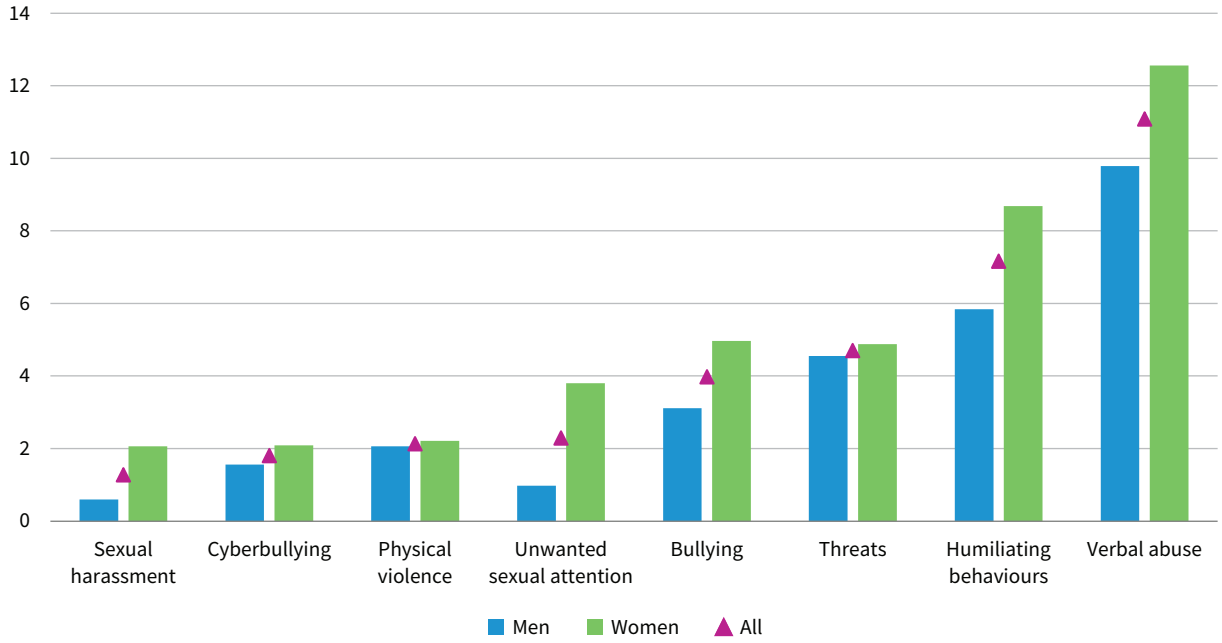
In the EWCS, adverse social behaviours are most likely to be reported by the younger age cohort (16–29 years old), with the exception of bullying and cyberbullying, which are reported more evenly across all age groups, from the youngest workers to those nearing retirement (55–64 years old).

In terms of gender (Figure 101), all adverse social behaviours are experienced by women to a greater extent than by men, except for physical violence and threats, for which no gender differences are observed.

Country differences

Considerable variations exist in the reporting of adverse social behaviours across different countries (Figure 102), with higher than average exposure in a number of countries, particularly in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden. Variation in reported prevalence rates across countries is often attributed partly to cultural and societal factors. Differences in what is considered acceptable workplace behaviour may lead to varying thresholds for recognising and reporting such incidents. In societies where public awareness, legal protections and open discourse around workplace mistreatment are more developed, individuals may feel more empowered to report adverse behaviours. In contrast, in countries where these issues remain less visible or are socially stigmatised, under-reporting is more likely, as victims may experience feelings of shame or guilt or fear of repercussions.

Figure 101: Prevalence of exposure to each of the adverse social behaviours in the EU by gender (%)



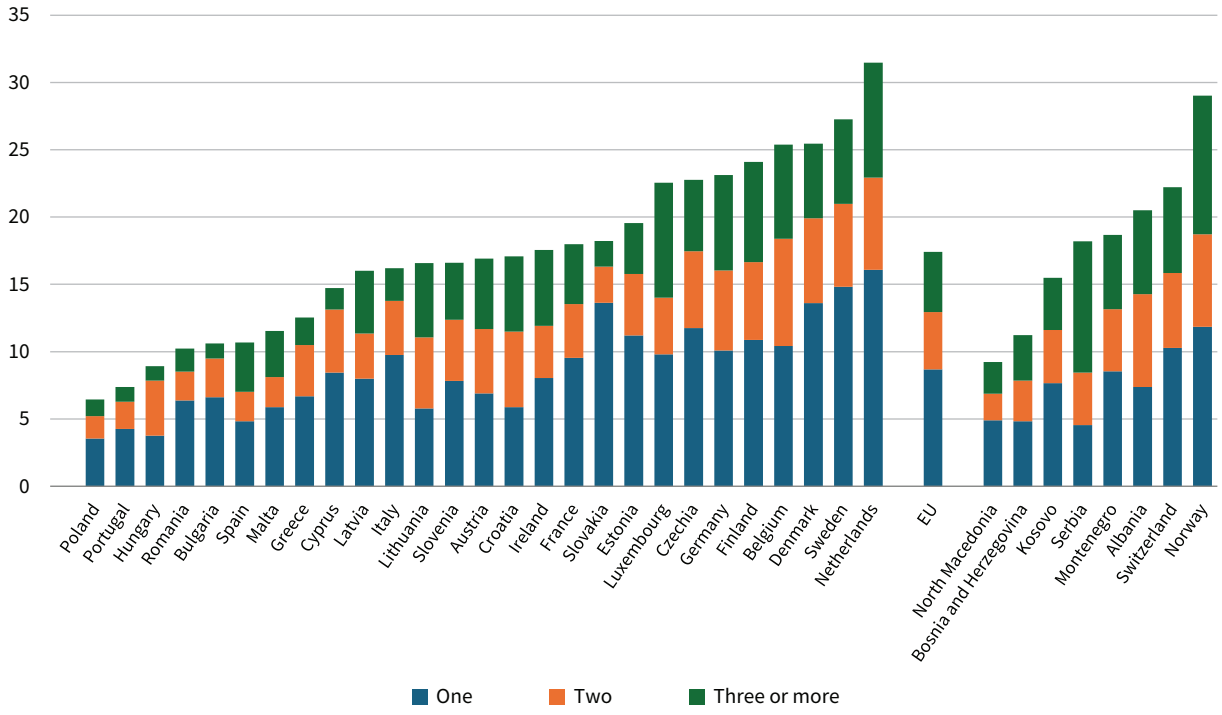
Box 8: Measuring sexual harassment in EU-wide surveys

The EU-wide Gender-based Violence Survey – conducted jointly by the European Institute for Gender Equality and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights – reported that 31 % of women in the EU have experienced sexual harassment at work during their lifetime, while 4 % had experienced it in the 12 months preceding the survey. The latter figure is higher than that found in the EWCS, which found that 1 % of workers (1 % of men and 2 % of women) had experienced sexual harassment at work in the previous 12 months. This discrepancy is attributable to key methodological differences, including the Gender-based Violence Survey's focus on lifetime experiences; its use of detailed, behaviourally specific questions; and its design, which is specifically tailored to capture experiences of gender-based violence, not limited to those that occur in working life.

In terms of exposure to various forms of adverse social behaviour **within the month preceding the survey**, the Netherlands reports the highest levels across all categories, with rates often more than double the EU average. The Netherlands has reported the following rates: 20 % for verbal abuse, 5 % for unwanted sexual attention, 10 % for threats and 12 % for humiliating behaviours. Other countries also have significantly higher than average prevalence rates of some of these behaviours: rates for verbal abuse in Belgium and Denmark are 18 % and 17 %, respectively; rates for unwanted sexual attention are 5 % in Denmark and 4 % in Finland and Italy; and rates for threats in Belgium, Denmark, Finland and Sweden are 7 % and in Germany are 8 %. A broader and more heterogeneous group of countries report higher than average rates for humiliating behaviours, including Sweden (13 %), Czechia (12 %), Belgium and Luxembourg (11 %) and Cyprus, Germany, Lithuania and Slovenia (10 %).

When the prevalence rates of adverse social behaviours **in the 12 months prior to the survey** are examined, it is again in the Netherlands that the highest prevalence rate of physical violence is seen, at 6 %, which is three times the EU average of 2 %, followed by Sweden (5 %) and Denmark, Finland and Ireland (all 4 %). In terms of bullying or harassment, Luxembourg has the highest prevalence rate in the EU, at 10 %, which is more than double the EU average of 4 %, followed by Belgium at 8 %. Cyberbullying, the digital counterpart to traditional bullying, exceeds the 2 % EU average in a few countries, with Latvia reporting the highest rate (4 %) and Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden all reporting rates of 3 %. Regarding sexual harassment, Finland has the highest prevalence rate (5 %), which is five times the EU average, followed by the Netherlands, which reports a rate of 3 %. The shares of workers across the 35 countries surveyed who experienced one or more adverse social behaviours are shown in Figure 102; the data cover such behaviours experienced within the month prior to the survey and within the 12 months prior to the survey.

Figure 102: Proportions of workers who reported one or more adverse social behaviours by country (%)



Differences by sector and occupation

Adverse social behaviours are disproportionately prevalent in certain sectors, as illustrated in Figure 103. The health sector stands out as having the highest percentage of workers subjected to the most forms of adverse social behaviour, including unwanted sexual attention (6 %), threats and humiliating behaviours (both 10 %), physical violence (8 %) and sexual harassment (3 %). Verbal abuse is most commonly reported in the public administration sector (17 %), followed closely by the health, transport and education sectors (all 15 %). Cyberbullying is most prevalent in the education sector (4 %), while bullying is an issue across all three public sectors, with public administration, health and education recording equally high prevalence rates of 7 % each.

Figure 103: Proportions of workers reporting one or more adverse social behaviours in the EU by sector (%)

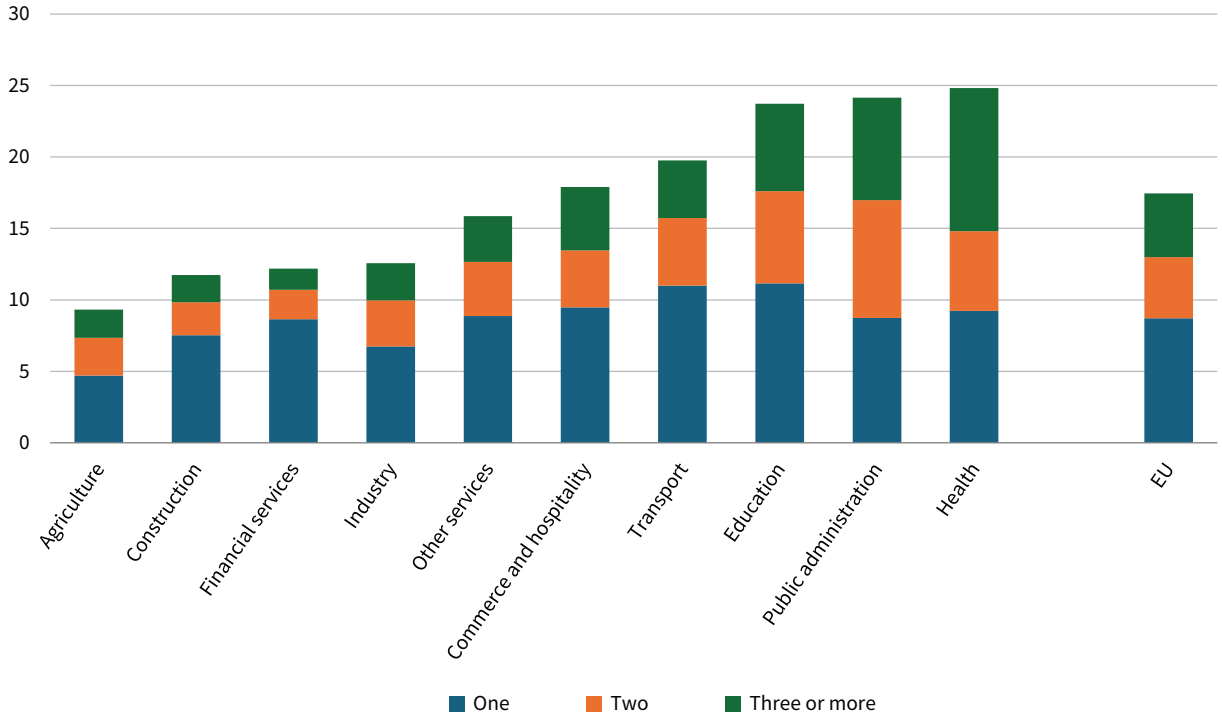
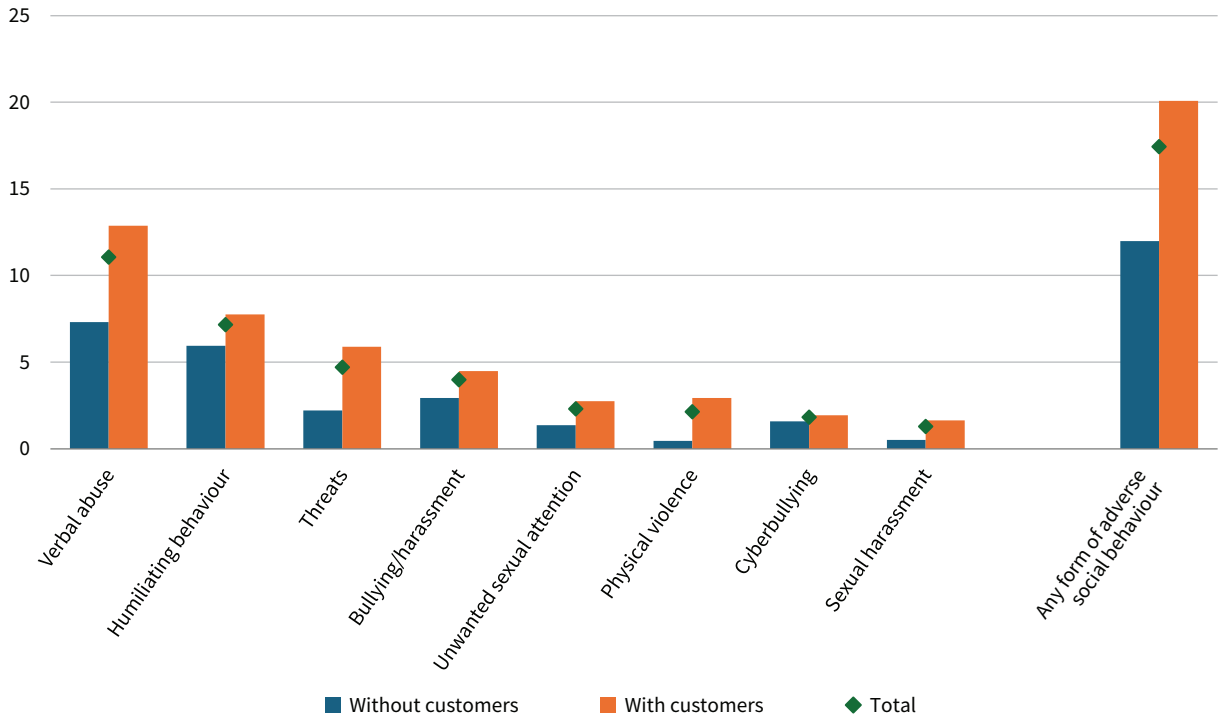


Figure 104: Prevalence of exposure to adverse social behaviours in the EU by whether or not work involves dealing with customers (%)



Notes: The category 'with customers' includes anyone who reports that their work involves dealing with customers at least a quarter of the time, while the category 'without customers' refers to those who report never or almost never dealing with customers. This analysis is based on questions addressed to all workers.

In terms of occupation, services and sales workers are disproportionately affected by some adverse social behaviours. This occupational group reports significantly higher rates of verbal abuse (16 %), unwanted sexual attention (4 %), threats (7 %), humiliating behaviours (9 %) and physical violence (4 %) than the EU average.

The prevalence of experiencing adverse social behaviours among services and sales workers, and in the public sector, can be attributed to two key factors: the predominance in these occupations and sectors of women, who are generally more likely to experience such behaviours, and their greater exposure to third parties, such as clients in public administration, patients in healthcare and students or parents in educational settings.

Having to deal with customers for a quarter of work time or more increases the likelihood of experiencing adverse social behaviour (Figure 104) compared with those who rarely or never deal with customers. This is particularly true in the case of exposure to verbal abuse, threats and physical violence and, to a lesser extent, in the case of humiliating behaviours, bullying or harassment and unwanted sexual attention.

Differences by employment status

Employees with a contract of unlimited duration report lower prevalence rates of exposure to adverse social behaviour (18 %) than those on a temporary contract (23 %) or those on a temporary agency employment contract (30 %).

Compared with employees, a smaller share of self-employed individuals report being exposed to any of the adverse social behaviours mentioned (18 % versus 13 %, respectively). Aspects related to the nature of the work could explain this difference. Self-employed individuals typically work outside hierarchical structures in which power imbalances exist, enjoy greater control over their work environment and the people they choose to interact with and may interpret negative encounters as part of doing business or challenges to be managed, rather than as bullying or harassment.

Discrimination

The Employment Equality Framework Directive (Council Directive 2000/78/EC) prohibits discrimination in the field of employment and occupation on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. These are the minimum standards set at EU level; some Member States, such as Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Spain and Sweden, have opted for a more comprehensive list of prohibited grounds than those listed in the framework directive (Eurofound, 2024d).

There is a substantial body of research that highlights the link between experiencing discrimination and poor mental health outcomes, whether discrimination is based on race or ethnicity (Nadimpalli et al., 2015), age (Lyons et al., 2018; Marchiondo et al., 2019), sexual orientation (Tomic et al., 2025) or disability (Sharma et al., 2025).

While the consequences of discriminatory behaviour towards workers – for example in terms of wages, promotion or access to other rewards in the workplace – are not covered in the EWCS, the survey nonetheless is instrumental in identifying the overall prevalence of experiences of discrimination in European workplaces and among the most vulnerable groups.

In the EU, approximately 6 % of workers reported experiencing discrimination at work in the 12 months preceding the survey. In other words, they reported being treated less favourably or unfairly due to their personal characteristics or identity. Cyprus (12 %) and Sweden (11 %) are the countries with the highest shares of workers reporting experiences of discrimination in their job. Women are more likely to report experiencing discrimination (8 %) than men (4 %). First-generation migrants also report higher levels of discrimination (12 %) than second-generation migrants (9 %) or native workers (5 %).

Looking at different grounds of discrimination, the results involve relatively small proportions of workers, which do not allow for further disaggregation of the data. Among the various grounds of discrimination identified in the survey, age-based and gender-based discrimination are the most frequently reported, although each is reported by only 2 % of workers. Discrimination based on all other grounds is reported by 1 % or less of workers.

Social support and management quality

Social support from colleagues and managers

Receiving social support always or most of the time from colleagues (73 %) and from managers (65 %) is quite common. Social support from colleagues is reported at a higher rate than social support from managers, with some degree of consistency over time.

While social support from colleagues has remained stable over time, social support from managers has been increasing, from 58 % in 2010 to 65 % in 2024 (albeit with a slight decrease to 56 % in 2015).

A lot of attention was paid to the quality of management during the pandemic, so this increase could partly be attributed to this attention and investment. All the items that make up the quality of management subdimension have been increasing since 2015, when they were first added to the survey. Respect by management for employees has remained stable at quite a high level. There has also been an increase of 8 pp since 2015 in the support given by management to the development of the individual.

The financial services and public administration sectors stand out for their high levels of social support from colleagues, with 81 % and 79 % of workers in these sectors, respectively, reporting frequent support. These sectors also exhibit high levels of support from managers, with 75 % of financial services workers and 71 % of public administration workers reporting frequent support. At the other end of the spectrum, transport and storage workers report the lowest levels of social support from both colleagues and managers.

In terms of occupation, workers in elementary occupations are more likely to report rarely or never receiving social support from colleagues, with 17 % falling into this category, which is more than three times the proportion among managers and professionals (5 %). Similar findings are observed in terms of support from managers.

Looking at telework arrangements, workers who telework (whether regularly, occasionally or full-time) are more likely to receive support from colleagues and managers than those who work on site.

Loneliness

Loneliness is a subjective, affective state whereby individuals feel that their social needs are not being met. Although the outcomes of loneliness have long been studied in psychology (Heinrich et al., 2006; Cacioppo et al., 2008), its specific implications within the workplace have only recently begun to receive focused attention, with evidence showing that workplace loneliness is negatively related to job performance (Özcelik et al., 2018). It can also lead to depression and dissatisfaction, behavioural outcomes like social withdrawal and reduced communication, and social or medical problems such as illness and exhaustion (McCarthy et al., 2025). Loneliness also negatively affects cognitive functioning and the ability to concentrate, leading to lower engagement and reduced efficiency at work.

In recognition of the detrimental impact of workplace loneliness on both employees and organisations, a new question was introduced in the EWCS 2024 asking respondents how often they experience feelings of loneliness at work. Nearly 3 in 10 workers report feeling lonely at work always or most of the time (9 %) or sometimes (19 %). Plant and machine operators (15 %) and skilled agricultural workers (14 %) are the most likely to report feeling lonely at work always or most of the time. Some of the most exposed individuals work in ‘lone occupations’, such as security guards, wind turbine technicians or sales roles that require frequent travel. In these cases, there are professional risks associated with being alone in their working environment. However, when those who report feeling lonely ‘sometimes’ are included, professionals emerge as the occupational group that is second most likely to experience loneliness at work – just after skilled

agricultural workers – with the rate rising significantly to 32 %. This experience of loneliness can be linked not only to specific roles, such as management – highlighting the pattern that, the higher you climb, the lonelier it can become – but also to particular working conditions and the use of technology. In contrast, services and sales workers are less likely to experience loneliness, most likely thanks to the social demands inherent in their roles, with 7 % reporting feelings of loneliness always or most of the time and 17 % reporting these feelings sometimes.

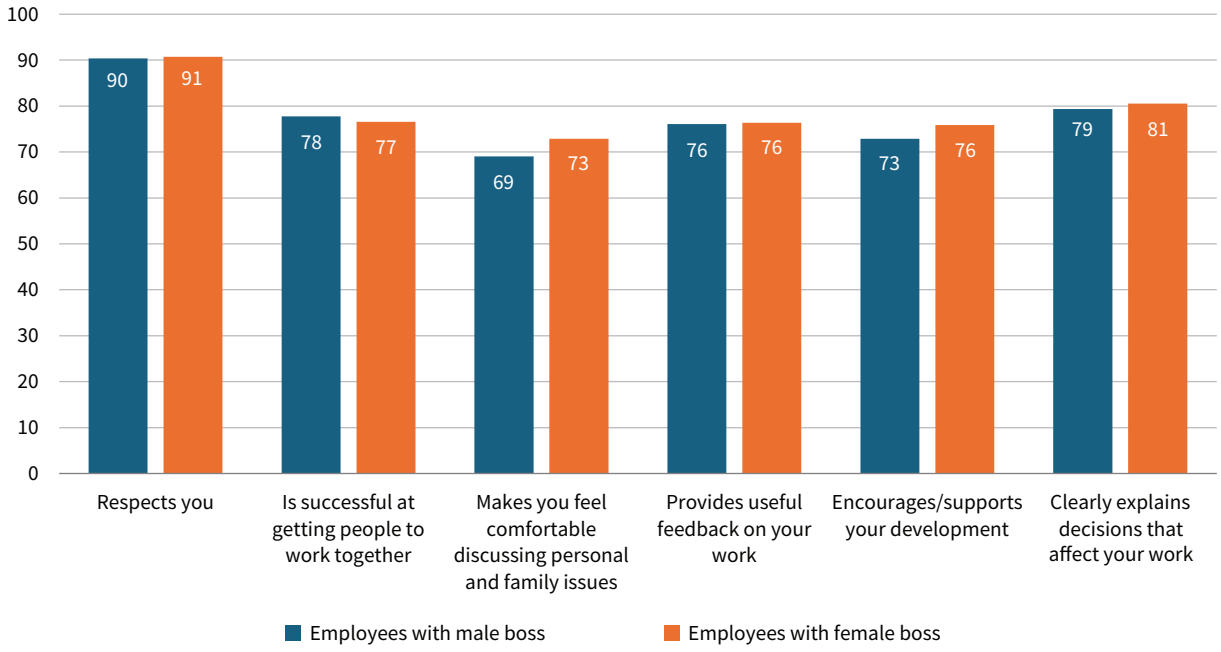
Management quality through a gender lens

In the modern workplace, the quality of management remains a critical determinant of organisational success, making it especially important to understand the factors that shape perceptions of effective leadership.

Research indicates that these perceptions are often influenced by the manager's gender, with women leaders frequently evaluated through biased lenses shaped by societal stereotypes (Eagly et al., 2002). This leads to less favourable attitudes towards women than men in actual or potential leadership roles. Despite this, studies have also shown that female leaders often outperform their male counterparts across various management levels and age groups in key leadership competences (Zenger et al., 2019). The analysis of the EWCS 2024 data reveals that workers' perceptions of supervisor management quality do not vary significantly depending on the supervisor's gender (Figure 105). The gap between male and female bosses does not exceed 3 pp for any of the six questions on perceived management quality. Female bosses are considered to be marginally better than male bosses at supporting and encouraging the personal development of employees and at making staff feel comfortable discussing personal issues, while male bosses are viewed as marginally better at getting people to work together.

A previous analysis of the EWCS 2005 data found that, in most aspects of workplace human relations, such as support from supervisors, there were no significant differences between male and female managers (Eurofound, 2013). However, the findings indicate that the gender of the subordinate, rather than that of the manager, more often influences workplace experiences. For example, female workers report less communication with their boss and less autonomy at work than their male counterparts. The analysis of the 2024 survey edition broadly confirms these findings.

Figure 105: Prevalence of different perspectives on management in the EU by gender of the boss (%)



Note: The figure shows the percentage of those answering 'strongly agree' or 'tend to agree'.

Physical environment

Summary

- Overall, the quality of the physical work environment has been improving since 2010 for both men and women. The rate of improvement has been faster for men.
- The general improvement is due to a reduction in most physical risks and demands. However, exposure to high temperatures has increased, as has chemical contact and contact with infectious materials, albeit to a lesser degree.
- There are gender differences in exposure to risks, with men more exposed to risks like vibrations, noise and heavy loads, while women are more exposed to risks posed by lifting people, sitting for prolonged periods and contracting infectious diseases. Men and women report similar levels of exposure to tiring or painful positions.
- Occupational hazards are a concern for workers in specific fields, such as crafts, agriculture and machine operation, as they face a higher accumulation of multiple physical risks.
- Episodic exposure to high temperatures (25–75 % of the time) has increased, potentially due to climate change. Men are more exposed to such episodic exposure than women (28 % versus 13 %, respectively). Workers in agriculture, construction, transport and industry are most affected.
- A significant percentage of workers, particularly women (42 % versus 39 % of men), report sitting for long periods.

The protection of workers against physical hazards that pose a risk to health and well-being is an acknowledged and uncontested feature of job quality. Eliminating or minimising these risks is a high priority on the European agenda. It is identified in Article 153 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union as a competence of the EU: 'the Union shall … complement the activities of the Member States in the following fields: improvement in particular of the working environment to protect workers' health and safety'. This commitment to health and safety is a long-standing concern in European social policy and has been frequently repeated and described in a series of topical directives on manual handling, risks related to chemical agents at work, exposure to carcinogens or mutagens at work, asbestos, biological agents at work, vibrations, noise and others. It was reaffirmed in one of the 20 principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights as the right of workers to a 'healthy, safe and well-adapted work environment'. The first priority of the EU strategic framework on health and safety for 2021–2027 is to anticipate and manage change in the context of the green, digital and demographic transitions (European Commission, 2021).

Risks at work that can result in physical harm can be divided into safety risks and health risks (EU-OSHA, 2025). The main results of insufficient safety are work accidents, which can have immediate consequences and lead to personal injury, disease or the death of one or more workers. Non-fatal accidents at work can cause medium- or long-term health consequences and, in the worst case, a permanent disability.

Exposure to physical risks can be caused by a variety of circumstances, including:

- natural circumstances exacerbated by climate change, such as high temperatures, storms or biological agents;
- human-made circumstances, for example as a result of work in buildings, on construction sites or on roads;
- exposure in a workplace context, including emissions from machinery, tools and materials (e.g. noise, vibration and chemical substances).

Physical risks and demands can be further classified into physical risks (e.g. noise, vibration, radiation and temperature), chemical risks, biological risks and physical demands such as posture-related risks.

Physical demands at work refer to the physical requirements and exertions that are necessary to perform a task or an activity. These demands can vary according to the type of work and industry and the job tasks. They are strongly influenced by the specific types of tasks in the job, the physical layout of the workspace, the tools and equipment available to workers to perform their tasks and the work schedule, which can have an impact on both the dose of exposure and the intensity at which the task is performed. Physical demands include poor posture at work and strenuous and possibly repetitive movements, which can harm the musculoskeletal system. Most commonly, a large proportion of workers undertake repetitive movements, carry heavy loads and lift people, among other tasks. Physical inactivity can also be a risk, for example when somebody spends most of their working day sitting at work.

The Physical environment index captures exposure to physical risks, such as noise, high and low temperatures,

Table 18: Proportions of EU workers reporting the subdimensions of the Physical environment index (%) and mean index scores, 2010–2024

Subdimension	Item	2010	2015	2024
Physical risk	Noise so loud that you would have to raise your voice to talk to people (a quarter of the time or more)	30	28	28
	High temperatures that make you perspire even when not working (a quarter of the time or more)	23	24	27
	Low temperatures, whether indoors or outdoors (a quarter of the time or more)	23	21	21
	Breathing in smoke, fumes, powder or dust (a quarter of the time or more)	17	15	13
	Breathing in vapours, such as solvents and thinners (a quarter of the time or more)	11	11	9
	Handling or being in skin contact with chemical products or substances (a quarter of the time or more)	15	17	16
	Handling or being in direct contact with materials that could be infectious (a quarter of the time or more)	11	13	12
Physical demands	Tiring or painful positions (a quarter of the time or more)	49	45	43
	Lifting or moving people (a quarter of the time or more)	9	10	9
	Carrying or moving heavy loads (a quarter of the time or more)	33	32	28
	Repetitive hand or arm movements (a quarter of the time or more)	64	61	61
	Sitting for periods of at least half an hour at a time (three quarters of the time or more)	*	*	40
	Vibrations from hand tools or machinery (a quarter of the time or more)	24	21	19
Overall index score	*Trend of index score*	*81*	*81*	*82*
	Full index 2024 score			*81*

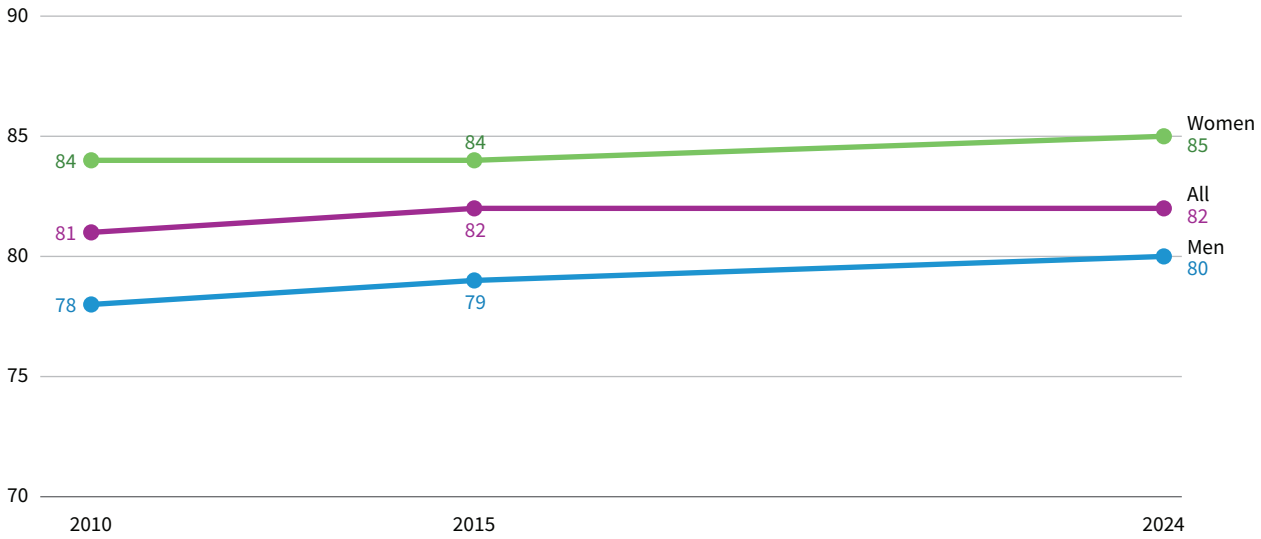
* Question not asked at this time.
Notes: Italic text indicates mean index scores, not proportions (%). The trend of the index score includes all items covered by the survey since 2010, while the full index score includes all items available in 2024. This explains possible discrepancies between the figures reported.
Source: EWCS series.

smoke inhalation (whatever its nature and source), vapour inhalation, the handling of or contact with chemical products and exposure to infectious diseases. It also captures physical demands such as tiring or painful positions, the lifting or moving of people, the carrying of heavy loads, repetitive movements, prolonged sitting (new in 2024) and vibrations (Table 18).

