



Reconciliation of work, private and family life in the European Union

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This report is available in electronic format only.

The reconciliation of work, private and family life is a key area for European employment policy, which aims to increase the participation of both men and women in the labour market and to encourage initiatives to support the health and well-being of employees. This survey data report examines employment rates for men and women, the impact of children on labour market participation, the various forms of flexibility to support the reconciliation of work and family life (part-time work, flexibility of working time, work organisation and place of work) and the satisfaction of individuals with their work–life balance.

Employment targets and employment rates

The creation of new, good quality jobs and an increase in both the overall and female [employment rate](#) form key elements of the EU's employment strategy. Under the [Lisbon Strategy](#), which ran from 2000 to 2010, the target was to achieve an overall EU employment rate of 70% and a female employment rate of 60%. Under the [Europe 2020 Strategy](#), one of the [headline indicators](#) is a target rate of 75% for overall employment of workers aged 20–64%.

Data from the EU Labour Force Survey (LFS) published by the European Commission in a 2010 [compendium \(757Kb PDF\)](#) show that the overall employment rate (for 15–64 year-olds) in EU27 was 65.4% in 2007 and 65.9% in 2008. The rate fell back slightly to 64.6% in 2009, presumably as a result of the economic crisis. The most recent figures for male employment show a rate of 72.8% in EU27 in 2008 and 70.7% in 2009; for female employment, the rate was 59.1% in 2008, falling back slightly to 58.6% in 2009.

There are significant differences in male and female employment rates between Member States (Figures 1 and 2). In the case of male workers, rates vary from 82.4% in the Netherlands and 77.6% in Cyprus, to 61% in Latvia and 59.5% in Lithuania. In the case of female workers, rates vary from 73.1% in Denmark and 70.2% in Sweden, to 46.4% in Italy and 37.7% in Malta.

Figure 1: Overall employment rates for age group 15–64 in the EU, 2009 (%)

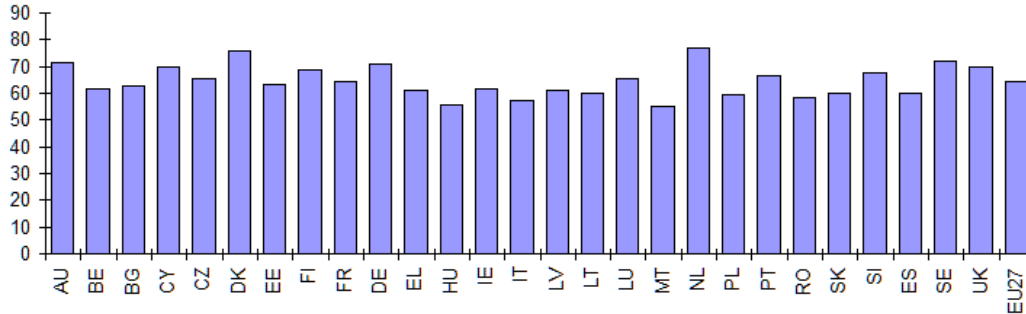


Figure 1: Overall employment rates for age group 15–64 in the EU, 2009 (%)

Source: EU Labour Force Survey, annual data (May 2010)

