

Working conditions and sustainable work

# Working conditions in the time of COVID-19: Implications for the future





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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.

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## EU country codes

AT	Austria	ES	Spain	LV	Latvia
BE	Belgium	FI	Finland	MT	Malta
BG	Bulgaria	FR	France	NL	Netherlands
CY	Cyprus	HR	Croatia	PL	Poland
CZ	Czechia	HU	Hungary	PT	Portugal
DE	Germany	IE	Ireland	RO	Romania
DK	Denmark	IT	Italy	SE	Sweden
EE	Estonia	LT	Lithuania	SI	Slovenia
EL	Greece	LU	Luxembourg	SK	Slovakia

## Non-EU country codes

AL	Albania	ME	Montenegro	RS	Serbia
BA	Bosnia and Herzegovina	MK	North Macedonia	CH	Switzerland
XK	Kosovo	NO	Norway	UK	United Kingdom

## Sectoral classification

Sectoral analysis of EWCTS data is based on the NACE Rev. 2 classification. To facilitate the analysis, the 21 NACE sectors were condensed into 10.

EWCTS sector	Corresponding to NACE Rev. 2 sectors
<b>Agriculture</b>	A Agriculture, forestry and fishing 01–03
<b>Industry</b>	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
<b>Construction</b>	F Construction 41–43
<b>Commerce and hospitality</b>	G Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles 45–47 I Accommodation and food service activities 55–56
<b>Transport</b>	H Transportation and storage 49–53
<b>Financial services</b>	K Financial and insurance activities 64–66 L Real estate activities 68
<b>Public administration</b>	O Public administration and defence; compulsory social security 84
<b>Education</b>	P Education 85
<b>Health</b>	Q Human health and social work activities 86–88
<b>Other services</b>	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

## Abbreviations

<b>EU-LFS</b>	European Union Labour Force Survey
<b>EWCS</b>	European Working Conditions Survey
<b>EWCTS</b>	European Working Conditions Telephone Survey
<b>GDP</b>	gross domestic product
<b>ICT</b>	information and communication technologies
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>ISCO</b>	International Standard Classification of Occupations
<b>MSD</b>	musculoskeletal disorder
<b>NACE</b>	<i>Nomenclature statistique des activités économiques dans la Communauté européenne</i> (Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community)
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>OSH</b>	occupational safety and health
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization



# Executive summary

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we live and work. Even though most of the measures taken to curb the spread of the virus have been removed, it continues to have repercussions on the world of work and on life. This report analyses the working lives of workers in Europe in 2021, their working conditions and job quality, and examines the implications for the future. It is based on data collected by the European Working Conditions Telephone Survey (EWCTS) in 2021 in a probability survey conducted in the EU27 and nine other European countries. Eurofound has been monitoring working conditions in Europe through its European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) since 1991. The EWCTS builds on this work. Collection and analysis of the data is part of Eurofound's mission to contribute to the improvement of working conditions.

## Policy context

The improvement of working conditions has been a goal of European integration since the Treaty of Rome (1957). Good working conditions were recognised as a prerequisite for the development of a competitive knowledge-based economy by the Lisbon Strategy (2000) and as essential to achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth by the Europe 2020 strategy. The European Pillar of Social Rights, adopted in 2017, set down 20 principles to guide the Member States 'towards a strong social Europe that is fair, inclusive and full of opportunity'. The Pillar is being delivered through a wide-ranging set of policy packages alongside the implementation of plans for a just transition towards a climate-neutral and digitalised society. The changes ahead will impact on job quality, well-being at work, gender equality and workers' ability to participate in the labour market.

## Key findings

- The EWCTS delivered a host of findings on the aspects of work that affect workers positively (job resources) and negatively (job demands), a sample of which include the following.
  - Physical and psychological hazards: Repetitive hand and arm movements was the most prevalent physical demand, reported by 71% of workers. Almost 1 in 10 had had to contend with verbal abuse at work in the month prior to the interview.
- Work intensity: 49% of workers frequently worked at high speed and 48% to tight deadlines. In addition, 19% of workers reported that their job frequently involved being in emotionally disturbing situations.
- Working time: While roughly half the workforce worked the standard 35–40-hour week, around 19% worked long hours of 48 hours or more per week. In addition, 21% of workers worked at night.
- Social support: 47% of workers had recourse to social support from their colleagues, while 41% received support from their managers.
- Autonomy: 54% of workers were free to change the order of their tasks, 51% were able to change the speed of work, and 49% were able to determine their work methods.
- Participation: Around 6 out of 10 workers were involved in decision-making regarding their work and the organisation that employs them.
- An index of job quality, calculated by comparing job demands with job resources, indicates that some 30% of workers were in 'strained' jobs, where the job demands outweighed the job resources. Strained jobs are associated with poorer well-being, poorer work–life balance, less ability to make ends meet, lower levels of work engagement and less trust within the workplace.
- The data confirm well-known facts regarding the gender segregation of sectors, occupations and workplaces. Only one in five workers worked in a gender-balanced workplace, while just one-third of managers were women.
- Gender disparities in the distribution of paid and unpaid work stood out in the data. Men spent nearly 6 hours more per week than women on paid work while women spent 13 hours more on unpaid work than men; as a result, women worked 7 hours more in total per week than men.
- Many workers were in vulnerable situations: 26% reported difficulty making ends meet, 17% were unable to predict their earnings in the coming three months, and 11% thought they might lose their jobs within six months.
- One-fifth of EU employees did not have a formal structure in their workplace to represent their interests, while 12% employees had neither employee representation nor regular meetings to express their views.

- The analysis of EWCTS data highlighted the different experiences of work during the pandemic depending on workers' own attributes and their place in the workforce. It seems that those who were able to work from home fared best, although they worked long hours and had high levels of work intensity. Frontline workers, by contrast, fared poorly on several fronts; work intensity was common in this group, and it had the highest proportion of workers who felt unrecognised for their work.

## Policy pointers

- The EWCTS findings confirm the ongoing need for policy to address several long-standing issues in the area of working conditions. These include the vulnerability of some employment situations; the lack of formal employee representation in some workplaces; the need to advance worker participation regarding change in the workplace; ensuring decent and predictable earnings from work; and long working hours and work-life imbalances.
- The survey provides evidence of the persistence of gender inequalities in employment, work and the interaction between work and home life. Segregation in employment – sectoral, occupational and in the workplace – and the uneven distribution of paid and unpaid work limit the participation of women in paid work and restrict their career opportunities, affecting their financial security, now and in the future. This calls for a redoubling of efforts to dismantle stereotypes that limit what work men and women do and the pursuit of policies to promote equal sharing of paid and unpaid work in households.
- Good job quality supports well-being and work-life balance. It protects health and can ensure that health status is not an obstacle to engaging in work, which in turn promotes the sustainability of work over the life course. The role of job quality in supporting work engagement and the financial sustainability of work demonstrates that better job quality is not only a goal in itself but is instrumental in achieving other important policy objectives, such as raising living standards and contributing to the economic performance of companies. This centrality of job quality in providing answers to a wide range of key policy challenges suggests that it must be mainstreamed in EU policies.
- EWCTS evidence indicates that working from home, which has largely transmuted into hybrid working arrangements since the pandemic, is not without drawbacks. Management practices and forms of work organisation will need to be adapted to support the development of high-quality hybrid work. A focus on developing their workplace risk assessment skills would enable companies to ensure that work is organised and adequate equipment provided to protect the health and safety of workers when they work remotely.

# Introduction

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that the outbreak of COVID-19 had become a global pandemic. The strict public health restrictions implemented by governments worldwide to contain the spread of the contagion changed the way we lived and worked overnight. With most of those restrictions now lifted and a return of normal life, it is clear that some of the changes we experienced between 2020 and early 2022 in how we work are set to reverberate into the post-pandemic period.

This report sets out to describe job quality and the quality of working life in Europe in 2021, when the continent was still in the grip of the pandemic. As well as providing a snapshot of working life during this extraordinary period, the report aims to derive lessons for the future, particularly in relation to the ways in which the pandemic has left enduring marks on how we work and the implications for work organisation, the quality of work, and the interaction between work and private life, including work–life balance.

The report is based on the analysis of data collected by the European Working Conditions Telephone Survey (EWCTS), a Europe-wide survey conducted in 36 European countries<sup>1</sup> between March and November 2021. This representative survey took as a starting point the well-established European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS). The seventh wave of this survey was due to take place in the spring of 2020, but the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic made the planned face-to-face interviews impossible. The survey questionnaire was, therefore, adapted to allow for remote data collection through computer-assisted telephone interviews. The resulting EWCTS, based on 72,000 interviews, provides a snapshot of working life in 2021.

In addition to forcing a change in the survey mode, the pandemic altered the pool of potential respondents to the survey, as well as their living and working conditions. Before delving into the working lives of those respondents, however, and to put the findings of this report in context, this introduction summarises key labour market trends between 2019 and 2021 based on data from the European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS). Developments between 2019 and 2020 are included, because these influenced the labour market in 2021. EU-LFS data are supplemented by media monitoring data on relevant public policy measures gathered in the period during which the survey was

carried out in 2021. The measures analysed include, in particular, nursery and school closures, teleworking mandates and the availability of schemes aimed at protecting employment (such as temporary unemployment and short-time working schemes), as these were the factors that arguably had the most significant impact on employment and working conditions during the pandemic.

## Evolution of key labour market indicators

The European Commission's Winter 2022 Economic Forecast shows that, after a 5.9% year-on-year decline in gross domestic product (GDP) in 2020, 2021 saw a recovery, with a 5.3% year-on-year increase in GDP. The Commission forecast 4% GDP growth in 2022 (European Commission, 2022).

### Changes in employment

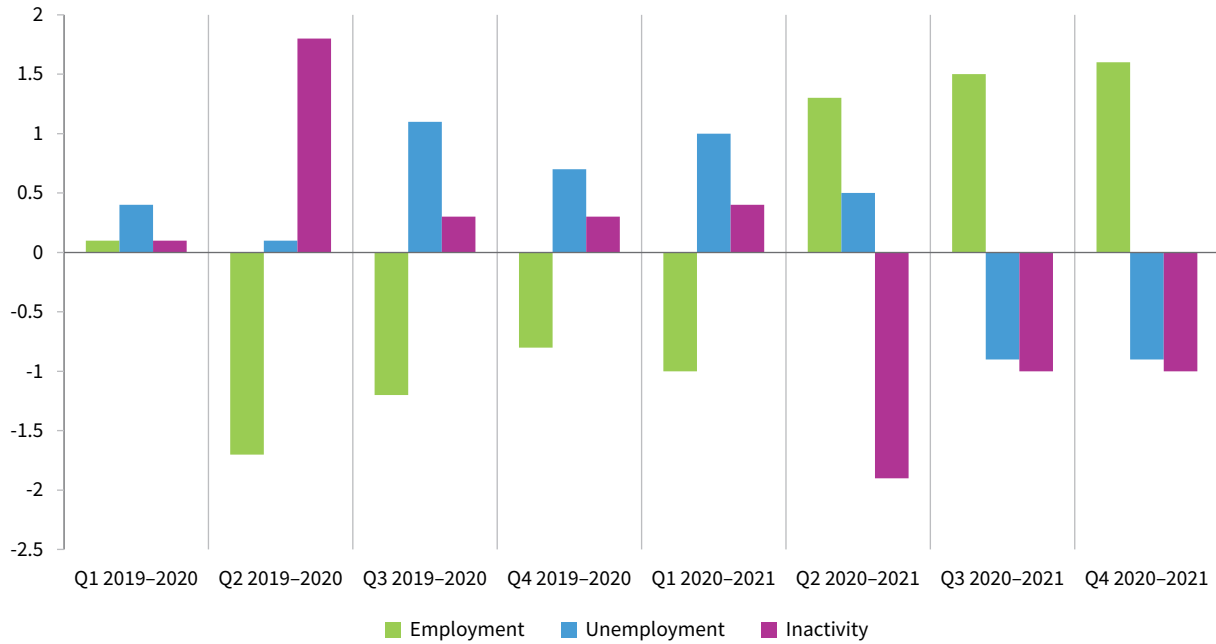
Key labour market indicators mirror this economic trend and provide an indication of the effectiveness of the measures taken at EU and national levels to cushion the impact of the pandemic on businesses, workers and society. The EU27 annual employment rate fell from 72.7% in 2019 to 71.7% in 2020 but rebounded to 73.1% in 2021. The number of inactive individuals (those not working and, unlike unemployed people, not available to work) in the EU was lower in 2021 than in 2019, after rising significantly in 2020. However, the unemployment rate, at 7%, was higher in 2021 than in 2019, when it stood at 6.7%.

Given the different waves of the pandemic and associated policy measures, a quarterly assessment of labour market data helps to provide clearer insights into the evolution of employment and working conditions during 2019–2021.

As Figure 1 shows, the EU experienced a year-on-year rise in unemployment and inactivity and a decline in employment rates from Q2 2019 until Q2 2021. While there was still a small increase in unemployment in Q2 2021, the inactivity rate dropped significantly and continued to do so in subsequent quarters compared with the previous year. A year-on-year rise in employment was also recorded from Q2 2021, while unemployment began to decline from Q3 2021 onwards.

<sup>1</sup> The survey was conducted in the 27 EU Member States, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

**Figure 1: Changes in unemployment, employment and inactivity rates, year on year by quarter, EU27, 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 (percentage points)**



Note: Data for the 15–64 years age group.

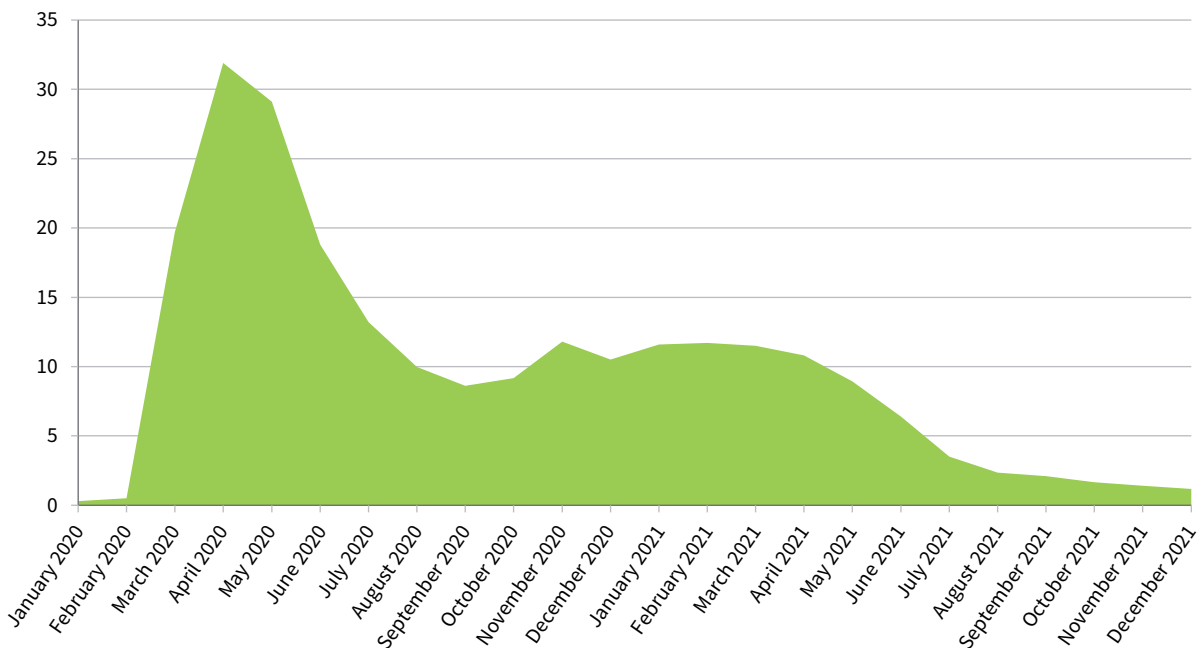
Source: Eurostat, EU-LFS (lfsq\_ipga, lfsq\_ergan and lfsq\_urgan), accessed in 2022; authors’ calculations

Overall, the rise in the unemployment rate and the drop in the employment rate were smaller than those that took place during the 2008–2010 economic and financial crisis. In addition, the changes in these indicators were much more muted than those experienced in the United States, which did not introduce schemes to protect employment and support businesses across the board (Eurofound and European Commission Joint Research Centre, 2021).

### Protecting employment

Over 30 million jobs in the EU were protected by employment-support measures – either short-time working schemes or temporary unemployment schemes – during the strict lockdowns across the EU in April–May 2020 (Figure 2). This number had fallen by 2021. Between January and April 2021, over 10 million EU workers were in receipt of such support. This

**Figure 2: Total number of jobs supported by government measures, by month, EU27, 2020–2021 (millions)**



Source: Eurostat, ‘Jobs benefiting from Covid-19 governmental support measures’ dataset

number had declined to 3.5 million by July 2021 and just under 1.2 million by December 2021.

In addition to protecting employment, Member States implemented a wide range of measures to support businesses by protecting them and their employees from the impact of forced full or partial closures necessitated by public health measures. These measures – and the fact that a significant share of workers were able to work from home – served to shield the labour market from more significant job losses (Eurofound, 2020a, 2021a).

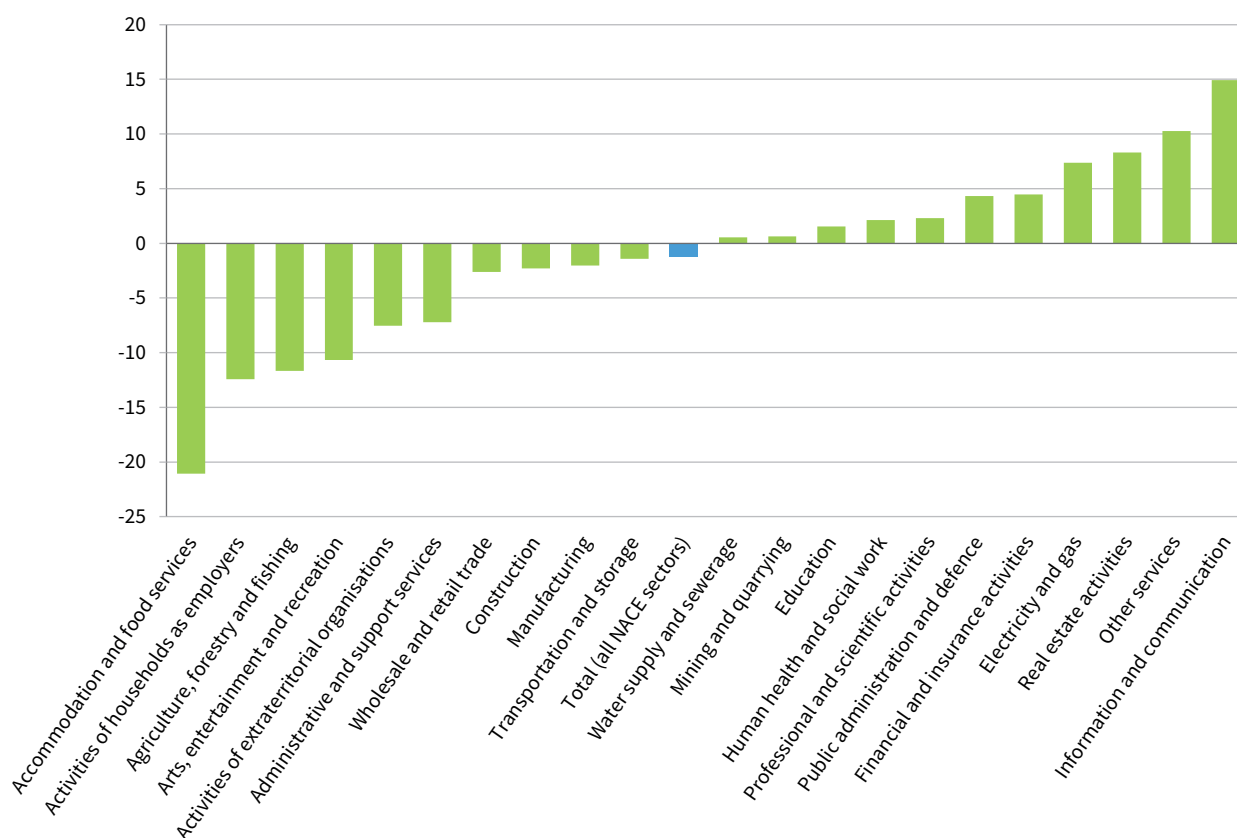
### Sectors and occupations most impacted

Due to the nature of the pandemic and the associated public health restrictions, certain economic sectors

witnessed more significant reductions in employment than others (Figure 3). Looking at the sectors as defined by NACE,<sup>2</sup> accommodation and food service activities recorded the greatest impacts, followed by activities of households as employers; agriculture, forestry and fishing; and arts, entertainment and recreation. However, some sectors faced rising demand and as a result recorded increases in employment levels. This was particularly evident in the information and communication sector.

At occupational level, a quarter-on-quarter trend comparison between Q2 2019 and Q2 2021 of the major ISCO-08 occupational groups<sup>3</sup> shows that there was an increase in employment among professionals and

**Figure 3: Sectoral shifts in employment, by NACE sector, year on year by quarter, EU27, Q2 2019–Q2 2021 (percentage points)**

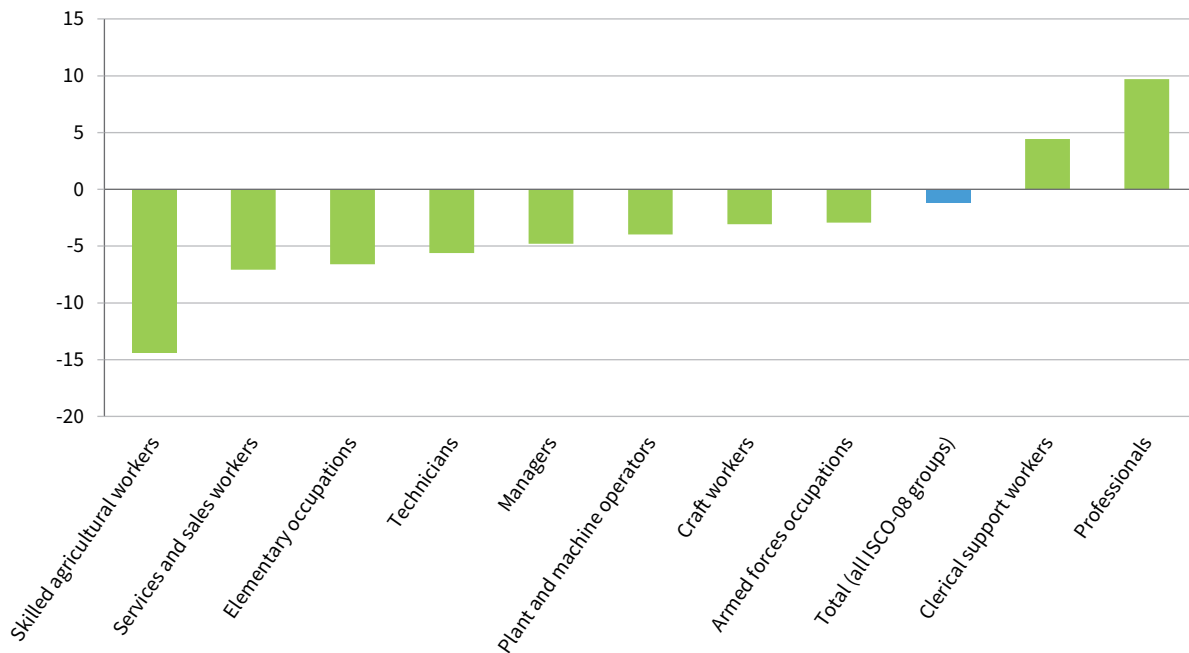


Source: Eurostat, EU-LFS (lfsq\_eisn2), extracted in 2022

<sup>2</sup> NACE (*Nomenclature statistique des activités économiques dans la Communauté européenne*) is the EU statistical classification system of economic sectors.

<sup>3</sup> ISCO (the International Standard Classification of Occupations) is a classification of occupations developed by the International Labour Organization. ISCO-08 is the latest version.

**Figure 4: Occupational shifts in employment, year on year by quarter, EU27, Q2 2019–Q2 2021 (percentage points)**



Source: Eurostat, EU-LFS (lfsq\_eisn2), extracted in 2022

clerical support workers (Figure 4). Employment in all other occupational groups declined, with skilled agricultural workers impacted most, followed by services and sales workers and elementary occupations.

### Additional indicators

Given that the public health restrictions affected sectors differently and that governments intervened to preserve jobs, the impact of the crisis on employment was muted, with a small rise in the unemployment rate. This means that the usual labour market indicators are insufficient to assess the implications of the pandemic for employment and working conditions. In addition to changes in employment, trends in actual hours worked and temporary absences from work, as well as trends in teleworking, form part of the picture of how working lives changed in 2020 and 2021. These trends were significantly influenced by the introduction of specific public policies mandating or recommending working from home, as well as by the measures to preserve employment implemented in each Member State. Media monitoring of pandemic policy interventions during the survey period demonstrates significant differences between Member States in relation to working from home mandates and the use of employment-protection measures.

#### Changes in hours worked and temporary absences from work

Across the EU, actual hours worked declined on average by one hour per week for all employees aged 15–64

between Q2 2019 and Q2 2020. There were significant differences between Member States, with Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Portugal and Romania witnessing the most significant reductions. Between Q2 2020 and Q2 2021, actual weekly hours worked increased again almost to pre-pandemic levels.

Temporary absences from work (largely supported by temporary unemployment schemes) rose by close to 9% between Q2 2019 and Q2 2020, but declined by 8.5% in the following year. The most significant rises in temporary absences in this period were recorded in Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Slovakia and Spain. In the majority of Member States, the year-on-year reduction in temporary absences between 2020 and 2021 was smaller than the increase in 2019–2020. This reflects the easing of restrictions and improvements in the labour market situation, which, however, did not lead to a fall to pre-pandemic levels (Eurofound, 2022a).

These statistics should be interpreted in the context of employment-protection schemes that were in place for over 80% of the survey period in 14 Member States (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain and Sweden) and over 50% of this period in 5 Member States (Bulgaria, Hungary, Malta, Poland and Slovenia). Only in Estonia and Lithuania were such schemes no longer operational when the survey was conducted, which may have impacted on the share of survey respondents reporting reduced hours or temporary unemployment.

## Changes in place of work

Another significant change arising from pandemic restrictions relates to the location of work. Prior to the pandemic, in 2019, 5.4% of workers usually worked from home, with an additional 9% sometimes doing so. In 2020, the percentage of teleworkers increased to 20.6%, with 12% of this group saying that they usually worked from home. Additional data analysis shows that telework was more common among workers who were self-employed, female, young or living in an urban area (Eurofound and European Commission Joint Research Centre, 2021; Eurofound, 2022a). Media monitoring of policy developments during the pandemic shows substantial variation across the Member States relating to requirements or recommendations on working from home.

- In four Member States (Belgium, France, Ireland and Portugal), for at least 55% of the survey period workers who could work from home were required to do so. In Ireland, this requirement was in place during the whole survey period.
- In nine Member States (Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Romania), telework was either mandatory or encouraged throughout the survey period.

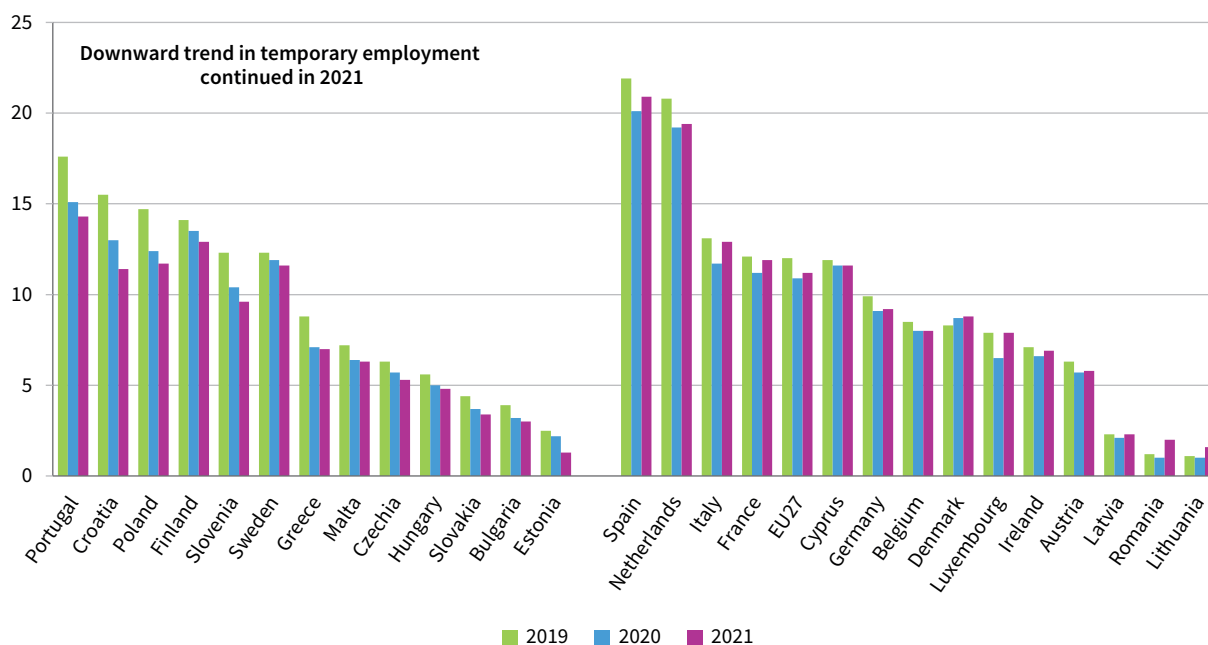
- Only two Member States (Croatia and Estonia) imposed virtually no restrictions on the location of work during the survey period.

## Workers most impacted

As was the case during previous crises, temporary employees were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. In 2020 alone, the reduction in temporary contracts accounted for 85% of the decline in aggregate EU employment (Eurofound and European Commission Joint Research Centre, 2021). Figure 5 shows that the downward trend in the share of temporary employees as a proportion of the total number of employees continued in 2021 in close to half of Member States.

Workers aged 25–54 years experienced much lower declines in employment between 2019 and 2020 than the youngest workers (in the 15–24 years age group); within the latter group, the decline in employment was somewhat greater among women than men (Table 1). However, the rebound in employment between 2020 and 2021 was strongest for the youngest age group. In terms of actual weekly hours worked, the largest year-on-year reduction between Q2 2019 and Q2 2020 was seen among men aged 55–64, followed by men aged 25–54.

**Figure 5: Temporary employees as a proportion of all employees, EU Member States, 2019–2021 (%)**



Note: Data for the 20–64 years age group.

Source: Eurostat (tesem110), extracted in 2022

**Table 1: Change in employment levels and weekly hours worked, year on year by quarter, by age and gender, EU27, 2019–2020 and 2020–2021**

	Employment (%)		Working time (hours)	
	Q2 2019–Q2 2020	Q2 2020–Q2 2021	Q2 2019–Q2 2020	Q2 2020–Q2 2021
<b>15–24 years</b>				
Men	-9	6	-0.1	0
Women	-10	7	-0.2	-0.1
<b>25–54 years</b>				
Men	-3	0	-1.3	1.1
Women	-3	1	-0.9	1.1
<b>55–64 years</b>				
Men	-3	0	-1.5	1.3
Women	2	2	-0.7	0.8

Source: Eurostat, EU-LFS, authors' calculations

Another aspect impacting people's working (and private) lives during the pandemic was the closure or restricted opening of schools and nurseries, which led to women in particular shouldering additional caring duties. Between the first and second quarters of 2020, the transition from employment to inactivity (as a percentage of total employment) increased more for women (by 0.9 percentage points) than for men (by 0.7 percentage points), suggesting that women may have dropped out of the labour market to look after their children (Eurofound, 2020b).

Among the Member States, Greece and Hungary experienced the longest spells of full nursery closure during the survey period, while nurseries were fully open in Spain and Sweden. Schools were fully open in Spain during the survey period and were open for more than 60% of the survey period in Belgium, Cyprus, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Slovakia and Slovenia.

### Different outcomes from different interventions

The COVID-19 pandemic and the mitigation measures taken clearly created a very specific context for workers' employment and working conditions in 2021. Despite the shared implications for all countries and the high degree of commonality across the types of policy approaches taken, there are significant differences between EU Member States and other countries included in the survey in terms of how they responded to the crisis. These differences impacted the sectors and occupations of the survey respondents and their working conditions. The experience of living and working during the pandemic was thus greatly dependent on the specific mitigation measures taken and whether individual workers were able to work from home, remained on the front line or saw their working hours curtailed.

## Objectives and structure of the report

The objective of this report is to provide a picture of job quality and the quality of working life in Europe in 2021. In doing so, it aims to shed light on differences in the experience of work during the COVID-19 pandemic across different groups of workers. It also aims to discover the possible implications of developments in 2021 for the future of work.

The report is structured in six chapters.

Chapter 1 describes the main characteristics of the workforce in 2021, focusing on the attributes that were most influential in determining how workers experienced the crisis. The chapter also introduces four distinct 'COVID groups', which constitute an important element of the analyses in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed description of job quality in 2021 across six distinct dimensions. For each dimension, it differentiates between the features of work classed as demands because they require effort and the features that can be understood as resources because they help to reduce the effort required of workers. An index – the job quality index – was constructed based on the demands and resources examined and is applied to identify the extent of job strain among workers and its effect on them.

Chapter 3 focuses on additional key features of workplaces that affect job quality. Starting with the question of who or what influences what workers do during their working day, the roles of customers, supervisors and computerised systems are examined. The type of work organisation in which workers perform their tasks is also examined, distinguishing between those that enable workers to exercise autonomy and participate at organisational level and those that limit



employee involvement. The chapter also looks at employee representation, whether through formal bodies or through direct participation in meetings, and the gender balance of workplaces, including the gender of the boss.

Chapter 4 provides insights into the reconciliation of work and private life, examining several facets: working time spent in paid work; total working time, combining paid and unpaid work; working time preferences expressed by workers; work–life balance; and work–life conflicts.

Chapter 5 turns to the question of the extent to which Europe’s workforce is ready for the future. It examines issues around the financial sustainability of work, trust and cooperation in workplaces, workers’ engagement with their work, and health and well-being in the workplace. A final section addresses the potential impact of the greening of the economy on job quality.

The final chapter summarises the findings and presents conclusions.

**Note on gender:** In the analysis of the EWCTS 2021 data, respondents are categorised according to gender on the basis of the following question: *‘Would you describe yourself as ... a man; a woman; or would you describe yourself in another way?’* The number of respondents who described themselves ‘in another way’ was not sufficient to allow for separate analysis. The terms ‘male’ and ‘female’ are used adjectivally to describe characteristics and experiences relating to men and women, respectively. A brief discussion of findings on non-binary people is presented in Chapter 5.



# 1 Europe's workforce in 2021

This chapter addresses the characteristics of work and employment that played an important role in determining how workers fared during the COVID-19 pandemic. It examines:

- the persistent gender segregation in sectors and occupations, which meant that, when public health restrictions were applied differently across sectors, the impact on men and women often differed
- household composition, because the presence of young children in a household placed an additional burden of care responsibilities on parents, especially women, when educational and care facilities were closed
- employment status – specifically temporary employment and self-employment – as workers with these statuses often lack job security and are not fully covered by social protection, an important consideration during the pandemic, when government support depended on employment and contractual status
- working hours, because the workforce split according to hours worked, some working more hours and others working fewer hours than stated in their employment contract
- place of work, to document the different locations of work during the pandemic and to capture those working remotely, including in 'hybrid arrangements' (home and office)

The last section introduces four groups of workers, the COVID groups; members of each have similar characteristics and are distinct from workers in the other groups. These groups will be used throughout the report to explore differences in working conditions across the working population.

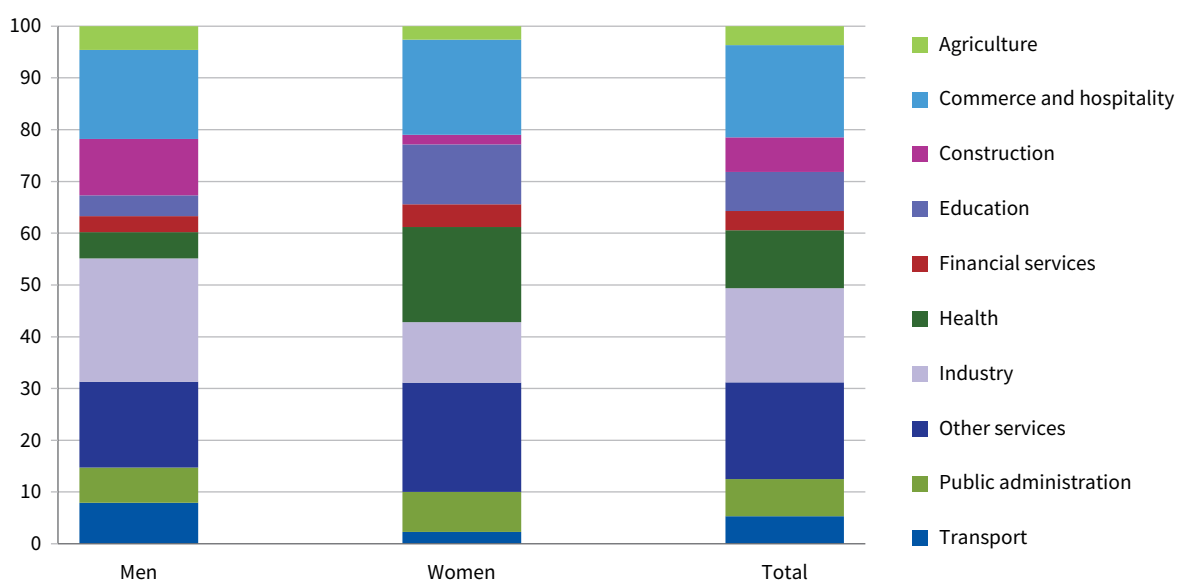
## A gender-segregated labour market

### Sectoral segregation

Although employment rates of women have increased across Europe in recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic has impeded this progress. More women than men lost their jobs at the beginning of the pandemic, mostly because they outnumbered men in the sectors that were most severely affected by lockdowns. The women and men remaining in the labour market in 2021 continued to work in highly gender-segregated sectors and occupations.

The uneven distribution of men and women across the various economic sectors in 2021 is shown in Figure 6. Employment in the industry, transport and construction sectors was more important for men than for women, whereas the health and education sectors were clearly more important for women's employment than for men's.

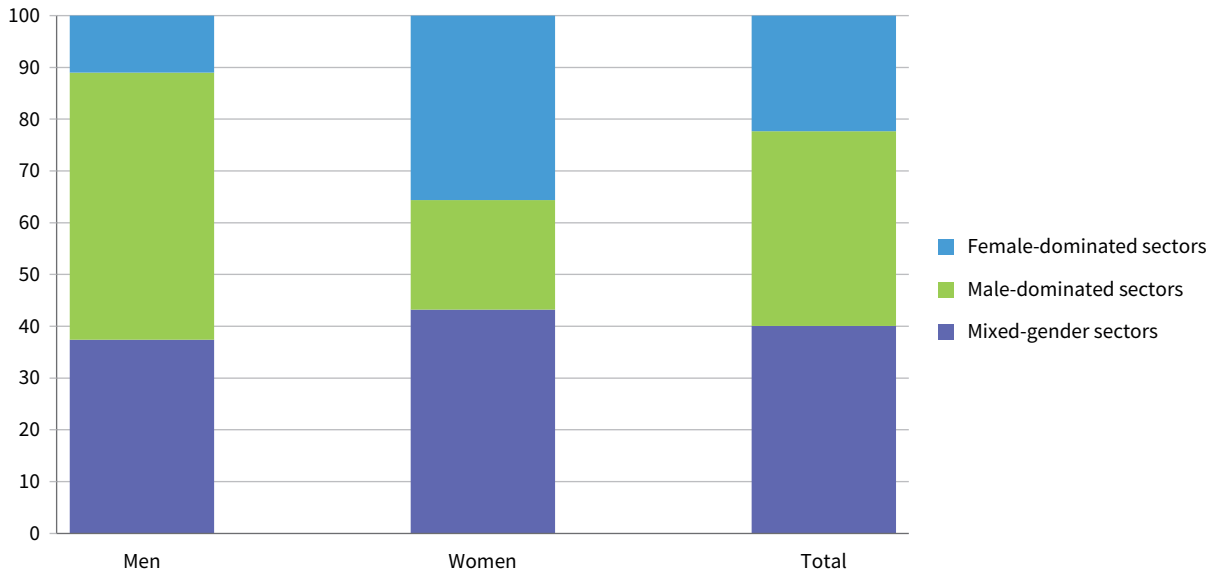
Figure 6: Shares of sectors in total employment, by gender, EU27 (%)



Note: Based on NACE Rev. 2. Sectors have been simplified; see p. v for the full list of sectors.

Source: EWCTS 2021

**Figure 7: Distribution of men, women and all workers according to sectoral gender-balance category, EU27 (%)**



Note: Based on NACE Rev. 2 main sectors.  
Source: EWCTS 2021

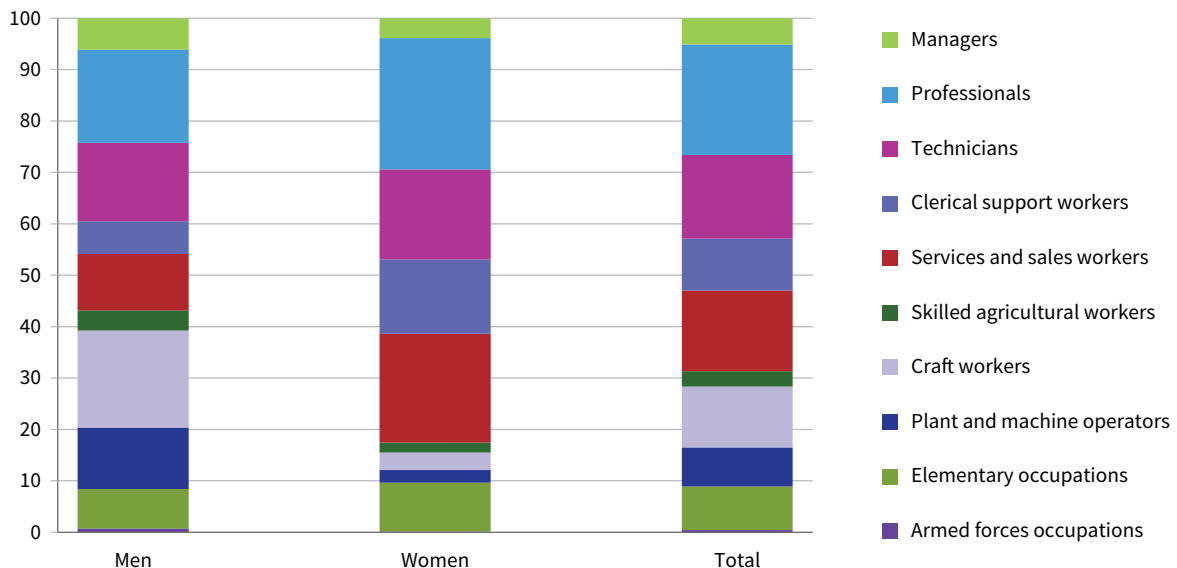
Workers can be classified according to whether they work in male-dominated, female-dominated or mixed-gender sectors. A sector is considered male or female dominated if over 60% of its workers are men or women; it is considered mixed gender when men or women constitute between 40% and 60% of the workforce. Figure 7 shows the distinct patterns of how male and female workers were distributed across male-dominated, female-dominated and mixed-gender sectors. More than half of men worked in male-dominated sectors (52%), while most women worked in mixed-gender (43%) or female-dominated sectors (36%). The share of women working in male-dominated

sectors (21%) was double of that of men working in female-dominated sectors (11%). Overall, only 40% of the EU’s workforce work in mixed-gender sectors.

### Occupational segregation

The occupational structure in the EU was no less gender-segregated than the sectoral structure. Men and women were distributed differently across occupational groups – shown in Figure 8 – with larger shares of women than men among professionals and services and sales workers and larger shares of men than women among craft workers and plant and machine operators.

**Figure 8: Shares of occupations in total employment, by gender, EU27 (%)**



Source: EWCTS 2021

The EWCTS data were further classified according to the predominant gender in each of the 43 ISCO-08 sub-major groups to determine their gender balance. Like NACE sectors, occupations with a share of women or men between 40% and 60% are considered mixed gender, while those with a share of women or men over 60% are considered female dominated or male dominated (the complete list of occupations and their gender balance classifications is provided in Annex 2).

The EWCTS data show that in 2021 more than half of the working population in the EU worked in occupations dominated by their own gender: nearly one-third of the working population was men working in male-dominated occupations, while another quarter was women working in female-dominated occupations. Women and men working in mixed-gender occupations represented no more than one-quarter of the working population. Men working in female-dominated occupations and women working in male-dominated occupations represented 10% and 8%, respectively, of the total working population (Figure 9).

Top of the list of female-dominated occupations are personal care workers and cleaners and helpers; over 80% of workers in these occupations are women, while between 94% and 97% of drivers and mobile plant operators, metal and machinery workers, and building workers are men. The share of workers in mixed-gender occupations is more than 30% of the workforce only in Luxembourg (31%). In Bulgaria and Romania, this share is less than 20%.

## Household characteristics

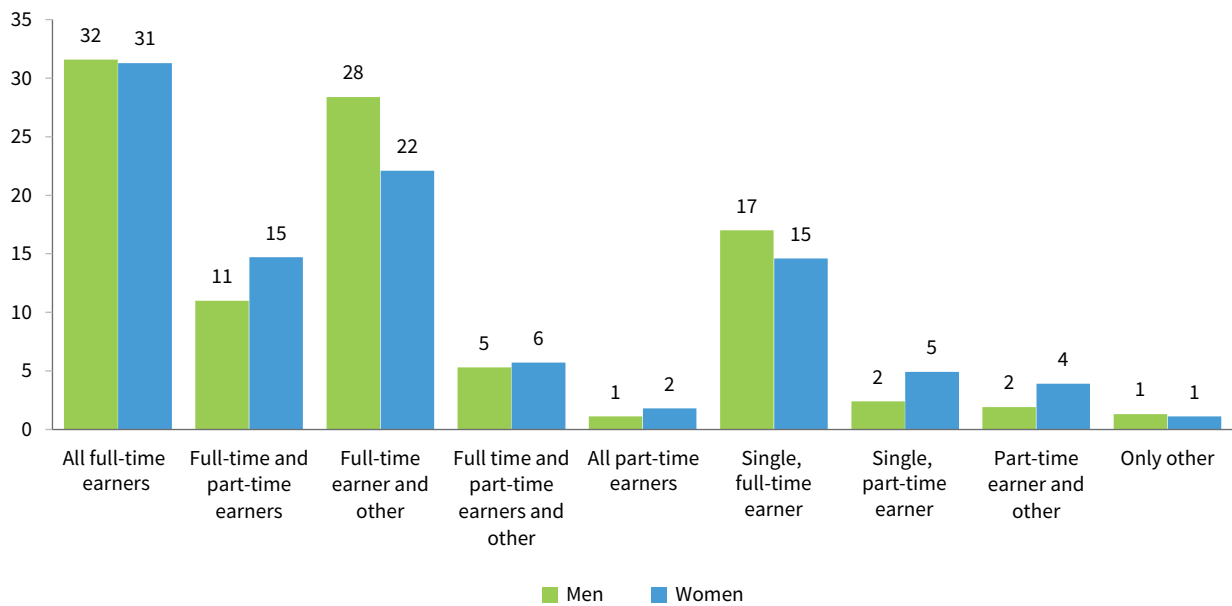
Many of the preferences of and choices that are made by workers are shaped by the composition of their households and the characteristics of their household members. Decisions on working part time or full time and on the distribution of paid and unpaid work, for example, are quite different if the household consists of a single member or a couple or if there are children or other dependents in the household. Household composition affects not only a person's financial situation but also their perceived work-life balance and work-life conflicts.

**Figure 9: Distribution of men and women according to occupational gender-balance category, EU27 (%)**



Source: EWCTS 2021

Figure 10: Composition of households, by full-time and part-time employment and by gender, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

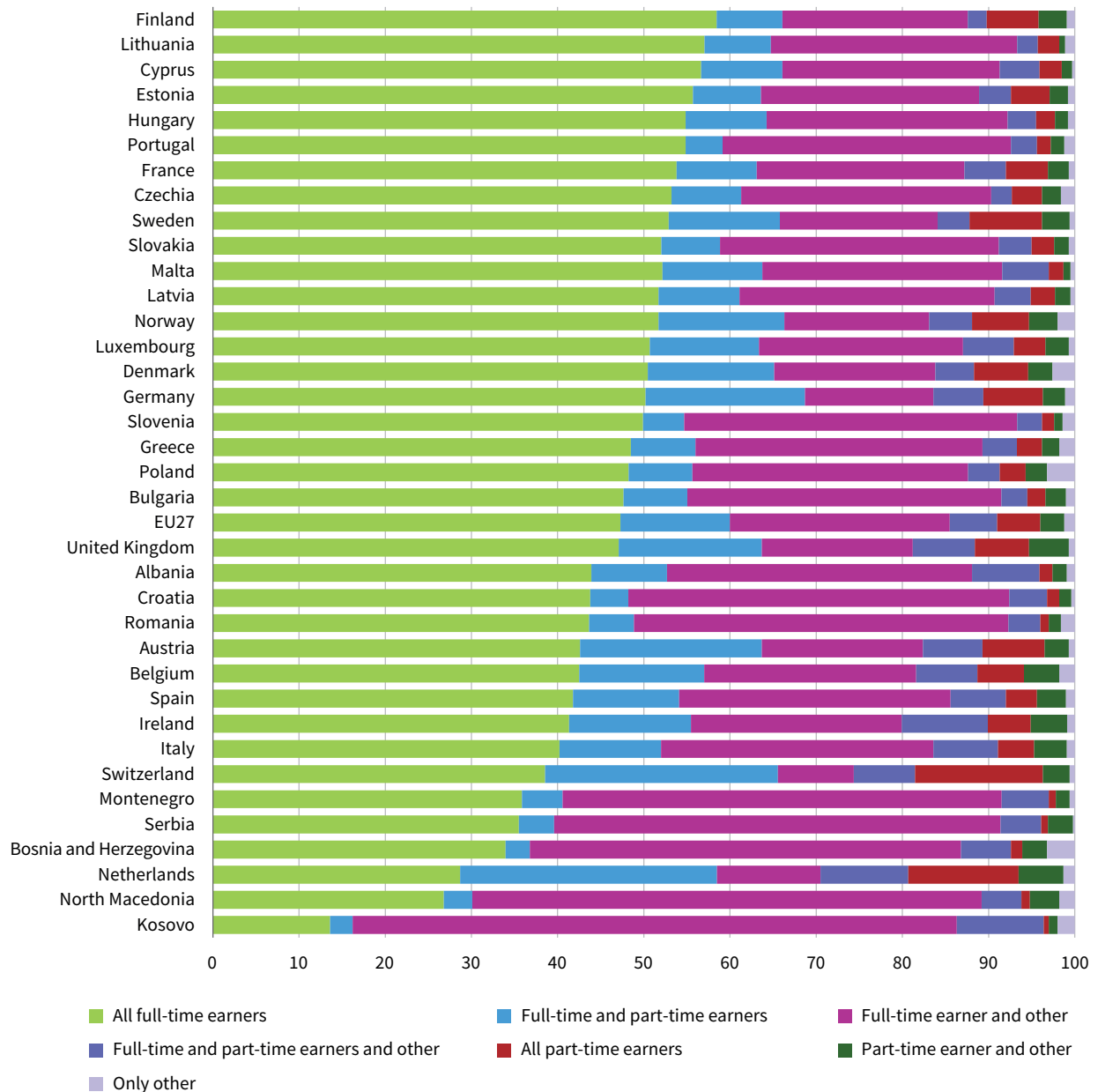
In 2021, nearly half of EU workers lived in one- or two-person households, while 1 in 10 workers lived in a household with 5 or more members. Half of workers lived in households with two adults (with or without children). Around two-thirds of workers (65%) lived in households without children, 18% lived in households with one child, 13.3% lived in households with two children and only 4% lived in households with three or more children. There were more than twice as many single mothers as single fathers (4.3% and 1.7%, respectively).

Workers' households can also be categorised according to their members' participation in employment. Nearly one-third of women and men lived in households where all adults were working full time, but more women (15%) than men (11%) lived in households with members working both full time and part time (Figure 10). Around a quarter of men and women lived in a household where at least one member working full time and one or more others were unemployed, on sick leave or studying or did not specify their activity (28% of men and 22% of women). Among single-person households,

more men (17%) than women (15%) were working full time, while the share of women who were part-time workers (5%) was more than double that of men (2%). Similarly, double the share of women (4%) compared with men (2%) lived in a household with at least one member working part time and one or more members not in employment. Slightly more than 1% of women and men were unemployed, on sick leave or studying or did not specify their activity.

The variation of household types among countries is shown in Figure 11. Finland had the largest share of households with all adult members working full time (58%), followed by Lithuania (57%). In Kosovo, all adults were working full time in only 14% of households, but in nearly 70% of households at least one person was working full time and at least one other member was unemployed, on sick leave or studying or did not specify their activity. The Netherlands and Switzerland stood out as countries with the highest shares of households where all earners worked part time (13% and 15%, respectively) and households that had both full-time and part-time workers (30% and 27%, respectively).

**Figure 11: Composition of households, by full-time and part-time employment, EU Member States and other European countries (%)**



**Note:** Single, full-time earner households are included in the 'All full-time earners' category, and single, part-time earner households are included in the 'All part-time earners' category.

**Source:** EWCTS 2021

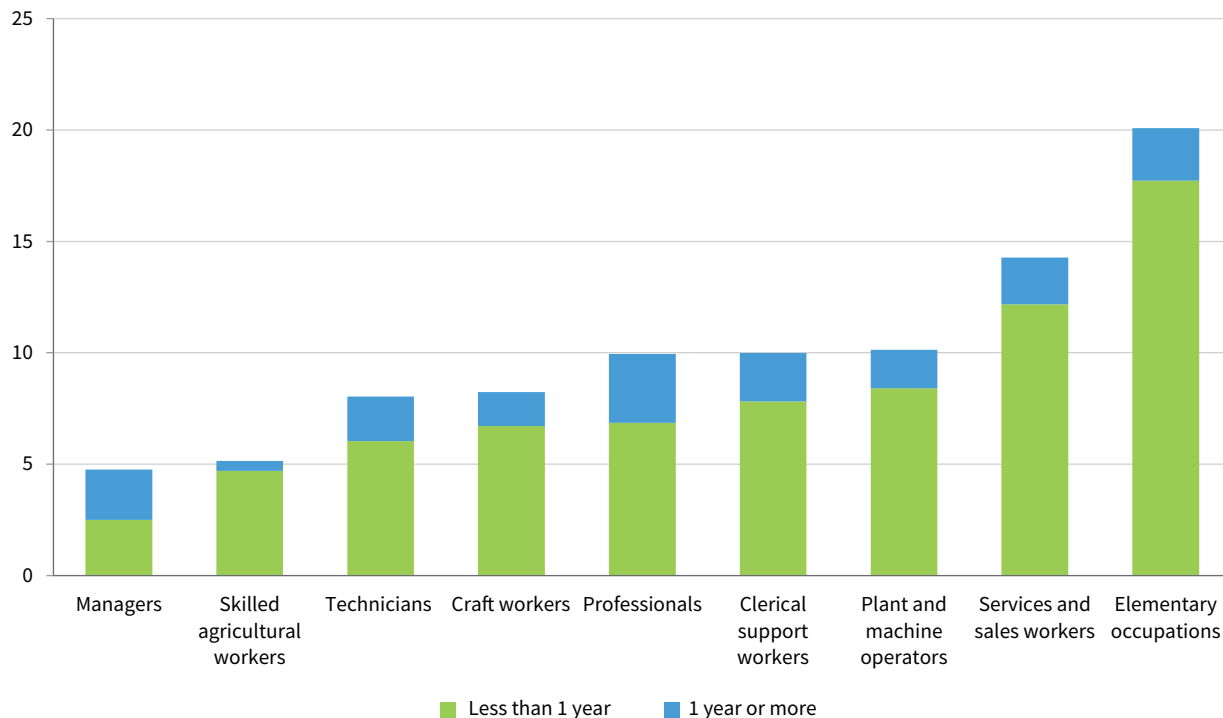
## Employment status

Working conditions differ depending on whether someone is an employee or self-employed; among employees, there are differences depending on whether the employee has a permanent (indefinite) contract, a temporary (fixed-term) contract or another type of contract. As temporary employees and self-employed individuals were particularly exposed to the vicissitudes of the pandemic, some findings on these workers are described next.

## Temporary employment

Temporary employment can in certain circumstances be perceived as a precarious form of work, and entering into a temporary contract can sometimes have negative consequences for working conditions and labour rights (Eurofound, 2015a, 2017a). The pandemic has proven this point, as it was primarily temporary jobs that were lost in its first year.

Figure 12: Workers with temporary contracts, by occupational group and duration of contract, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

Temporary workers are distinguished by contract length, with short-term temporary contracts of less than a year being particularly insecure. In 2021, short-term temporary contracts were more common in certain sectors, including education (constituting 14% of employment in the sector), health (11%), and commerce and hospitality (10%). The most substantial drop in temporary employment during the pandemic occurred in the commerce and hospitality sector. Longer temporary contracts (of more than one year) were, on the other hand, most likely to be found in public administration (5%) and education (4%).

In terms of occupation, shown in Figure 12, workers in elementary occupations were most likely to be employed on short-term temporary contracts (comprising 18% of this group), followed by services and sales workers (12%), plant and machine operators (8%), and clerical support workers (8%). Longer temporary contracts are more common among professionals (3%). These differences are similar for men and women, but women are overall more likely to work as temporary employees than men (10% of women compared with 7% of men).

## Self-employment

Self-employment remains high on the policy agenda in the EU, especially as regards social protection and interest representation for self-employed individuals, and bogus self-employment. These issues have become even more pressing during the pandemic, as many self-employed workers did not have access to

public support measures at its outset. One feature of governments' responses to COVID-19 was the extension of income support to groups not previously covered by social protection, including the self-employed. This demonstrated the possibility of finding (at least temporary) solutions to long-standing policy debates in the face of impending hardship for groups often most directly affected by economic crises (Eurofound, 2020a).

While most self-employed people enjoy good working conditions and job quality, as previous Eurofound research has shown, self-employment is not always a choice; people are often forced to become self-employed because of a lack of alternative employment options (Eurofound, 2017b).