Physical environment quality over time

The quality of the physical environment has been slowly improving since 2010 for both men and women. It remains higher for women than for men, but the gender gap has been decreasing, from 6 points down to 5 points (Figure 106). The improvement is due to a

Figure 106: Mean Physical environment index scores in the EU by gender, 2010–2024



Source: EWCS series.

decrease in exposure to most physical risks and demands for which trends are available. The largest reduction has been observed in posture-related risks such as tiring or painful positions (– 6 pp), carrying or moving heavy loads (– 5 pp) and repetitive hand or arm movements (– 3 pp).

The exceptions to these improvements are exposure to high temperatures and handling or being in skin contact with chemical products or substances and exposure to infectious diseases, which have increased slightly.

Physical environment scores have improved for all age groups, including younger workers, who are more exposed to physical risks than older workers; however, the age gap has increased over time. The Physical environment index has improved in most occupations, with the exception of services and sales workers, technicians and, to a very small extent, professionals and skilled agricultural workers, for whom it has deteriorated over time. The greatest progress has been recorded for workers in elementary occupations and managers (+ 2 points). The quality of the physical environment has improved in all sectors since 2010 with the exception of the health and education sectors. It has improved the most in large companies.

The progress made since 2010 may be fragile and will need to be consolidated; for example, the quality of the physical environment of services and sales workers and technicians continued to worsen between 2015 and 2024 and the quality of the physical environment in education and health disimproved over the same period.

The quality of the physical environment in Member States shows various trajectories over time. The largest increases have been seen in Luxembourg, Portugal, Italy, Hungary and France. The index decreased by 1 point in five Member States (Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Latvia and Spain).

Physical environment index

In 2024, the quality of the physical environment, as assessed using the Physical environment index, remains higher for women (index score of 83) than for men (79).

There are significant differences in the quality of the physical environment between Member States (Figure 107). These reflect different employment

Figure 107: Mean Physical environment index scores by country

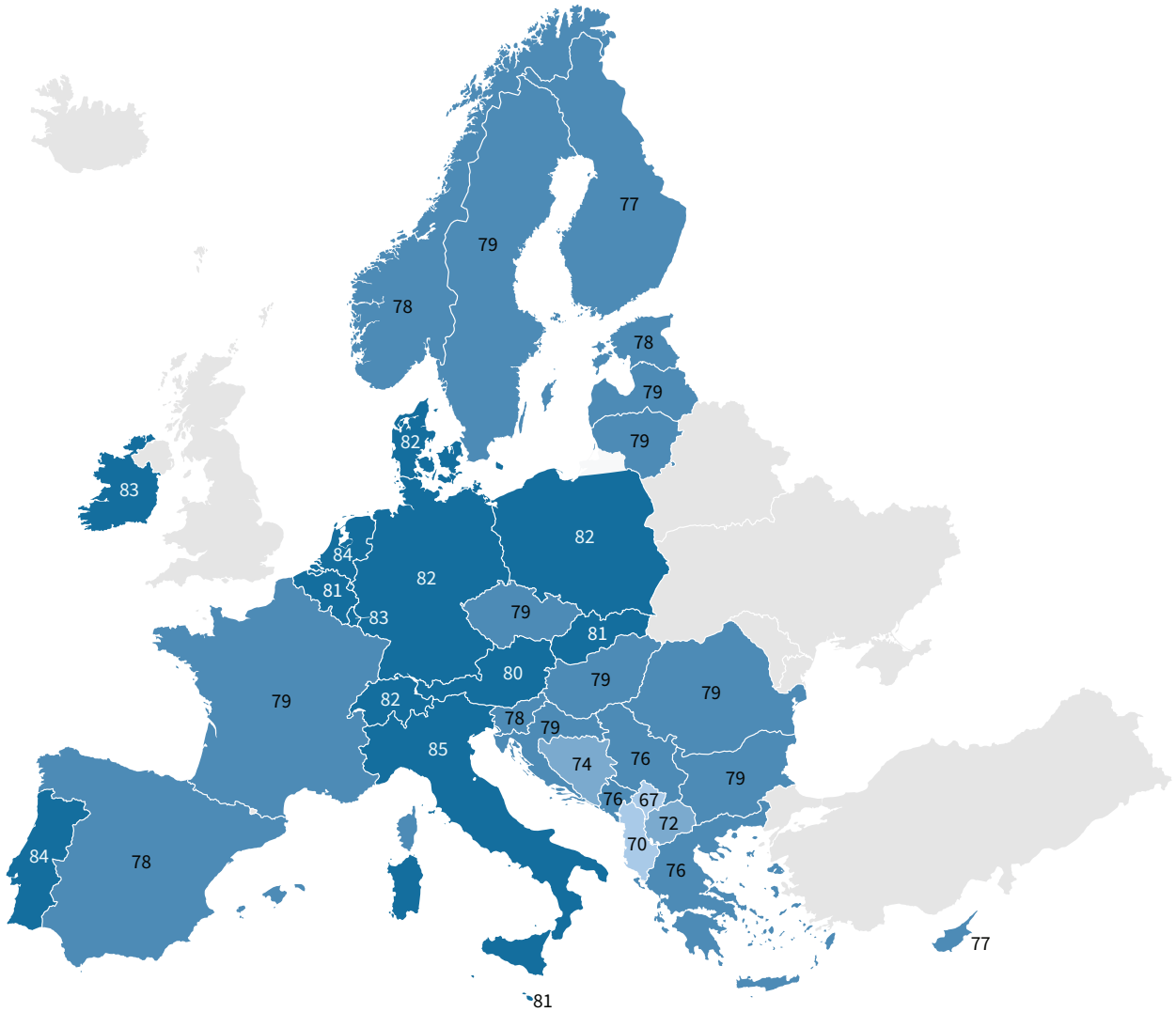


Figure 108: Mean Physical environment index scores in the EU by sector



compositions but also different regulations and practices. A lower-than-average Physical environment score suggests that the importance that is given to addressing physical risks and demands in the workplace is lower.

There are also significant differences between sectors: construction, agriculture and industry score the lowest (Figure 108).

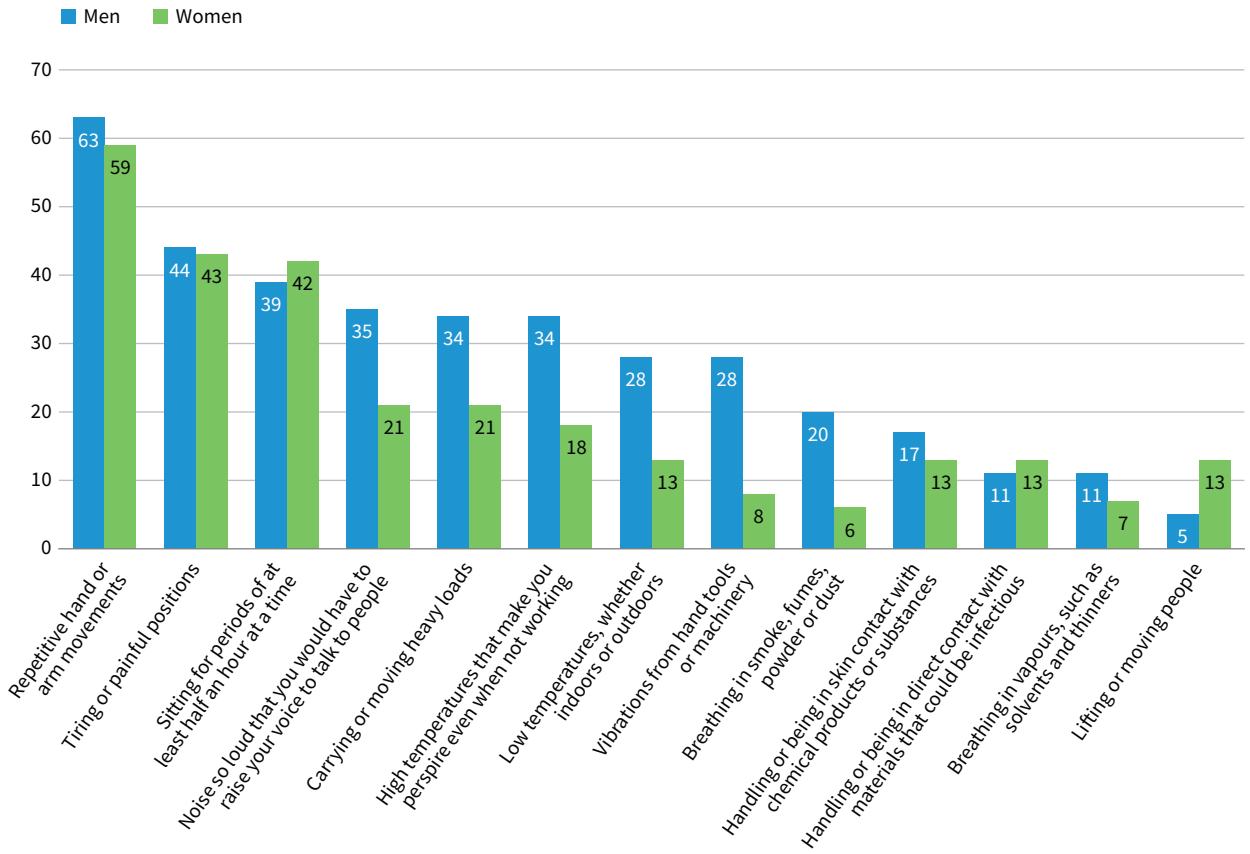
Physical environment quality – a gender approach

Exposure to physical risks and physical demands is related to specific conditions in the various activities of the economy and occurs in the context of gender-segregated occupations. Men are most exposed to vibrations, high and low temperatures, carrying and moving heavy loads, breathing in smoke, noise, breathing in vapours, repetitive arm movements and chemicals. Women are most exposed to lifting or moving people, prolonged sitting and infectious diseases. Men and women report similar levels of exposure to tiring or painful positions (Figure 109).

The impact of physical demands and risks on workers also depends on the policies and practices in the workplace and the workers' personal characteristics. In some cases, structural inequalities persist (Messing, 2021; Anact, 2025): equipment may have been designed for the average male worker; biological differences such as differences in thermoregulatory capacities are not considered; some physical demands are underestimated (e.g. exposure to noise in schools and schoolyards); standards (e.g. on the number of letters and packages to be delivered) may have been calculated for a young 'average' man; or the different tasks assigned to women and men in the same occupation may not be considered (e.g. on a train, women may be allocated the cleaning of toilets, which are small and more complicated, while men clean corridors, which are larger surfaces and less cluttered).

When workers who perform tasks have different physical attributes, for example women being smaller and less physically strong, the performance of the tasks can be more strenuous and may have a stronger negative impact on health.

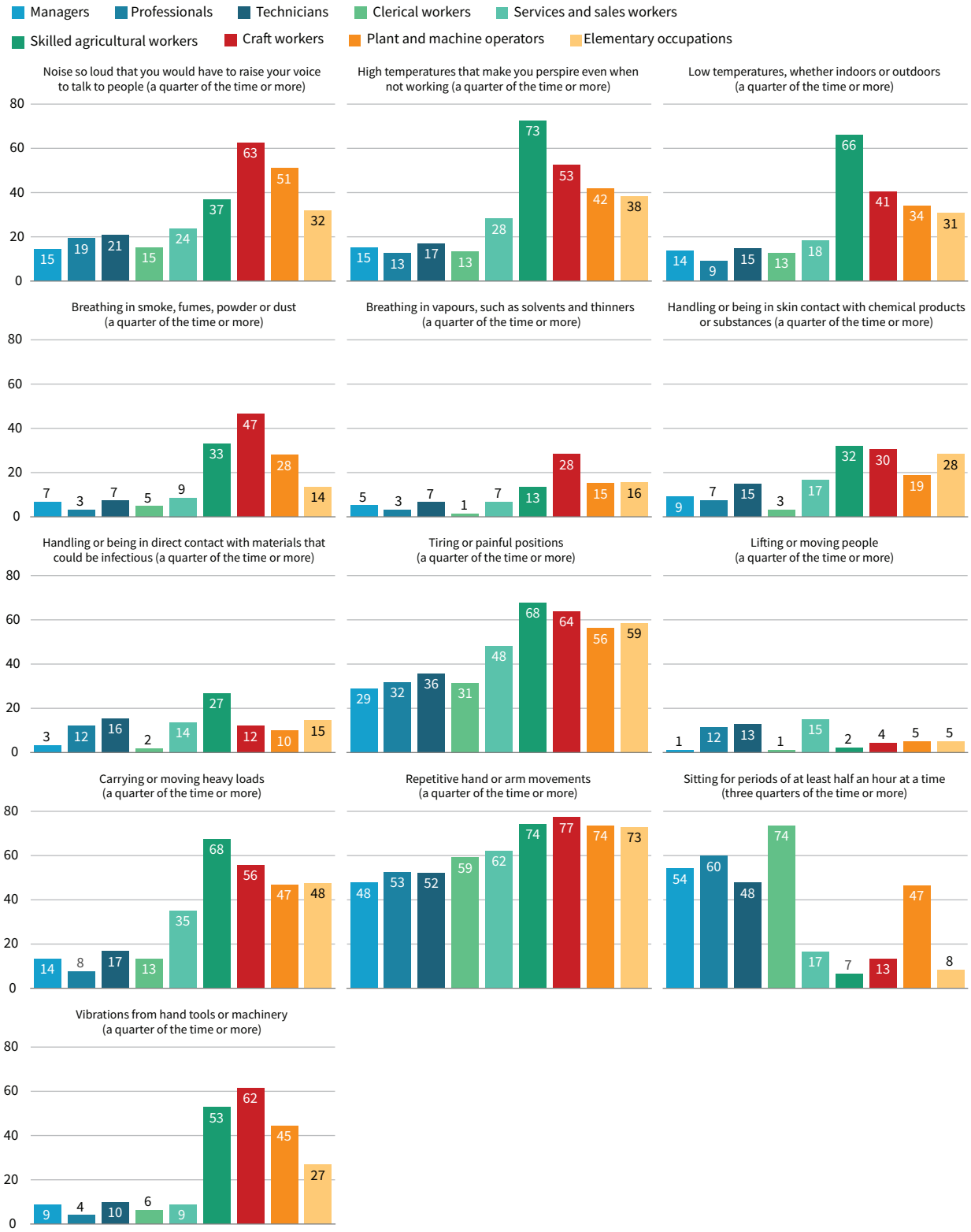
Figure 109: Prevalence of exposure to physical risks and demands in the EU by gender (%)



Physical environment quality by occupation

Exposure to multiple physical risks and demands is likely to increase the negative impact on health. In this context, the situations of craft workers, skilled agricultural workers and plant and machine operators are of particular concern, as these occupations involve high exposure to most physical risks and physical demands (Figure 110). Services and sales workers report high exposure to high temperatures, painful positions, carrying and moving heavy loads and repetitive movements. Workers in higher-skilled occupations are most exposed to prolonged sitting.

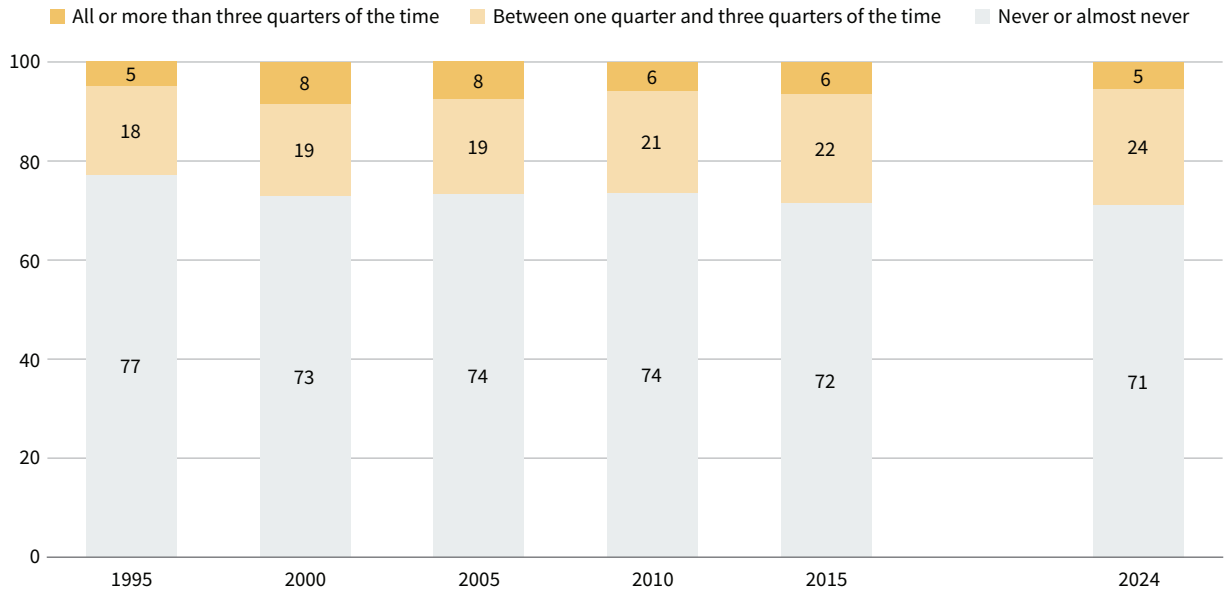
Figure 110: Prevalence of physical risks and demands in the EU by occupation (%)



Exposure to high temperatures

Work on the impact of climate change on job quality (Schulte et al., 2016; Eurofound, 2024c) has shown that climate change is leading to an increase in physical risks as natural circumstances change (temperatures are warming and vector habitats of agents susceptible to carrying infectious diseases are shifting, among other things). The EWCS has captured the increase in exposure to high temperatures since 1995. In 2024, 34 % of men and 18 % of women reported exposure to temperatures so high that they perspire even when they are not working.

Figure 111: Prevalence of exposure to high temperatures in the EU by frequency of exposure, 1995–2024 (%)



Note: In this figure, 'EU' refers to the EU-14, the 14 Member States (excluding the United Kingdom) that joined the EU prior to 2004.
Source: EWCS series.

Exposure to high temperatures all or more than three quarters of the time has remained relatively stable since 2010 (Figure 111). This applies to people who are working in a very hot environment, for example in a foundry or kitchen. However, episodic exposure (between a quarter and three quarters of the time) has increased. The increase could point to the effects of climate change.

Consequently, new populations are exposed to high temperatures, and outdoor workers face higher exposure in terms of both intensity and frequency.

When looking at sectors, workers in agriculture (68 %), construction (52 %), industry and transport (both 33 %) report above-average exposure to high temperatures a quarter or more of the time (Figure 112). Many of these workers work outdoors.

For those most exposed, such exposure intensifies the risk of heat stress and work accidents caused by fatigue and reduced vigilance. Among workers working 48 hours or more a week, 39 % report exposure to high temperatures. For all, heat exposure makes performing work activities more strenuous and difficult: it increases physical discomfort, reduces manual dexterity, affects cognitive performance and alters workers' emotional states (leading to irritability or anger).

Migrant workers report above-average exposure to heat. Employees with no contract or another type of contract (31 %) and self-employed individuals with employees (30 %) also report high exposure.

Figure 112: Prevalence of exposure to high temperatures in the EU by frequency of exposure and sector (%)

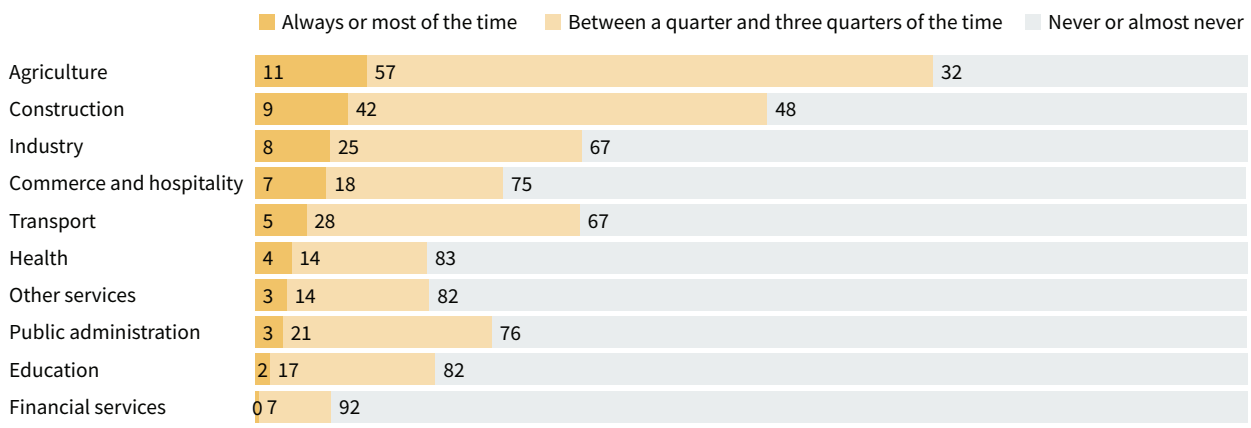
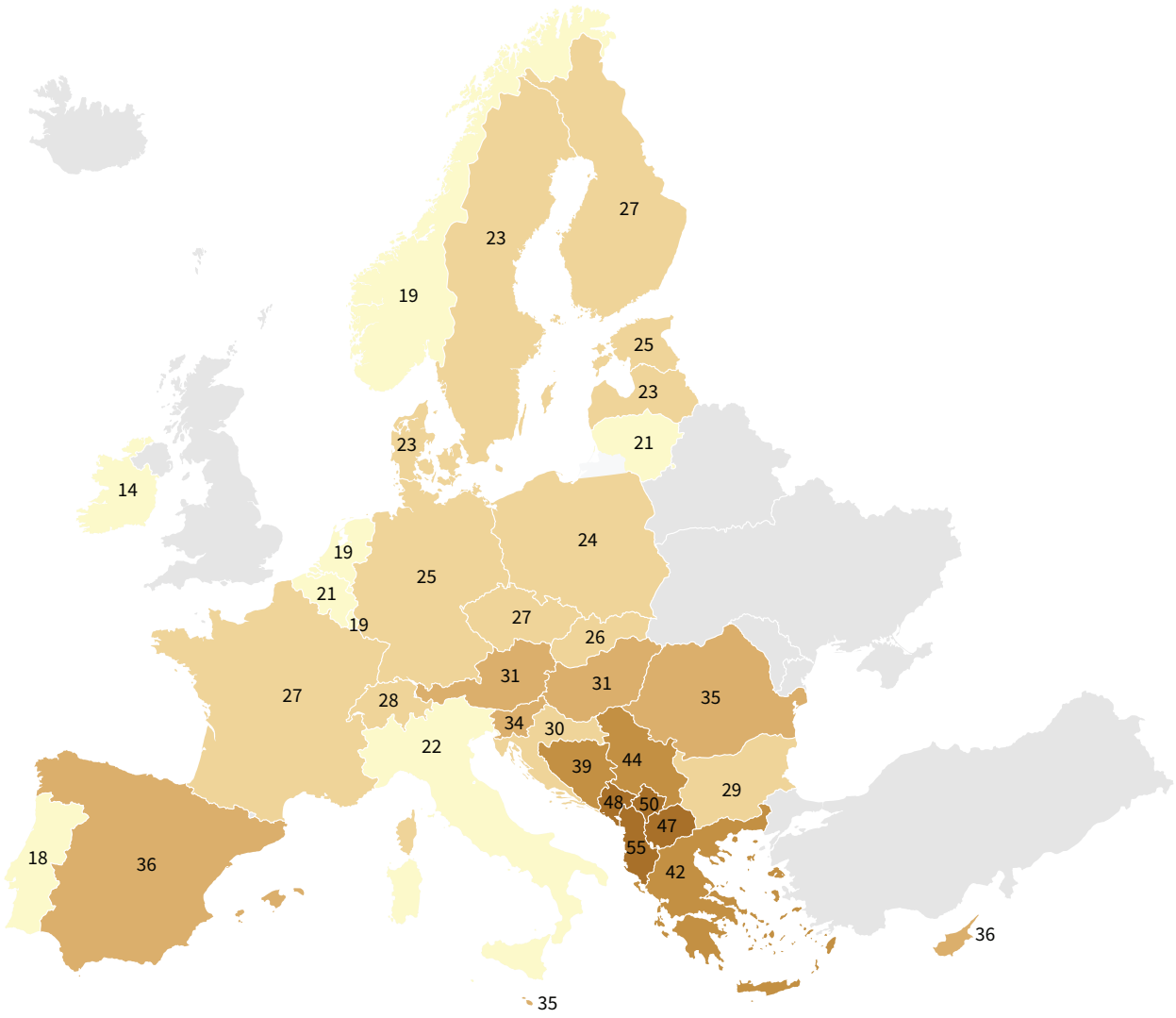


Figure 113: Prevalence of exposure to high temperatures a quarter of the time or more by country (%)



Exposure varies by country (Figure 113), with workers in countries in the south and east of Europe most exposed.

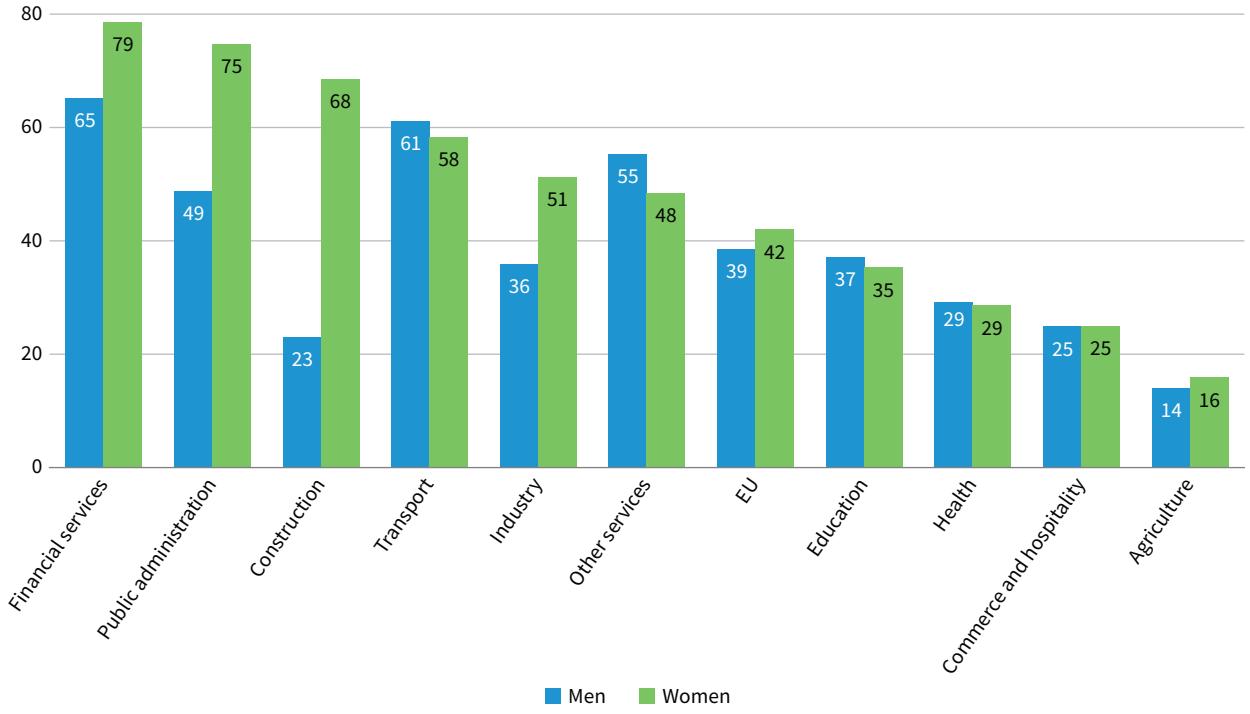
Sedentary work

Many workers find themselves sitting at their desks and workstations for prolonged periods, mainly due to the increased use of computers and other technical developments (e.g. cobots) and the increased digitalisation of many work processes. Prolonged sitting may lead to musculoskeletal disorders and health risks in other domains, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, depression and even mortality (Gao et al., 2024). Sedentary behaviour is increasing both at work and in private life, which is why additional attention is being paid to this health risk. Recent results of the European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks support this finding, highlighting sedentary work as both a general risk factor and a specific risk factor linked to digitalisation (EU-OSHA, 2025).

In terms of the gender difference, 42 % of women and 39 % of men report sitting for periods of at least 30 minutes for three quarters of the time.

A look at exposure to prolonged sitting by sector shows stark differences between men and women in some sectors (Figure 114). This confirms that men and women often hold different functions within the same sector, leading to varying exposure to physical risks in the same sector, with construction being the most extreme example.

Figure 114: Prevalence of prolonged sitting three quarters of the time or more in the EU by sector and gender (%)



5 Working life

As presented in the two preceding chapters, job quality reflects the properties of the job. Quality of working life, on the other hand, reflects the way workers assess their experience of working life. Workers' evaluation of their working life depends on their personal circumstances (their own individual preferences, the characteristics of their household and their own social network), but also on the labour market and the availability of and access to relevant social and employment services.

This chapter examines workers' concrete experience of their working life and assesses the role of job quality in contributing to a positive experience of work. It addresses seven specific areas: skills matching; financial security; the reconciliation of work and private life; workers' health and well-being; trust, engagement and motivation; meaningful work; and the sustainability of work.

The section on **skills matching** examines the extent to which the skills of workers match their job requirements.

The section on **financial security** examines the extent to which work provides protection in monetary terms for the worker and their household.

The section on the **reconciliation of work and private life** examines workers' ability to ensure a good fit between their job and other areas of their life – such as family, social relationships and personal development. It is a crucial determinant of the decision to enter and remain in employment. When such balance is poor, it can harm workers' well-being and performance, disrupt family and social connections and hinder personal growth. The two domains, working life and private life, are not isolated. They influence each other, with work spilling over into private life and vice versa. Workers' preferences regarding their working hours are also examined.

The section on **workers' health and well-being** examines health in a broad sense, encompassing both physical and mental health. It looks in particular at the phenomena of sickness absence and presenteeism (working while sick), and the extent to which workers consider that their health is at risk because of their work.

The section on **trust, engagement and motivation** explores the various dimensions of a trustful and safe work climate, engagement and the role of organisations in motivating workers to perform at their best.

The section on **meaningful work** examines the extent to which workers consider they are doing useful work and that their work is well done; it also looks at the extent to which they consider that they are fairly treated and recognised at work.

The final section addresses the **sustainability of work**, that is, whether workers are enabled to continue working over the life course through the safeguarding of the quality of their job and work environment while adequately accounting for their personal and domestic needs (such as their health situation or care requirements) (Eurofound, 2015b). This section examines the most important aspects of work for workers, the areas in which they would like to see improvements, workers' assessment of the impact of work on their health, their perceived ability to work until the age of 60 and their preferred retirement age.

Skills and employability

Summary

- In 2024, 13 % of workers were underskilled, that is, they needed further training to cope well with their duties.
- Although most workers in the EU feel that it would be easy to find a similar job if they were to lose or quit their current job (58 %), more than a quarter (28 %) feel this would be rather unlikely. This figure is higher for those with a low level of education (34 %).

Developing skills and competences is a crucial aspect of the quality of work and employment, with numerous benefits for workers, companies and society in general (see, for example, Eurofound, 2002; OECD, 2019; Cedefop et al., 2023). The importance of skills development and lifelong learning has been widely recognised and, as a result, it has remained a key priority on the policy agenda at both EU and national levels, as reflected most recently in the Union of Skills (European Commission, 2026). The findings presented here complement the job quality indices on Skills and discretion and Prospects, offering a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between skills development, job quality and employability.

Both under- and overskilling have implications for health

The concept of the 'skills match' refers to the optimal utilisation of workers' potential and the idea that being over- or underskilled is associated with an inefficient use of human capabilities (McGuinness et al., 2018). The EWCS questionnaire addresses this concern by asking workers to self-assess their skills in relation to their job duties. Specifically, workers were asked to indicate whether:

- they need further training to cope well with their duties (underskilled);
- their present skills correspond well with their duties (skills match);
- they have the skills to cope with more demanding duties (overskilled).

In 2024, the proportion of self-perceived underskilling in the EU was 13 %, with almost no differences between men and women. It ranged from 2 % in Portugal to 29 % in Austria (Figure 115). Belgium and Lithuania showed the greatest increases in the proportion of underskilled workers between 2010 and 2024: from 9 % to 16 % in Belgium and from 15 % to 23 % in Lithuania. Denmark and Hungary showed the largest declines.

Overall, overskilling is reported by 30 % of workers in the EU, with the proportion ranging from 18 % in Malta to 44 % in Romania (Figure 115). Greece and Malta show the greatest decreases in the proportion of overskilled workers between 2010 and 2024 (from 48 % to 33 % and from 32 % to 18 %, respectively), with a sharp decline also seen in Croatia (from 43 % to 31 %). Significant increases in percentages of overskilled workers were recorded in Austria (+ 16 pp), Norway (+ 12 pp) and Slovakia (+ 10 pp).