Figure 2: Employment rates for men and women in the EU, 2009

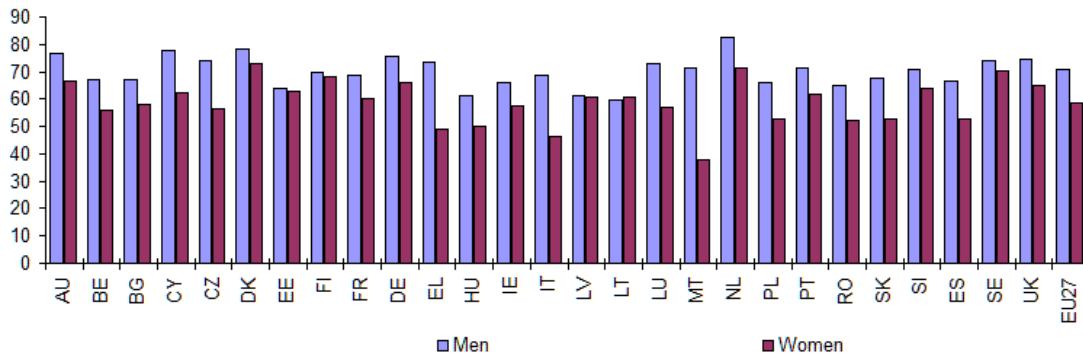


Figure 2: Employment rates for men and women in the EU, 2009

Source: EU Labour Force Survey, annual data (May 2010)

Flexibility in the organisation and length of working time, which enables greater reconciliation of work, private and family life, can play an important role in increasing employment rates, particularly among women, who retain the bulk of the responsibility for child and dependant care. This, however, is a complicated policy issue. According to the 2009 [report on the reconciliation of work, private and family life in the EU \(13Mb PDF\)](#) from the European Commission, the presence of children (especially younger ones) can have a strong influence on the type of job sought, in particular among women. Flexible working time arrangements, part-time jobs or temporary work are examples of employment that those with parental responsibilities may seek or be ‘pushed into’, often as a result of insufficient, inappropriate or unaffordable childcare provisions. Public policies regarding reconciliation between parenthood and labour market participation have sometimes developed in contradictory ways, combining measures encouraging parents to stay at home with those encouraging them to take up paid employment.

Although female employment rates have increased strongly over the past decade, women (and also to some extent men) still encounter difficulties in reconciling work and private and family life.

The influence of children

Although significant changes have been made to the labour market over the past 50 years and the labour market participation of women has increased substantially, the Commission report points out that women's participation in the workforce continues to be affected by their predominant role in the care of children.

The presence and number of children, as well as the age of the youngest child, can have a marked influence on female employment rates. The presence of children decreases labour market participation in virtually all EU Member States, while the presence of children usually has the effect of increasing male labour market participation (Table 1). The average negative effect on female participation is -11.3% in EU27 and -10.9% in EU15. For men, the average positive effect is 7.7% in EU27 and 8.8% in EU15.

Table 1: Employment rates for 25–49 year-olds with and without children, 2006

	Without children		With children		Difference	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
EU27	78.3	82.4	67.0	90.0	-11.3	7.7
EA15	77.3	82.8	66.3	91.6	-10.9	8.8
BE	75.8	81.4	72.4	91.4	-3.5	10.0
BG	77.3	77.1	71.4	81.2	-5.9	4.1
CZ	84.8	87.8	68.3	93.7	-16.5	5.9
DE	82.3	81.6	68.5	90.6	-13.8	8.9
EE	85.6	83.5	78.7	93.2	-7.0	9.7
EL	67.3	86.2	59.4	95.1	-7.9	8.9
ES	75.0	84.1	60.6	91.3	-14.4	7.2
FR	79.9	81.1	72.0	91.3	-7.9	10.3
IT	68.2	82.6	55.8	91.7	-12.4	9.1
CY	82.3	87.2	73.2	95.2	-9.1	8.0
LV	81.8	78.9	77.4	87.4	-4.5	8.5
LT	83.0	78.0	80.1	88.1	-2.9	10.0
LU	82.8	90.1	65.4	94.8	-17.4	4.7
HU	79.2	80.5	62.2	85.4	-17.1	4.9
MT	65.6	87.6	31.4	93.2	-34.2	5.6
NL	85.1	87.7	73.8	94.2	-11.3	6.5
AT	83.6	88.5	73.9	93.1	-9.7	4.5
PL	74.1	72.6	66.2	84.6	-7.8	12.1
PT	76.2	82.5	76.9	91.9	0.7	9.4
RO	73.6	78.7	69.6	83.5	-4.0	4.8

	Without children		With children		Difference	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
SI	79.0	83.1	85.6	93.2	6.6	10.1
SK	79.3	79.0	66.7	88.6	-12.5	9.6
FI	81.8	80.4	76.8	92.5	-5.0	12.1
UK	85.6	85.5	68.4	90.9	-17.1	5.4

Notes: Data apply to children under the age of 15. Difference is expressed in percentage points.