Self-employed workers can be broken down into those who are self-employed with employees (4.5% of the working population) and solo self-employed, who do not have employees (9.5%). The latter can be further distinguished by whether or not they are economically dependent on one or a few clients, with little or no autonomy in terms of running their business. These solo self-employed workers in many ways resemble dependent employees but often lack the labour rights of employees, including access to social protection (such as unemployment benefits and accident or sickness benefits). This type of self-employment is often characterised by low income and financial insecurity and has been particularly affected by the pandemic and the associated public health measures (Eurofound, 2021a). Only 1.3% of the overall workforce, or 9% of solo



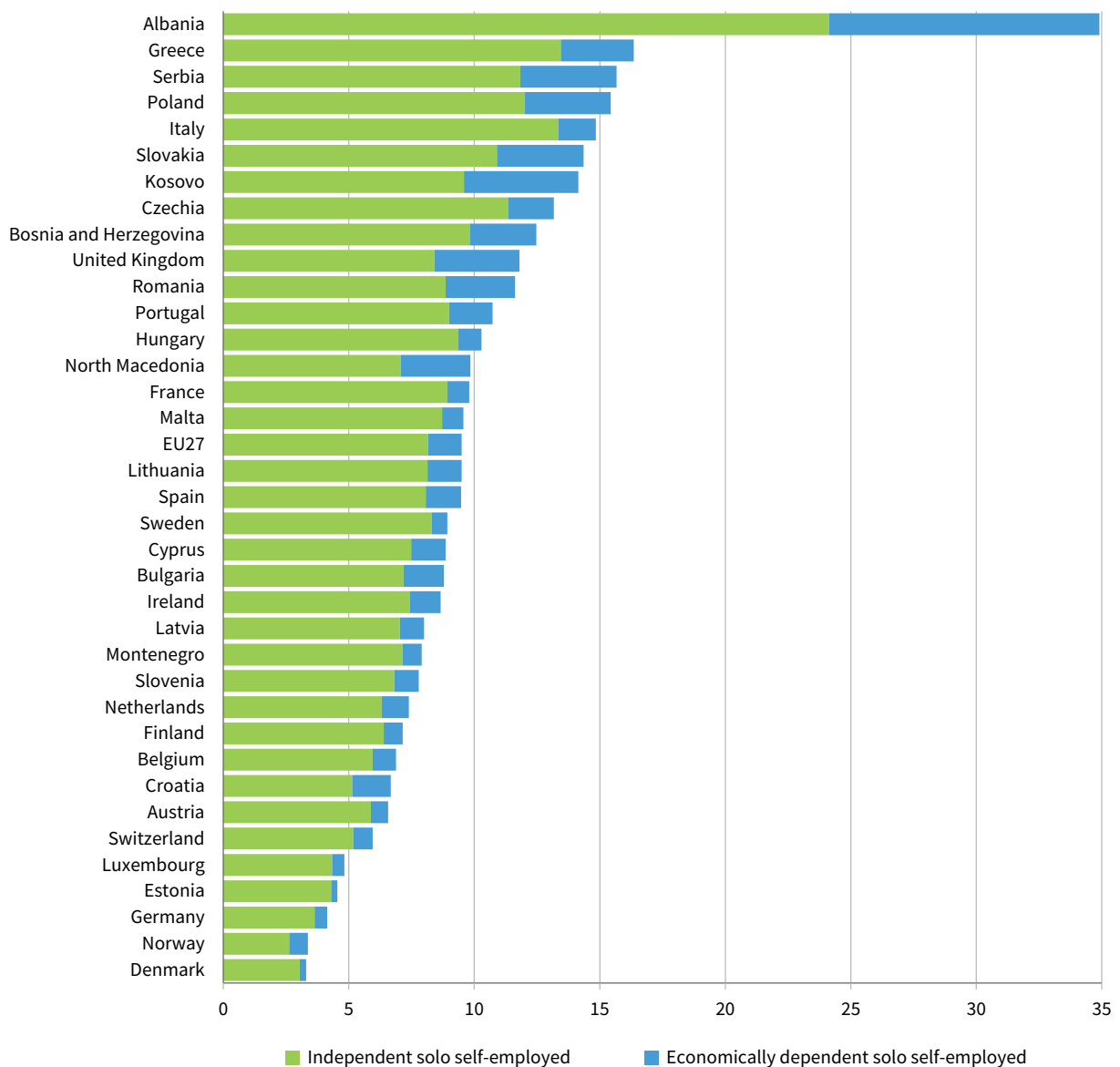
self-employed workers, were economically dependent in 2021. Solo self-employed women were more likely to be economically dependent than men (13% and 7%, respectively).

Solo self-employment has decreased slightly in the EU over the years, from 10.2% in 2010 to 8.9% in 2021, although more so for men (1.6-percentage-point decrease) than for women (0.8-percentage-point decrease), according to EU-LFS data. However, this aggregate hides the uneven distribution of economically dependent solo self-employment detected by the EWCTS across EU Member States and neighbouring countries, as shown in Figure 13. Solo self-employment was most common in non-EU countries, especially Albania (35% of all workers) and Serbia (16% of all workers). Among EU Member States,

Greece (16%), Poland and Italy (both 15%) had the highest proportions. Economically dependent solo self-employment was most common in Albania (11%), Kosovo (5%) and Serbia (4%).

Among the self-employed, those with employees were overrepresented in the commerce and hospitality, construction and industry sectors. Independent solo self-employed workers were more likely than other self-employed workers to work in the 'other services' sector (a broad group including the information and communication, administrative services, professional and scientific services, and arts and entertainment sectors) and in the education sector, whereas the highest proportions of economically dependent solo self-employed workers worked in the agriculture and health sectors.

Figure 13: Solo self-employed workers, by dependence status, EU Member States and other European countries (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

**Table 2: Distribution of workers according to employment situation at time of survey, by gender, EU27 (%)**

	Men	Women	Total
<b>Self-employed</b>			
Working	15.5	10.7	13.3
Not working	0.6	0.5	0.5
<b>Employee</b>			
With expected hours in contract	66.1	71.2	68.5
Paid on completion of tasks or activities	2.9	2.4	2.6
Not guaranteed any hours	1.7	1.3	1.5
Paid for a minimum number of hours for a defined period even if these hours are not worked	2.6	2.0	2.4
Not working	2.6	4.5	3.5
Different employment arrangement from those mentioned above	5.3	4.6	5.0
Refusals to respond or non-responses	2.6	2.8	2.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: EWCTS 2021

In terms of occupation, self-employed workers with employees were most likely to work as managers, while independent solo self-employed workers most often worked as professionals or technicians. Economically dependent self-employed workers were more likely to work in elementary or skilled agricultural occupations.

## Working hours

One of the ways in which the COVID-19 crisis most affected workers was in terms of the amount of time they spent in paid work. Some worked longer hours than required or expected to; others worked fewer hours or stopped working completely. Table 2 shows the distribution of workers, broken down by gender, according to whether or not they were working at the time the EWCTS fieldwork was conducted. The table distinguishes between employees who had a contract that stated their expected hours of work and those who did not. The former group represented just over 65% of the male workforce in the EU and just over 70% of the female workforce, corresponding to nearly 80% of all employees.

Although employed, some workers were not working at the time of the survey, for example because they were on sick leave, on maternity or paternity leave, or on a temporary unemployment scheme. These employees represented about 4% of the total working population in the EU; this share is larger for women (around 5%) than for men (almost 3%). Self-employed workers who were not working at the time of the survey represented 0.5% of the total working population in the EU.

The 2019 Directive on Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions states that all workers in the EU have the right to access complete information on

essential aspects of their work, including on the number and predictability of working hours. It aims to cover all workers in all forms of work, including those in the most flexible, non-standard and new forms of work, such as those on zero-hour contracts, casual workers and platform workers. In that context, it is important to note that about 6.5% of the workforce was composed of employees who said that they were paid on completion of tasks or activities (2.6%), not guaranteed any hours (1.5%) or paid for a minimum number of hours for a defined period even if these hours were not worked (2.4%).

Most employees whose working hours were stated in their contracts worked those same hours (64% of women and 60% of men), while only 6% (of both women and men) reported working fewer hours than stated in their contracts (Table 3).

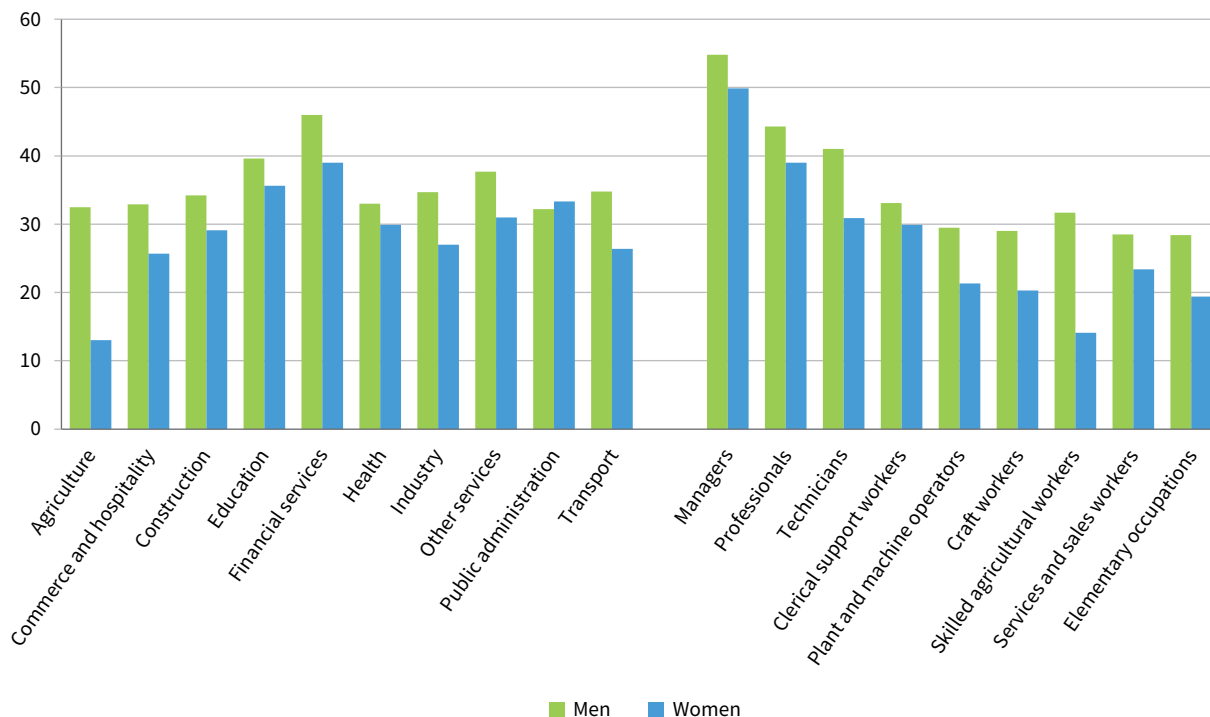
**Table 3: Distribution of employees with working hours stated in their employment contract according to usual hours of work, by gender, EU27 (%)**

	Men	Women	Total
<b>More hours than in contract</b>	35	30	33
<b>Same hours as in contract</b>	60	64	62
<b>Fewer hours than in contract</b>	6	6	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: EWCTS 2021

A substantial share (35% of men and 30% of women) reported working more hours than they were contracted.

**Figure 14: Employees who worked more than contracted hours, breakdown by sector and occupation according to gender, EU27 (%)**



Source: EWCTS 2021

### Employees working fewer hours than contracted, by sector and occupation

The share of employees who reported working fewer hours than set out in their contracts varied by sector and occupation. Large shares of men and women working in the transport sector and men working in the health and agriculture sectors reported working fewer hours than contracted. Women working as plant and machine operators and men and women working as services and sales workers were more likely to report working fewer hours than their contracts stipulated, whereas this situation was reported much less by managers of both genders and women in skilled agricultural jobs.

### Employees working more working hours than contracted, by sector and occupation

The share of employees reporting working more hours than contractually obliged was larger for men than for women in most sectors, except in public administration (Figure 14). Men and women working in financial

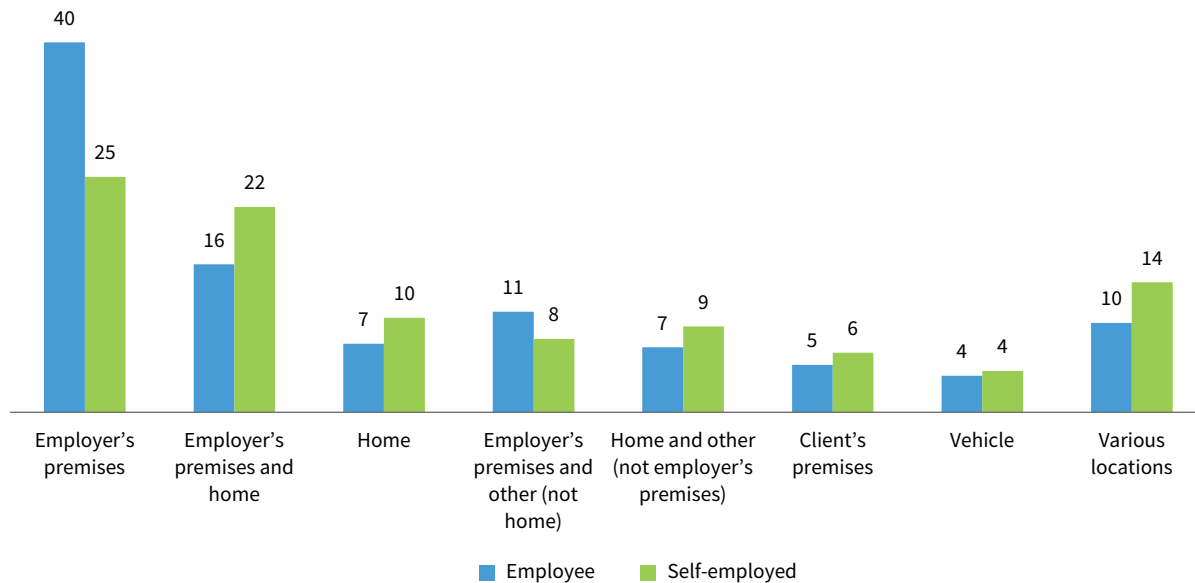
services and education and men in other services most commonly reported working more hours than contracted. The share was largest for managers and professionals and male technicians; in all occupational groups, more men than women reported working more hours than contracted. (Refer to Chapter 4 for a detailed analysis of the duration of work during the pandemic.)

## Place of work

In the 12 months preceding the survey interviews (spring–summer 2021), most EU Member States implemented lockdowns and temporary business closures. Many workers continued to go to their workplace, but others, especially those who could telework, worked from their homes. This section characterises workers based on their main place of work. It establishes different categories of main place of work according to whether workers were working from a single place of work or from a combination of places of work in the year before the survey.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The EWCTS questionnaire asked respondents to indicate the frequency – never, rarely, sometimes, often or always – with which they worked in each of the following locations: at home; at their employer's premises or their own business premises (office, factory, shop, school and so on); at locations they were sent to by their employer or requested to go to by clients; in a car or in another vehicle; and at locations that were not covered by the previous categories.

Figure 15: Main place of work, by employment status, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

The categories of main place of work identified are those most often indicated by the respondents and are as follows:<sup>5</sup>

- employer's premises
- employer's premises and home
- home
- employer's premises and other (not home)
- home and other (not employer's premises)
- client's premises
- vehicle
- various locations

### Main place of work

Across the 27 EU Member States, 40% of employees reported that they continued to work at their employer's premises in the 12 months before the survey; 16% had some type of hybrid work arrangement combining their employer's premises and home; 7% worked from home; 7% worked from home and somewhere else other than their employer's premises; 5% worked at a client's premises; 4% worked from a vehicle; and 10% worked from various locations (Figure 15).

One-quarter of self-employed workers reported working from their own business premises and 22% reported working from their business premises and from home; 10% worked exclusively from home and 9% worked from home and from a place different from their own business premises.

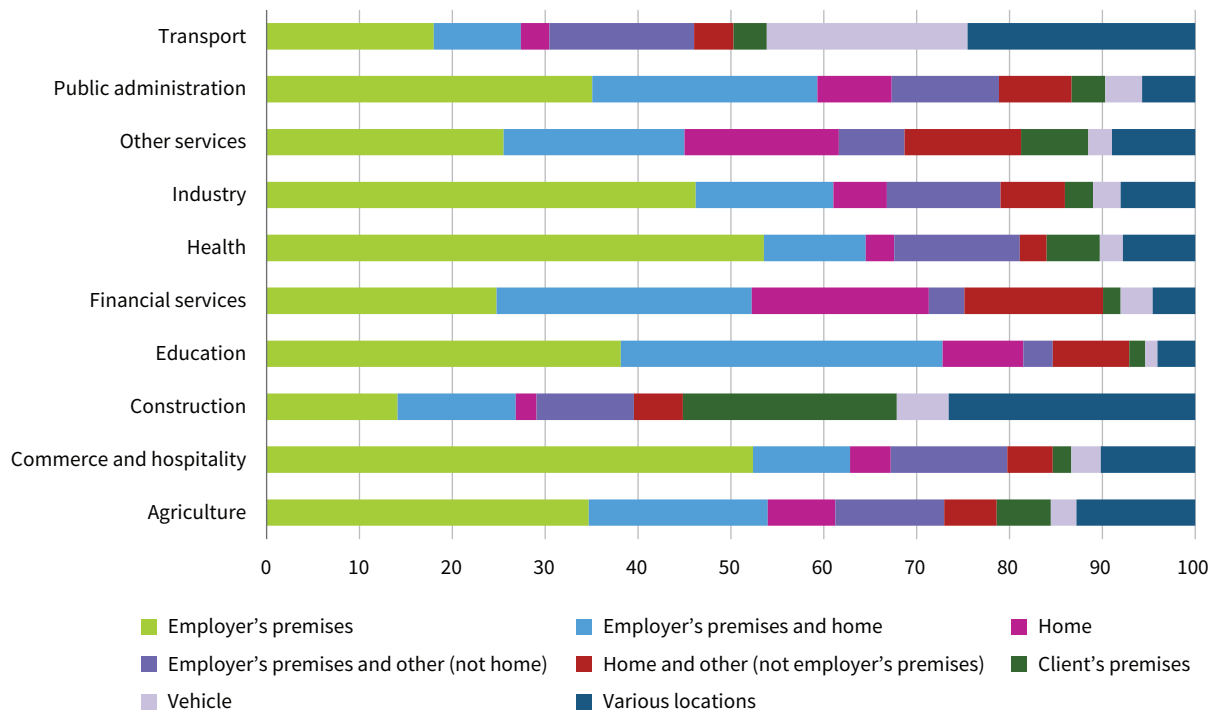
### Sector and occupation

Among those who worked both at their employer's premises and from home, the highest shares are found among workers employed in education (34%), financial services (27%), public administration (24%) and other services (19%) (Figure 16).

The three sectors with the highest shares of workers working at their employer's premises only are health (54%), commerce and hospitality (52%), and industry (46%). Financial services and other services are the sectors where most workers reported working from home all the time. The construction sector had the highest share of workers working at a client's premises (23%).

<sup>5</sup> The category 'employer's premises' includes the location 'own business' (such as a headquarters, seat or shop) if the respondent is self-employed.

Figure 16: Main place of work, by sector, EU27 (%)

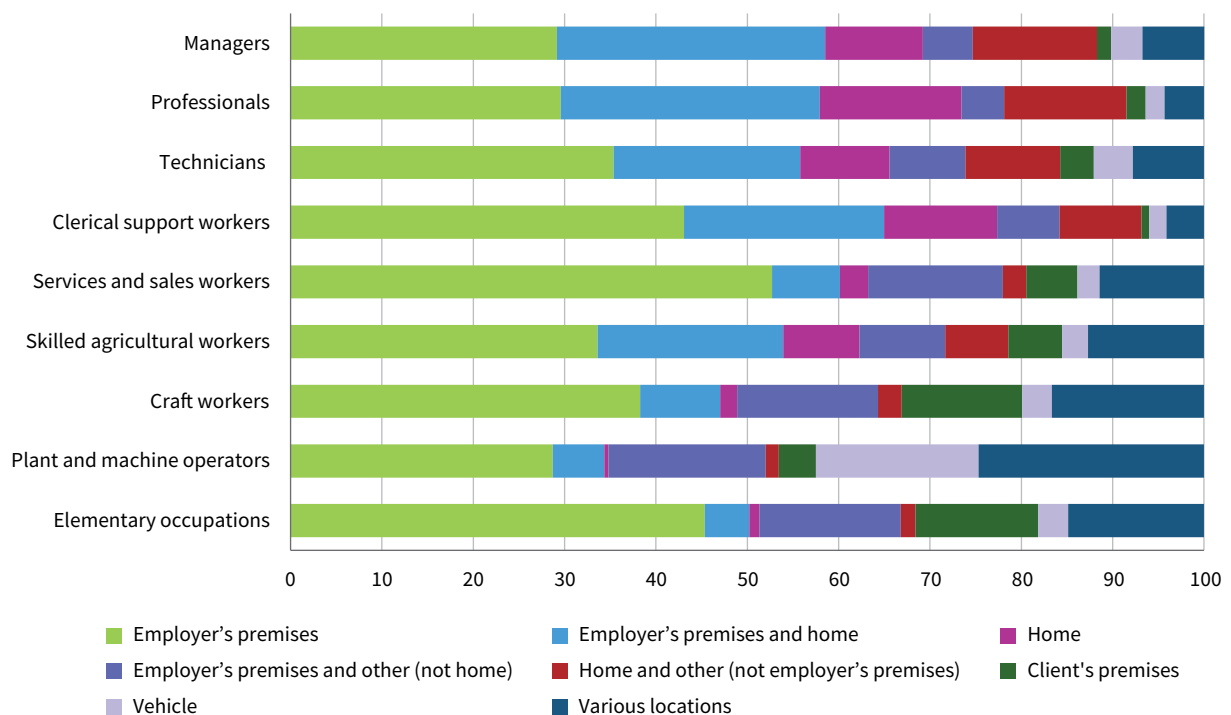


Source: EWCTS 2021

Figure 17 gives a breakdown of the main place of work for each occupational group. This shows that higher-skilled workers – managers, professionals, technicians, clerical support workers and skilled agricultural workers – were most likely to be able to

work from home (around 10% in each category) or in some form of hybrid arrangement (between 20% and 30% in each category), which in most cases is associated with telework (see Box 1 for a discussion on how the teleworkability of jobs influences place of

Figure 17: Main place of work, by occupation, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

work). This confirms the European Commission's finding that telework is skewed towards higher-paid, white-collar jobs (Sostero et al, 2020). Workers in other occupational groups were more likely to work at their employer's premises and other locations. More than half of services and sales workers (53%) and nearly half of workers in elementary occupations (45%) worked only at their employer's premises.

### Gender differences

Women and men had slightly different patterns in terms of main place of work, which is explained by the gender segregation of occupations. Among women, 9% worked from home all the time (compared to 7% of men), 18% had a hybrid work arrangement, working from home and from their employer's premises (compared to 16% of men), and 44% worked at their employer's premises (compared to 32% of men). Men were more likely than

women to work in jobs that required them to perform their work in various locations (13% of men compared with 7% of women) or from a vehicle (6% of men compared with 2% of women).

### Workplace size

The share of individuals who reported working from home increased with the size of the workplace. Of those employed in workplaces with 500 or more employees, 16% reported working from home only, the largest share when workplace size is considered. No matter the size of the workplace, similar percentages of workers, between 15% and 20%, reported having a hybrid work arrangement. The highest shares of workers working at their employer's premises all the time were found in workplaces of 10–49 employees and 5–9 employees: 42% and 43%, respectively. Workers who worked alone were most likely to work at a client's premises (10%).

## Box 1: Telework and place of work

During the COVID-19 pandemic, an important factor in determining place of work was the 'teleworkability' of a job – that is, the potential that a job could be performed online in a location different from the employer's premises **using digital devices** (such as laptops, tablets and smartphones) (Sostero et al, 2020). Eurofound defines telework as:

*a work arrangement in which work is performed outside a default place of work, normally the employer's premises, by means of information and communication technologies (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 is working outside the employer's premises and the number of places where workers work remotely (mobility).*

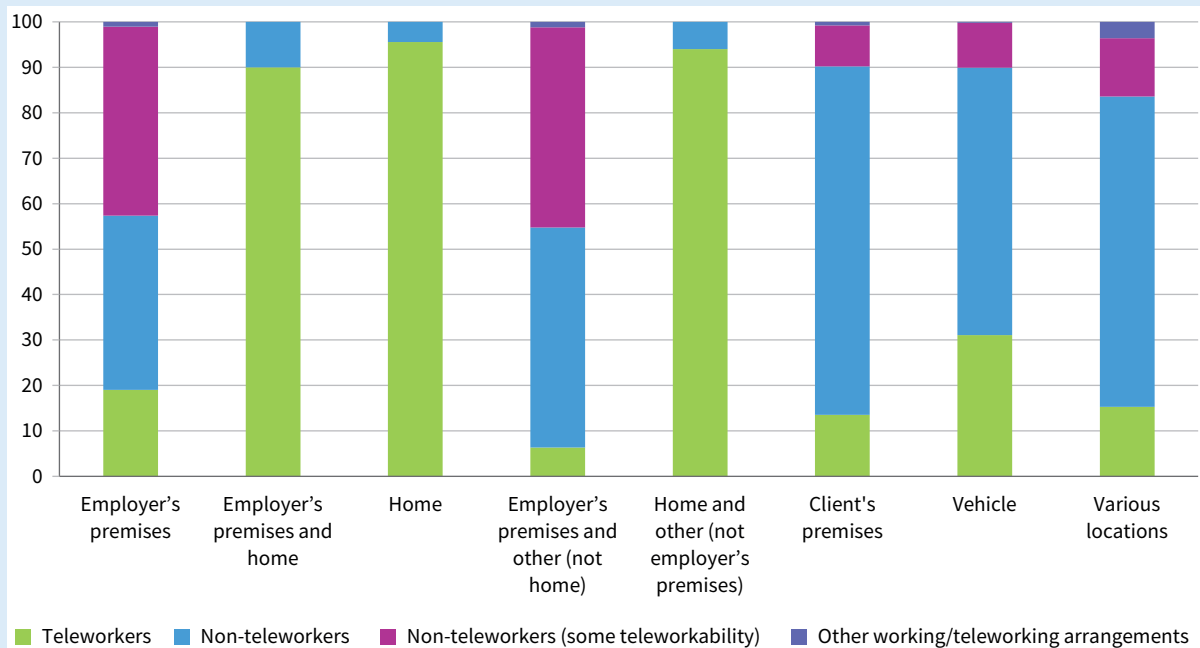
(Eurofound, 2022b)

This definition implies that not all workers who work from home can be classified as teleworkers. To explore the link between place of work and telework, a telework variable was created using EWCTS data, taking into account the teleworkability index developed by Sostero et al (2020) to measure the teleworkability of occupations, place of work (the place that respondents reported most often as a work location) and ICT use ('always' and 'often'). Four categories of worker were identified by this exercise:

- **teleworkers**, which includes people in teleworkable jobs who used ICT and worked from home always, often, sometimes or rarely
- **non-teleworkers**, who did not use ICT or were not in teleworkable jobs
- **non-teleworkers (some degree of teleworkability)**, who did not telework but whose job was potentially teleworkable
- **those with other work or telework arrangements**, including workers in teleworkable jobs who used ICT but worked in other locations with varying frequency and workers who teleworked but not from home, and who cannot therefore be conceptually included in the other three categories

As Figure 18 illustrates, among those who worked exclusively from home, 96% were teleworkers, while a small percentage were non-teleworkers (4%). Among those who worked both at their employer's premises and from home, 90% were teleworkers. Interestingly, 42% of those who worked exclusively at their employer's premises were in a job that is potentially teleworkable, while 19% were teleworkers who rarely worked from home. Non-teleworkers made up the majority of workers who worked at a client's premises (77%), at various locations (68%) or from a vehicle (59%); they also accounted for large shares of workers working from their employer's premises and somewhere else (48%) and their employer's premises only (38%).

Figure 18: Main place of work, by telework status, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

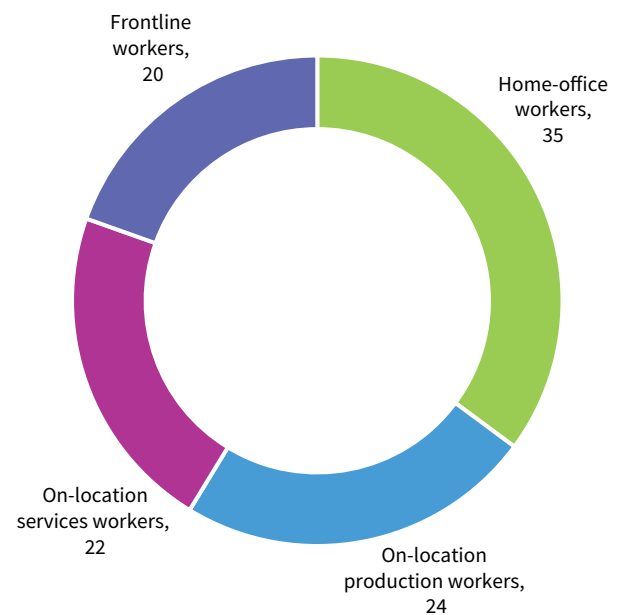
Readers interested in an in-depth exploration of workers' experiences of telework during the pandemic can refer to the report *COVID-19 and the rise in telework: Impact on prevalence, working conditions and regulations* (Eurofound, 2022c).

## COVID groups

The introduction to this report described the exceptional pandemic situation, which split the workforce into different groups of workers, each of which was affected differently by the pandemic and the associated public health measures implemented by the Member States. Workers in these groups were exposed to varying degrees of risk of job loss, temporary unemployment, increased or decreased working time, income cuts and so on, depending on the type of job they were in; their main place of work; and their level of exposure to infection because of their physical proximity to other people in their workplace (including colleagues, clients, patients and students).

To broadly identify the groups of workers who experienced the pandemic differently and with the aim of presenting insights into their working conditions in this report, a statistical technique called latent class analysis (see Box 2) was applied to EWCTS data. The analysis identified four COVID groups, shown in Figure 19.

Figure 19: Categorisation of working population into COVID groups, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

## Box 2: Latent class analysis

Latent class analysis is a statistical technique that can be used to identify clusters (groups) based on patterns in data; in this case, workers who shared similar features in terms of employment and working conditions were grouped together.

Using the 2021 EWCTS data for the EU Member States, this technique classified workers into several groups of different sizes based on similarities in the patterns of the variables listed in Annex 3. Similar jobs were assigned to the same cluster and substantially different jobs were assigned to different clusters.

### Home-office workers

The biggest group (35%) consists of workers who mostly worked in teleworkable office jobs, with almost half working either from home or in some form of hybrid arrangement (such as from home and at their employer's premises). Workers in this group heavily depended on digital devices to perform the tasks associated with their job.

This group is mostly composed of workers in white-collar occupations: managers (10%), professionals (35%), technicians (27%) and clerical support workers (24%). Looking at a more detailed breakdown of occupational groups, nearly all subgroups of managers and professionals are in this group except for hospitality managers, teaching and health professionals, and legal and social professionals, who are mainly found in the on-location services workers and frontline workers groups.

Workers in this group worked in private sector services and in public administration, although in certain occupations only. Most workers (63%) are concentrated in three sectors: other services (33%), industry (19%) and financial services (10%). Indeed, almost all financial services workers (95%) belong to this group. The group also has the highest share of workers who used digital devices in their work and the lowest share of workers reporting that they were exposed to infectious materials and to health and safety risks at work.

Home-office workers are the most highly educated group (with 67% having completed tertiary education) and are the most balanced group in terms of demographics, although younger workers (aged 16–34) are underrepresented. In terms of contractual status, these workers were much more likely to have permanent contracts than other groups. As regards hours worked, home-office workers were close to the norm, but there are fewer part-time workers (working fewer than 35 hours per week) in the group than on average. In terms of working time flexibility, they were more likely to be able to easily take a couple of hours off than the other groups – 44% could do so, compared with 33% on average. However, a high proportion of home-office workers (39%) worked more than their contracted hours.

### On-location production workers

This COVID group represents 24% of the EU27 workforce. It largely consists of plant and machine operators, craft workers and workers in elementary occupations (87%), most of whom worked during the pandemic at their employer's or their own business premises, at a client's premises or at some combination of these locations. The vast majority of workers in this group were employed in private sector companies in the industry (45%), construction (21%) or transport (17%) sectors.

Workers in this group mainly had skilled manual jobs; the group includes 90% of all craft workers and 97% of all plant and machine operators. It is heavily male dominated (84%), in line with the employment structure of these occupations. It has a balanced age profile and has the highest proportion of workers educated to secondary level only (83%) and the lowest proportion with tertiary education (14%). Almost all workers in this group (91%) worked 35 hours per week or more at the time of the survey.

On-location production workers were less likely than the average to directly deal with customers in their workplace. They also had a lower risk of being in contact with infectious materials in their workplace, but a higher proportion reported exposure to occupational health and safety risks than the EU27 average (44% compared with 34%). They were also less likely to use computers in their jobs than the average worker, with 48% using computers never or rarely.

### On-location services workers

The on-location services workers group represents 22% of the EU27 workforce. It is mainly composed of services and sales workers (49%) but also includes workers in elementary occupations (21%). Skilled agricultural workers account for 13% of this group and are overrepresented, with 96% of all skilled agricultural workers being classified in this group. More than half of workers in elementary occupations (54%) fall into the group. At a more detailed level, some typical occupations in the group are sales workers, personal services workers, food preparation assistants, cleaners and helpers, and hospitality and retail managers.



The group has a high proportion of solo self-employed workers (28%) and, in fact, includes 40% of all self-employed workers.

Most of the workers in this group (85%) worked at their employer's or their own business premises, at a client's premises or at some combination of these and other locations in 2021 but were unlikely to work from home at any time. Over 65% worked in jobs where they often had to deal directly with customers or other service users.

The group has both the highest proportion of part-time workers (37%) and of workers who worked long hours, that is 48 hours or more per week (22%). The vast majority of workers in this group (86%) worked in the private sector. In terms of sector, most worked in commerce and hospitality (49%), other services (26%) and agriculture (15%). Computer use was well below average in this group, and more than a third never used computers in their jobs. Workers' exposure to infectious material and to health and safety risks at work was slightly above average in this group.

### Frontline workers

This COVID group represents 20% of the EU27 workforce. It mainly comprises public sector workers (68%), and most come from three sectors: health (45%), education (30%) and public administration (19%).

The group includes 84% of health professionals, 81% of teaching professionals and 87% of members of the armed forces. It also includes 66% of personal care workers and 61% of protective services workers, such as police officers and firefighters.

Temporary contracts were more common in this group than on average, with 11% employed on temporary contracts of less than a year. Almost a third worked part time, and it was more difficult for workers in this group to take a couple of hours off when needed: 42% reported this to be fairly or very difficult (compared with 24% on average). More than two-thirds (67%) of this group were women.

Most of the workers (49%) worked at their employer's premises at the time of the survey, 21% worked from both their employer's premises and from home, and the rest worked from a combination of locations. Workers in this group frequently interacted with people who were not colleagues; most (80%) reported always or often dealing directly with customers, passengers, pupils, patients and so on. Workers in this group were also likely to be exposed to infectious materials at work (34% came into contact with such materials) and the prevalence of exposure to occupational health and safety risks (reported by 49%) was well above the EU27 average of 34%. Three-quarters of workers in this group used digital devices often or always in their jobs.

## Summary

- Work continued to be highly segregated by gender in 2021: 60% of the working population worked in sectors dominated by one gender. As a consequence, the sector-specific restrictions imposed by governments to control the pandemic had differentiated employment impacts on men and women, with women being more detrimentally affected. One-third of the working population was men in male-dominated occupations, while another quarter was women in female-dominated occupations. Mixed-gender occupations represented no more than 25% of the total workforce.
- Workers with young children, and especially single parents, had a tough time as responsibility for the care and home-schooling of children fell entirely upon parents when schools and care facilities were forced to close. One-third of respondents to the EWCTS lived in households with children. More than twice as many women than men were single parents (4.3% and 1.7% of workers, respectively).
- The majority of jobs lost in 2021 were temporary jobs, underlining the vulnerability of temporary employment when an economy goes into crisis. Short-term contracts of less than a year can be particularly insecure and offer more limited access to social protection. EWCTS data show that these were more prevalent in three sectors: education (14%), health (11%), and commerce and hospitality (10%). The latter suffered big job losses as bars, restaurants and hotels closed their doors.
- Working hours fell across the EU as workers were placed on short-time working and temporary unemployment schemes. Nevertheless, 33% of the employees who responded to the EWCTS said that they were working longer hours than the hours stated in their contract. It was more common for men and women working in finance and education to put in extra hours as well as men working in the 'other services' sector (an umbrella sector encompassing sectors including information and communication, administrative services, professional and scientific services, and arts and entertainment).

- The growth of telework was one of the major transformations of working life, but the survey clearly indicates that this working arrangement was confined to just some parts of the workforce: only 7% of workers were working exclusively from home when surveyed. A further 16% had some type of hybrid arrangement combining their employer's premises and home, while 7% worked from home and from another location not their employer's premises. The employer's premises continued to be the exclusive place of work for the largest group of workers (40% of the working population).
- The impact of the pandemic across the economy split the working population into four distinct groups of workers sharing similar features in terms of employment and working conditions.
  - Home-office workers (35%), which consisted mostly of workers in white-collar office jobs, with almost half working either from home or in a hybrid arrangement (such as from home and at their employer's premises).
  - On-location production workers (24%), which largely comprised blue-collar skilled and unskilled workers, most of whom worked during the pandemic at their employer's premises, their own business premises or a client's premises, or worked across some combination of these locations.
  - On-location services workers (22%), which was composed mainly of services and sales workers and workers in elementary occupations employed in the commerce and hospitality (49%), other services (26%) and agriculture (15%) sectors. Few of these workers worked from home.
  - Frontline workers (20%), which largely comprised public sector workers, most working in the health (45%), education (30%) and public administration (19%) sectors. The group included personal care workers and protective services workers, such as police force personnel and firefighters.

## 2 | Job quality in Europe

The COVID-19 pandemic and public health responses to limit the spread of the virus led to the rapid implementation of changes to workplaces and a rapid change in the conditions under which workers performed their work. The pandemic brought about new ways of working and accelerated the digital transition of workplaces. To what extent did jobs change? Were these changes positive, negative or mixed? How were different groups of workers affected?

To answer these questions, this chapter first presents a detailed picture of how the different aspects of work that contribute to job quality were distributed across the working population. It distinguishes between job demands, which carry psychological and physiological costs, and job resources, which support well-being.

The second part uses an index, created using a methodology developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), to

measure the quality of the working environment. Based on the number of demands and resources associated with a job, this index – called the job quality index – calculates the degree of job strain experienced by workers and hence can be used to examine how different groups of workers are faring in terms of their job quality. Box 3 explains the rationale for adopting the OECD approach.

### Six dimensions of job quality

This section introduces the overall framework used to construct the job quality index. The index takes account of six dimensions of job quality drawn from the EWCTS data: the physical and social environment, job tasks, organisational characteristics, working time arrangements, job prospects and intrinsic job features. Each dimension is examined using a number of indicators that measure a specific aspect of job quality.

#### Box 3: Capturing job quality during the pandemic

Fieldwork for the seventh EWCS was stopped in March 2020, as it was no longer possible to collect information through face-to-face interviews in people's homes. The survey was, therefore, adapted to allow the collection of data through telephone interviews, a no-contact mode. Details of the methodology are available in Annex 1.

One of the key challenges was the need to substantially shorten the questionnaire used. Typically, the EWCS collects an extensive range of information on job quality during a 45-minute interview. However, the duration of telephone interviews was limited to 20 to 25 minutes, so the part of the questionnaire relating to job quality had to be reduced. The selection of questions for the shortened questionnaire was guided by the work of the OECD, as presented in the *OECD guidelines on measuring the quality of the working environment* (OECD, 2017).

These guidelines aim to support the collection of good data on the working environment.

*From a policy perspective, good data on the working environment are crucial to: 1) measure social conditions and their progress ...; 2) improve workers' health and well-being, as there is increasing concern that more intensive work systems, combined with greater competitive pressures at the international level, may give rise to higher levels of mental-health problems ...; [and] 3) increase productivity and competitiveness, as there is evidence that the quality of the working environment is important for work performance, an effect that may become stronger in a technologically advanced economy.*

(OECD, 2017, p. 14)

The guidelines propose prototype question modules on the working environment; these modules were used as a guide to select the questions from the EWCS that would be retained in the EWCTS and would be used to measure the job quality of workers.

A few items not included in the OECD modules, such as a question about exposure to infectious materials, were added to the EWCTS questionnaire because of their relevance during the pandemic. Furthermore, two questions were added to capture the specificities of the job quality experienced by employees and self-employed individuals to enhance the possibilities of comparing their situations.

## Indicator characteristics

The indicators pertaining to job quality share several common features.

- Each indicator has an independent influence (positive or negative) on the health and well-being of workers. Several recent epidemiological studies have identified and discussed these characteristics of interest.
- The indicators capture objective attributes of jobs – physical, psychological, social and organisational – that can be evaluated by a third party.
- Workers' exposure to the objective attributes of a job will depend on their organisational context and personal characteristics.
- These job attributes are experienced by the worker who is carrying out their tasks in a specific job context and work environment, drawing on their individual abilities and personal characteristics. This means that the experience of real work – that is, work performed under varying conditions – is captured and not the work as prescribed.
- The indicators capture either job demands or job resources. Job demands are job attributes that require an effort and increase a worker's risk of poorer health and well-being. Job resources are attributes that support workers, doing so in three ways: by reducing job demands and their physiological and psychological costs; by helping workers achieve their work goals; and by fostering personal growth. This conceptualisation is in line with the job demands–resources model proposed by Bakker and Demerouti (2008).

It is the combination of negative and positive attributes that determines how good a job is. For instance, if a worker experiences very intense work, having the autonomy to decide how to do it reduces the adverse impact on them. By capturing job quality at individual level, these compensating and interacting effects can be captured most effectively.

While the attributes of a job can have an expected positive or negative relationship with health and well-being, they are also associated with company performance (Eurofound, 2017a; OECD, 2017). For example, low levels of presenteeism (working while sick), high levels of work engagement (associated with creativity and performance) and a good social climate have all been shown to be linked to better economic performance at company level. From the worker's point of view, good job quality can be conducive to a satisfactory work–life balance and can lead to a productive and sustainable working life (Eurofound, 2015b).

## Overview of job quality dimensions

The analysis in this chapter organises the aspects of job quality around the six broad dimensions described below and summarised in Table 4.

- **Physical and social environment:** Features of the physical space in which work is undertaken and the relationships between workers in the workplace. It captures three demands: exposure to physical risks, physical demands, and intimidation and discrimination. One resource is included: social support at work.
- **Job tasks:** The conditions under which workers carry out their tasks. This dimension captures workers' work intensity (a demand) and level of autonomy (a resource).
- **Organisational characteristics:** The ability of workers to be part of the decision-making processes at work. One resource is examined: the practices that give employees opportunities to be involved in decision-making concerning their work. This dimension also includes one demand, relevant only to self-employed workers: dependence, as measured by a lack of freedom to make important decisions on how to run the business and recruit staff.
- **Working time arrangements:** This dimension includes one demand, unsocial work schedules, and one resource, the working time flexibility available to workers.
- **Job prospects:** The opportunities to advance in one's career. One demand, job insecurity, is explored, which encompasses the risk both of losing one's employment and of losing valued characteristics of one's job. The dimension also includes two resources: opportunities to develop skills through training and the career prospects of the job.
- **Intrinsic job features:** The opportunity for self-development, contributing to a goal in line with personal values. It includes two job resources: intrinsic rewards and opportunities for self-realisation.

The EWCS includes an additional dimension, earnings; this is not covered in the EWCTS due to the change in methodology.

**Table 4: Dimensions of job quality and corresponding job demands and job resources**

Dimension	Job demands	Job resources
Physical and social environment	Physical risks	Social support
	Physical demands	
	Intimidation and discrimination	
Job tasks	Work intensity	Task discretion and autonomy
Organisational characteristics	Dependence (self-employed only)	Organisational participation and workplace voice
Working time arrangements	Unsocial work schedules	Flexibility of working hours
Job prospects	Perceptions of job insecurity	Training and learning opportunities
		Career advancement
Intrinsic job features		Intrinsic rewards
		Opportunities for self-realisation

## Physical and social environment

All working environments are both physical and social spaces. During the pandemic, the implementation of measures to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 impacted the physical organisation of workplaces and the level of social support available to workers. The pandemic highlighted the crucial benefit of a working environment that reduces the risks to health and well-being. It confirmed the importance of employers having an overall framework for conducting workplace risk assessments and implementing preventive measures to protect workers. A safe and healthy work environment is not only good for workers' health, preventing injuries and illnesses, it is important for reducing absenteeism, ensuring efficiency, and supporting productivity and quality.

## Physical environment

The European Commission has been very active in recent years in regulating the protection of workers from dangerous chemical substances, such as carcinogens and mutagens, while the reduction of physical demands and exposure to physical demands is a well-established policy objective.

Exposure to physical risks and physical demands continued to be a feature of the working environment for a significant share of workers in the EU in 2021 (Table 5). The EWCTS captured physical risks by quantifying the frequency with which workers were exposed to chemicals, infectious materials and noise. Physical demands were captured by measuring the frequency with which a job involved carrying or moving heavy loads, lifting people, being in tiring or painful positions, or doing repetitive hand or arm movements.

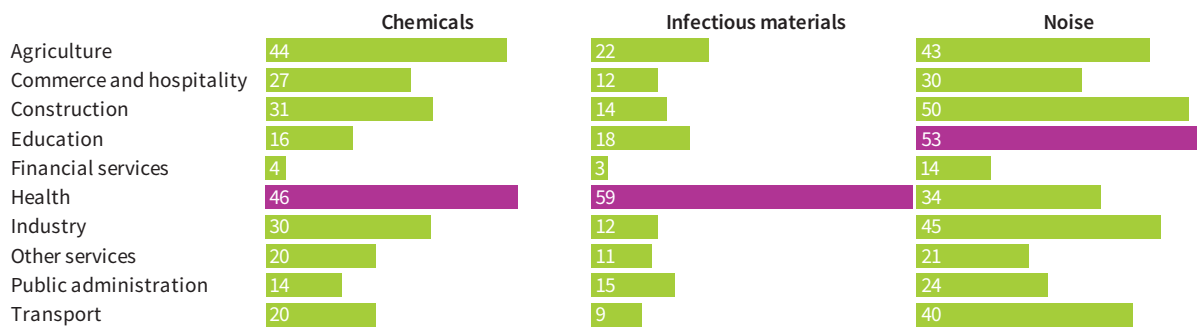
**Table 5: Physical environment – High level of exposure to physical risks and demands, EU27, 2021 (%)**

		Men	Women	Total
Physical risks	Handling or having skin contact with chemicals	28	25	26
	Handling or being in contact with infectious materials	15	21	18
	<i>Exposure to loud noise</i>	37	32	34
Physical demands	Carrying or moving heavy loads	40	29	35
	Lifting or moving people	9	15	12
	<i>Tiring or painful positions</i>	49	51	50
	<i>Repetitive hand or arm movements</i>	70	72	71

**Notes:** The data refer to workers who responded 'sometimes', 'often' or 'always' to each item. *Italics indicates variables that were collected in Module 1 of the questionnaire, for which answers were collected from two-thirds of respondents.*

**Source:** EWCTS 2021

Figure 20: High levels of physical risk, by sector, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

Exposure to infectious materials became a particular concern during the pandemic, where the group of workers who typically report being in contact with infectious substances expanded to include workers whose jobs involved dealing with customers, clients, pupils and so on – workers who previously would not have thought they were vulnerable to such a risk. In the midst of the pandemic, these workers realised that they could be exposed to the COVID-19 virus, which is transmitted through respiratory droplets and the environmental surface contamination associated with exhaled breath. Workers in general recognised that working outside their homes carried more risk of infection by the virus than working from home. Such fear of exposure to disease added a psychological risk to the physical risk of infection (Spoorthy et al, 2020).

Table 5 shows there were significant gender differences in exposure to the three types of physical risk, but especially with regard to infectious materials – with women more likely to be at risk.

As regards physical demands, men were more likely to carry or move heavy loads in their jobs, whereas women were more likely to have to lift people. This confirms the gendered nature of physical risks and demands (Thébaud-Mony et al, 2015; Messing, 2021), which are linked, at least partly, to labour market segregation and gendered occupational choices (Messing, 2021).

### Physical risks

Figure 20 shows the percentage of workers exposed to the three types of physical risks by sector.

The highest levels of exposure to chemicals were found in the health and agriculture sectors, followed by construction and industry.

Exposure to loud noise was very common in most sectors, but was most prevalent in sectors where work was most likely to take place on site: construction, industry, agriculture and transport. However, it was reported most by workers in education (53%). Noise levels in workplaces, including educational settings, were affected by mask-wearing, which caused people to raise their voices to be understood. Changes in people’s place of work and how they communicated (for example, through a physical screen or online, sometimes with a poor-quality internet connection) may also have impacted their exposure to noise. The workers least exposed to loud noise were those working from home (15%) or from both home and their employer’s premises (17%).

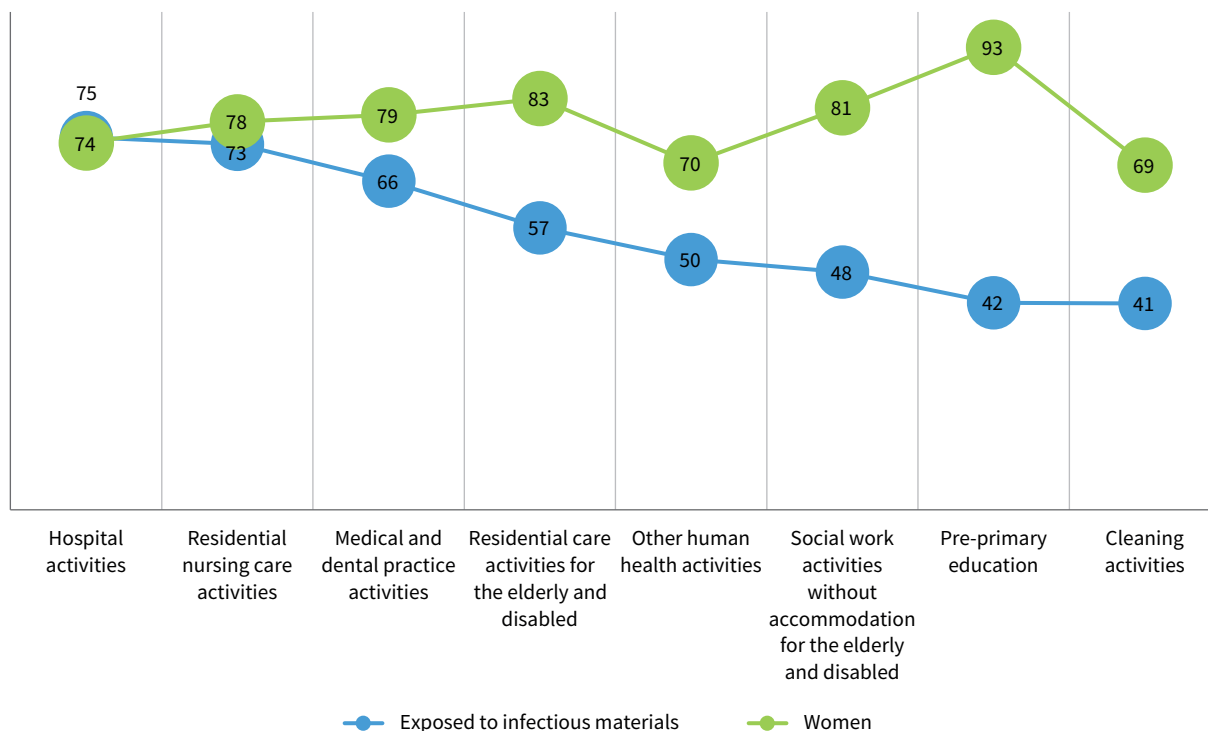
The health sector stands out with regard to exposure to infectious materials, with 59% of respondents employed in the sector reporting such exposure. Looking at sectors at a more granular level (NACE Level 3), Figure 21 shows that workers in the hospital activities and residential nursing care activities subsectors had the highest level of exposure (75% and 73%, respectively).

The occupational subgroups with the highest level of exposure to infectious materials were health professionals and health associate professionals (both 71%), personal care workers (53%), and cleaners and helpers (37%).

Exposure to loud noise was most prevalent among plant and machine operators and metal and machinery workers (both 68%), followed by skilled forestry and fishery workers (67%) and teaching professionals (61%).

Over half of workers in several occupations reported that they were exposed to chemicals: cleaners and helpers (62%), health associate professionals (59%), health professionals (54%), skilled agricultural workers (53%), other elementary occupations (52%), and metal and machinery workers (52%).

**Figure 21: Subsectors with highest levels of exposure to infectious materials and proportion of women employed in each, EU27 (%)**



Note: NACE Level 3 subsectors.  
Source: EWCTS 2021

### Physical demands

Physical demands can affect a worker's posture and have been found to be related to musculoskeletal complaints. They can potentially cause serious health problems, including musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) (da Costa and Viera, 2010; Tynes et al, 2017). MSDs affect millions of workers in the EU and can lead to disabilities in the worst cases. They are not linked to a single cause but to a combination of physical and psychosocial hazards and organisational and individual factors.

Workers' performance of physical tasks during the pandemic was made more arduous by the requirement for them to wear a mask and heavy personal protective equipment. Procedures for lifting people, which involve contact with a person's body, were modified extensively to reduce the risk of contamination.

While male workers' exposure to physical demands decreases with age, evidence has shown that this does not hold true for female workers to the same extent. In the context of demographic ageing, protecting men and women from risks caused by physical effort and repetitive movements is a priority, as their negative impact on health accumulates over time. Older workers who are exposed in their working lives to a high level of physical demands may exit the labour market early, which decreases the percentage of older workers who report being exposed to physical demands; hence, the

older workers captured by the survey may be less likely to report physical risks.

The most prevalent physical demand in the working population in 2021 was repetitive hand and arm movements, reported by 71% of workers (Table 5). About half of workers worked in tiring or painful positions.

As regards occupations, all reported some exposure to repetitive movements. Working in tiring or painful positions and carrying heavy loads were most common among skilled agricultural workers, craft workers and workers in elementary occupations, with about 6 out of 10 workers in these occupations reporting both. The demand of lifting people was most prevalent among services and sales workers (24%), an occupational group that includes personal care workers and protective services workers, but professionals and technicians (both 13%) also reported this job demand.

As for sector, repetitive movements were reported most by workers in agriculture (81%), construction (79%), commerce and hospitality (75%) and transport (75%). Workers in the agriculture (70%), health (64%) and construction (59%) sectors were most likely to work in tiring and painful positions. Carrying heavy loads was most prevalent among workers in the agriculture (64%), construction (56%) and transport (43%) sectors. Lifting people was most common in the health sector (51%), followed by education (16%) and public administration (14%).

## Social environment

To provide insights into the social environment of European workplaces, the EWCTS gathered data on workers' experiences of intimidation, discrimination and social support. Intimidation involves workers being subject to malicious behaviours from co-workers, supervisors or customers to a degree that makes them feel inadequate or afraid. Discrimination refers to the unfair or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people on the grounds of a personal characteristic. Social support encompasses friendship, encouragement and assistance provided by co-workers and supervisors.

The social environment at work was transformed by drastic changes to the layout of work environments and the organisation of work during the COVID-19 pandemic. The adaptation of workplaces to social distancing, the rapid expansion of remote working and the introduction of travel restrictions all altered social interactions at work. For many workers, these changes altered their channels of communication with colleagues, modifying the dynamics of social support, intimidation and discrimination.

The EWCTS captured three types of intimidation: verbal abuse; unwanted sexual attention; and bullying, harassment or violence. Verbal abuse was the most reported type: 9% of workers stated that they had been exposed to it in the month prior to the survey (Table 6). Fewer respondents reported receiving unwanted sexual attention (2%) and experiencing bullying, harassment or violence (6%). About 11% of workers in the EU27 reported being discriminated against at work in the 12 months prior to the survey.

The picture for social support is relatively positive, with almost half of employees (47%) reporting that they were always supported by their colleagues and 41% reporting that they were always supported by their managers. Self-employed workers felt somewhat less supported by their peers, with 37% saying that they always felt supported. Solo self-employed workers were the most isolated, with 28% reporting that they never or rarely received support from colleagues or peers.

### Intimidation and discrimination

Intimidation is a major risk factor for depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation. It is also associated with absence from work and intention to quit. Discrimination has been shown to increase the risks of depression, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases and breast cancer and to increase mortality (OECD, 2019).

The existing legal framework protecting workers against discrimination and violence was reinforced in 2019 by the adoption by the International Labour Organization (ILO) of Convention No. 190 on violence and harassment at work. Furthermore, the EU's Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 addresses all sources of gender inequality and violence against women and calls for increasing the protection of workers against sexual harassment.

Figure 22 depicts country differences in workers' experiences of intimidation in the workplace. The findings should be interpreted with caution, however, keeping in mind that higher proportions reporting intimidation do not necessarily indicate workplace cultures characterised by higher levels of intimidation. Cultural differences as regards awareness of and levels of tolerance towards intimidating behaviour play a role in the reporting of incidents.