Overskilling does not vary hugely across sectors except for agriculture, where almost half of workers feel they could cope with more complex matters (41 %). Agriculture is also the only sector where the skills match is about 50 %, well below the average of 57 %. The proportion of underskilled workers, on the other hand, ranges from 7 % in transport to 18 % in the health sector. Across occupations, the highest proportions of underskilling are observed among professionals and technicians (both 18 %), while overskilling was more frequent among elementary occupations (32 %), managers (35 %) and skilled agricultural workers (41 %).

Figure 115: Proportions of over- and underskilled workers across countries (%)

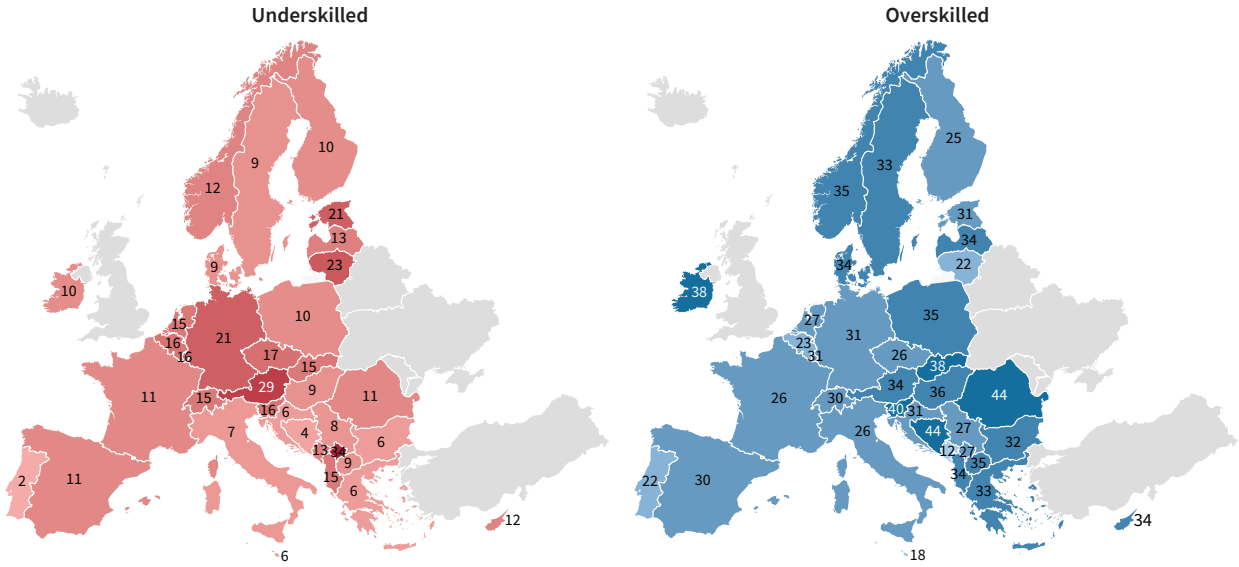
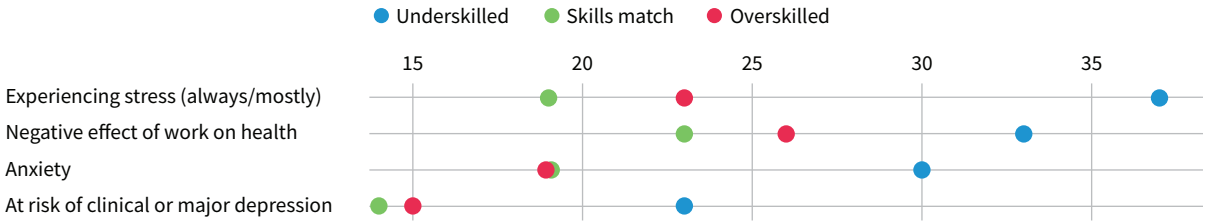


Figure 116: Prevalence of health-related items in the EU by degree of skills match (%)



When workers' skills are underutilised (i.e. when they are performing tasks that are below their level of ability), they are unable to contribute their full potential and may not be fully engaged in their work. Conversely, when workers lack the necessary skills to perform their job effectively and this is not adequately addressed, their health is negatively affected. The EWCS 2024 confirms these insights, as illustrated in Figure 116. Underskilled workers are more likely to report poor health, stress, negative health effects of their work and lower levels of mental well-being. The large proportion of underskilled workers reporting anxiety might be related to fears about their skills becoming redundant or obsolete and losing their job, as has been suggested by Green et al. (2002). However, overskilled workers also have worse health and well-being outcomes than those with the right skills for the job.

From an economic perspective, a better alignment of skills with job requirements leads to a more efficient allocation of labour. The benefits include increased labour productivity, improved income and greater economic growth. Research has shown that a skills mismatch can have negative consequences for workers, including lower wages, reduced job satisfaction and increased job insecurity (Cedefop, 2015; Bischof, 2021). By addressing skills mismatch, individuals, organisations and societies can unlock the full potential of the workforce, leading to overall improved outcomes.

Skills matching promotes employee retention

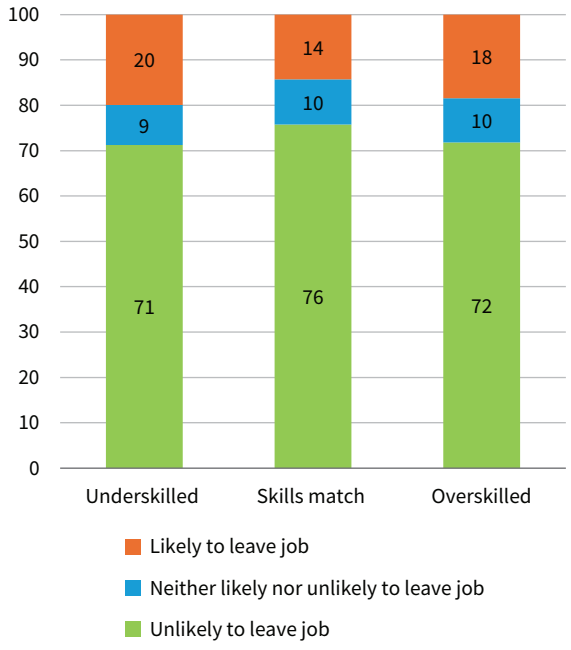
Employability is defined by Cedefop as 'a combination of factors which enable an individual to progress towards or get into employment, to stay in employment and to progress during his/her career' (Cedefop, undated). Some of these aspects are covered in the EWCS 2024 by asking employees how likely it is that they will leave their main job over the next year and how easy it would be to find a new job with a similar salary.

On the one hand, 74 % of employees state that it is unlikely or very unlikely that they will leave their job during the next year, with 16 % stating that is likely or very likely. Gender differences are negligible. The share of workers considering it likely that they will leave their job is larger among younger workers (29 % of workers aged 16–29 years), workers in elementary occupations (25 %) and workers in the commerce and hospitality sector (21 %).

On the other hand, 58 % of employees strongly agree or tend to agree that it would be easy to find a similar job if they were to lose or quit their current job. However, for 28 % this seems rather unlikely and, among those with a low level of formal education, 34 % tend to disagree or strongly disagree with the statement. Differences between men and women are also negligible.

Figure 117 shows the proportion of employees who think it is likely or unlikely that they will leave their current job during the next year according to their self-perceived skills (mis)match. The shares of those stating that it is likely they will leave their job are greater among those reporting under- and overskilling.

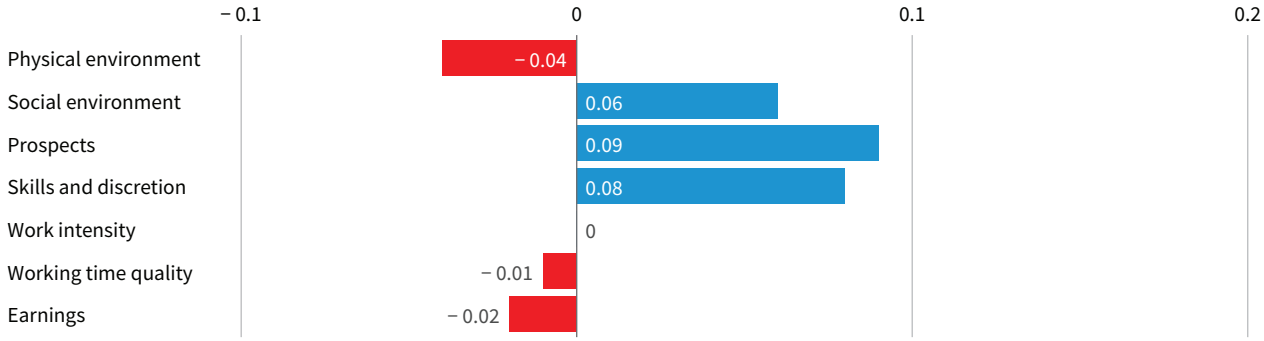
Figure 117: Proportions of employees who think it likely or unlikely that they will leave their job by degree of self-perceived skills (mis)match (%)



This indicates that ensuring a good match between workers' skills and their duties can be an important tool to retain workers.

As shown in Figure 118, job quality is very weakly associated with employability.

Figure 118: Association between job quality and employability (how easy it is to find another job with similar pay) across the job quality indices



Financial sustainability

Summary

- The share of workers struggling to make ends meet varies greatly between countries. Some 8 % of workers in the EU reported that it was difficult or very difficult to make ends meet. This share is lower in Denmark, Finland, Poland and Sweden, whereas some eastern and southern European countries tend to have higher proportions of workers facing economic difficulties.
- Consistent with the findings of other research studies, workers' household composition is linked to their level of financial vulnerability. Lone parents, for instance, are disproportionately affected by financial hardship.
- Job quality is positively associated with financial sustainability, especially in terms of earnings.

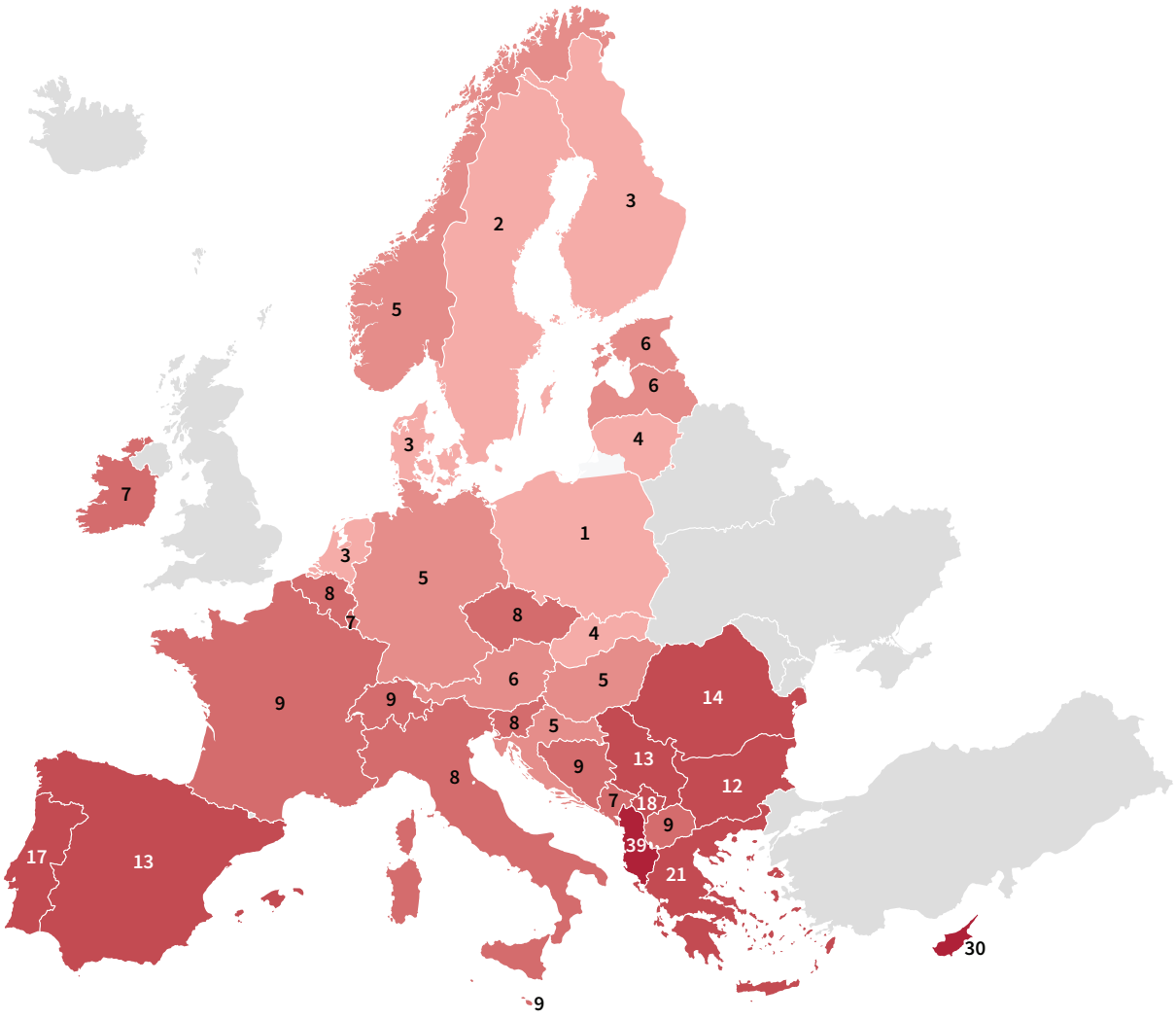
Work is the main source of income for most households with adults of working age. Sufficient wages or salary to cover the financial needs of a household (including savings) is key for the financial sustainability of work. In-work poverty is associated with lower levels of subjective and mental well-being, housing problems, poorer relationships and feelings of social exclusion (Eurofound, 2017b; Peña-Casas et al., 2019). The rate of in-work poverty of the working-age population has been consistently decreasing but still stands at 8.2 % as of 2024 (Eurostat [ilc_iw01]).

Clear geographical pattern in ability to make ends meet

The EWCS has been tracking economic hardship among the working population since 2005, utilising a well-established indicator: the ability to make ends meet. Respondents are asked to evaluate, considering the total monthly income from various sources, how easy it is for their household to make ends meet on a six-point scale, ranging from 'very easily' to 'with great difficulty'. Overall, 8 % of respondents across the EU reported that it was difficult or very difficult to make ends meet in 2024. Differences between the genders were negligible.

The survey reveals significant disparities across countries, with the proportion of workers struggling to make ends meet varying greatly, from 1 % in Poland to 39 % in Albania, as depicted in Figure 119. A clear geographical pattern emerges, with the Scandinavian countries consistently showing low proportions of individuals struggling financially, whereas some eastern and southern European countries tend to have higher proportions of workers facing economic difficulties.

Figure 119: Prevalence of difficulty in making ends meet (difficult or very difficult) by country (%)



Since 2010, which marked the middle of the economic crisis, the proportion of workers experiencing difficulties in making ends meet has significantly decreased. In 2010, around 17 % found it difficult or very difficult to get by economically, whereas in 2024 this proportion was only 8 %. Concurrently, the share of those who found it very easy or easy increased from 30 % to 40 %. The most significant improvements have been observed in some eastern European countries, such as Bulgaria, Hungary and Latvia (decreases of more than 30 pp in the proportion of workers facing economic difficulties) and Croatia, Lithuania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Romania (decreases of more than 20 pp). There were no countries that reported a statistically significant increase in difficulties in making ends meet.

There is a strong link between the characteristics of workers' households and their level of financial vulnerability, consistent with the findings of other research studies. Lone parents are disproportionately affected by financial hardship, with 43 % reporting difficulty in making ends meet. Lone mothers are particularly vulnerable, with 46 % experiencing financial difficulties. Workers in households with children tend to face greater financial challenges, with 31–37 % struggling to make ends meet, followed by single-person households of prime working age, with 28 % reporting difficulties.

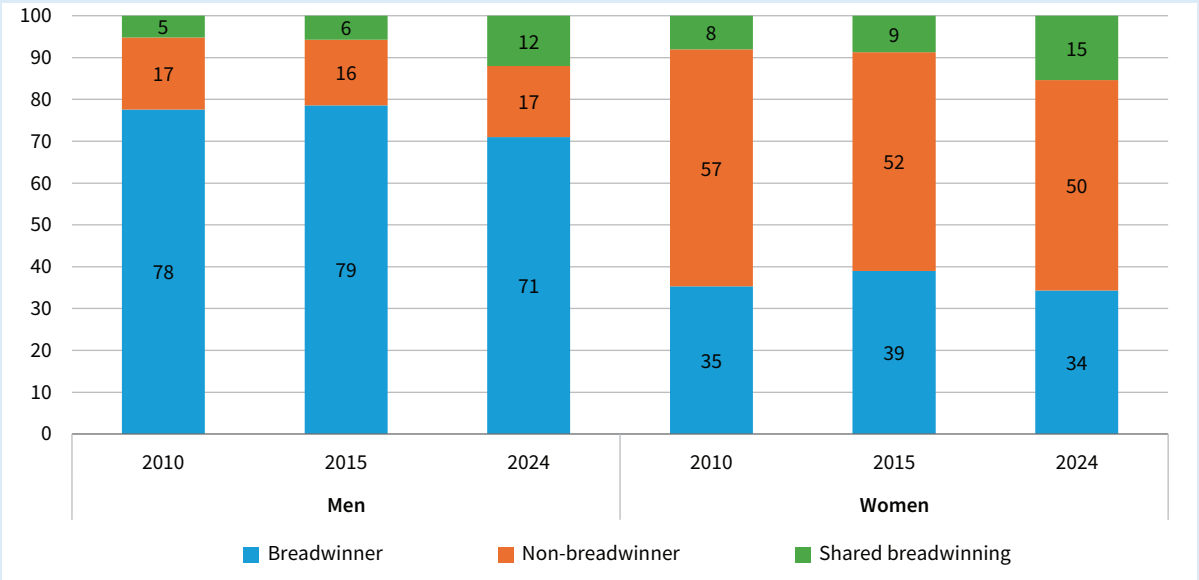
The data also highlight a gradient of financial vulnerability according to employment and occupational status. Employees with fixed-term contracts (36 %), economically dependent solo self-employed individuals (40 %) and those with no contract or another type of contract (42 %) report the highest proportions of difficulties in making ends meet. Workers in lower-skilled occupations face greater difficulties: 49 % of workers in elementary occupations, 47 % of skilled agricultural workers, 37 % of services and sales workers and 35 % of plant and machine operators experience at least some difficulty in making ends meet. In contrast, workers in higher-skilled occupations, such as managers, technicians and professionals, report relatively low levels of financial hardship, with percentages below 20 %.

These findings confirm known patterns and underscore the need for policymaking to target support towards specific groups, including lone parents and workers in low-paid jobs, who are often under significant financial pressure. Box 9 shows that gender is also still a factor when it comes to financial vulnerability.

Box 9: Men are still the main breadwinners

EWCS respondents can be classified according to who contributes the most to the household income. The proportion of workers in households with shared breadwinning, where both workers contribute equally to the household income, has increased significantly since 2010, doubling for women and more than doubling for men (Figure 120). During that period, the share of male breadwinners has reduced, while it has returned to the 2010 level for women after an increase in 2015. However, breadwinning in the EU remains greatly segregated according to gender: more than 70 % of male workers are the main breadwinners, compared with only 34 % of female workers. Half of female workers are not the main breadwinners in their household, compared with only 17 % of their male counterparts.

Figure 120: Prevalence of different levels of contribution to household income by gender, 2010–2024 (%)

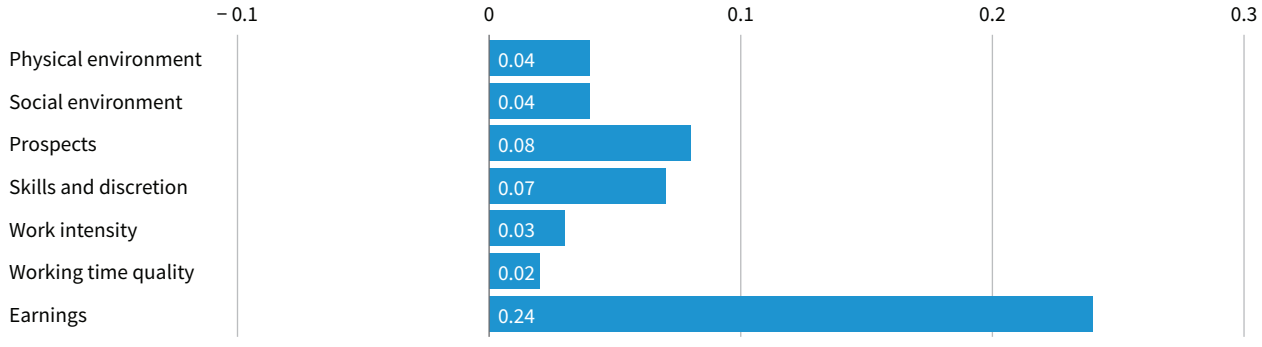


Source: EWCS series.

Job quality and financial sustainability

As is clearly shown in Figure 121, the Earnings dimension is positively associated with workers' ability to make ends meet and, thus, their financial sustainability. All other dimensions are very weakly related.

Figure 121: Association between job quality and making ends meet across job quality indices



Reconciling work and private life

Summary

- Gender inequalities persist in unpaid work, regardless of household composition. In most settings, women continue to carry a disproportionate share of the responsibility for childcare, the care of relatives and housework.
- In 2024, 83 % of EU workers reported a good fit between their working hours and other, non-work commitments. The remaining 17 % reported a poor fit.
- Employees have a better work–life balance than self-employed individuals.
- Agriculture stands out as the sector with the largest shares of workers who have to change their private and family activities due to work-related requests, who continue to worry about work when they are not working and who feel tired after work.
- Most workers in the EU (56 %) report that they would like to work the same number of hours that they are currently working, but the share of those preferring to work fewer hours increased from 27 % in 2015 to 33 % in 2024.

In a context of ageing demographics and tightening labour markets, ensuring that workers have the ability to balance work with all other aspects of life is crucial to encourage people to enter and remain in the labour market. The benefits of a good balance between work and private life reach beyond workers and their families and affect organisations and companies, and wider society. Adequate and accommodating working time arrangements combined with a supportive social infrastructure help workers to achieve a better balance and fuller participation in employment as a consequence (Eurofound, 2018b).

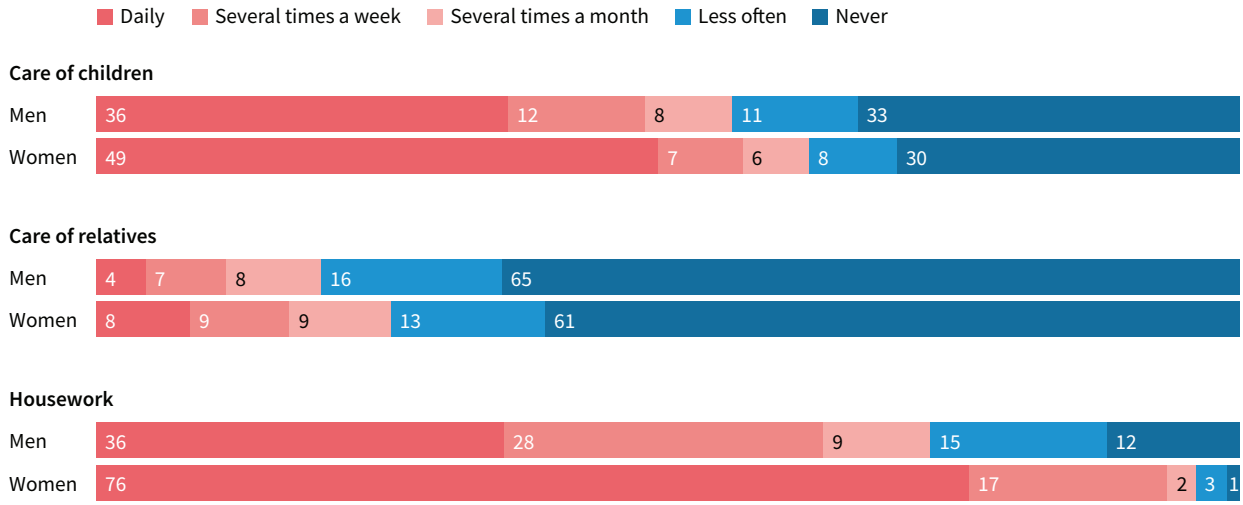
This section examines the frequency and extent of unpaid work, work–life balance, the work–household interface and working time preferences.

Working women still shouldering most of the care and domestic work

Work–life balance is strongly affected by the frequency and amount of time spent on unpaid domestic tasks and care responsibilities. The EWCS asked workers how frequently they carry out these activities and how much time they spend on them: caring for and/or educating children or grandchildren (including those living outside the household); caring for older relatives or those with disabilities (also including those living elsewhere); and cooking and doing housework. For the first two activities, the proportions discussed refer exclusively to respondents who report having children or grandchildren and older relatives or relatives with disabilities, respectively.

There are clear gender differences in the frequency of regular unpaid work – namely such work that is carried out at least several times a month – among workers in the EU. Women disproportionately shoulder caregiving and household responsibilities. Approximately 62 % of women provide regular care for children and 26 % care for relatives. Corresponding shares among men are considerably lower, at 56 % and 20 %, respectively. The gender gap is even more pronounced in terms of housework. Almost all women (96 %) report doing housework regularly compared with only 73 % of men. Notably, 12 % of men report never engaging in housework, whereas this is just 1 % among women. In the case of all three activities, women are more likely to perform them on a daily basis (Figure 122).

Figure 122: Frequency of unpaid work activities in the EU by gender (%)



Notes: Respondents who answered 'don't know', refused to answer or stated that they do not have children or grandchildren (in relation to the question about the care of children) or older relatives or relatives with disabilities (in relation to the question about the care of relatives) are not included in the figure.

Household composition inherently affects the distribution of unpaid work (Figure 123). In households with children, childcare involvement is greater for women in households with two adults: 96 % provide care at least several times a month. The largest gender gap appears in lone-adult households with children: while 94 % of women care for children regularly, only 76 % of men do the same. Some 29 % of men in this situation are regularly involved in care for relatives (including those not living in the same household) compared with 28 % of their female counterparts. Women consistently report higher involvement across all household configurations regarding housework. The gender disparity is most pronounced in multi-adult households, indicating that men's engagement in domestic tasks decreases when living with other adults.

Workers who regularly engage in unpaid work outside their job (at least several times a month) were asked how much time they devote on average to these activities.

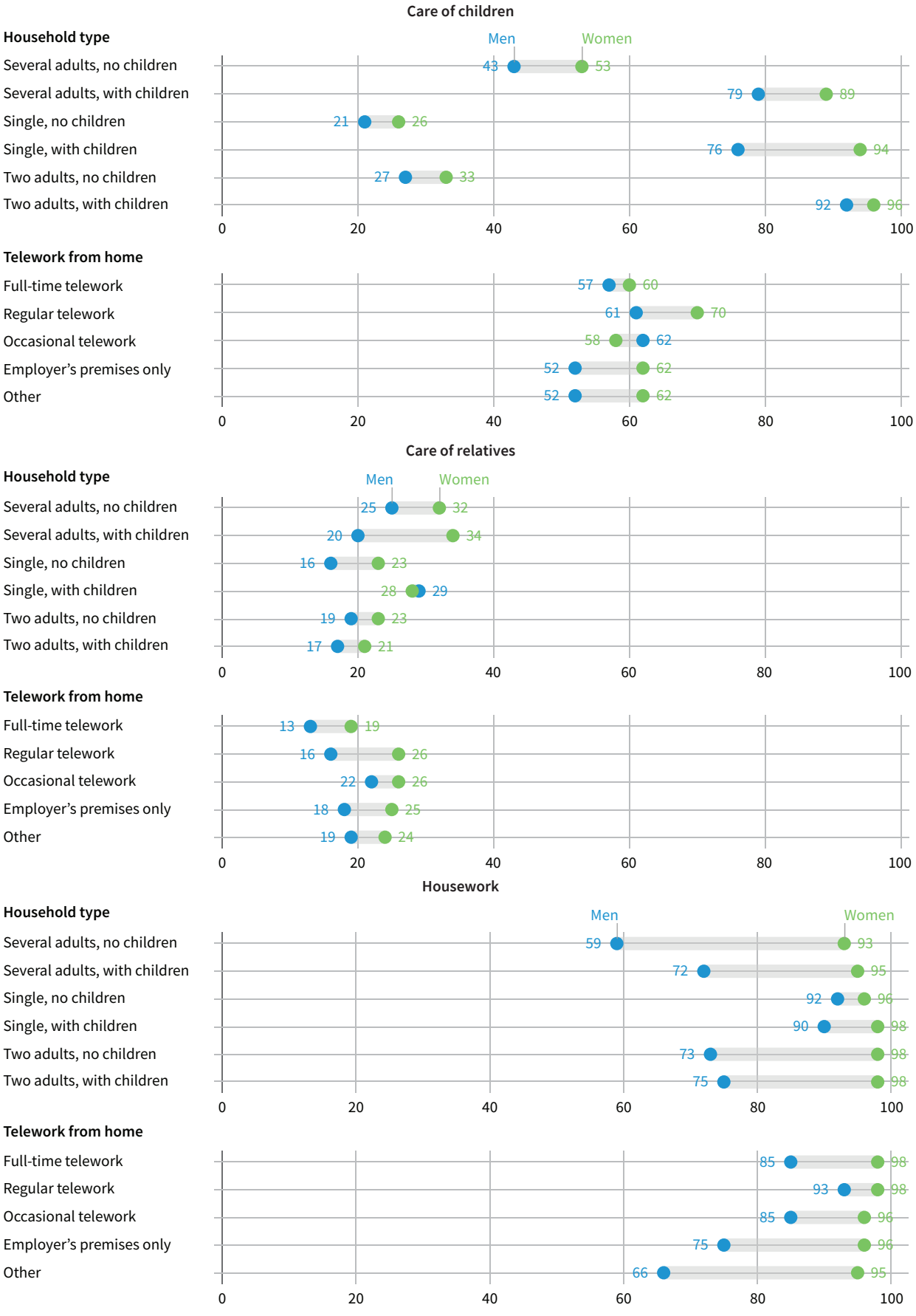
Those engaged in regular childcare spend on average 22 hours per week caring for children, with women (27 hours) spending more time than men (17 hours).

The gender gap in time spent on childcare is most pronounced in households with two or more adults and children (Figure 124). Even in single-adult households with children, men report spending less time on childcare than women.

Regular carers providing care for relatives spend an average of eight hours per week on this activity. As with childcare, women dedicate more time to caring for relatives than men (nine and seven hours, respectively), with the gender gap evident across most population subgroups. For both women and men, the time devoted to caring for relatives increases with age, peaking among women aged 65 and older: they spend the highest average number of hours per week on such care (18 hours).