The analysis is based on a specific LFS database allowing household composition breakdowns. This database does not contain information on Denmark and Sweden.

No data were available for Ireland.

Source: Eurostat, LFS

Much of the difficulty in reconciling work with childcare comes from the high cost of childcare, which has a greater impact where there are two or more children. While women with a single child can succeed in combining motherhood and work with some organisational restructuring, this becomes increasingly difficult with two or more children. This means that women, particularly those in relatively low-paid jobs, prefer to undertake the childcare themselves and withdraw from the labour market.

Some of the main ways in which individuals try to reconcile work and family and private life include:

- part-time working;
- working flexibility;
- flexibility in the organisation of work, including the length of the working day and taking time off as and when needed;
- flexibility in the place of work, largely through teleworking from home.

These issues are explored below.

Part-time work

Part-time work is widespread among the female workforce, although a proportion of men also work part-time. According to the most recent data from Eurostat, 18.8% of the EU27 workforce worked part-time in 2009. For men the total was 8.3% and for women it was 31.5%. The Netherlands stands out as having the largest proportion of part-time workers among the female workforce (75.8%), due to a long-standing tradition of encouraging part-time working.

In addition to differences between men and women in the incidence of part-time working, the reasons why men and women work part-time also differ considerably. In the case of women, the main reason is the care of children and incapacitated adults, accounting for 42% of female part-time work in 2006 (Figure 3); this reason accounted for only 8% of male part-time workers (Figure 4). For men, the main reason for working part-time was the lack of a full-time job (43% of cases in 2006).