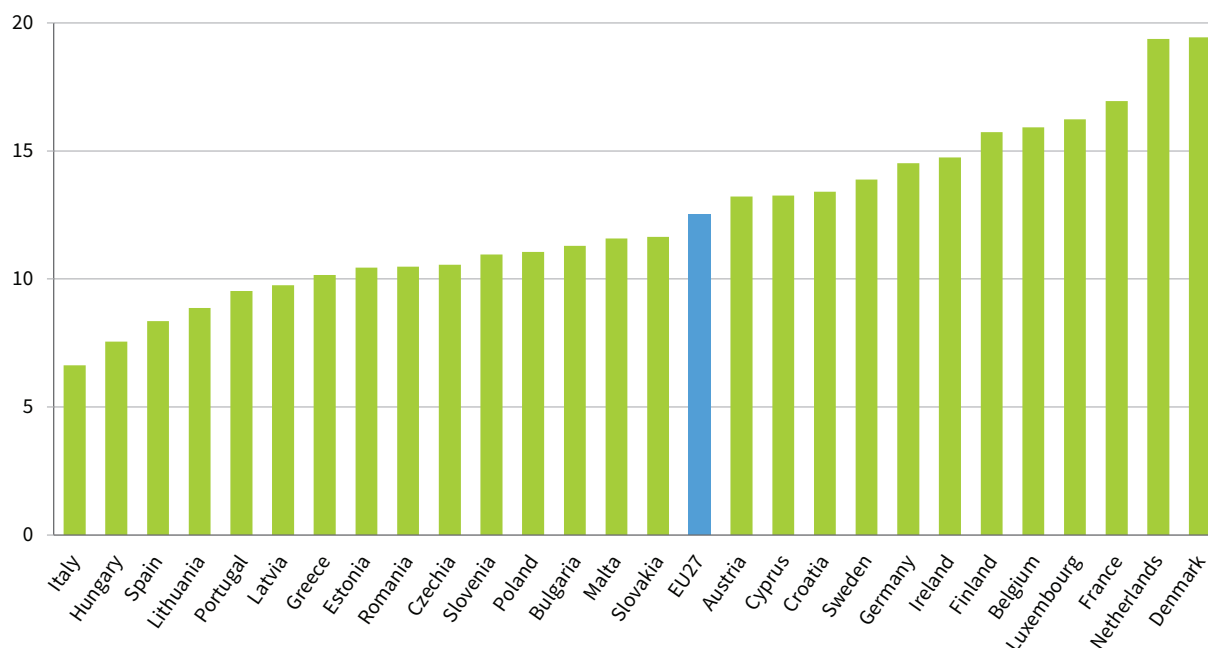
**Table 6: Social environment – Exposure to intimidation and discrimination and receipt of social support, EU27 (%)**

			Men	Women	Total
<b>Intimidation</b>	Verbal abuse or threats	In the last month	8	10	9
	Unwanted sexual attention		1	3	2
	Bullying, harassment or violence	In the last 12 months	5	7	6
<b>Discrimination</b>	Discrimination at work	In the last 12 months	10	13	11
<b>Social support</b>	Support from colleagues (always)	Employees	46	48	47
	Support from managers (always)		41	41	41
	Support from colleagues or peers (always)	Self-employed	37	37	37

Source: EWCTS 2021



Figure 22: Exposure to at least one type of intimidation, EU Member States (%)



**Note:** Intimidation covers exposure to any of the following three types of behaviour: verbal abuse or threats; unwanted sexual attention; and bullying, harassment or violence.

**Source:** EWCTS 2021

More women than men experienced discrimination and intimidation. The group that reported discrimination most was women aged 25–34 years. Some 15% of them reported having encountered discrimination, 5 percentage points more than men in the same age group. The prevalence was lowest among men aged 56 and over (reported by about 8%).

Exposure to verbal abuse was most common among the youngest workers (aged 16–24 years) and least reported by older workers (aged 56 and over). Bullying, harassment or violence was most reported by workers in the middle age group (aged 35–44). Receipt of unwanted sexual attention was most common among younger women (aged 16–24).

Workers in the health sector reported the highest prevalence of any type of intimidation (Figure 23). In the health sector, women report being more exposed to intimidation and discrimination than men.

Intimidation was second most prevalent in the transport sector, with women in this sector reporting the highest level of discrimination, followed by public administration. In both of these sectors, more men experienced verbal abuse (12% in transport and 15% in public administration) than women (10% and 11%, respectively).

Figure 23 also shows that across most sectors women experienced more intimidation than men, and in all sectors more women than men reported that they had been unfairly treated.

In terms of occupation, services and sales workers were most exposed to different types of intimidation (12%). About 4% of female services and sales workers reported having received unwanted sexual attention, and 7% reported having experienced violence, bullying or harassment.

### Social support

Social support at work can come from different sources, the most influential being colleagues and managers. Social support from colleagues can take different forms: help in carrying out tasks, moral support in challenging work situations and a sense of solidarity. The quality of the respect that managers are perceived to give to their subordinates is very important for achieving a good worker–manager relationship. Social support from managers can consist of technical help, providing an appropriate level of control over and supervision of tasks, clearly communicating assignments and expectations, and demonstrating an understanding of the work carried out by their subordinates. Ultimately, managers can be an important source of support when their leadership is acknowledged by their subordinates (Bodier and Wolff, 2018).

Figure 23: Exposure to intimidation and discrimination, by sector and gender, EU27 (%)



Note: The data on the agriculture sector should be treated with caution due to small sample size.  
 Source: EWCTS 2021

**Social support from colleagues and peers:** Support from colleagues and peers influences communication, stress and productivity and facilitates the acceptance of organisational change among workers (Shadur et al, 1999; Coupaud, 2022). Higher levels of support from colleagues have also been associated with decreased depression (Baker et al, 1996).

Of the employees in the EU27 surveyed by the EWCTS, 47% reported that their work colleagues always helped and supported them, while 37% of self-employed workers reported the same of their peers. The proportion of workers who reported receiving a low level of social support (answering that colleagues or peers never or rarely helped and supported them) was around 8% for employees and 21% for the self-employed.

The receipt of social support from colleagues was slightly more common for women than men and less common for older age groups than younger age groups.

Occupational differences are substantial. Support from colleagues was least reported by skilled agricultural workers, with about 20% never receiving any or

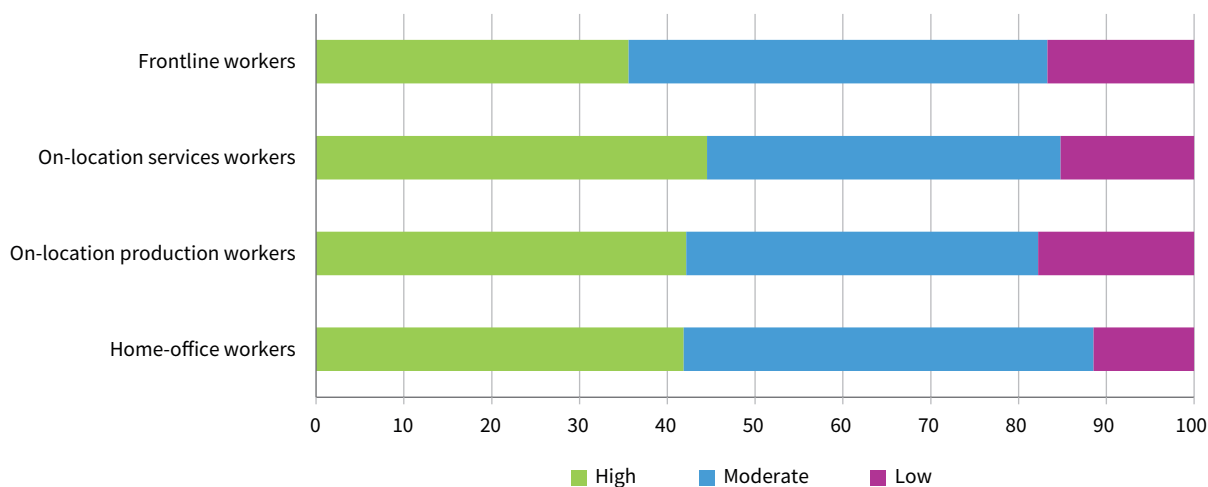
receiving it only rarely. In addition, 15% of workers in elementary occupations and plant and machine operators reported never or rarely receiving support. By contrast, only about 7% of managers and professionals said that they lacked social support.

When looking at differences by sector, consistent with the findings for occupations, the receipt of support from colleagues or peers was least common among workers in the agricultural sector: 18% of workers reported never or rarely receiving it. Transport comes in second, with 16% reporting an absence of support.

Workers in the commerce and hospitality, health and construction sectors received the most support from their colleagues: about half reported that their colleagues or peers always helped and supported them.

Among the COVID groups, the home-office workers group had the smallest share of workers who never or rarely received support from colleagues, at 6%, followed closely by the frontline workers group (7%). And while 44% of both frontline workers and home-office workers reported receiving a high level of social support, the percentage was even higher among on-location services workers (50%).

Figure 24: Levels of social support from managers, by COVID group, EU27 (%)



**Note:** Levels are based on responses to the statement 'Your manager helps and supports you': high corresponds to 'always'; moderate corresponds to 'sometimes' or 'often'; and low corresponds to 'rarely' or 'never'.

**Source:** EWCTS 2021

**Social support from managers:** The EWCTS indicates that receipt of social support from managers was quite high overall, but less common than the receipt of social support from colleagues (Table 6); 41% of workers reported receiving a high level of support from managers whereas about 15% reported never or rarely receiving it.

Following a similar pattern as support from colleagues, the receipt of support from managers was reported more by women than men and by younger age groups than older age groups. Of workers under 25 years old, 49% reported always feeling supported by their managers, while the figure for workers aged 56 years and over was 39%.

In terms of sector, more workers in agriculture (52%) and construction (46%) than in other sectors reported always receiving support from managers. The transport sector, on the other hand, had the highest share of employees (20%) reporting that they received support from managers rarely or never. This is followed by the health, public administration and industry sectors, where 16% of employees reported receiving support rarely or never.

The occupation with the highest share of workers reporting that they received support from managers was skilled agricultural workers (57%), followed by armed forces workers (46%). The lowest shares were observed among professionals (38%), technicians (39%) and managers (39%).

Figure 24 shows that, of the COVID groups, a high level of social support from managers – meaning that they always provided help and support – was least reported by frontline workers (36%).

## Job tasks

While jobs define the specific tasks that people undertake, the conditions under which jobs are performed in different companies with different modes of work organisation vary considerably. Of key importance for health and well-being are the intensity of work and the degree of discretion and autonomy workers have in performing tasks.

Work intensity is a job demand necessitating a sustained effort on the part of the worker. In the EWCTS, it is captured by asking respondents to specify the frequency with which their jobs require them to work at very high speed and to tight deadlines and to what extent they are put in situations that are emotionally disturbing. Task discretion and autonomy refer to the scope workers have to decide the way in which they carry out their activities, their working methods and their pace of work. Both are resources that allow workers to deal with the demands of their jobs.

Epidemiological evidence demonstrates that a high level of demands is associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease (Fishta and Backé, 2015; Kivimäki et al, 2015; Theorell et al, 2016), MSDs and depression (Bonde, 2008; Bannai and Tamakoshi, 2014; Theorell et al, 2015). This is especially the case when a high level of demands is combined with limited autonomy and, more so, a low level of social support.

If a job requires workers to work at very high speeds, absorbs all of their mental and physical energy, or requires them to work to very tight deadlines, it becomes difficult for them to perform tasks in the most effective way that is not harmful to health. Persistent high work intensity is hard to bear for all workers and even more so for older workers (Eurofound, 2017c).

**Table 7: Job tasks – Work intensity and task discretion and autonomy, EU27 (%)**

		Men	Women	Total
<b>Work intensity</b>	Working at very high speed	47	51	49
	Working to tight deadlines	49	46	48
	Emotionally disturbing work	15	22	19
<b>Task discretion and autonomy</b>	Ability to choose or change methods of work	51	48	49
	<i>Ability to choose or change order of tasks</i>	54	56	54
	<i>Ability to choose or change speed or rate of work</i>	52	50	51

**Notes:** The data refer to workers who responded ‘always’ or ‘often’ to each item. Italics indicates variables that were collected in Module 1 of the questionnaire, for which answers were collected from two-thirds of respondents.

**Source:** EWCTS 2021

In 2021, almost half of the workforce in the EU27 experienced high levels of work intensity (Table 7), reporting that they worked at high speed (49%) and to tight deadlines (48%) always or often. In addition, almost a fifth (19%) of workers experienced emotionally disturbing situations always or often. More women than men experienced these situations, with a 7-percentage-point difference between the two.

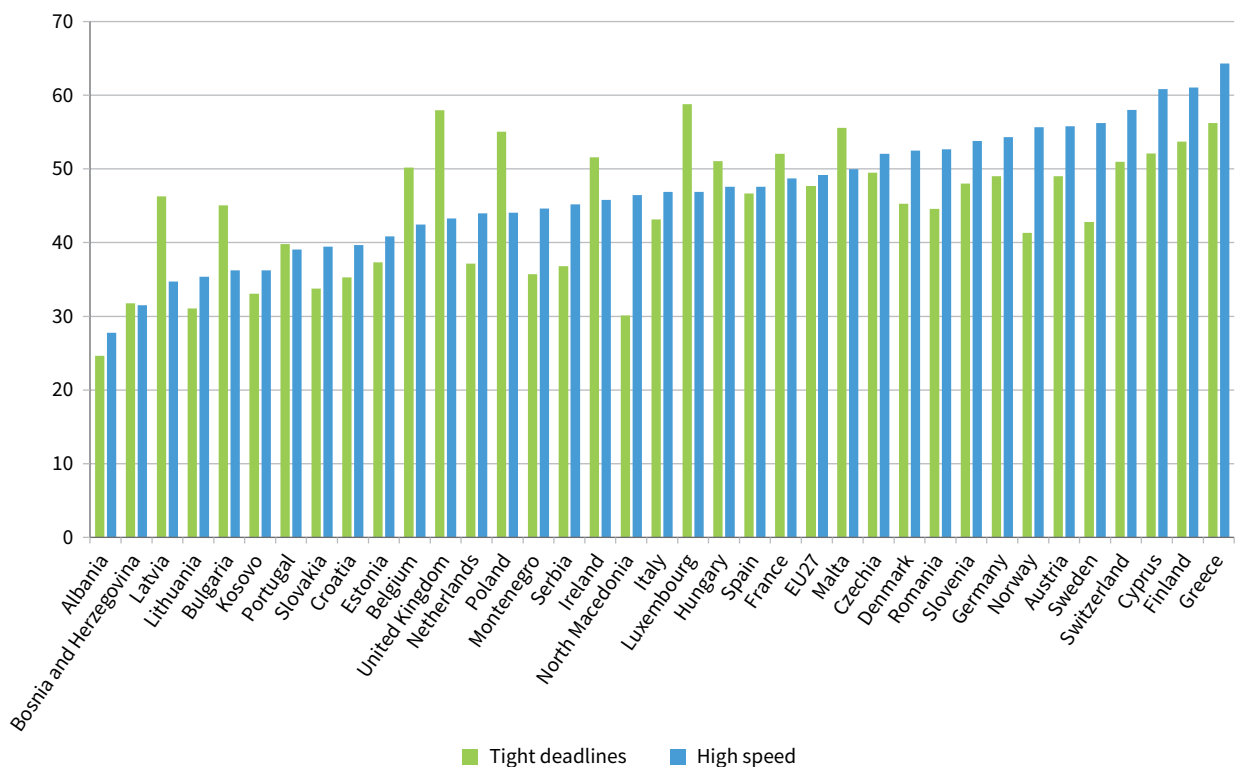
At the same time, more than half of workers had the autonomy to change the order of their tasks (54%) and the speed of their work (51%), and almost half (49%) had the power to determine their work methods. More men than women reported having higher levels of

autonomy in relation to their methods and speed of work, although the differences are small. More women than men were able to change the order of their tasks; again, the difference is small.

**Work intensity**

The prevalence of the three aspects of work intensity varied between countries (Figure 25). Working at high speed always or often was most common among workers in Greece, Finland and Cyprus, with more than 60% of workers reporting this demand, compared with around 35% in Lithuania and Latvia. The highest share of workers reporting that they worked to tight deadlines always or often was found in Malta, Luxembourg and

**Figure 25: Working at high speed and to tight deadlines always or often, EU Member States and other European countries (%)**



**Source:** EWCTS 2021

Poland (above 55%). In Greece, Finland and Cyprus, more than half of workers reported working both at high speed and to tight deadlines.

As regards sector, working at high speed was most common in health, commerce and hospitality, and financial services; working to tight deadlines was most common in financial services, construction and transport.

The challenges posed by emotional demands at work came to the fore during the pandemic. Emotional demands are more frequent in jobs that involve dealing with people, particularly those that involve providing care and support. These jobs are in most cases rewarding. They can be a part of a worker’s professional identity and fulfil a desire for social usefulness and to help people in difficulty or pain (Méda and Vendramin, 2017). However, the high level of emotional demands that comes with these jobs has been found to be a predictor of depressive disorders (Madsen et al, 2022) and other mental health problems, fatigue and burnout.

A detailed look at occupations confirms the high level of emotional demands placed upon workers in caring professions. The highest proportions of workers reporting that they experienced emotionally disturbing situations were found among health professionals (48%) and health associate professionals (43%). Around one-third of personal care workers (34%) and protective services workers (32%) also reported experiencing such situations regularly, as did subsistence farmers (32%) and teaching professionals (31%).

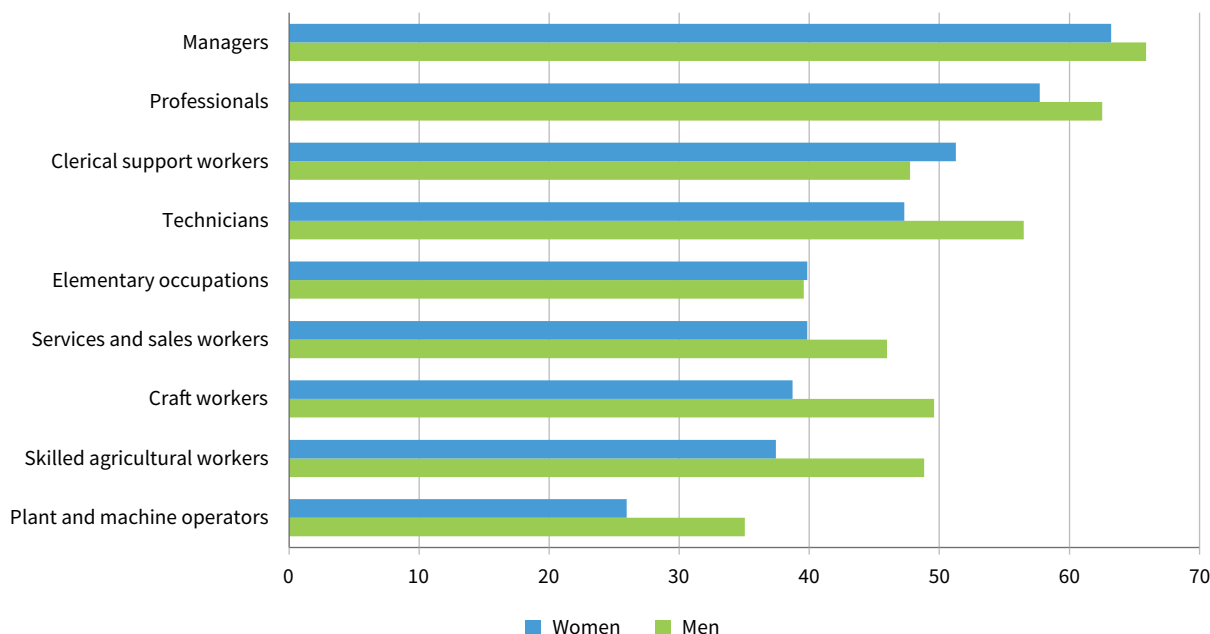
For the COVID groups, the frontline workers group had the largest proportion of workers reporting that they experienced emotionally disturbing situations (39%), three times more than home-office workers and on-location production workers. More frontline workers than workers in other groups had to work at high speed (53%), while working to tight deadlines was most prevalent among home-office workers (54%).

### Task discretion and autonomy

Workers benefit from having the discretion and autonomy to work in the way that suits them best. It leads to learning at work and increases creativity in the workplace. It also supports organisational performance, as it encourages workers to increase their discretionary effort – that is, the effort workers put in above and beyond the basic requirements of their job. A lack of task discretion and autonomy, on the other hand, can put a strain on workers’ health and well-being. A low level of freedom to make decisions about work has been associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, MSDs and mental health issues (Niedhammer et al, 2021).

Unsurprisingly, in the EWCTS, more managers than other occupational categories reported having task discretion and autonomy (61%); the lowest proportion was among plant and machine operators (40%). The occupational gradient is clearest when the autonomy to choose or change methods of work is considered (Figure 26).

Figure 26: Autonomy to choose or change methods of work, by occupation, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

In terms of sector, having autonomy as regards the speed of work was least reported by workers in the health (43%) and transport (44%) sectors and most reported by workers in financial services (60%).

Employment status and contract type were associated with different levels of autonomy. There was a clear gradient: the autonomy to determine methods of work was most common among self-employed workers with employees (63%) and solo self-employed workers (59%) and least so among temporary agency workers (34%) and temporary workers (42%).

An increase in autonomy was cited by many teleworkers as an advantage of remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, EWCTS data confirm that more workers working from home either exclusively (59%) or in combination with other locations (62%) reported having autonomy than workers based in other locations (an average of 45% depending on location).

## Organisational characteristics

The policies and practices that companies set to organise and manage work play a key role in shaping the conditions under which jobs are performed and, ultimately, job quality.

Organisational participation and employee voice are key resources. The involvement of workers in their employer's decision-making processes is important for their motivation. It also provides an opportunity for them to transform their knowledge and experience into added value for the enterprise. Workplaces that innovate and adopt practices to optimise the performance of their employees through increasing their involvement in decision-making processes emphasise the positive effects of participation on performance, learning and skills development, and creativity (Eurofound and Cedefop, 2020).

Data from the EWCTS show that in 2021 60% of workers in the EU were able to influence decisions that were important for their work (Table 8). This share was higher for the self-employed (85%) than for employees (56%), and more men reported having this power than women.

Among employees, 57% were involved in improving work organisation and processes in their own department or organisation, and the same share was consulted before their work objectives were set.

## Dependence

Self-employed workers sometimes depend on a client to make key decisions about their work. In the EWCTS, 30% of self-employed workers reported being unable to hire or dismiss staff, and 6% were not in a position to make the most important decisions on how to run the business. These circumstances constitute an organisational demand, as they restrict the opportunities for self-employed workers to operate independently. These issues are distinct from issues around the economic vulnerability of the self-employed, discussed later in the chapter in the section 'Job prospects'.

## Organisational participation and workplace voice

Organisational participation and workplace voice refer to the extent to which employees are able to influence decisions in the workplace through direct consultation rather than through their representatives (for more information on employee representation, see Chapter 3). This allows workers to communicate matters affecting their work and well-being to management, to enhance management's awareness of the needs of their staff and to help employers use their resources more efficiently.

**Table 8: Organisational characteristics – Organisational participation and dependence, EU27 (%)**

			Men	Women	Total
<b>Organisational participation</b>	Ability to influence decisions that are important for your work (always or often)	Self-employed	86	83	85
		Employees	59	52	56
		All	63	56	60
	<i>Involved in improving the work organisation or work processes of your department or organisation (always or often)</i>	Employees	58	57	57
		<i>Consulted before the objectives of your work are set (always or often)</i>	57	56	57
<b>Dependence</b>	Do not have the authority to hire or dismiss employees	Self-employed	26	37	30
	Make the most important decisions on how to run the business (tend to agree or strongly disagree)		4	8	6

**Note:** *Italics indicates variables that were collected in Module 1 of the questionnaire, for which answers were collected from two-thirds of respondents.*

**Source:** EWCTS 2021

In 2021, more than twice the proportion of managers took part in organisational developments as workers in elementary occupations: while 84% of managers were able to influence decisions that were important for their job, this was the case for 41% of workers in elementary occupations. When occupation and gender were considered, more men always reported having opportunities to influence important decisions than women.

Employees with a permanent contract reported having organisational voice on all three indicators more than employees with a temporary contract and temporary agency workers. A higher proportion of employees with a longer-term temporary contract reported organisational participation, while the proportion of workers with a part-time contract who did so (87%) was lower than that of those who worked full time (91%).

An interesting pattern was found in organisational participation by age. Some 63% of older workers (aged 56 and over) reported that they were able to influence decisions that were important for their work, 3 percentage points more than workers aged 25–34 years. The proportion who said that they were consulted before objectives were set for their work, at 57%, was similar to that of the other age groups. And 56% were involved in improving the work organisation or work processes of their own department or organisation, 4 percentage points less than workers aged 35–44 years.

The pandemic created the need for many workplaces to adapt work processes quickly. It is therefore interesting to examine the differences between the four COVID

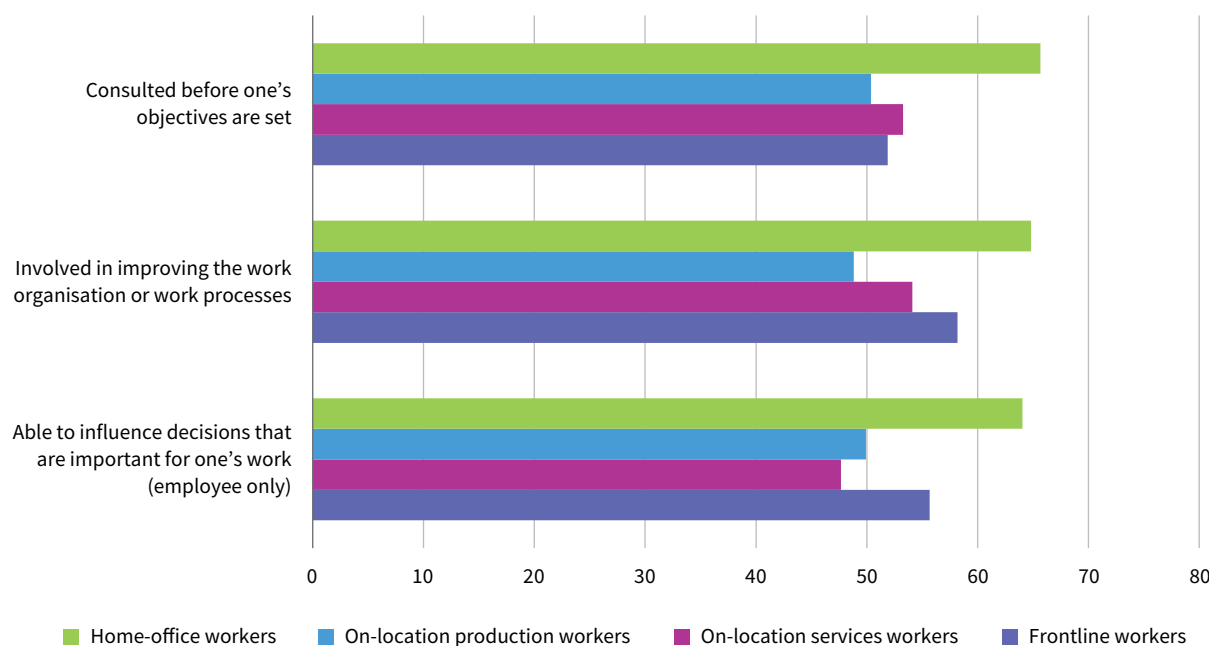
groups as regards organisational participation and voice. Figure 27 shows that the ability to influence decisions important to their work was most likely to be reported by home-office workers (64%) and least likely to be reported by on-location services workers (48%). With regard to being consulted on work objectives and involvement in improving work organisation and processes, home-office workers also fared better than other groups; 66% were consulted and involved.

## Working time arrangements

Considerable attention has been paid to working time, and it has been regulated by the EU with a view to ensuring the protection of workers against excessively long and atypical working hours. More recently, policy discussions and regulation have addressed the predictability of working hours and the ‘right to disconnect’ – the right of workers not to engage in work-related electronic communications such as emails or messages outside working hours.

Working time – specifically, its duration and organisation – contributes to job quality in two ways. On the one hand, working time affects the health and well-being of workers. Long working hours constitute a health risk, and the extent to which workers are exposed to workplace risks increases with the duration of work. On the other hand, a good fit between working time and non-working time over the life course is essential for workers to be able and motivated to work and to continue to work up to the standard retirement age.

Figure 27: Organisational participation and workplace voice, by COVID group, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted working time arrangements in multiple ways. For many working men and women, the way they allocated hours individually and at household level to work and non-work-related activities changed dramatically. The closure of schools and care facilities was very challenging not only for households that needed to avail of those services but also for households whose members were delivering these services. Working from home reduced commuting time. For workers based at their employer's premises, the implementation of social distancing in workplaces and changes to public transport schedules affected the times at which they could work. For example, extra time may have been needed to clean up work stations between patient and customer visits. A shift system may have been implemented to reduce the possibility of contact between employees and to comply with social distancing rules.

These COVID-19-related changes in working time arrangements occurred in the context of longer-term changes in working time, characterised by a decline in the proportion of people working long hours, the increased blurring of the line between working and non-working life, and an increase in the flexibility granted to workers with regard to working time arrangements.

This section examines working time demands (different ways in which working hours are unsocial) and resources (the flexibility of working hours) in workers' main job. (The overall allocation of available hours to paid work, caring and housework, and the influence of gender roles are discussed in Chapter 4.)

### Unsocial work schedules

The EWCTS captures four types of working time that are generally regarded as unsocial: regularly working in one's free time, regularly working at night, working long hours and regularly being required to work at short notice. Although these dimensions are captured by separate questions, they can overlap.

A sizeable share of workers in the EU continued to face challenges regarding working time arrangements in 2021 (Table 9). One in six workers (16%) reported working during their free time several times per week or more to meet work demands. Around one-fifth worked at night regularly, and 17% reported working more than 48 hours per week. Some 14% of workers had to go into work at short notice (2%, daily; 4%, several times a week; and 8%, several times a month). Except for working in one's free time, men reported more working time demands than women.

On the positive side, three-quarters of workers found it very easy (33%) or fairly easy (43%) to arrange to take an hour or two off during working hours to take care of personal or family matters, an indicator for working time flexibility; nevertheless, 11% found it very difficult and 13% found it fairly difficult to do so.

### Working in free time

Working during one's free time is one way in which the boundaries between work and private life are blurred. The use of technology and the advent of the digitised workplace have undoubtedly contributed to this. People may work in their free time to carry out supplementary tasks to prepare for work or to deal with unpredictable emergency tasks, but often they do so just to keep on top of their everyday tasks.

Working in one's free time was most common in the education and agriculture sectors, reported by 36% and 31% of workers, respectively. More than a third of skilled agricultural workers (36%) reported doing so regularly, as did 29% of managers and 25% of professionals.

Figure 28 shows EWCTS findings on working during one's free time according to location of work. They highlight that 26% of those who worked from home partially and 23% of those who did so exclusively worked in their free time, higher rates than among workers who worked from other locations. There is

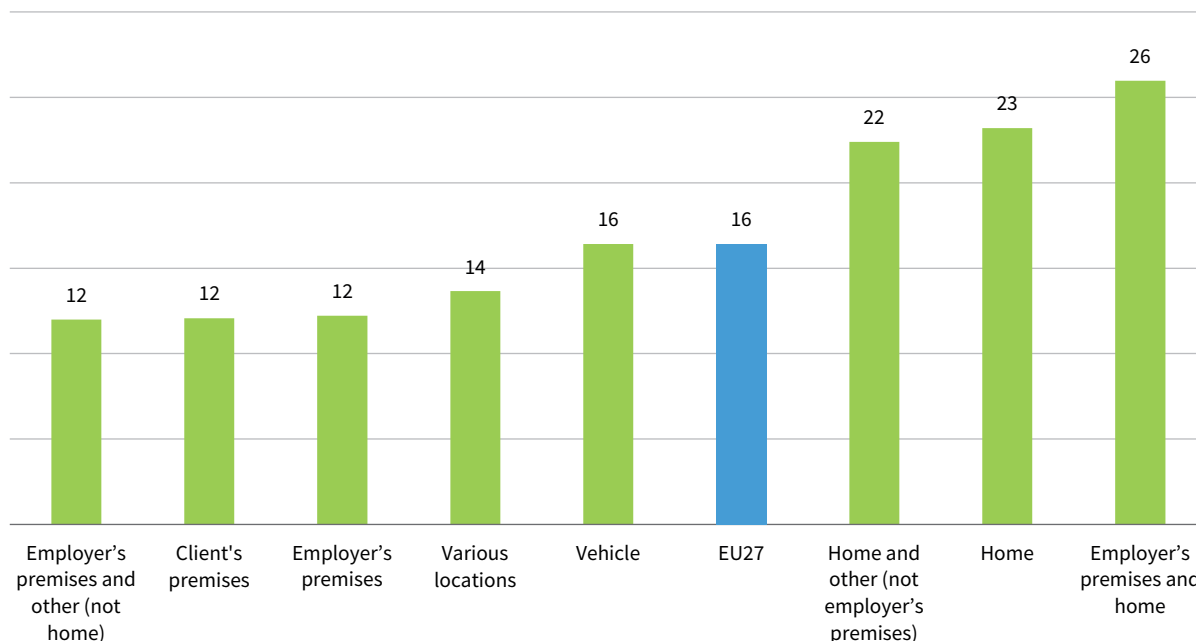
**Table 9: Working time arrangements – Unsocial work schedules and flexibility in working hours, EU27 (%)**

		Men	Women	Total
<b>Unsocial work schedule</b>	Working in free time to meet work demands (several times a week or more)	16	17	16
	Working at night (sometimes or more often)	25	17	21
	Long working hours (48 or more in main job)	21	11	17
	Working at short notice (several times a month and more)	15	12	14
<b>Flexibility in working hours</b>	Arranging to take an hour or two off work (very easy)	37	29	33

Source: EWCTS 2021



Figure 28: Working in free time, by place of work, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

evidence that the expectation that workers will be available outside working hours is connected to neck pain, mental distress, sleep problems and work–life conflict, all of which have a negative impact on workers' health (Knardahl and Christensen, 2022).

### Night work

Night work has long been identified as taxing and has negative repercussions for the health and well-being of workers. One-fifth of workers (21%) in the EU27 engaged in night work in 2021. It was more common for men than for women (25% versus 17%) and in the middle and younger age groups than in older age groups.

When occupations are considered, night work was most prevalent in occupations linked to security, such as armed forces workers and protective services workers (65% of each category reported working at night). It was also common in the care occupations, such as health professionals (39%), and occupations linked to the operation of 24/7 facilities and the transport of goods, such as plant and machine operators (42%) and drivers (46%).

In terms of employment status, night work was more prevalent among self-employed workers with employees (34%), solo self-employed workers (29%) and temporary agency workers (23%). A quarter of employees with a fixed-term contract of over a year also reported working at night.

Of the COVID groups, the highest prevalence of night work was found among frontline workers (29%) and on-location production workers (28%), whereas the

prevalence was 22% among on-location services workers and 13% among home-office workers.

### Long working hours

Anyone who works 48 hours or more a week on average is considered to have long working hours; 17% of workers reported that their usual working hours met or exceeded the 48-hour threshold in 2021.

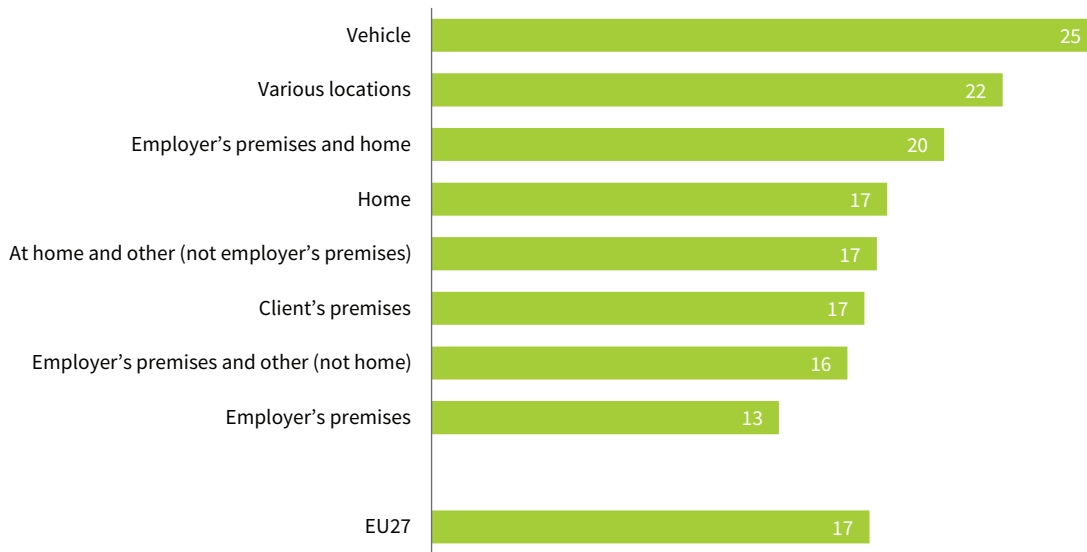
More than one in four skilled agricultural workers, managers, drivers and machine operators worked very long hours. Women were less likely to work long hours in paid work than men, across all age groups, with a gender gap of around 10 percentage points. In terms of location of work, Figure 29 shows that working long hours was most prevalent among workers who worked from a vehicle (25%); the prevalence was around the EU27 average among workers who worked from home fully or partially. (Long working hours are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.)

### Working at short notice

Being asked to come into work at short notice makes working time unpredictable and achieving a good work–life balance more difficult.

EWCTS data show that workers in the youngest age group, 16–24 years (21%), and workers with a low level of education (23%) reported working at short notice in greater numbers, proportionately, than workers aged 56 and over (12%) and workers with higher levels of education (12%). It was also more common for workers with managerial responsibilities to be called into work at short notice.

Figure 29: Long working hours, by place of work, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

Substantial differences in working at short notice are apparent when employment status and contract type are examined (Figure 30). Self-employed with employees and solo self-employed workers, workers with no contract and workers whose contractual arrangement was categorised as ‘other’ reported a higher prevalence of working at short notice.

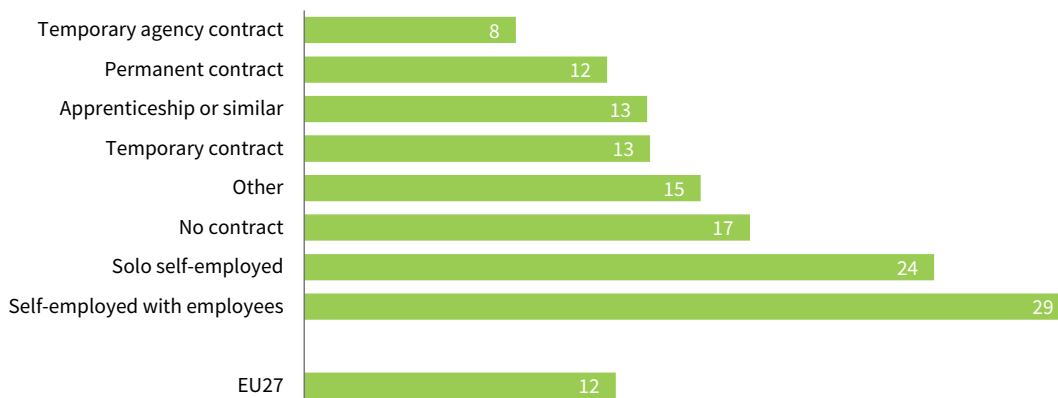
### Flexibility in working hours

Having the flexibility to adapt their working hours is good for workers’ well-being and supports a healthy balance between their personal and working lives. There is a great divide in terms of work–life balance between workers who enjoy some flexibility and those

who do not. Research has found that the latter report substantially poorer work–life balance, higher risk to their health and well-being because of work, and a greater prevalence of exhaustion, both emotional and physical, than the former (Eurofound, 2018a). Having flexibility also improves engagement with work.

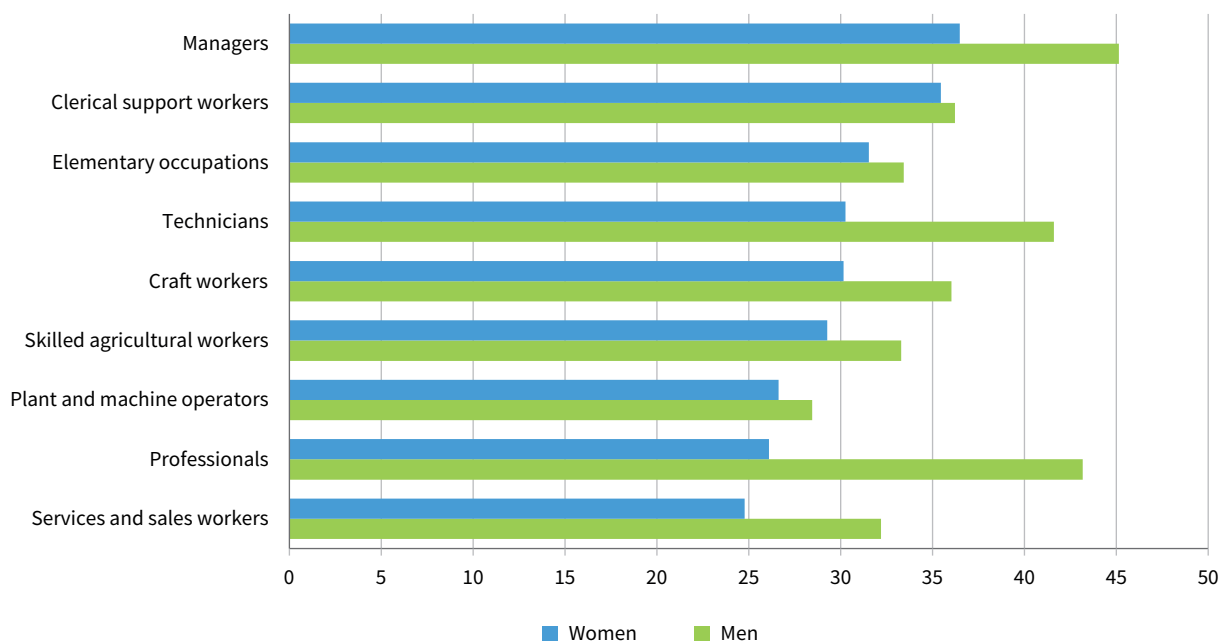
A significant indicator of working time flexibility is the ease with which an individual can take an hour or two off to attend to a personal matter. Access to this flexibility was very gendered in 2021: 37% of men were able to take such time off very easily, while 29% of women could do so. This gender gap exists for all age groups and was widest, 10 percentage points, for workers aged 56 years and over.

Figure 30: Working at short notice, by employment status, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

Figure 31: Very easy to take an hour or two off work, by occupation and gender, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

In all occupations, more men than women reported being able to take an hour or two off easily (Figure 31). For example, among professionals 43% of men but only 26% of women reported that it was very easy to take time off.

In terms of sector, only in public administration and construction did the same proportion of women as men report having the ability to take a couple of hours off.

## Job prospects

Job prospects relate to those aspects of a job that contribute to an individual's need for employment, both the material need to have an income and the psychological need associated with the individual's self-esteem and identity. These prospects influence people's experience of work in different ways: positively, when jobs provide opportunities for training, learning and career advancement, and negatively, when insecurity is a feature of the job.

With regard to job resources, prospects include opportunities to grow and learn new skills at work and for career advancement. In terms of job demands, prospects include the risk of losing one's job and qualitative job insecurity – that is, the fear of losing

some attributes of work that one values (such as certain working hours or rewarding tasks). An equivalent demand affecting self-employed workers is economic vulnerability.

An individual's job prospects depend on external factors, such as changes in organisational structures (including downsizing and restructuring), and the general labour market outlook. Macroeconomic fluctuations may reinforce the perception of job insecurity, while robust labour market policy, such as employment-protection legislation, effective public employment services and unemployment benefits, can alleviate workers' concerns about their job prospects.

In 2021, 15% of employees and 17% of self-employed people in the EU27 feared that they might lose their job in the six months following the survey, while around a fifth of workers (21% of employees and 22% of the self-employed) expected an undesirable change in their work situation (Table 10). In the year preceding the interview, 45% of employees received training paid for by their employer; in addition, 46% of all workers had access to on-the-job training, while 62% felt that they were learning new things at work. Just half of workers reported that their job offered opportunities for career advancement.

**Table 10: Job prospects – Job insecurity, training opportunities and career advancement, EU27 (%)**

			Men	Women	Total
<b>Perceptions of job insecurity</b>	Might lose job in the next 6 months (strongly agree or tend to agree)	Employees	16	13	15
		Self-employed	18	16	17
	Expected undesirable change in work situation (strongly agree or tend to agree)	Employees	22	21	21
		Self-employed	25	20	22
	Do not have more than one client or customer	Self-employed	10	13	11
<b>Training and learning opportunities</b>	Training paid for or provided by employer	Employees	47	44	45
	On-the-job training provided (by co-workers or supervisors)	Employees	50	47	49
		Self-employed	34	34	34
	Learning new things (always or often)	Employees	60	61	61
		Self-employed	71	71	71
<b>Career advancement</b>	Job offers good prospects for career advancement (strongly agree or tend to agree)	Employees	55	45	50
		Self-employed	60	54	58

Source: EWCTS 2021

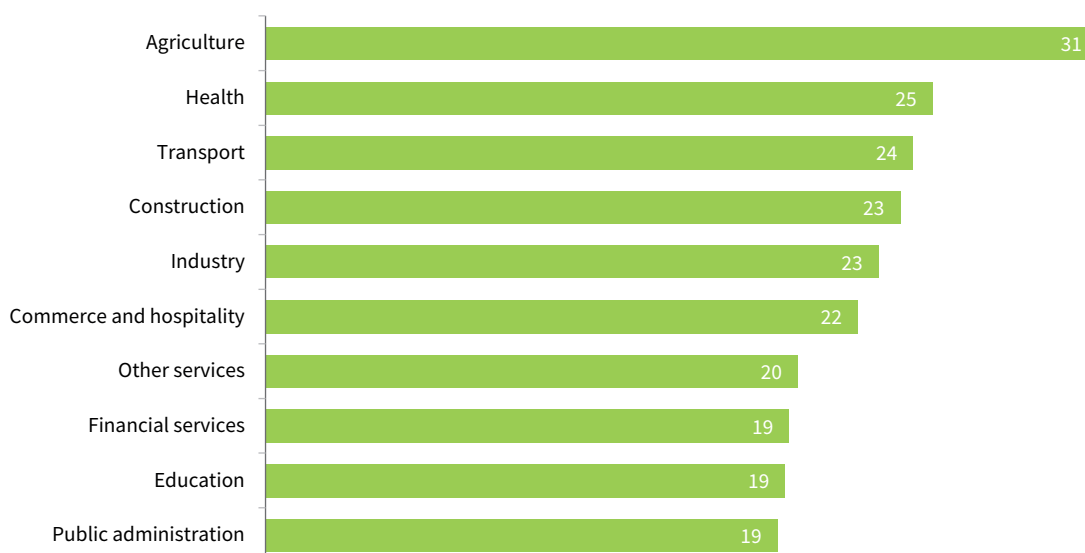
### Perceptions of job insecurity

The COVID-19 pandemic and its economic consequences diminished job security and job stability, which has affected workers' well-being (Wilson et al, 2020). The effects of job insecurity on well-being are similar to that of unemployment (De Witte, 1999; Burchell, 2011) in terms of the risk of cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure and chronic depression (Sultan-Taïeb et al, 2022). Moreover, job insecurity is associated with suicide attempts (Blomqvist et al, 2022), a finding that makes it crucial to expand knowledge on this issue.

The fear of losing one's job was more common among younger workers (20%), solo self-employed workers (19%), workers on temporary agency contracts (40%) and temporary workers (33%) than among workers of other employment statuses in 2021.

It was reported more by services and sales workers (19%), craft workers (17%), plant and machine operators (20%), and workers in elementary occupations (22%) than workers in other occupations. In terms of sector, this aspect of job insecurity was more prevalent in commerce and hospitality and in construction, two sectors whose activity had been restricted at some time during the pandemic. And in terms of workplace size, close to one-fifth of workers (18%) in micro-companies (with 1–9 employees) reported concerns about losing their job in the six months after the survey, compared with 11% of workers in large companies (with 250 or more employees).

Some 24% or more workers in the agriculture, health and transport sectors reported that they expected undesirable changes in their work (Figure 32). And from

**Figure 32: Expectation of undesirable change in the workplace situation, by sector, EU27 (%)**

Source: EWCTS 2021

an occupational perspective, a quarter or more of skilled agricultural workers, craft workers, and plant and machine operators experienced this type of job insecurity.

### Training and learning opportunities

Close to half of employees (45%) received some type of training paid for or provided by their employer. The shares of younger (16–24 years) and older (aged 56 years and over) women who received training (34% and 40%, respectively) were smaller than the shares among their male counterparts. Training opportunities continued to differ by occupation, with the highest skilled receiving more training.

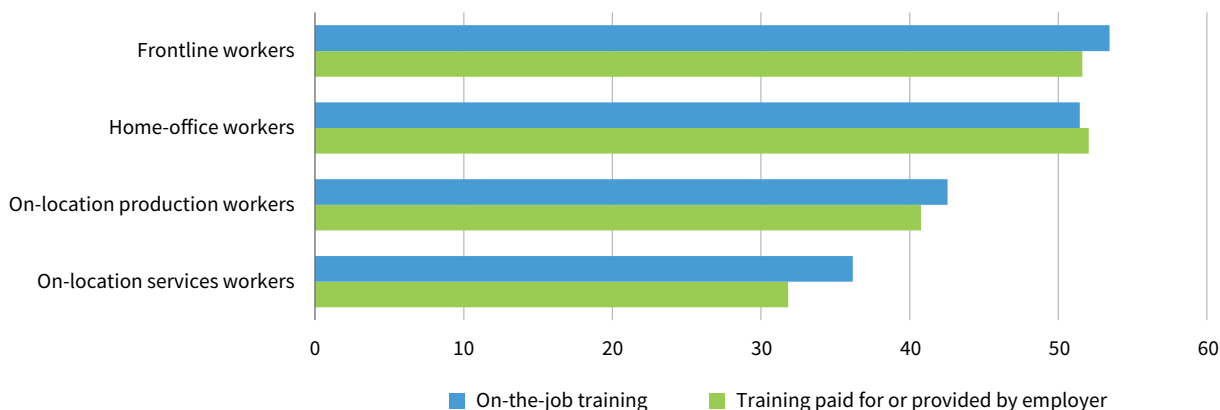
During the pandemic, training was likely to have been in greater demand, given the introduction of many new workplace practices and other adaptations required as a result of the pandemic. In addition, for some workers at least, downtime due to temporary interruptions to business activities gave workers the opportunity to spend more time in training. A look at the four COVID groups indicates that more frontline workers and home-office workers had access to training than the other groups, with more than half of workers in both groups accessing on-the-job training and employer-paid formal training (Figure 33). The lowest percentage accessing paid training and on-the-job training was among on-location services workers.

Younger workers had more opportunities to learn new things in their job than workers in the middle and older age groups, while the percentage of self-employed workers who reported learning new skills in their job was 10 percentage points higher than that of employees. The same occupational trend as for access to training appears in the data, with more workers in the most skilled occupations saying that they learnt new things at work than in other occupations: 78% of professionals and 72% of managers reported learning new things but only 37% of workers in elementary occupations did so.

### Career advancement

Providing opportunities for career advancement is crucial to maintain the motivation and engagement of the workforce; jobs with poor career prospects tend to cause psychological distress. On average, a higher share of men responding to the EWCTS (56%) said that their job had good career prospects than women (47%). With increasing age, the share of workers disagreeing with the statement that their career prospects were good increased. The most optimistic group was men aged 25–34 years, of which only 23% felt that they did not have good prospects.

Figure 33: Access to training opportunities, by COVID group, EU27 (%)



Note: On-the-job training applies to all workers, while training paid for by the employer applies to employees only.  
Source: EWCTS 2021

In terms of employment contract, the group that least perceived opportunities for career advancement was temporary agency workers (39%), while higher-than-average percentages were found among apprentices (77%) and self-employed workers with employees (67%). Unsurprisingly, perhaps, a low share of those working part time (42%) believed their opportunities for career advancement were good.

In terms of sector, positive assessments of career prospects were least common among workers in education, while they were most common among workers in the financial services and construction sectors. Among occupations, the lowest share of workers reporting good prospects was in the elementary occupations group, whereas the highest shares were found among managers and craft workers. In all sectors and occupations, more men than women reported that the career prospects in their job were good.

## Intrinsic job features

There are many reasons why people work. People engaging in work have expectations not only around income and job security and high-quality personal relationships but also around intrinsic rewards, including opportunities for personal development, fulfilment and self-expression at work.

A key dimension of intrinsic rewards captured by the EWCTS is recognition for one's work, which refers to the extent to which workers receive external validation acknowledging the contribution they have made through their work.

Work also provides opportunities for self-realisation, measured by several indicators in the EWCTS: having enough opportunities to use one's knowledge and skills in one's current job, being paid appropriately for one's work, doing useful work and having a sense of work well done.

Jobs that allow self-realisation and make workers feel recognised are likely to improve company performance because workers are willing and eager to go the extra mile. They also support well-being and make workers more resilient to stress and risks.

When people's expectations (and these intrinsic ones in particular) in relation to work are not met, there is a risk of low motivation and exit from work and a higher risk of burnout and mental health problems.

During the pandemic, society acknowledged the unstinting efforts of many workers, including doctors, nurses, hospital and nursing home workers, and transport and retail workers, as well as some groups of workers that are usually invisible to society at large, such as workers who collect refuse or who are in contact with bodies (Hughes, 1951). In the early months of lockdown, people across the EU in cities, towns and villages engaged in nightly public clapping in recognition of the commitment and courage of workers required to carry out hazardous but essential work. At the same time, people working from home instead of the office reported feeling isolated and felt a lack of recognition for their contribution from co-workers and the work community. It seems that digital channels have not been capable of fully replacing in-person communication.

In 2021, a large majority of workers (72%) in the EU27 felt that they received the recognition they deserved for their work (Table 11). The vast majority (88%) felt that they were doing useful work always or often. The share who always or often felt their work was well done was also high (86%).

However, the share who felt they were appropriately paid was lower, at 59%. Only 55% of women felt appropriately paid, as opposed to 62% of men. In addition, 50% of men and 46% of women reported having enough opportunities to use their knowledge and skills in their job.

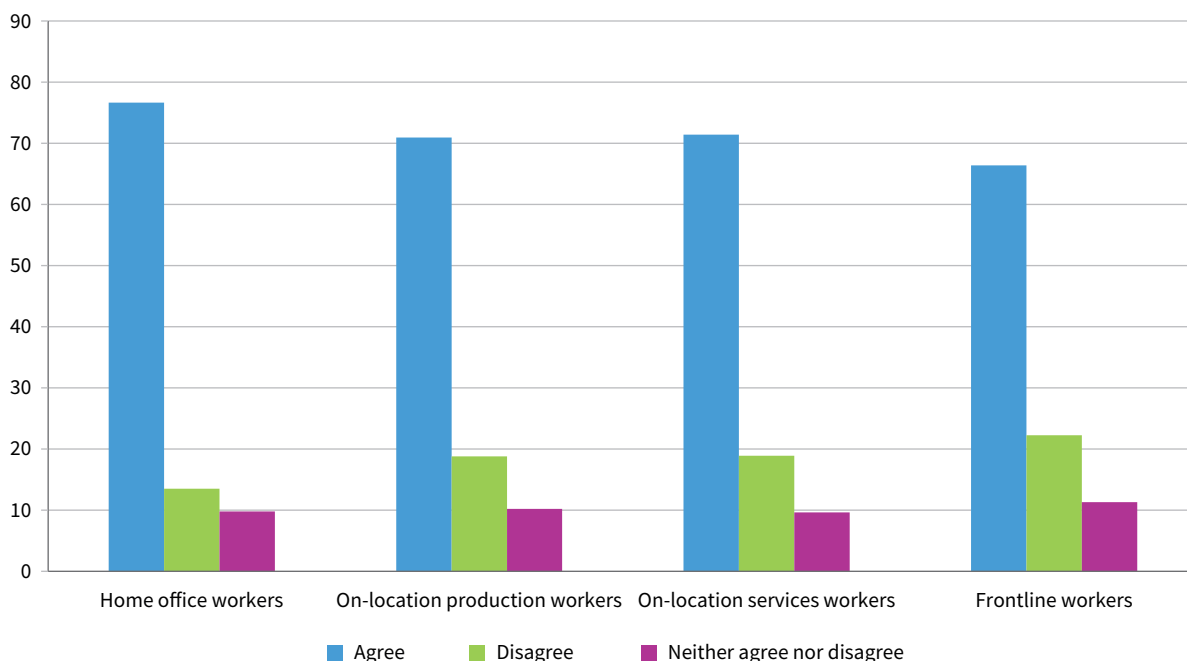
**Table 11: Intrinsic job features – Intrinsic rewards and opportunities for self-realisation, EU27, 2021 (%)**

		Men	Women	Total
<b>Intrinsic rewards</b>	<i>I receive the recognition I deserve for my work (strongly agree or tend to agree)</i>	73	71	72
<b>Opportunities for self-realisation</b>	<i>I have enough opportunities to use my knowledge and skills in my current job (agree)</i>	50	46	48
	I feel that my work is well done (always or often)	86	87	86
	I am doing useful work (always or often)	88	89	88
	<i>Considering all my efforts and achievements in my job, I feel I get paid appropriately (strongly agree or tend to agree)</i>	62	55	59

**Note:** *Italics indicates variables that were collected in Module 1 of the questionnaire, for which answers were collected from two-thirds of respondents.*

**Source:** EWCTS 2021

Figure 34: Recognition at work, by COVID group, EU27 (%)



Note: Responses to the statement 'I receive the recognition I deserve for my work'.

Source: EWCTS 2021

### Intrinsic rewards

The pandemic highlighted the issue of recognition for work when it suddenly became clear how important relatively poorly paid and often rather hidden jobs are for the functioning of society. The discrepancies between societal importance and recognition are reflected in the EWCTS data.

In some sectors that played a key role in the management of the COVID-19 pandemic, lower proportions of workers than the EU27 average (72%) agreed with the statement that they received the recognition they deserved, including agriculture (66%), transport (67%), health (68%) and education (69%). Proportions were also lower than the average among refuse workers (68%), teaching professionals (67%), protective services workers (66%), plant and machine operators (66%), health associate professionals (61%) and skilled agricultural workers (44%).

Of the COVID groups, the frontline workers group had the highest share of workers (22%) who disagreed with the statement that they received the recognition that they deserved for their job (Figure 34).

More self-employed workers with employees (80%) and solo self-employed workers (76%) reported receiving recognition for their work than employees. Furthermore, more workers aged 56 and over and younger workers (aged 18–24) reported receiving recognition (both 76%) than their peers aged 25–55 (70%).

### Opportunities for self-realisation

Turning to opportunities for self-realisation and respondents' perception of their pay, less than half of workers employed in the health sector agreed that their pay was in line with the efforts that they put into their work. Dissatisfaction with pay was also apparent among others who made a significant contribution during the pandemic: 54% of teaching professionals, 51% of health professionals and 45% of personal care workers agreed that their pay was fair.

The feeling of carrying out useful work often or always was more common among workers who dealt with customers than among those who had no customer contact. This highlights the direct and positive influence that contact with customers and clients can have on workers' self-realisation at work. When working with customers goes well, it is a source of gratification.