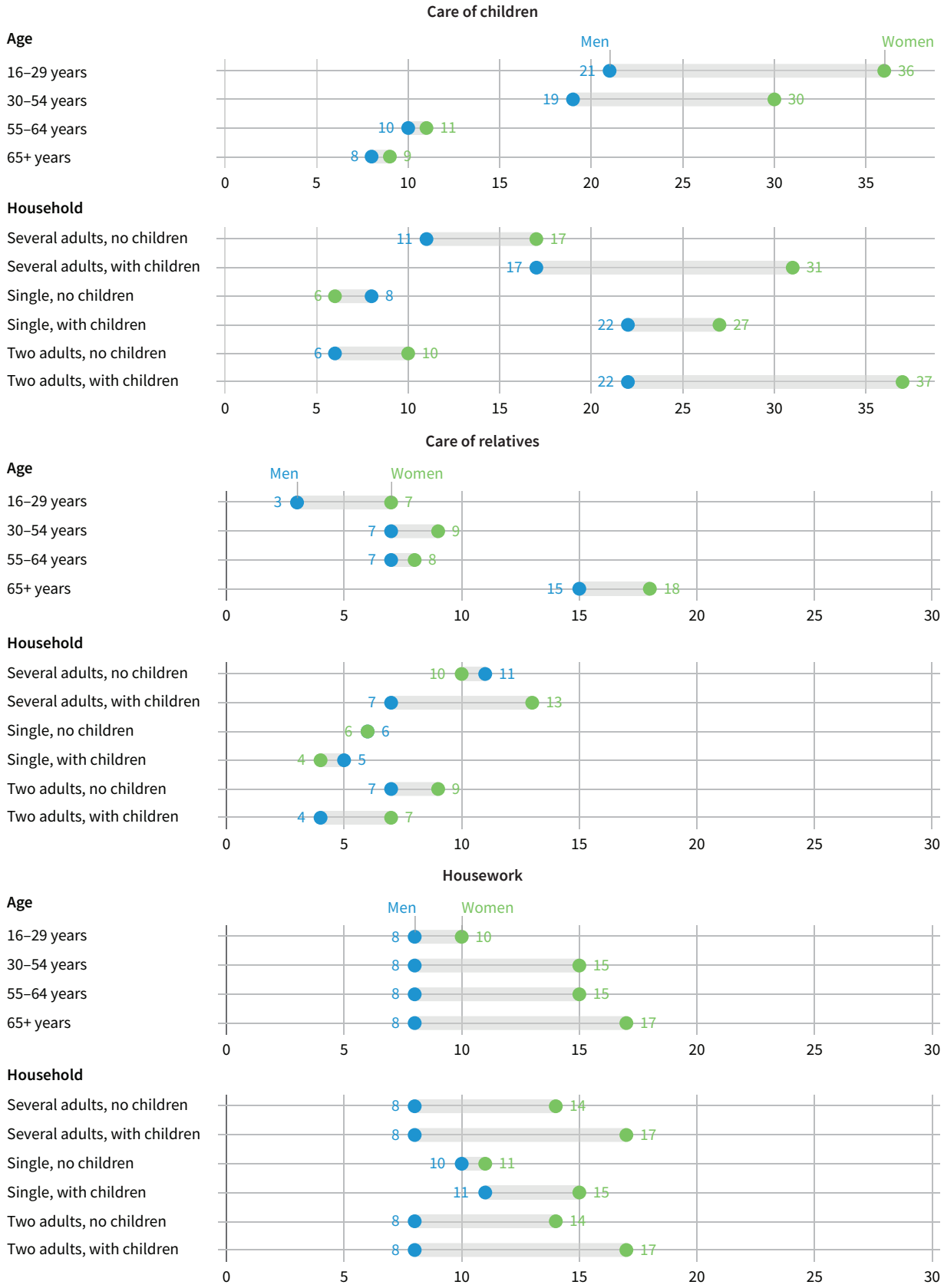
Workers who regularly engage in housework spend an average of 12 hours per week on such activities. Women devote almost twice as much time as men (15 and 8 hours, respectively). Household composition further shapes these differences: gender gaps in time devoted to housework are more pronounced in households with children and in those with multiple adults. There is also an intersection between income and contribution to housework (Box 10).

Figure 123: Shares of respondents who perform unpaid work activities at least several times a month in the EU by gender, household type and telework from home (%)



Notes: Respondents who answered 'don't know', refused to answer or stated that they do not have children or grandchildren (in relation to the question about the care of children) or older relatives or relatives with disabilities (in relation to the question about the care of relatives) are not included in the figure. Telework from home refers to employees only.

Figure 124: Weekly hours spent on unpaid work activities in the EU by gender, age and household type (only workers regularly involved in the activity)



Notes: The figure is based only on respondents who mentioned engaging in the given activity at least several times a month. Respondents who answered 'don't know' or refused to answer are not included in the figure.

Box 10: Income and housework – an uneven (gendered) division of roles

The intersection between the contribution to household income and household tasks exposes further important gender inequalities in terms of work–life balance (Table 19). Some 23 % of workers are both the main breadwinner and the main contributor to housework – with slightly more women in this group (55 %). Breadwinners making a lesser contribution to household tasks represent another 21 % of the EU workforce – 5 % of this group are women. Furthermore, some 15 % of workers are the main contributor to housework but not the main breadwinner, with 93 % of these being women. Some 10 % of workers are not the main contributor to either (that is, household tasks or breadwinning), and 60 % of them are men.

Only 7 % of the EU workforce lives in households that share breadwinning and housework equally. This group is composed of equal shares of men and women. The remaining group in the EU workforce (24 %) consists of workers who share either breadwinning or housework but not both.

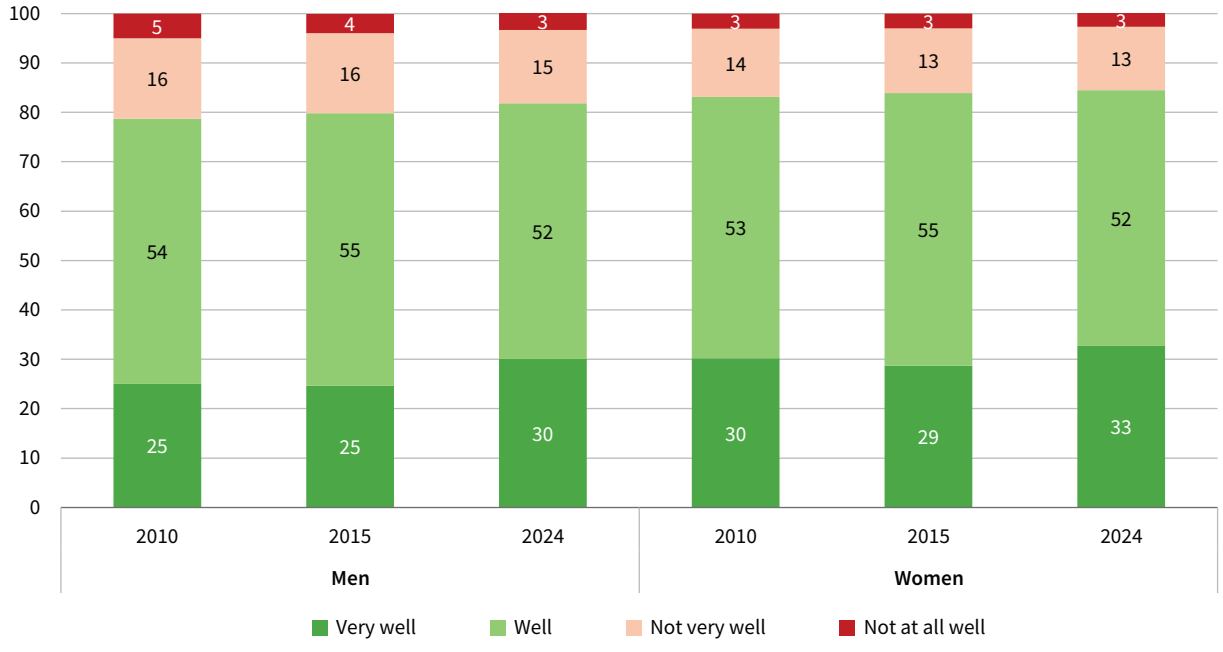
Table 19: Distribution of workers according to their contribution to household income and household tasks and proportion of women (%)

Contribution	Share of total	Proportion of women
Most income and most household tasks	23	55
Most income and shared household tasks	10	22
Most income and least household tasks	21	5
Shared income and most household tasks	4	87
Shared income and shared household tasks	7	50
Shared income and least household tasks	3	15
Least income and most household tasks	15	93
Least income and shared household tasks	7	72
Least income and least household tasks	10	40
Total	**100**	**47**

Slow but steady improvement in work–life balance

The EWCS asked respondents how well their working hours fit with their family or social commitments outside work. In 2024, 83 % of workers reported a good fit. The remaining 17 % reported a poor fit. Gender differences are small, but women are more likely than their male counterparts to report a good fit (85 % versus 82 %, respectively) (Figure 125). Trend data show a slow but steady improvement for both in this respect: the shares of women and men reporting their working hours fitting very well or well with their family or social commitments increased from 83 % and 79 %, respectively, in 2010, to 85 % and 82 %, respectively in 2024.

Figure 125: Prevalence of degrees of fit between working hours and family and social commitments outside work in the EU by gender, 2010–2024 (%)



Source: EWCS series.

Work–life balance changes over the life course. Working hours fit well or very well with social commitments for 92 % of workers aged 65+ years and 85 % of young workers (16–29 years). However, this balance is more challenging for 30- to 54-year-olds: 81 % report a good balance. This goes up to 86 % for 55- to 64-year-olds. Among occupations, clerical workers (89 %), professionals and workers in elementary occupations (both 86 %) have the largest shares with a (very) good match, while skilled agricultural workers (71 %) and services and sales workers and plant and machine operators (both 78 %) have the smallest shares.

Employees have a better work–life balance than self-employed individuals – a (very) good fit was reported by 84 % of employees compared with only 75 % of self-employed individuals. The balance between work and private life is also linked to the financial situation of the household. Whereas around 88 % of workers in households that find it (very) easy to make ends meet reported a (very) good fit, this share drops to 67 % among those who find it very difficult and 74 % among those who find it difficult to make ends meet.

Previous research has shown that a better work–life balance is associated with improved health outcomes and life satisfaction (Sirgy et al., 2018). The EWCS 2024 results support this finding, as workers who report a better fit between work and private life are more likely to rate their overall health positively and are less likely to report a risk of depression.

Work–household interface

Working life and private life influence each other, creating a dynamic interplay between personal and professional responsibilities. The central concept of the work–household interface is that fulfilling demands in one area can make it difficult to meet obligations in the other (Demerouti et al., 2012). The EWCS captures the spillover of work into workers' private lives by asking respondents how often over the 12 months prior to the survey they:

- changed their private and family activities due to work-related requests, which captures the interference of work in the private lives of workers;
- kept worrying about work when they were not working, which is a manifestation of stress and mental workload ('worry about work');
- felt too tired after work to do some of the household jobs that needed to be done, which points to physical or mental exhaustion from work ('tired after work');
- found that their job prevented them from giving the time they wanted to family, which indicates an imbalance between work and personal life ('job affects family time').

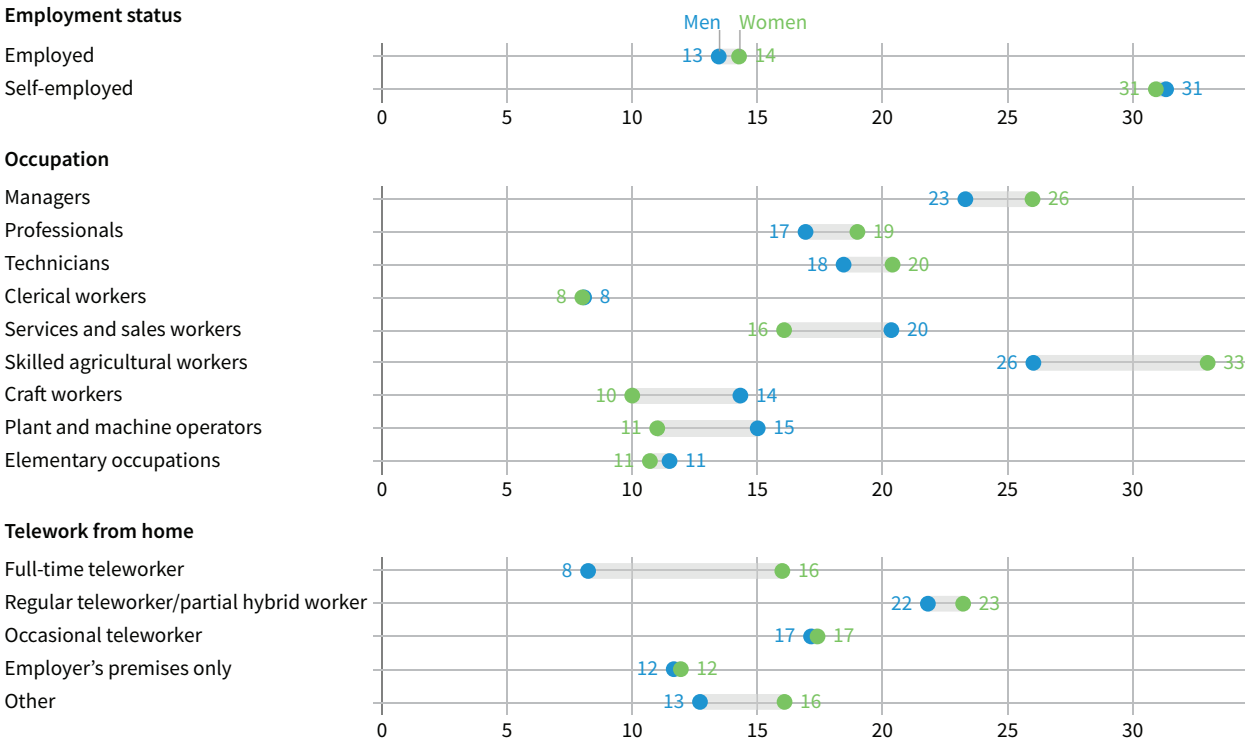
Although nearly half of workers (47 %) said that they never had to change their private and family activities due to work-related requests, 4 % mentioned that they did so at least several times a week, 13 % experienced it several times a month and 37 % did so less often. A larger share of self-employed workers (31 %) than employees (14 %) adjusted their private and family activities at least several times a month (Figure 126). The frequency of work-induced changes in private and family activities varies across occupations, with the lowest among clerical workers (8 %) and the highest among skilled agricultural workers (28 %).

The proportion of workers who adjusted their private and family activities at least several times per month because of work is higher among occasional teleworkers (17 %) and regular teleworkers/hybrid workers (23 %) than among full-time teleworkers (11 %) and employees who work exclusively on site (at their employer's premises) (12 %). These findings partially align with previous research associating telework with reduced work–family interference (Beckel et al., 2023) and suggest that the flexibility associated with occasional or hybrid (regular) telework may come with increased unpredictability and spillover into private life.

Changes to private and family activities induced by work seem to be also linked to work intensity: the share of workers adjusting their private activities at least several times a month increases from 9 % among those who never work to tight deadlines to 34 % among those who do it all the time.

Around 15 % of workers worry about work in their free time and 22 % feel tired after work (unless stated otherwise, the reported percentages refer to the share of respondents who experienced a particular type of spillover of work into their private life always or most of the time). An additional 13 % stated that their job interferes with the time they would like to spend with their family. Such spillovers of work into private life are more commonly reported by women than men. Women are more likely to experience fatigue after work (24 % versus 20 % of men), to worry about work when off duty (16 % versus 14 % of men) and to feel that their job affects the time that they can dedicate to their family (13 % versus 12 % of men). Compared with employees, self-employed individuals are more likely to feel tired after work (21 % and 26 %, respectively), to worry about work (13 % and 28 %, respectively) and to feel that their job affects family time (12 % and 17 %, respectively).

Figure 126: Prevalence of changing private and family activities due to work-related requests at least several times a month in the EU by gender, employment status, occupation and telework from home (%)

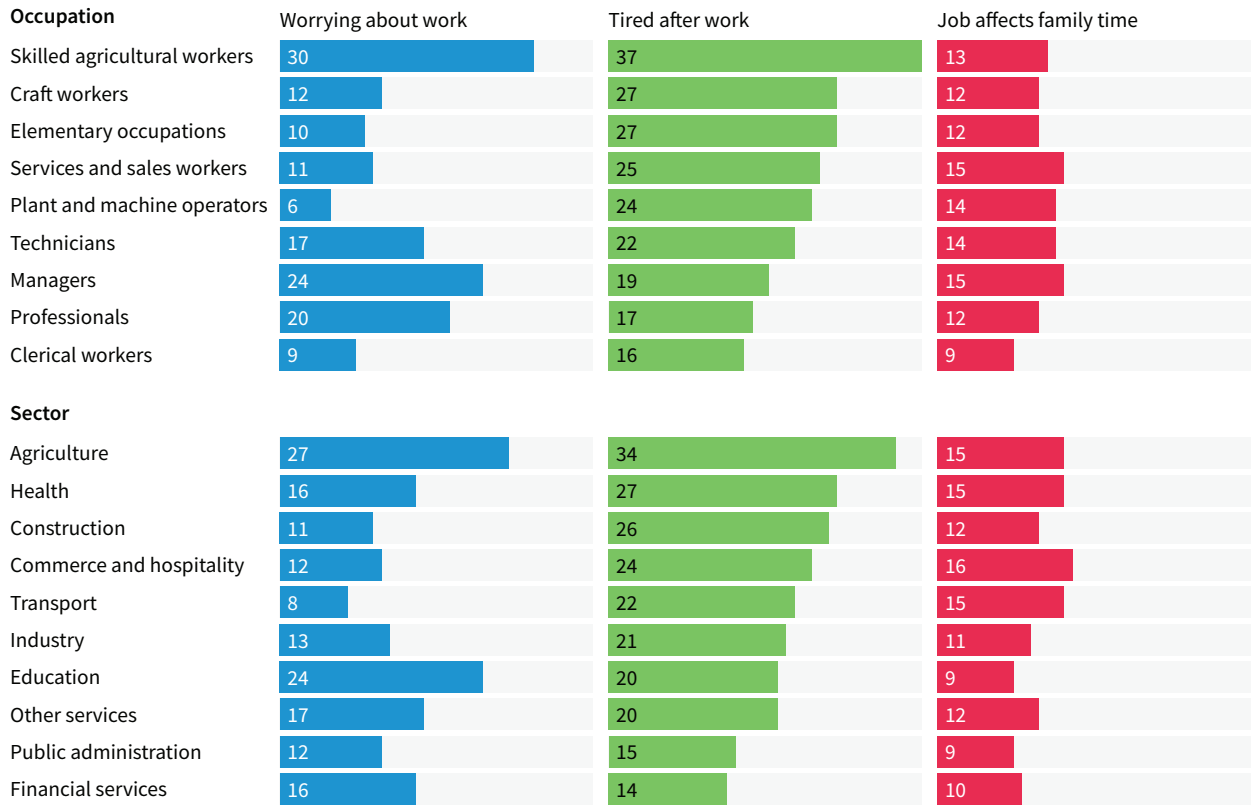


Notes: It shows the shares of respondents who answered that they daily, several times a week or several times a month had to change their private and family activities due to work-related requests. Those who answered 'don't know' or refused to answer are not included in the figure. Telework from home refers to employees only.

There is also a considerable variation in work–life conflicts across occupations (Figure 127). Skilled agricultural workers stand out as experiencing the highest levels of spillover for two dimensions: 30 % worry about work during their free time and 37 % are too tired after work. Managers have the second-largest share of those worrying about work (24 %), although they remain below average in terms of fatigue after work (19 %).

Agriculture also stands out as the sector with the largest shares of workers who continue to worry about work when not working (27 %) and who feel tired after work (34 %), and it has the third-largest share of workers whose job affects their family time (15 %). The health sector has a notably high percentage of workers who feel tired after work (27 %) and experience work–family conflict (15 %). The education sector has a considerable share of workers worrying about work (24 %), while the commerce and hospitality sector (16 %) and health and transport sectors (both 15 %) have large proportions of workers whose job affects family time.

Figure 127: Prevalence of work–life conflicts in the EU by occupation and sector (%)



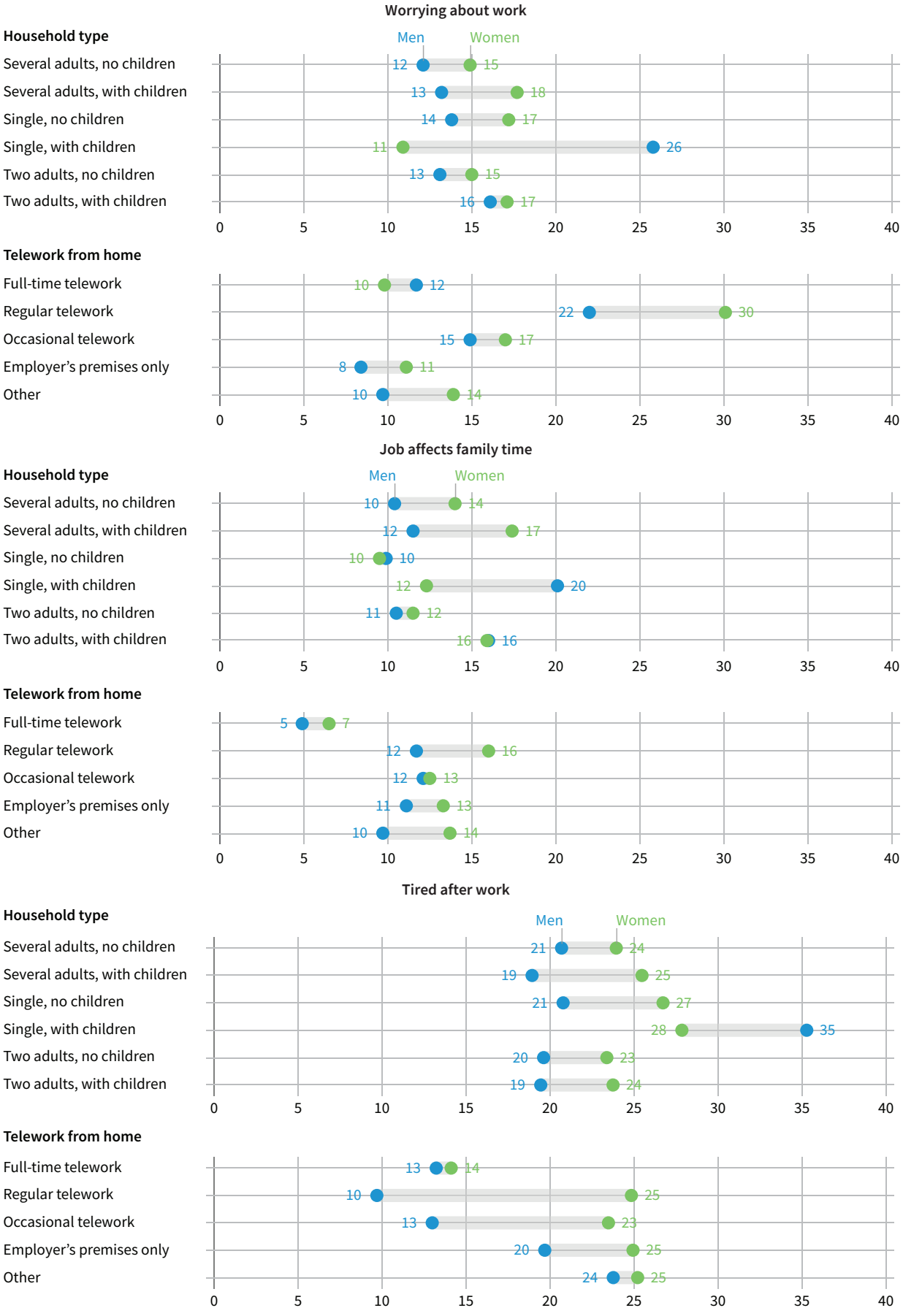
Notes: The percentages correspond to those who responded 'always' or 'most of the time' when asked how often they experienced each of the three conflicts in the 12 months prior to the survey. Those who answered 'does not apply' or 'don't know' and those who refused to answer are not included in the figure.

Women experience more work–life conflicts than men, regardless of household composition (Figure 128). The notable exception are lone men with children, among whom larger shares report worrying about work (26 %), tiredness after work (35 %) and their job affecting family time (20 %), suggesting that lone fathers may face higher pressure in managing both work and caregiving responsibilities.

Family–work interference

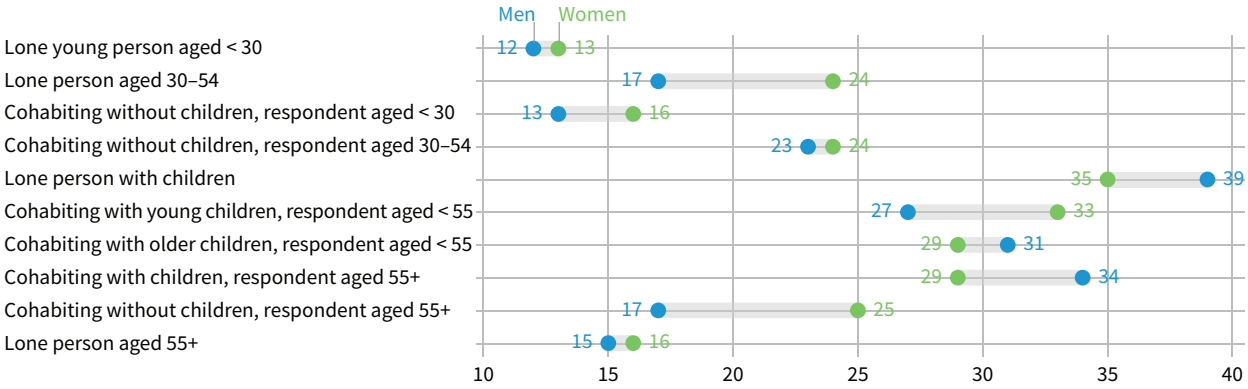
Worker's private lives can also affect their performance at work, as family responsibilities may interfere with their concentration, for instance. In the EU, 4 % of workers report that they always or most of the time find it difficult to concentrate on their job due to family responsibilities, while 20 % say this is sometimes the case and 32 % say that this is rarely the case. The remaining 44 % of workers never find it difficult. Difficulties concentrating always or most of the time are slightly more prevalent among women (5 %) than men (3 %) and are more common among self-employed individuals (5 %) than employees (4 %).

Figure 128: Prevalence of work–life conflicts in the EU by gender, household type and telework from home (%)



Notes: Those who answered 'does not apply' or 'don't know' and those who refused to answer are not included in the figure. Percentages correspond to those who responded 'always' or 'most of the time' when asked how often they experienced each of the three conflicts in the 12 months prior to the survey. Telework from home refers to employees only.

Figure 129: Prevalence of difficulty concentrating on job because of family responsibilities in the EU by gender, age and household type (%)



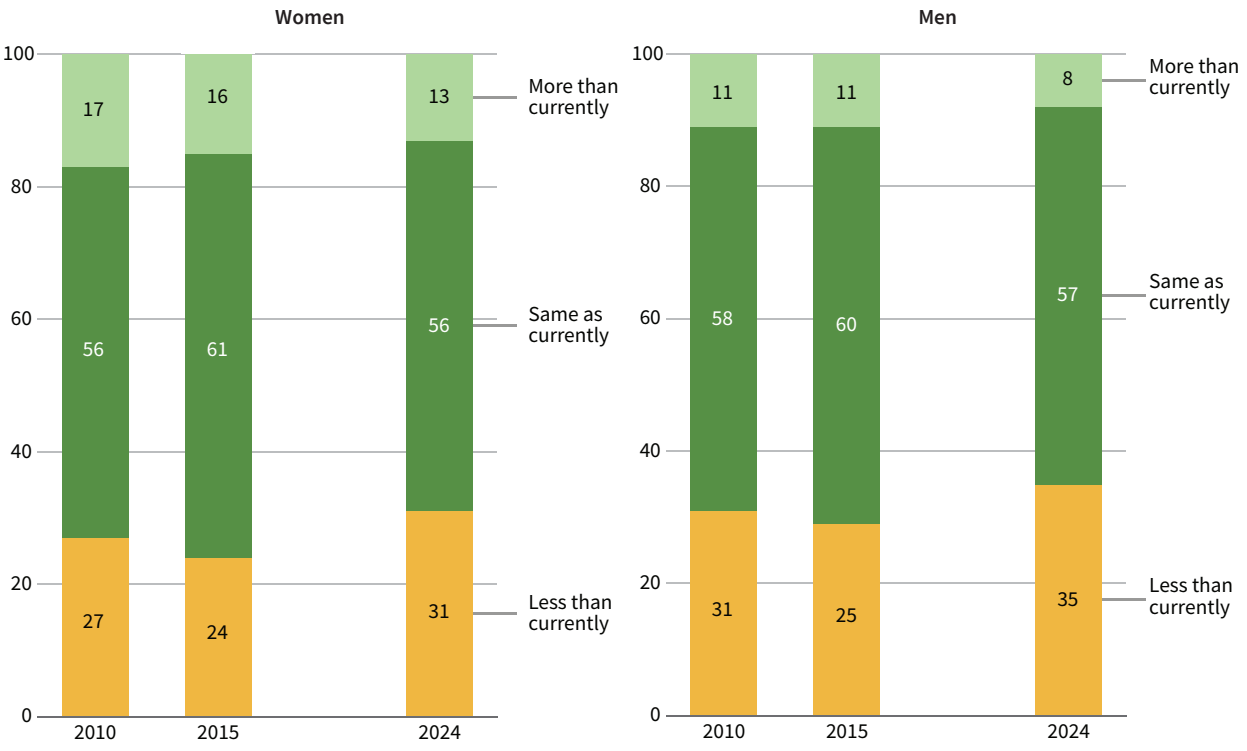
Notes: Those who answered 'don't know', those who refused to answer and those who stated 'I have no family responsibilities' are not included in the figure. The percentages correspond to those who responded 'always' , 'most of the time' or 'sometimes'.

In households where there are children, the likelihood of experiencing difficulties concentrating at work because of family responsibilities increases; the likelihood is particularly high for lone parents (Figure 129). In contrast, such difficulties are observed much less frequently in households with no children, regardless of the respondent's age.

Growing preference for fewer working hours

While most workers in the EU (56 %) are happy with the number of hours that they are currently working, the results indicate an increasing preference for a reduction in working hours. The share of workers preferring to work fewer hours increased from 27 % in 2015 to 33 % in 2024. This preference is more common for men than women but increased for both: from 29 % to 35 % among men and from 24 % to 31 % among women (Figure 130). At the same time, the share of those preferring to work more hours decreased from 14 % in 2015 to 11 % in 2024.

Figure 130: Prevalence of different preferences on working hours in the EU by gender (%)



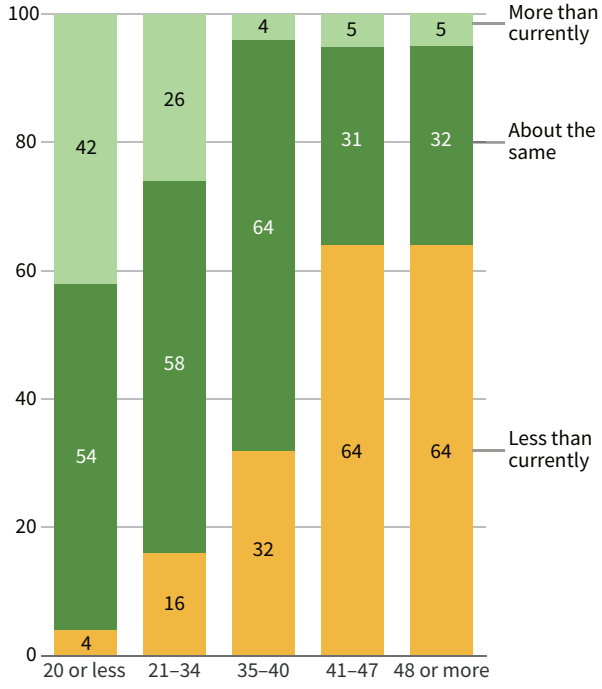
Note: The figure shows the prevalence of the answers to the following question: 'Provided that you could make a free choice regarding your working hours and taking into account the need to earn a living, how many hours per week would you prefer to work at present?'
Source: EWCS series.

The preference to work fewer hours is most likely to be reported by men aged between 35 and 44 years (40 %). A preference for longer hours is expressed by relatively more young men (28 %) and young women (24 %) aged between 16 and 24 years, compared with only 10 % of men and 6 % of women aged 55 and over.

There are substantial differences in working time preferences across countries, and substantial differences between men and women in some countries. For instance, the shares of workers preferring to work fewer hours are larger for women than for men in Finland, Norway and Sweden; the opposite is the case in Austria, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain and Switzerland. The shares of those preferring to work more hours are particularly large among both men and women in the Netherlands and Norway; they are larger among men in France and Malta, and among women in Germany and Switzerland.

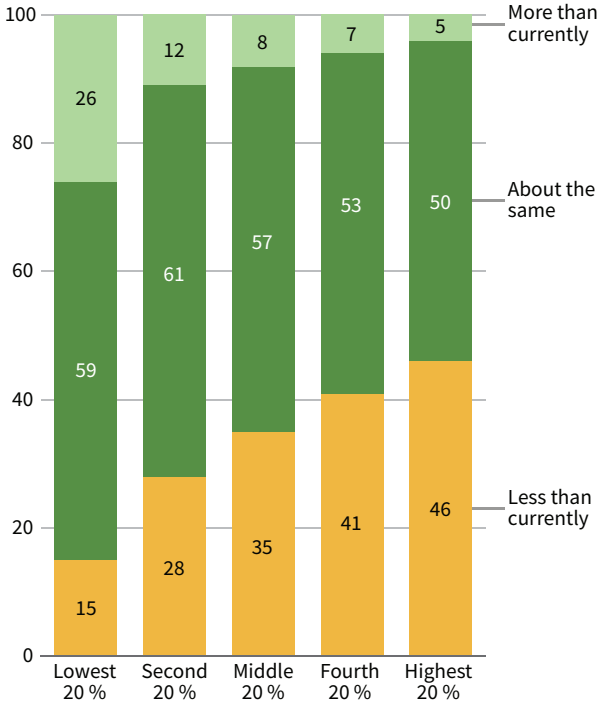
Unsurprisingly, people who work very long hours are more likely to say they want to work fewer hours: 64 % of those working 41 hours or more per week would prefer to work fewer hours. At the same time, 42 % of those usually working 20 hours or less per week would prefer to work more hours (Figure 131).