Figure 3: Women's reasons for part-time work in EU27, 2006

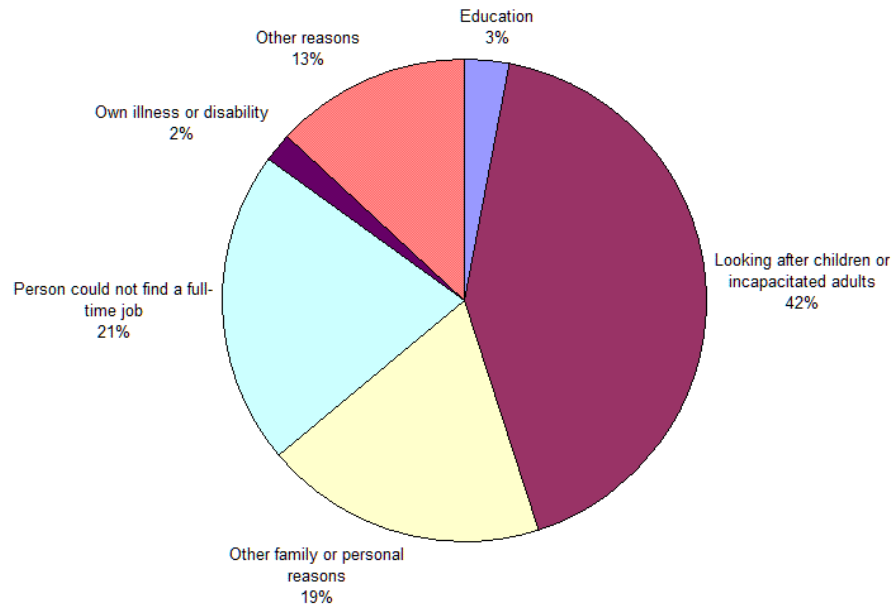


Figure 3: Women's reasons for part-time work in EU27, 2006

Source: Eurostat, LFS

Figure 4: Men's reasons for part-time work in EU27, 2006

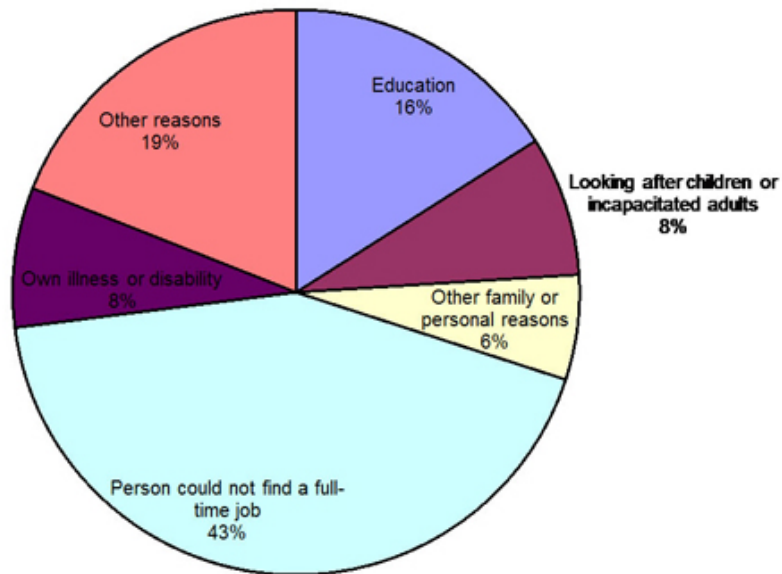


Figure 4: Men's reasons for part-time work in EU27, 2006

Source: Eurostat, LFS

The 2009 Commission [report on the reconciliation of work, private and family life in the EU \(13Mb PDF\)](#) notes that it is not clear whether part-timers would prefer to work full-time if childcare services were more extensive or if full-time working hours were organised to be more family-friendly. ‘Looking after children’ was a reason often cited by women in the Netherlands and the UK, but this could either be due to insufficient childcare facilities or to a deliberate choice of the mothers.

Flexibility in the organisation of work

There are many different types of flexible working schemes and arrangements on offer to workers to help them to reconcile work and private and family life. These cover issues such as flexibility in the organisation of working time (including working atypical hours) and flexibility in the length of working time.

The main forms of flexible work organisation are:

- part-time work;
- reduced hours, which allow people to trade income for time off;
- term-time contracts, which allow employees to remain on a permanent contract as either full- or part-time employees, but gives them the right to unpaid leave during school holidays;
- compressed working week, where weekly hours are compressed into fewer days than normal, for example a four-day week, giving employees longer weekends;
- flexitime, which allows employees to vary their working hours within specified limits (core hours) from day to day;
- shift swapping, which allows employees to rearrange shifts among themselves to suit their needs;
- self-rostering, where employees schedule their own working day to meet the requirements of service delivery or production (often as a team with a mix of skills, accommodating individual preferences as much as possible);
- staggered hours, where employees have different start, finish and break times (often in large workplaces to cover longer working days).

This type of flexibility can have benefits for both the employer and the employee. For the employer, they can help to reduce employee turnover, increase productivity and reduce operating costs; for the employee, they can help to reconcile work, private and family life.

Using data from the Establishment Survey on Working Time and Work–Life Balance ([ESWT \(615Kb PDF\)](#) 2004–2005, Figure 5 gives an indication of the impact of flexible types of working time arrangements offered by employers. It shows that the main impact was higher job satisfaction (cited by 73% of employee representatives and 61% of managers). A better adaptation of workload was also cited by a majority of both employee representatives and managers (67% and 54%, respectively), and lower absence rates were cited by 31% of employee representatives and 27% of managers. Among the negative impacts, communication problems were cited by 20% of employee representatives and 10% of managers, and increased costs by 6% of employee representatives and 5% of managers.