Comparing different contractual situations, aspects of self-realisation were reported least by temporary agency workers: 83% felt they did useful work always or often, and 80% had a feeling of work well done. At the other end of the spectrum, 92% of self-employed workers had a feeling of work well done, and 88% of employees reported that they did useful work always or often. There was no difference in the experience of doing useful work between part-time workers and full-time workers.

Considering the COVID groups, there are clear differences in how they assessed the usefulness of their work but not in relation to work well done: 93% of frontline workers reported that their work was useful, followed by 88% of home-office workers and 88% of on-location production workers, whereas the figure was 85% for on-location services workers.

The proportions of men and women reporting doing useful work were similar, while of all age groups older workers most often reported doing useful work and a feeling of work well done.

At occupational level, the highest proportions of workers reporting that their work was useful were found among managers, skilled agricultural workers and craft workers (91% for all three), while the lowest proportion was found among workers in elementary occupations (82%), followed by clerical staff and members of the armed forces (both 85%). At a more granular level, the highest proportions reporting useful work were among personal care workers, health professionals and health associate professionals (all 95%) and teaching professionals (94%).

In relation to work well done, this feeling was most common among managers (89%) and craft workers (88%) and least commonly reported by workers in elementary occupations and clerical support staff (both 84%) and members of the armed forces (82%). Drilling down further, the feeling of work well done was least common among refuse workers, customer service clerks, protective services workers and labourers in the construction sector.

Across sectors, the perception of doing useful work was least prevalent among workers in commerce and hospitality (83%) and most prevalent among workers in health and education (94% in both cases), sectors that contributed to meeting essential needs during the pandemic. Work well done was reported most by workers in the construction (89%), health (88%) and education (87%) sectors. It was least reported by workers in the public administration sector.

With regard to opportunities to use one's knowledge and skills in a job, fewer women reported systematically having those opportunities than men.

More self-employed workers (56%) reported having opportunities to use their knowledge and skills in their work than employees (47%). And whereas only 9% of workers on a permanent contract reported not having opportunities to use their knowledge and skills, this was the case for 15% of those on a temporary contract.

The lowest proportions of workers who had opportunities to use their knowledge and skills were found among clerical support workers and workers in elementary occupations (both 44%), while the highest proportions were found among managers (55%) and craft workers (53%). In terms of sector, the highest proportions were reported by workers in construction (53%) and health (50%).

## Job quality index

Having examined how job demands and job resources were distributed across the working population in 2021, this section focuses on job quality and applies the job quality index to calculate workers' job quality. The index uses a methodology developed by the OECD (2017) to measure the quality of the working environment, comparing individual exposure to demands and resources. In cases where workers are exposed to more job demands than job resources, they experience 'job strain'. Workers who feel job strain are most at risk from a health and well-being perspective and would benefit most from an improvement in their job quality.

The quality of the working environment is one of the three headline indicators collected by the OECD to monitor the qualitative performance of its jobs strategy. It measures the 'better jobs' dimension, which in the EU is usually referred to as 'job quality'. The relevance of job quality in EU policy is summarised in Box 4.

### Box 4: Policy relevance of job quality

EU Member States are strongly committed to improving working conditions. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union states in Article 151 that the EU and its Member States

*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.*

This commitment was endorsed by its inclusion as a key objective of the European Employment Strategy.

The job quality agenda complements the policy agenda on employment and supports equal opportunities in the workplace for women and men. It is instrumental in supporting the transition of the EU as it adapts to the digital, decarbonisation and demographic transitions and will be impacted by these developments.



Numerous areas of policy are relevant to job quality, including occupational health, skills, inclusion, gender equality, employment status and working time. Policy initiatives and regulations limit or decrease exposure to demanding working conditions (for example, long working hours or exposure to carcinogens) and promote access to more favourable and fairer working conditions (encapsulated in the European Pillar of Social Rights). Policies and legislation set minimum standards, ensuring equal access to rights for all workers, promoting exchange and cooperation between Member States, supporting actors and contributing to the improvement of working conditions of groups of workers.

In most cases, job quality policies are being developed with the support of the social partners, who communicate and represent the perspectives and interests of the stakeholders of work. Indeed, social dialogue and the involvement of workers is one of the 20 principles of the Pillar.

Over the years, job quality has also steadily gained more policy traction across the world. Examples include:

- the OECD Jobs Strategy (2018), which emphasises job quality and inclusion alongside strong job creation and measures the qualitative performance of the labour market using three indicators: earnings security, labour market insecurity and the quality of the working environment
- the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which include Goal 8: ‘Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all’
- the ILO’s Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which includes the principle of a safe and healthy working environment, added on 21 June 2021

### Strained jobs and resourced jobs

The quality of the working environment indicator is based on the job demands–resources model proposed by Bakker and Demerouti (2008). This model summarises the quality of the working environment as the difference between the number of job resources (which affect workers positively) and the number of job demands (which affect workers negatively). The indicator is calculated at the level of the individual worker by comparing the number of demands and resources in their job. A job is described as ‘strained’ when the number of demands exceeds the number of resources and ‘resourced’ when the number of resources exceeds the number of demands. Workers in strained jobs are at risk of poorer health and well-being, not only in the short term but also in the medium and long terms.

Using the EWCTS data and building on the quality of the working environment indicator, an index for measuring job quality was constructed. Based on this index, jobs are grouped into six levels, ranging from those with the highest number of demands relative to resources to those with the lowest number of demands relative to resources: extremely strained, highly strained, moderately strained, poorly resourced, moderately resourced and highly resourced. (Details on how the job quality index was constructed can be found in Annex 4.) This categorisation of jobs will be used in the chapters that follow to analyse the job quality associated with different aspects of working life.

In order to validate the job quality index, its association with well-being and other dimensions of the quality of working life were tested using the EWCTS data – see Box 5.

### Box 5: Association between job quality and quality of working life

The analysis examined the association between job quality and the quality of working life as represented by facets such as well-being, work–life balance, work engagement and ability to make ends meet. The association between job demands and resources with these working life outcomes was also examined.

The results, shown in Table 12, confirm that all the dimensions of job quality considered have an impact on well-being and the quality of working life and point to potential areas of concern and policy intervention for the improvement of working conditions.

The first row shows the association between poor job quality (job strain) and working life outcomes. It indicates, for example, that job strain is associated with lower well-being and increased exhaustion.

The subsequent rows examine the individual association of the respective job demands and job resources with the quality of working life. They show that job demands are negatively related to the quality of working life, while job resources are positively related to it. The results indicate, for example, that a reduction in discrimination and

intimidation (which constitute social demands) would improve the quality of working life, as it would boost well-being, work engagement, trust and work-life balance, and reduce exhaustion and health and safety risks at work.

The results suggest that working life could also be improved by increasing job resources.

**Table 12: Association between job quality, job demands and job resources and well-being and quality of working life indicators**

	Well-being	Engagement	Trust and cooperation	Work-life balance	Ability to make ends meet	Exhaustion	Health and safety at risk
<b>Job strain</b>	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
<b>Job demands</b>							
Physical risks	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
Physical demands	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
Social demands	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
Work intensity	Red	Red	Red	Red	Blue	Red	Red
Dependency	Blue	Red	Red	Blue	Red	Red	Red
Unsocial hours	Red	Red	Red	Red	Blue	Red	Red
Job insecurity	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
<b>Job resources</b>							
Social support	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue
Autonomy	Blue	Blue	Red	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue
Workplace voice	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue
Time flexibility	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue
Training	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Red	Blue
Intrinsic rewards	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue
Self-realisation	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	Blue

**Notes:** The bars represent regression coefficients. Each row shows the relative association between an indicator on the left and well-being and other quality of working life indicators. The red bars indicate a negative outcome for workers, while the blue bars indicate a positive outcome. For example, social demands have a strong negative impact on well-being. The analysis controlled for country, occupation, industry, age, sex and employment status. Only significant results are shown.

The well-being and quality of working life indicators used in this analysis are described below.

- **Well-being** is based on the WHO-5 Well-being Index, the items of which are included in the questionnaire.
- **Work engagement** is based on a series of questions examining workers’ experience of a ‘positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption’ (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003, p. 4).
- **Trust** is based on responses to three statements relating to issues contributing to a good social climate at work: management trusts employees, employees trust management, and there is good cooperation between colleagues.
- **Work-life balance** is based on responses to the question of whether or not respondents’ working hours fit with their family and social commitments.
- **Making ends meet** measures a household’s ability to cope financially.
- **Exhaustion** captures self-reported incidence of both emotional and physical exhaustion.
- **Health and safety at risk** is an evaluation provided by respondents of their safety at work.

These quality of working life indicators are examined in more depth in Chapters 4 and 5.

While the association between the job quality index and well-being was expected, given that the job quality indicators were selected for their empirical and theoretical association with health and well-being, the same strong relationship is also observed with the other dimensions of working life. This is in line with prior empirical evidence from the 2015 EWCS. However, it was observed that despite far-reaching changes to the working environment during the COVID-19 pandemic, job quality continued to play a role in supporting well-being and a good quality of working life. It thus proved to be a resilient indicator.

These results endorse the high priority given to a 'better jobs' policy. They indicate that the improvement of job quality is key to supporting sustainable work over the life course. They also support the current emphasis in policy on preventing exposure to psychosocial risks in the workplace. These risks include work intensity, quantitative and qualitative job insecurity, low autonomy and exclusion from participation in organisational developments, poor social relationships at work, and a lack of opportunities for self-realisation (Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Santé, 2011).

These results suggest that there are many ways to improve job quality, by reducing exposure to job demands and increasing access to job resources. They also indicate the need for a comprehensive policy agenda to address these issues and aid in efforts to decrease workers' exposure to job demands and efforts to increase access to job resources.

## Distribution of job quality

This section presents findings on how the distribution of job quality varies across the working population according to different characteristics of workers and their work.

In 2021, around 30% of EU workers were in strained jobs, where they experienced more job demands than job resources. Broken down further by the degree of strain, the results show that 4% of workers were in extremely strained jobs, 8% were in highly strained jobs and 19% were in moderately strained jobs. The remainder (approximately 70%) were in resourced jobs, meaning they had more access to job resources and were less exposed to job demands: 26% were in poorly resourced jobs, 23% were in moderately resourced jobs and 21% were in highly resourced jobs.

### Gender

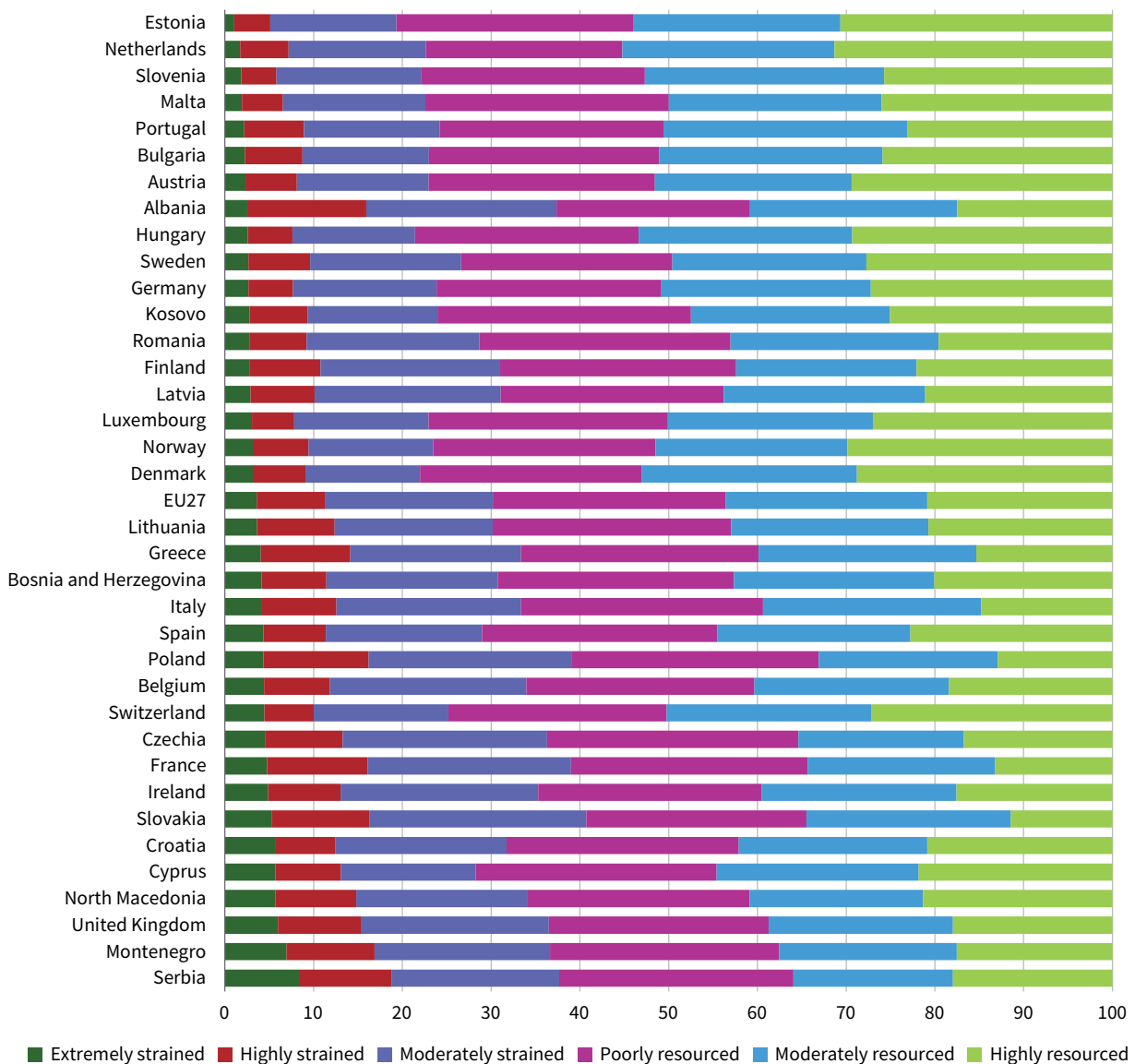
Gender differences in relation to job strain are apparent: more women (32%) had strained jobs than men (29%). In addition, more women (20%) than men (18%) worked in moderately strained jobs.

### Country

Country differences in workers' exposure to job strain are considerable (Figure 35). They reflect different occupational structures and different employment and work policies and practices, as well as different phases of the pandemic and different policy responses to it. Despite the dissimilarities, the results highlight the size of the population of workers that would benefit most from being supported after the pandemic.

In 13 countries, fewer than one-quarter of workers worked in a strained job: Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Kosovo, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and Slovenia. But over a third of workers in 12 countries did so: Albania, Belgium, Czechia, France, Ireland, Italy, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia and the United Kingdom.

Figure 35: Job quality index, EU Member States and other European countries (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

### Employment status

More employees (31%) worked in strained jobs than self-employed workers (27%), a finding that is in line with prior research on job quality; nevertheless, while the proportions of employees and self-employed workers in extremely strained jobs are similar (about 4%), more than 1 in 10 self-employed individuals worked in highly strained jobs. There are substantial differences between self-employed workers and employees when their employment status is considered at a more detailed level (Figure 36).

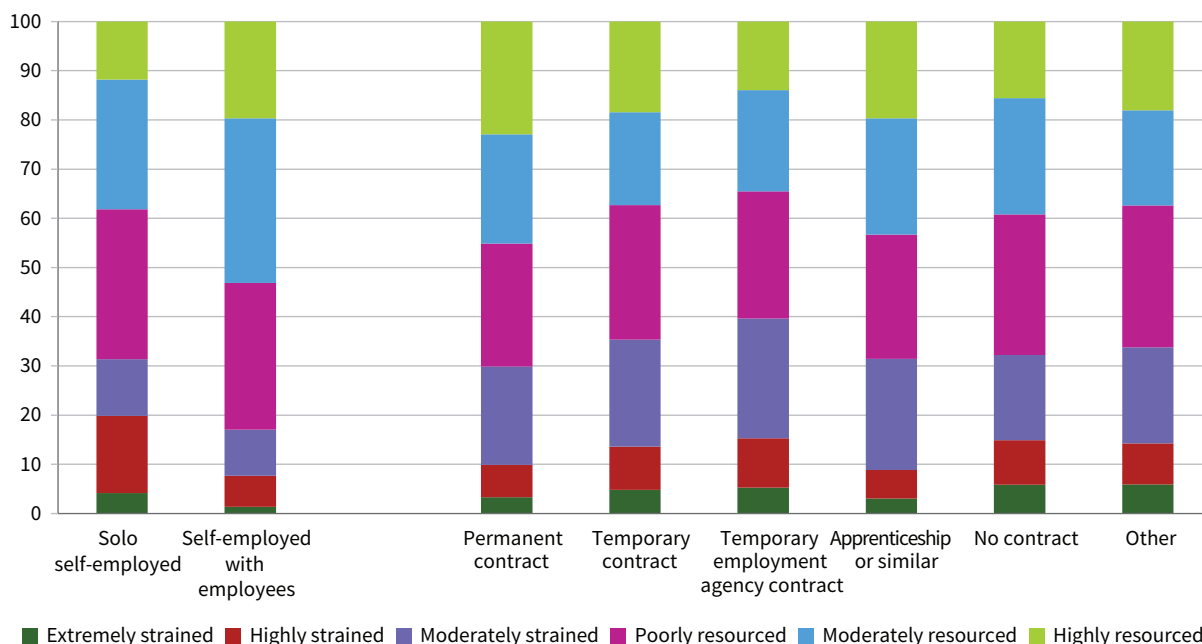
Among self-employed workers with employees, 17% worked in strained jobs (extremely strained, highly strained and moderately strained jobs), which is the lowest percentage of all employment statuses in strained jobs and just over half of the average for the

working population (30%). The share is 31% among solo self-employed workers, which is in line with the average and only 1 percentage point more than employees with a permanent contract. Solo self-employed workers are, however, overrepresented in the extremely strained and highly strained categories.

Turning to employees, the highest proportion of these in strained jobs is found among temporary agency workers (40%); the proportion of employees with a fixed-term contract of less than a year working in strained jobs (37%) was also above average, by 6 percentage points.

Extremely strained jobs are most common among employees with no contract (6%); altogether, 32% of this group are in strained jobs.

Figure 36: Job quality index, by employment status, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

Smaller proportions of employees with a permanent contract report were in extremely and highly strained jobs but were overrepresented in moderately strained jobs.

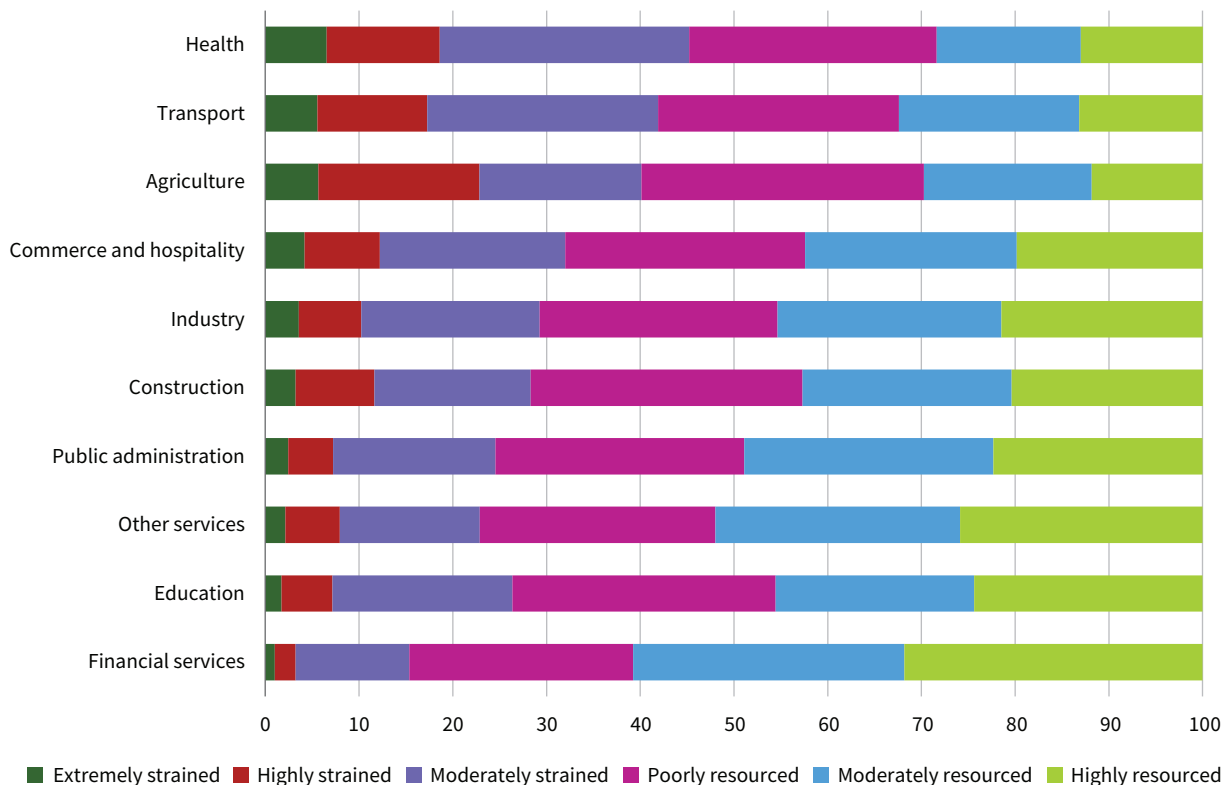
These results suggest structural differences in the experience of job strain according to employment status and confirm the relevance of developing policies that support employment quality (in terms of better terms and conditions of employment) to complement efforts in improving job quality. While the job quality index does not include features of workers’ employment situation, these features determine some aspects of job quality, such as employment security and access to training.

**Sector**

The highest proportion of strained jobs was found among workers in the health (45%), transport (42%) and agriculture (40%) sectors (Figure 37). Extremely strained jobs were most common among workers in health (7%, nearly double the EU27 average), and 50% more workers in this sector than the EU27 average worked in highly strained jobs (12%, compared to the EU27 average of 8%).

More workers in the public sector worked in strained jobs (33%) than those in the private sector (29%). Workers who worked alone or in micro-workplaces (fewer than 10 workers) worked to a lesser extent than average in strained jobs (28% versus 30%). Workers who worked alone, however, worked to a greater extent in highly and extremely strained jobs (15%) than workers overall in these categories (12%).

Figure 37: Job quality index, by sector, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

### Occupation and gender

Occupations encapsulate many structural characteristics of work and entail different degrees of exposure to job demands and access to job resources.

Strained jobs were least prevalent among managers (16%) (Figure 38), but this percentage obscures substantial differences within this group: strained jobs were far more common among hospitality managers and production managers than among other subgroups of managers.

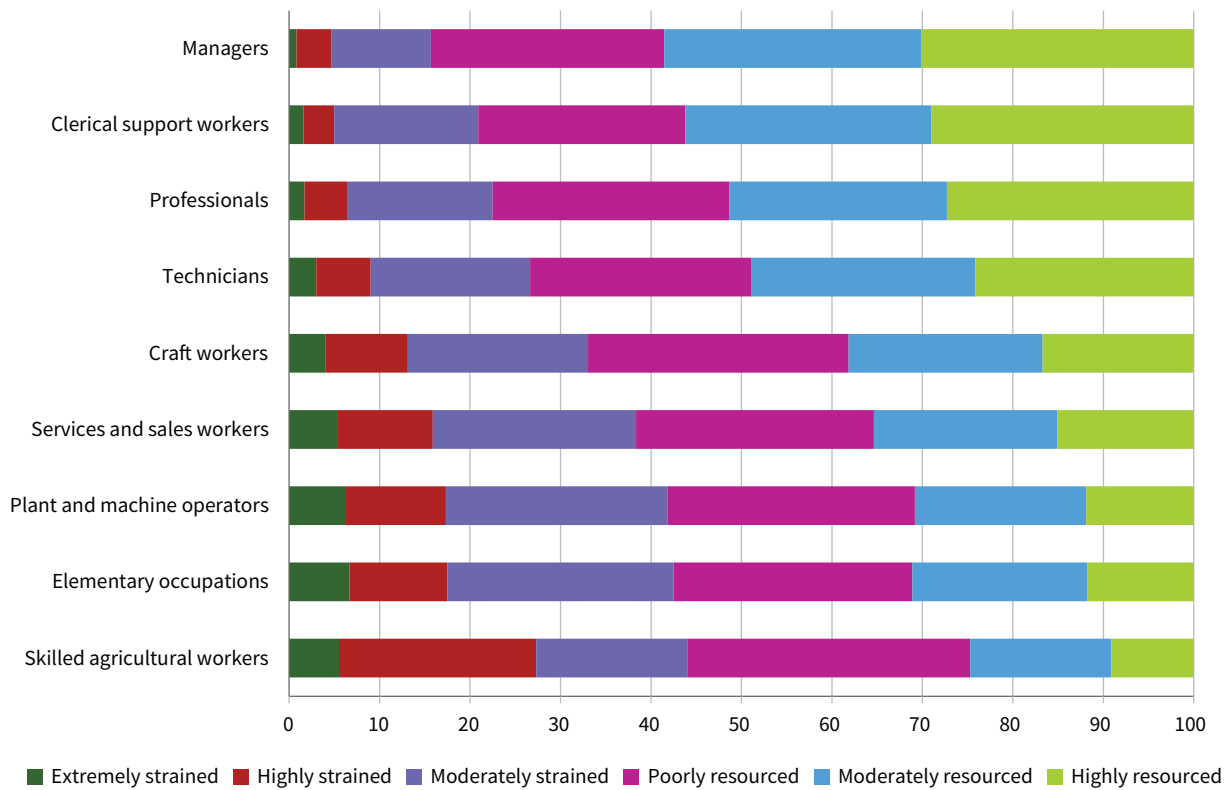
Of the other main occupational groups, 21% of clerical support workers and 23% of professionals worked in strained jobs, below the EU average of 30%.

Exposure to job demands was most prevalent among skilled agricultural workers, while the proportion with access to job resources was low; as a result, 44% of these workers were in strained jobs, while 27% of them had jobs in the highest strain categories (almost 6% were in extremely strained jobs and 22% were in highly strained ones). The proportion of workers in strained jobs was higher than average in the elementary occupations (43%) and plant and machine operators (42%) groups and to a lesser extent among services and sales workers (38%).

Looking at a more granular level (ISCO-08 submajor groups), health associate professional was the only occupation where the majority of workers were in strained jobs (53%), but close to half of personal care workers (48%) were similarly in strained jobs. Strained jobs were also more prevalent among labourers in mining, construction and manufacturing; other elementary workers; agricultural labourers; refuse workers; health professionals; stationary plant and machine operators; drivers; protective services workers; and cleaners and helpers. In all cases, the proportions were at least 10 percentage points above the average for all occupations.

When the gender composition of occupations is considered, significant gender differences become apparent. For several occupational groups, the proportion of women in strained jobs was higher than the proportion of men: for female professionals, 11 percentage points higher; for female managers, 4 percentage points higher; for female technicians, 7 percentage points higher; for female services and sales workers, 5 percentage points higher; and for female skilled agricultural workers, 4 percentage points higher. In the case of clerical support workers and craft workers, more men than women worked in strained jobs. Among elementary occupations and plant and machine operators, there were no differences between the proportions of men and women in strained jobs.

Figure 38: Job quality index, by occupation, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

### Other demographic characteristics

**Older workers:** Job strain is likely to be harder for older workers to sustain, and they tend to work towards preventing or coping with job demands by adjusting their job and adapting their work strategies. And, indeed, the EWCTS data show that 26% of workers aged 56 and over were in strained jobs, somewhat lower than the average of 30%. Again, there is a gender gap: the proportion of women aged 56 and over working in strained jobs was 6 percentage points higher than that of their male counterparts.

**Workers with a chronic illness:** This group was the focus of specific policy measures during the pandemic due to their increased susceptibility to severe COVID-19 symptoms and risk of needing hospitalisation. More generally, an inclusive labour market aims to accommodate all workers who have some ability to work, including those with a chronic illness (one that has lasted or is expected to last more than six months).

The proportion of workers with a chronic illness in moderately, highly and extremely strained jobs was higher than average. This suggests that efforts should continue to promote policies and practices that support the accommodation of workers with chronic illnesses at work.

**Workers with children:** Strained jobs are prevalent among single parents: 14% of single parents with children aged under 5 years worked in extremely and highly strained jobs, while 38% of single parents with a child aged over 5 years were in a job characterised by one of the three levels of strain.

These results highlight the potential for positive synergies between social and employment policies that could be achieved to support the full participation in work of workers who may be more vulnerable due to their personal circumstances.

## Summary

- Job quality is multidimensional. Six dimensions were examined based on the replies of EWCTS respondents.
  - **Physical and social environment:** Exposure to physical risks and demands remained a feature of working life for a significant proportion of workers in 2021. The most prevalent physical demand was repetitive hand or arm movements, reported by 71% of workers, while half reported working in tiring or painful positions. Regarding the social environment at work, almost half of employees said that they received support from their colleagues, while 4 out of 10 felt supported by their managers. On the flip side, 13% of workers had experienced some form of intimidation, while 11% reported being discriminated against at work. The health sector particularly combined higher exposure to physical and social risks and demands.
  - **Job tasks:** Almost half of the EU27 workforce experienced high levels of work intensity in terms of working at high speed and to tight deadlines. Working in emotionally disturbing situations was less common, reported by close to one-fifth of workers. In terms of having autonomy over their work, more than half of workers were free to change the order of their tasks (54%) and the speed of work (51%), and almost half (49%) were able to determine their work methods.
  - **Organisational characteristics:** Responses to questions on organisational participation showed that 56% of employees were able to influence decisions that were important for their work, 57% were involved in improving work organisation and processes in their own department or organisation, and 57% were consulted before their work objectives were set. Most self-employed workers (85%) were able to influence key work-related decisions. Nevertheless, some lacked decision-making powers, reflected in the findings that 30% of self-employed workers were unable to hire or dismiss staff, and 6% could not make important decisions on how to run the business; these are characteristics of dependent self-employment.
  - **Working time arrangements:** On the indicator of working time flexibility, three-quarters of workers found it easy to arrange to take an hour or two off during working hours to take care of personal or family matters. Many workers had unsocial aspects to their working time: one-fifth worked at night regularly, while 16% said they worked in their free time every week to meet work demands. On average, 14% were called into work at short notice regularly, but proportions were considerably higher among workers aged 16–24 years (21%) and workers with lower educational attainment (23%).
  - **Job prospects:** Half of employees and 58% of self-employed workers reported their job had good prospects for career advancement. But on the negative side, around a fifth of workers (22% of employees and 21% of self-employed) expected undesirable change in their work situation in the year after the survey, while 15% of employees and 17% of self-employed workers thought they might lose their job within six months. Among the self-employed, 11% reported having only one client, which points to economic vulnerability. Turning to opportunities for learning, more than 6 out of 10 employees learnt new things on the job and close to half received some training at work. Higher-skilled workers received more training than lower-skilled workers.
  - **Intrinsic job features:** Most workers found their jobs rewarding: 72% agreed with the statement ‘I receive the recognition I deserve for my work’. A large majority (88%) felt that they were doing useful work; the percentage was higher (93%) among frontline workers. Percentages dropped when respondents were asked about their pay: 59% of workers said they felt they were paid appropriately. Less than half of workers (48%) said they had opportunities to use their knowledge and skills in their job; the proportions were lowest among clerical support workers and workers in elementary occupations (both 44%).
- Using EWCTS data, an index of job quality was constructed to calculate the job quality of each worker. The index uses a methodology developed by the OECD, where the job demands (which affect workers negatively) and the job resources (which affect workers positively) of an individual are compared. When workers have more demands than resources, they experience poorer job quality or ‘job strain’.
- The job quality index is positively associated with well-being and other aspects of the quality of working life. For example, higher scores on the index are associated with better work–life balance, fewer work–life conflicts, higher engagement at work, better trust and cooperation in the workplace, better ability to make ends meet, and reduced health and safety risk. The results show that, despite the shifts in the composition of the workforce and changes in the working environment brought about by the pandemic, job quality continued to play an important role in supporting good-quality working lives in 2021.



- According to the data, around 30% of EU workers were in strained jobs, where they experienced more job demands than job resources. Broken down further by the degree of strain, 4% were in extremely strained, 8% in highly strained and 19% in moderately strained jobs. The remainder (approximately 70%) were in resourced jobs, meaning they had more access to job resources than exposure to job demands. Notable findings were as follows.
  - More women (32%) had strained jobs than men (29%).
  - Country differences were substantial: in 13 of the countries surveyed, fewer than one-quarter of workers worked in strained jobs, but in 12 countries, over one-third had strained jobs.
  - More employees (31%) than self-employed workers (25%) worked in strained jobs; of the latter, percentages were higher among the solo self-employed (31%) than the self-employed with employees (17%).
  - Among employees, temporary workers were more likely to work in strained jobs: 40% of temporary agency workers and 37% of workers with a fixed-term contract of less than a year.
  - Across sectors, the highest proportions of strained jobs were found among workers in health (45%), transport (42%) and agriculture (40%).
  - When occupation is considered, the proportion of workers in strained jobs was highest for agricultural workers (44%), elementary occupations (43%), and plant and machine operators (42%), while it was lowest among managers (16%).



# 3 Working together in the pandemic

Chapter 2 examined different dimensions of job quality, looking at positive and negative features of jobs as reported by job holders and based on their concrete experiences of work. Chapter 3 supplements this analysis by examining additional features of the workplace during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- the internal and external drivers of what workers did in their work and the ways in which these drivers affected that work
- how work was organised and to what extent workers were involved in decision-making in their workplaces
- employee representation in the workplace, the different forms of which were an organisational resource for workers
- gender balance in the workplace, whether men and women tended to work in integrated or segregated environments, and whether their boss was of the same or the opposite gender

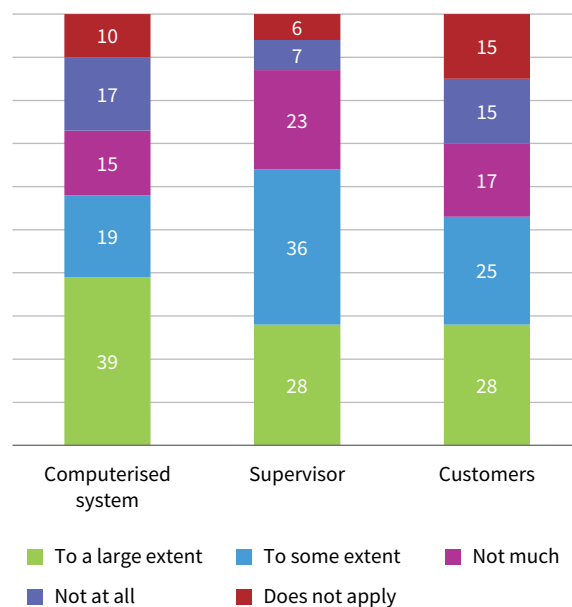
## Influences on work

A key factor in how a job is organised is the influence of drivers internal and external to the workplace. What a worker does at work is influenced mainly by a supervisor or manager, by customers or suppliers, or by computerised systems. The EWCTS asked respondents about the degree to which each of these drivers influenced the content of their work in 2021. The following describes the influence of those drivers on employees.

At EU27 level, the external driver that was most reported by employees (39% in all) as influencing their work to a large extent was a computerised system (Figure 39). An example of this is a system where a digital automated workflow prompts the worker to complete a task, rather than a supervisor or a client. The two other drivers, supervisor influence and customer influence, were both experienced to a large extent by 28% of workers.

When looking at the difference in the influence of these drivers by gender across the EU27, it does not change much from the general picture. A computerised system was the most common influence for both women (43%) and men (36%). For the two other drivers, gender differences were negligible. Interestingly, even in the digital age 27% of workers reported that there was no

**Figure 39: Extent of influence of a computerised system, a supervisor, and customers on employees' work, EU27 (%)**

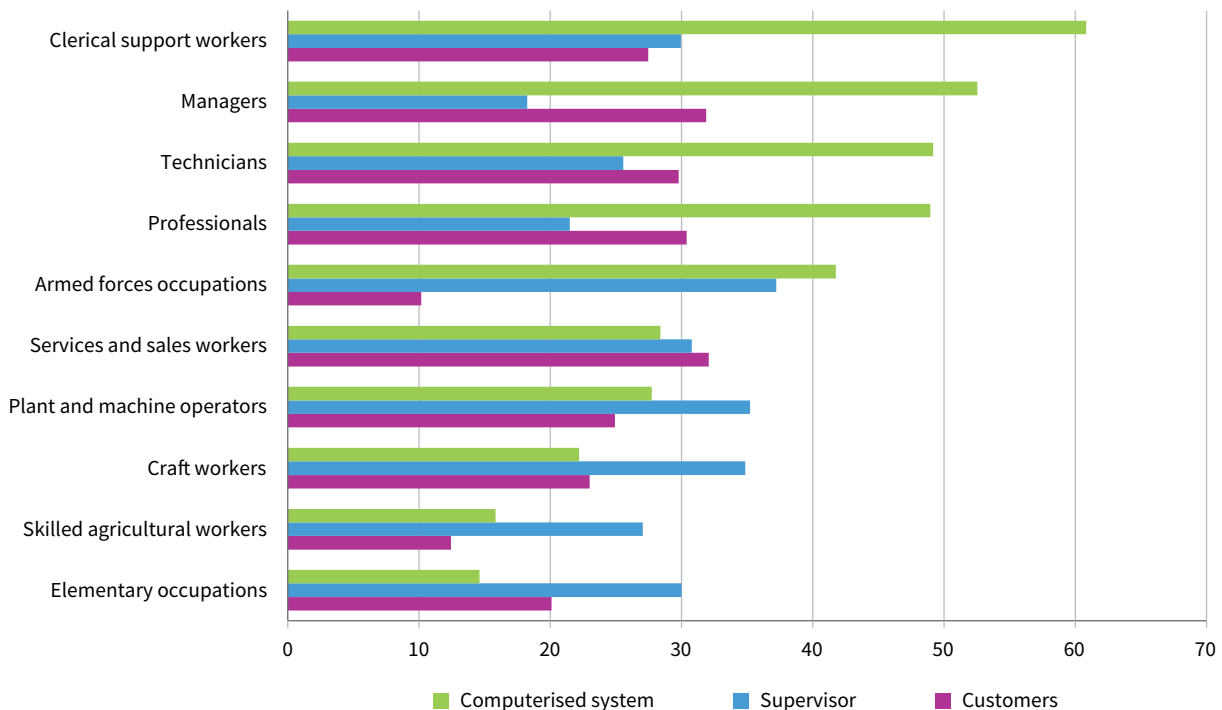


Source: EWCTS 2021

influence of a computerised system on their work or that this type of influence was not applicable to their job.

Figure 40 shows the shares of employees across the various occupational groups who reported drivers influencing their work to a large extent. A computerised system was mentioned most by managers, professionals, technicians and clerical support workers. For the first three of these occupations, gender differences were small; for clerical support workers, however, there was a 15-percentage-point difference: 66% of women compared with 51% of men mentioned that computerised systems drove their work to a large extent. Services and sales workers was the only occupation for which customers had a large influence for the largest share of workers. However, if that share is broken down by gender, the finding applies only to women (32%), whereas the influence mentioned most by men is a supervisor (33%). For skilled agricultural workers, craft workers, plant and machine operators, and elementary occupations, the driver that had a large influence was mostly a supervisor.

**Figure 40: Employees influenced to a large extent by a computerised system, a supervisor and customers, by occupation, EU27 (%)**



Source: EWCTS 2021

The work of workers educated to tertiary level was most likely to be influenced to a large extent by a computerised system (reported by more than half of women (53%) and 46% of men). By contrast, less than 10% of female workers and 14% of male workers with just primary education reported that a computerised system had a large influence on their work; in addition, in this category the influence was more likely to be minimal or not applicable to their job.

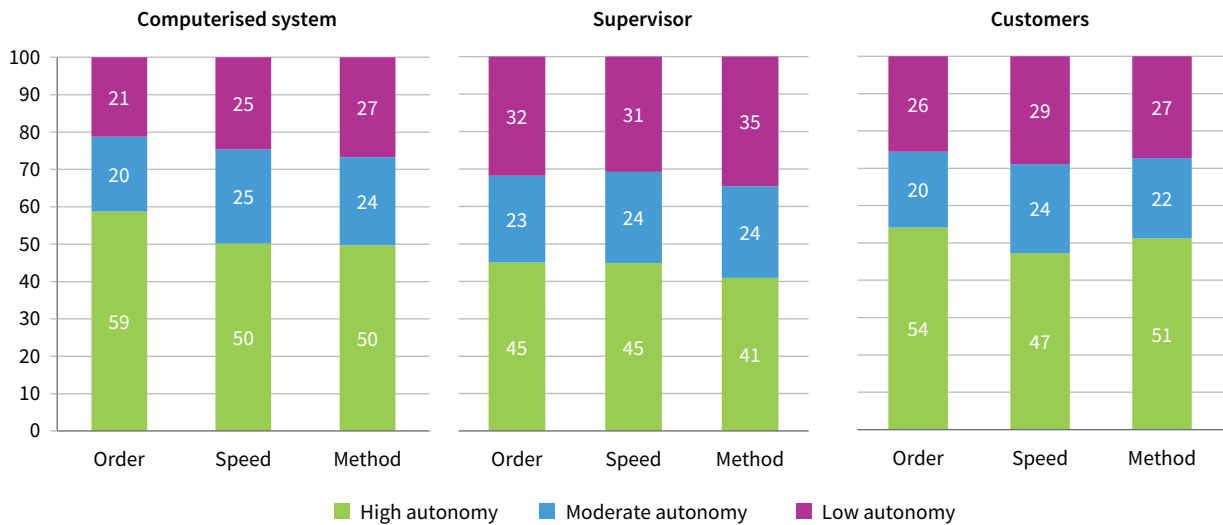
The sector with the highest share of workers who reported that a computerised system influenced their work to a large extent was financial services, for both women (66%) and men (62%). The second highest share was reported in the public administration sector, with a larger difference between men and women: 60% of women compared with 43% of men. Construction is an interesting sector as regards gender differences. Whereas 61% of women working in the sector reported that a computerised system had a large influence on their work, the influence reported most by men was that of a supervisor (30%). Only 18% of men working in construction said that a computerised system had a large influence on their work. This finding reflects the different locations of work for men and women in the sector: most men work on construction sites, while most women work in offices. The only sector where computerised systems played less of a role was agriculture.

## Autonomy

The influence of a computerised system, a supervisor or customers can determine the order in which a worker performs tasks, the speed at which tasks are accomplished and the methods chosen to complete these tasks. The influence of these drivers affects the power of a worker to determine these dimensions of their work. EWCTS data show that among employees who said that a computerised system had a large influence on their work, 59% also reported that they could decide, always or often, on the order of their tasks, and around half reported high levels of autonomy with regard to determining the speed and methods of their work (Figure 41).

Compared with a computerised system, the influence of a supervisor seems to have a greater impact on workers' autonomy. Among those reporting that a supervisor had a large influence on their work, a higher share reported low levels of autonomy for all three items: 35% reported a low level of autonomy for determining work methods (compared with 27% for a computerised system), 32% reported a low level of autonomy for determining the order of tasks (compared with 21% for a computerised system) and 31% reported a low level of autonomy for determining the speed of their work (compared with 25% for a computerised system).

**Figure 41: Employees influenced by a computerised system, a supervisor and customers, by level of autonomy, EU27 (%)**



Source: EWCTS 2021

For those employees for whom the influence of customers was prevalent, the share reporting low levels of autonomy was slightly higher than for those where the influence of a computerised system was large: 29% reported a low level of autonomy for determining the speed of their work, 27% reported a low level of autonomy for determining work methods and 26% reported a low level of autonomy for determining the order of tasks.

**Combined influences**

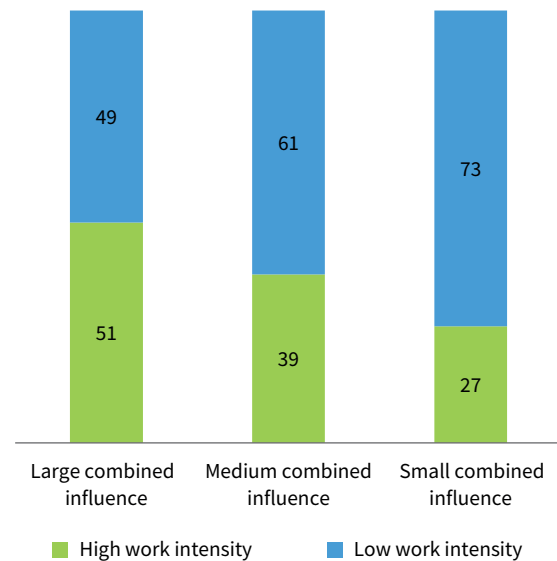
A worker can be influenced by a supervisor, customers or a computerised system in combination. In the EU, the work of 28% of employees was influenced by all three drivers to a large extent; the work of 47% was influenced to a medium extent (a mix of large and small influence); and the work of 25% was influenced to a small extent. A high degree of combined influence was experienced by 30% of women and 25% of men.

As Figure 42 illustrates, being subject to several drivers of work is linked to a higher intensity of work (see Chapter 2 for a definition of work intensity and a description of how it is measured). Among employees who experienced a high degree of combined influence from the aforementioned drivers, 51% reported a high work intensity, compared with 27% of those who experienced a low degree of combined influence.

**Influence of a computerised system: Digital devices**

When examining the influence of a computerised system on work, a question arises about the extent to which this is linked to workers using digital devices in their work. This section briefly examines the complex

**Figure 42: Extent of combined influence on employees, by work intensity, EU27 (%)**

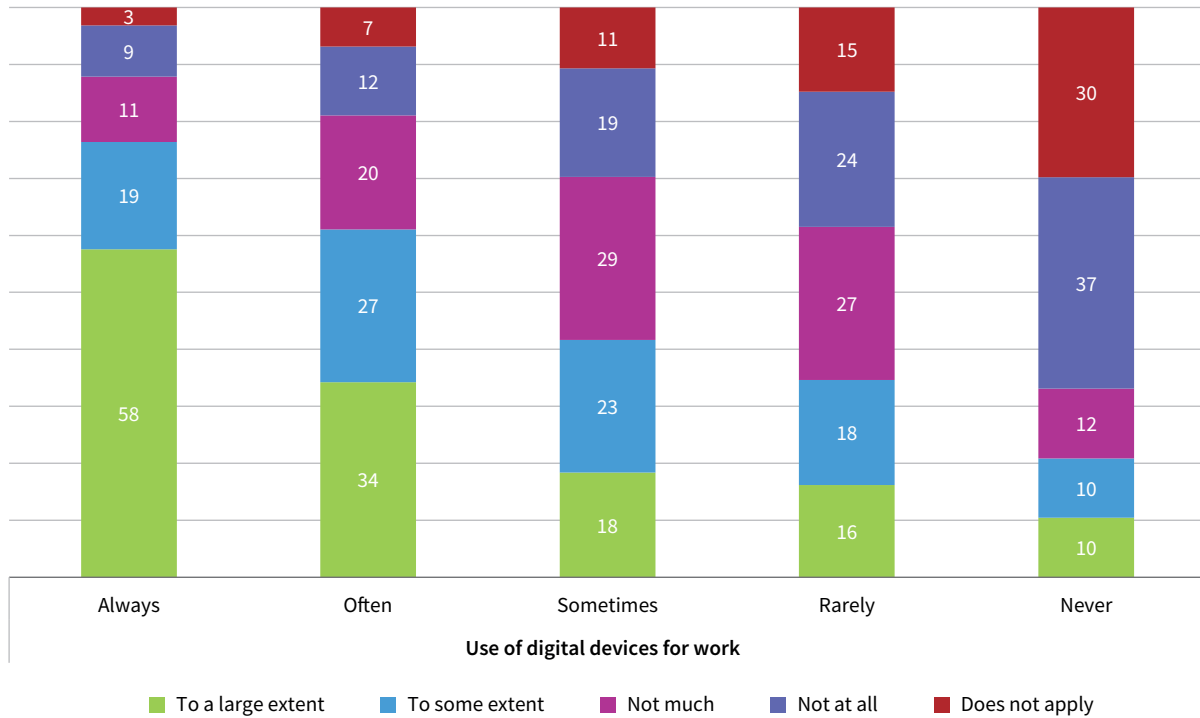


**Note:** A work intensity threshold was calculated based on the mean values of speed of tasks and working against tight deadlines for each respondent, obtaining a new set of values x. Work intensity was then set as 'low' if the resulting values were below the median of x and 'high' if above.

Source: EWCTS 2021

digital structures involved in work organisation. The EWCTS asked respondents if they worked with any of the following digital devices and how often: computers, laptops, tablets or smartphones. The link between the frequency of working with a digital device and the influence of a computerised system is shown in Figure 43.

Figure 43: Frequency of working with digital devices, by extent of influence of a computerised system, EU27 (%)

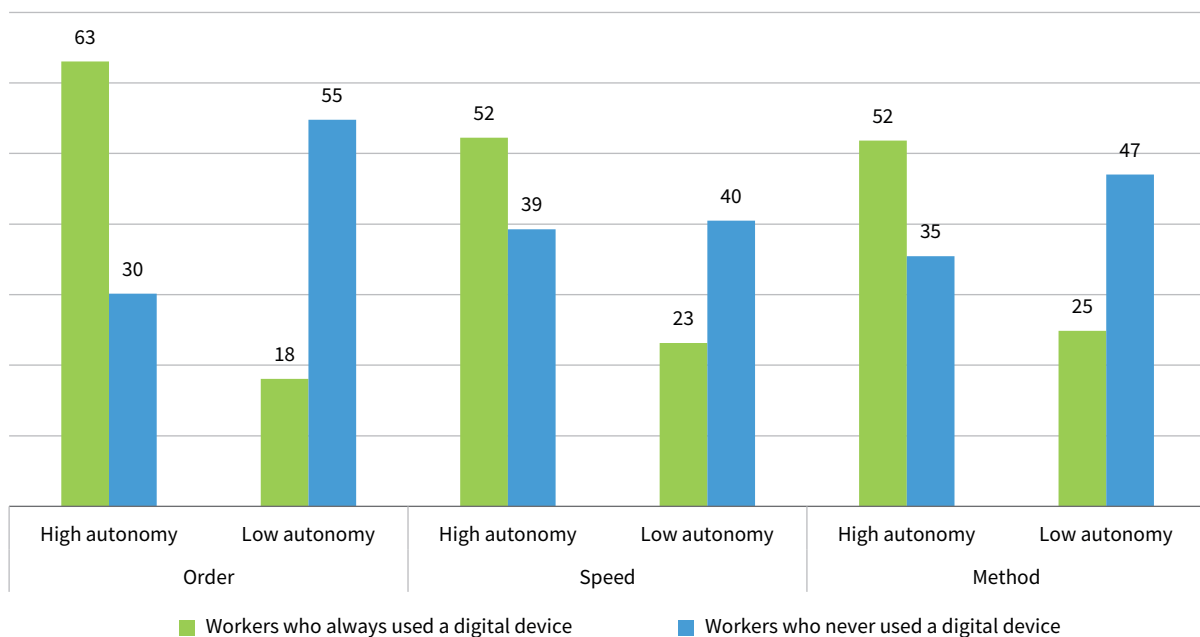


Source: EWCTS 2021

As expected, the largest group of workers (58%) whose work was influenced by a computerised system to a large extent was those who always used a digital device. However, interestingly it was observed that those who never or rarely worked with a digital device were also prompted in their work by a computerised system, an example of which is a picker of goods in a warehouse.

Heavy use of digital devices for work combined with a computerised system having a strong influence on that work could result in a loss of autonomy for workers. However, Figure 44 shows that those who always used digital devices and whose work was influenced by a computerised system to a large extent maintained a high level of autonomy in deciding the order (63%),

Figure 44: Autonomy of employees influenced by a computerised system, by use of a digital device, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

speed (52%) and methods (52%) when carrying out their tasks. On the other hand, workers who never used a digital device and whose work was influenced by a computerised system to a large extent were more likely to report low levels of autonomy in all three dimensions: order (55%), speed (40%) and methods (47%).

This analysis suggests that working with digital devices does not necessarily determine the autonomy of workers and that the digital world of work increasingly entails algorithms and digital processes having an influence on one’s job. This aspect of work could be explored in future research to gain further insights.

### What driver has the most influence?

In answer to the question of what or who has the most influence over employees’ work, the largest influence is a computerised system, reported by 39% of the workforce, and workers most likely to be influenced by this are managers, professionals, technicians and clerical support workers. Work intensity is linked to the control exercised by computerised systems, supervisors and customers on workers, and it is higher when the three drivers are combined.

## Work organisation

Another important factor that influences work is the autonomy and decision-making ability that are afforded to employees in their workplaces. Autonomy and the power to make decisions, referred to in this section as employee involvement, are the product of two

measurable indices: task discretion, or the ability of employees to take independent initiative in their work, and organisational participation, or the ability of employees to participate in decisions that affect wider organisational issues. Based on these two metrics of employee involvement, four categories of workplace organisation were developed: high-involvement, low-involvement, consultative and discretionary (Eurofound and Cedefop, 2020).

In 2021, one-third of employees in the EU worked in high-involvement organisations, in which they had a high degree of task discretion and a high degree of organisational participation (Figure 45). The next largest group (30%) worked in low-involvement organisations, in which their task discretion and organisational participation were low. A further 22% worked in consultative organisations, where their task discretion was low, but their organisational participation was high, while 16% were employees of discretionary organisations, with high autonomy for deciding on their tasks but low participation in decision-making at organisational level.

There were only marginal differences between the distributions of men and women across these forms of organisation, but men were slightly more likely to work in high-involvement organisations than women. The countries with the highest proportions of workers in high-involvement organisations were Estonia (49%), the Netherlands (45%), Norway (44%) and Malta (43%). Those with the lowest proportions were Albania (17%), North Macedonia (23%), Serbia (23%) and Slovakia (25%).

Figure 45: Types of work organisation and proportion of EU employees in each, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

Workplaces varied in the extent to which decision-making was delegated to employees. Sector made a difference: employees in the financial services, other services and education sectors tended to have a high level of involvement, for instance, whereas in the transport and agriculture sectors, their involvement tended to be much lower. Occupation was also important: professionals and managers were more likely to work in organisations that give employees more control over their work and influence on organisational matters than workers in blue-collar and less-skilled jobs. Interestingly, the highest proportions of clerical support workers, workers in elementary occupations and technicians worked in discretionary organisations, while services and sales workers, agricultural workers and craft workers were most likely to be employed in consultative organisations.

Figure 46 shows that differences are also pronounced across COVID groups, especially as regards home-office workers compared with the other groups. Almost 45% of the former reported working in a high-involvement work organisation, while this was true for only 24% of on-location production workers. Conversely, 39% of on-location production workers reported working in a low-involvement work organisation compared with only 19% of home-office workers. The results for the on-location services worker and frontline worker groups resembled those of the on-location production workers group. There was little variation across groups as regards the shares in discretionary and consultative organisations. Frontline workers were, however, most likely – out of the COVID groups – to work in a consultative organisation.

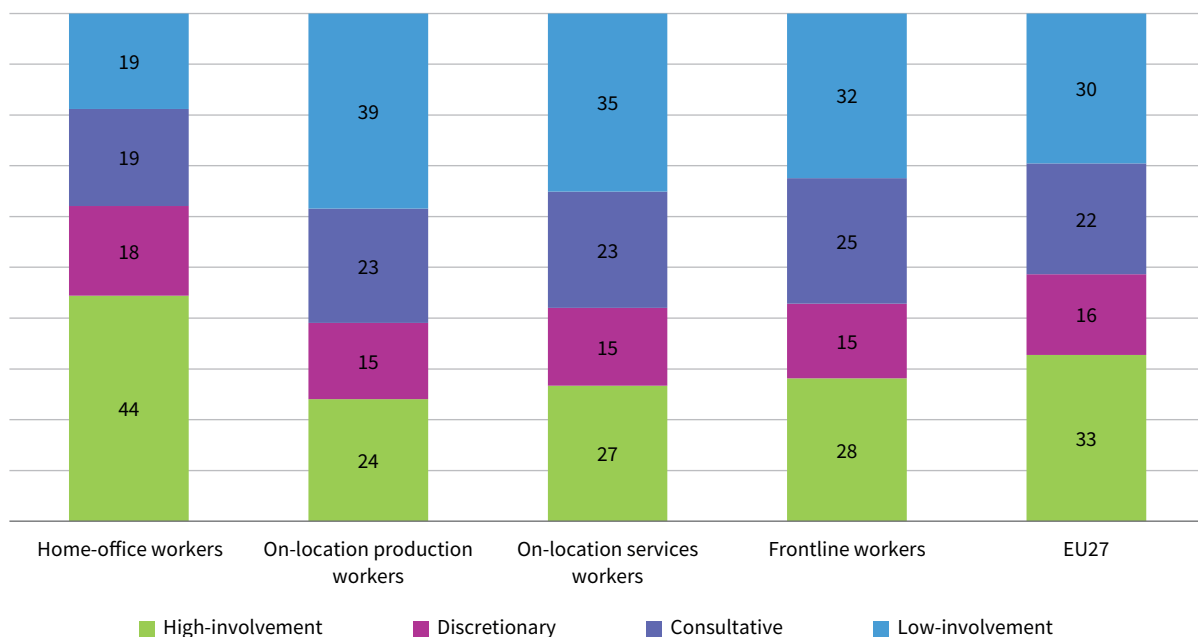
The occupation of workers appears to be the biggest driver of differences across COVID groups. An analysis of the data that controlled for the influence of other factors found that workers in the higher-skilled occupations – managers, technicians, skilled agricultural workers and professionals – were more likely to be employed in high-involvement organisations than workers in other occupations.

The analysis furthermore showed that where an occupation dominates a sector, it is the occupation that tends to determine the most common work organisation in the sector. This gives rise to the unexpected result that, when the analysis controlled for various factors, thereby removing the influence of occupation, workers in the health, public administration and education sectors were least likely to work in high-involvement organisations. This may be explained by the fact that while most workers in education, for instance, are professionals who work in high-involvement organisations, once the analysis removes the effect of occupation, the outcome is that education is among the sectors least likely to have high-involvement organisations.

In addition, the place of work was, to a certain extent, a statistically significant explanatory factor: employees who reported that they never worked from home were least likely to work in high-involvement organisations and most likely to work in low-involvement organisations.