Figure 131: Prevalence of different preferences on working hours in the EU by usual weekly working hours (in main and secondary jobs) (%)



Working time preferences are also linked to workers' income and financial security. As Figure 132 shows, the greater the income level, the more likely it is that workers would prefer to work fewer hours. It is also interesting to note that, the greater the effort–reward imbalance (when workers disagree that they are being paid appropriately considering their efforts and achievements), the more likely it is that they are not happy with their current working hours: 43 % of those who strongly disagree that they are appropriately paid would like to work fewer hours.

Figure 132: Prevalence of preferences on working hours in the EU by income quintile (%)



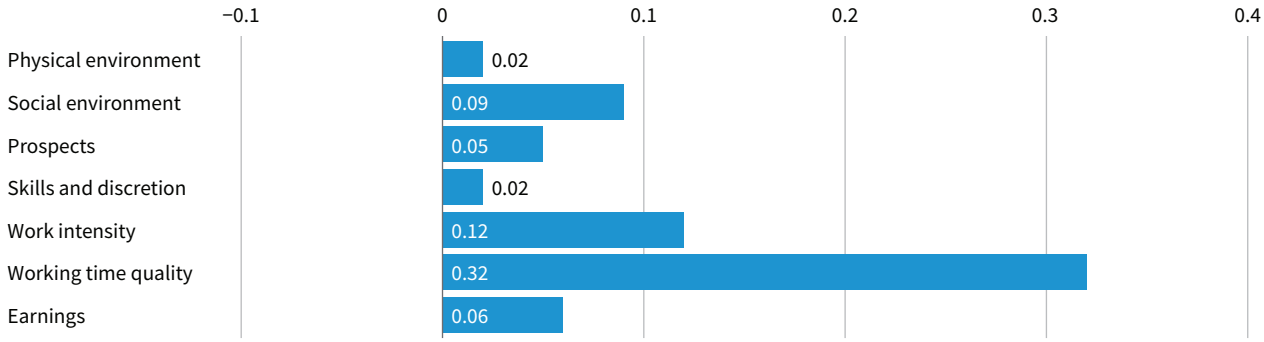
The preference to work fewer hours is greater among workers in agriculture (38 %) and smaller among those in the commerce and hospitality sector (29 %). The preference for longer hours is reported by larger shares of those working in other services (15 %), commerce and hospitality (14 %) and health (14 %), whereas this is the case for small shares of those working in industry (6 %) and public administration and construction (7 %). Managers (44 %) and professionals (40 %) are the occupations most likely to report a preference for fewer working hours. A preference for longer hours is reported by a quarter of those in elementary occupations.

Working time preferences change over the life stages. Those over the age of 55 cohabiting in households with other adults and without children have the largest shares of those who were happy with their working hours at the time of the survey. The preference for fewer working hours is larger among lone adults aged 30–54, lone adults with children and those cohabiting with other adults and small/young children.

Job quality and work–life balance

As shown in Figure 133, the Working time quality index and, to a lesser extent, the Work intensity index are positively associated with a better fit between working hours and workers' family and private commitments outside work.

Figure 133: Association between job quality and work–life balance across job quality indices



Workers' health and well-being

Summary

- Musculoskeletal problems are the most prevalent health issues, and occupation is a factor in the reporting of health problems. Workers in physically demanding and lower-skilled occupations report a higher prevalence of backache and muscular pains, while workers in higher-skilled occupations tend to report higher levels of headaches, eyestrain and anxiety.
- More women than men report health problems, with the largest gender differences in self-reported health problems being for headaches, eyestrain and anxiety.
- More women (23 %) than men (18 %) and more older workers of core age (30–54 years) (21 %) and of pre-retirement age (55–64 years) (24 %) than younger workers (16–29 years) (18 %) are likely to report experiencing sleep difficulties daily or several times a week.
- A significant proportion of EU workers experience physical and emotional exhaustion, with 28 % of workers always or most of the time feeling physically exhausted and 13 % always or most of the time feeling emotionally exhausted.
- A significant proportion of EU workers report being exposed to health and safety risks at work: about 26 % of workers in the EU report that their health or safety is at risk because of work, a figure that has remained relatively unchanged since 2010.
- There is an age gradient in health-related absenteeism, with pre-retirement-age workers (55–64 years) being more likely to report extended sick leave (17 %) than younger workers (16–29 years) and core-age workers (30–54 years) (both 13 %). Home-based teleworkers are significantly more likely to report presenteeism (working while being sick) than those who work solely at their employer's premises (over 40 % versus 27 %, respectively), suggesting that the shift to remote work may contribute to increased presenteeism.
- Many workers lack information about health and safety risks and stress prevention measures: 14 % of EU workers reported being 'not very well informed' or 'not at all well informed' about health and safety risks at work, while 29 % reported being unaware of measures to prevent work-related stress, highlighting a need for improved communication and awareness from employers.

Well-being at work is a multidimensional concept, extending beyond the mere absence of harm, and refers to the physical, mental and social well-being of workers and the ways in which work and the workplace contribute to it. The emphasis on mental and psychosocial dimensions is particularly important given that, according to the WHO, an estimated 15 % of working-age adults have a mental disorder at any point

in time. Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, to realise their abilities, and to work well. Poor mental health affects a person's capacity to participate in work, and can reduce productivity, performance, and the ability to work safely (WHO, 2022a). Lower back pain, however, remains the single leading cause of disability worldwide when measured in years lived with disability (the years that people live in less than full health due to disease or injury; WHO, 2023).

WHO (2022) research also highlights the close link between mental and physical health, showing that good mental health supports good physical health and vice versa. In fact, the WHO defines health not merely as the absence of disease or infirmity, but as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being. This holistic understanding underlines the importance of addressing mental health in a proactive and integrated manner, especially in the workplace.

Being a foundational component of overall well-being, mental health is also critically important from an organisational perspective, leading to increased performance and productivity.

Musculoskeletal problems prevail among reported health issues

Survey respondents were asked about the health issues they had experienced in the 12 months preceding the survey, choosing from a list of five types of problems, without explicitly attributing these problems to work:

- backache,
- muscular pains in the shoulders, neck and/or upper limbs,
- muscular pains in the lower limbs,
- headaches and eyestrain,
- anxiety.

The most reported health problems are muscular pains in the shoulders, neck or upper limbs and backache (both reported by 52 % of workers), followed by headaches and eyestrain (47 %), muscular pains in the hips or lower limbs (38 %) and anxiety (21 %). More women than men report problems across all health issues covered in the survey – the largest gender differences in self-reported health problems are for headaches and eyestrain (54 % of women and 41 % of men) and anxiety (26 % of women and 16 % of men).

As shown in Table 20, workers in elementary occupations (63 %) and skilled agricultural workers (62 %) exhibit the highest reported prevalence of backache, followed by plant and machine operators (59 %) and craft workers (58 %). These occupations also report the highest prevalence of muscular pains in the upper and lower limbs, suggesting a common underlying factor related to the physical demands of these jobs (see Chapter 3). Such factors could include, for instance, manual handling and lifting; repetitive movements; exposure to vibrations and other posture-related factors; and limited breaks and rest periods. By comparison, the prevalence of backache among all higher-skilled occupations is lower than 50 % but that of headaches and anxiety is higher.

Physical and emotional exhaustion

The survey also asked respondents whether they felt physically exhausted at the end of the working day and whether they felt emotionally drained by their work. These are some of the symptoms of burnout.

Across the EU, 8 % of workers always feel physically exhausted, 20 % most of the time, 39 % sometimes, 22 % rarely and 10 % never. Women are more likely than men to report feeling physically exhausted always or

Table 20: Prevalence of health problems in the EU by occupation (%)

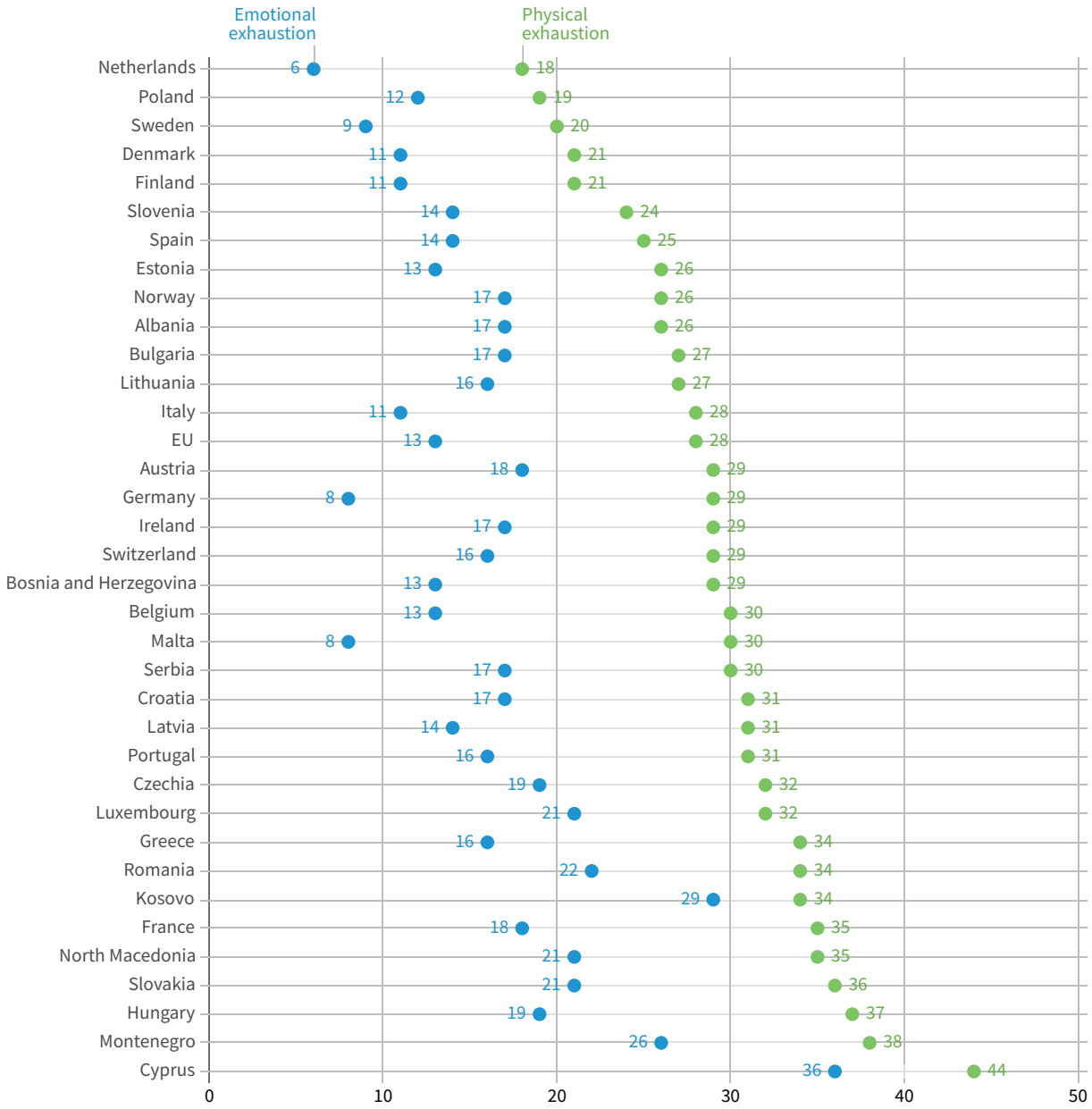
Occupation	Backache	Upper limb pain	Lower limb pain	Headaches/ eyestrain	Anxiety
Managers	42	47	27	45	21
Professionals	48	51	31	55	26
Technicians	49	50	35	50	22
Clerical workers	49	46	29	51	20
Services and sales workers	54	52	41	44	21
Skilled agricultural workers	62	61	56	32	17
Craft workers	58	60	49	40	13
Plant and machine operators	59	56	45	40	17
Elementary occupations	63	59	47	44	20
EU	**52**	**53**	**38**	**47**	**21**

Note: The colour scheme in this figure illustrates how occupations compare with the EU average in reported health issues. Each column shows the percentage of workers in each occupation reporting health problems, with the EU average as a non-colour-coded reference. Red indicates significantly above-average reporting, orange represents moderately above or near-average levels, yellow reflects values close to the average, and green indicates below-average reporting.

most of the time (30 % and 26 %, respectively). Across occupations, the share of workers experiencing physical exhaustion most of the time or always ranges from 20 % among clerical workers to 37 % among skilled agricultural workers. Across sectors, the highest proportions can be found in health and agriculture (both 35 %). Considerable differences among countries emerge in the prevalence of physical exhaustion linked to work. In Cyprus, nearly half of workers (44 %) report feeling physically exhausted always or most of the time due to their job, the highest share among all countries included in the survey (Figure 134). In contrast, the lowest levels of physical exhaustion are observed in the Netherlands (18 %).

Examining emotional exhaustion, 3 % of workers in the EU report always feeling emotionally drained by their work, 10 % most of the time, 28 % sometimes, 30 % rarely and 29 % never. Women are also more likely than men to experience this always or most of the time (15 % versus 12 %, respectively). Persistent emotional exhaustion is most prevalent among technicians (15 %) and plant and machine operators (15 %), while education (18 %) and health (17 %) are the sectors with the highest shares of affected workers. Employees report emotional exhaustion more often than self-employed individuals (14 % and 11 %, respectively). When looking at differences between countries, the overall pattern closely mirrors that of physical exhaustion. The highest share of workers who experience feeling emotionally exhausted always or most of the time is found in Cyprus (36 %), while the lowest share is observed in the Netherlands (6 %) (Figure 134).

Figure 134: Prevalence of physical and emotional exhaustion by country (%)



Note: The percentages correspond to those who responded 'always' or 'most of the time' when asked how often they felt exhausted in their job(s).

Overall, 28 % of workers rarely or never feel physically or emotionally exhausted (30 % of men and 25 % of women), but 10 % report feeling physically and emotionally exhausted always or most of the time (8 % of men and 11 % of women).

Risk of depression

The EWCS uses the WHO-5 index (see Chapter 1). A high score on this index is associated with a good level of psychological well-being. A low score indicates that the person is at risk of mental health problems, including depression (Topp et al., 2015). A score of less than 50 (out of 100) is interpreted as the person being at risk of clinical depression. A score below 28 (out of 100) is interpreted as a sign of major depression. Based on the WHO-5 scores, 5 % of workers are at risk of major depression and an additional 11 % are at risk of clinical depression. The share of workers at risk of depression is especially concerning in the health sector, in which this share reaches one fifth of workers (Figure 135).

Sleep a problem for a significant minority

Sleep is essential for overall health, and disturbances in sleep have emerged as a significant occupational health concern. Poor sleep has been associated with reduced task performance (Robbins et al., 2019); impaired cognitive functioning (McGregor et al., 2018); increased risk of mental and physical health issues (Seow et al., 2020); a higher likelihood of workplace injuries (Uehli et al., 2014); and, consequently, greater absenteeism (Åkerstedt et al., 2020).

Sleeping difficulties are tracked through a question in the EWCS 2024 that asks respondents how often they experienced sleeping difficulties in the previous month. According to the data, 21 % of workers report experiencing such problems daily or several times a week.

A gender gap is apparent from the data, with relatively more women (23 %) than men (18 %) having difficulties in sleeping. These gender gaps are largest among managers, professionals, clerical workers, skilled agricultural workers and those in elementary occupations (Figure 136). Workers in higher-skilled occupations are somewhat more likely to report sleeping difficulties daily or several times a week than workers in lower-skilled occupations. There is also an age gradient, with younger workers less likely to report sleeping difficulties (18 %) than core-age (21 %) and pre-retirement-age workers (24 %).

Figure 135: Prevalence of workers at risk of depression by sector (%)

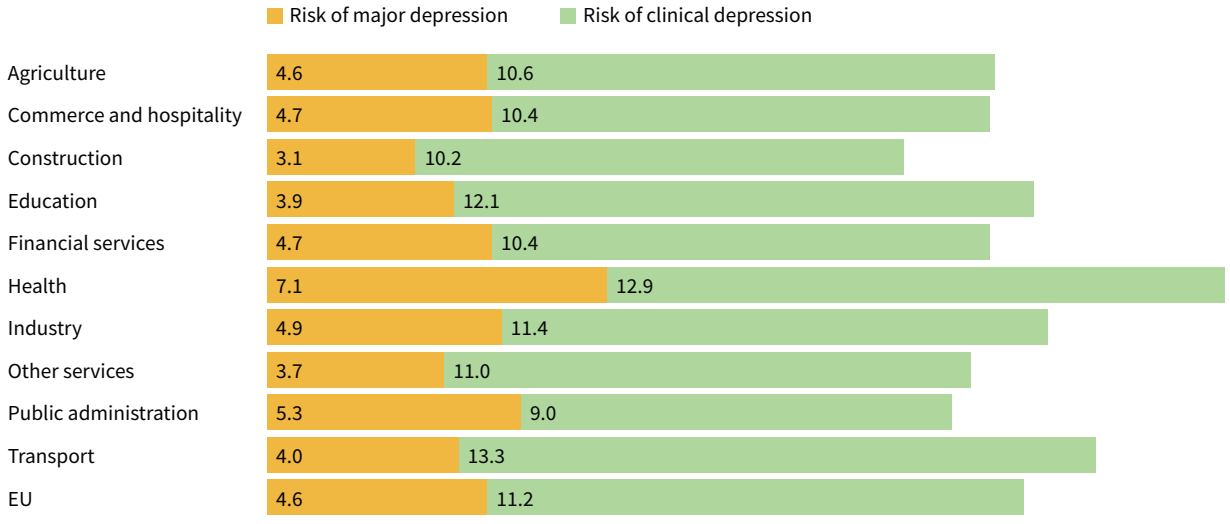
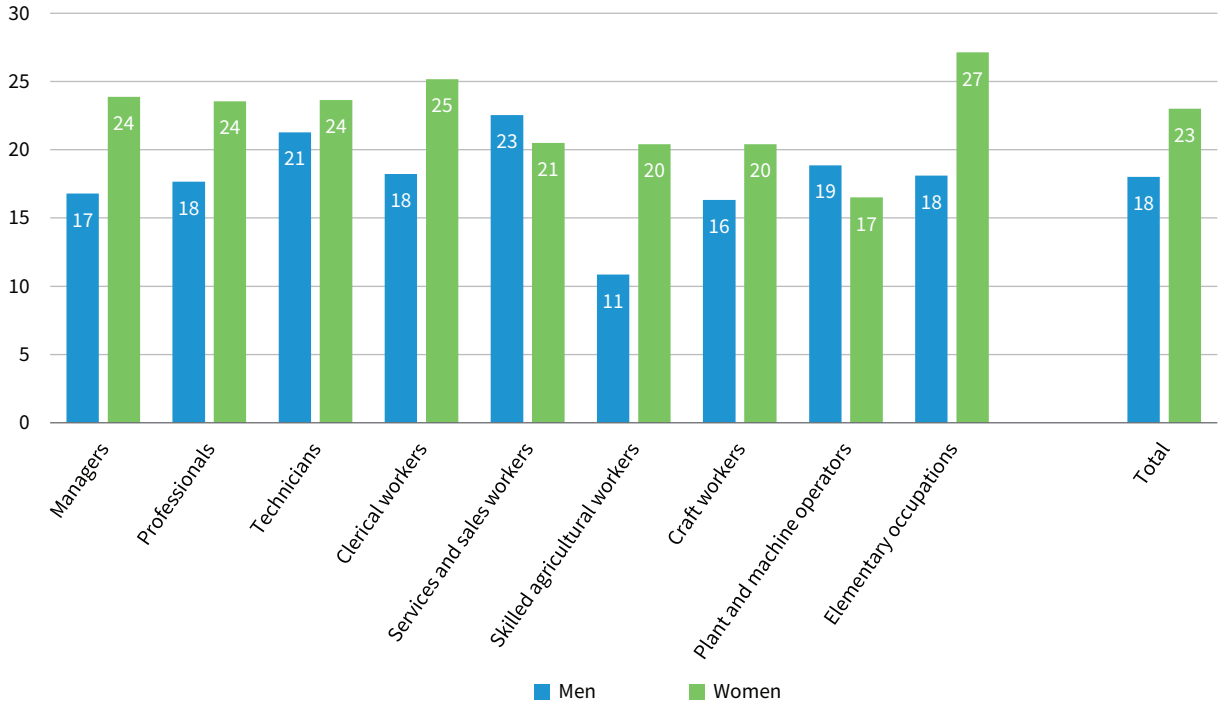


Figure 136: Prevalence of sleeping difficulties in the EU by occupation and gender (%)



Sickness leave

Some 26 % of workers said that they were absent from work for health reasons for 5 or more days in the 12 months prior to the survey. It is worth noting that the non-response rate for this question was high, except in Denmark, Finland, Germany and Sweden, which limits the comparability of results across countries.

The data show a distinct age gradient in health-related absenteeism, with younger workers (16–29 years) and core-age workers (30–54 years) less likely to report over 20 days of sick leave, at 13 % each, than pre-retirement-age workers (55–64 years), at 17 %. By contrast, post-retirement-age workers (65+ years) are more likely to report never being absent (26 %) and, at the same time, are less likely to take extended sick leave of more than 20 days, compared with all other age groups. This may, however, exemplify the 'healthy worker effect', a phenomenon in occupational epidemiology (Li et al., 1999) wherein employed populations tend to exhibit better health outcomes than the general population, primarily because individuals who are severely ill are less likely to be employed. Applied to older workers, this means that the remaining employed individuals tend to be healthier than the general population.

Furthermore, an occupational gradient is evident, as workers in lower-skilled occupations (such as those in elementary occupations) are more likely to report sick leave of over 20 days than workers in more highly skilled occupations (such as managers, professionals and technicians). Workers in industry and public education are more likely to report sick leave of over 20 days.

Presenteeism

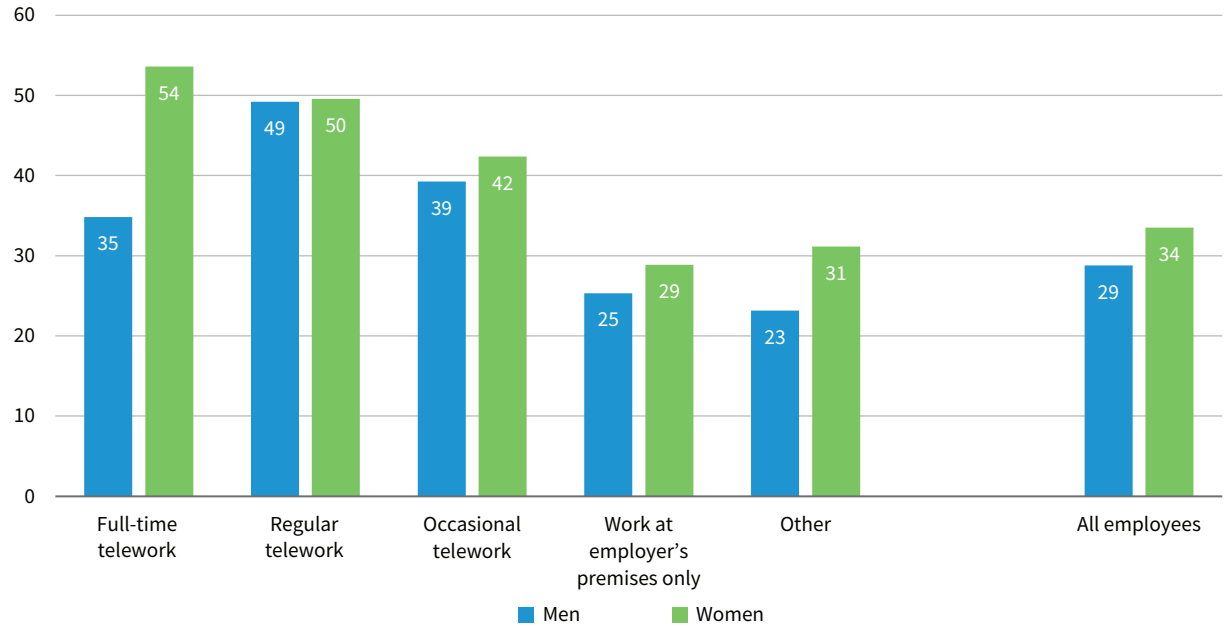
Presenteeism in the workplace – when workers attend work despite being unwell – has been linked to reduced productivity (Johns, 2010) and health and safety concerns (EU-OSHA, 2023).

Empirical analysis of the EWCS 2010 data found that psychological factors – such as decision authority, skill discretion, perceived rewards, exposure to abuse and high psychological, cognitive and emotional demands – and organisational pressures like shift work, long hours and client-facing roles were associated with a greater likelihood of working while ill (d'Errico et al., 2016).

Based on the most recent EWCS 2024 data, 31 % of workers report having worked while being sick in the previous 12 months or since starting their current job, with women more likely to do so (34 %) than men (29 %). Women who telework full time in particular are more likely than their male counterparts to report working while being sick (54 % versus 35 %; Figure 137). In terms of age group, older workers of post-retirement age – those aged 65 and over – are least likely to report presenteeism (18 %), and core-age workers (aged 30–54) are most likely to report it (32 %).

The share of employees reporting presenteeism varies by workplace setting, with home-based teleworkers being the most likely to continue working while unwell. Comparing telework with office-based work, 41 % of those who telework occasionally and 49 % of those who regularly telework (hybrid work) report presenteeism, compared with 27 % of those who work solely at their employer's premises.

Figure 137: Prevalence of presenteeism in the EU by telework arrangement and gender (%)

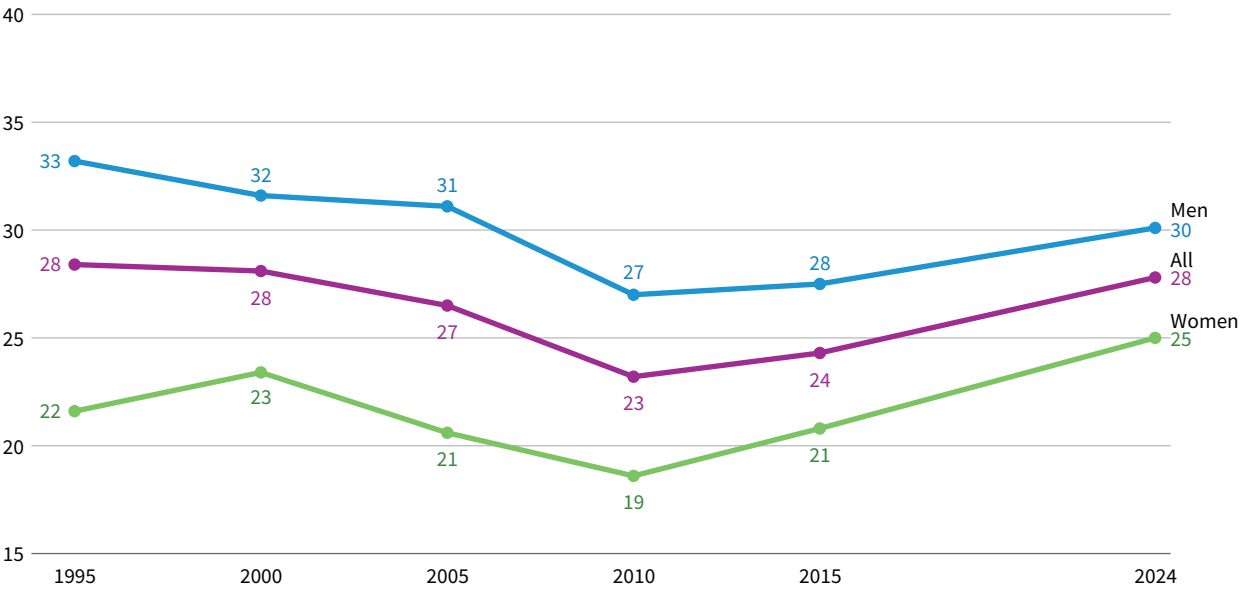


Health and safety at work

In line with the EU framework directive on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the health and safety of workers at work (Council Directive 89/391/EEC), employers are required to inform and consult workers and to ensure that each employee receives appropriate health and safety training. The dissemination of occupational health and safety information remains a cornerstone of effective risk prevention strategies. This focus is reinforced by the EU strategic framework on health and safety at work for 2021–2027, which emphasises the importance of anticipating and managing workplace change, as well as strengthening the prevention of work-related accidents and illnesses. A new priority of the current framework is the identification and management of psychosocial risks, particularly in the context of evolving work patterns driven by digitalisation and increased remote working.

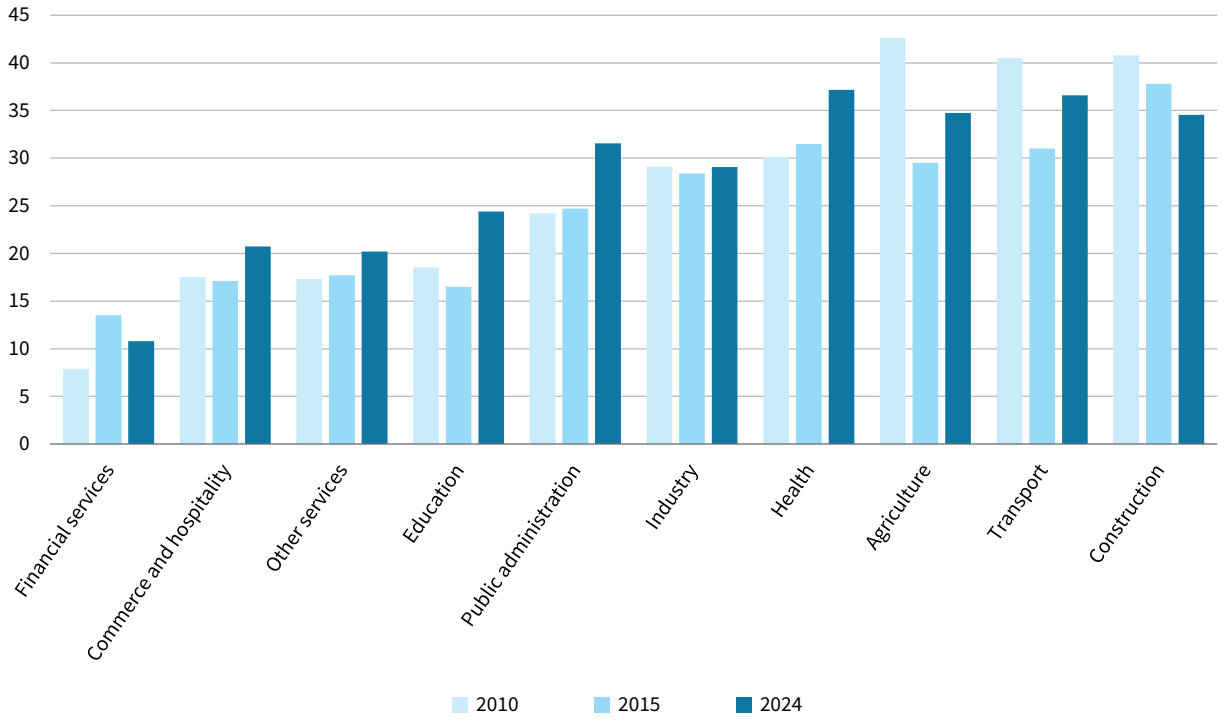
A question about whether workers report that their health is at risk due to their work has appeared in all editions of the EWCS going back to 1991 (the first EWCS). The initial large differences by gender have tended to diminish over time (Figure 138). Men are still more likely to report work-related health risks, but the share of men doing so has declined while that of women has increased (from 22 % in 1995 to 25 % in 2024).

Figure 138: Proportions of workers reporting that their health is at risk because of work in the EU by gender, 1995–2024 (%)



Note: In this figure, 'EU' refers to the EU-14, the 14 Member States (excluding the United Kingdom) that joined the EU prior to 2004.
Source: EWCS series.

Figure 139: Prevalence of work-related health risk by sector, 2010–2024 (%)



Source: EWCS series.

In 2024, about 26 % of workers in the EU reported that they thought their health was at risk because of work, with similar proportions observed in 2010 and 2015. Spain and Sweden have seen the greatest increases since 2010 in the share of workers reporting that their health or safety is at risk because of work. In contrast, Malta and several eastern European countries, such as Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania and Slovenia, have seen the opposite trend. In terms of sector, health, agriculture, transport and construction are the areas in which respondents are most likely to report risk to their health related to work (Figure 139). The situation has improved over time in construction but has disimproved in agriculture, transport, health and public administration compared with 2015.

In 2024, 14 % of workers (15 % of women and 11 % of men) in the EU reported being 'not very well informed' or 'not at all well informed' about occupational health and safety risks at work, a slight increase on the proportions reported in 2010 and 2015 (both 11 %).