Figure 5: Effects of introducing flexible working time (%)

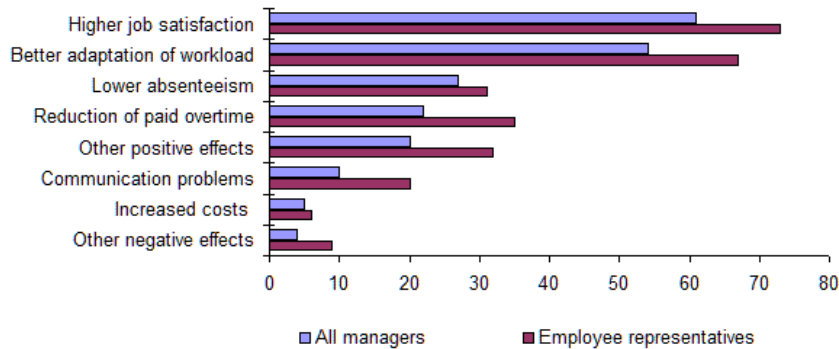


Figure 5: Effects of introducing flexible working time (%)

Note: Surveyed companies with employee representation offering flexible working time arrangements (multiple answers possible). The structure of establishments with employee representation differs significantly from the structure of all the establishments surveyed.

Source: ESWT, 2004–2005

In addition, there are a range of family-friendly arrangements that employers can provide which go beyond working time arrangements (Table 2). These include types of leave over and above statutory provision, including enhanced maternity and paternity leave, and **parental leave**. Other types of leave that employers can offer include leave for family reasons such as to look after an elderly relative, leave upon the adoption of a child, and a range of career break schemes. Employers can also provide help with childcare, in the form of financial assistance such as vouchers or provision of workplace nurseries. Other types of support that can be offered by employers include help with managing **work-life balance** and counselling (where needed).

Table 2: Examples of work–family arrangements provided by enterprises

Type	Examples
Flexible working arrangements	Part-time work Flexible arrangements Job-sharing Teleworking/working at home Term-time work Saving hours
Childcare arrangements	Workplace nursery Contracted childcare places Childminding Childcare resource and referral Financial assistance Holiday play schemes/summer camps
Leave	(Extra statutory) maternity leave

Type	Examples
	Parental leave Paternity leave Leave for family reasons (including elderly) Adoption leave Career break scheme
Supportive arrangements	Work–family management training Employees counselling/assistance Work–family coordinator Research on employees needs Financial contributions

Source: Den Dulk (2001)

Varying the working day

The Labour Force Survey [ad hoc module 2005 on reconciliation between work and family life \(3.6Mb PDF\)](#) collected data from EU27 Member States plus three European Free Trade Association ([EFTA](#)) countries.

A relatively high degree of flexibility was found in the proportion of men and women able to vary the start and finish of their working day by at least one hour for family reasons; 69% of men and women in EU27 could vary their working day in this way. In country terms, the proportion ranged from 93% in the Netherlands to 45% in Romania. The report notes that this is not surprising given that this type of working time flexibility is very common in the Netherlands.

Relatively little difference in access to this type of flexibility was found between men and women. Only in Germany, Hungary, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia were the differences noticeable (between 3 and 4 percentage points). However, in the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden) and Malta, men seem to have a greater degree of this type of working time flexibility than women (with a difference of between 7 and 8 percentage points).

Taking days off for family reasons

The second aspect of flexibility examined in the Labour Force Survey [2005 ad hoc module \(3.6Mb PDF\)](#) was the opportunity to organise working time for family reasons (including care for children, disabled or other dependants) by taking days off without using holidays or special leave. This includes working time banking as well as individuals with free working time who can be absent for a day without any special arrangement.

In EU27, 62% of employees aged 25–49 had the possibility of taking entire days off for family reasons, with only a marginal difference between men and women. At the level of individual countries, the most flexibility was found in Austria, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Norway and Slovenia (all above 75%). The lowest scoring country was Cyprus (30%), where employed people do not generally have the possibility of taking entire days off.

From a gender perspective, more women have this opportunity in the Benelux countries and Germany, whereas in the Nordic countries, significantly more men than women are able to alter working time or take days off for family reasons.

However, the report also notes that it is often left to the employer’s discretion whether working times can be altered or days off granted for family reasons. Nevertheless, some countries have a statutory obligation to grant employees time off from work and the report provides information on statutory provisions in Member States.