Why is employee involvement desirable? A study of employee involvement by Eurofound (2020d) showed that employees of workplaces where staff involvement

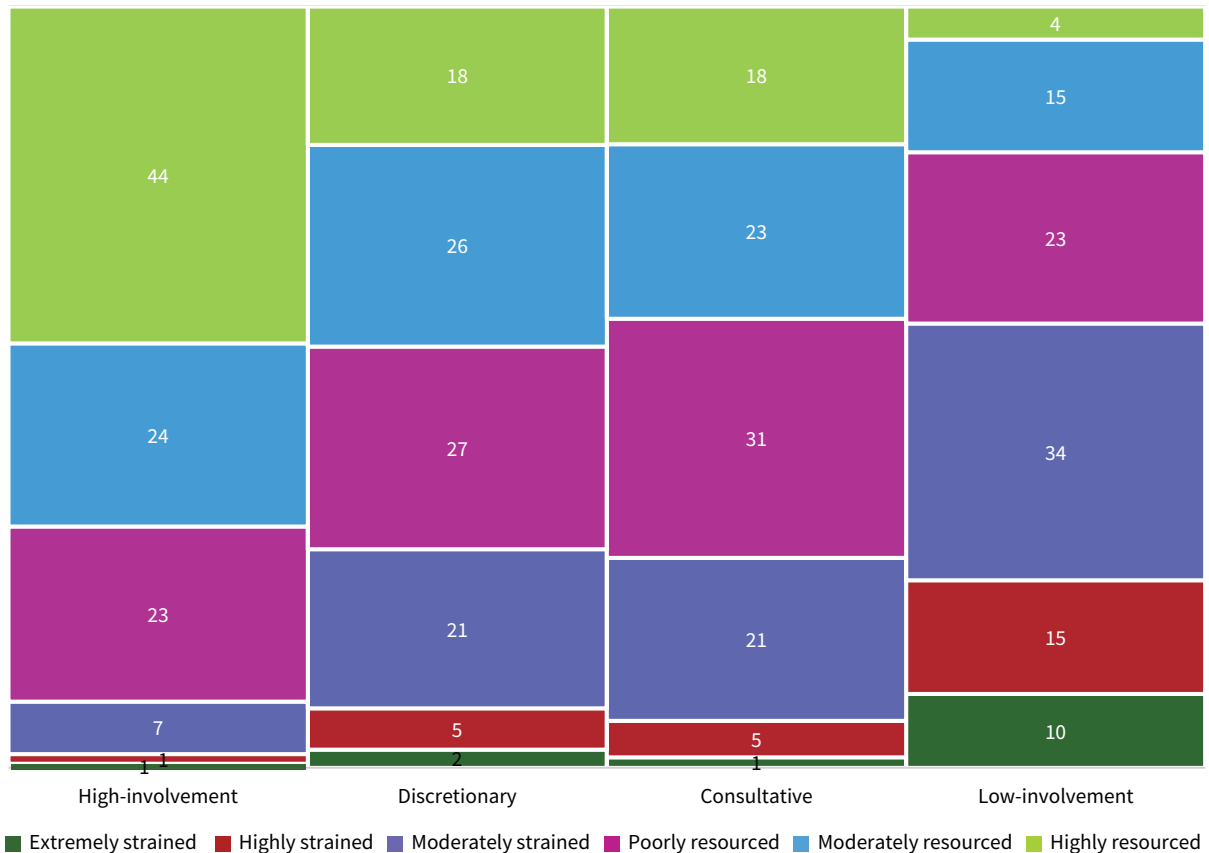
Figure 46: Types of work organisation, by COVID groups, EU27 (% of employees)



Source: EWCTS 2021



Figure 47: Job quality index, by type of work organisation, EU27 (% of employees)



Source: EWCTS 2021

is inherent in job design are more likely to be highly engaged and have access to training and skills development opportunities (see Chapter 5). It is also evident, as illustrated in Figure 47, that employee involvement and job quality are clearly linked. Almost 7 in 10 workers who were employed in high-involvement organisations worked in highly or moderately resourced jobs compared with one-fifth of workers in low-involvement organisations. In addition, a quarter of workers in low-involvement environments were in highly or extremely strained jobs, while the proportion was negligible among workers in high-involvement workplaces.

Employers who succeed in maintaining a workforce that is highly engaged, well-trained and competent can have a competitive advantage. Eurofound's study of employee involvement showed that high-involvement work organisation is associated with supportive, egalitarian work environments with good job quality that fosters work engagement. Participative work environments are also more likely to provide employees with opportunities for training and skills development.

## Employee representation and voice

Employee representation is defined by Eurofound's online European Industrial Relations Dictionary 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 shows that the presence of employee representation in the workplace can be a determining factor in creating and improving working conditions (Eurofound, 2011, 2018b), while being beneficial for gender equality (Pillinger and Wintour, 2019).

Although no concrete evidence is available yet, it is plausible that employee representation may have been particularly important as an additional layer of support for workers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The EWCTS captured the presence of two main types of employee representation in the organisations that employed respondents: representation that is strictly related to health and safety matters – a health and safety delegate or committee – and other, broader forms of representation, such as trade unions, works councils or similar bodies representing employees. In addition, the questionnaire asked respondents about the possibility of direct participation through regular meetings in their workplace ‘in which employees can express their views about what is happening in the organisation’. It must be noted that these variables quantify only the possibility of respondents’ views being considered and expressed collectively (through a health and safety committee or trade union or works council) or individually, through meetings. They do not provide any information on the nature, extent, impact, efficacy or efficiency of the functioning of such representative entities or meetings.

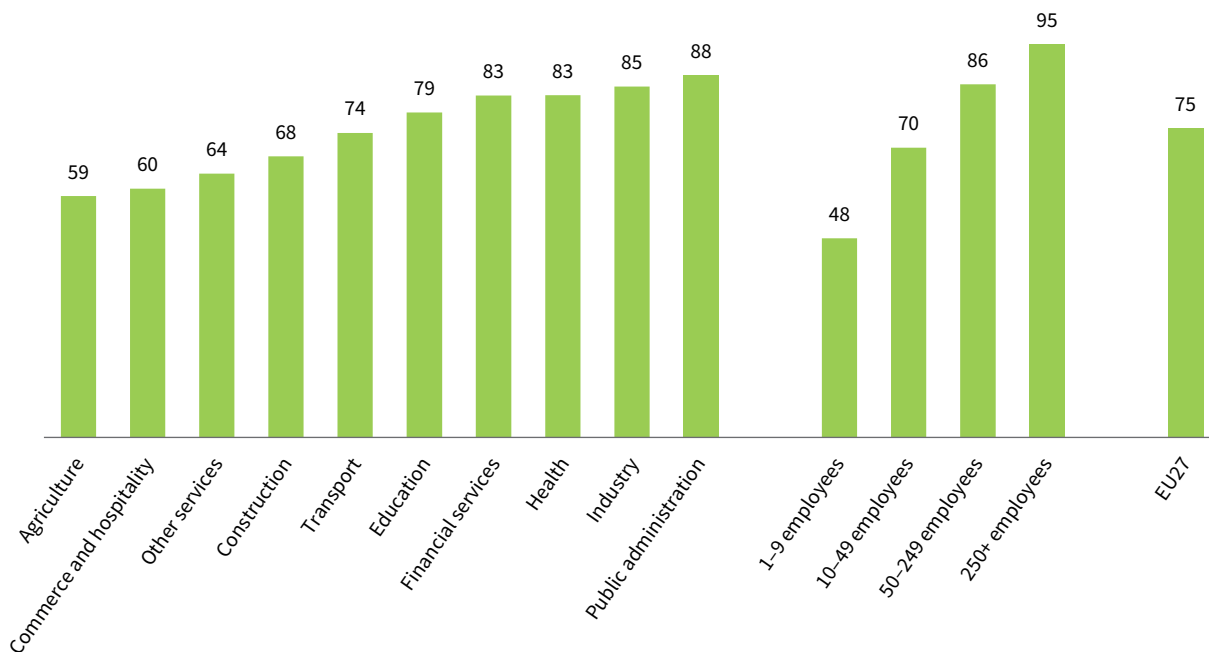
### Health and safety delegate or committee

Employers’ obligations regarding worker representation on health and safety are set out in Framework Directive 89/391/EEC on the introduction of measures to

encourage improvements in the safety and health of workers at work. The directive states that ‘the employer shall designate one or more workers to carry out activities related to the protection and prevention of occupational risk’. It defines a workers’ representative with specific responsibility for the safety and health 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 the threshold in terms of workplace size for which such a body is required varies greatly across the EU (Fulton, 2018).

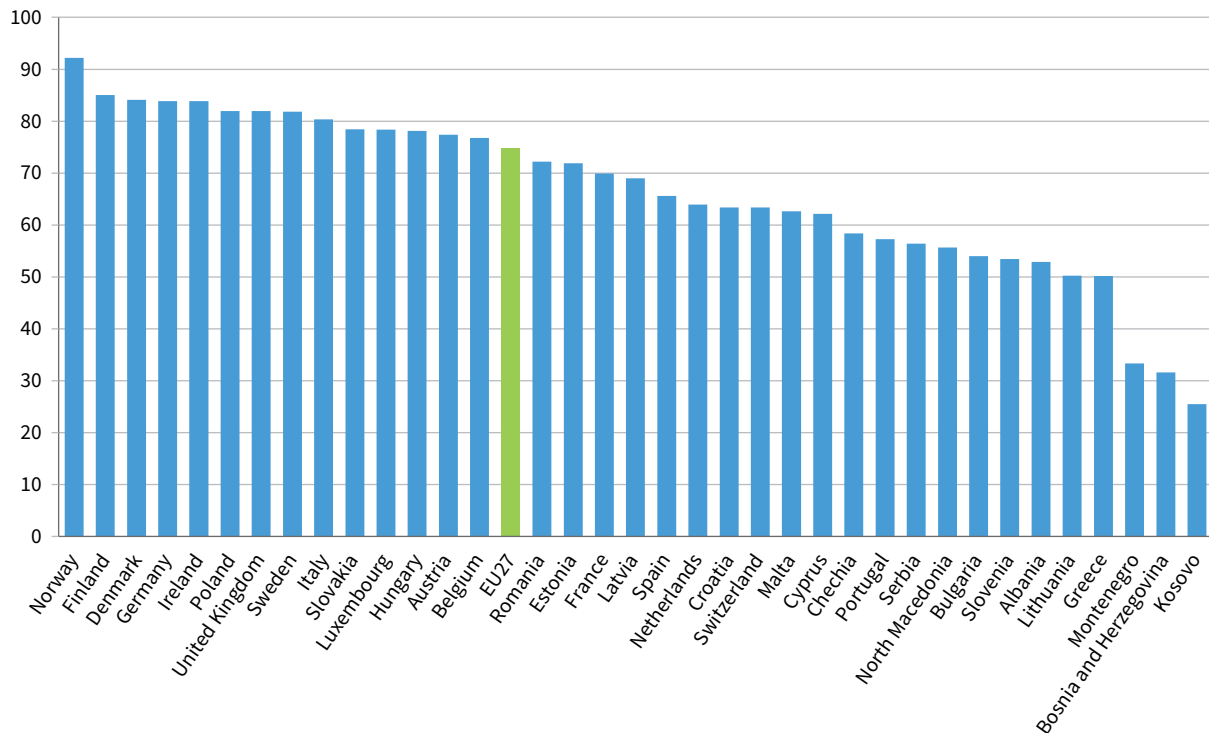
In the EU27, 75% of employees reported the presence of a health and safety delegate or committee in their workplace (Figure 48). The proportion was larger in large workplaces (95%). The share differed across sectors of activity, ranging from 59% in agriculture to 88% in public administration. In practice, how this representation was organised varied across the EU, ranging from individual delegates to committees composed either of employee representatives or of representatives of employees and the employer.

**Figure 48: Health and safety delegate or committee in the workplace, by sector and workplace size, EU27 (% of employees)**



Source: EWCTS 2021

**Figure 49: Health and safety delegate or committee in the workplace, EU Member States and other European countries (% of employees)**



Source: EWCTS 2021

Figure 49 shows the shares of employees in the European countries surveyed whose workplaces had health and safety representation. The proportion ranges from 26% in Kosovo to 92% in Norway, both non-EU countries. Differences between countries should be considered in the context of provisions included in the applicable national legislation; there are different size thresholds (in terms of number of employees) over which a company or establishment is legally required to have health and safety representation, and different rules can apply across sectors. The economic structure of the country is also relevant, as the proportions of organisations of different sizes vary significantly across countries.

### Trade union or works council

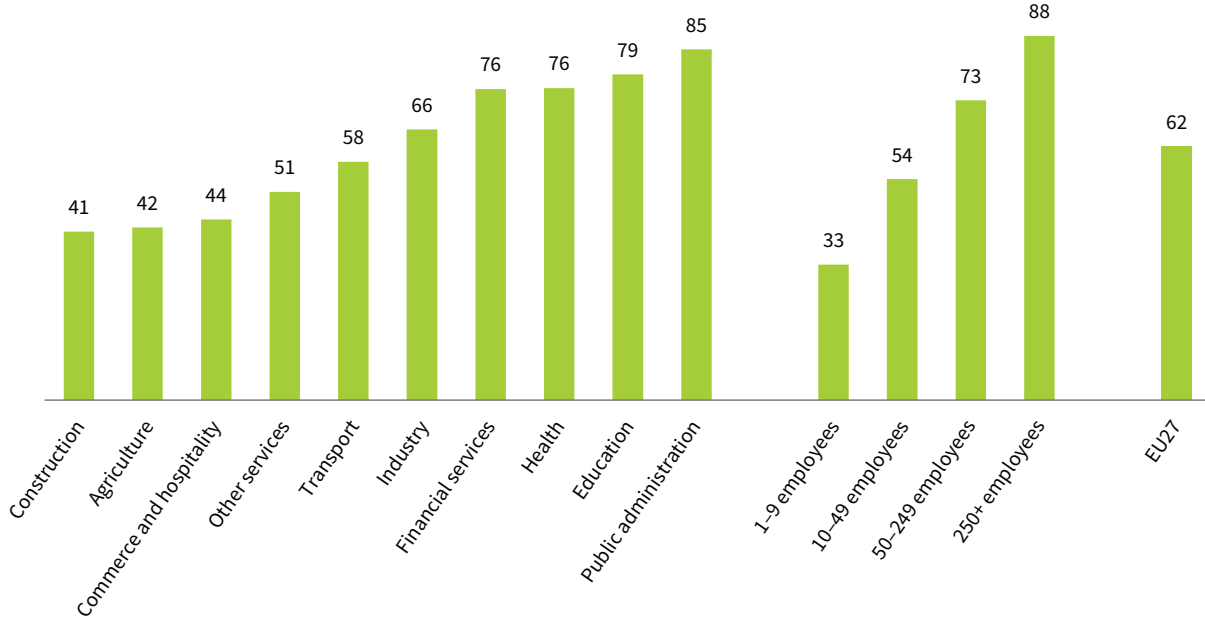
Formal structures for employee representation take many forms across the EU Member States: employee representatives or delegates, trustees, works councils or

local trade unions, shop stewards and joint consultative committees. These representative entities may function differently in different industrial relations systems and depending on industrial relations traditions, and different rules may apply according to criteria such as the size of the company or establishment. They may be involved in many issues including terms and conditions of employment, work practices, conduct at work and, more recently, return-to-work measures implemented following the COVID-19 lockdowns.

Overall, 62% of all employees in the EU27 reported that their company or organisation had a trade union, works council or similar committee representing employees. The proportion of workers reporting the presence of such a body was smallest in the construction, agriculture, commerce and hospitality and other services sectors, and among workers in small workplaces (10–49 employees) and micro-workplaces (1–9 employees) (Figure 50).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The differences according to workplace size in part result from Directive 2002/14/EC, which establishes the general framework for informing and consulting employees in the EU. The directive is applicable, according to the choice made by Member States, to undertakings employing at least 50 employees in any one Member State, or establishments employing at least 20 employees in any one Member State.

**Figure 50: Trade union, works council or similar body in the workplace, by sector and workplace size, EU27 (% of employees)**



Source: EWCTS 2021

It is important to highlight that during the pandemic, when policies on public health restrictions and the adaptation of workplaces were having a tumultuous effect on working life, over one-fifth (21%) of employees in the EU27 had no formal employee representation: neither a trade union, a works council or a similar committee representing employees, nor a health and

safety delegate or committee in their company or organisation. Of these employees, about 86% worked in small workplaces and micro-workplaces, and 83% worked in the private sector.

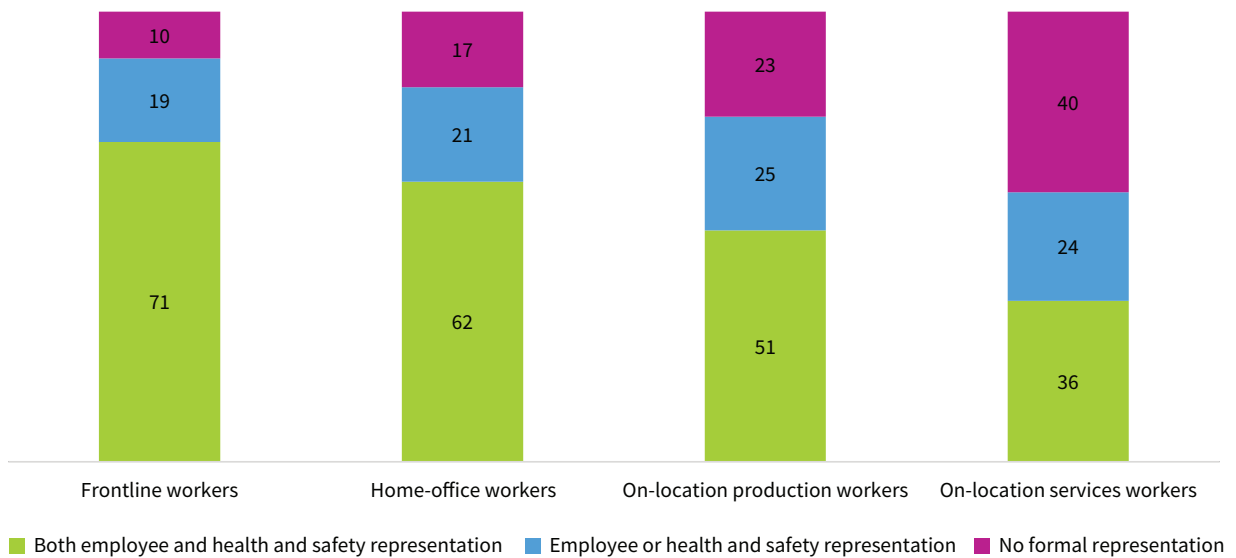
Access to employee representation varied by main location of work (Figure 51). Employees working from home or from their employer’s premises or from both

**Figure 51: Formal employee representation setup, by main place of work, EU27 (% of employees)**



Source: EWCTS 2021

Figure 52: Formal employee representation setup, by COVID group, EU27 (% of employees)



Source: EWCTS 2021

locations were more likely to have employee representation and therefore may have felt more protected and supported. However, actually accessing this type of support may have been more difficult for workers working from home. Employees working from various locations, from a vehicle or from a client's premises were more likely to report that there was no formal representation in their company or organisation.

Differences in access to formal employee representation are even starker between COVID groups (Figure 52). Some form of employee representation was available to most frontline, home-office and on-location production workers, but this representation was reported much less by on-location services workers: 40% of on-location services workers stated they had no access to any employee representation at all, compared with 23% of on-location production workers, 17% of home-office workers and 10% of frontline workers.

### Meetings to express views

Respondents to the EWCTS were also asked whether regular meetings took place in which employees could express their views about what was happening in their organisation. In the EU27, a total of 68% of employees said that such meetings took place, but the proportions differed substantially by country, ranging from 48% in Greece to 83% in Sweden.

### Combinations of representation

A large share of employees (44%) reported that both forms of collective representation were present in their workplaces and that they had an opportunity to express their views in regular meetings. Conversely, 12% of employees reported having neither type of employee representation nor no regular meetings (see Figure 53).

Representation and voice were much less available to employees if they worked in micro-workplaces. In contrast, employees who worked in large workplaces (with 250 or more employees) or even in small and medium-sized workplaces (with 10–249 employees) were much more likely to have collective representation or the opportunity to express their views in meetings, or both. In light of the differences in company, organisation and workplace sizes by sector, the extent of worker representation and their ability to express their views also varied significantly across sectors. In sectors where many workers work in large workplaces – such as public administration, health, education, financial services and industry – large proportions of workers reported the presence of employee representation and regular meetings to express views. In contrast, in sectors with a large prevalence of micro-companies – agriculture, other services, construction, and commerce and hospitality – more workers reported the combined absence of representation and meetings to express their views.

**Figure 53: Distribution of employees according to presence of formal employee representation and meetings in the workplace, EU27 (%)**



Source: EWCTS 2021

## Gender segregation at work

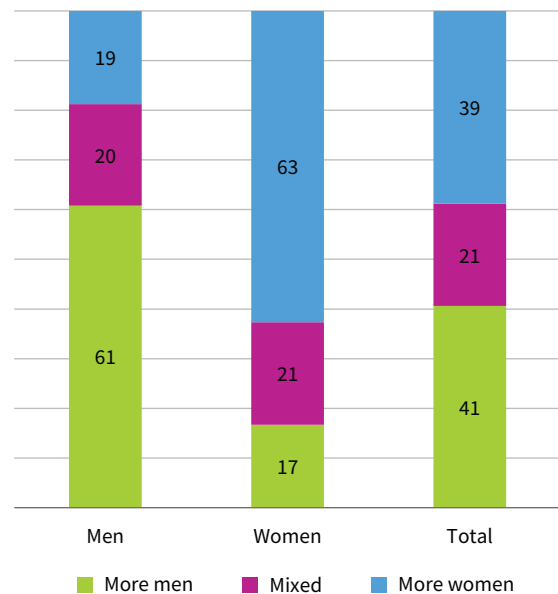
Chapter 1 showed that the EU labour market remains highly gender segregated. Overall, only 40% and 25% of the workforce worked in mixed-gender sectors and mixed-gender occupations, respectively.

### Gender-segregated workplaces

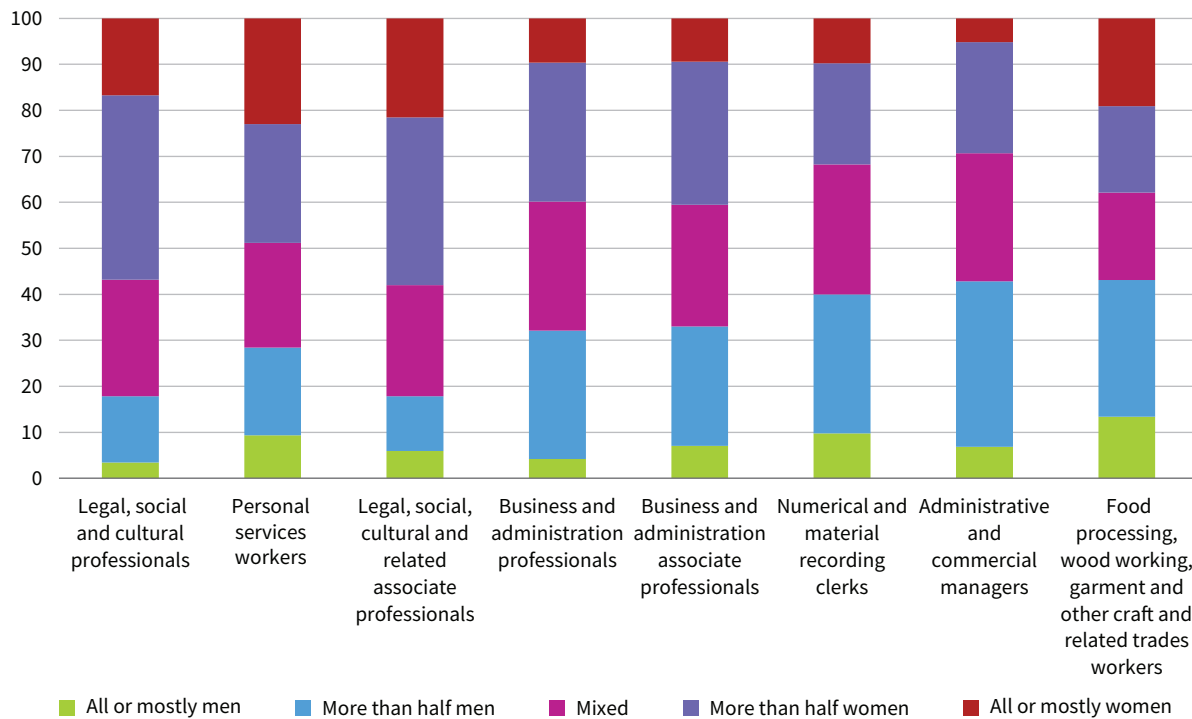
EWCTS data show that workers working in gender-balanced occupations and sectors did not necessarily have gender-balanced workplaces, and workers often worked with colleagues exclusively or mainly of the same gender as their own. To capture the level of gender segregation in the workplace, the EWCTS asked respondents to estimate the share of female co-workers in their workplace on a five-point scale, from ‘none or nearly none’ to ‘all or nearly all’.

Figure 54 clearly shows that gender segregation persists in workplaces in the EU: more than 60% of men and women indicated that there were more co-workers of their own gender in their workplace than the other gender. Among these workers, 40% indicated that most or all their co-workers were of the same gender. Only around one in five workers were working in mixed-gender workplaces.

**Figure 54: Predominant gender in the workplace, by gender, EU27 (%)**



Source: EWCTS 2021

**Figure 55: Predominant gender in the workplace in mixed-gender occupations, EU27 (%)**

**Note:** Includes only occupations classified as gender-mixed (a 40–60% share of women or men). See Annex 2 for a full list of the gender balance of ISCO-08 occupations at two-digit level.

**Source:** EWCTS 2021

Averages, although important, hide variability across occupations. Only one in five workers in mixed-gender occupations worked in mixed-gender workplaces. Figure 55 examines mixed-gender occupational subgroups on a granular level. The lowest share of mixed-gender workplaces (19%) was among food processing, wood working, garment and other craft and related trades workers; the highest (28%) was among numerical and material recording clerks and business and administration professionals. More than half (58%) of legal, social and cultural professionals and legal, social and cultural and related associate professionals worked in female-dominated workplaces, while 43% of administrative and commercial managers and food processing, wood working, garment and other craft and related trades workers worked in male-dominated workplaces.

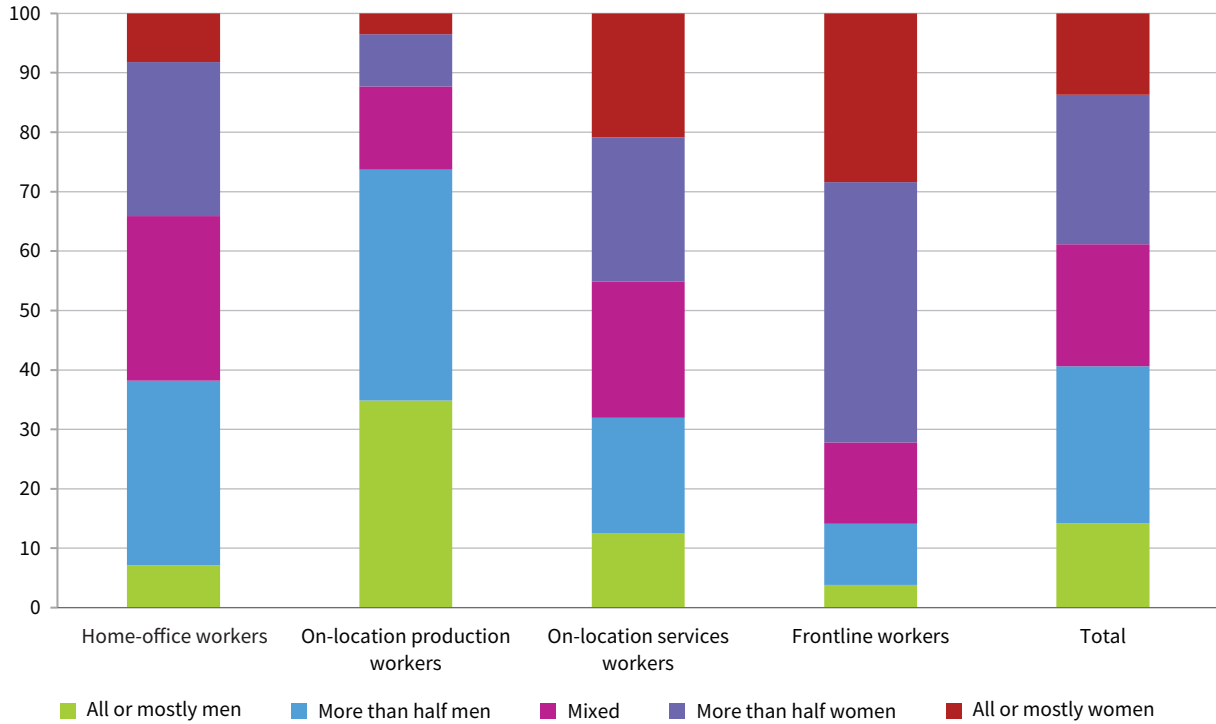
As regards the COVID groups, on-location production workers and frontline workers had the most gender-segregated workplaces (Figure 56).

The workplaces of the former were dominated by men, and the co-workers of the latter were predominantly women.

### Gender-segregated management

Whatever sector or occupation women may work in, management has traditionally been viewed as a man's business. Nowadays, more and more women are becoming managers, although the share of managers who are women remains well below that of men, indicating the persistence of 'glass ceilings'. Moreover, female managers remain concentrated in sectors or occupations that are largely dominated by women, mirroring the segregation in the labour market more broadly (see Chapter 1). They often perform managerial functions that are considered supportive (in human resources, finance and administration) rather than strategic (in operations, profit and business development), pointing to the existence of 'glass walls'.

Figure 56: Predominant gender in the workplace, by COVID group, EU27 (%)

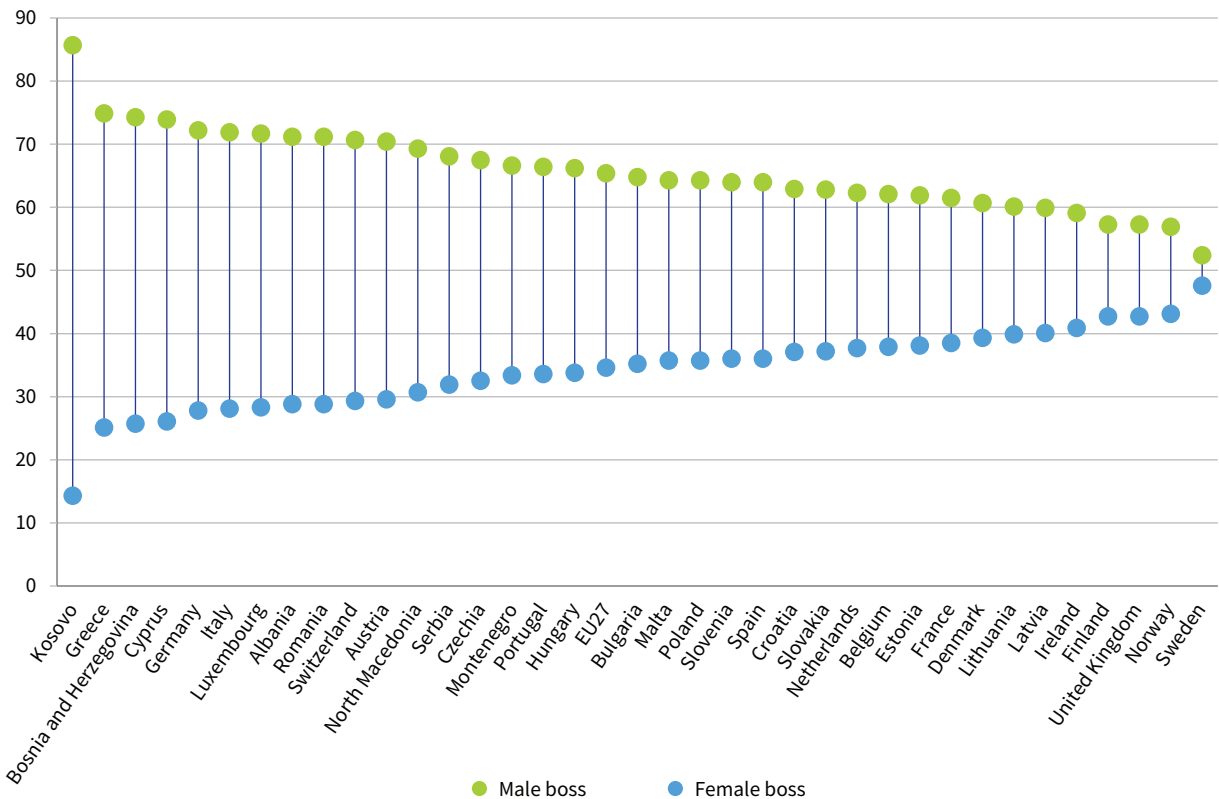


Source: EWCTS 2021

In the EU in 2021, two-thirds of workers had a boss who was a man. Taking into account the range of countries surveyed, at one extreme only 14% of workers in Kosovo

had a female boss, while at the other extreme nearly half of workers in Sweden (48%) had a woman as a boss (Figure 57).

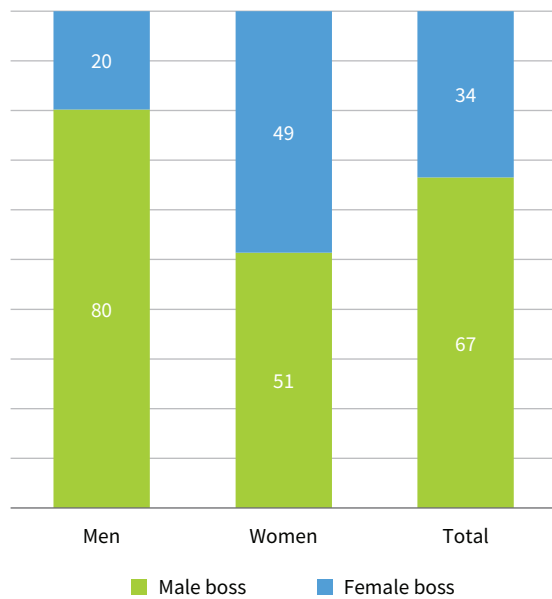
Figure 57: Gender of the boss, EU Member States and other European countries (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021



**Figure 58: Gender of the boss, by employee gender, EU27 (%)**



Source: EWCTS 2021

Men tended to have a boss who was a man (80%), while for women the possibility of reporting to a woman or a man was roughly the same (Figure 58). In the non-EU countries, the share of female bosses was slightly higher than in the EU: 53% of women in non-EU countries had a woman as a boss compared with 49% in the EU; for men, the shares of female bosses were 23% and 20% for non-EU countries and the EU, respectively.

The higher the level of education of employees, the lower the share who had male bosses and the higher the share who had female bosses (Figure 59). Employees with tertiary education were more likely to have a female boss (39%) than those with primary education only (22%).

More than half of workers in female-dominated occupations had a female boss. In contrast, only 16% of workers in male-dominated occupations reported to a woman, clearly pointing to the persistent glass walls for female managers. Similarly, in workplaces where most workers were women, 56% of their bosses were also women, while in male-dominated workplaces, this share was smaller, at 12%.

**Figure 59: Educational level of employees, by gender of boss, EU27 (%)**

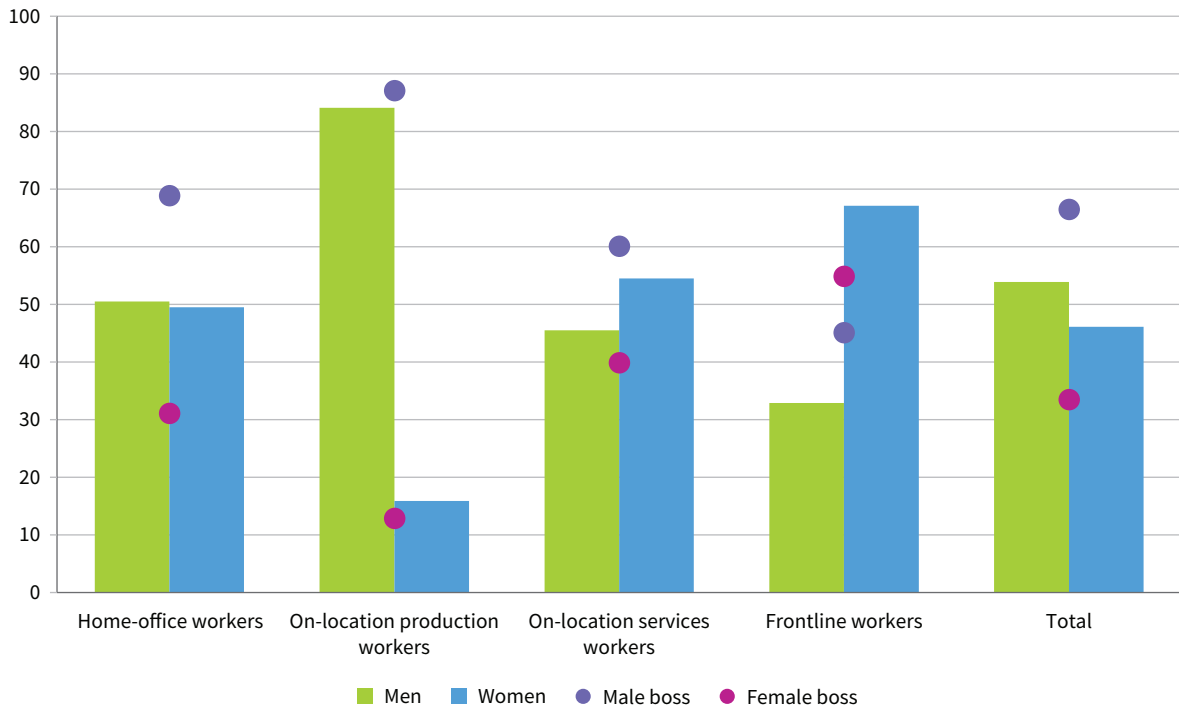


Source: EWCTS 2021

Gender segregation among the COVID groups is shown in Figure 60. It was most extreme among on-location production workers, where 84% of workers were men and 16% were women, and the share of their female and male bosses roughly corresponded to the shares of women and men belonging to this group (87% and 13%,

respectively). There were more women than men in the on-location services workers and frontline workers groups. For the latter, the share of women was double that of men and more workers had a boss who was a woman than those whose boss was a man.

Figure 60: COVID groups, by employee gender and gender of the boss, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

## Summary

### Influences on work

- When looking at the three main factors in the workplace that influence what workers do at work – a supervisor or manager, customers and suppliers, or a computerised system – a clear division is apparent between white-collar and blue-collar jobs. The most prevalent influence on managers, professionals, technicians and clerical support workers was a computerised system, whereas among agricultural workers, craft workers, plant and machine operators, and elementary occupations, it was a supervisor. Only among services and sales workers were customers the most common influence.
- There is a link between who or what influences work and the autonomy employees have, and the findings suggest that the influence of a supervisor has a more limiting effect on autonomy than a computerised system. Among those for whom a supervisor was the main influence, 35% had a low level of autonomy to determine the methods to perform tasks, compared with 27% of those whose main influence was a computerised system. Among the latter, 59% reported that they could decide the order of their tasks, and around half reported high levels of autonomy for determining the speed and methods of work.
- Interestingly, workers who used digital devices and whose work was influenced by a computerised system maintained a fairly high level of autonomy over the order, the speed and the method of performing tasks. By contrast, those who never used digital devices and whose work was influenced by a computerised system reported relatively lower levels of autonomy. This could be an indicator of the influence of algorithms on some workers.

## Work organisation

- In 2021, one-third of employees worked in high-involvement organisations, an organisation type that enables employees to make decisions about their work and to participate in organisational decision-making. This type of work organisation has been shown to be associated with higher levels of well-being, learning in the workplace and work engagement. However, an almost equal share, 30% of employees, worked in the opposite, low-involvement, type of environment, with limited scope for employees to make decisions about their work or to participate at organisational level.
- Employees in the financial services, other services and education sectors and in high-skilled white-collar occupations were more likely to be employed in high-involvement organisations. Workers in health, public administration and education were least likely to work in that type of organisation.

## Employee representation

- Three-quarters of employees reported the presence of a health and safety delegate or committee in their workplace. The proportion was greater in large workplaces (95%) and varied substantially with the sector, ranging from 59% in agriculture to 88% in public administration.
- Overall, 62% of employees had a trade union, works council or a similar committee to represent their interests. The figure was much lower in sectors hit by business closures during the pandemic including commerce and hospitality (44%) and other services (51%), although it was even lower in construction (41%) and agriculture (42%).
- One-fifth of employees had no formal employee representation in 2021, at a time when protecting the health of workers was a major concern and all employees experienced some upset to their employment or working conditions.

## Gender segregation at work

- Like sectors and occupations, workplaces are segregated by gender. More than 60% of men and women indicated that there were more co-workers of their own gender in their workplace than the other gender. Only one-fifth worked in mixed-gender workplaces, where the shares of women and men were roughly equal.
- Glass ceilings persisted, with men continuing to predominate at the level of line manager: two-thirds of employees had a male boss in 2021. There was also some proof of glass walls restricting the roles available to women, with the finding that a large majority of men in the survey (80%) had a male boss. Female employees were evenly split between male and female bosses.
- Comparing COVID groups, the biggest gender disparity at line manager level was among the on-location production workers group, where 87% of bosses were male and 13% female, indicative of the low degree to which women have made inroads into management in traditional manufacturing sectors.



## 4 Reconciling work and other spheres of life

Multiple lockdowns and movement restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic shut millions of people in their homes for extended periods. For those whose home became their place of work, the line between working time and free time was further blurred. With the closure of care and educational institutions and with external and family support networks out of reach, an acute additional workload was placed on people with caring responsibilities, significantly increasing their combined paid and unpaid working hours. For many, this worsened work–life balance and increased work–life conflicts. Although unpaid care work increased both for women and men, the impact was greater for women, especially for mothers with children under the age of 12 (Eurofound, 2020b, 2020c; EIGE, 2021a).

This chapter addresses how workers reconciled work with other spheres of life during the pandemic, focusing on:

- time spent on paid work, in both workers' main job and other jobs they may have
- the accumulation of weekly hours spent on paid work, including commuting, and unpaid work
- how workers managed to strike a balance between work and other spheres of their lives and to what extent they were exposed to situations in which working life and private life overlapped, causing conflict

- workers' working time preferences and how well working time needs were met in the specific context of the COVID-19 pandemic

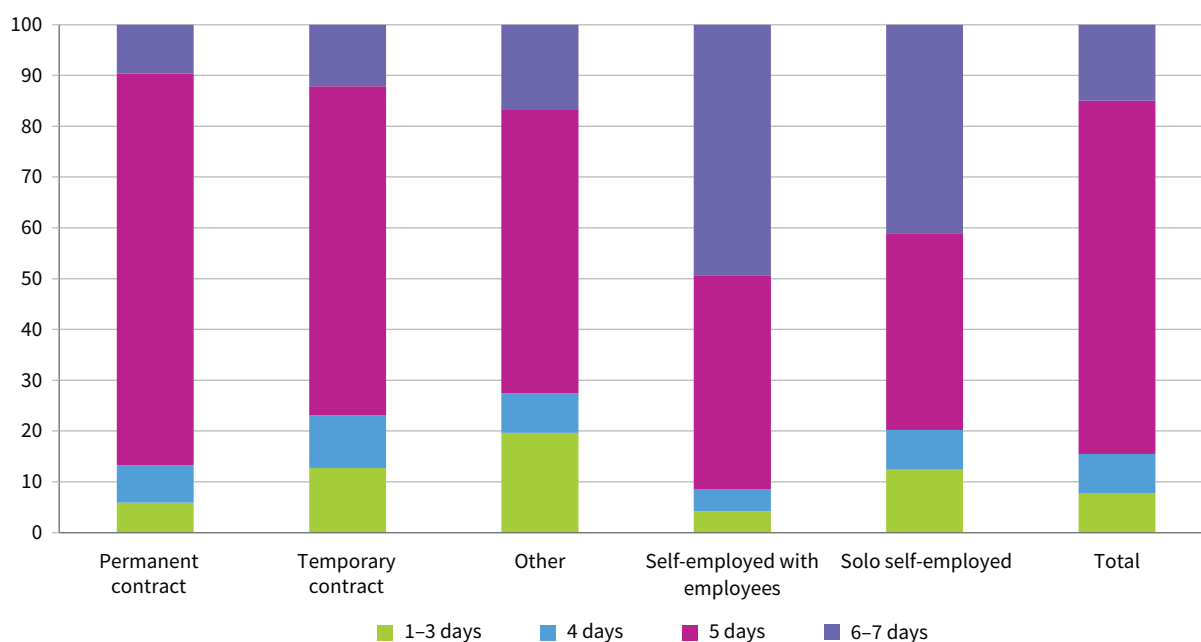
### Duration of paid work

#### Working week

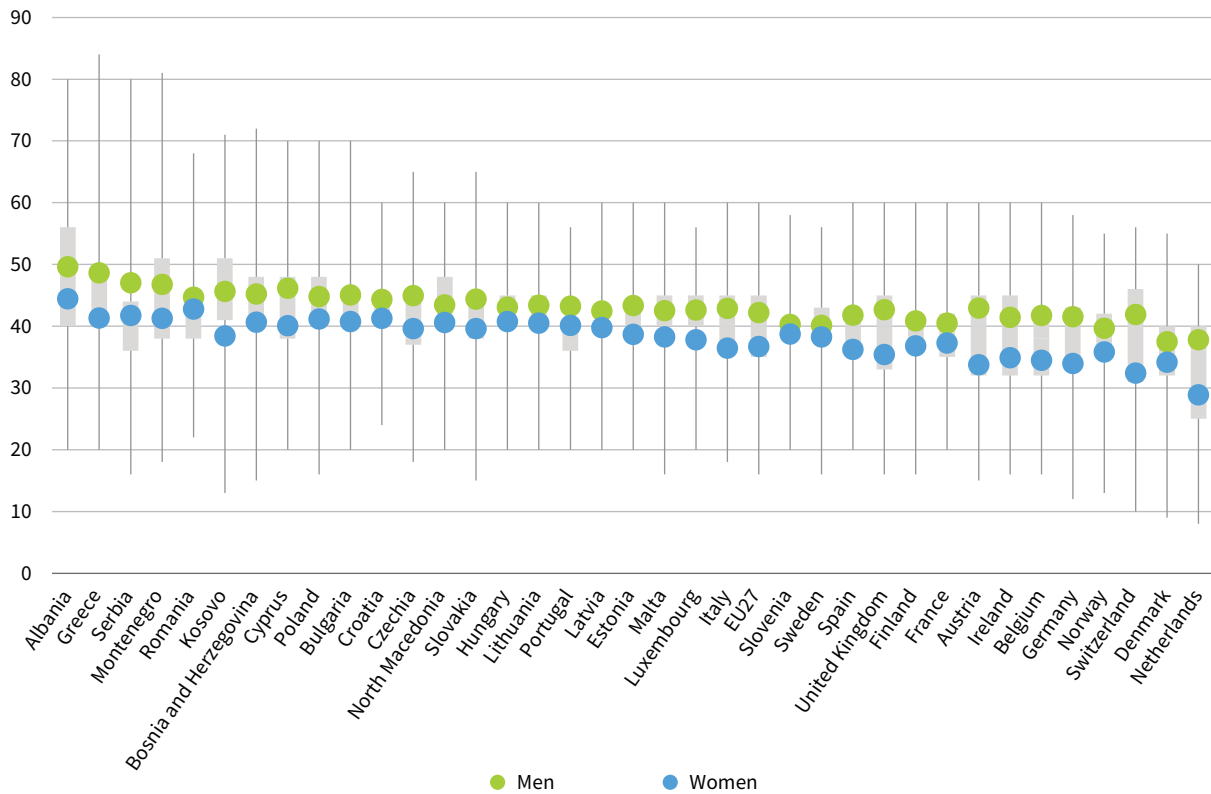
In 2021, a five-day working week continued to be the norm for men and women in all EU Member States. Women in the Netherlands are an exception, as most normally worked four days per week. The vast majority of workers (70%) reported having a five-day working week, while the rest were nearly equally split between working four days or fewer (16%) and working six or seven days (15%) per week. A four-day working week, which has been discussed primarily as a mechanism to improve workers' well-being and work–life balance and to potentially create more jobs and reduce unemployment (De Spiegelare and Piasna, 2017), was reported by approximately 8% of workers in the EU27 (6% of men and 10% of women).

The share of respondents reporting that they worked up to four days per week was largest among employees with an employment status described as 'other' (neither permanent nor temporary) (28%) and employees with temporary contracts (23%) and among the solo self-employed (20%). A six- or seven-day week was most common among the self-employed with employees (50%) and the solo self-employed (41%) (Figure 61).

Figure 61: Usual number of days in a working week, by employment status, EU27 (%)



**Figure 62: Usual weekly hours in paid work and their dispersion, by gender, EU Member States and other European countries (weekly hours)**



**Note:** Grey boxes represent the interquartile range (50% of workers fall within the box) for each country and the whiskers represent the 5th and 95th percentiles. The circles represent the average usual paid working hours of men and women.  
**Source:** EWCTS 2021

Working weeks of four days or fewer were common among services and sales workers (27%), workers in elementary occupations (20%) and in the health (29%) and education (22%) sectors. Working weeks of six or seven days were more common among skilled agricultural workers (62%), services and sales workers (23%) and managers (19%), and in the agriculture (52%), commerce and hospitality (23%), and transport (18%) sectors.

### Weekly working hours

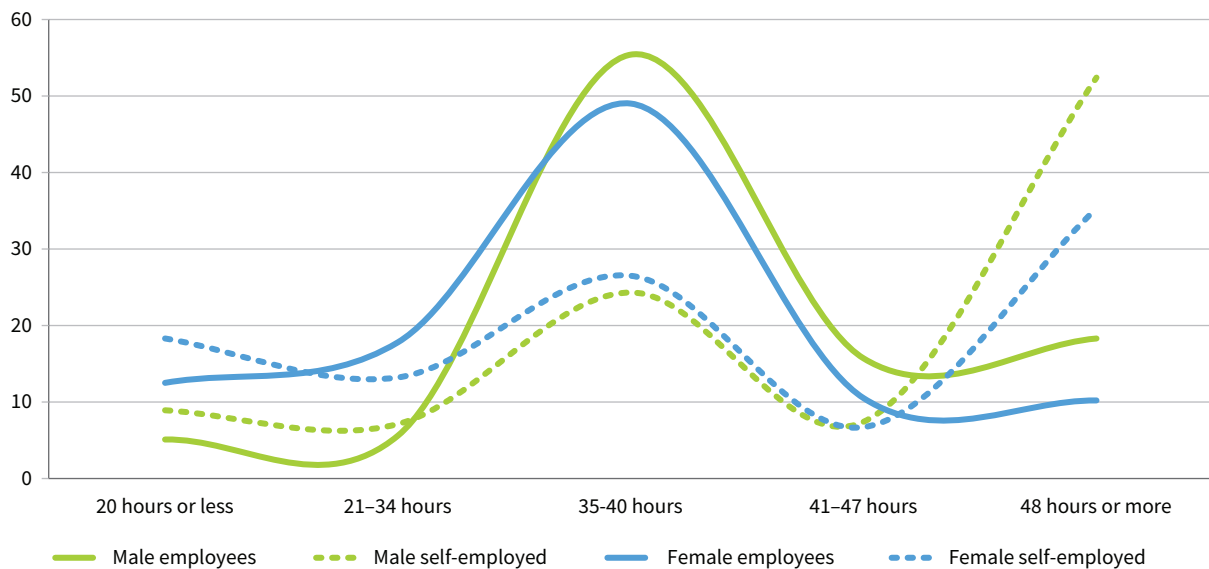
Figure 62 shows the dispersion of usual working hours in paid work between those working fewer hours and those working longer hours per week by country, from the longest average hours on the left to the shortest average hours on the right. Some countries, such as Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Slovenia, have a narrow distribution of hours worked, as indicated by the grey boxes representing the interquartile range, which

includes half of workers. In other countries, such as Austria, Ireland and the Netherlands (in the EU) and Albania and Switzerland (outside the EU), the dispersion is much wider, indicated by wider grey boxes and longer whiskers (vertical lines).

On average, in the EU27 men reported working a little over 42 hours per week while women worked close to 37 hours. The classic 40-hour week remained the standard in 2021 in the vast majority of countries, except France (35 hours), Denmark (37 hours), Norway (38 hours) and Switzerland (42 hours). Some 20% of all workers (31% of women and 12% of men) worked 34 hours or fewer per week.

In 2021, around half of men and women worked between 35 and 40 hours per week (Figure 63). On average, the self-employed spent 6.4 hours more in paid work (4.3 hours more for women and 6.9 hours more for men) than employees.

**Figure 63: Distribution of employees and the self-employed according to usual weekly hours in paid work, by gender, EU27 (%)**



**Notes:** Includes usual hours of paid work in main job and other jobs; lines have been smoothed for readability.

**Source:** EWCTS 2021

### Very short hours

The EWCS 2015 data showed that working 20 hours or fewer per week (very short working hours) is associated, on the one hand, with job insecurity and poorer career prospects and, on the other hand, with a better work-life balance and having the flexibility to take time off during the day (Eurofound, 2017a). In 2021, 9% of workers in the EU27 (13% of women and 6% of men) worked very short hours. Larger shares of self-employed women and men worked very short hours (18% and 9%, respectively). This situation was more common among services and sales workers and workers in elementary occupations, and in the education, commerce and hospitality, health and other services sectors (Figure 64). Very short working hours were most common among workers employed in micro-workplaces and less common as workplace size increased.

### Long working hours

Long working hours are associated with health conditions such as depression, anxiety, sleep disorders and coronary heart disease (Eurofound, 2017a, 2019) and can challenge the balance between work and other aspects of life.

In 2021, 19% of workers in the EU27 (13% of women and 24% of men) reported working 48 hours or more per week. The shares among the self-employed were larger: 52% of men and 35% of women. Long working hours were reported by more than half (58%) of the self-employed with employees, 40% of the solo self-employed and about 14% of employees.

Long hours were more commonly reported by skilled agricultural workers, managers, and plant and machine operators, and in the agriculture, transport and construction sectors (Figure 64). Long hours were also more common in micro-workplaces than in larger workplaces.

The share of workers who reported working 48 hours or more per week varied greatly by country: 34% of workers in Greece, 26% in Romania, 24% in Poland and 23% in Czechia, but only 10% of workers in the Netherlands and 9% in Denmark.

Figure 64: Usual weekly hours in paid work, by occupational group, sector and workplace size, EU27 (%)



Note: Includes usual hours of paid work in main job and other jobs.

Source: EWCTS 2021

## Paid and unpaid work

As well as asking workers about the hours they spent in their main job and other jobs and commuting, the EWCTS included questions about unpaid work, determining how often respondents took care of and educated their children and grandchildren, cared for

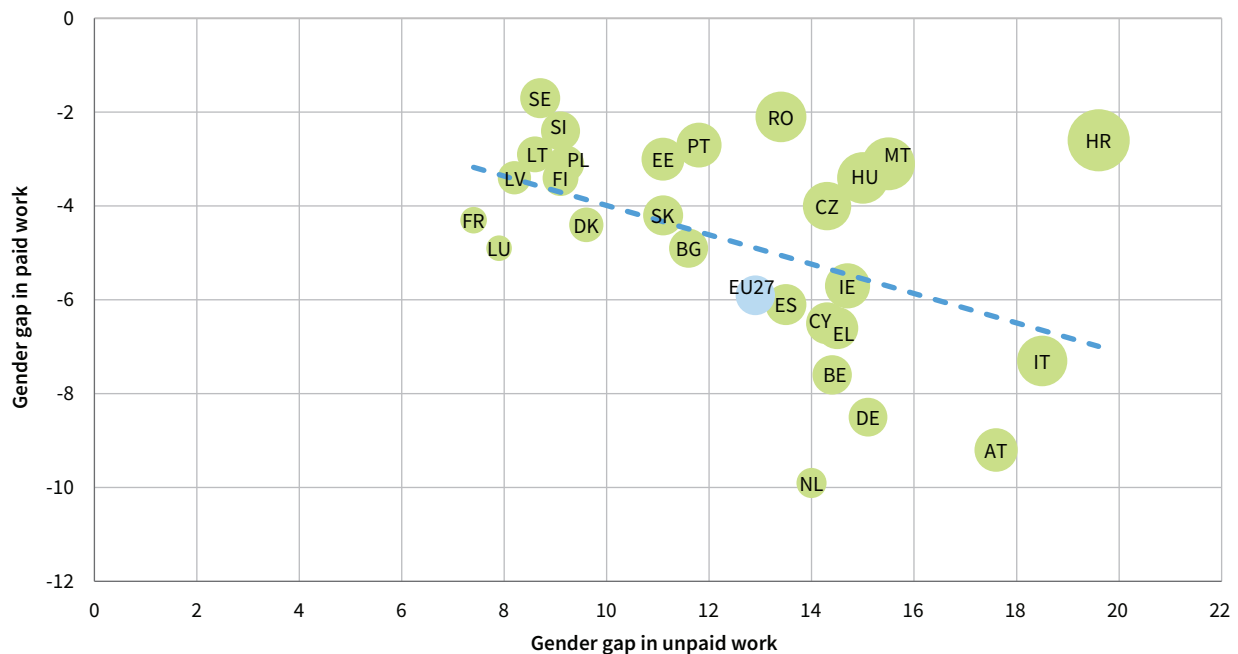
elderly or disabled relatives, and did cooking and housework. It also asked how much time they spent on these activities if they performed them daily.<sup>7</sup> (Other activities, such as voluntary work and sports and leisure activities, were not included in the survey.) These unpaid hours were added to respondents' paid hours to calculate their total working hours.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Hours for unpaid work activities done less often than daily were imputed (for more information on the imputations, please see Annex 3).

<sup>8</sup> In cases where the total hours reported were more than 168 a week (24 hours a day multiplied by 7 days a week), all paid and unpaid activities were adjusted proportionally. It is not unexpected that some activities, such as caring for others and doing household chores, were carried out simultaneously and could be done (or had to be done) at any time of the day or night, especially if a person was working from home or had flexible work arrangements. However, for the purposes of this analysis we limited the total hours to 24 daily hours.



Figure 65: Gender gaps in weekly paid, unpaid and total working hours, EU Member States (weekly hours)



**Notes:** The vertical axis shows how many hours fewer women spent on paid work than men; the horizontal axis shows how many hours more women spent on unpaid work than men. The bigger the size of a bubble, the larger the gender gap in total working (paid and unpaid) hours.