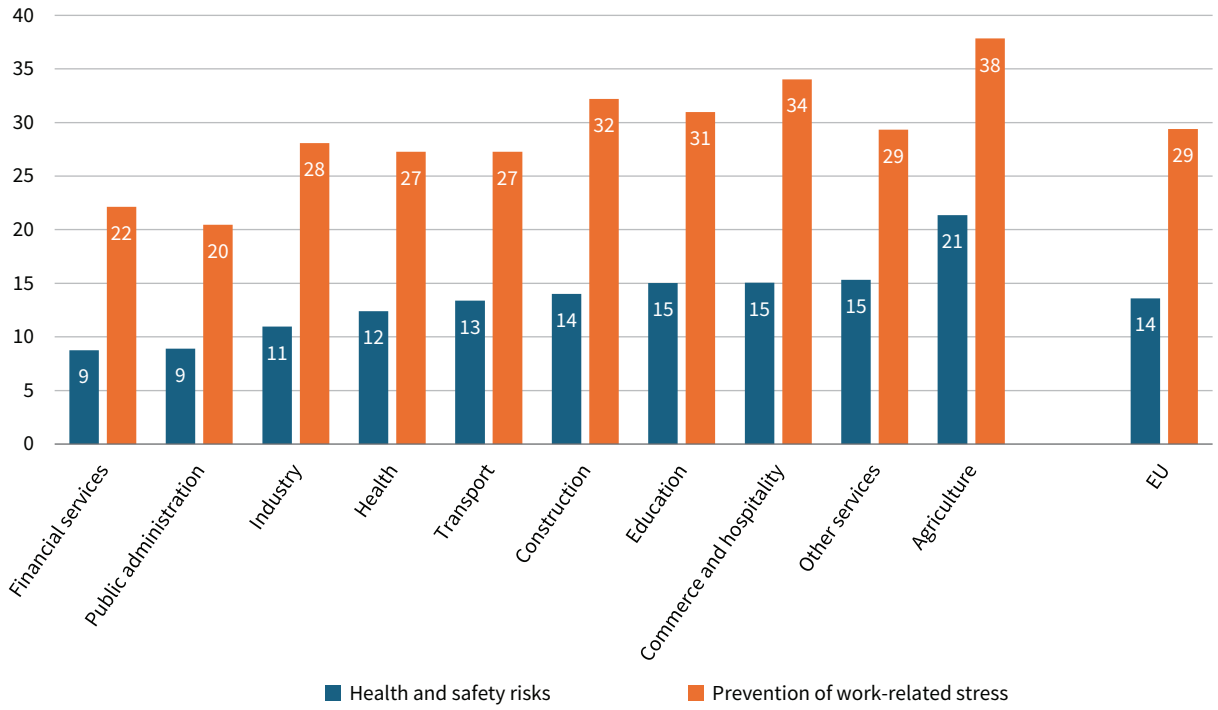
Workers in some occupations and types of employment are comparatively less well informed than others. For example, 25 % of employees in elementary occupations, 28% of those with no contract and 26 % of those with temporary agency work contracts report being not very well or not at all well informed. Other groups with high proportions of workers not being informed include younger workers (16–29 years, 18 %) and those working for a company for less than one year (20 %). By sector, a higher share of workers in agriculture (21 %) report not being very well or not being at all informed about health risks at work (Figure 140). At the other end of the spectrum, only 9 % of workers in financial services or public administration report not being well informed about such risks.

The percentage of workers who are not informed about their health and safety risks also varies according to the size of the workplace. The percentage of workers reporting that they are not well informed decreases as the size of the workplace increases.

The data also show that employees who reported the presence of an occupational health and safety delegate at their workplace are better informed about workplace risks than those in workplaces without such a delegate.

The EWCS 2024 also includes a new question to all workers on whether they are informed about the prevention of work-related stress at their workplace. A significant proportion of workers (29 %) report being either 'not very well informed' or 'not at all well informed' about measures to prevent work-related stress. This highlights a gap in the communication and awareness of stress prevention strategies among workers, indicating a need for employers to improve information sharing and support for managing work-related stress. In terms of sector, a similar profile is observed to that of being informed about occupational health and safety risks more generally, with 38 % of workers in agriculture reporting not being very well or not being at all informed about stress prevention measures, and lower levels reported in financial services (22 %) and public administration (20 %) (Figure 140).

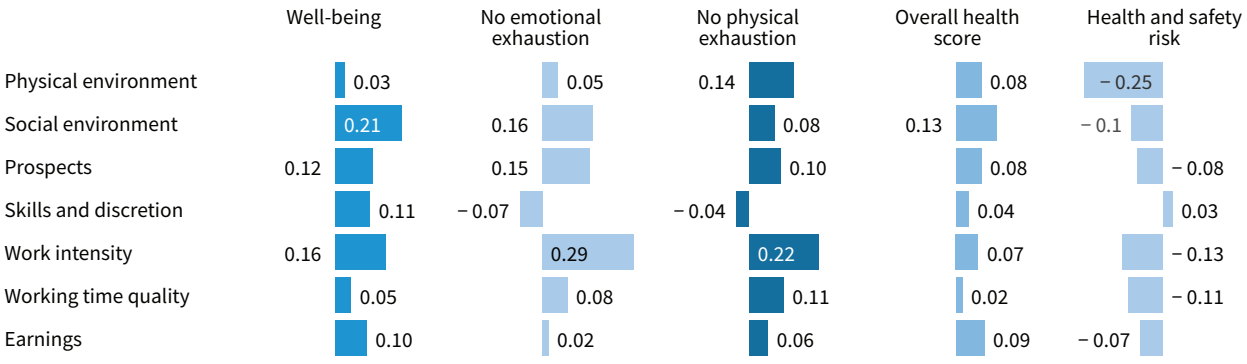
Figure 140: Proportions of workers not very well or not at all informed about health and safety risks and prevention of work-related stress in the EU by sector (%)



Job quality and workers' health and well-being

On the one hand, job quality is positively associated with the level of subjective well-being reported by workers; on the other hand, it reduces the likelihood of workers considering that their health and safety is at risk because of work (Figure 141). The Social environment and Work intensity indices have the strongest association with well-being, while Physical environment is the index most associated with health and safety risks.

Figure 141: Association between job quality and both well-being and work-related health and safety risk across job quality indices



Trust, engagement and motivation

Summary

- Levels of trust are relatively high. Most workers agree that employees trust management, that management trusts employees, that conflicts are resolved in a fair way and that their organisation prioritises the health and well-being of the employees.
- Health, education and financial services are the sectors with the highest levels of engagement. Industry and commerce and hospitality have the lowest levels.
- Self-employed individuals tend to exhibit higher levels of engagement than employees, with those who are self-employed with employees showing the highest average engagement level.
- The proportion of workers stating that their organisation motivates them to give their best job performance has slightly increased over the years, from 61 % in 2010 to 68 % in 2024, while the percentage of those disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement that their organisation motivates them has declined from 16 % to 14 %.
- The largest shares of workers disagreeing that their organisation motivates them are in transport and public administration (both 17 %), followed by health and industry (both 16 %). Construction (76 %) and financial services (77 %) are the sectors with the highest proportions of workers motivated by their organisation.

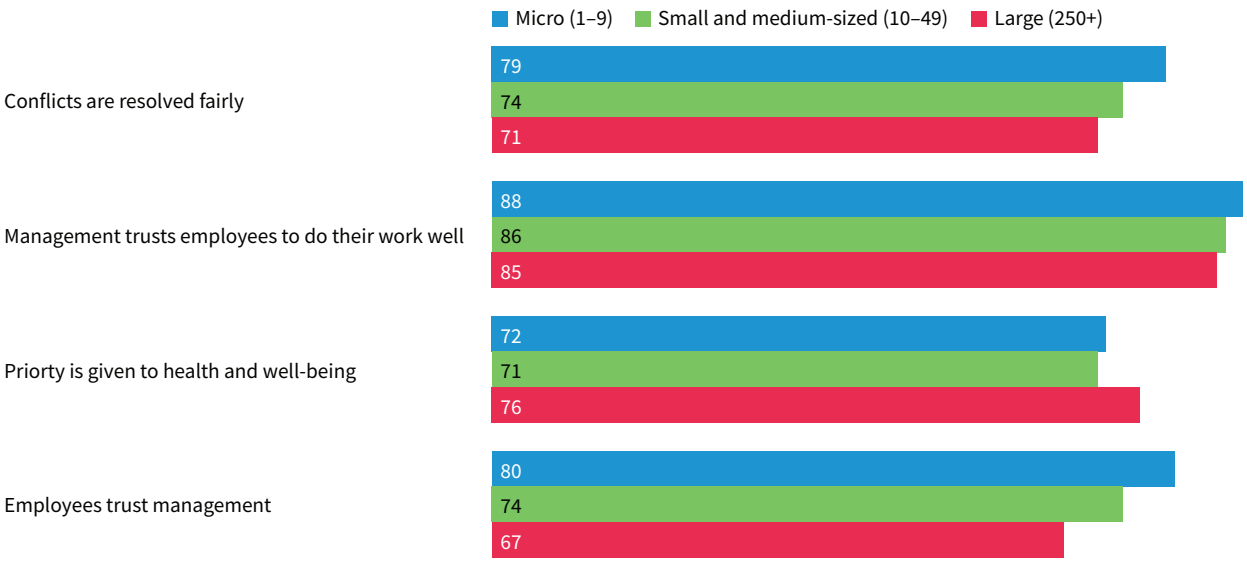
Trust in the workplace

Working in a safe, fair and trustful workplace benefits workers and the organisation they work for (Eurofound et al., 2020). Conversely, a poor social climate can have an impact on workers' well-being and can harm organisations through poorer performance and organisational commitment. Research has linked social climate to health and well-being (Erdil et al., 2011; Fandiño-Losada et al., 2013; Ardito et al., 2014). Workers' experience of the social climate, fairness and organisational justice are also key factors in determining their work engagement and motivation and, ultimately, their work sustainability.

In the EWCS, employees were asked about some aspects of work that contribute to a trustful and safe climate in workplaces, namely management's trust in employees, employees' trust in management, fairness in conflict management and prioritisation of employees' health and well-being. Levels of trust are relatively high across Member States. Around 74 % strongly agree or tend to agree that employees trust management to do their work well. Almost 9 in 10 (86 %) strongly agree or tend to agree that, in general, management trusts their employees to do their work well. Three quarters (75 %) believe that, generally, conflicts are resolved in a fair way and 72 % strongly agree or tend to agree that their organisation prioritises the health and well-being of the employees. Differences between men and women were marginal.

As illustrated in Figure 142, workplace size has a significant impact on the fairness and trust perceived by workers, with notable differences in agreement levels

Figure 142: Prevalence of trust and cooperation items in the EU by workplace size (%)



across various indicators. For example, 80 % of workers in micro-workplaces report trusting management, compared with 67 % in large organisations. However, larger organisations appear to prioritise health and well-being more frequently (76 % versus 72 % on average), but in the other indicators, workplace size appears to follow a gradient, with smaller workplaces generally exhibiting larger shares of positive answers.

Work engagement

Previous research has consistently highlighted the significance of worker engagement in enhancing workers' well-being, sense of personal fulfilment and job satisfaction, and its positive impact on company performance (see, for example, Fawkes, 2007; Kumar et al., 2015; Eurofound, 2022b). Fostering worker engagement is a key objective of human resource policies and work organisation practices. Effective leadership plays a vital role in creating and sustaining worker engagement, setting the tone for a positive work environment. Work engagement is also an important outcome measure of sustainable work.

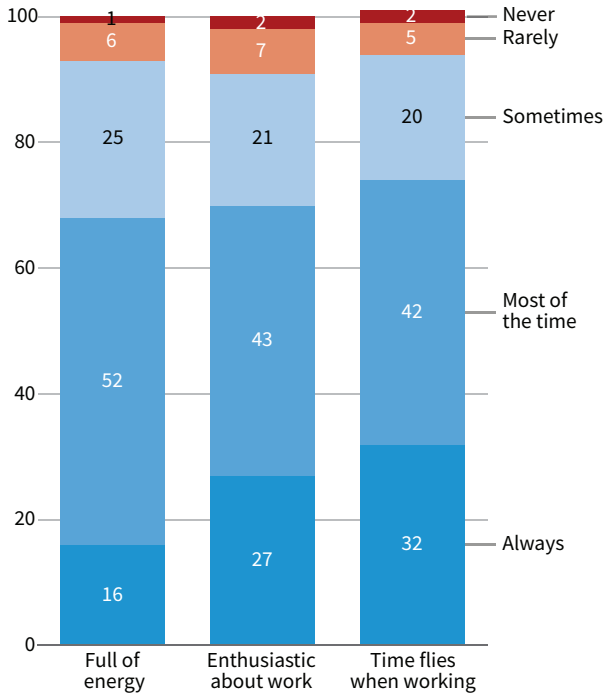
The data from the EWCS shed some light on the nature of workers' commitment – both to their work and to the organisation in which they work – and factors that motivate them to perform well. The various dimensions of engagement and the association with positive or negative aspects of job quality are examined, as is the role of the organisation in motivating workers to perform their best.

Dimensions of engagement

Work engagement has been described as a 'positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption' (Schaufeli et al., 2007). This is the opposite, according to Jackson et al. (1982), of the core dimensions of burnout: exhaustion, depersonalisation and personal accomplishment. Engagement is positively related to job performance at the individual level, a factor that can boost performance, creativity and health and well-being, while preventing absence from and frustration with work. It also has positive implications at the collective level: commitment to the organisation, client satisfaction and employee retention.

The various components of engagement were first measured in the EWCS in 2015. Work engagement is captured by asking workers if they felt full of energy, if they were enthusiastic about their job and if they felt that time flies when they were working. The EWCS results paint a generally positive picture across the EU (Figure 143). However, since 2015, overall engagement has gone down as regards both average levels and the proportion of highly engaged workers. While 36 % of workers reported high engagement in 2015, this number went down slightly to 35 % in 2024. At the same time, the proportion of low engagement increased from 25 % to 28 %. The biggest drops in engagement levels were observed among craft workers (4.3 pp), clerical workers (3.1 pp) and professionals (3 pp). In 2024, more than two thirds of workers (68 %) reported feeling full of energy always or most of the time and that they were enthusiastic about their job (70 %), while 73 % reported feeling that time flies at work.

Figure 143: Prevalence of elements of work engagement in the EU (%)



Based on the answers to these questions (the mean score on all dimensions), an engagement index ranging from 0 (low) to 100 (high) was constructed. Scores of 0–49 can be considered low, scores of 50–79 represent medium engagement and a score of 80 or above represents high engagement. Older workers score better than prime-age workers (Figure 144), workers in micro- and small workplaces score above those in medium-sized and large workplaces, and more seniority is associated with higher engagement levels. Engagement is also highly correlated with trust and cooperation.

Sectoral, occupational and employment status differences are notable. The top three most engaged sectors are health, education and financial services. The lowest engagement level is found in industry, followed by commerce and hospitality. The top three most engaged occupations are managers, with an average engagement score of 76, followed by skilled agricultural workers, professionals and technicians (Figure 144). In contrast, the lowest engagement levels are reported among those in elementary occupations (with an average score of 66), plant and machine operators and clerical workers (both 68).

Self-employed individuals tend to exhibit higher levels of engagement, and those who are self-employed with employees show the highest average engagement level. Self-employed individuals who work on their own account also show high engagement levels (with an average score of 76), which may be attributed to the flexibility and independence that come with being one's own boss. The findings as displayed in Figure 144 on the engagement of self-employed individuals suggest that having a sense of autonomy, control and responsibility for one's own business can be a powerful motivator. Apprentices also demonstrate high levels of engagement, which is most likely because they are invested in learning and developing new skills and are motivated by the prospect of future career opportunities.

In contrast, employees with fixed-term contracts, particularly those with short durations, tend to exhibit lower engagement levels. This may be due to the uncertainty and insecurity that come with temporary or precarious work arrangements. Employees with no contract or another type of contract show the lowest engagement level. Employees with permanent contracts, on the other hand, exhibit a moderate engagement level (an average score of 71), which may suggest that job security and stability can contribute to higher engagement, but may not be enough to motivate employees to reach their full potential.

High levels of engagement suggest that individuals in these occupations are highly motivated, invested and satisfied with their work (see, for example, Truss et al., 2013; Eurofound, 2018b; Ferraro et al., 2020; Deepalakshmi et al., 2024). This is confirmed by the EWCS: workers who said that they strongly agreed with the statement that the organisation they worked for motivates them to give their best job performance had an average engagement level of 83, while those who tended to disagree or strongly disagreed exhibit a lower average engagement level of 57 and 55, respectively.

Motivation key to worker engagement

The role of organisations in motivating workers is therefore an important aspect of work engagement. According to the EWCS, the proportion of workers saying that the organisation they work for motivates them to give their best job performance has slightly increased over the years, from 61 % in 2010 to 68 % in 2024, while the percentage of those disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement has declined from 16 % to 14 %.

The highest proportions of workers who strongly or tend to agree with the statement that the organisation they work for motivates them to do good work were reported in Ireland (80 %), Denmark (79 %) and Austria (78 %), while Czechia, Greece and Cyprus all report proportions below 50 %. With 34 % of workers tending

Figure 144: Mean scores of engagement level in the EU by occupation, employment status and age

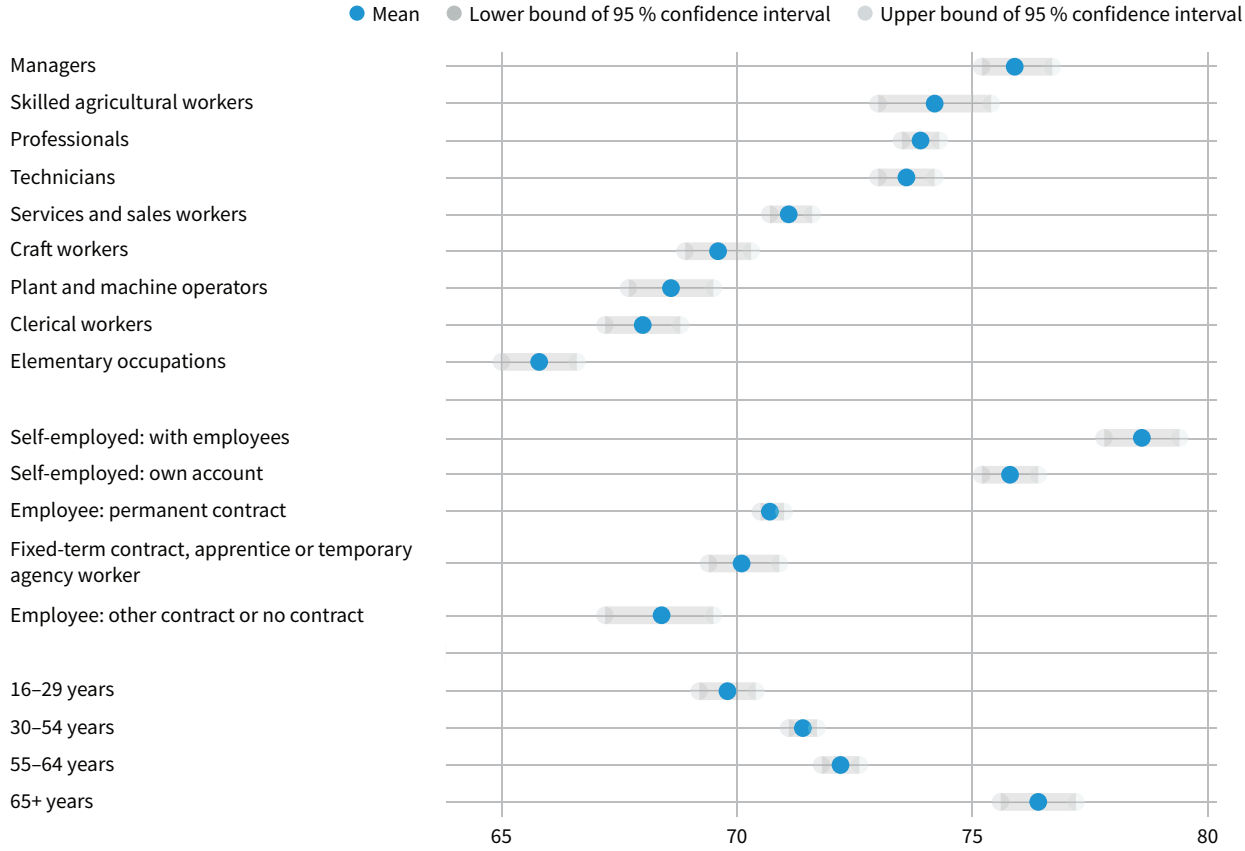
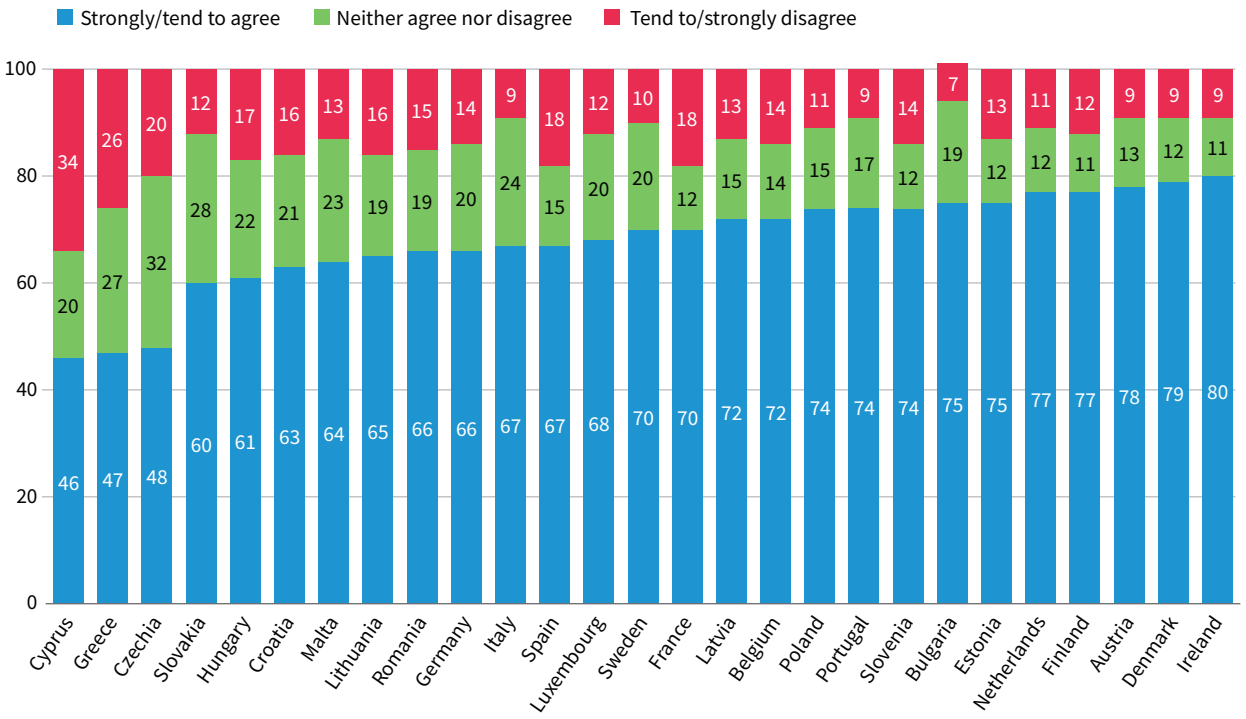


Figure 145: Proportions of workers feeling motivated to various degrees by their organisation by Member State (%)



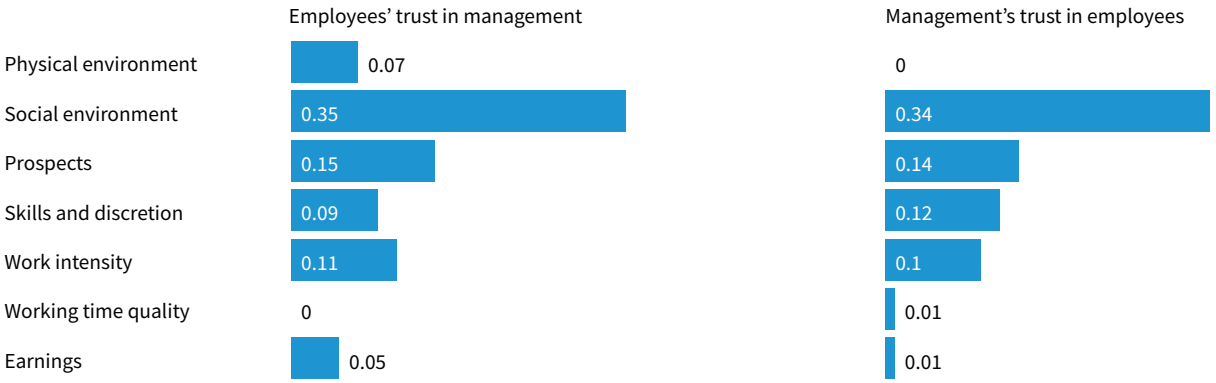
to disagree or strongly disagreeing with the statement, Cyprus also had by far the largest proportion of negative assessments (Figure 145).

Financial services and construction are the sectors with the largest proportions of workers being motivated by their organisation (77 % and 76 %, respectively). Among the sectors with the lowest proportions are education (64 %) and public administration (65 %) and the workers most likely to disagree that their organisation motivates them are in transport and public administration (both 17 %), followed by health and industry (both 16 %).

Job quality, trust, engagement and motivation

As Figure 146 shows, trust in the workplace is positively associated with job quality, with Social environment displaying the strongest association.

Figure 146: Association between job quality and trust in the workplace across job quality indices



Both motivation and engagement are associated with job quality, with the Social environment, Skills and discretion and Prospects indices having the strongest associations (Figure 147). Workers in low-quality jobs are more likely to be less motivated and engaged.

Figure 147: Association between job quality and motivation and engagement across job quality indices



Meaningful work

Summary

- For most workers, their job is meaningful. The different aspects of meaningful work – doing useful work, ethical consistency between work and job holders' values, and being fairly treated and recognised at work – are all linked to job quality. Workers reporting positive experiences as regards these aspects also achieve higher scores for almost all job quality indices. They report higher levels of engagement, trust, well-being and motivation.

Experiences of work carry more weight when an individual perceives their behaviours to be in alignment with their 'true' self. This can occur because workers feel their work has a higher purpose, their work is ethically consistent with their values or they have a sense of belonging at work. These aspects are often subsumed under the concept of 'meaningful work'.

It is undisputed that carrying out meaningful work is important for workers and their employers, as it supports increased life satisfaction, subjective well-being, motivation, innovative work behaviour, increased engagement and performance, and creativity (Tan et al., 2023). Loss of meaning has been associated with a significant increase in sickness-related absenteeism, and finding little meaning in a job has been identified as a strong explanatory factor for resignation (Coutrot et al., 2022). While much of the research on the outcomes of meaningful work has studied its benefits, there is limited but growing research also acknowledging the undesirable effects on well-being, work–household interface conflicts and other personal sacrifices (Blustein et al., 2023).

In line with results from prior EWCS editions, the 2024 data confirm that, for most workers, their work is meaningful:

- 85 % of workers find their work useful always or most of the time;
- 83 % experience a feeling of work well done always or most of the time;
- 68 % strongly agree or tend to agree that they receive the recognition they deserve for their work;
- 85 % of workers feel fairly treated in their workplaces always or most of the time;
- 44 % never do things at work that they disapprove of, but 30 % say they sometimes or more often do.

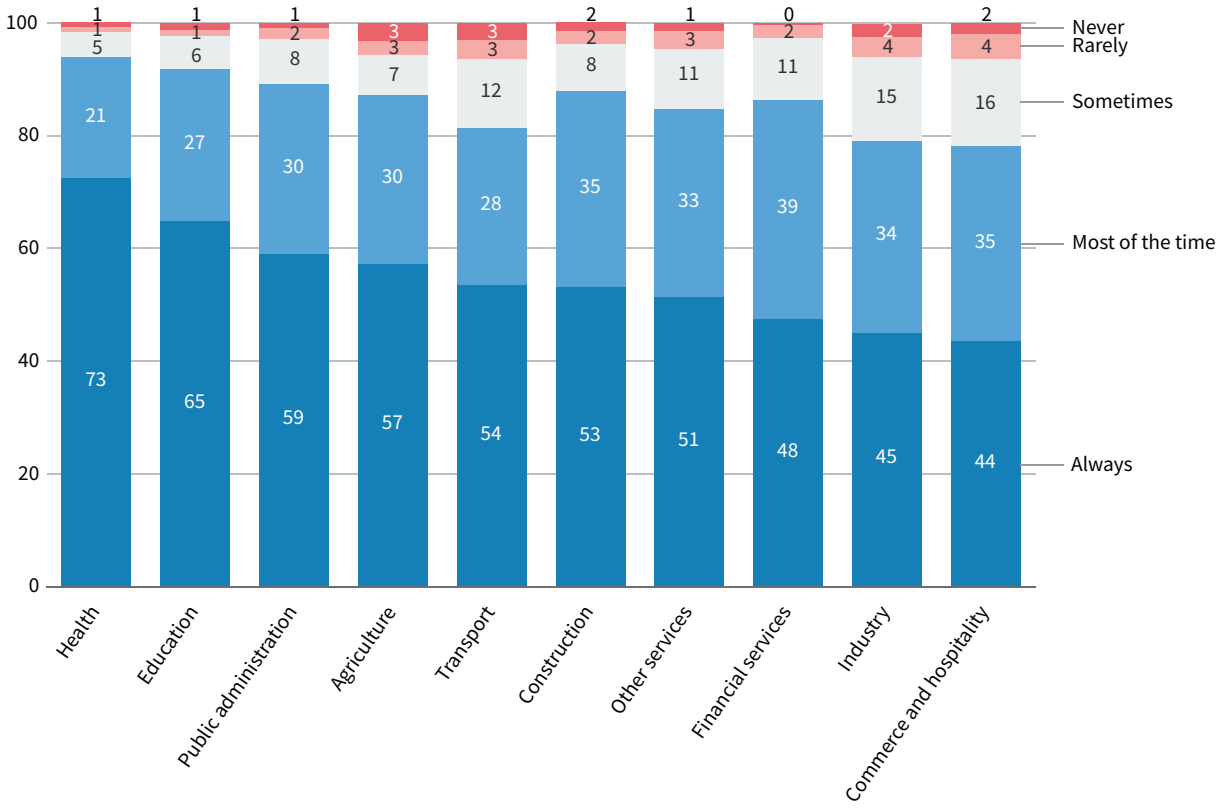
A job with greater purpose – doing useful work and work well done

When a job is assessed to have meaning to a wider set of stakeholders, it is 'useful'; it has an external utility and serves some greater good. Some 55 % of women and 52 % of men report always performing useful work, and older workers report more often than younger workers always doing useful work (71 % among those aged 65+ years, compared with 48 % of 16- to 29-year-olds).

Since 2005, the proportion of workers feeling that they are doing useful work always or most of the time has remained stable; the proportion of workers reporting 'always' has slightly decreased (from 56 % to 53 %). Self-employed individuals with employees (65 %) and solo self-employed individuals (63 %) are more likely to feel they are doing useful work than employees.

Health and education continue to be the sectors with by far the largest proportions of workers reporting that they do useful work, while workers in commerce and hospitality and in industry report it the least (Figure 148). The largest increase over the years was recorded in the financial sector. The share of workers reporting always doing useful work has increased by 11 pp since 2010. In contrast, the share of workers in agriculture reporting the same has decreased by 5 pp. There is also a gradient across occupations (Box 11).

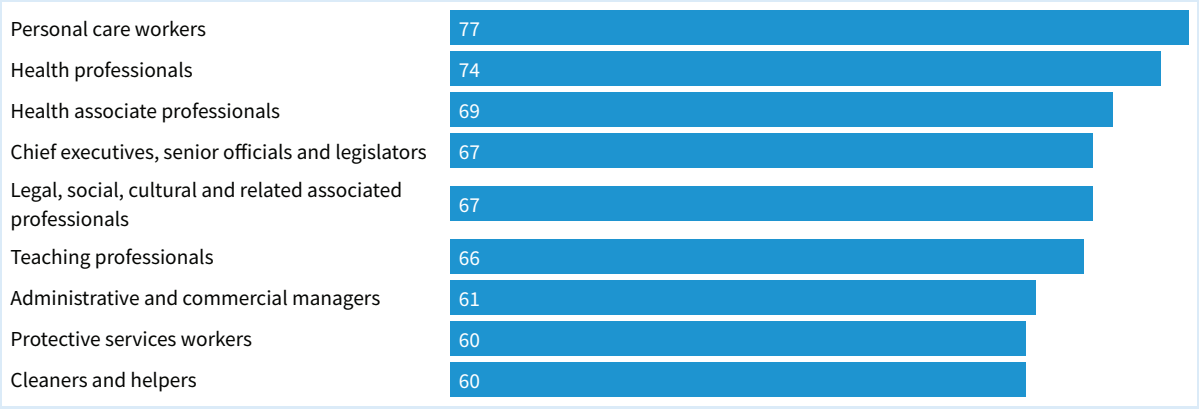
Figure 148: Proportions of workers reporting doing useful work by sector (%)



Box 11: Making a difference: care and health workers feel most useful

Figure 149 presents the 10 occupational groups (at the ISCO two-digit level) with the largest shares of workers finding their work most useful. This list is illustrative of the service orientation of these occupations, which does not always correspond with the highest earnings, public visibility or recognition.