Flexibility in the place of work

One important element of flexibility in the organisation of work is flexibility regarding where employees carry out their work. If individuals can work remotely, usually from home on a **telework** basis, this can improve their work–life balance in terms of reducing commuting times and enabling them to combine working with being on hand to deal with family-related issues. For employers, the advantages of this type of arrangement include cost reductions (less office space is needed) and a reduction in employee absence and turnover. However, the 2009 European Commission [report on the reconciliation of work, private and family life in the EU \(13Mb PDF\)](#) also notes that the introduction of teleworking, or remote working, requires a relatively high degree of trust and communication between employee and employer.

The incidence of teleworking has increased relatively slowly in the EU in recent years. In EU27 in 2006, 3.8% of men said that they ‘usually’ worked from home and 8.4% said that they ‘sometimes’ worked from home. For women, 4.9% said that they ‘usually’ worked from home and 7.1% said that they ‘sometimes’ worked from home.

There are significant differences between Member States. In the UK, for example, a relatively high proportion of both men and women (26.8%) and women (22.5%) said that they ‘sometimes’ worked from home (Table 3). This was also the case in Denmark, where 28.6% of men and 21.8% of women said that they ‘sometimes’ worked from home.

The incidence of men who ‘usually’ worked at home was highest in Finland (9.9%) and Austria (8.8%) and lowest in Romania (0.5%). For women, incidence was highest in France (11.6%) and Austria (11.2%) and lowest in Romania (0.8%).

Table 3: Teleworking in EU Member States and Iceland, 2006

	Men		Women	
	Usually	Sometimes	Usually	Sometimes
EU27	3.8	8.4	4.9	7.1
EU15	4.3	9.4	5.4	7.6
BE	8.6	8.8	8.3	7.2
BG	1.9	2.5	2.0	3.8
CZ	2.5	6.3	4.2	5.0
DK	2.9	28.6	4.5	21.8
DE	3.7	10.7	4.5	7.3
EE	4.5 u	4.8 u	4.1 u	5.5 u
IE	8.2 p	6.6 p	4.1 p	4.3 p
EL	1.0	2.4	2.2	3.5
ES	2.8	2.5	2.8	2.1
FR	8.6	9.7	11.6	6.5

	Men		Women	
	Usually	Sometimes	Usually	Sometimes
IT	3.7	1.8	3.5	1.3
CY	–	–	1.0 u	–
LV	2.0 u	3.5	3.2	4.4
LT	1.5 u	2.2 u	1.6 u	3.7 u
LU	5.7	1.6 u	10.1	1.1 u
HU	1.7	4.5	2.1	5.3
MT	3.0 u	4.4 u	6.0 u	6.2 u
NL	5.7	– u	5.8	– u
AT	8.8	12.7	11.2	8.0
PL	2.2	6.8	3.0	9.8
PT	0.7	4.2	1.4	2.8
RO	0.5	0.2 u	0.8	0.3 u
SI	3.6	6.7	7.1	8.2
SK	3.5	4.1	4.6	4.7
FI	9.9	9.5	8.9	6.6
SE	2.6	11.2	2.6	6.8
UK	1.6 u	26.8 u	4.1	22.5
IS	11.9	27.3	10.6 u	23.9 u
NO	5.5	7.8	2.9	6.1
CH	2.0	12.8	6.2	13.0

Notes: Population in employment working from home, as a percentage of total employment, for the age group 25–49, by gender.

u = unreliable or uncertain data; p = provisional; – = data not available; IS = Iceland

Source: Eurostat, LFS

There is no doubt that the incidence of teleworking has increased over the past decade. Data presented in the 2010 Eurofound report, *Telework in the European Union (TN0910050S)*, show that there was a steady increase in teleworking (as measured by those who teleworked at least a quarter of the time) in the EU between 2000 and 2005. In 2000, the average proportion of employees involved in telework was 5.3% in EU15 and 4.2% in the then candidate countries. By 2005, this figure had increased to 7% in EU27 (Figure 6).