**Source:** EWCTS 2021

On average, EU workers spent 42 hours per week on paid work, including 38.7 hours on their main job, 3.2 hours on commuting (84% of workers commuted to work) and close to 15 hours on other jobs (9% of workers had other jobs). They spent an additional 24 hours per week on unpaid work: 11.5 hours taking care of children, 2.5 hours caring for relatives and 10.2 hours on housework. Unpaid work constituted more than one-third of people's total working hours in 2021, with the largest share of unpaid work spent on caring for children.

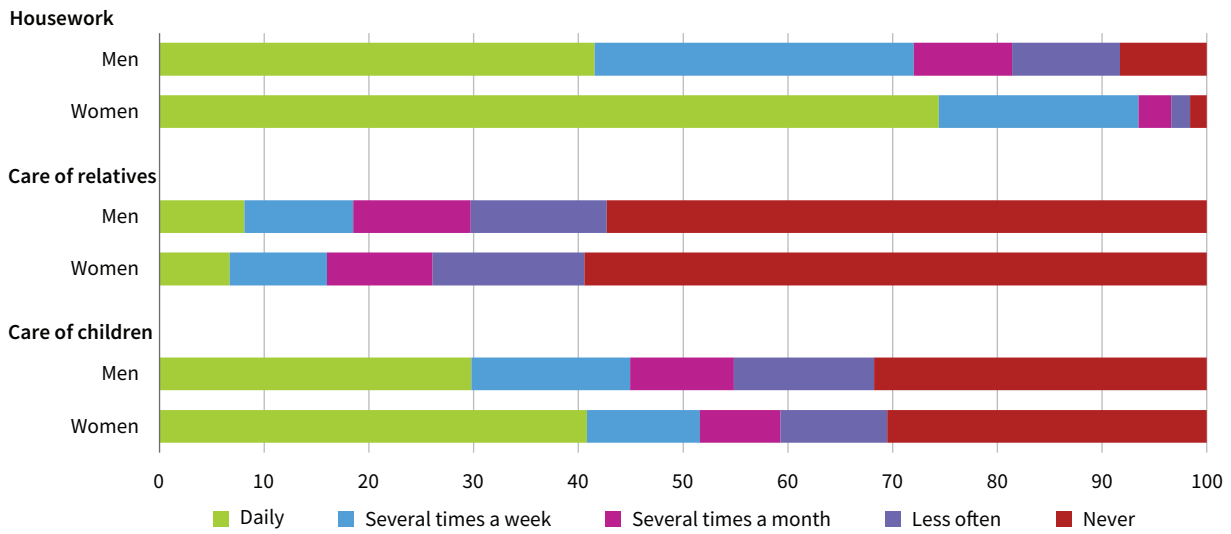
The composition of total working hours varied by gender. Women, on average, spent less time (6 fewer hours) in paid work, but this was overcompensated for by time spent in unpaid work (13 more hours). The gender gap in paid work went from as little as 2 hours in Sweden and Romania up to 10 hours in the Netherlands, where most working women worked part-time.<sup>9</sup> Overall, considering paid and unpaid work, women on average

worked 7 hours longer in a week than men (70 hours and 63 hours, respectively). The country differences in total hours ranged from 3 hours in Luxembourg and France to 17 hours in Croatia. In Figure 65, EU Member States are plotted by gender gaps in paid work (vertical axis), unpaid work (horizontal axis) and total working time (bubble size). Countries with smaller gender gaps in paid work also had smaller gender gaps in unpaid work (with the clear exception of Croatia).

On average, women in the EU spent around 44% of their total working hours doing unpaid work, while for men this share was 29%. There are no substantial differences in whether or not and how often working men and women took care of their older or disabled relatives, but many more women than men reported taking care of children (41% and 30%, respectively) and doing housework (74% and 42%, respectively) daily (Figure 66).

<sup>9</sup> According to the EU-LFS, in 2021, 65% of employed women in the Netherlands worked part-time.

Figure 66: Frequency of unpaid work activities, by gender, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

### Occupation

When paid and unpaid work are considered together, women always worked longer hours than men regardless of their occupational group. Across the occupational groups, hours in paid work were always slightly longer for men than for women, except for skilled agricultural workers. Workers in this occupation not only worked the longest hours of all occupations,

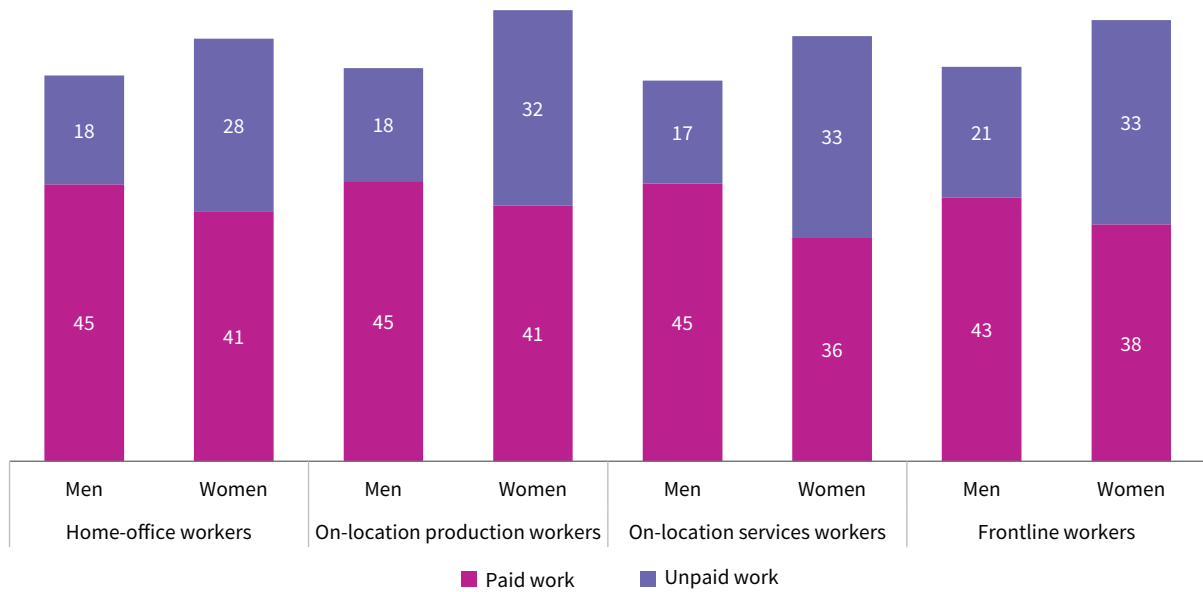
women also worked longer paid hours than men (51 and 50 hours per week, respectively). In addition, unpaid working hours for skilled agricultural workers were more than double for women compared with men, resulting in the largest overall total hours gender gap, 19 hours, among all occupational groups. Only women in elementary occupations spent more time on unpaid work than on paid work (Figure 67).

Figure 67: Paid and unpaid work, by occupational group and gender, EU27 (weekly hours)



Source: EWCTS 2021

Figure 68: Paid and unpaid work, by COVID group and gender, EU27 (weekly hours)



Source: EWCTS 2021

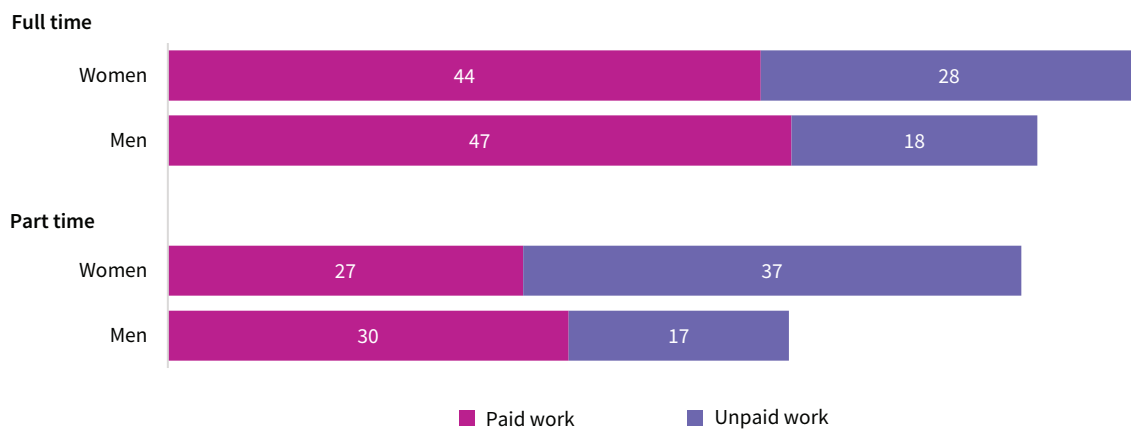
### COVID groups

Among the COVID groups, although on-location production workers and home-office workers reported the longest paid working hours (on average for women and men), female frontline workers and on-location production workers worked the longest overall weekly hours (Figure 68).

### Part time versus full time

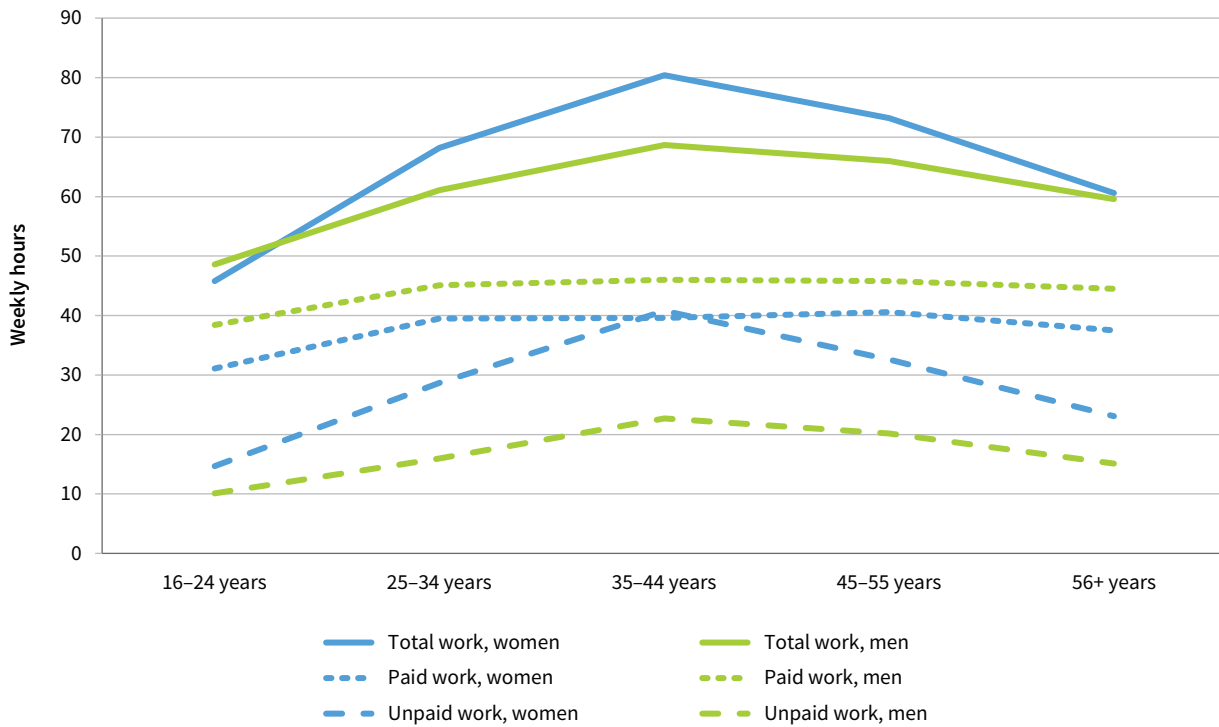
On average, women with part-time jobs worked as many total hours (paid and unpaid) as men in full-time jobs, with women spending the equivalent of a full-time job doing unpaid work (Figure 69). In the case of workers with full-time jobs, women spent only 2.5 hours fewer per week than men doing paid work (44 hours and 47 hours, respectively, when both figures are rounded), but they spent 10 hours longer doing unpaid work.

Figure 69: Paid and unpaid work of women and men, by full-time and part-time status, EU27 (weekly hours)



Source: EWCTS 2021

Figure 70: Paid, unpaid and total work of women and men, by age group, EU27 (weekly hours)



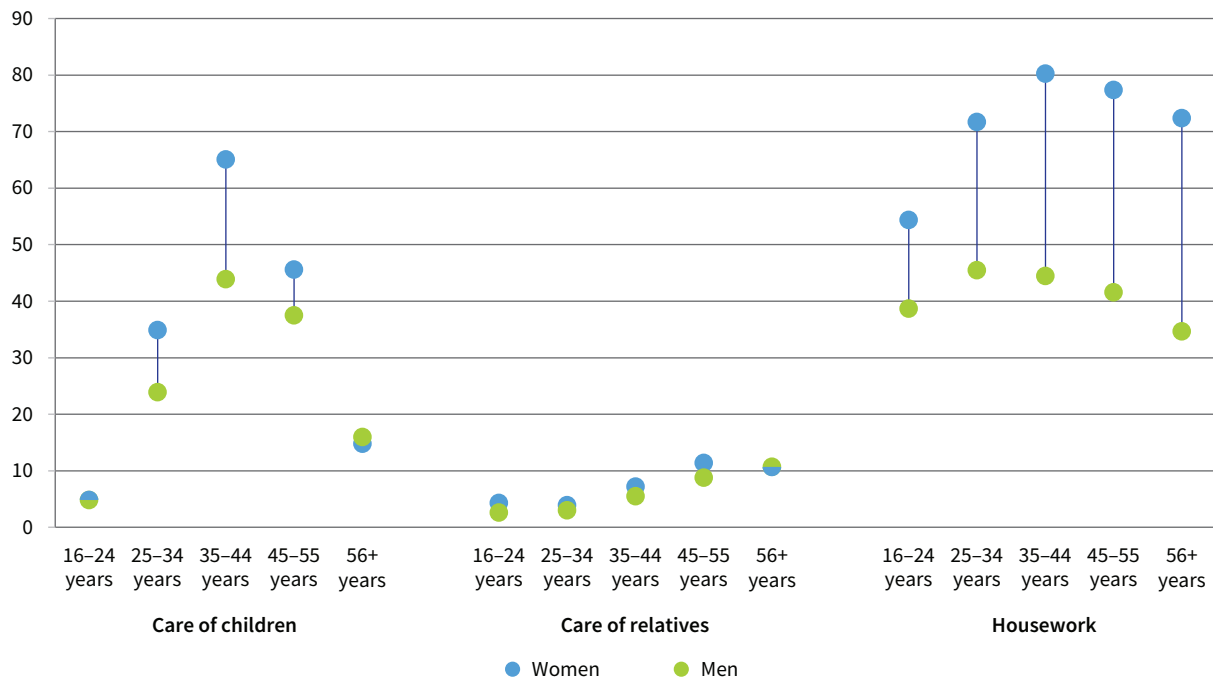
Source: EWCTS 2021

### Age group

Women’s total working hours were longer than those of men across most age groups, except for the youngest age group (16–24 years) (Figure 70). The largest gap in total working hours between men and women was in the 35–44 years age group, mostly driven by 18 hours’ difference in unpaid work. On average, women in this age group spent 39.6 hours on paid work and the equivalent of another full-time working week, 40.8 hours, on unpaid work. The uneven distribution in caring for children between women and men is the main cause of the gender gap in unpaid work. Working women in the 35–44 age group spent 11.3 hours more per week taking care of children than men of the same age. Women also spent six hours more than men doing housework on average across age groups.

Figure 71 presents more detail on the gender gap in unpaid work across the age groups. The shares of workers taking care of children and grandchildren daily form an inverted U shape, with the peak – both in terms of the share and the gender gap – in the 35–44 years age group. The shares of women and men taking care of their elderly or disabled relatives daily were low and increased slightly with age, but the gender gap was almost non-existent. The proportion of men who reported cooking and doing housework daily did not vary much by age (around 40%), but for women it reached 80% for those aged 35–44 years, resulting in a gender gap of 35 percentage points, one that remained high into the older age groups.

Figure 71: Daily unpaid work activities, by gender and age group, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

## Workers with children

Having children increases unpaid working hours and therefore total working hours. In the EU in 2021, men with children spent 1.3 more hours per week on paid work and another 14.2 hours more per week on unpaid work than men without children. For women with children, paid working time was 1.5 hours shorter than for women without children, but their unpaid work was 29.3 hours longer. The additional unpaid hours worked by women with children were almost double those worked by men with children, which points to the persistence of gender stereotypes and social norms around who should take care of children and who should be the main breadwinner in a family.<sup>10</sup> Becoming the main carer in a family results in an increase in unpaid work and a decrease in time available for paid work, causing some to drop out of the labour market completely.

Financial incentives are one driver of decisions on who does more unpaid work in households. Women on average earn less than men, so the financial impact on a family is less if women reduce their working hours. Tax and benefit systems, especially joint income taxation, can also have an impact on women's labour supply, incentivising them to work fewer hours or to drop out of the labour market (Figari et al, 2011; Bick

and Fuchs-Schündeln, 2017; Christl et al, 2022; Coelho et al, 2022).

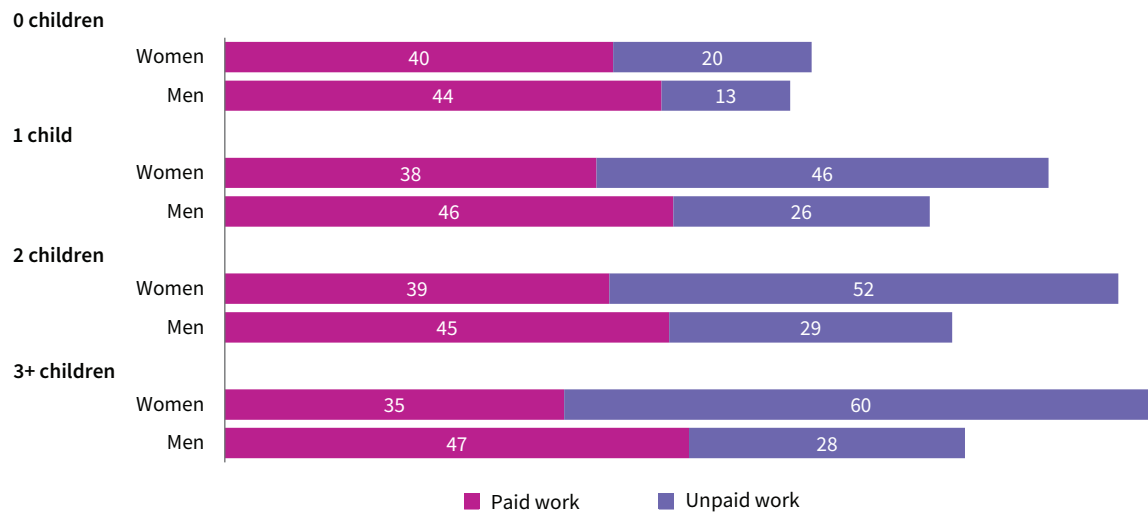
The accessibility and affordability of education and care services (including care after school and during school holidays) have an impact on these decisions, as this is the main condition influencing the choice of parents – mostly mothers – to fully participate in the labour market. As Olivetti and Petrongolo (2017, p. 221) phrase it, 'the one indicator that is across the board associated with more equal gender outcomes is spending on early childhood education and care'.

In the case of single parents, single fathers reported spending 21 hours fewer per week on unpaid work than single mothers, which may be explained by the availability of external help or different custody arrangements or both. Mothers become sole carers more often than fathers, and even in case of shared custody, which is increasing in Europe, on average children spend more time with their mothers than their fathers (Steinbach, 2019; Steinbach and Augustijn, 2021).

Total weekly working hours increased with the number of children, especially for women. For working women, having one child meant adding the equivalent of a second part-time job of 24 hours per week of unpaid work, rising close to the equivalent of a full-time shift for

<sup>10</sup> In the EU in 2020, 72.2% of women and 90.0% of men aged 25–54 with children were employed. The employment rate for women without children in the same age category was 4.6 percentage points higher, while for men it was 9.1 percentage points lower (Eurostat, 2021).

Figure 72: Paid and unpaid work of women and men, by number of children, EU27 (weekly hours)



Source: EWCTS 2021

those with three or more children, compared with women without children (Figure 72). Meanwhile, paid working hours for women with three or more children were only 5 hours shorter than for women without children. It is worth noting that this analysis focuses only on working mothers and cannot draw conclusions about women who left employment due to increased unpaid caring responsibilities. In the EU, employment rates for women with three or more children are much lower than those for women without children or with fewer children.<sup>11</sup>

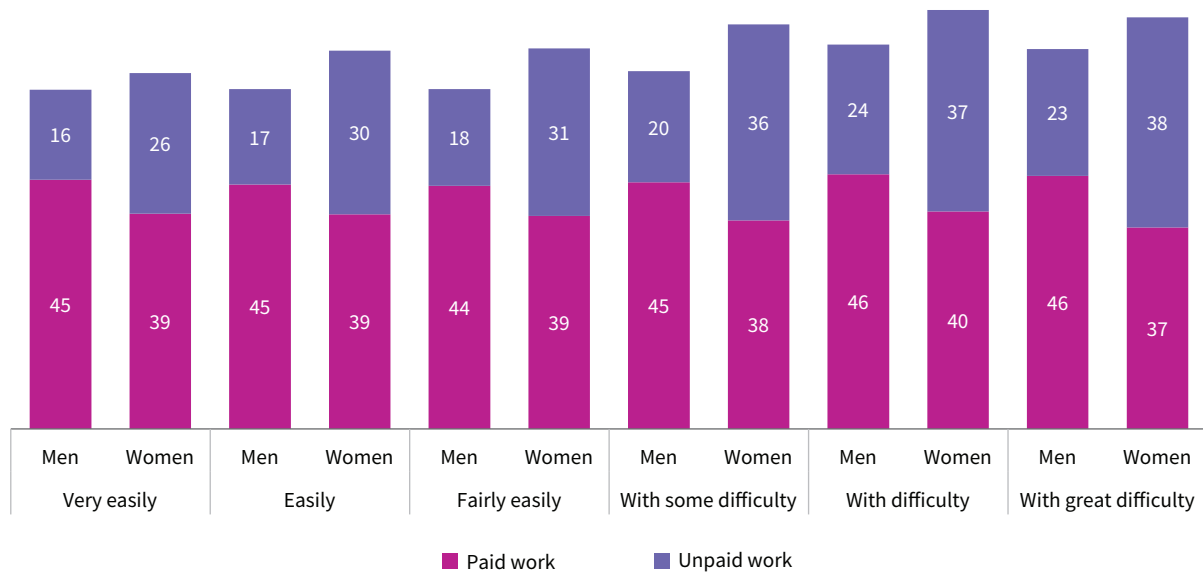
Most of the unpaid work burden results from caring for young children. Unpaid working hours varied considerably with the age of the youngest child, with the longest unpaid hours worked by people with children under five years old: unpaid hours were 18 hours longer for men and 38 hours longer for women with children in this age group than workers without children.

The EWCTS data also show that there were no significant differences in paid hours between people who could make ends meet easily and those who found it difficult to make ends meet. However, unpaid working hours increased with increased financial difficulty. For people who had difficulty or great difficulty in making ends meet, unpaid hours were, on average, 10 hours longer (7 hours longer for men and 13 hours longer for women) than for those who could make ends meet very easily. This is most likely related to a lack of resources to outsource unpaid work owing to financial limitations (Figure 73).

A lack of access to affordable education and childcare services is more damaging to people with fewer financial resources than to wealthier households, as it traps people – mostly mothers – in a vicious cycle of being unable to afford these services while also being unable to increase their income because of the unpaid workload that prevents them from spending more hours in stable paid jobs (EIGE, 2021b).

<sup>11</sup> In 2020, the employment rates for women with up to two children were similar to those of women without children (around 74% on average); however, the average employment rate for women with three or more children was 59.1% (Eurostat, 2021).

Figure 73: Paid and unpaid work of women and men, by ability to make ends meet, EU27 (weekly hours)



Source: EWCTS 2021

## Work–life balance

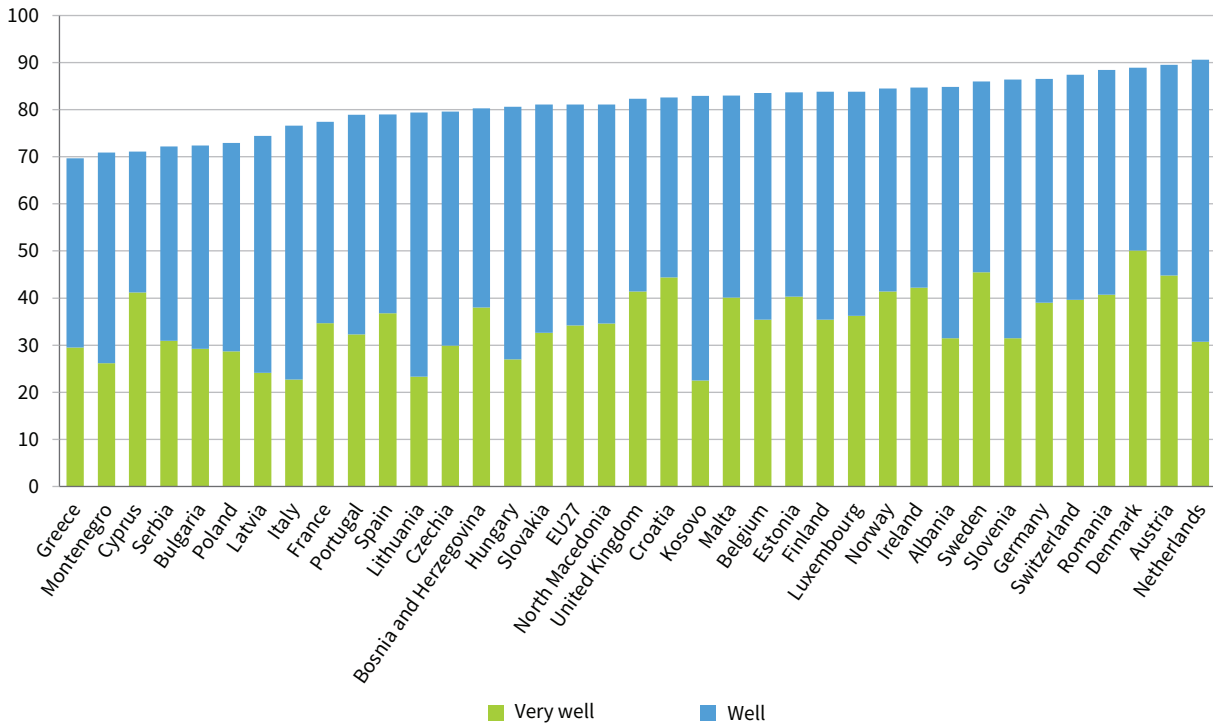
Work–life balance is a widely used concept in research, policy, business and daily life. It expresses the aim of working women and men to achieve a balance between work and other spheres of their lives. The importance of work–life balance has been increasingly acknowledged in the EU policy context. Both the European Pillar of Social Rights and the directive on work–life balance for parents and carers (Directive (EU) 2019/1158) state the need to improve the work–life balance of parents and carers. However, ensuring a better balance between work and private life is important not only to carers and parents but also to every other working person.

Research has shown that employees whose work commitments are better adapted to their private lives tend to report less sickness absences and higher levels of work motivation. In contrast, poor work–life balance has a negative impact on workers' performance while disrupting their family and social spheres. Poor work–life balance may not only be harmful to workers' health and well-being, and to their social relationships and personal development; it can also lead individuals to reduce their availability for paid work or drop out of the labour market completely (Eurofound, 2018a).

In the EWCTS, data on work–life balance were gathered by asking respondents how well their working hours fitted in with their family or social commitments outside work on a four-point scale, from 'very well' to 'not at all well'. In 2021, 81% of people across the EU27 reported that their working hours fitted in either well or very well with their family or social commitments (Figure 74). However, this share varied by country, ranging from 70% in Greece to 91% in the Netherlands. The proportion of workers whose working hours fitted in very well with their family responsibilities was highest in Denmark, where half of workers reported this, and lowest in Kosovo, where the figure was 23%. The country rankings have remained the same as before the pandemic.

At EU level, a larger share of women (82%) reported a good fit between their working life and their private life than men did (80%). Women tend to adjust their working time arrangements according to the needs of family members (as noted earlier, women tend to work fewer paid hours), which means that their perception of work–life balance is more positive than that of men.

**Figure 74: Workers whose working hours fitted in with family and social commitments outside work well or very well, EU Member States and other European countries (%)**



Source: EWCTS 2021

Despite a large share of people reporting a good or very good fit between their work and commitments outside work, a closer look at different groups of workers shows that perception of work–life balance was not so positive for all. As Figure 75 illustrates, many reported that they had a poor work–life balance, saying that their working hours fitted in not very well or not at all well with family and social commitments. Around one-quarter of plant and machine operators, members of the armed forces, and skilled agricultural workers reported that their work–life balance was poor.

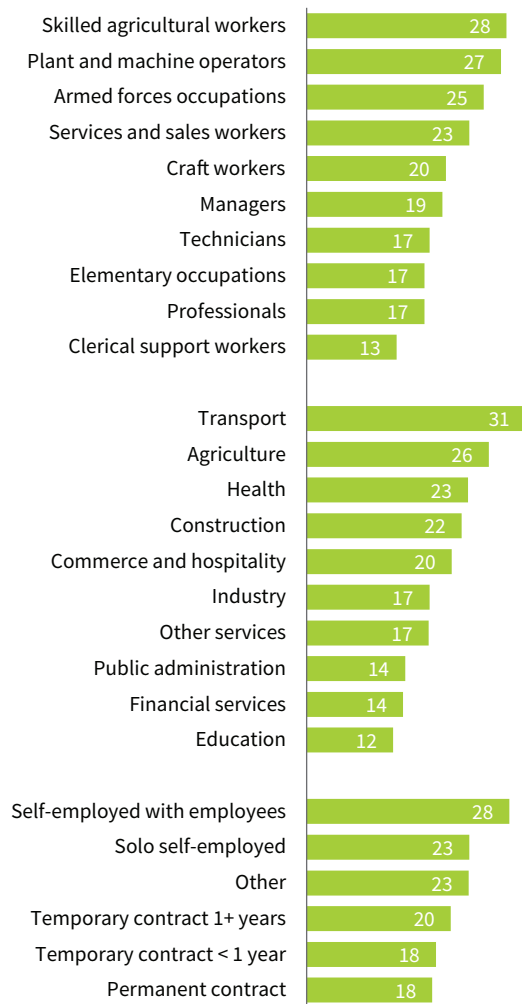
At sector level, the transport sector had the largest share of workers who reported a poor work–life balance (31%). In very male-dominated sectors, where 80% or more workers are men, more workers perceived their work–life balance to be poor – for both women (29%) and men (24%) – than workers in female-dominated or mixed-gender sectors (17% on average). The same holds

true in male-dominated workplaces for men only (22%). The gender of the employee’s boss, on the other hand, does not seem to make a difference to their perceived work–life balance.

More than 20% of self-employed workers – irrespective of whether or not they had employees – reported a poor fit between work and family and social commitments, which is due mainly to the longer hours they spent in paid work. The perception of poor work–life balance was also more prevalent among those who had more than one job (25%, compared with 18% among those with one job). As a rule, the longer the paid working hours, the larger the share of people who reported a poor work–life balance. Only 1 in 10 people working up to 20 hours per week reported a poor work–life balance compared with 1 in 3 of those working 48 hours per week or more. Commuting did not seem to have an effect on work–life balance.



**Figure 75: Poor fit between working hours and family and social commitments outside work, by occupation, sector and employment status, EU27 (%)**



**Note:** Respondents were considered to have poor work-life balance if they responded ‘not very well’ or ‘not at all well’ when asked how well their working life fitted in with their family and social commitments.

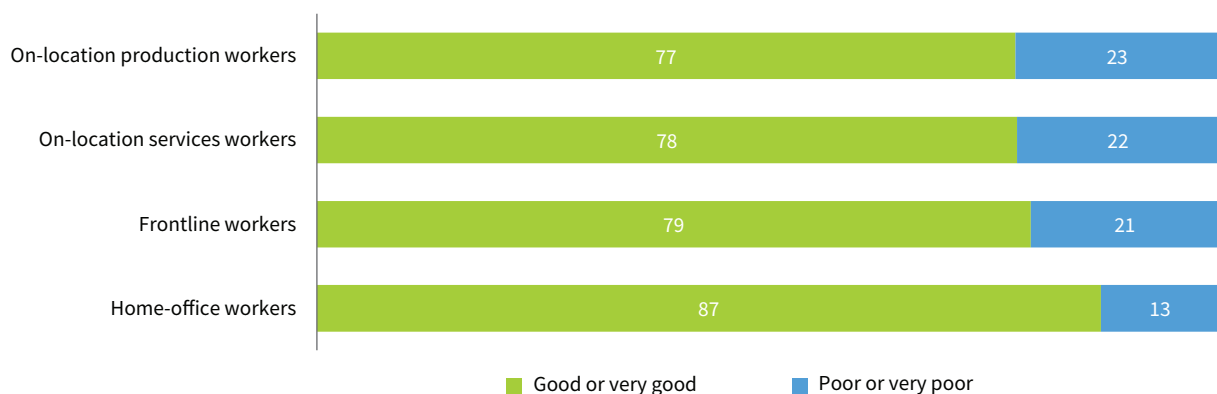
**Source:** EWCTS 2021

The EWCTS data show that people working from home (exclusively or in combination with other locations) enjoyed a better work-life balance than people working in other locations. One-quarter of people working mostly from a vehicle and from various places perceived their work and social commitments as not very well balanced or not at all well balanced, compared with 14% of those who worked from home exclusively and 13% of those who worked both from home and other locations. These differences are also reflected in the COVID groups (Figure 76). The home-office workers group had the largest share of workers who reported a good or very good fit between their work and commitments outside work (87%). The figure is almost 10 percentage points lower among on-location production workers and on-location services workers.

In all age groups, larger shares of men than women reported their work-life balance to be wanting (Figure 77). In terms of age, the largest group who perceived their work-life balance as poor was among those aged 35–44 years. This age group is known as the ‘sandwich generation’, when people progress in their careers, children are born, older relatives start requiring more attention and help, and financial needs are accelerating with the increased household size and changing family needs. After peaking at the age of 35–44 years, the share of people with a poor work-life balance decreases for each older age group. The best work-life balance is recorded for people aged 56 years or older.

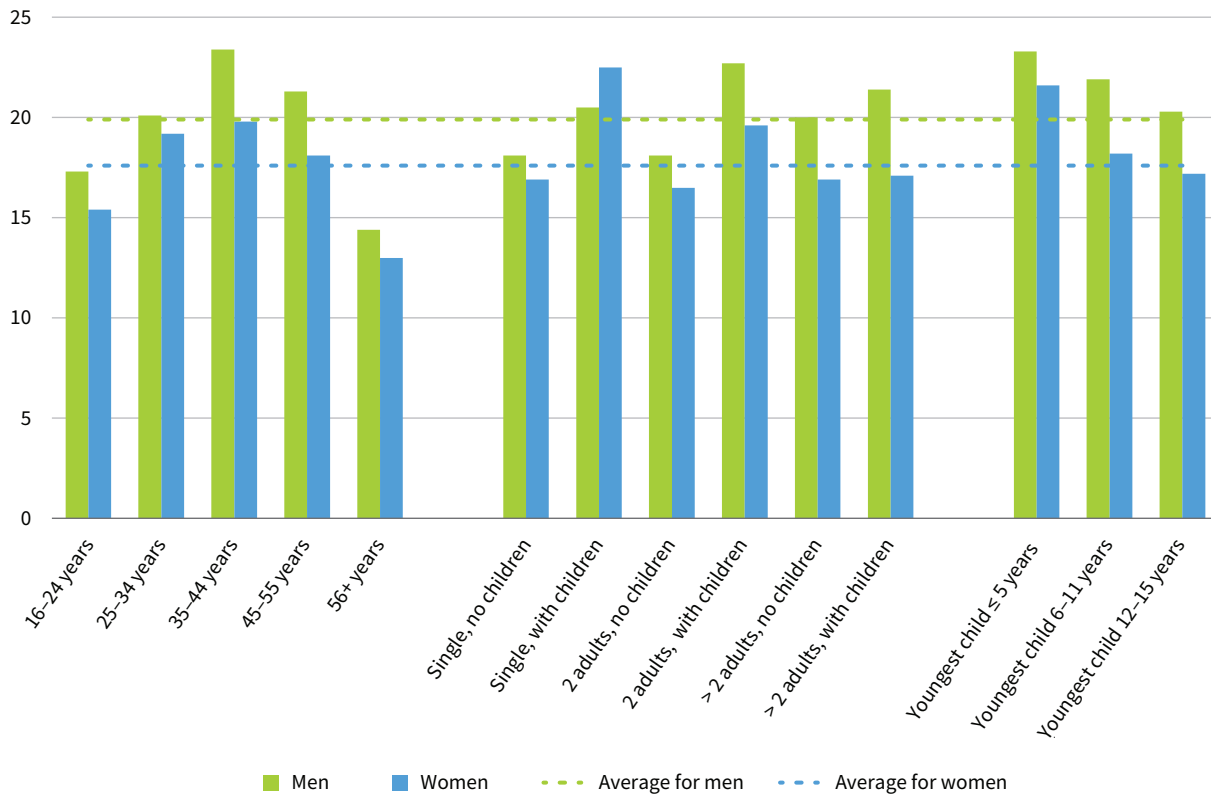
Having children increases the share of women and men reporting a poor fit between work and social commitments, especially for single mothers and men in a couple with children. In all the household types shown in Figure 77, more men than women had a poor work-life balance, except in the single, with children group. The age of the youngest child matters for perception of work-life balance: parents with young children (whose youngest child was under five years old) more often reported having a poor work-life balance than parents with older children.

**Figure 76: Fit between working hours and family and social commitments outside work, by COVID group, EU27 (%)**



**Source:** EWCTS 2021

**Figure 77: Poor work–life balance, men and women compared, by age group, household type and age of youngest child, EU27 (%)**



Source: EWCTS 2021

## Work–life conflicts

Working life and private life inevitably affect each other. Work can infringe on people’s private lives at different levels, for example on their physical and mental availability to do housework or care for others. People’s private lives may also impinge on their working life, for example when family preoccupations reduce workers’ focus and attention levels. The EWCTS captured this conflict between working and non-working life by asking respondents how frequently over the 12 months prior to the survey they:

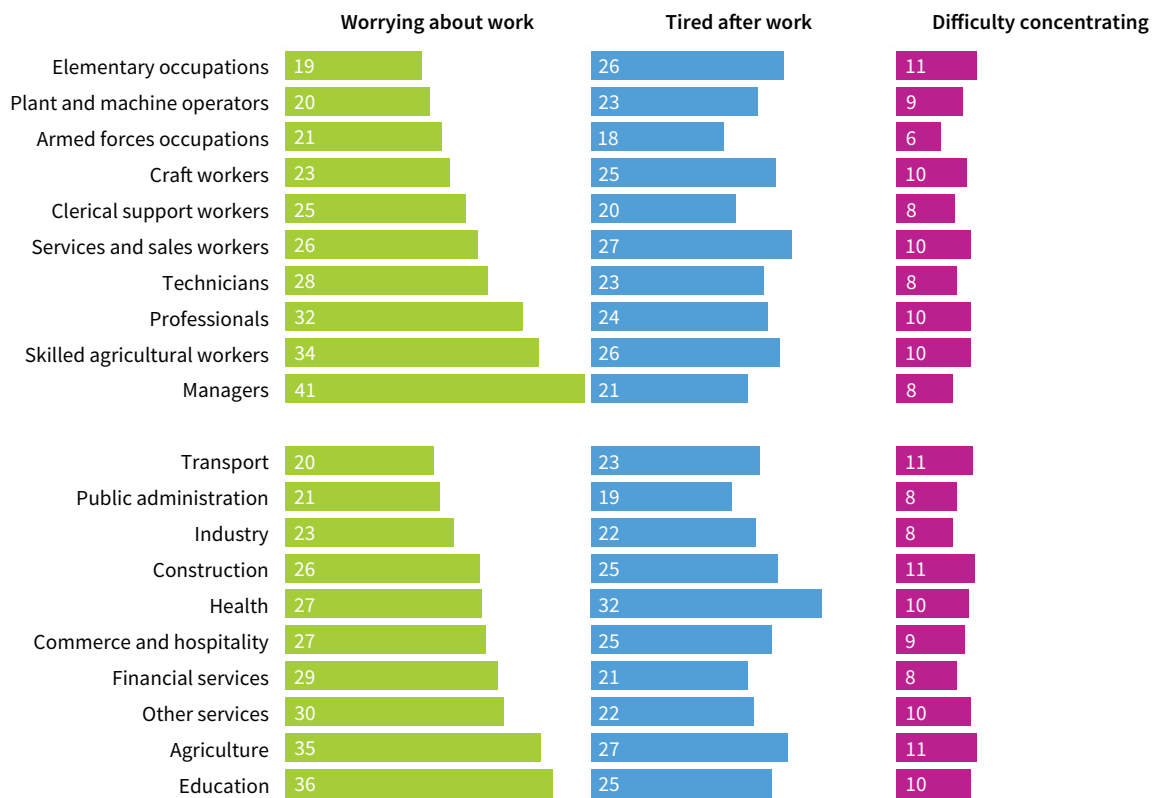
- kept worrying about work when they were not working, which is a manifestation of stress and mental workload (‘worry about work’)
- felt too tired after work to do some of the household jobs that needed to be done, which points to physical or mental exhaustion from work (‘tired after work’)
- found it difficult to concentrate on their job because of their family responsibilities (‘worry about family’)

The first two questions concern the spillover of work into people’s private lives, while the third captures spillover in the opposite direction, from family and social commitments into working life.

In the EU27, 27% of workers reported that they always or often worried about work when they were not working, 24% reported that they were always or often too tired after work to do household tasks and 9% always or often found it difficult to concentrate on their job because of their family responsibilities.

Across the occupational groups, 41% of managers and 34% of skilled agricultural workers worried about work after working hours; at sector level, the largest shares were among workers in education and agriculture (Figure 78). The work–life balance of workers in the transport sector was the worst among all sectors, but they worried least about their work when not working, meaning that most workers in this sector seem to have been able to switch off from work more easily than, for example, workers in the education sector. The largest share of workers who reported being too tired to do housework was in the health sector.

Figure 78: Work–life conflicts, by occupation and sector, EU27 (%)



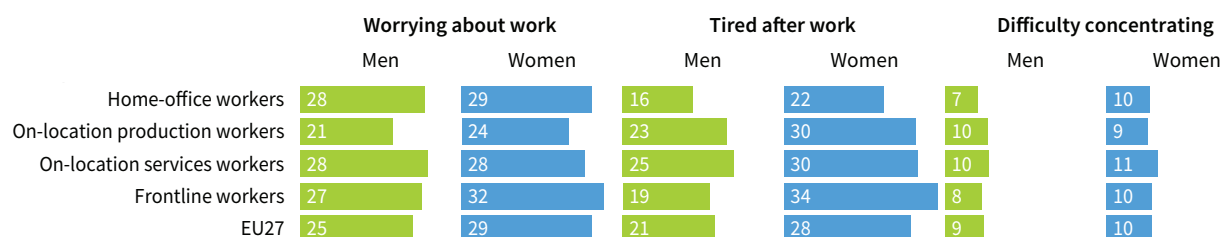
**Note:** Percentages correspond to those who responded ‘always’ or ‘often’ when asked how often they experienced each of the three conflicts in the 12 months prior to the survey.

**Source:** EWCTS 2021

The self-employed, especially those with employees, stand out in terms of worrying about work, as almost half of them often or always worried about work outside working hours. These are the entrepreneurs and small company owners who worry about their businesses and their livelihoods, worries that were especially acute during the pandemic. Work–life conflicts were also more common among workers with more than one job; the shares reporting such conflicts were 2–3 percentage points higher than the average in each of the three dimensions.

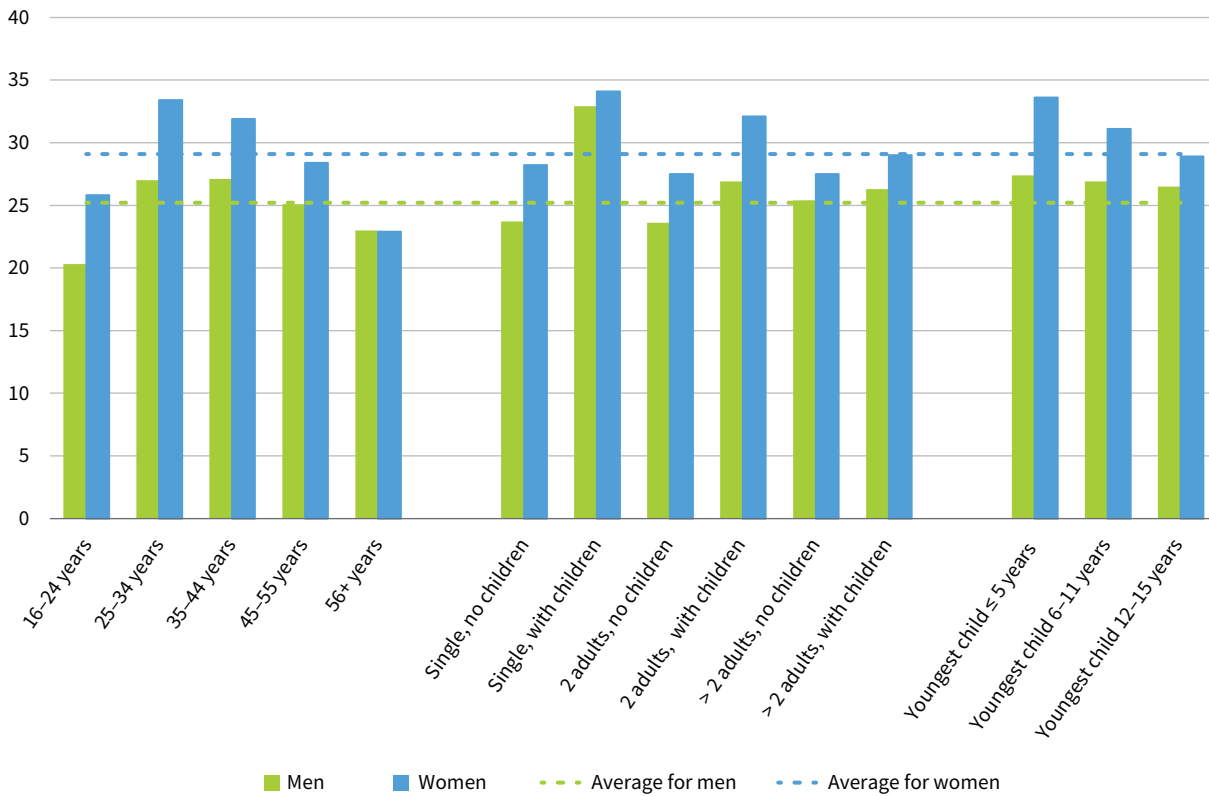
Among the COVID groups, women who were frontline workers were the largest group who worried about their work and felt tired after work (around one in three in both cases) (Figure 79). In contrast, only around one in five men who were frontline workers felt tired after work. The on-location production workers group had the lowest share of people who worried about work, for both women (24%) and men (21%). Home-office workers had the lowest share of respondents who reported often or always feeling tired after work (16% of men and 22% of women).

Figure 79: Work–life conflicts, men and women compared, by COVID group, EU27 (%)



**Source:** EWCTS 2021

**Figure 80: Worrying about work (always or often), men and women compared, by age group, household type and age of youngest child, EU27 (%)**



Source: EWCTS 2021

Although more women than men perceived a good fit between their work and family and social commitments, more women than men also experienced work–life conflicts. The gap between the shares of women and men who always or often worried about work is 4 percentage points, while the gap among those who were always or often too tired after work to do housework is 8 percentage points. The gender gap in difficulty concentrating at work is nearly 2 percentage points.

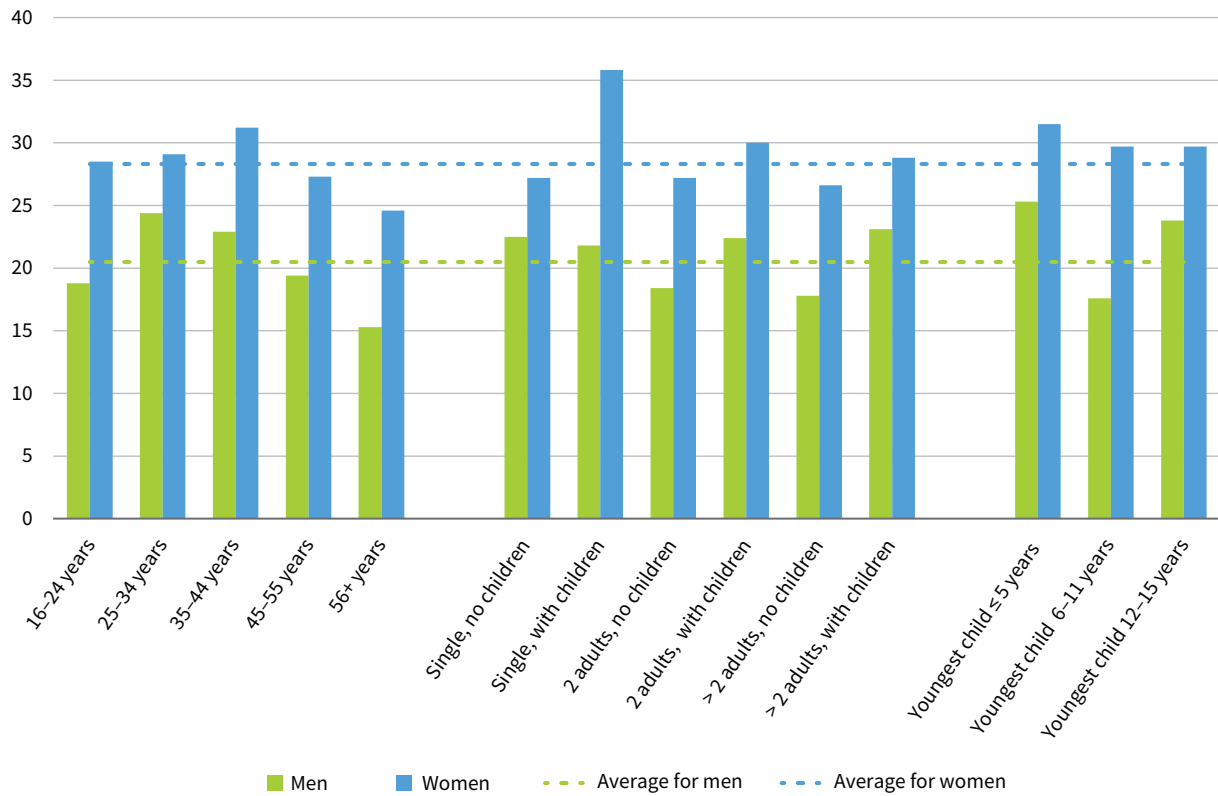
In terms of age groups, the highest shares of those who worried about work outside working hours were found among women aged 25–34 years and men aged 25–44 years (Figure 80). Having children increased the share of people who worried about work after working hours, especially for single parents; the share who reported worrying decreased as the age of the youngest child increased.

There was a considerable difference between the shares of women and men who reported feeling tired after work (Figure 81). Although women on average spent fewer hours doing paid work, more reported being tired than men. This is probably related to the hours of unpaid work that women were more likely to do at home after their paid work shift ended. This issue was especially acute for single mothers and mothers with two or more children. The share of mothers and fathers who felt tired after work was highest for those whose youngest child was under five years old.

Having difficulty concentrating at work because of family responsibilities was not an issue for many workers in the EU. Yet around one-fifth of single parents, parents with three or more children and parents with children under five (especially women) reported facing this difficulty.

Box 6 describes how perceived work–life balance and work–life conflicts related to the job quality indicator examined in Chapter 2.

Figure 81: Feeling tired after work (always or often), men and women compared, by age group, household type and age of youngest child, EU27 (%)

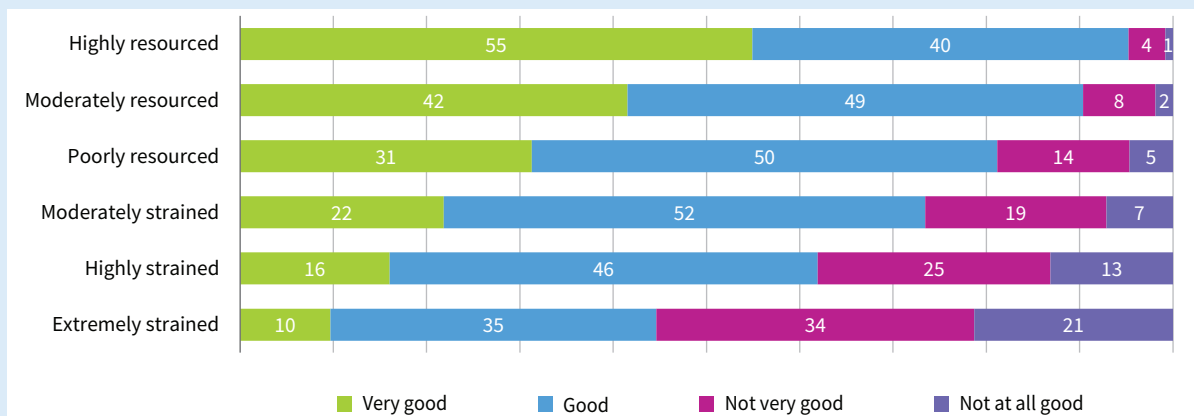


Source: EWCTS 2021

### Box 6: Work-life balance and job quality

Work-life balance and job quality reinforce each other, as Figure 82 shows. The less strained and more resourced workers were, the more likely they were to report a good fit between working hours and family and social commitments outside work.

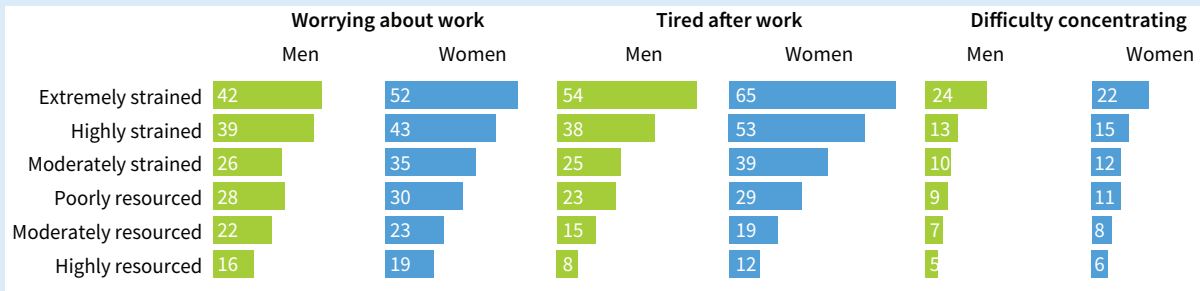
Figure 82: Fit between working hours and family and social commitments outside work, by job quality, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

Similarly, Figure 83 illustrates that work–life conflicts are associated with job quality. In general, the higher the level of resources available to workers, the less likely both women and men were to report worrying about work outside of work, feeling tired after work or having problems concentrating at work because of their family responsibilities.

**Figure 83: Work–life conflicts, men and women compared, by job quality, EU27 (%)**



**Note:** Percentages correspond to those who responded ‘always’ or ‘often’ when asked how often they experienced each of the three conflicts in the 12 months prior to the survey.

**Source:** EWCTS 2021

## Working time preferences

Workers’ preferences regarding their working hours can be considered an important gauge of the efficiency of the labour market and work organisation practices in matching individual’s needs at different stages of life with the needs of employers and organisations. A preference for working fewer hours may reveal tensions in terms of working time organisation, while a preference for longer working hours is possibly related to underemployment or insufficient earnings. This section analyses individuals’ working time preferences in relation to their actual working hours, according to their job and organisational characteristics and from the gender and life-course perspectives. It also offers evidence on where the major tensions between actual and preferred working time arose during the COVID-19 pandemic and how these tensions have affected working time patterns.

EWCTS respondents were asked to indicate how many hours per week they would prefer to work, taking into account the possible impact on earnings of a change in working hours. Overall, in 2021, 43% of the working population in the EU (44% of women and 43% of men) reported that their current working hours matched their preferences. This means the working hours of most workers in the EU did not match their preferences: 12% (13% of women and 11% of men) expressed a preference for working more hours, whereas 45%

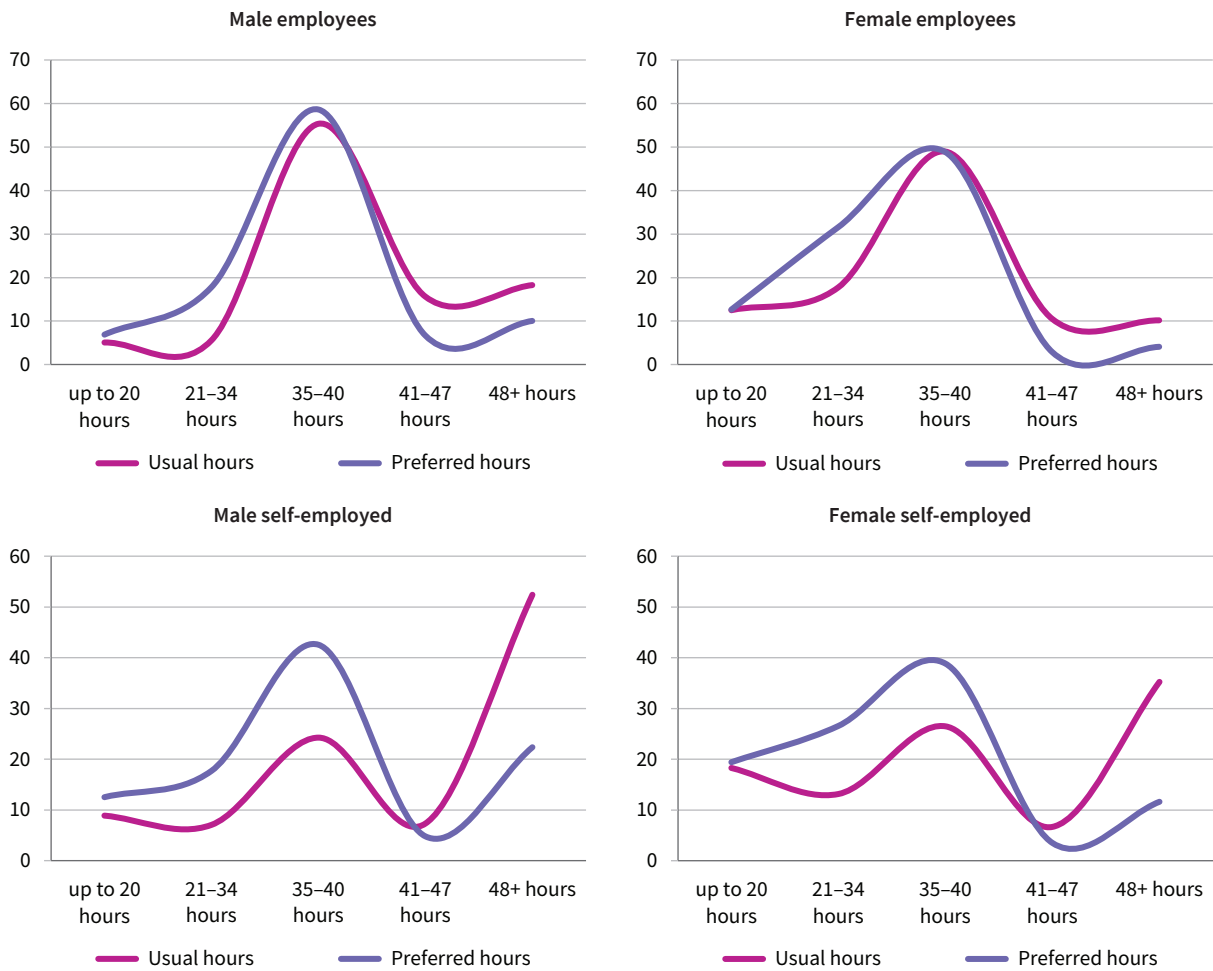
(43% of women and 46% of men) would prefer to work fewer hours.