Figure 149: Share of workers reporting that their work is useful (always) by selected occupations (ISCO two-digit level) (%)



'Work well done' encapsulates individuals' desire to feel valuable and worthy through work experiences that produce feelings of accomplishment. Some 83 % of workers in 2024 reported feeling that their work was well done always or most of the time. The shares of men and women reporting that they always feel their work was well done are similar: 42 % and 41 %, respectively. Younger workers (under the age of 29) reported this the least (37 % always; 5 pp less than the EU average).

Since 2010, the share of workers reporting that their job always gives them a feeling of work well done has decreased among all higher-skilled occupations and services and sales workers, while it has increased for skilled agricultural workers and plant and machine operators. Furthermore, workers in the agriculture and health sectors have the highest shares reporting a feeling of work well done 'always' (both 50 %). The shares are smaller in industry (36 %) and commerce and hospitality (38 %). As with the trend for 'useful work', the proportion of employees reporting a feeling of work well done 'always' is lower than that of self-employed workers. Micro-workplaces (9 employees or fewer) have the highest rate of workers reporting work well done always or most of the time.

Another aspect that affects how workers feel about their job relates to being asked to do something that they do not approve of (Box 12).

Box 12: When work conflicts with values

The 2024 survey contained a new item describing situations in which workers feel that there is a conflict between their values and what they do in work. Such a conflict can be inherent to the job itself. More often, organisational constraints 'push' workers into doing things that they disapprove of. For example, they are not able to give their full attention to service users, they do not have sufficient means to address the needs of their patients or they are carrying out activities that have a negative impact on the natural environment. Having to do things at work of which one disapproves is rather infrequent.

Most report that this is never or rarely the case – 71 % of women and 70 % of men. However, this is a feature of work for about 30 %, with 23 % reporting it sometimes, 5 % reporting it most of the time and 2 % reporting it always. Workers in health and in public administration responded 'sometimes' significantly more than in other sectors (30 % and 29 %, respectively). Only about 20 % of workers in agriculture, commerce and hospitality, other services, industry and construction replied 'sometimes'.

A sense of belonging – being recognised and fairly treated at work

Another aspect that is crucial for a meaningful experience of work is being well integrated into the workplace. This is captured in the EWCS survey through a question about feeling recognised for one's work and another about being fairly treated.

Being recognised for one's work significantly enhances motivation by 'validating employees' contributions, fostering a sense of achievement and encouraging task completion' (Imran et al., 2025). However, a lack of recognition can have an impact on mental health. Some 28 % of men and 26 % of women strongly agree that they receive the recognition that they deserve for their work. Self-employed individuals with employees (42 %) and solo self-employed individuals (33 %) report more recognition than employees (26 %). Recognition also varies greatly per occupation: relatively fewer clerical workers responded 'strongly agree' (21 %) than managers (33 %), professionals (29 %) and technicians (28 %).

The proportion of employees who report being fairly treated always or most of the time has increased from 80 % in 2010 to 85 % in 2024. The highest proportions of always being treated fairly were reported by managers and skilled agricultural workers (55 % and 54 %, respectively). The agriculture sector has the largest share of employees reporting always being treated fairly (61 %), which is significantly higher than in transport, construction and industry (41 %, 43 % and 45 %, respectively) (Figure 150). The share of part-time workers responding 'always' (53 %) is also greater than the share of those working full time (47 %).

Job quality and meaningful work

Job quality is strongly associated with the various aspects of meaningful work.

As shown in Figure 151, both useful work and work well done are positively associated with the Skills and discretion, Social environment and, to a lesser extent, the Prospects and Work intensity indices.

Being recognised is associated with job quality and in particular with the Social environment, Prospects, Earnings and, to a lesser extent, Skills and discretion indices (Figure 152).

Figure 150: Fairly treated by sector (employees only)

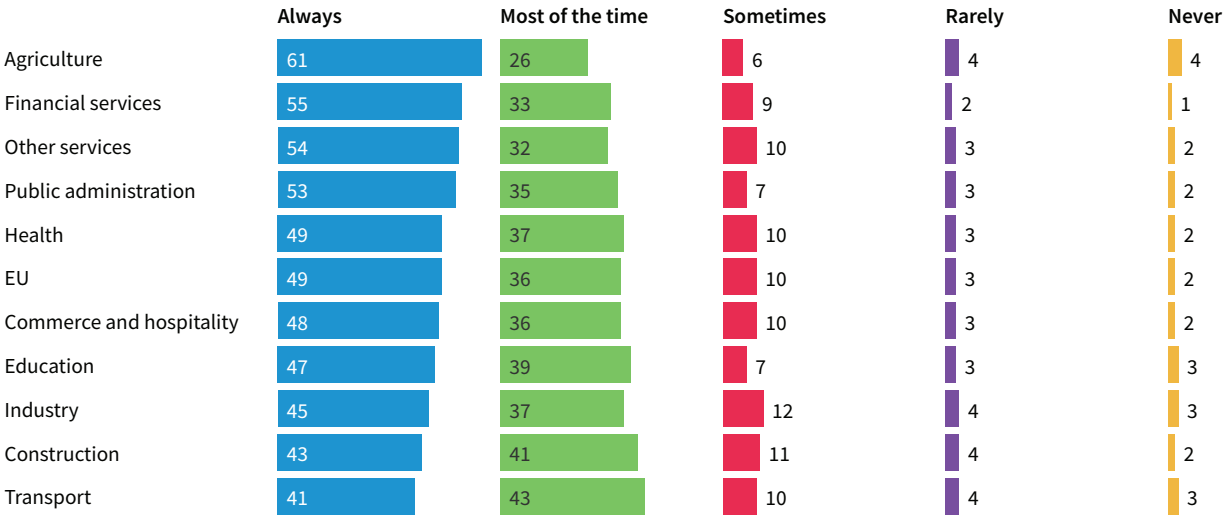


Figure 151: Association between job quality and useful work and work well done across job quality indices

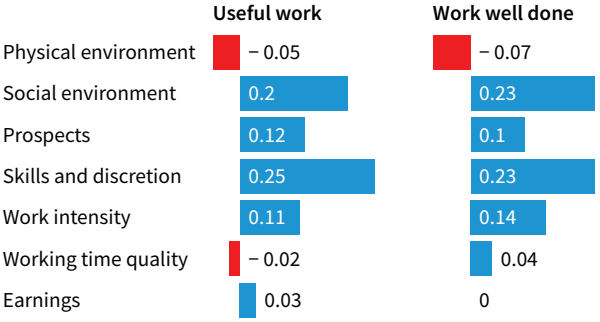
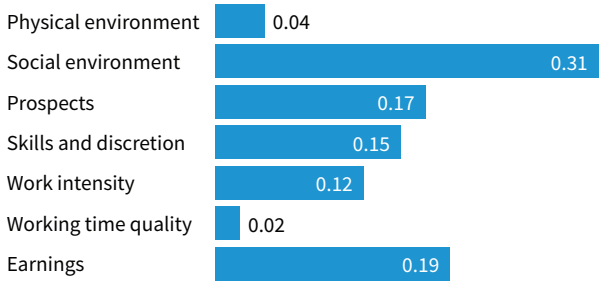


Figure 152: Association between job quality and recognition for one's work across job quality indices



Work sustainability

Summary

- It's not all about the money: a safe working environment for mental and physical health and a trusting working environment are the most important aspects for the largest shares of workers in the EU at 71 % and 69 %, respectively. Good pay and benefits come in third, being considered very important by two thirds of respondents.
- For self-employed people, being able to use their own initiative is the most important aspect of work, with 73 % of all self-employed people ranking it in first place.
- Gender and age play a role in what matters most to workers: men between the ages of 16 and 54 value good pay and benefits most, while a safe working environment for mental and physical health is the most important aspect for women aged between 16 and 64.
- The proportion of workers reporting that work has a negative effect on their health decreased from 27 % in 2010 to 26 % in 2024. The proportion of workers who believe their work has a positive effect on their health has increased compared with 2010 but has stayed at the level of 2015 (12 %).
- In the EU, around 1 in 5 respondents aged 45 or over would like to work 'as long as possible', while 1 in 10 responded they would like to retire 'as early as possible'. For those who specified a concrete age, the average desired retirement age was 63.9 years for men and 63.1 years for women in the EU. In many countries, the preferred age is below the legal pension age.
- The majority (87 %) of workers in the EU aged between 45 and 54 believed they could continue working in their current job or a similar one until the age of 60 (among those who did not reply 'don't know' to the question).
- Among those aged 55 or over, 74 % of respondents were confident that they could continue working in their current or a similar job for at least five more years, while 26 % expressed doubts about their ability to do so.
- Differences exist between occupations. More than 78 % of technicians, clerical workers, professionals and managers indicated they would be able to work until the age of 60, compared with less than 60 % of those in elementary occupations. Around 28 % of the latter replied 'no' to the question, which was by far the highest proportion to do so among all occupations.

The concept of sustainable work is rooted in the understanding that current work practices have a profound impact on future capacity to work (Docherty et al., 2009b; Eurofound, 2015b, 2022b). As the modern workforce needs to navigate diverse and flexible working arrangements, the idea of sustainable work is gaining significant traction in both public and political discourse. This is particularly pertinent in the face of demographic challenges posed by an ageing population and the increasing economic and societal need to keep working longer (Eurofound, 2025a). At its core, sustainable work encompasses two key elements. First, it entails ensuring that individuals are both able and willing to work until or even beyond retirement age by prioritising the quality of their job and working environment throughout their life course. Second, it involves accommodating workers' personal circumstances and needs, such as care responsibilities and personal development, to enable them to maintain a sustainable work–life balance and continue working productively throughout the life course. Sustainable work adopts a dual approach, combining preventive and proactive measures to promote longer, high-quality working lives. This involves managing work across the life course to prevent – among other things – low work engagement, health problems or burnout. It also focuses on managing work to facilitate ongoing participation in paid employment and providing support for workers with limited abilities to ensure their continued engagement.

A substantial body of research highlights the critical role played by working conditions and work organisation in enabling workers to accumulate and replenish their personal resources, including capacities, health, well-being and skills, rather than depleting them (Docherty et al., 2009b; Volkoff et al., 2015; de Wind et al., 2016; Eiffe, 2021). Notably, studies have shown that improving working conditions can be a key factor in retaining older workers in employment, particularly those in occupational groups with lower skill requirements (Wahrendorf et al., 2013).

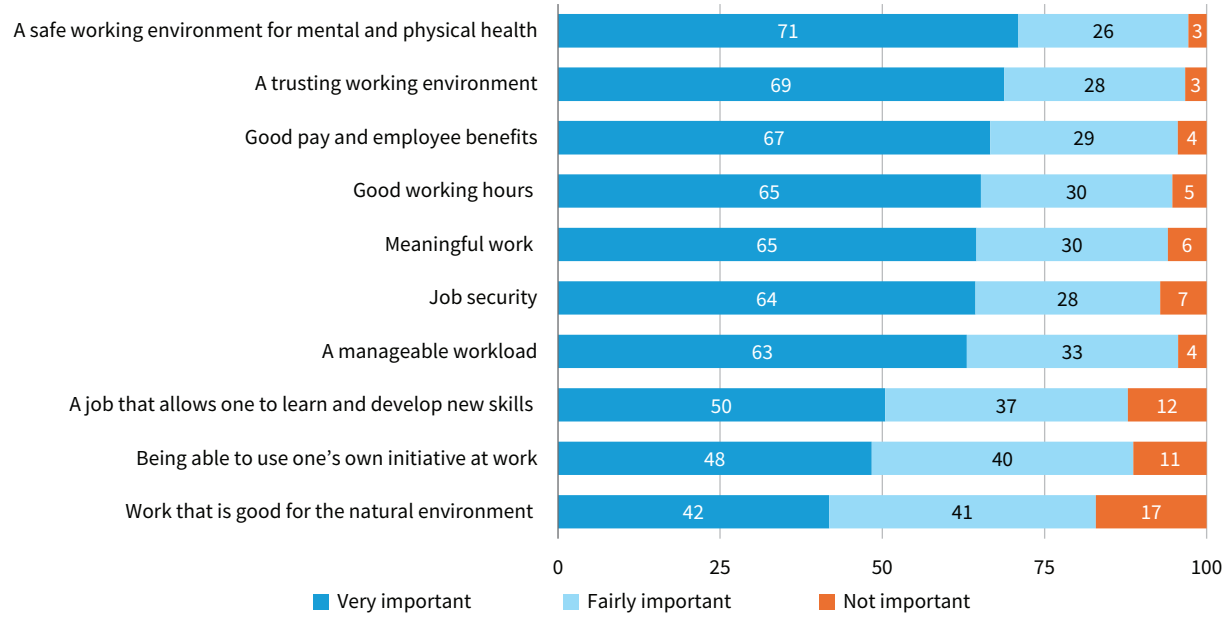
The EWCS 2024 provides valuable insights into workers' preferences and priorities regarding their working lives. By examining the findings from the survey, policymakers and stakeholders can inform discussions on making work more sustainable, ultimately contributing to the creation of healthier, more productive and more inclusive work environments.

Safe and trusting environment vital for workers

Respondents to the EWCS 2024 were asked to say how important several work-related aspects are for them. Figure 153 ranks those aspects from the most to the least important in the EU. 'A safe working environment for my mental and physical health' and 'a trusting working environment' appear at the top, being very important for the largest shares of workers: 71 % and 69 %, respectively. Being able to learn and develop new skills, to use one's own initiative at work and to do work that is good for the environment appear at the bottom of the list, being considered very important by half of the workers or less. Remarkably, the top aspect for self-employed individuals is being able to use their own initiative at work (marked as very important by 73 % of all self-employed individuals), on a par with a safe working environment (also 73 %) and followed by a trusting working environment (69 %).

It is noteworthy that the order of importance given by men and women regarding those work-related aspects is different and seems to change over the life course (Table 21). A safe working environment for physical and mental health is the most important aspect for both men and women. However, while good pay and employee benefits come second among men, women prioritise a trusting working environment. Good pay and benefits come in sixth place for women, after good

Figure 153: Prevalence of differing levels of importance to workers of several work-related aspects in the EU (%)



Note: The items are ordered according to the shares of those considering the item 'very important'.

Table 21: Top five aspects of work for men and women of different age groups

	Men				Women			
Ranking	16–29 years	30–54 years	55–64 years	65+ years	16–29 years	30–54 years	55–64 years	65+ years
1	Good pay and benefits	Good pay and benefits	Safe environment	Safe environment	Safe environment	Safe environment	Safe environment	Trusting environment
2	Safe environment	Safe environment	Trusting environment	Trusting environment	Trusting environment	Trusting environment	Trusting environment	Meaningful work
3	Trusting environment	Trusting environment	Good pay and benefits	Meaningful work	Good pay and benefits	Good working hours	Manageable workload	Safe environment
4	Good working hours	Good working hours	Manageable workload	Manageable workload	Manageable workload	Meaningful work	Job security	Manageable workload
5	Job security	Meaningful work	Meaningful work	Ability to use own initiative at work	Job security	Manageable workload	Meaningful work	Good working hours

Table 22: Top five aspects of work for workers by occupation

Ranking	Managers	Professionals	Technicians	Clerical workers	Services and sales workers	Skilled agricultural workers	Craft workers	Plant and machine operators	Elementary occupations
1	Safe environment	Safe environment	Trusting environment	Good working hours	Safe environment	Safe environment	Good pay and benefits	Good pay and benefits	Good pay and benefits
2	Trusting environment	Trusting environment	Safe environment	Job security	Trusting environment	Good for the natural environment	Safe environment	Safe environment	Safe environment
3	Meaningful work	Meaningful work	Meaningful work	Safe environment	Good pay and benefits	Meaningful work	Manageable workload	Job security	Good working hours
4	Autonomy	Good working hours	Good pay and benefits	Manageable workload	Job security	Trusting environment	Job security	Trusting environment	Manageable workload
5	Good pay and benefits	Manageable workload	Good working hours	Good pay and benefits	Good working hours	Autonomy	Trusting environment	Good working hours	Job security

working hours, a manageable workload and meaningful work. Pay and benefits are the most important aspects for men up to 54 years of age, whereas a safe environment is the most important aspect for women up to 64 years of age. A trusting environment seems to increase in importance with age and becomes the second most important aspect for men aged 55 or over and the most important aspect for women aged 65 or over.

A safe environment is the top aspect for workers in agriculture, commerce and hospitality, education, other services and public administration, whereas pay and benefits are at the top in construction, industry and transport. A trusting environment is the most important among those working in financial services and health. Meaningful work comes second in education and health, and good pay and benefits come second in commerce and hospitality. In all other sectors, it is a trusting environment or a safe working environment that appears second.

It is noteworthy to see that pay and benefits are ranked at the top among craft workers, plant and machine operators and workers in elementary occupations, which are typically associated with lower skills levels, whereas a safe environment is ranked at the top for managers, professionals, services and sales workers and skilled agricultural workers (Table 22). Good working hours are top for clerical workers and a trusting environment is the most important among technicians.

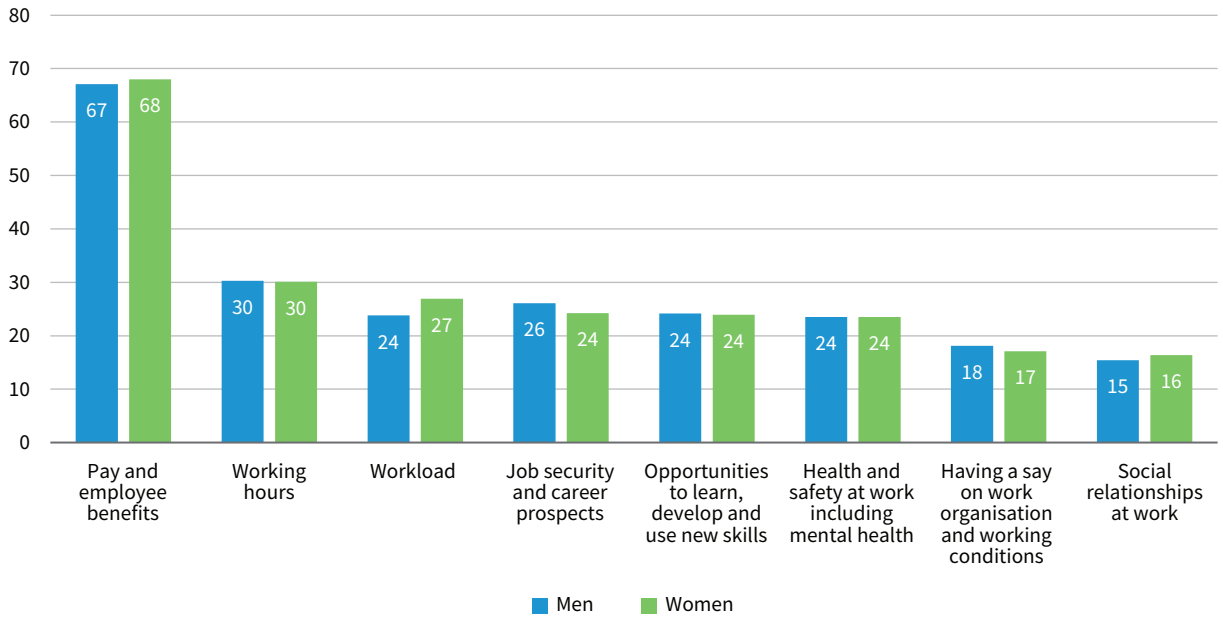
Areas where workers would like to see improvements

The respondents to the EWCS 2024 were asked to indicate up to three areas of their work (from the following list of eight) in which they would like to see improvements:

- pay and employee benefits,
- job security and career prospects,
- working hours,
- health and safety at work including mental health,
- social relationships at work,
- opportunities to learn, develop and use new skills,
- workload,
- having a say on work organisation and working conditions.

Pay and benefits were clearly top for the vast majority of workers in the EU, being mentioned by more than two thirds of men and women (Figure 154). Working hours ranked in second place (referred to by 30 % of workers). Among women, workload came third (referred to by 27 % of women), whereas among men it was job security and career prospects (26 %). Having a say on work organisation and working conditions and social relationships at work were the aspects least referred to by both men and women (less than 20 %).

Figure 154: Prevalence of workers reporting areas of work in which they would like improvements by gender (%)



While pay and benefits were signalled by most workers across the various occupational groups as areas in which they would like to see improvements, regardless of gender, age, level of education, occupation, sector of activity or country in which they work, the other areas in which workers would like to see improvements vary according to occupation and sector. For instance, 'good working hours' is the second most important issue for most occupational groups, while workload is more relevant for managers and skilled agricultural workers (the occupational groups that also report the longest usual working hours) and learning opportunities are the second most important issue for professionals (Table 23).

Table 23: Most to least reported areas of work in which workers would like to see improvements by occupation

Ranking	Managers	Professionals	Technicians	Clerical workers	Services and sales workers	Skilled agricultural workers	Craft workers	Plant and machine operators	Elementary occupations
1	Pay and benefits	Pay and benefits	Pay and benefits	Pay and benefits	Pay and benefits	Pay and benefits	Pay and benefits	Pay and benefits	Pay and benefits
2	Workload	Learning opportunities	Working hours	Working hours	Working hours	Workload	Working hours	Working hours	Working hours
3	Working hours	Workload	Learning opportunities	Learning opportunities	Job security and prospects	Health and safety	Job security and prospects	Job security and prospects	Job security and prospects
4	Learning opportunities	Working hours	Workload	Workload	Workload	Job security and prospects	Health and safety	Health and safety	Health and safety
5	Social relationships	Job security and prospects	Health and safety	Job security and prospects	Health and safety	Working hours	Workload	Workload	Workload
6	Job security and prospects	Health and safety	Job security and prospects	Health and safety	Learning opportunities	Learning opportunities	Learning opportunities	Learning opportunities	Learning opportunities
7	Health and safety	Voice	Voice	Voice	Voice	Voice	Voice	Voice	Social relationships
8	Voice	Social relationships	Social relationships	Social relationships	Social relationships	Social relationships	Social relationships	Social relationships	Voice

Table 24: Most to least reported areas of work in which workers would like to see improvements by sector

Ranking	Agriculture	Commerce and hospitality	Construction	Education	Financial services	Health	Industry	Other services	Public administration	Transport
1	Pay and benefits	Pay and benefits	Pay and benefits	Pay and benefits	Pay and benefits	Pay and benefits	Pay and benefits	Pay and benefits	Pay and benefits	Pay and benefits
2	Working hours	Working hours	Workload	Workload	Working hours	Workload	Working hours	Working hours	Workload	Working hours
3	Job security and prospects	Job security and prospects	Working hours	Learning opportunities	Learning opportunities	Health and safety	Job security and prospects	Learning opportunities	Learning opportunities	Job security and prospects
4	Health and safety	Workload	Health and safety	Health and safety	Workload	Working hours	Health and safety	Job security and prospects	Working hours	Workload
5	Workload	Learning opportunities	Job security and prospects	Job security and prospects	Job security and prospects	Learning opportunities	Learning opportunities	Workload	Health and safety	Health and safety
6	Learning opportunities	Health and safety	Learning opportunities	Working hours	Voice	Job security and prospects	Workload	Health and safety	Job security and prospects	Learning opportunities
7	Social relationships	Social relationships	Voice	Voice	Social relationships	Voice	Voice	Social relationships	Voice	Social relationships
8	Voice	Voice	Social relationships	Social relationships	Health and safety	Social relationships	Social relationships	Voice	Social relationships	Voice

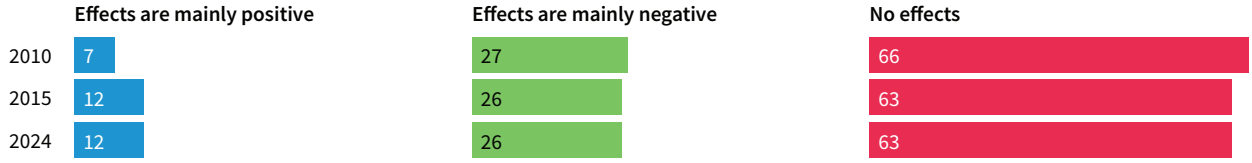
After pay and benefits, working hours or workload is the second most important item across sectors (Table 24). Job security and prospects play an important role for agriculture, commerce and hospitality, industry and transport. Improving learning opportunities is frequently mentioned in education, financial services, other services and public administration.

Unsurprisingly, a larger share of those with a poor fit between working hours and other commitments mention an improvement in working hours as a priority: 60 % of those reporting that their working hours do not fit well at all with other commitments reported this area for improvement, compared with 22 % of those who reported a good fit.

Workers' assessment of the impact of work on their health

Work can be sustainable only if it does not have a negative impact on workers' health. The EWCS explores this aspect by asking workers if work affects their health, positively or negatively. Since 2010, the proportion of workers reporting a negative effect on health has decreased slightly and is now at the same level as in 2015 (26 %) (Figure 155). The proportion of workers who believe their work has a positive effect on their health has increased compared with 2010, but has remained at the same level as in 2015 (12 %). In 2024, 63 % of workers perceived that their work had no effect at all on their health, the same proportion as in 2015.

Figure 155: Proportions of workers reporting types of effects of work on their health in the EU, 2010–2024 (%)



A marginal gender disparity is observed in the perception of work's negative impact on health, with slightly more men than women reporting a negative effect. No significant gender difference is observed in the assessment of work's positive impact on health. Notable variations are apparent across occupations. Most lower-skilled occupations, such as skilled agricultural workers, craft workers, plant and machine operators and those in elementary occupations, exhibit a consistently high proportion of workers (32–35 %) who report a negative impact of work on their health. At the other end of the spectrum, clerical workers have the lowest proportion of workers (18 %) reporting a negative effect. Other higher-skilled occupations fall somewhere in between, with approximately one in five reporting a negative impact. Conversely, the occupations with the highest proportions of workers reporting a positive effect of work on health are skilled agricultural workers (16 %), followed closely by professionals (15 %) and technicians (13 %).

Across sectors, workers in transport, agriculture (both 31 %), health (30 %) and industry (28 %) report more than the average that work affects their health negatively. Simultaneously, the health (15 %) and agriculture (14 %) sectors also have the largest shares of workers saying that work affects their health positively. Education and other services also have relatively large shares of workers reporting a positive impact of work (15 % and 16 %, respectively). Over the years, the proportion of workers reporting negative health effects of work decreased significantly in the construction sector from 41 % in 2015 to 28 % in 2024.

Perceived ability to work – the age perspective

Work ability, a concept originally developed by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health in the late 1980s (Ilmarinen, 2007), refers to a person's capacity to perform their job effectively, considering their physical and mental health, skills, work environment and work motivation (see, for example, Tengland, 2011; Magnavita et al., 2025). It reflects the balance between an individual's capabilities and the requirements of their work. Maintaining good work ability is essential for sustainable work, productivity and overall well-being. As work environments change and individuals age, supporting and improving work ability becomes increasingly important for both employees and employers.

The EWCS investigates respondents' perceptions of their ability to continue working in their current job or a similar job as they age. The survey question was tailored to the respondents' age group to gather more nuanced insights. Workers aged 44 and younger were asked to specify the age at which they thought they would no longer be able to perform their current job or a similar one. Respondents between 45 and 54 years old were asked if they believed they could continue working in their current job or a similar job until the age of 60. Those aged 55 and older were asked if they thought they could still perform their current job or a similar one in five years' time.

A significant proportion of respondents were uncertain about their ability to continue working, with 25 % of those aged 44 and younger and 11 % of those aged 45 and older responding with 'don't know'.

Among the EU respondents who provided a definitive answer, approximately 87 % aged between 45 and 54 believed they could continue working in their current job or a similar one until the age of 60, while 14 % thought they would not be able to do so. In the 55+ age group, 74 % of respondents were confident that they could continue working in their current or a similar job for at least five more years, whereas 26 % expressed doubts about their ability to do so.

Men were slightly more positive than women in this respect: the average age at which workers aged 44 years or younger thought they could continue to work until in their current or similar job was 58.9 years for men and 57.5 years for women. In the 45+ age group, 73 % of men answered in the affirmative compared with 72 % of women.

There are notable differences in terms of employment status, as illustrated in Figure 156. Among those aged 45+, 70 % of self-employed workers without employees (83 % with employees) stated that they felt they could work until the age of 60 (or in five years' time), as did 73 % of workers on a permanent contract and around 66 % of workers with a fixed-term or temporary agency contract. One in four employees with another type of contract or no contract replied 'don't know', as did 15 % of solo self-employed workers.

Differences also exist between different occupations. More than 78 % of technicians, clerical workers, professionals and managers indicated that they would be able to work until the age of 60, compared with less than 60 % of those in elementary occupations. Around 28 % of the latter replied 'no' to the question, which among all occupations was by far the highest proportion.

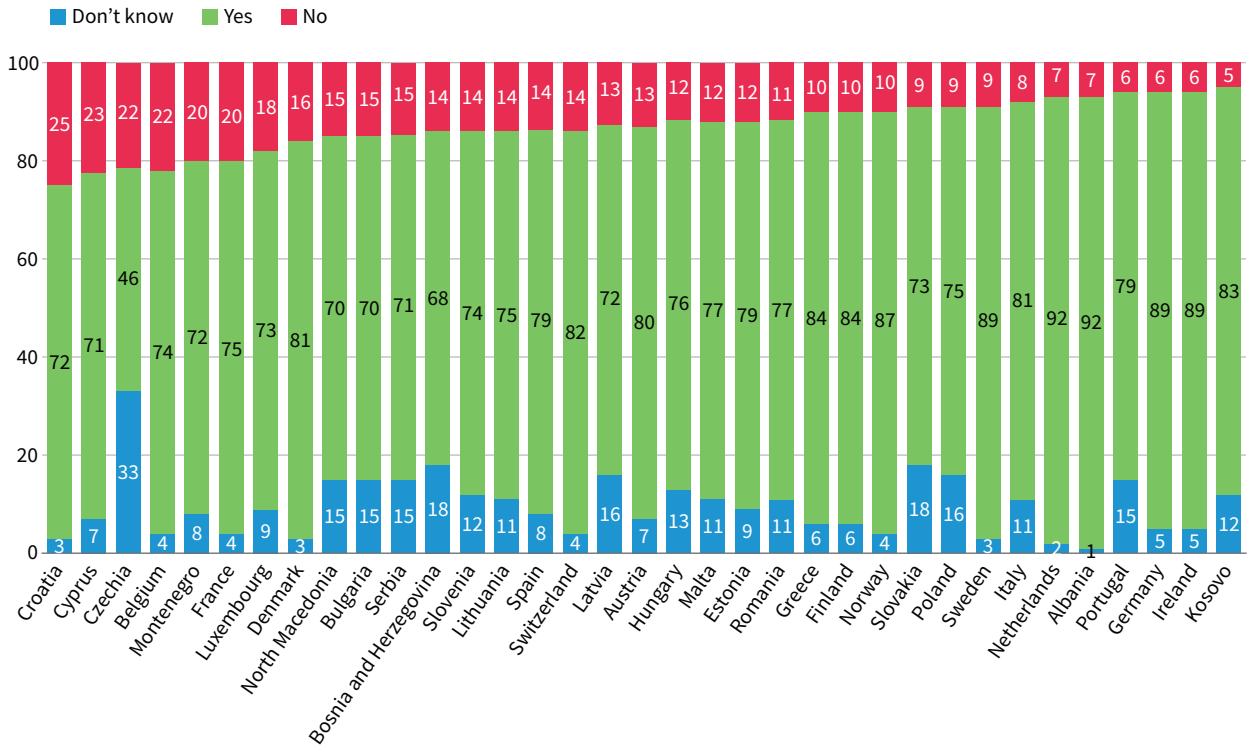
Figure 156: Prevalence of responses to the question about work ability until the age of 60 in the EU by occupation and contract type (%)



Note: Respondents were asked the following question: do you think you will be able to do your current job or a similar one until you are 60 (if aged 45–54 years) or in five years' time (if aged 55+)? Figure shows the answers provided by respondents aged 45 to 54.

Unsurprisingly, considerable differences are observed between countries in terms of workers' expectations of their work ability (Figure 157). In Albania, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden, 89 % or more of workers (men and women) aged 45–54 felt that they could work up to the age of 60. This contrasts sharply with 70 % or less – for some countries, markedly less – in Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Czechia. In Czechia, only 46 % responded in the affirmative.

Figure 157: Prevalence of responses to the question about work ability until the age of 60 or in five years' time by country (%)



Note: Figure shows the answers provided by respondents aged 45 and older.

In most countries, the differences between men and women are small; however, in Cyprus, Kosovo and Slovenia, there is a gap of more than 15 pp, with women markedly less positive about their future work ability. Some countries have a reversed gender gap in terms of self-perceived work ability, especially in Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Slovakia, where women are more optimistic about their work ability than men, with gaps of 12, 10 and 9 pp, respectively.