There are significant differences between Member States, with those experiencing relatively high levels of teleworking also experiencing strong growth. Teleworking grew particularly strongly in the Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Latvia and the Netherlands between 2000 and 2005, although it actually decreased in Cyprus, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania and the UK (very slightly).

Figure 6: Levels of teleworking in the EU, 2005

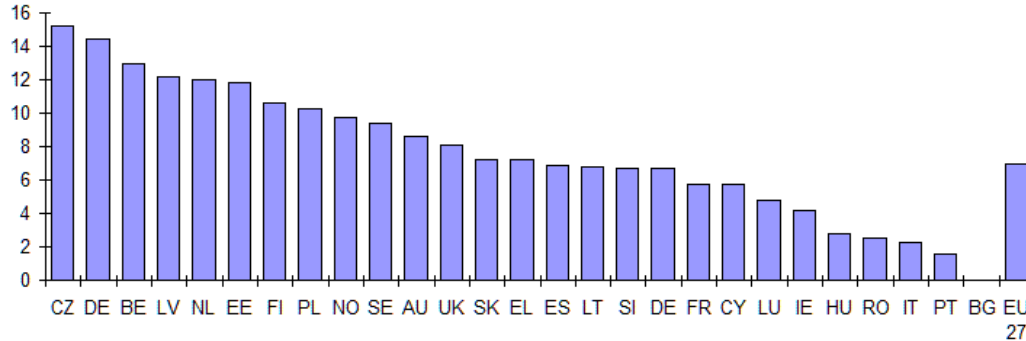


Figure 6: Levels of teleworking in the EU, 2005

Source: [TN0910050S](#)

In terms of the future of teleworking, the Eurofound report notes that there are many factors that favour its expansion such as the growing use of the internet and cost considerations. However, there are also a number of factors hampering the growth of teleworking such as problems related to the security of internet connections (particularly in the case of sensitive data). There is also a concern that teleworkers may be disadvantaged compared with more traditional types of employees in terms of skills updating and access to career progression.

Satisfaction with work–life balance

The Labour Force Survey also asked questions relating to how satisfied employees were with their work–life balance including whether they wanted to work or work more and reduce their caring activities, or whether they wanted to work less and increase their caring activities.

General overall satisfaction with current types of working arrangements was found among both men and women with caring responsibilities. Overall, only 2.3% of individuals in 2005 said that they wanted to work more or start working, while 5.9% said that they wanted to work less and have more time for caring activities (Table 4).

There were some differences between Member States. In countries such as Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Italy, Latvia and Slovenia, a significantly higher proportion of workers than the EU average said that they wanted to work less in order to have more time for caring. In terms of individuals wanting to work more or to start working in order to have less caring responsibilities, the proportions of individuals in France and the Netherlands indicating this were higher than the EU average (7.7% and 5.2% respectively).

Women tended to be less satisfied with their working arrangements than men; 2.9% of women in EU27 indicated that they would like to work more or start working compared with 1.8% of men (3.6% in EU15 compared with 2.2%), while 7% of women in EU27 said that they would like to work less compared with 5% of men (7.5% in EU15 compared with 5.7%).