Figure 84 contrasts workers’ usual hours in paid work (including in the main job and other jobs) with their preferred hours. Men and women, both employees and self-employed, seemed to favour a reduction in working hours and a transition from long hours to around or slightly less than standard working hours (between 35 and 40 hours per week).

Those who worked long (41–47) or very long (48 or more) weekly hours were much more likely to prefer to work fewer hours, while those who worked fewer hours than the norm (up to 20 hours or 21–34 hours) were more likely to say that they would like to work more hours (Figure 85). Most of those who worked normal weekly hours were happy with their working hours, but 4 out of 10 would prefer to work fewer hours.

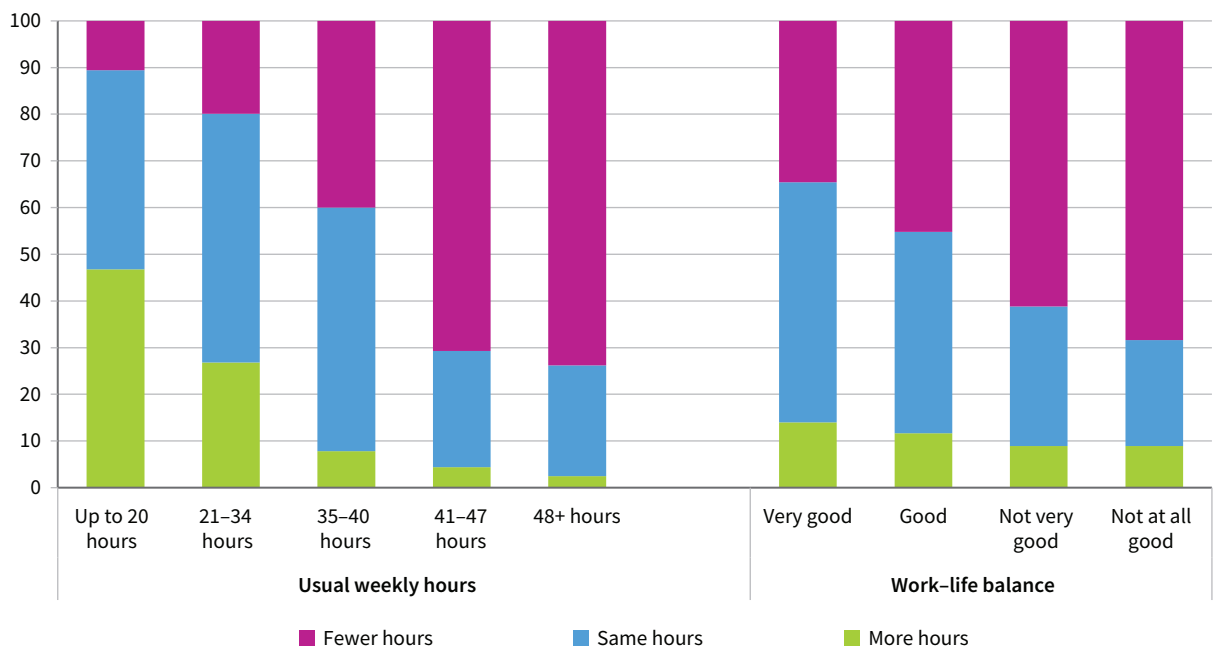
Preferences regarding working hours were also strongly related to the fit between working hours and family or social commitments outside work. Workers reporting a poorer work–life balance were more likely to report a preference for working fewer hours.

Figure 84: Distribution of usual and preferred weekly hours, by gender and employment status, EU27 (%)



Notes: Usual hours include hours in paid work in main job and other jobs; lines have been smoothed for readability.  
Source: EWCTS 2021

Figure 85: Working time preferences, by usual weekly working hours and work-life balance, EU27 (%)

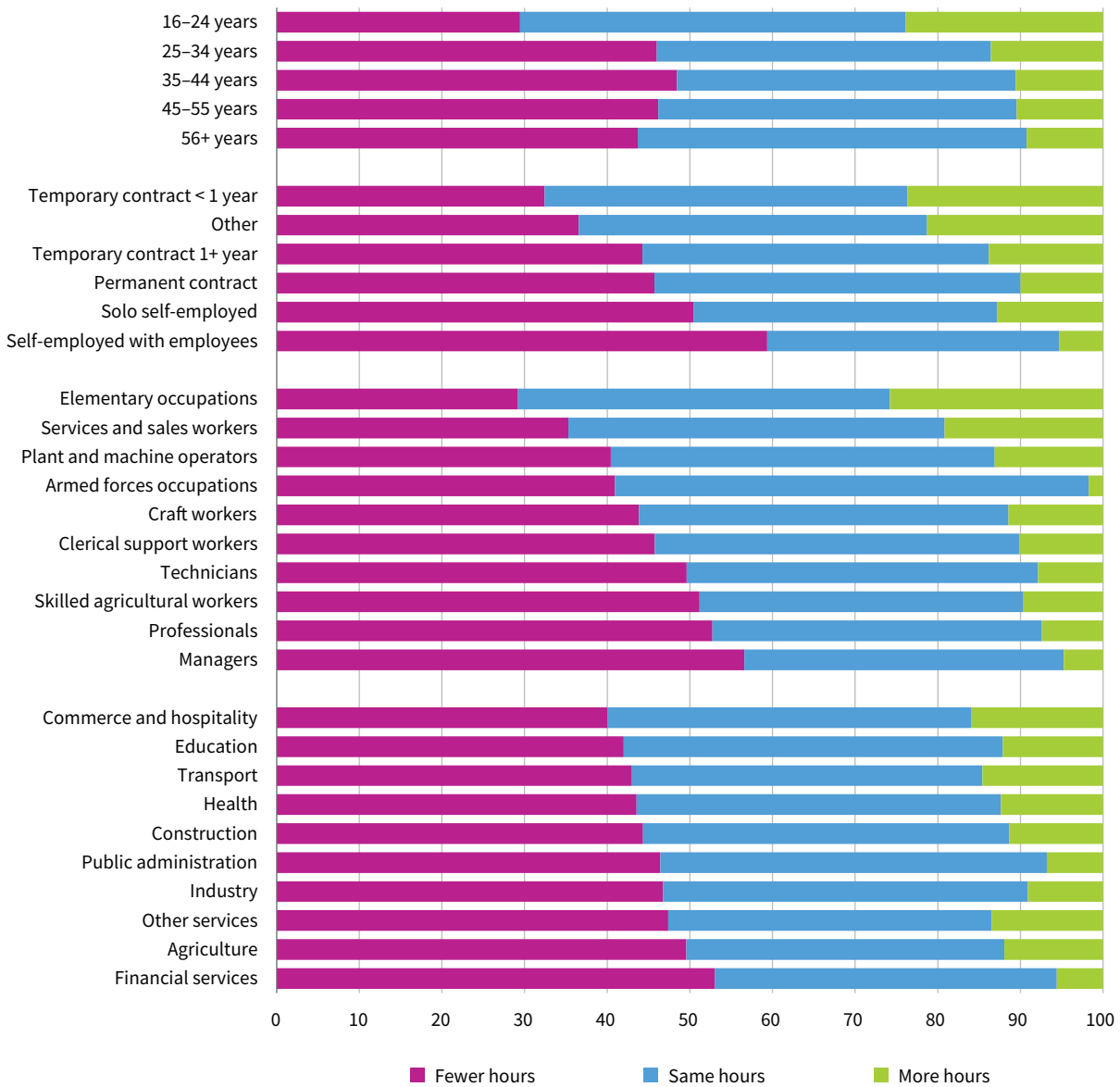


Source: EWCTS 2021

A preference for longer working hours, which may to some extent reflect underemployment, was more common among younger workers (24% of those aged 16–24 years), temporary employees with contracts of less than a year (24%), workers in elementary occupations (26%), and services and sales workers (19%), and in the commerce and hospitality (16%) and transport (15%) sectors (Figure 86).

A preference for fewer hours was most prevalent among workers aged 35–44 years (48%) and among the self-employed, both with employees (59%) and without employees (50%). This preference was more prominent among managers (57%), professionals (53%), skilled agricultural workers (51%) and technicians (50%). It was also particularly common among those working in the financial services (53%) and agriculture (50%) sectors.

Figure 86: Working time preferences, by age group, employment status, occupation and sector, EU27 (%)



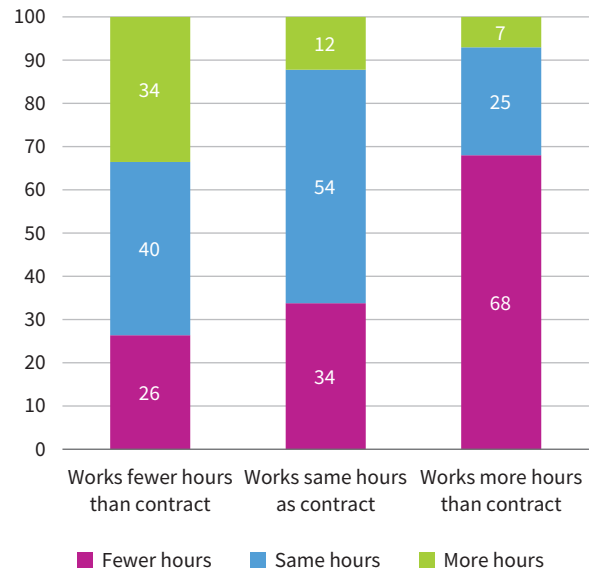
Source: EWCTS 2021



Working time preference patterns according to the relationship between usual and contractual working hours reveal an imbalance between what workers would prefer in terms of participation in employment and working time and what happens in reality (Figure 87). Not surprisingly, slightly over half of those who worked the same hours as stated in their employment contract wished to continue working those same hours; nevertheless, nearly one-third stated a preference for working fewer hours. Among those who worked more hours than expected, a majority (nearly 70%) would have preferred to work fewer hours. Among those who worked fewer hours than expected, around one-third would have liked to work more hours, while just over a quarter would have preferred to work even fewer hours.

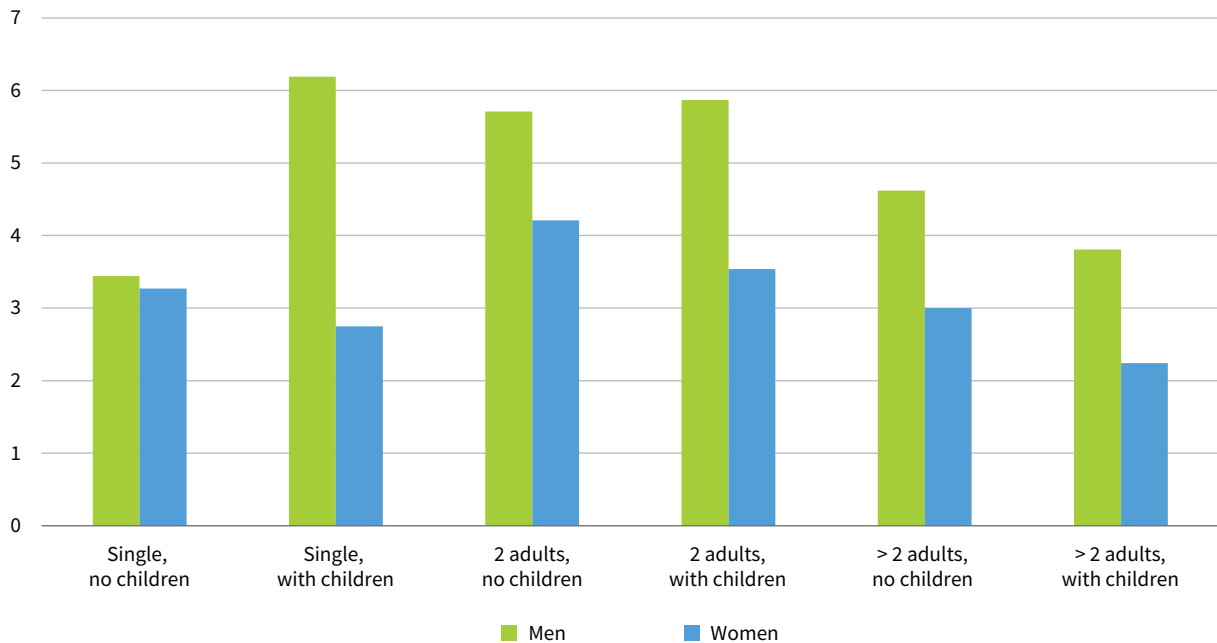
Figure 88 shows the discrepancy between the average usual weekly hours and the average preferred hours for women and men in different household types. Regardless of the type of household they lived in, workers worked longer hours than they would have liked. The largest discrepancies were among men who were single parents and men in a couple with children, which means that they experienced greater strain in

**Figure 87: Working time preferences, by relationship between usual hours and contracted hours, EU27 (%)**



Source: EWCTS 2021

**Figure 88: Difference between average usual and preferred weekly working hours, by household type and gender, EU27 (hours)**

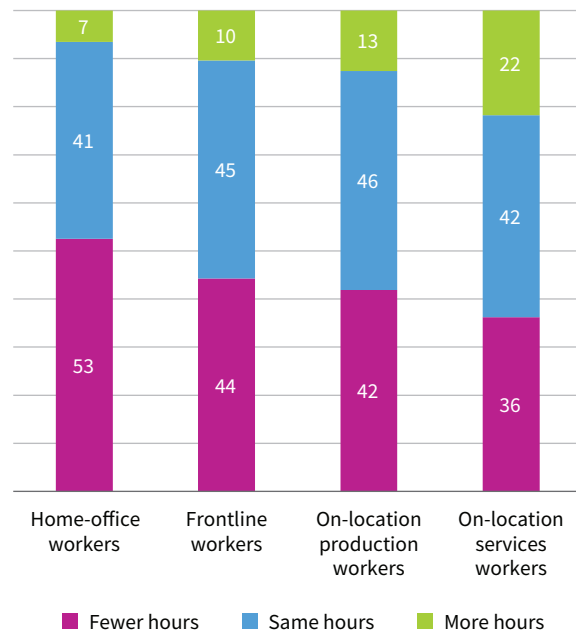


Source: EWCTS 2021

terms of organising their time. Their situations would require larger reductions in usual weekly working hours in order to meet their preferences. Men and women in couples without children would also require large adjustments to their usual weekly working hours in order to have their preferences met. The smaller discrepancies among women again confirms the idea that, in general, they are more used to managing their jobs and careers around their family needs and responsibilities, whereas men adjust those needs and responsibilities to their jobs and careers.

As shown in Figure 89, working time preferences patterns varied across the COVID groups. More than half of home-office workers wanted to work fewer hours, which suggests that many workers in this group may have increased their working hours when they started working from home regularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, 44% of frontline workers expressed a preference for working fewer hours. In contrast, 22% of on-location services workers wanted to work more hours (almost double the EU average), possibly indicating their underemployment and uncertainty about working hours, which may have been aggravated by the pandemic.

Figure 89: Working time preferences, by COVID group, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

## Summary

### Weekly working time

- Most of the working population continued to put in standard working hours in their jobs in 2021: 70% worked a five-day week, and roughly half worked 35–40 hours a week. A substantial minority of employees, 14%, worked long hours of 48 hours or more a week.
- Half of the self-employed with employees worked a six- or seven-day week, as did 41% of the solo self-employed. On the other hand, a large share of the solo self-employed (20%) worked four days or fewer – the largest share, in terms of employment status, after employees with temporary contracts (23%).
- The EWCTS data suggest that there was a latent but widespread desire among workers to work fewer hours: 45% would have preferred to work fewer hours, while 43% were satisfied with their current hours. Among workers whose working hours were the standard 35–40 hours per week, 4 out of every 10 would have preferred to work fewer hours.

### Paid and unpaid work

- There was a strong gender divide in paid and unpaid work. On average, in the EU27, men spent nearly 6 hours per week more than women on paid work, while women spent 13 hours more on unpaid work than men. This resulted in women working 7 hours more per week than men (70 hours and 63 hours, respectively).
- Women in part-time jobs worked as many total hours (paid and unpaid) as men in full-time jobs (64 and 65 hours, respectively), with the former spending the equivalent of a full-time job doing unpaid work (37 hours).
- In the case of workers with full-time jobs, women spent only 2.5 hours fewer per week than men in paid work (44 hours and 47 hours, respectively, when both figures are rounded), but 10 hours more in unpaid work (28 and 18 hours, respectively).
- Comparing the time spent on paid and unpaid work by men and women with and without children further highlights the gender disparities. Men with children spent 1.3 hours more per week on paid work and another 14.2 hours more on unpaid work compared with men without children. Women with children worked 1.5 hours fewer in paid work than women without children, but 29.3 hours more in unpaid work.

## Work–life balance and work–life conflicts

- Despite the upheavals of 2021, most workers maintained a good work–life balance, with more women (82%) than men (80%) reporting that their working hours fitted well or very well with their family and social commitments. Furthermore, people working from home (exclusively or in combination with other locations) enjoyed better work–life balance than people working in other locations. Poor work–life balance was more common among blue-collar workers and workers in the agriculture and transport sectors.
- It was relatively common for the concerns of work to spill over into private life, with around a quarter of people saying they regularly worried about work when they were not working, while a similar proportion reported that they were regularly too tired after work to do housework.
- More women than men experienced work–life conflicts. For instance, there was a gap of 8 percentage points in relation to being too tired after work to do housework. This is doubtlessly connected to the bigger burden of housework that women faced at the end of their working day: 74% of women did daily housework and cooking, compared with 42% of men.
- Home life impinged on work much less: 9% of workers found it difficult to concentrate on their job because of their family responsibilities. However, around one-fifth of single parents, parents with three or more children, and parents with young children (especially women) had problems concentrating.
- The analysis confirmed an association between job quality and work–life balance and work–life conflicts. The better workers' job quality, meaning the less job strain and the more resources they had, the less likely they were to report poor work–life balance and work–family conflicts.



# 5 | A workforce ready for future challenges

Sustainable work has been defined by Eurofound as the interplay of working and living conditions ‘such that they support people in engaging and remaining in work throughout an extended working life’ (Eurofound, 2015b, p. 5). The definition of sustainability in the context of work implies simultaneous efforts towards achieving individual, social and economic goals in relation to work and the labour market that will enable the needs of the worker in the present to be met without compromising their ability to work in the future. This requires a combination of sustainable conditions in a worker’s current job (for example, sufficient income and a good social climate at work); their ability, willingness and motivation to do their job (or a similar one) now and in the future (dependent on their health, skills and work engagement); the institutional preconditions for them to participate in the labour market (jobs being available, employment levels and labour market services); and their ability to balance their work-related and personal responsibilities.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted significantly on the factors that are essential for the sustainability of work and how workers assessed them. It questioned to what extent the workforce is ready to face future challenges, including those associated with the digital, decarbonisation and demographic transitions. How future-proof is the workforce in Europe?

This chapter looks at four specific aspects of workers’ subjective experiences of working life that have been identified as crucial ingredients of sustainable work (Eurofound, 2002, 2015b, 2017a, 2021d; Lukić et al, 2020):

- the financial sustainability of work, or in other words the ability of a worker, based on their income from work, to cover their household expenses and to fund other expenses and savings that allow their household to survive and grow materially (Gleißner et al, 2022)
- the social climate at work, an organisational feature of work that sets the context in which work is performed
- work engagement, an outcome of the working environment that reflects the emotional commitment of employees to their organisation
- health and well-being, whose relationship with work is complex and bidirectional, with work having specific impacts on health and health being a precondition for sustainable work

The analysis addresses variations in these aspects of working life across sectors, occupations, household types, COVID groups and so on, and examines the links with job quality.

The chapter concludes by looking into the topic of green jobs. As our societies embark on the process of decarbonisation, it is important to monitor if and how the jobs involved will be of good quality and hence sustainable. What should we do if we want a green transition based on good-quality jobs and work environments?

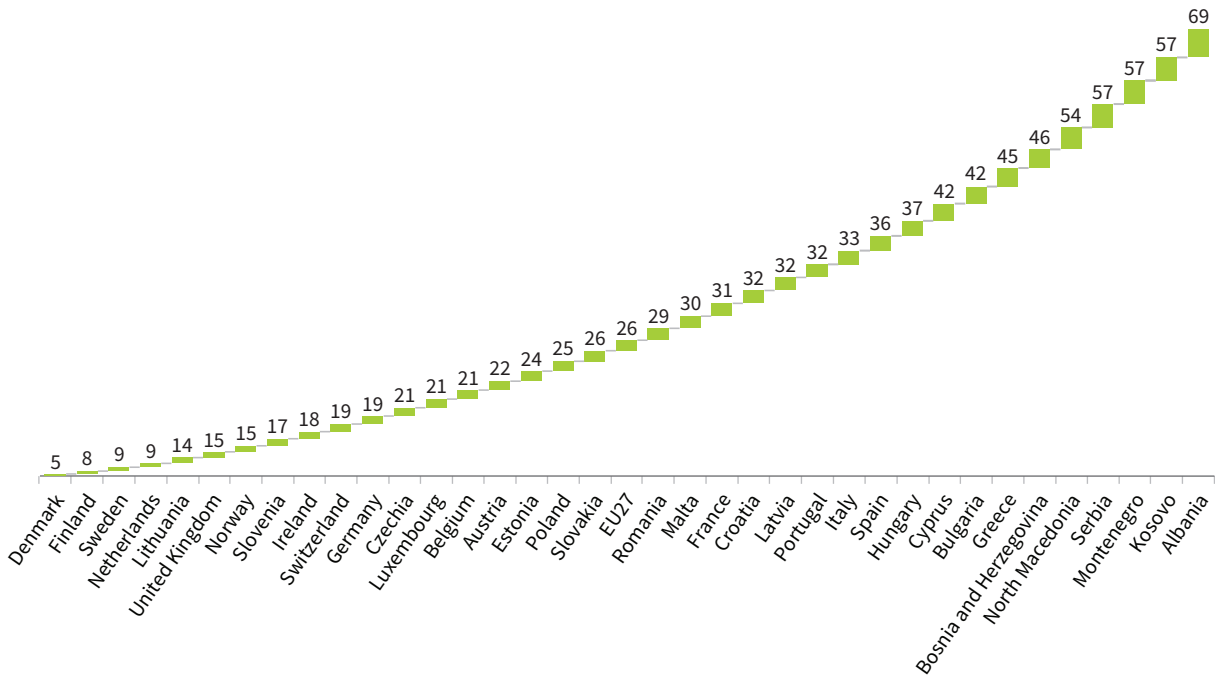
## Financial sustainability of work

Work is the main source of income for most households with adults of working age. The salary or wage being enough to cover the financial needs of a household and some additional expenses and savings is a central feature of the financial sustainability of work. The working poor face significantly more social problems than the population as a whole and struggled during the COVID-19 pandemic. In-work poverty is associated with lower levels of subjective and mental well-being, housing problems, poorer relationships with other people and feelings of social exclusion (Peña-Casas et al, 2019).

With the public health measures taken in response to the pandemic and the associated business closures, job losses and recourse to short-time working schemes, household incomes fell substantially across Member States in the first phase of the pandemic. Without the interventions of governments, however, they would have fallen considerably more. This illustrates the essential role of governments in cushioning the negative effects of external crises and shocks (Eurofound, 2021a).

Against this background, this section presents EWCTS findings on some crucial aspects of the financial sustainability of work, looking first at the ability of households to make ends meet based on income from work and other sources (for example, income from other household members and social benefits). Additional aspects – the predictability of earnings, job security and career prospects – are considered in relation to the COVID groups and job quality.

Figure 90: Difficulty making ends meet, by country, EU27 and other European countries (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

### Making ends meet

The EWCTS captured economic hardship in the working population using a well-established indicator: ability to make ends meet. The survey asked respondents to assess their household’s ability to make ends meet considering the household’s total monthly income from different sources on a six-point scale, from ‘very easily’ to ‘with great difficulty’.

Differences varied hugely across countries in terms of the shares of workers who had difficulty making ends meet, ranging from 5% in Denmark to 69% in Albania, as illustrated in Figure 90. Bulgaria was the EU Member State with the highest proportion of workers in economic hardship, with 42% finding it difficult to make ends meet. Traditionally, very low proportions of people in the Nordic countries have difficulty making ends meet, while the opposite is the case in eastern Europe.

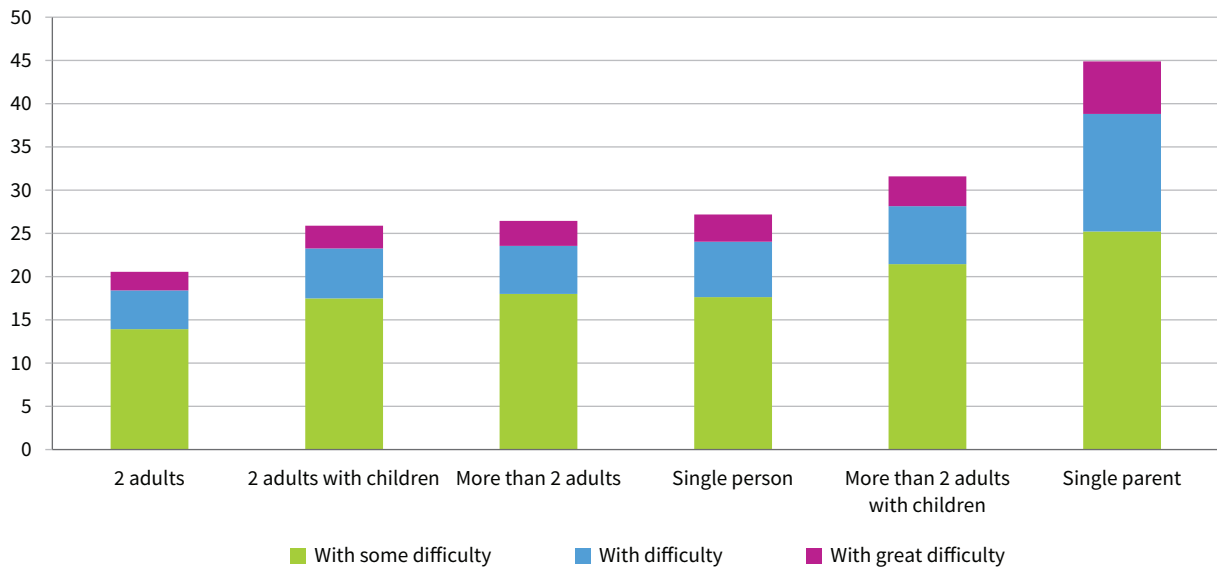
In line with the findings of other research, the characteristics of workers’ households were closely associated with their level of financial vulnerability.

A high proportion of single parents were in financial hardship, with 45% stating that they had difficulty making ends meet (Figure 91), and the figure was higher among single mothers (48%). The next highest proportions were among workers in households with more than two adults and children (32%) and single-person households (27%).

It comes as no surprise that less skilled workers struggled more to make ends meet: 42% of workers in elementary occupations, 36% of services and sales workers, and 32% of plant and machine operators reported at least some difficulty. Percentages among the white-collar occupations of managers, technicians and professionals were all below 20%.

These findings confirm known patterns but also highlight that policymakers need to focus on specific groups, such as single parents and workers in low-paid jobs, who are under high financial pressure even in normal circumstances. The pandemic put an additional burden on these groups, for instance when they needed to keep working but had to take on additional tasks such as home-schooling and childcare.

Figure 91: Difficulty making ends meet, by household type and level of difficulty, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

### COVID groups

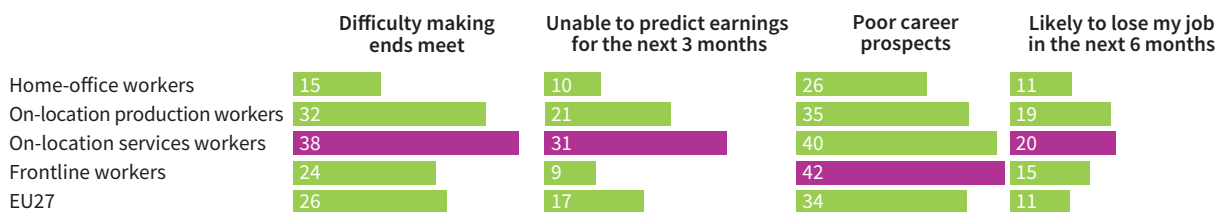
Broadening the analysis to include other factors that affect the financial sustainability of work – the predictability of earnings, job prospects and job security – Figure 92 illustrates how these indicators were distributed across the COVID groups. This shows a somewhat mixed picture.

On-location services workers fared poorly in terms of financial sustainability across the board, with 38% reporting having difficulty making ends meet, 31% unable to predict their earnings, and 40% reporting poor career prospects. One in five of these workers

thought they were likely to lose their job within six months. On-location production workers were also above the EU27 average on all indicators but appear to have been in a somewhat better situation: 21% were unable to predict their earnings for the following three months, 19% thought that they were likely to lose their job in the following six months, and 32% reported difficulty making ends meet.

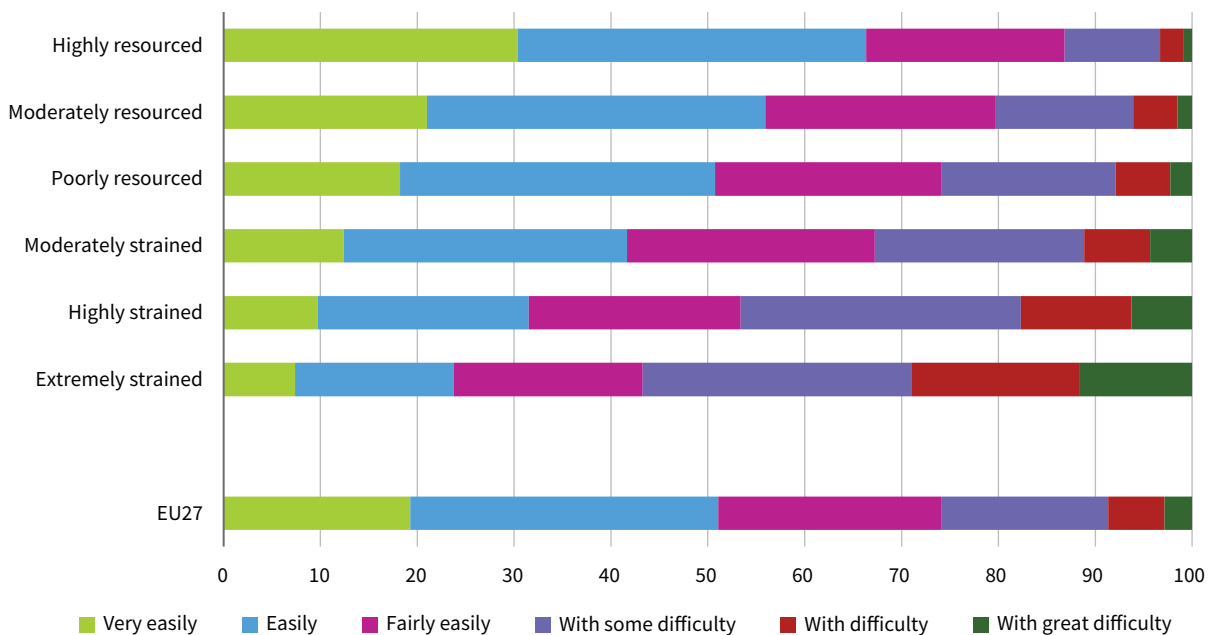
Frontline workers were below average on two indicators but had the highest proportion reporting poor career prospects (42%). The proportions of home-office workers reporting concerns across all four indicators were relatively low.

Figure 92: Financial sustainability indicators, by COVID group, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

Figure 93: Job quality index, by ability to make ends meet, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

### Financial sustainability and job quality

Figure 93 shows a clear relationship between job quality and workers’ ability to make ends meet. One-third of workers in highly resourced jobs (30%) reported that they were able to make ends meet very easily compared with only 7% of workers in extremely strained jobs. On the other hand, 12% of workers in extremely strained jobs had great difficulty making ends meet, compared with only 1% of those who worked in highly resourced jobs.

### Social climate at work

Ensuring a good social climate is a central task of organisational management. A good social climate arises from factors such as mutual trust, the perception of fairness and cooperation among colleagues and is a win-win situation for organisations and workers (Eurofound and Cedefop, 2020). Failure to create a positive social climate may be harmful for both the organisation and the well-being of the workers, resulting in adverse outcomes such as poorer worker performance and lower organisational commitment. Research has also shown the social climate to be associated with health and well-being (for example, Erdil and Ertosun, 2011; Fandiño-Losada et al, 2013; Ardito et al, 2014).

With fewer people in the workplace, requirements to maintain physical distance and increased remote working, the COVID-19 pandemic changed workers’ experience of the social climate and the related perceptions of fairness and organisational justice.

Previous research has shown, for instance, that trust in management during the pandemic was often related to prompt, efficient and transparent communication and good crisis management (Lukić et al, 2020; Eurofound, 2021c; Schreier et al, 2022). These were not simple tasks in a time when environments were changing quickly, and decisions had to be made fast.

The disruption caused by the pandemic would suggest that the work climate and morale deteriorated, especially for workers in organisations that were under high pressure and who experienced higher levels of work-related stress and exhaustion, such as healthcare workers or health practitioners (Yahya et al, 2020; Hlubocky et al, 2021). Other reasons for the social climate in companies suffering might have been economic pressure resulting in dismissals or the furloughing of workers.

### Trust and cooperation

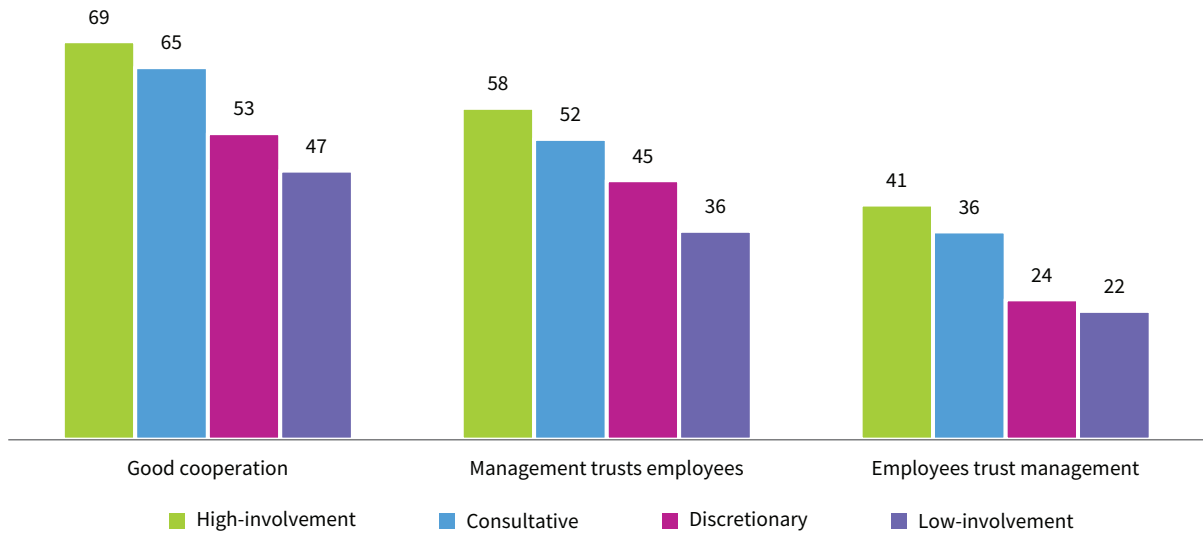
In the EWCTS, employees were asked about some aspects of work that contribute to a good social climate in workplaces: management’s trust in employees, employees’ trust in management and cooperation between colleagues.

Levels of trust and cooperation were relatively high across the Member States.

- Around 86% strongly agreed or tended to agree that management trusted employees to do their work well.
- Almost three-quarters (73%) strongly agreed or tended to agree that, in general, employees trusted management in their workplace.



Figure 94: Aspects of social climate, by type of work organisation, EU27 (%)



Note: The figure shows the percentage of workers who strongly agreed with each item.  
Source: EWCTS 2021

- More than 90% reported good cooperation between themselves and their colleagues.

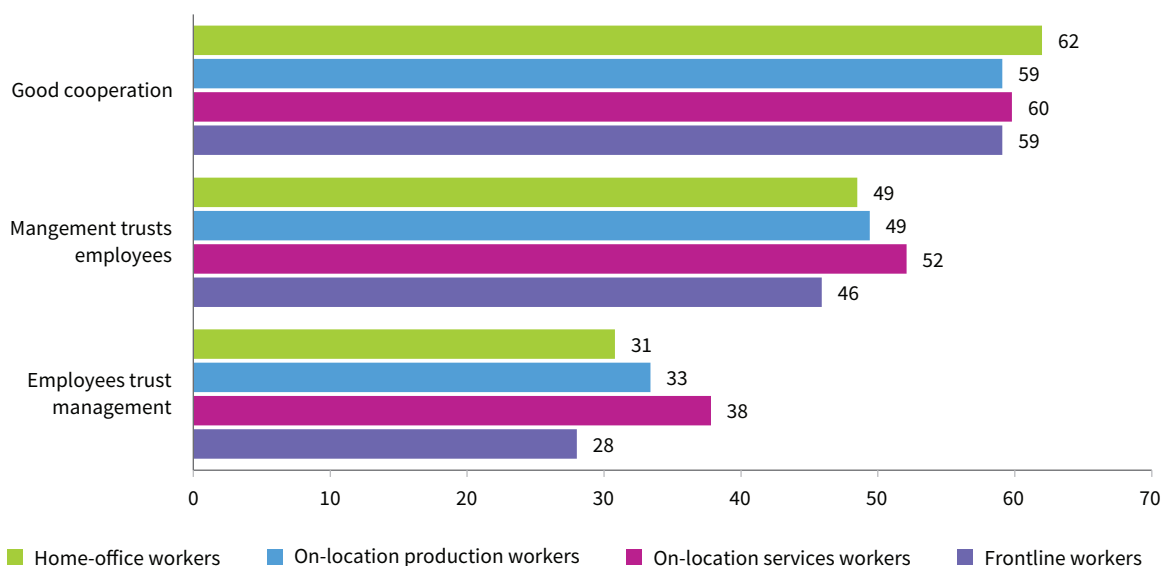
Workplace size was closely related to the social climate. As regards trust, a clear gradient related to the size of the organisation is evident, with more workers in smaller workplaces reporting higher levels of trust regarding both management’s trust in employees and employees’ trust in management.

Striking differences are clear when the type of work organisation is examined (see the section ‘Work organisation’ in Chapter 3 for details on types). Across all trust and cooperation items, workers in

high-involvement organisations were most likely to strongly agree, followed by consultative, discretionary and low-involvement organisations. These findings are in line with previous Eurofound research. The difference between high-involvement and low-involvement organisations regarding the proportion of workers reporting that employees trusted management is 19 percentage points (Figure 94).

Across the COVID groups, the proportions of workers who strongly agreed that there was trust and cooperation also differ but less than according to work organisation (Figure 95). Only on the existence of

Figure 95: Aspects of social climate, by COVID group, EU27 (%)



Note: The figure shows the percentage of workers who strongly agreed with each item.  
Source: EWCTS 2021

cooperation among colleagues was there strong agreement among the majority of employees in all groups. The greatest disparity in agreement related to employees’ trust in management, which ranged from 28% of frontline workers to 38% of on-location services workers. These differences appear to be mainly driven by the economic sector in which respondents were employed. Employees in the transport, public administration and health sectors were least likely to agree with the statement that employees, in general, trust management. These differences remain statistically significant after controlling for other factors that might have an effect, such as age, gender and education.

### Social climate and job quality

A social climate indicator was created, summarising the items of trust and cooperation discussed above, to examine the link with job quality. There is a clear relationship, as Figure 96 illustrates. Workers in moderately or highly resourced jobs were much more likely to encounter trust and cooperation in their organisation than workers in extremely or highly strained jobs. For example, 47% of workers in highly resourced jobs reported a high level of trust and cooperation in their organisation compared with only 3% in extremely strained jobs. On the other hand, almost 60% of workers in extremely strained jobs reported a low level of trust and cooperation, which was reported by only 4% of workers in highly resourced jobs.

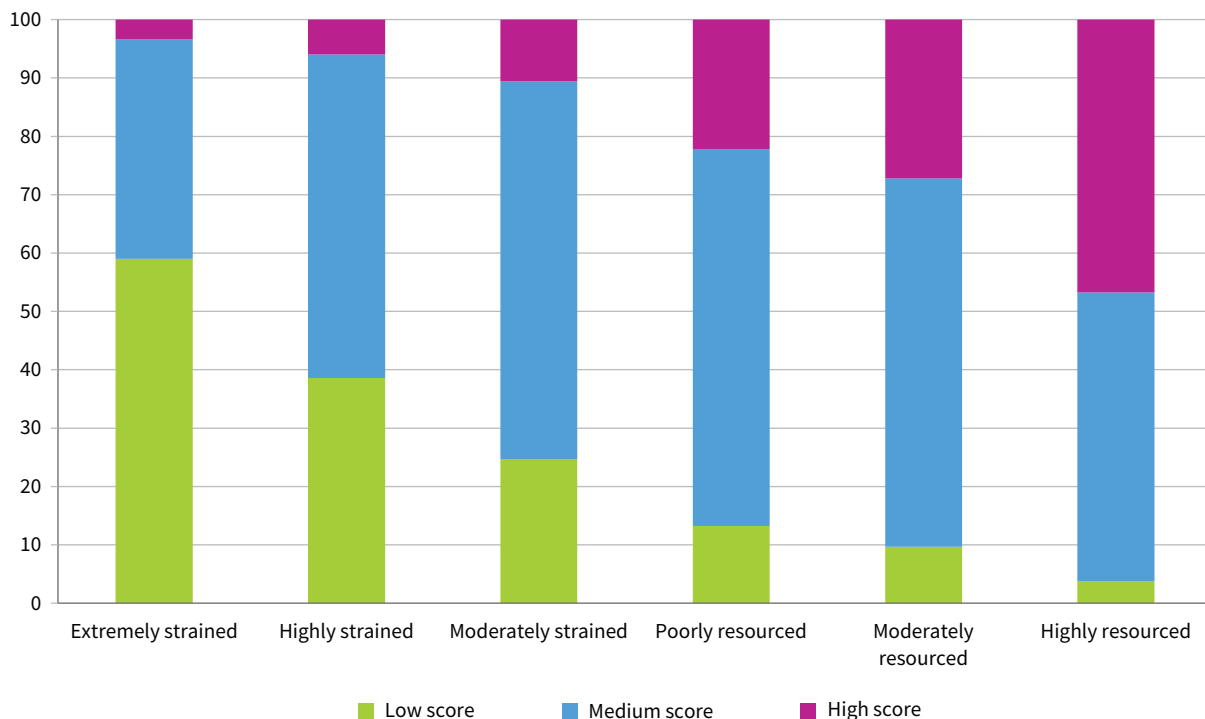
The social climate in organisations is sometimes underestimated as a key factor in making work sustainable, but these findings suggest that more attention should be paid to providing flourishing work environments that will overall have a positive impact on individual workers and organisations as a whole.

### Work engagement

Work engagement refers to the emotional commitment of employees to their organisation, defined as a ‘positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption’ (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003). It is the opposite, according to Maslach and Jackson (1981), of the core dimensions of burnout: exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment. In previous Eurofound research, engagement was identified as one of the crucial outcome indicators of sustainable work (Eurofound, 2020d; Eiffe, 2021).

Engagement is positively related to an individual’s job performance, a factor that can boost creativity, income, and health and well-being, while preventing absence from work. It also has positive implications at a collective level: commitment to the organisation, client satisfaction, good safety record and employee retention.

Figure 96: Social climate indicator, by job quality index, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic challenged managers to keep employee’s engagement with work high in a time of home working, insecurity and pessimism. But the negative effects of less social interaction, distance from the workplace, lack of communication, and so on highlighted its crucial role for workers and organisations alike.

### Levels of engagement

The EWCTS captured work engagement by asking workers if they felt full of energy at work, if they were enthusiastic about their job, and if they felt that time flies when they are working. The findings paint a generally positive picture across the EU27, despite the pandemic. The majority of workers (68%) reported feeling full of energy always or most of the time, 73% were enthusiastic about their job, while 77% felt that time flew at work.

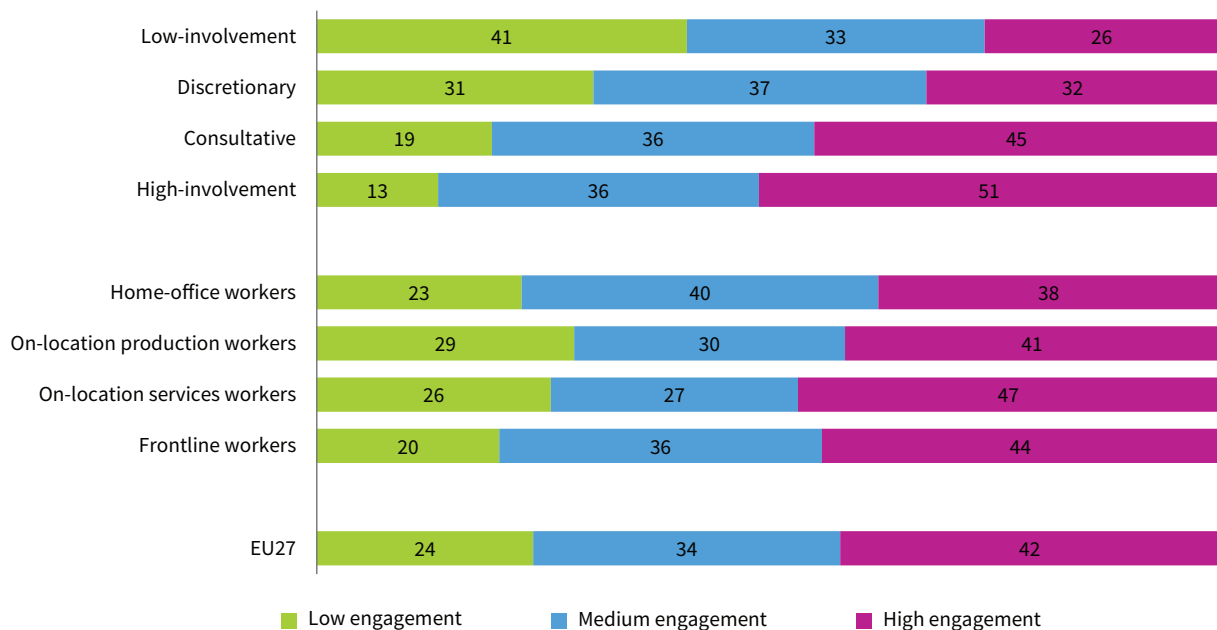
Based on respondents’ answers to these questions (calculating the mean score of all dimensions), an engagement index ranging from 0 to 100 was constructed and subsequently transformed into a three-category variable detecting low, medium and high levels of overall engagement. Across the EU27, 42% of workers reported a high level of engagement at work.

Based on the index, differences were found in work engagement between genders, age groups, employees and the self-employed, sectors and occupations, which remain statistically significant after controlling for confounders (other factors that might influence the result). Women were more likely to have higher levels of engagement than men, and older age groups scored higher than younger age groups. Among sectors, the highest levels of engagement were found in agriculture, construction and education, while the lowest were found in industry, financial services and transport.

Engagement differed, as expected, across the types of work organisation, with employees working in high-involvement organisations being more engaged on average than employees in workplaces with the other types of work organisation (Figure 97). Least engaged on average were workers working in low-involvement organisations; those whose engagement level was low made up 41% of this type of work organisation.

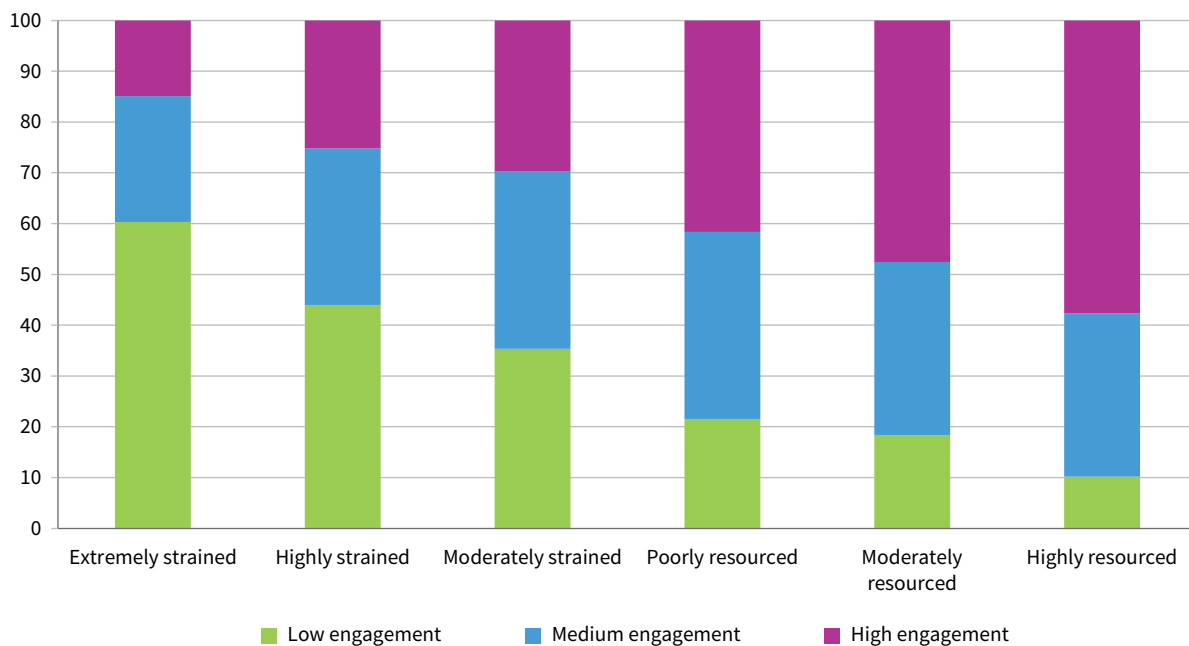
Among the COVID groups, the highest proportions of high engagement were found among on-location services workers (47%), followed by frontline workers (44%), on-location production workers (42%) and home-office workers (38%). There was, however, more variation as regards low engagement: on-location production workers and on-location services workers had the highest proportions of low engagement (29% and 26%, respectively), compared with relatively lower proportions of workers in this category among home-office workers (23%) and frontline workers (20%).

Figure 97: Work engagement, by type of work organisation and COVID group, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

Figure 98: Work engagement by the job quality index, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

## Engagement and job quality

The link between job quality and engagement is quite intuitive and has been explored in previous research (for example, Geisler et al, 2019; Ariza-Montes et al, 2021; Eiffe, 2021). It comes as no surprise that the working conditions and quality of jobs influence the engagement of employees with their work. If workers are satisfied with their experience at work, they are also more likely to engage with their work, with many positive knock-on effects for workers and their organisations.

Data from the EWCTS confirm these insights and demonstrate that workers in extremely and highly strained jobs tended to report lower engagement than those in less strained and better resourced jobs (Figure 98).

## Health and well-being

Work has specific impacts on health, and health is a precondition for sustainable work. The health and well-being of workers should be key to the organisations they work for, because only workers who are well will remain in work and contribute economically up to the standard retirement age.

Health and well-being were dominant topics during the pandemic. COVID-19 not only threatened the health of individual workers but also introduced the possibility of contagion in the workplace – undermining workers' feelings of safety at work, leading to anxiety and uncertainty – and disrupted the functioning of work organisation.

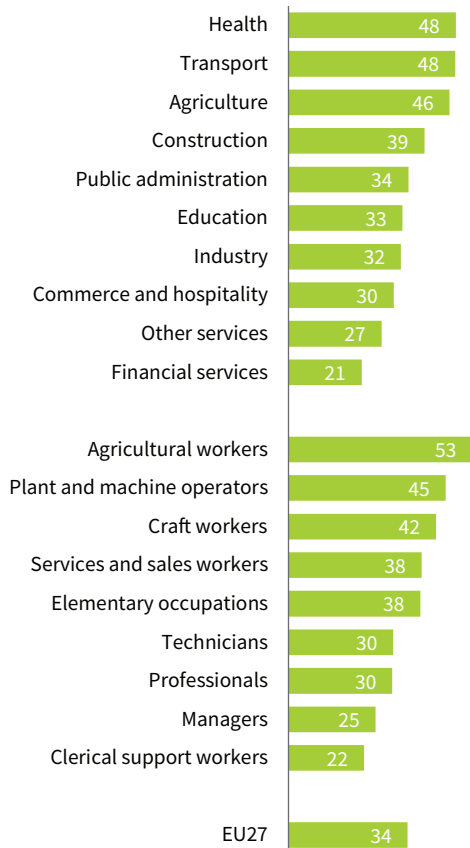
Much research on how the pandemic affected workers focused on the impact of remote work on well-being (for example, Monica and Ghayathri, 2020; Eurofound, 2021b; Mostafa, 2021; Erro-Garcés et al, 2022), occupational safety and health (OSH) among teleworkers (EU-OSHA, 2021; Schall and Chen, 2021), and work–life balance conflicts (for example, Ghislieri et al, 2021). Some authors explored the health of office-based workers during the lockdowns (for example, Ortiz and Bluysen, 2022) and the health and mental well-being of workers in specific occupations, such as healthcare workers (for example, Spoorthy et al, 2020; Franklin and Gkiouleka, 2021).

The EWCTS contributes further insights to the health and well-being of workers across the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic. It collected data on several aspects of health and well-being: health and safety at risk because of work, health problems, presenteeism, and the overall mental well-being of workers.

## Health and safety risks at work

OSH risks are varied, ranging from handling dangerous materials to work-related stress, bullying and harassment (examined in Chapter 2 in the section 'Physical and social environment'). COVID-19 was, of course, a major OSH risk in 2021, and the workplace has been found to be one of the biggest sites for transmission of the COVID-19 virus (Galmiche et al, 2021). In the report *Benchmarking working Europe 2021: Unequal Europe*, the authors state that the 'pandemic has had a major impact on occupational safety and health (OSH) for different groups of workers' (ETUI and ETUC, 2021, p. 13).

**Figure 99: Employees whose health and safety is at risk because of their work, by sector and occupation, EU27 (%)**



Source: EWCTS 2021

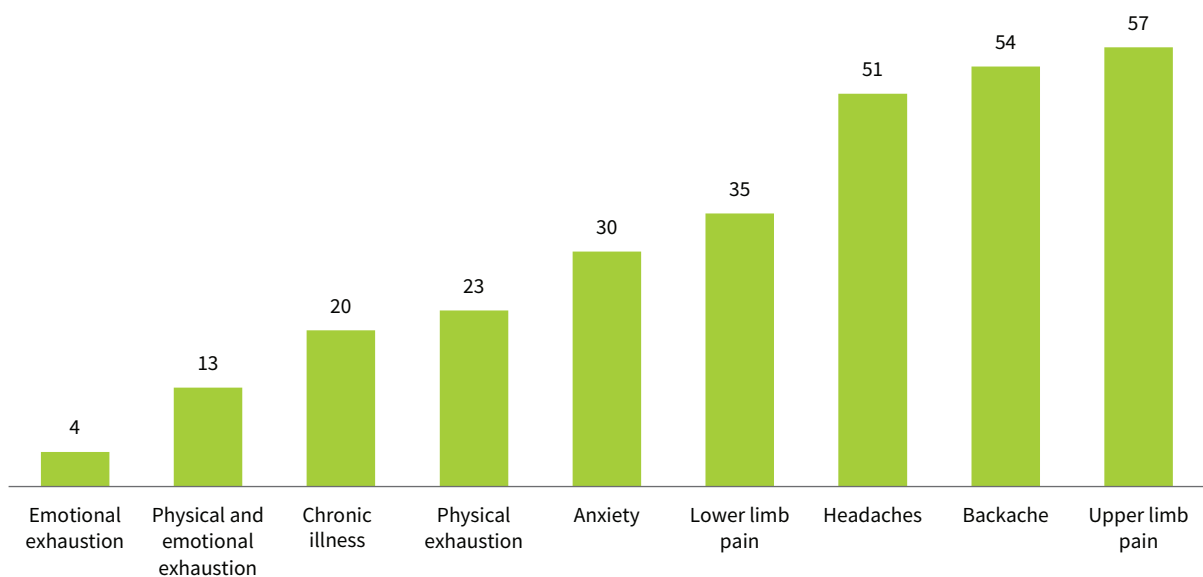
The EWCTS data enable the exploration of the exposure of workers to health and safety risks in the workplace and the analysis of inequalities across the different groups of workers. Figure 99 shows the findings according to sector and occupation. The share of workers who reported that their health and safety was at risk because of work was highest in the health and transport sectors (both 48%), followed by the agriculture (46%) and construction (39%) sectors, where the prevalence was also above the EU27 average (34%). Over half of skilled agricultural workers (53%) reported such risks, followed by plant and machine operators (45%) and craft workers (42%).

In terms of employment status, solo self-employed workers and workers with other types of contracts reported their health and safety to be at risk to the greatest extent (38%), followed by self-employed workers with employees (36%) and employees with permanent contracts (34%).