Preferred age for retirement

It is not only the ability but also the motivation to keep working that counts. Work motivation plays a crucial role for core outcomes of sustainable work, such as work engagement and keeping workers in the labour market as long as possible (van Dam et al., 2017). Indeed, motivational factors are key in deciding about transiting from work to retirement (Pohrt et al., 2015). Labour market participation in general and staying in the labour market until or beyond reaching the age of eligibility for a pension require some degree of individual motivation. Older workers' motivation to remain in or re-enter the labour market is crucial for their overall employment rate.

To capture workers' motivation to stay in employment, the EWCS asked respondents aged 45 years or older until what age they would like to work: 'Thinking about retirement, until what age do you want to work?' Respondents who replied to the question without naming a specific age were categorised into 'work as long as possible', 'stop working as early as possible' or 'don't know'. Some 68 % of workers mentioned a specific age, while 32 % responded differently.
A substantial proportion expressed a desire to continue working indefinitely, with 21 % stating they would work as long as possible. In contrast, 12 % in the age group indicated they would retire as early as possible. Differences between men and women are negligible. Across countries, Estonia (46 %), Montenegro (44 %) and Poland (37 %) have the highest proportions of respondents who said they wanted to work for as long as possible. Conversely, Poland, Portugal and Italy showed the highest proportions of respondents who would prefer to retire as early as possible (18 %, 22 % and 24 %, respectively).

For EU residents who specified a concrete retirement age, the average desired retirement age was 63.9 years for men and 63.1 years for women.

The following three items are compared across countries for men in Figure 158 and for women in Figure 159:

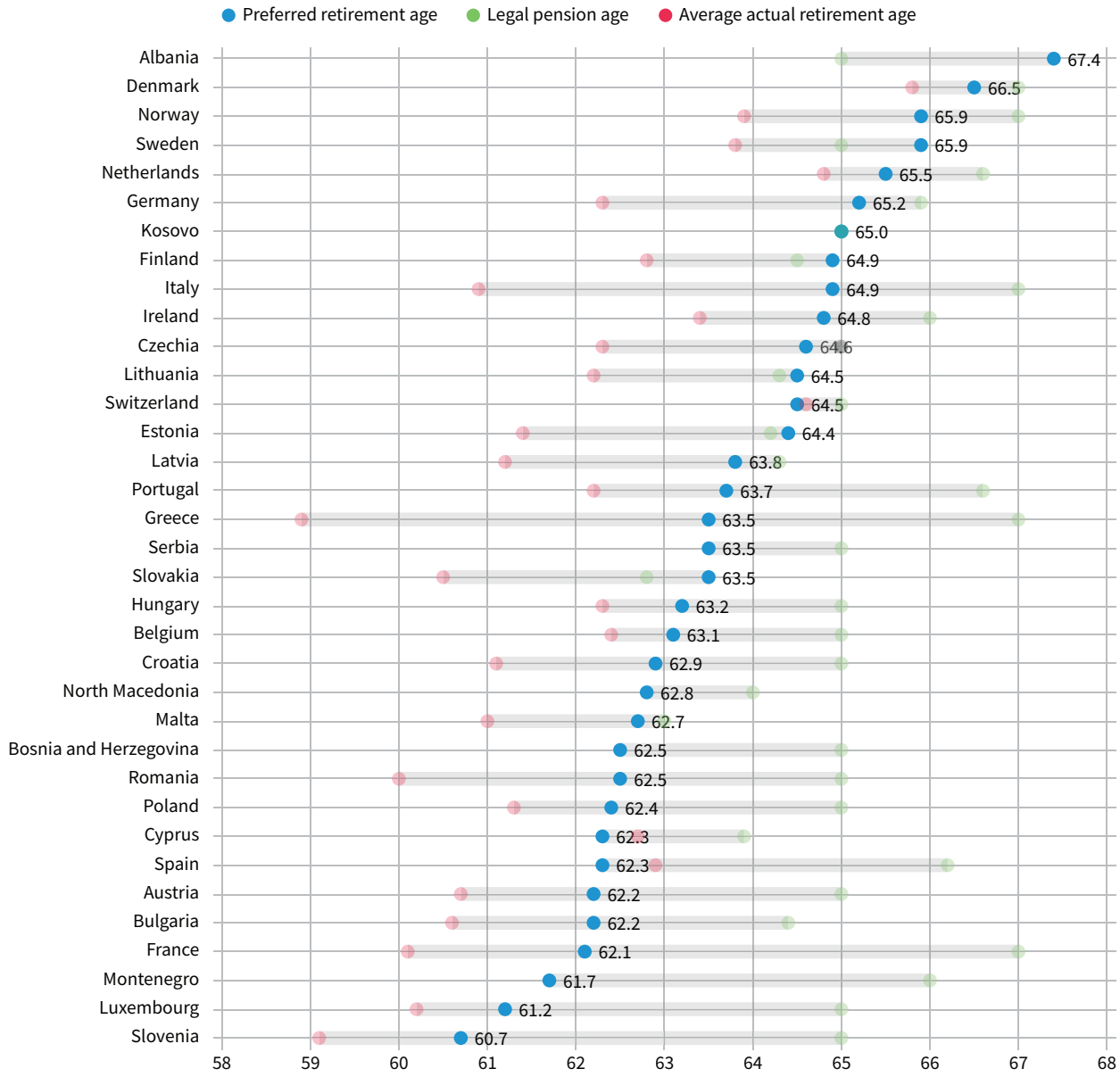
- the preferred retirement age as reported in the EWCS,
- the legal pension age,
- the average actual retirement age as of 2023 (the age at which a person aged 50–74 started receiving an old-age pension).

Preferred retirement ages for men range from 60.7 in Slovenia to 67.4 in Albania, with most countries clustering between 62 and 65. Notably, Luxembourg (61.2) and Slovenia (60.7) show preferred ages far below their legal pension ages (both 65.0), reflecting significant labour market misalignment. Conversely, Slovakia's legal pension age (62.8) is slightly lower than its preferred retirement age (63.5). Actual retirement ages for men in most countries fall below statutory ages, particularly in Greece (58.9 versus the legal pension age of 67), Romania (60 versus 65) and Poland (61.3 versus 65), where early retirement persists despite higher legal requirements. In contrast, Denmark, Sweden and Switzerland demonstrate closer alignment between legal and actual retirement ages, with Denmark's average (65.8) nearly matching its legal threshold (67). France and Greece show large gaps between preferred (62.1 and 63.5, respectively) and legal (both 67) ages, while in Denmark and the Netherlands preferred ages (66.5 and 65.5, respectively) align with their legal ages (67 and 66.6, respectively). Southern and eastern European countries like Romania (60) and Slovenia (59.1) report average retirement ages for men significantly below the legal threshold (both 65), whereas Nordic countries such as Sweden (63.8) and the Netherlands (64.8) show more correlation with their legal ages (65 and 66.6, respectively).

For women, the data reveal distinct patterns compared with their male counterparts. Preferred retirement ages range from 59.7 in Slovenia to 65.5 in Norway, with most countries clustered between 61 and 65. Notable mismatches include Luxembourg (preferred age of 60.1 versus a legal age of 65) and Austria (preferred age of 61.4 versus a legal age of 60); Austria's legal age for women is significantly lower than that for men (65). Conversely, Slovakia (preferred age of 62.4 versus a legal age of 62) and Italy (preferred age of 63.6 versus a legal age of 67) show closer proximity, although Italy's legal age remains much higher than its female population's preference. While most countries have equal legal ages for both genders, actual retirement ages for women (e.g. 59.8 in Czechia) often fall short, reflecting labour market challenges or societal norms. This is especially the case in Greece (58.2), Romania (59.2) and Poland (59.3). In contrast, Denmark (65.6), Sweden (64.1) and Finland (63.1) show little differences between legal, preferred and actual retirement ages, suggesting stronger compliance.

A comparison of retirement data for men and women reveals some regional patterns and gender-specific trends, reflecting variations in labour market participation, cultural norms and policy enforcement specific to retirement behaviour. In southern and eastern Europe, both men and women tend to retire significantly earlier than the legal pension age. In contrast, Nordic countries such as Denmark and Sweden display closer proximity between average retirement ages and legal ages for both genders,

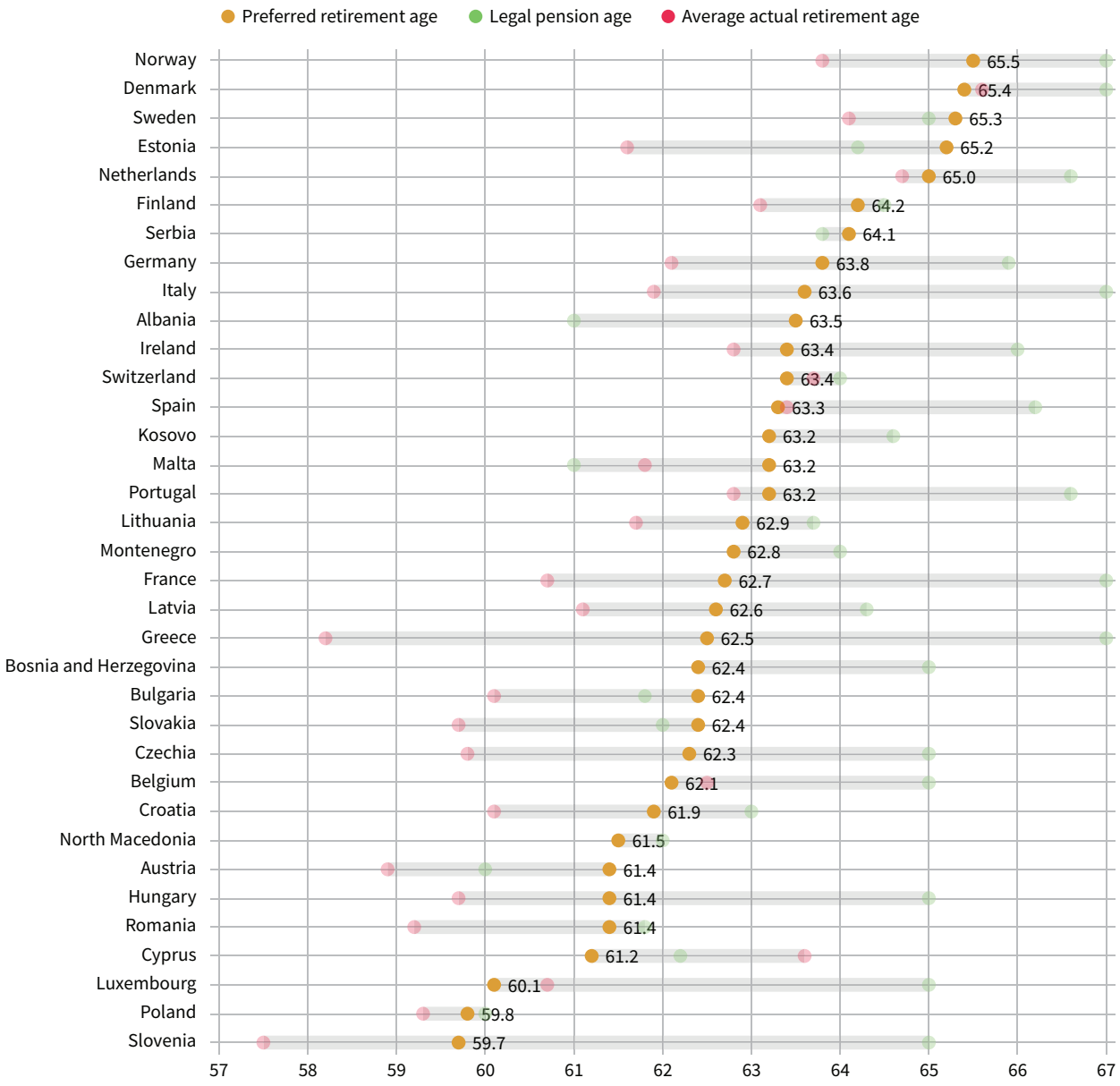
Figure 158: Average preferred, actual and legal retirement ages for men (years) by country



Note: If respondents mentioned a specific age at which they would like to retire, average ages are displayed by country. Other verbal responses were categorised as 'as long as possible' and 'as early as possible' and are excluded from this figure.
Sources: EWCS 2024 (preferred retirement age), European Commission (legal pension age), Eurostat (average actual retirement age).

reflecting stronger alignment with statutory frameworks. However, notable gender differences emerge in specific contexts: in Cyprus, women's average retirement age (63.6 years) exceeds the legal pension age (62.2 years), while in Bulgaria and Croatia women retire earlier than legally permitted, contrasting with men's patterns.

Figure 159: Average preferred, actual and legal retirement ages for women (years) by country

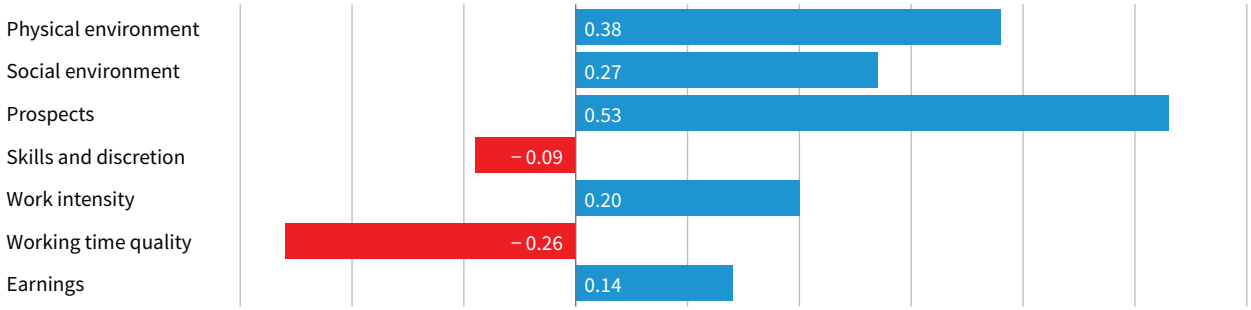


Note: If respondents mentioned a specific age at which they would like to retire, average ages are displayed by country. Other verbal responses were categorised as 'as long as possible' and 'as early as possible' and are excluded from this figure.
Sources: EWCS 2024 (preferred retirement age), European Commission (legal pension age), Eurostat (average actual retirement age).

Job quality and work sustainability

Job quality is modestly associated with work sustainability. Figure 160 shows that higher scores on the Prospects, Physical environment, Social environment and, to some extent, Work intensity and Earnings indices lead to workers preferring to retire at a later age.

Figure 160: Association between job quality and preferred retirement age (workers 45 years of age or older) across job quality indices



Note: The coefficients presented here refer to the relationship between the various job quality dimensions and the preferred retirement age.

Conclusions

Job quality is improving in Europe

Four of the seven job quality indices have improved since 2010: Prospects, Skills and discretion, Working time quality and Physical environment. Some slight deterioration is observed for the Social environment and Work intensity indices. The Earnings index cannot be compared over time.

The **Earnings** index cannot be compared over time because trend data are not available for this composite index. A positive development in relation to earnings is that the percentage of workers who feel they are not paid appropriately in relation to their efforts has been decreasing.

The **Working time quality** index has been increasing over the last two decades for both women and men, with the latter catching up with their female counterparts in 2024. This is the result of positive developments in most of the indicators of working time quality, including in terms of duration, 'atypical' working hours and working time arrangements.

The **Prospects** index has improved significantly since 2010 for both men and women in the context of a much-improved labour market. However, the gender gap has increased since 2015 and men continue to experience better prospects than women.

The **Skills and discretion** index shows clear improvements since 2010. Men continue to achieve higher scores than women, but in 2024 the gender gap had reduced.

The **Work intensity** index score has decreased slightly over the last three survey editions, indicating an intensification of work. Whereas previously men were somewhat more likely to report higher levels of work intensity, in 2024 women were more likely to report higher levels.

The **Social environment** index score increased by 1 point between 2015 and 2024, after having decreased by 2 points between 2010 and 2015. The existing gender gap increased between 2015 and 2024, with women's scores consistently lower than men's, primarily due to women's greater exposure to adverse social behaviour.

The **Physical environment** index has been slowly improving since 2010 for both men and women. The quality of the physical environment remains higher for women than for men, but the gender gap has decreased from 6 points down to 5 points. The improvement is due to a reduction in exposure to most physical risks and demands for which trends are available.

These overall positive developments reflect the EU's long-standing commitment to the improvement of working conditions, an objective embedded in its ambition since the Treaty of Rome ([4]). Persistent efforts to improve the physical work environment through extensive EU legislation in the areas of health and safety, the reduction in working time or the extension of lifelong learning to an increasing share of workers are examples of policy interventions that clearly have had an impact. Technological change, changing organisational practices and solutions found through social dialogue and in collective agreements have played an important role as well.

At EU level, the current guiding document, the European Pillar of Social Rights, devotes 6 of its 20 principles to fair working conditions, advocating healthy, safe and well-adapted work environments. The action plan, drawn up by the European Commission in 2021 to complement national actions and contribute to the Pillar's implementation, highlights the need to make 'work standards fit for the future of work'. Among the EU-level actions, the following are examples of how the improvement of working conditions has been addressed: the Work–Life Balance Directive, the Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions Directive, the EU strategic framework on health and safety at work for 2021–2027, the Minimum Wage Directive and, more recently, the Platform Work Directive.

Consolidating Europe's winning hand

Despite overall positive trends and high levels of job quality already achieved in several dimensions, Europe cannot rest on its laurels. The EWCS 2024 clearly shows that the benefits of improved job quality are **not evenly distributed**. Differences do not only exist between men and women. There are divides between sectors and occupations, between age groups, between native workers and those with a foreign background and between healthy workers and those living with a chronic illness, to name just some of the gaps.

([4]) Article 151: 'The Union and the Member States, having in mind fundamental social rights … shall have as their objectives the promotion of employment, improved living and working conditions, so as to make possible their harmonisation while the improvement is being maintained, proper social protection, dialogue between management and labour, the development of human resources with a view to lasting high employment and the combating of exclusion.'

Even in higher-quality jobs there is usually room for further improvement. For example, while managers score highest on the Earnings, Prospects, Skills and discretion, Social environment and Physical environment indices, they score lowest on Work intensity (indicating a high level of work intensity) and only about average on Working time quality. A similar picture emerges for workers in financial services, who, when compared with other sectors, achieve the highest scores on all indices apart from Work intensity.

Some jobs on the other hand, come with multiple disadvantages: workers in elementary occupations score lowest on the Prospects and Skills and discretion indices. They also score low on Social environment and Earnings.

Various combinations emerge when it comes to job quality. Mixed-gender occupations, for instance, display the highest scores on Prospects, Working time quality, Skills and discretion, Social environment and Physical environment but less favourable scores on Earnings and Work intensity. Medical doctors and nursing and midwifery professionals score highly on the Prospects and Skills and discretion indices but poorly on Working time quality, Social environment and Work intensity.

This report provides evidence that the majority of jobs come with a mix of positive job quality features and areas for improvement. It reveals a complex and more nuanced picture than a simple gradient of high–low quality or a good–bad job dichotomy.

Emerging issues

The analysis of the EWCS 2024 data shows that the vast majority of jobs have **room for further improvement in specific dimensions of job quality**. This means that the policy goal of improving job quality must recognise its multidimensionality. The fact that job quality is multidimensional leaves open an array of possible interventions to reduce the exposure to job demands and increase access to job resources. The benefits of job quality both for workers themselves and for companies are clear: higher job quality is associated with better health and well-being; increased performance, engagement and motivation; and an improved working life. The findings point to the need for a more integrated and holistic approach to improving job quality – through actions implemented at EU and national levels – that is complemented by a sector-specific and even company-specific approach that takes account of the needs of certain occupations and jobs.

Policy action needs to consider the strong sectoral dimension of job quality. The EWCS 2024 data show that, for example, health, transport and agriculture fare worse than other sectors when it comes to job quality and working life indicators. Sector-specific solutions should, therefore, complement a more general framework. It should be noted that workers in these sectors play an essential role in the functioning of our societies, as evidenced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Investing in their job quality and health and well-being means also investing in the sustainability of our societies and economy.

Faced with a shrinking and ageing working-age population, Europe needs to provide good job quality to more people to allow a larger share of a more diverse working-age population to join the labour market and stay in employment for longer.

The ambition to manage the twin transition in a fair and sustainable way is a further reason to keep monitoring and improving the working conditions of workers who are affected by the move to a digitalised, decarbonised economy.

Finally, fostering an agile, innovative and competitive economy is a prerequisite for protecting the European way of life. The innovative capacity, adaptability and productivity of businesses that make up this economy will benefit from high levels of job quality for all workers.

Three themes emerge from the EWCS findings presented in this report, which reflect the arguments for keeping the focus on improving job quality:

- supporting the labour market participation of men and women throughout their working careers,
- protecting the health and well-being of workers,
- supporting the twin transition through fair working conditions.

Support the labour market participation of men and women throughout their working careers

The EWCS shows that there has been progress on job quality, but also that there have been **different job quality trajectories for men and women**. The job quality enjoyed by men is greater than that of women in the dimensions of Skills and discretion, Work intensity, Social environment, Prospects and Earnings. The job quality of women is better than that of men in terms of Physical environment and, to a much smaller extent, in Working time quality. The gender gap in job quality has widened from 1 to 3 points for the Social environment index and from 3 to 4 points for the Prospects index. It has stayed the same (2 points) for Work intensity, reduced from 3 points to 2 point for Skills and discretion and reduced from 6 points to 5 points for Physical environment. Only for Working time quality has the gender gap completely closed over time.

Differences in job quality experienced by men and women are linked to the persistent level of gender segregation in the labour market. In very female-dominated occupations, job quality is lowest in all dimensions except Work intensity and Physical environment. Very male-dominated occupations are also at a disadvantage when it comes to job quality, particularly as regards Physical environment. For example, skilled agricultural workers, protective service workers, drivers and electrical workers experience very demanding conditions in several dimensions. Improving job quality in these very gender-segregated and often demanding occupations could increase their attractiveness and contribute to a decrease in labour market segregation. Overall, mixed-gender occupations report the most balanced job quality outcomes, as they do not entail any of the job quality disadvantages of male- or female-dominated occupations.

Looking at job quality in detail, gender-specific areas for attention that point to different and possibly unequal treatment of women can be identified. For example, women report more frequently than men unfair pay in relation to effort; poorer career prospects; less access to flexible working time arrangements (that allow workers to take an hour or two off during working hours to attend to personal or family matters); weaker working time autonomy; less influence on important decisions for their work; and the experience of adverse social behaviours at work. Closing the gender job quality gap will help women thrive in a gender-equal economy and support progress in the journey to achieving full gender equality.

Men tend to be overrepresented in jobs with a high level of exposure to multiple physical risks and demands. This increases the risk of a negative impact of work on health and of leaving the labour market prematurely due to poor health. This warrants more action to improve the quality of the physical working environment.

Inequalities in work between men and women are compounded by an unequal share of household duties and roles. Less than one in four men and women say that they contribute to household tasks equally. Whereas two thirds of women report that they contribute the most to household tasks, only one fifth of men make that claim.

More balanced participation of men and women at work requires supporting good work–life balance for all. Lower working time quality and more intensive work are associated with poorer work–life balance. A better social environment is associated with less work–household interference. Support from colleagues and management and good leadership quality can help to find the desired work–life balance. Supporting the work–life balance of workers should remain a key policy concern to ensure equal and high levels of labour market participation by men and women across the life course, especially as the aspiration of workers in our societies to reconcile their professional and personal lives is getting stronger (Eurofound, 2024e).

Protect the health and well-being of workers

The popular wisdom that 'the greatest wealth is health' seems to be shared by EWCS respondents. 'A **safe working environment** for my mental and physical health' is rated as the most important aspect of work in general. Second is a trusting work environment. At the same time, in 2024, a quarter of workers (26 %) reported that their health and safety is at risk because of their work. Furthermore, 18 % of workers (but 26 % of 55- to 64-year-olds) have a chronic disease or suffer from a health problem that severely or somewhat limits their ability to do normal activities. Given that the 55- to 64-year-old age group has seen the most dramatic rise in employment rates, the issue of accommodation in the workplace for workers with a chronic disease can be expected to increase in importance. Accommodation for women's health issues is also increasingly discussed, but full or partial accommodation by employers for painful periods and disruptive menopausal symptoms remains uncommon, as the EWCS shows.

- **Protect workers' health – areas of job quality needing attention**

As the analysis of the physical work environment shows, physical risks have not disappeared. At the same time, risks that can have a negative impact on mental health are on the rise. As the circumstances of work diversify – with some workers more engaged in physically demanding work and others more exposed to psychosocial risks, for example because of frequent exposure to emotional demands – both concerns need to be addressed.

Among the respondents to the EWCS 2024, 72 % of employees strongly agree or tend to agree that their **organisation gives priority to the health and well-being** of their employees. Areas in which further improvement is possible also become apparent: 14 % of workers report that they are not very well informed or not at all informed on the health and safety risks related to their job. This share is higher as regards psychosocial risks: 29 % of workers report being not very well informed or not informed at all about the prevention of work-related stress at their workplace.

The EWCS also explored the extent to which accommodations are made for workers who require them. One set of questions looked at workplace accommodations for workers with a chronic disease, and a second set examined the accommodation of work for women when they experience painful periods or disruptive menopausal symptoms. In both instances,

workers who had accommodation in their work reported higher job quality than workers who did not. This suggests that reasonable accommodation – in line with the need of the individual concerned and the business needs of the company or organisation – should be encouraged and facilitated. Accommodation for women's circumstances is also likely to further promote full participation of women in the workforce.

A look at access to job resources, such as organisational participation, training, social support and autonomy, is also merited, as these job resources are supportive of health and well-being. The EWCS 2024 shows an important divide in terms of job quality between those who have a say in and more control over how they organise their work than those who do not. Equally, those who have access to job resources, like support from colleagues and managers, good management quality, job security or training, fare better than those who do not have these resources at their disposal. Ensuring access to job resources is a marker of investment in human resources. Supporting workers in accessing these will also help them to adapt to and feel prepared for the twin transition.

- **Improve job quality by drawing on workers' knowledge – voice and representation**

There are many different ways to improve job quality. Workers, their representatives, employers, governments and other relevant stakeholders all have a role to play. Improvements can be encouraged, discussed, designed and implemented at many levels – at EU, national, regional, sectoral and organisational levels.

Improvements are likely to yield greater benefits if they build on workers' experiences in their work, including their knowledge of the constraints under which their work is performed. In this respect, the EWCS highlights a number of issues. The Skills and discretion subdimension of organisational participation captures whether workers are consulted before objectives are set for their work, are involved in improving work organisation or work processes of their own department or organisation and have the ability to influence decisions that are important for their work. Whereas this subdimension increased between 2010 and 2015, it has since fallen back to what it was in 2010. Companies and organisations that listen to their employees' experience of real work will be able to harness their tacit knowledge to improve products or services and work processes. Not tapping into this rich source of knowledge could put companies and organisations at a disadvantage.

The presence of employee representation can be a **determining factor in improving and maintaining good working conditions**. In 2024, one fifth of employees in the EU had neither formal representation nor meetings at which they could express their views about work-related issues at the workplace. In addition, 10 % reported the existence of meetings at which they could express their views in their company or organisation but no form of collective interest representation.

Supporting individual participation and collective representation at the workplace can contribute to identifying the areas in job quality that need addressing and bring them to the attention of management, with benefits for both the workforce and companies.

Support the twin transition through fair working conditions

The EU is aiming for a clean, just and competitive transition to a digital and climate-neutral economy. It is acknowledged that protecting and promoting quality jobs is a prerequisite for getting the support of citizens for this transition, but also for harnessing the knowledge and innovative capabilities of the EU workforce, which are driving the change.

Both the **digital and green transitions have a direct impact** on the world of work, bringing new challenges but also opportunities. As regards technology use, the EWCS 2024 shows that a new gender divide could be opening, given the differences in the adoption of technologies. Men are more likely to use emerging technologies like generative AI, despite women reporting higher frequency of computer use. In addition to gender disparities, there are also age and education gradients in the use of most digital workplace technologies.

The EWCS 2024 data also show that digital technologies have both removed tasks and added new ones to jobs. This illustrates the complexity of the impact of the digital transition. A similar level of complexity is to be expected as regards the impact of decarbonisation. Whereas the mitigating measures introduced to address climate change will have an impact on what is produced and how it is produced and, through this adaptation process, will influence the structure of the economy and the quality of jobs, the direct impact of climate change on workers also needs to be addressed. This is exemplified by the experience of workers in a few sectors, such as agriculture and construction, who face increased exposure to high temperatures.

- **Promote learning and skills development**

One clear impact of the twin transition is the need to **ensure that workers have the right skills** to deal with changing technologies and the associated change in tasks. The results of the EWCS 2024 show an increase in the use of skills at work and improved access to training. However, this positive trend has not eliminated skills mismatches. On the one hand, 13 % of workers in the EU perceive themselves as being underskilled and in need of further training to be able to cope well with their current duties. On the other hand, 30 % of workers

reported overskilling, as they feel that they have skills that exceed the requirements of their current role. Both types of mismatches require action. Inequalities in access to training need to be addressed. Older workers (aged 55 years or more) reported less access to training than their younger colleagues. In addition, while access to employer-paid training has improved for all occupational groups, it remains lower for low-skilled occupations, with elementary occupations receiving the least.

The EWCS explores more than access to training. Three quarters of workers report having opportunities to learn new things at work, which is another way to develop and enhance skills. At the same time, less than half of workers (43 %) say that they have enough opportunities to use their skills and knowledge in their work. The interest in opportunities to learn, develop and use new skills is strong, with a quarter of workers mentioning this as one of the areas in which they would like to see improvements in their working conditions.

Offering workers the opportunity to apply and develop their skills not only supports workers in their current work but also helps them to be ready for the changes brought about by the twin transition. It also strengthens the adaptability of the companies and organisations that they work for and their economic performance. The link between forms of work organisation that support learning and skills development needs to be examined further to ensure support for companies to help them develop into learning organisations.

- **Sustain worker engagement and motivation**

Managing the twin transition requires not only a skilled and healthy workforce but also workers who are engaged and bring creativity and high performance levels to the company or organisation that they work for.

According to the EWCS, 35 % of workers reported high engagement in 2024. This is 1 pp less than in 2015. At the same time, the proportions of low engagement increased from 25 % in 2015 to 28 % in 2024.

The EWCS 2024 confirms that the role of organisations in motivating workers is an important aspect of work engagement. The proportion of motivated workers has increased slightly over the years, from 61 % in 2010 to 68 % in 2024, while the percentage of those disagreeing with the statement that their organisation motivates them has declined from 16 % to 14 %. Wide differences between countries in the share of workers who feel motivated – ranging from 80 % in Ireland to below 50 % in Cyprus, Czechia and Greece – suggest that there is room for improvement and an opportunity to learn from good practices how worker motivation can be strengthened.

Another factor linked to levels of engagement and motivation is the extent to which workers regard their work as meaningful. The different aspects of meaningful work that the EWCS explores – doing useful work, ethical consistency of work with job holders' values and being fairly treated and recognised at work – are all linked to higher levels of engagement and motivation.

Most workers in the 2024 survey report that their **job is meaningful**. More than 80 % find their work useful, experience a feeling of work well done and feel fairly treated in their workplace always or most of the time. Just over two thirds (68 %) agree that they receive the recognition they deserve for their job.

Maintaining and improving these largely positive results is important not only because of the link between meaningful work and engagement and motivation. The EWCS 2024 results also show that 'meaningful work' increases in importance with age, with workers over 65 years considering it among the most important aspects of work. Policies designed to keep more older workers in employment need to take this into account.

Progress through dialogue

The data collected in 2024 through the EWCS not only paint a contemporaneous picture of the most important aspects of working conditions and job quality but also draw the main trend lines of these factors over more than a decade. The positive developments in many of the dimensions and subdimensions of job quality are an unequivocal sign that the mechanisms and efforts put in place, at the various levels (European, national, sectoral and organisational), to ensure good working conditions in the space of the EU are bearing fruit.

At the same time, the **overall progress does not seem to reach all parts of the EU workforce**. This adds to fundamental inequalities in the quality of the jobs of different individuals. Some experience a range of poor conditions across many or even all of the job quality dimensions. Others seem to have good conditions in most aspects, but rarely are good conditions experienced in all. To reap the benefits of job quality – such as better health and well-being, motivation, engagement and creative power – it is crucial to ensure that improvements in job quality are felt by all members of an increasingly diverse workforce.

To achieve a cohesive and resilient society that is capable of facing the great challenges that currently confront Europe – demographic change, climate change, the twin transition and geopolitical conflict – the EU must, besides preserving the progress achieved so far in the improvement of job quality, tackle the areas in which further improvement is needed. The EU and its Member States have a strong track record in

finding solutions through dialogue among the interested parties. Social dialogue at European, national, sectoral and company levels has helped find solutions to many of the challenges Europe has faced in the past and is well placed to tackle the upcoming challenges. The recent EU-level initiatives to strengthen social dialogue are proof of confidence in this mechanism to deliver solutions that benefit both workers and the organisations that they work for.

Continued monitoring of trends in job quality and capturing changes in working life through the EWCS are prerequisites for providing social partners and other policymakers with the evidence they require to take better-informed decisions.

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