Table 4: Changing the balance of working life and care responsibilities, 2005

	Wish to work or to work more (and reduce caring time)			Wish to work less to have more time for caring		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
EU27	2.3	1.8	2.9	5.9	5.0	7.0
EU15	2.8	2.2	3.6	6.5	5.7	7.5
BE	1.0	0.6	1.4	4.7	3.3	6.3
BG	0.5	–	:	4.7	2.7	6.7
CZ	0.9	0.4	1.5	8.2	5.7	11.4
DK	0.6	–	0.9	13.8	11.2	16.7
DE	1.5	–	2.8	1.7	1.3	2.1
EE	0.5u	–	:	6.3	4.4	8.3
IE	1.3	0.5	2.2	6.6	4.4	9.4
EL	1.0	0.6	1.6	11.0	6.9	17.1
ES	1.9	1.1	3.1	7.8	7.0	8.9
FR	7.7	8.6	6.7	1.5	0.7	2.4
IT	2.2	1.5	3.2	14.7	14.3	15.3
CY	0.4u	–	–	17.3	11.0	24.8
LV	3.3	–	4.3	22.1	16.5	26.5
LT	–	–	–	2.2	–	3.5
LU	0.6u	–	1.1u	0.8u	–	1.5u
HU	0.8	0.5	1.1	6.0	3.7	8.8
MT	–	–	–	–	–	–
NL	5.2	2.3	8.6	2.8	2.4	3.4
AU	1.9	0.9	3.2	4.3	4.3	4.3
PL	0.2	0.2	0.3u	1.0	0.6	1.5
PT	1.4	0.9	1.9	7.5	4.5	10.9
RO	0.2	–	0.2u	2.3	1.3	3.6
SI	0.6	0.3	0.9u	12.5	10.1	15.2
SK	0.7	0.7	0.8	3.3	0.6	5.2
FI	–	–	–	13.9	12.3	15.6
SE	1.5	0.7	2.5	5.5	5.4	5.6
UK	1.4	0.8	2.1	6.2	4.8	7.8
NO	0.8	– u	1.5	4.6	4.0	5.3

Notes: People with caring responsibilities, as a proportion of all employed persons in the age group 25–49, by gender.

u = unreliable or uncertain data due to sample size; – = data not available.

Source: LFS and ad hoc module

Commentary

The EU labour market has changed considerably over the past few decades, moving towards more flexibility both in terms of working time and work organisation. In addition, female participation rates have increased sharply, though they are not as high as male participation rates and tend to fall where women have childcare or other types of caring responsibilities. This makes the labour market of today a very different world to that of 50 years ago.

The reconciliation of work, family and private life is a core issue for EU employment and health and well-being policy. Helping workers to achieve a better work–life balance and to balance the demands of a job with caring responsibilities will help to increase labour market participation rates for all workers (particularly for women) in line with EU employment policy targets.

Part-time working is a major component of this and this option is taken up by a great many women as a way of combining work with caring responsibilities. From the available data, it would seem that part-time working is often not a voluntary option for men, as many state that the reason for their part-time work is a lack of full-time work.

There is also an array of working time flexibility options on offer from employers including time banking schemes, and work organisation flexibility. These can work well provided they are well managed. Similarly, remote working and teleworking options, usually involving working from home, can add a significant element of flexibility to work in terms of reducing commuting time and allowing employees to be more flexible about when they work. This type of flexibility has grown in recent years and is likely to increase further in the future due to technological advances and the attraction of cost savings on office space for employers. However, this type of flexibility also needs to be well-managed and demands high levels of trust and communication if it is to work well.

Reconciliation of work, family and private life is set to be an ongoing challenge for EU employment policy. In addition to the likely increasing responsibility for care that will take place as a result of the ageing EU population, individuals are beginning to expect more flexibility and work–life balance in their lives in general, in contrast to previous working generations. These trends will ensure that work–life balance issues remain a high-profile topic over the coming years.

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Bibliography

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Annex: Methodology and data sources

The data used in this report come mainly from the European Commission/Eurostat 2009 report, [Reconciliation between work, private and family life in the European Union \(13Mb PDF\)](#), which used data from the Labour Force Survey 2005 ad hoc module, [Reconciliation between work and family life \(3.6Mb PDF\)](#). The report also uses data from the [Establishment Survey on Working Time and Working Life Balance 2004–2005 \(615Kb PDF\)](#) carried out by Eurofound.

Where possible, data have been updated using Eurostat sources found online. The statistics on employment rates can be found under the Eurostat [portal](#) for headline data for the Europe 2020 strategy.

Data on teleworking have also been taken from the Eurofound 2010 comparative analytical report on teleworking in the EU. This report is based on data from Eurofound national correspondents for 26 EU Member States (no comparative information was available for Cyprus) and Norway, as well as findings of the [Fourth European Working Conditions Survey \(EWCS\)](#) conducted by Eurofound.