### Health problems

Health problems are widespread across the EU workforce, some of which affect more than half of the population. The health problem most reported by workers in 2021 was upper limb pain (reported by 57%), followed by backache (54%), headaches (51%), muscular pains in the hip or lower limbs (35%) and anxiety (30%) (Figure 100). This confirms that MSDs are one of the most common work-related health problems in the EU, affecting millions of workers (EU-OSHA, 2020). Physical exhaustion was reported by 23% of respondents, chronic illness by 20%, and physical and emotional exhaustion (a risk factor for burnout) by 13%.

**Figure 100: Health problems reported in the 12 months before the survey, EU27 (%)**



Source: EWCTS 2021

**Table 13: Reported health problems, by occupation, EU27 (percentage point difference from mean)**

	Backache	Upper limb pain	Lower limb pain	Headaches	Physical exhaustion	Anxiety	Emotional exhaustion	Chronic illness	Physical and emotional exhaustion
Managers	-5.4	-3.2	-8.8	1.0	-3.7	3.9	0.6	-2.1	-0.9
Professionals	-3.0	-2.2	-8.8	6.7	-3.7	4.6	1.3	-1.0	0.2
Technicians	-1.7	-2.7	-5.9	3.7	-2.2	0.1	-0.5	-1.1	-0.5
Clerical support workers	-0.2	1.3	-8.5	6.7	-6.3	1.3	0.3	-0.8	-3.2
Services and sales workers	3.9	2.4	7.8	-0.6	3.0	1.4	-0.4	1.9	3.1
Skilled agricultural workers	6.0	4.3	18.4	-5.9	11.0	1.0	-3.2	5.0	6.3
Craft workers	2.1	2.7	7.6	-8.8	5.7	-6.4	-0.6	-1.1	-1.5
Plant and machine operators	0.2	-1.4	6.5	-8.1	-1.8	-6.1	0.0	0.3	-0.4
Elementary occupations	2.3	3.3	10.7	-8.2	8.3	-2.9	-0.5	2.4	-0.2

Note: The red bars indicate a higher-than-average prevalence of the illness, while the blue bars represent a lower-than-average prevalence.

Source: EWCTS 2021

More than 45% of workers reported having three or more of the five specific health problems covered by the survey. Women were more affected than men, with 53% of women and 39% of men reporting three or more problems simultaneously. The gender gap was large across most problems: muscular pain in the upper limbs (reported by 64% of women and 49% of men), headaches (reported by 59% of women and 42% of men), backache (reported by 57% of women and 49% of men) and anxiety (reported by 38% of women and 26% of men).

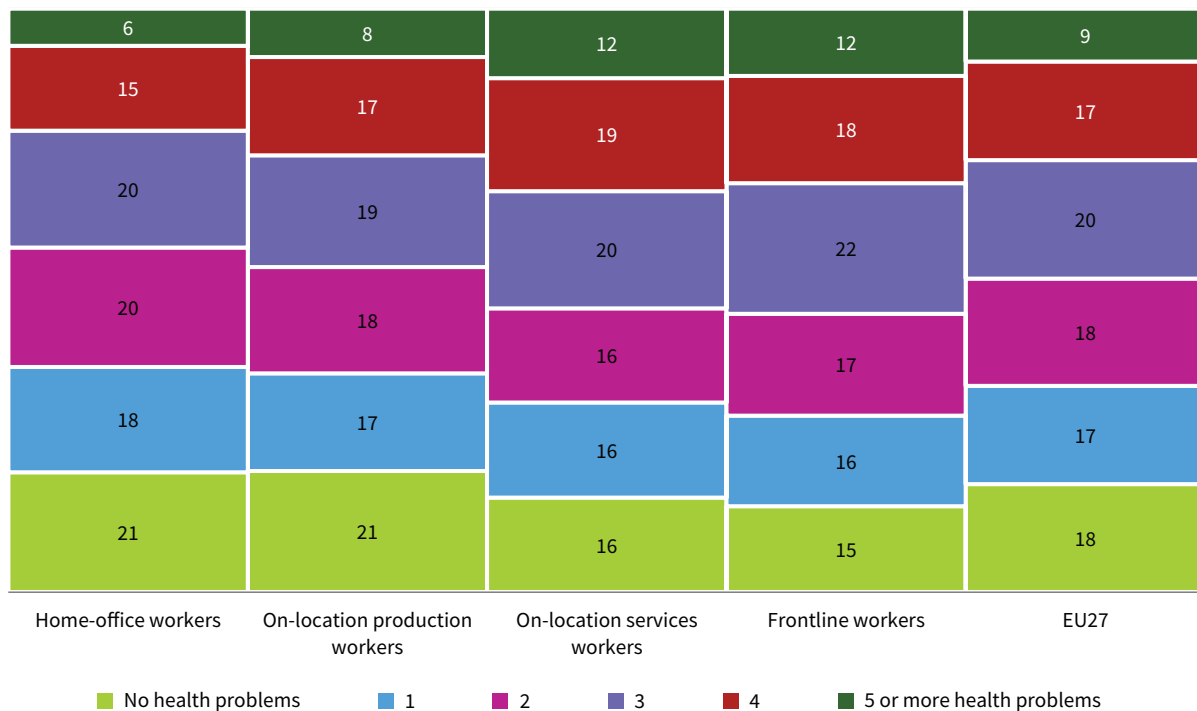
Turning to occupation, Table 13 shows the extent to which the prevalence of the most common health problems in each occupation deviated from the average across all occupations. It illustrates that health problems varied significantly according to occupation. While specific muscular pain such as backache or pain in the upper or lower limbs was more prevalent in blue-collar and agricultural jobs, headaches and anxiety were more typical among white-collar professions.

Chronic illness was more evenly distributed, although it was most prevalent among agricultural workers. Managers and professionals were more likely to suffer from emotional exhaustion than other occupations, while physical exhaustion was common among skilled agricultural workers, workers in elementary occupations and craft workers.

In terms of economic sectors, health problems were most prevalent in health and agriculture, with more than half of all workers in these sectors reporting three or more health problems. The proportion was also above average in the education sector (48%).

These findings are reflected in the COVID groups, shown in Figure 101: frontline workers were most likely to report three or more health problems (52%), followed by on-location services workers (51%). The differences across groups remain statistically significant after controlling for other influential factors (gender, age, occupation, sector and country).

Figure 101: Number of health problems, by COVID group, EU27 (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

## Presenteeism

Presenteeism is defined as the behaviour of working in a state of ill health (Ruhle et al, 2020). There is increasing awareness of the costs of presenteeism; not least, it is associated with lower productivity and with risks for workers and organisations alike (Kinman, 2019).

COVID-19 has certainly shifted attitudes to presenteeism and has changed people's views on the acceptability of attending work while sick (Ruhle and Schmoll, 2021), as a new awareness of the threat of being infected in the workplace has changed workers' feelings around health and safety.

On the other hand, virtual presenteeism – teleworking while sick – might have increased because workers were able to adjust working conditions at home. Hence, it might be expected – and previous research has shown (Steidelmüller et al, 2020) – that workers who worked from home were more likely to work while ill because they had no commute to work and no risk of infecting others. On-site workers, however, would have been reluctant to show up at work when unwell.

EWCTS data show that, indeed, the proportion of workers who reported that they had worked while sick in the preceding 12 months was highest among those

who worked mostly from home (33%), well above the EU average of 28% (Figure 102). Nevertheless, around a quarter of workers who worked mostly from their employer's premises and those who worked from vehicles said that they worked while sick, as did 29% of those working at a client's premises.

These findings are also reflected in differences across employment statuses, occupations and sectors: presenteeism was most common among the self-employed, especially those with employees (43%), and the solo self-employed (38%). The sectors with the highest proportions of presenteeism were agriculture (38%), health (34%), financial services (31%) and education (31%), while the phenomenon was less widespread in the industry (23%) and transport (24%) sectors. The occupations where presenteeism was most prevalent were agricultural workers (45%), managers (35%) and professionals (32%). Presenteeism was below average for clerical and blue-collar workers.

The sectoral and occupational influences as regards presenteeism are reflected in the differences between the four COVID groups. The highest proportion reporting that they worked while sick was in the frontline workers group (34%), while the lowest proportion was among on-location production workers (24%).

Figure 102: Presenteeism, by place of work, EU27 (%)

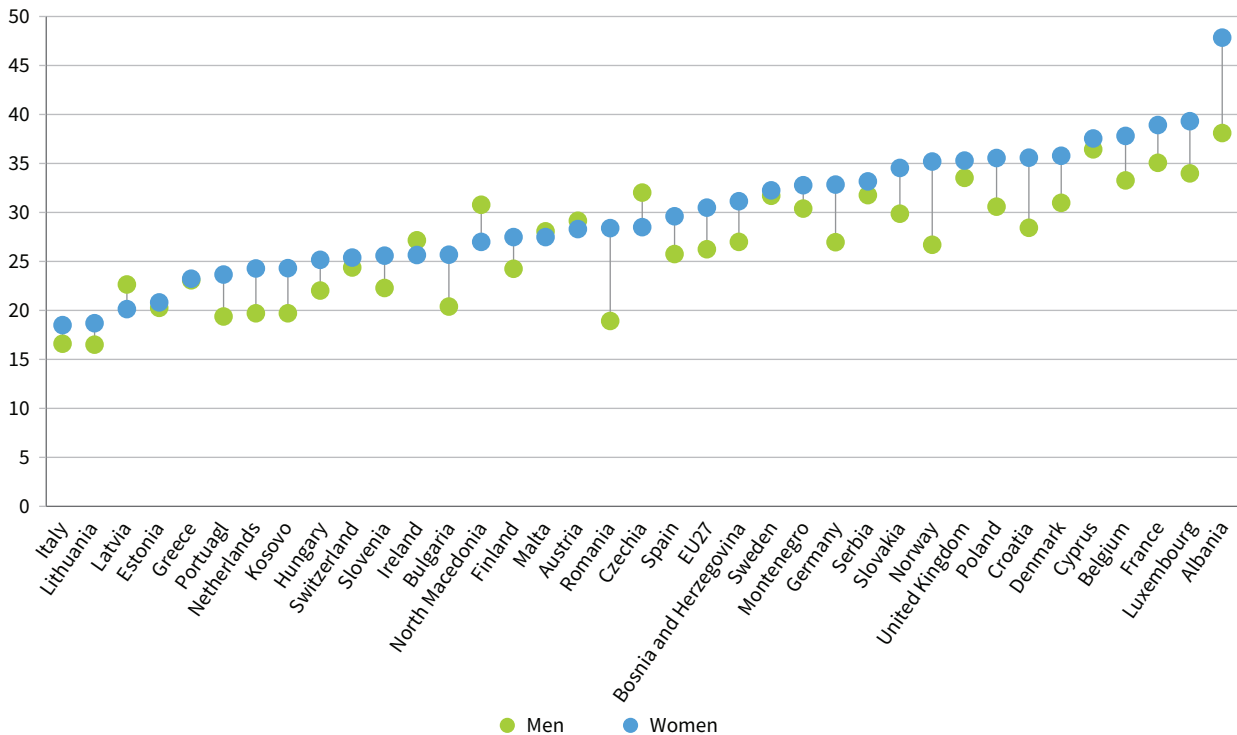


Note: The figure shows the percentage of workers who often or always worked when sick from the specified place of work.  
 Source: EWCTS 2021

In terms of sociodemographic differences, Figure 103 shows that women were more likely to work when sick than men (31% and 26%, respectively) in the EU27. This pattern is observed in most countries, except for Czechia, Latvia and North Macedonia, where proportions of presenteeism were slightly higher for men.

Economic pressure as a motivator for presenteeism during the pandemic is reflected in the high proportion of single parents (mostly women) who reported having worked while ill (36%), followed by workers living in households with two adults and children (31%).

Figure 103: Presenteeism, by gender, EU27 and other European countries (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021



## Mental well-being

The EWCTS measured the mental well-being of workers using the WHO-5 Well-being Index, which scores individuals on a scale of 1–100. The average score of workers in the EU27 was 65. Figure 104 shows the mental well-being scores of different groups of workers. Men scored higher than women (67 and 63, respectively), which is in line with the findings of the *Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey*, Eurofound’s survey on the impact of the pandemic on the work and lives of Europeans (Eurofound, 2020e) and other research on well-being. Workers aged 25–44 had the lowest average well-being score (63), while workers aged 56 and over had the highest score (69).

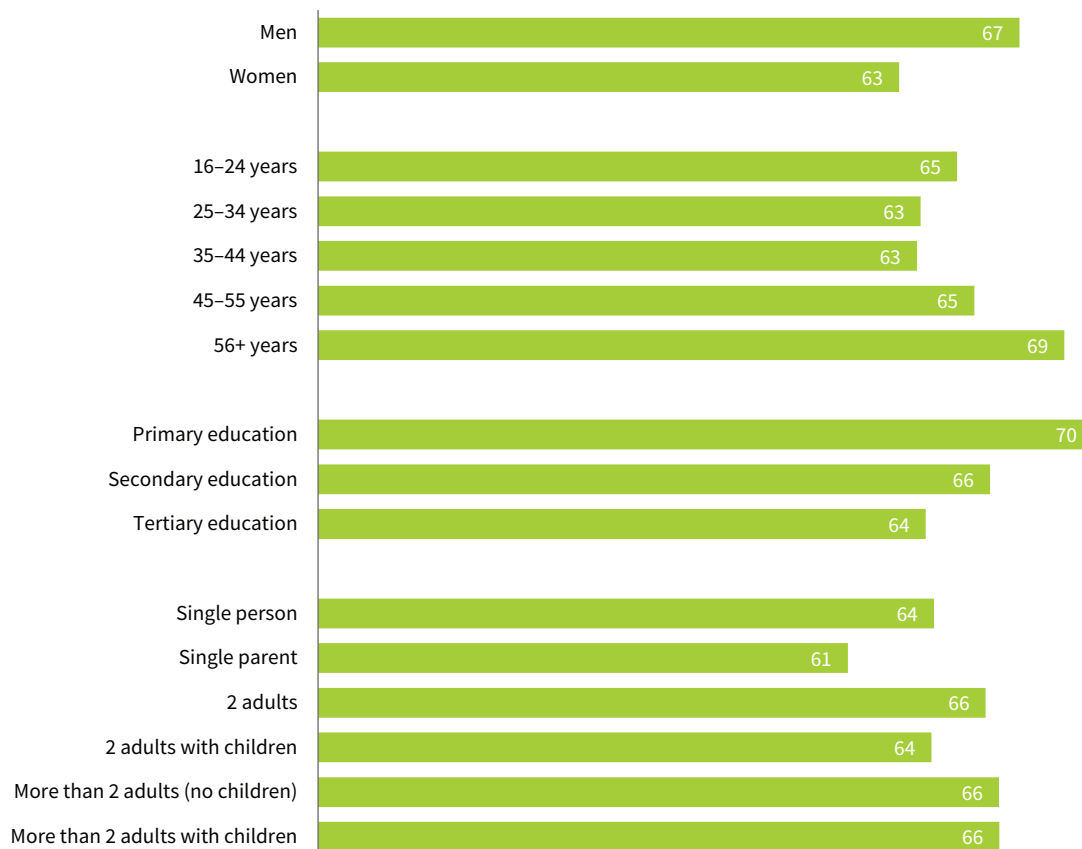
In terms of educational attainment, well-being was highest for workers with primary education only (70) and lowest for those with tertiary education (64). This finding is in contrast to previous research in the EU,

which found that people with higher educational attainment on average score higher on well-being (for example, Eurostat, 2016), suggesting that this finding might be an effect of the specific circumstances in 2021.

There was no clear pattern in well-being among the occupational groups. Plant and machine operators and craft workers had the highest levels of well-being (with scores of 68 and 67, respectively), while clerical support workers and professionals score lower (63 and 64, respectively).

Examining the household context, single parents and workers living in a household with two adults and children scored lowest on well-being (61 and 64, respectively). Again, this could well reflect the strained situation in 2021, when schools and childcare facilities in many Member States were closed while parents had to continue working.

**Figure 104: WHO-5 Well-being Index scores, by sociodemographic group and employment status (mean)**



Source: EWCTS 2021

### Box 7: The experience of non-binary people at work

The EWCTS 2021 asked respondents to describe themselves as a man, as a woman or in another way. This allowed individuals who identify themselves in ways different from the traditional gender binary to report so. ‘Non-binary’ is used as an umbrella term for all those other gender identities that differ from the dichotomous concept of gender. According to this definition, 215 EWCTS respondents were classified as non-binary, representing 0.3% of the total sample.

The working lives of non-binary people remain under-studied and poorly understood. Although the sample size is too small for robust conclusions to be drawn, the EWCTS data offer a glimpse of their situation at work, which in many aspects is worse than for people who identify themselves within the binary gender classification.

Non-binary respondents reported higher exposure to discrimination, verbal abuse, bullying, violence and harassment in the workplace. They also reported higher job insecurity. From the resource side, non-binary respondents reported less access to organisational participation and workplace voice: they were less often consulted before objectives were set for their work and could influence decisions that were important for their work to a lesser degree. Altogether, compared with men and women, a higher proportion of non-binary respondents were in strained jobs.

Nearly one-third (31%) reported well-being scores indicating that a person is at risk of depression. That proportion is significantly larger than that reported by men and women. Out of the non-binary respondents, almost half reported that they had experienced anxiety in the 12 months prior to the interview, a larger share than for men or women.

Discrimination and intimidation in the workplace play an important role in the exposure to minority stress. Non-binary people are more vulnerable to mental health issues, which are likely to arise from minority or marginalisation stress – that is, stress caused by being in a social group that is discriminated against (Richards et al, 2016). To improve the working and living conditions of non-binary and other LGBTQ+ groups, workplaces must take action to discourage harmful behaviours and structural discrimination – for example, by spreading awareness of how gender pronouns or titles are used and providing support for the specific challenges that these groups encounter.

### Health and job quality

Figure 105 shows the relationship between health outcomes and job quality, illustrating how workers with extremely and highly strained jobs compare with those in moderately or highly resourced jobs in five health-related indicators. The table provides clear evidence that health and well-being outcomes are related to job quality: around 8 in 10 workers in extremely strained jobs report three or more health problems (shown in the Accumulated health problems column), compared with less than one-third of workers in highly resourced jobs.

The proportion of workers who reported that their health and safety was at risk because of work was much higher in extremely and highly strained jobs than in moderately and highly resourced ones: only 13% of workers in highly resourced jobs and a quarter of workers in moderately resourced jobs reported that their health and safety was at risk, while such risks were reported by the majority of workers in highly strained (64%) and extremely strained (77%) jobs. The pattern is similar for other health and well-being outcomes. Notably, more than half of workers (54%) in extremely strained jobs were at risk of depression, but only 9% of workers were at risk in highly resourced jobs.

Figure 105: Job quality index, by health-related indicators, EU27 (%)

	Accumulated health problems	Health and safety at risk	Presenteeism	Physical and emotional exhaustion	At risk of depression
Extremely strained	82	77	56	43	54
Highly strained	69	64	47	31	42
Moderately strained	57	48	34	19	32
Poorly resourced	49	36	30	12	22
Moderately resourced	36	22	22	6	15
Highly resourced	29	13	16	3	9
EU27	46	34	28	13	22

Source: EWCTS 2021

The relationship between the job quality and health outcomes underscores the important areas to address to make work sustainable over the life course. Research has highlighted that working conditions and work organisation are crucial to ensuring that workers can build up and regenerate their personal resources in terms of capacities, health and well-being, and skills (Docherty et al, 2009; Eurofound, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic made this relationship even more obvious. It is important to recognise this relationship, as previous Eurofound research has highlighted that improving job quality and ultimately workers' health and well-being can help keep workers, particularly those at lower occupational levels, engaged and in employment over a longer period of the life course (Eurofound, 2017c).

## Supporting the green transition with job quality

Research on job quality in jobs connected with the green economy is rare but includes the European Commission research paper *Quality of green jobs* (Hancke et al, 2021).

This exploratory section addresses the quality of jobs likely to be impacted by the transition to a carbon-neutral economy and proposes a thought experiment: if we want a green transition based on high-quality jobs and work environments, what should we do?

In order to answer this question, we need first to identify which occupations are likely to be impacted by the green transition, then assess the job quality of those jobs and then identify the most pressing areas for intervention.

## Greening occupations

There are many possible ways to define green occupations; a broad approach focuses on the greening of occupations:

*The 'greening' of occupations refers to the extent to which green economy activities and technologies increase the demand for existing occupations, shape the work and worker requirements needed for occupational performance, or generate unique work and worker requirements.*

(Dierdorff et al, 2009, p. 11)

Such an approach can be operationalised based on the Occupational Information Network (O\*NET) database, which is maintained by the United States Department of Labor. This enables four 'greening occupational groups' to be distinguished based on the likely impact of the greening of the economy, as set out in Table 14.

According to the EWCTS, in 2021, 63% of workers in the EU27 were in occupations that the green transition will have little or no impact on. About 9% of workers were in occupations that will see new or emerging jobs arising from the green transition, while 14% are in occupations that may require enhanced skills as a result of greening, and 15% are in occupations that are likely to see increased demand due to the transition.

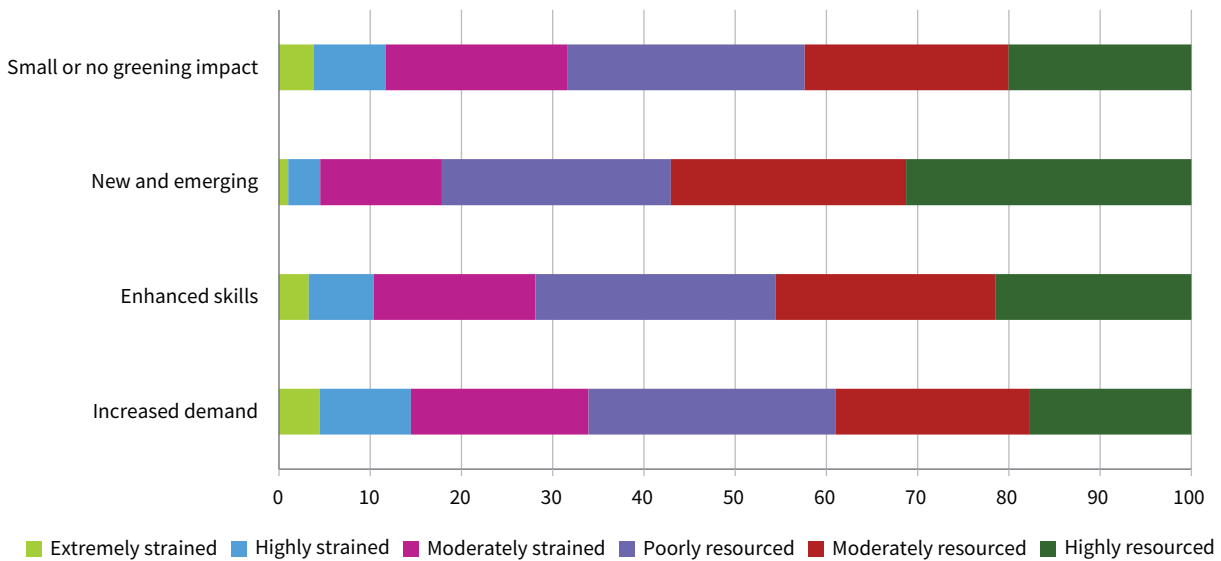
The occupations likely to be impacted by the green transition employ 20% of female workers but half of the male working population, clearly indicating that the scale of the impact of the green transition will be different for men and women.

**Table 14: Greening occupational groups**

Label	Description
Small or no greening impact	Occupations that will see little or no impact of greening.
New and emerging	New and emerging occupations that do not exist in ISCO-08 and are currently classified under one of the existing codes. <i>The impact of green economy activities and technologies is sufficient to create the need for unique work and worker requirements, which results in the generation of a new occupation .... This new occupation could be entirely novel or 'born' from an existing occupation.</i> (Dierdorff et al, 2009, p. 4)
Enhanced skills	Existing occupations that will potentially require changes in tasks, skills and knowledge as a result of the transition to a carbon-neutral economy. <i>The impact of green economy activities and technologies results in a significant change to the work and worker requirements of an existing ... occupation. This impact may or may not result in an increase in employment demand for the occupation. ... The essential purposes of the occupation remain the same, but tasks, skills, knowledge, and external elements, such as credentials, have been altered.</i> (Dierdorff et al, 2009, p. 12)
Increased demand	Existing occupations that will not require changes in tasks, skills and knowledge but that will potentially see increased demand due to the transition to a carbon-neutral economy. <i>The impact of green economy activities and technologies is an increase in the employment demand for an existing occupation. However, this impact does not entail significant changes in the work and worker requirements of the occupation. The work context may change, but the tasks themselves do not.</i> (Dierdorff et al, 2009, p. 11)

Source: Dierdorff et al (2009), authors' elaboration

Figure 106: Job quality index, by greening occupational groups (%)



Source: EWCTS 2021

The distribution of workers according to the potential impact of greening by sector confirms that it will predominantly affect those working in sectors with larger stakes in the greening process, for example in terms of the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Still, greening is likely to affect workers in all sectors of the economy. On the one hand, sectors such as agriculture, mining and quarrying, construction and transport employ the largest shares of workers in occupations likely to be impacted by the green transition. On the other hand, and as expected, sectors such as education and health employ very small shares of workers in occupations that could be impacted.

### Job quality in greening

Figure 106 illustrates the distribution of strained and resourced jobs across the greening occupational groups. A much lower share of workers in new and emerging occupations are in strained jobs than workers in the other occupations, while increased demand occupations fare worst. This reflects the fact that these jobs are worse than average in terms of both job demands and job resources.

All things considered, if the green transition results in the creation of more jobs of the new and emerging type, this will contribute to an overall improvement in job quality compared with the current situation. This positive evolution of jobs, however, may be dampened if the increased demand type gains momentum, as jobs of this type demonstrate below-average job quality, at least for the moment.

### Supporting the development of good-quality jobs in greening

Table 15 shows how the different types of occupation compare in relation to workers' exposure to job demands. New and emerging occupations perform much better than the other types in terms of physical risks and physical demands, whereas increased demand occupations perform the worst. This suggests that policy should be targeted towards reducing the level of physical demands and physical risks in increased demand occupations and that developments in this area should be monitored.

Table 15: Job demands of greening occupational groups compared with average

Greening impact	Physical risks	Physical demands	Intimidation and discrimination	Work intensity	Dependence*	Unsocial work schedules	Perception of job insecurity
Small or no greening impact	Red bar (above avg)	Red bar (above avg)	Red bar (above avg)	Blue bar (below avg)	Red bar (above avg)	Blue bar (below avg)	Blue bar (below avg)
New and emerging	Blue bar (below avg)	Blue bar (below avg)	Blue bar (below avg)	Red bar (above avg)	Blue bar (below avg)	Red bar (above avg)	Blue bar (below avg)
Enhanced skills	Blue bar (below avg)	Blue bar (below avg)	Blue bar (below avg)	Red bar (above avg)	Blue bar (below avg)	Red bar (above avg)	Blue bar (below avg)
Increased demand	Red bar (above avg)	Red bar (above avg)	Blue bar (below avg)	Blue bar (below avg)	Red bar (above avg)	Red bar (above avg)	Red bar (above avg)

\* Self-employed only.

Note: The red bars represent demands that are above average, whereas the blue bars represent demands that are below average.

Source: EWCTS 2021

Table 16: Job resources of greening occupational groups compared with average

	Social support	Task discretion and autonomy	Organisational participation and workplace voice	Flexibility in working hours	Training and learning opportunities	Intrinsic rewards	Career advancement	Opportunities for self-realisation
Greening impact								
Small or no greening impact								
New and emerging								
Enhanced skills								
Increased demand								

Note: The red bars represent resources that are below average, whereas the blue bars represent resources that are above average.

Source: EWCTS 2021

A comparison of how the different types of occupation compare in relation to workers' access to job resources, depicted in Table 16, indicates that workers in new and emerging and enhanced skills occupations tend to be better resourced than those in increased demand occupations and those with small or no greening impact. Again, workers in increased demand occupations appear particularly disadvantaged. They would benefit from policy action aimed at developing their autonomy and organisational voice and enhancing their working time flexibility, as well as company practices aimed at supporting social support and intrinsic rewards.

### Why does job quality matter for greening?

As our societies embark on the process of decarbonisation, it is important to monitor if and how the jobs involved will be of good quality. What should we do if we want a green transition based on jobs and work environments of good quality? We should develop a preventive approach aimed at decreasing exposure to job demands and supporting access to more and better job resources, and closely monitor this approach throughout the transition.

## Summary

### Financial sustainability of work

- The household setup of workers was closely associated with their level of financial vulnerability. A high proportion of working single parents were in financial hardship, with 45% stating they had difficulty making ends meet; the figure was higher among working single mothers (48%). The next highest proportions having difficulty making ends meet were among workers in households with more than two adults and children (32%) and single-person households (27%).
- Economic pressure as a motivator for presenteeism during the pandemic is reflected in the high proportion of single parents (mostly women) who reported having worked while ill (36%), followed by workers living in households with two adults and children (31%).
- The financial sustainability of work differed for the four COVID groups. The highest proportion reporting difficulty making ends meet was in the on-location services workers group (38%), followed by the on-location production workers group (32%), both of which exceeded the EU27 average (26%). More workers in the on-location services workers group and the on-location production workers than average also reported being unable to predict their earnings for the following three months (31% and 21%, respectively, versus 17% on average), having poor career prospects (40% and 35%, respectively, versus 34% on average) and experiencing job insecurity (20% and 19%, respectively, versus 11% on average). Frontline workers had the highest proportion reporting poor career prospects (42%).

### Social climate at work

- Workers in high-involvement organisations were most likely to report high levels of trust and cooperation. There was a striking difference of 19 percentage points between high-involvement and low-involvement organisations in the proportion of workers reporting that employees trusted management.

### Work engagement

- Across the EU27, 42% of workers reported a high level of engagement at work. In high-involvement organisations, this percentage increased to 51%. Among the COVID groups, on-location services workers had the highest share of highly engaged workers (47%), while the lowest share was in the home-office workers group (38%).

### Health and well-being

- Health problems are widespread across the EU workforce, some affecting more than half the population. The health problem most reported by workers in 2021 was upper limb pain (reported by 57%), followed by backache (54%), headaches (51%), muscular pains in the hip or lower limbs (35%), and anxiety (30%). One-third of workers reported that their health and safety was at risk because of work.
- The proportion of workers who reported health and well-being risks was much higher in extremely or highly strained jobs compared with moderately and highly resourced jobs: only 13% of workers in highly resourced jobs and a quarter of workers in moderately resourced job reported that their health and safety was at risk because of work, while this risk was reported by most workers in highly strained (64%) and extremely strained (77%) jobs.

### Supporting the green transition with job quality

- Jobs were classified according to the impact that the greening of the economy will have on them. This exercise distinguished four categories of job: small or no greening impact; new and emerging; enhanced skills; and increased demand. Examining the job quality in these categories showed that the proportion of low-quality jobs (strained jobs) is higher in occupations for which there will be increased demand in the transition to a carbon-neutral economy. Job strain is lowest in the new and emerging occupations.

# Conclusions

This report set out to describe the working conditions, the job quality and the quality of working life of workers in Europe in 2021. The aim was to gain insights from an analysis of the experiences of workers at that time – still in the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic – for the future of work. What ‘pain points’ did the situation in 2021 highlight? Which long-standing issues were confirmed and what new challenges arose? Do solutions emerge from these findings, and are opportunities apparent?

While some of the significant consequences of the pandemic’s impact on working lives will reveal themselves only in the long run, the EWCTS data provide evidence already of the shorter-term impacts and enable us to propose several evidence-based policy recommendations. Four underlying issues of particular importance surfaced from the vast amount of evidence presented in the report: the differences in the experiences of workers, depending on which of four groups they belonged to – the COVID groups, as we labelled them; the working life challenges faced by the workforce, some long-standing and some new; the role of job quality in protecting workers’ health and well-being, particularly the balance between job demands and job resources; and the persistent gender differences in terms of working conditions, job quality and working life outcomes. The main conclusions about these four topics are presented below, followed by an examination of the implications for the future.

## Lessons from working in the time of COVID-19 ...

The exceptional situation of the COVID-19 pandemic split the workforce into different groups of workers, each of which was affected differently by the pandemic and by the public health measures implemented to deal with it. The EWCTS data provide a firm sense of the contours of the split. Respondents were grouped according to attributes such as employment status, sector, occupation, usual hours worked, location of work, computer use, direct contact with customers, and risk of infection. This exercise identified four groups – frontline workers, on-location services workers, on-location production workers and home-office workers – and analysis shows that different approaches are required to improve their working conditions and job quality and to tackle the specific challenges they face.

**Frontline workers**, the people in the first line of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, represented one-fifth of the EU workforce. Overall, the EWCTS data show that workers in this group were under great strain

during the pandemic. While normally exposed to infectious materials in their jobs, they bore a greater risk of infection by the COVID-19 virus at work than other groups. They were also exposed to higher-than-average job demands, both physical – many reported lifting people or working in tiring positions – and psychosocial (such as intimidation and discrimination). More workers in this group experienced work intensity in their jobs than workers in the other three groups.

Frontline workers also struggled with the quality of their working time: they put in the second longest weekly hours of paid and unpaid work combined, and the group had a high incidence of night work. An above-average share reported poor work–life balance and work–life conflicts, such as worrying about work when not at work or being too tired after work to do household tasks. The ability to take some time off to deal with personal or family matters, which has been found to improve work–life balance, was mentioned by a relatively small fraction – and was available to more men than women. Although the vast majority of frontline workers reported that they felt they did useful work (93%) and had a sense of work well done (86%), but only two-thirds believed they received the recognition they deserve for their work.

Workers in this group received a good level of social support from their colleagues, but the share that received support from their managers was smaller than for other groups. The vast majority had some type of formal employee representation at work – reported by more than 90% – but a minority (28%) worked in high-involvement organisations.

During the pandemic, frontline workers had the highest levels of emotional and physical exhaustion, anxiety and musculoskeletal pain complaints, and the lowest level of well-being.

The COVID-19 crisis revealed how vital frontline workers are for the functioning of our societies; it also exposed the many great challenges that this group of highly engaged people face at work. To ensure that our workforce is ready for emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to strengthen the existing structures of employee representation and to adopt models of work organisation that are based on participation and worker involvement. This will help to develop solutions to reduce frontline workers’ job demands, improve their working time quality and enhance their career prospects.

**On-location services workers** represented 22% of the EU workforce in 2021. Many of these workers were in unstable work situations, borne out by the findings that they were more likely to report job insecurity, poor

career prospects, inability to predict their earnings and financial hardship. A smaller share than the other groups received training (either on the job or provided by their employer), the lack of which makes it more difficult to secure a better job. In addition, an above-average share of workers wanted to work more hours, which suggests that many had difficulty finding enough work during the pandemic.

A large proportion experienced physical demands at work, such as carrying heavy loads, working in tiring positions or doing repetitive movements (although somewhat less than the share of on-location production workers). Contact with infectious materials (reported by 20%) was more prevalent than average, a consequence of the large percentage of workers who interacted directly with customers or clients, and an above-average share had experienced intimidation at work. Physical exhaustion was most common in this group, while the proportions reporting exposure to health and safety risks at work and anxiety were higher than the average.

The bundle of challenges faced by this group in terms of employment, working conditions and job quality was exacerbated by the barriers to making their voices heard at work: many worked in low-involvement organisations (35%) and did not have formal employee representation in their workplace (40%, the largest share among the four groups). This lack of involvement and representation adds to the challenge of improving their situation in terms of reducing the physical demands and strengthening their job security and career prospects.

**On-location production workers** represented nearly one-quarter (24%) of the EU workforce. This group comprised mostly men working in male-dominated workplaces and with male managers. They were subject to high levels of physical demands: this group had the largest shares of workers carrying heavy loads (57%), working in tiring positions (64%) and doing repetitive movements (80%). Production workers reported the longest weekly hours in paid work, and the incidence of night work among them was high. The impact of demanding work schedules is reflected in the poor work-life balance of a relatively large share in this group. These workers were less engaged than average and were more likely than average to work in low-involvement organisations and to report a poor social climate at work. The group had a relatively large share of workers who were unable to predict their earnings and who had symptoms of financial hardship. More worked in strained jobs; physical and emotional exhaustion were also more common among these workers.

Like the other groups, on-location production workers played their part during the pandemic. Although not as exposed to COVID-19 infection at work as the frontline

workers or the on-location services workers groups, the on-location production workers group faced the accumulated challenges of physical risks, poor working time quality, low levels of autonomy and work engagement, and financial hardship – none of which are exclusively related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Similar to on-location services workers, on-location production workers and their employers would benefit from a reduction in job demands and increased participation and involvement in decision-making about their work and their organisation.

**Home-office workers** were mainly those who could work from home during the pandemic and represented 35% of the EU workforce in 2021. Of the four groups, this one probably experienced the greatest transformation of their work during the pandemic, as it required new ways of working together. It is a mixed-gender group, with many members working in mixed-gender workplaces but most still having male managers. Despite spending long hours in paid work and having an above-average share of workers who wanted to work fewer hours, this group fared better than average in terms of working time flexibility (in terms of the ease with which they could take some time off for personal or family matters), work-life balance and work-life conflicts.

Fewer had to cope with physical risks and physical demands, intimidation and discrimination, but a higher proportion experienced high levels of work intensity and worked from home while sick. It was the group that had the highest share of workers who had autonomy at work, opportunities for organisational participation and access to training and who received recognition for their work. They also tended to have a good social climate at work as well as better career prospects and better job security than average. It had the smallest share of workers reporting difficulty making ends meet. The great majority (over 80%) had access to formal employee representation and a large proportion worked in high-involvement organisations (44%). Home-office workers experienced the least job strain of the four groups.

**The analytical relevance of the COVID groups may decrease** as the pandemic diminishes. However, the changes to working lives will not disappear once the pandemic is over. For example, if the predicted proliferation of hybrid forms of work organisation – involving various combinations of working from the office, home and other locations – becomes a reality, the adaptation to these forms of work organisation and all its consequences, positive and negative, need to be addressed. Even as the pandemic fades, for some workers, challenges created or exacerbated during the pandemic linger. Such challenges must be addressed in order to ensure that the whole workforce is ready for the future.



## ... confirm lingering working life challenges

While the EWCTS data show how separate groups of workers experienced the pandemic differently, they also draw attention to important long-standing issues that persist for the whole EU workforce and greatly determine our societies' capacity to tackle future challenges. These issues include the vulnerability of some employment situations, the representation and voice of workers, trust and engagement, and involvement in decision-making at work. Also important is workers' health, and mental health in particular. Recognition of this is reflected in the growing concern at EU level over the life-course impact of poor mental health and is addressed in initiatives to achieve a healthier EU, such as the European Commission's Healthier Together – EU Non-communicable Diseases initiative of 2021.

Temporary employment can, under certain circumstances, be considered precarious and can be associated with poor working conditions and lack of access to labour rights. Temporary jobs were the first to go during the pandemic. Short-term temporary contracts (lasting fewer than 12 months), which are particularly insecure, were most common in education and health – two critical sectors – and commerce and hospitality, a sector severely affected by the pandemic.

Evidence of the economic hardship felt in parts of the workforce is the finding that 26% of workers reported difficulty making ends meet. This share grows to 45% when single parents are considered separately and to 48% among single mothers. Furthermore, 17% of respondents were unable to predict what their earnings would be in the three months after the interview, while more than one-quarter were able to make only an approximation.

These EWCTS findings on employment conditions and the financial sustainability of work underline the pertinence of policies that aim to make work pay and to facilitate transitions towards higher-quality employment.

The majority of employees in the EU had some type of formal representation in the workplace: a health and safety representative or a body to represent their interests, such as a trade union or works council, or sometimes both. However, 2 out of every 10 employees did not have such representation. Furthermore, 12% of employees had neither type of formal representation nor regular meetings to express their views on organisational issues. It is reassuring that the vast majority of employees in crucial sectors such as health and education had access to formal representation or could express their views through meetings. At the same time, it is worrying to see sectors such as agriculture, construction, and commerce and hospitality – which will play important roles in the coming years of

demographic, green and digital transitions – with large shares of employees reporting the combined absence of representation and meetings to voice their opinions.

Another challenge is that a high proportion of employees, nearly one-third, worked in low-involvement organisations, where they have limited autonomy over their work and limited organisational participation. Employee involvement is strongly related to job quality, and employers who succeed in providing high-involvement work organisation are likely to create supportive, egalitarian work environments with good job quality that fosters work engagement and performance. EWCTS data also confirm that high-involvement organisation helps to deliver greater cooperation among employees and greater trust between employees and management.

Current and anticipated socioeconomic challenges require more workers to enter the workforce and to stay for longer, which means that working conditions must not jeopardise workers' health and well-being. However, the picture offered by the EWCTS in 2021 is troubling: nearly half of workers reported having multiple health problems, one-third thought their health and safety was at risk because of work, nearly 3 in 10 had gone to work while sick, and more than one-fifth were at risk of depression. Eurofound research has shown that job quality is one of the main factors supporting health and well-being. It is essential, therefore, that working conditions support workers' health and well-being, so that they can remain engaged with work for longer and that our societies are better prepared for a volatile, uncertain and complex future.

## ... confirm that job quality is the foundation of a good working life

The EWCTS data show that workers experienced many changes in their work in 2021. However, despite the changes, the link between job quality and the core indicators of the quality of working life remained unbroken. As a yardstick, job quality turned out to be 'resilient'.

The empirical results confirm not only the role of job quality in supporting well-being, as expected, but also demonstrate positive associations with other aspects of the quality of working life: good work–life balance, fewer work–life conflicts, better ability to make ends meet, better work engagement and greater trust within the workplace. These findings underscore the fundamental role that job quality plays. The improvement of working conditions is an objective of the EU, as laid down in Article 151 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. But better job quality is not only a goal in itself, it is instrumental in achieving other important policy objectives, such as improving well-being and raising the economic performance of companies.

**There are many ways to improve job quality by reducing job demands and increasing job resources.**

Many actions are best taken within companies and organisations, as measures can be tailored to the opportunities and constraints of individual workplaces, but there is also a role for public actors in supporting the provision of job resources such as health-protective work practices, working time flexibility, learning opportunities, secure and adaptable employment, and employee representation. More concretely, policies or programmes of action that promote, for example, health and safety in the workplace by preventing psychosocial risks and outlawing discrimination and violence, among other objectives, contribute to improving working conditions. Taking action is particularly urgent in sectors where exposure to job strain is highest.

The analysis of the job demands on workers and their access to job resources, based on the EWCTS, highlights several challenges but also specific opportunities to improve job quality while reducing inequalities between workers.

**Physical demands and risks remain typical attributes of many jobs.**

Many workers experienced physical demands at work, especially in sectors in which work is predominantly manual, such as construction and agriculture. However, workers in the commerce and hospitality and health sectors also reported very high levels of physical demands. Physical risks were also common: one in five workers was exposed to infectious materials, one in four to chemicals and one in three to loud noise. Whereas exposure to chemicals and infectious materials was a distinctive characteristic of specific sectors and occupations, exposure to loud noise was widespread across sectors.

The rationale for decreasing exposure to physical risks and physical demands is inescapable. Both may impair physical health (and more so when there is exposure to both), lead to premature exits from the labour market, and cause illness and death. While workers who worked from home were less exposed to physical risks and demands, they still reported, for example, performing repetitive hand movements and working in tiring positions, which in the online workplace may have been invisible to employers. Ensuring that workers can work safely outside of traditional work locations has become more pressing. In addition, exposure to physical risks and demands has a strong gendered component, implying that occupational health and safety policy should be strengthened from a gender perspective.

**A significant proportion of workers are exposed to psychosocial risks.**

The investigation of psychosocial risk factors showed that about half of workers experienced high levels of

work intensity, one in five had emotionally demanding work, and more than a quarter had low autonomy in their job. Thirty per cent did not think that they were fairly paid, while one in five felt that they did not receive the recognition that they deserved. Insecurity in earnings and employment insecurity were reported by a significant proportion of employees. As regards intimidation, 9% of workers had experienced verbal abuse and 2% had experienced unwanted sexual attention in the month prior to the interview, while 6% had experienced violence or bullying in the preceding year. In addition, 11% had experienced discrimination in the preceding year.

Subdividing the working population highlighted the differences in psychosocial risks across subgroups. More women than men experienced intimidation, discrimination and emotional demands; fewer women than men had autonomy, received recognition of their contribution and believed that they were fairly paid. During the pandemic, intense work was common across occupations but slightly less so in occupations that have a high level of physical demands. The health sector stands out because of the high prevalence of psychosocial risks.

The EWCTS findings on psychosocial risks can partly be attributed to the extraordinary changes to working life set in train by the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, psychosocial risks are common and have been a focus of policy for many years because of their link to increased risk of cardiovascular diseases, MSDs and mental health problems. Many actors play a role in preventing and addressing psychosocial risks, from workers and their managers to international, European and national policy actors. There are many ways to protect workers against psychosocial risks, through job design, workplace innovation programmes, training of workers and managers, and managing workload.

Workplaces are key in efforts to remove psychosocial risks at work because that is the level at which primary preventive measures can be developed and implemented collectively to address the organisation of work, the working environment and employment conditions. Working life is constantly evolving, and change could increase workers' exposure to psychosocial risks – consider the exceptional levels of risk to which the working population was exposed during the pandemic, some effects of which are likely to endure. This calls for vigilance to be maintained in the future.

**Employability is at risk for some, but training can prepare the workforce for the future.**

In times of uncertainty and rapid change, it is essential that change is managed responsibly, taking account of the interests of all stakeholders involved, including workers. Managing change involves maintaining employees' employability; however, many respondents

to the EWCTS expressed lack of confidence about their prospects for the future. One-fifth of workers feared undesirable changes in their work situation, while 15% reported that they might lose their job in the six months after the survey.

On the positive side, almost half (48%) said that they had enough opportunities to use their knowledge and skills in their work, and almost 60% were learning new things in their job, findings that offer some reassurance about preparedness for the future. As for formal learning opportunities, 45% of employees had training provided by their employer in the 12 months prior to the survey, and about the same proportion had benefited from on-the-job training (46%).

### **A sizable proportion of workers face challenges regarding working time arrangements.**

Working at unsocial hours has an impact on health and well-being; it also affects people's ability to coordinate their time with others, such as family members, and their engagement in activities outside work. Unsocial working hours were relatively common in 2021; for instance, one in five workers worked at night (25% of men and 17% of women).

The blurring of boundaries between work and private life remained a significant challenge: 16% of workers worked in their free time to meet work demands, 14% were called into work at short notice, and 30% worried about work when they were not working. More positively, one-third of workers found it very easy to take an hour or two off during the day if they needed to.

Long working hours persisted for many: 19% of workers typically worked 48 hours or more per week (24% of men and 13% of women). Working time duration matters, not only because of its relationship with health and well-being but also because it affects people's availability for unpaid domestic and family work and work-life balance. In addition, the weekly volume of unpaid work (mostly caring for children) represented significant time demands upon workers, amounting to 24 hours per week on average on top of the average of 40 hours spent on paid work.

### **Many workers benefit from their job resources.**

The EWCTS shows high levels of organisational participation among workers: 60% of employees were able to influence decisions that were important for their work, 57% were involved in improving work organisation or work processes, and 57% were consulted before their work objectives were set. Around half were able to change their methods of work, the order of their tasks and the speed of their work. In terms of support, another important job resource, a large share of workers gave positive responses: close to half (47%) always had the support of their colleagues, while a somewhat lower share (41%) always received support from their managers.

Having such job resources is likely to have been a buffer against the risks associated with the new job demands that arose as a consequence of the pandemic. Individual workers, their line managers, and the management of companies and organisations, together with other stakeholders, can play a role in augmenting the resources available to workers by supporting practices that encourage organisational participation.

### **Almost one-third of workers had strained jobs in which job demands exceed job resources.**

The investigation of the job demands on workers and their access to job resources contributes to an overall assessment of job quality in the EU. According to the EWCTS, 12% of workers were in extremely strained or highly strained jobs, meaning jobs with a high number of demands combined with very limited access to resources.

The degree of job strain is of direct relevance to the quality of working life. Working in a strained job increases the risk of developing chronic disease, such as MSDs, which are already among the most common work-related diseases. Workers in resourced jobs, on the other hand, where job resources outnumber job demands, enjoy a better working life.

More women than men worked in strained jobs, and more employees with temporary contracts had strained jobs than those with a permanent contract. Strained jobs were more common in the health, transport and agriculture sectors, and among services and sales workers, skilled agricultural workers, workers in elementary occupations, and plant and machine operators. Some groups were more at risk of job strain because of their specific circumstances, such as workers with a chronic disease. The survey also highlighted that workers in some essential but less visible jobs, such as nursing assistants and refuse workers, experienced high levels of job strain.

These findings point to the continuing need for the improvement of job quality in occupations and sectors with demanding working conditions and the elimination of imbalances between men and women, as well as employees with different contract types.

The richness of the survey results confirms the value of monitoring job quality to understand the world of work in a changing environment. Focussing on job demands and job resources gives scope to address a wide range of policy issues that require attention because of their importance for overall well-being. Regular monitoring of job quality indicators would be useful to complement the monitoring of quantitative employment targets.

## ... confirm the need to address persistent gender inequalities

Despite the increasing participation of women in the labour market, the COVID-19 pandemic held back progress on gender inequality while profoundly changing the daily lives of women and men. For women and men to thrive equally,<sup>12</sup> it requires not only that gender gaps in employment are closed, but also that the participation of women and men across different sectors and occupations is balanced and that the gender gap in unpaid work is eliminated. These objectives are closely related to ensuring equal access of women and men to key decision-making positions, be it in society or in the workplace.

In 2021, women and men continued to work in sectors and occupations that are predominantly occupied by people of the same gender. Only one-quarter of the workforce was in mixed-gender occupations, the same share as six years earlier. Moreover, even in mixed-gender occupations only one in five workers worked in a gender-balanced workplace, meaning that workplaces across the EU remain highly gender segregated too. These disparities carry through into management. Only one-third of managers were women, and they remained concentrated in sectors and occupations that are largely dominated by women. The COVID groups of workers illustrate this point as well. On the one hand, most frontline workers worked in female-dominated workplaces with female managers, whereas most production workers worked in male-dominated workplaces with male managers. On the other hand, home-office workers and on-location services workers were more likely to work in mixed-gender workplaces, although still mostly with male managers.

Achieving a more balanced participation of women and men across different occupations and sectors remains a challenge in Europe. Female managers continue to face glass ceilings and glass walls, the latter referring to the tendency for women to be confined to certain types of managerial functions, particularly functions that are considered supportive rather than strategic. These barriers to full participation call for measures that foster equal opportunities in recruitment to leadership positions at work, such as the recent political agreement between the European Parliament and the Council on the directive on improving the gender balance among non-executive directors of listed companies. This proposes a 40% quota for women on boards by 2026 to increase their participation in economic decision-making in the EU.

The gender divide is also tenacious in the distribution of paid and unpaid work. Despite men, on average, spending more time in paid work, women work longer hours per week in total, as they carry out most of the unpaid work of housework and care of children or other dependent relatives. On average, in the EU, men spent nearly 6 hours more than women per week on paid work in 2021, while women spent 13 hours more on unpaid work than men, so that women worked 7 hours more per week than men. Among part-time workers, the gender gap in unpaid work (20 hours) was double that of full-time workers. Such was the amount of time spent on unpaid work by women working part time, their total working hours were the same as those of men in full-time jobs. When children were present in a household, women spent twice as much time as men on unpaid work. The unequal sharing of cooking and housework was also striking: men spent only half the time on this work daily that women spent.

Gender stereotypes and social norms contribute to the very uneven distribution of paid and unpaid work. In families faced with care demands, it is mostly women who reduce their paid work, or drop out of the labour market completely, to take on those responsibilities. The Work-Life Balance Directive, which was adopted in 2019 and introduced minimum standards for family leave and flexible working arrangements for workers, has created a legal foundation enabling parents to share caring responsibilities more equally. However, financial incentives also play an important role in the distribution of unpaid work. Women on average earn less than men, so when care demands arise for a family, it is less of a financial setback if the woman reduces her working hours. Countries' tax-benefit systems, especially concerning joint income taxation, can also have an impact on women's participation in the labour market. In 2019, the European Parliament called on Member States to remove gender bias in taxation by moving to individual taxation, thereby promoting equal sharing of paid and unpaid work, income and pension rights.

The vast majority of workers in the EU reported having a good fit between their working hours and their family and social commitments outside work. While more women than men reported a good work-life balance, more women than men also experienced work-life conflicts. Having children, particularly younger children, had a negative impact on work-life balance and work-life conflicts, especially for single parents.

<sup>12</sup> A phrase derived from the Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, which sets out three policy objectives: make sure that women and men have equal opportunities to thrive; guarantee that women and men have equal chances to lead our European society; and ensure freedom from gender-based violence and gender stereotypes.

Long working weeks – of 6 or 7 days or of more than 40 hours – and lack of flexibility to take time off to take care of personal matters continued to be the greatest barriers to a good work–life balance. However, even normal working hours (37–40 hours per week), a standard five-day working week and lack of flexibility in a workplace can leave little room for manoeuvre for people with demanding caring responsibilities. It is not surprising that workers’ working time preferences seem to favour an overall reduction of working hours; most would prefer to work normal weekly hours or slightly less. Men who were single parents or in a couple with children had more difficulty with the fit between their working hours and their family and social commitments. They would require larger adjustments than women to their usual weekly hours to meet their working time preferences.

These findings bear out the assertion in the Gender Equality Strategy that women ‘often align their decision to work, and how to work, with their caring responsibilities and with whether and how these duties are shared with a partner’ (European Commission, 2020, p. 11), whereas men adjust their family needs and caring responsibilities around their jobs and careers, which creates more tensions for them in terms of organisation of their time and work–life balance. For women, not only is there the immediate impact of the uneven sharing of unpaid work, but there are also long-term financial implications. Lower (or no) income from work means lower contributions to social security systems, which translates into lower old-age pensions and a higher risk of poverty for women than men in old age. Additionally, a workplace culture of long working hours is one of the factors preventing people with caring responsibilities, mainly women, from progressing in their careers. This contributes further to gender segregation.

More equal sharing of unpaid work within a family and access to good-quality, affordable care at all life stages, which the 2022 European Care Strategy aims for, are the primary conditions that would allow carers – mostly women – to fully participate in the labour market and to have a better work–life balance. The uneven distribution of paid and unpaid work between women and men, which is a sign of the persistence of gender stereotypes, also calls for a reassessment of the relative value of paid and unpaid work in our societies, which still tend to assign greater value to remunerated activities.

## ... point to the need to shape a future of work that leaves no one behind

The COVID-19 pandemic was a critical life event in everyone’s working and daily lives. The longer-term effects on health and well-being, future earnings, work motivation and career development are uncertain. However, the data collected through the EWCTS in 2021 provide ample evidence that policy measures are required to make work more sustainable over the life course and that doing so will increase the resilience of the workforce and equip workers for an uncertain future.

The situations of young workers and new entrants to the labour market demand close attention. Their integration into companies and organisations took place under very different conditions compared with pre-pandemic times, and action should be taken to ensure that this does not adversely affect their future professional lives.

The EWCTS shows that over the life course, people’s work circumstances vary depending on family and personal circumstances. The results suggest that participation of people in work could be increased if support measures within and outside workplaces took account of these different circumstances. The life-course perspective needs to be considered when designing measures to support work–life balance, for example through the development of flexible arrangements for working time and place of work.

Work can be sustainable over the life course only if working conditions do not jeopardise the health and well-being of workers. The pandemic made health in the workplace more visible, and learning of the risk of possible exposure to the virus at work helped to shed light on the complex relationship between work and health. EWCTS data confirm that health challenges, both physical and mental, in the workplace persist. Preventive action to ensure that workers’ health and safety is protected while they work therefore remains a priority. The European Commission has announced its intention to develop an EU mental health strategy. Work plays a key role in mental health: when work is well organised and job quality is good, it can support well-being. By improving job quality, policymakers and company-level actors can prevent poor health outcomes for those currently in work and can ensure that health status, including having a chronic disease, is not an obstacle to engaging in work.

Workers working from home during the pandemic experienced new ways of working with their colleagues and clients. This experience is likely to continue in the hybrid working arrangements that have replaced the mandatory requirements to work from home. Hybrid working arrangements will have an impact not only on people working from home but also on those operating from employers' premises, affecting the quality of communication and cooperation in workplaces with off-site and on-site workers. The positive sides to online working must be acknowledged; for instance, cooperation through virtual meetings can allow more people to join the conversation. On the other hand, the survey results show that remote working is associated with a higher incidence of presenteeism, working in one's free time and long working weeks. Ensuring quality hybrid working is clearly a challenge for the future.

It should also be borne in mind that remote working is not an option for the majority of workers, as many occupations include tasks that are not teleworkable. This could increase inequalities between groups of workers. For example, the EWCTS shows that workers who had difficulty making ends meet were less likely to work from home and tended to have occupations that are not teleworkable.

The survey results also illustrated a link between who (client or supervisor) or what (computerised system) influences work and the autonomy of workers in doing their jobs. They highlight the key role that management, work organisation and workplace practices play in shaping people's work and their job quality. Workplace practices that involve workers through consultation and enable them to participate in change in the workplace – for example, in the co-design of the adoption of new technologies and associated training measures – can support the smooth implementation and management of change. In a context of abundant and profound change, such practices are more than ever needed to shape the future of work as we want it to be.

One of the transitions that needs to be managed is the shift to a low-carbon economy. In an initial exercise, EWCTS data were used to gain an understanding of job quality in green jobs. Occupations were classified according to the most likely impact of greening, and the job quality of the different categories was estimated. This showed that new green jobs will potentially have better job quality. However, occupations that exist already and for which demand will increase in the green transition show poorer job quality. This indicates the importance of mainstreaming job quality in greening policies to achieve a fair and just transition. It shows how vital it is to continue monitoring the working conditions and job quality of the jobs being created or transformed by the green transition.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the response to it have raised longer-term concerns about our level of preparedness in a less predictable world and have led to calls to reinforce the EU's resilience. Frontline workers – the first line of response in crises – and their indispensable role in keeping society afloat came into the spotlight during the pandemic. The EWCTS shows that the working conditions of these workers are often more demanding than those of other groups of workers, while they are not necessarily rewarded with adequate pay. Actions to improve the job quality of frontline workers are essential for reinforcing our collective resilience.

The evidence generated by the EWCTS illustrates the centrality of work and job quality in finding answers to a wide range of key policy challenges. It suggests that job quality must be mainstreamed in EU policies designed to address these challenges, and this will help to achieve a fair, just and sustainable transition and the goal that no one is left behind in the transition.

To ensure this process is well informed and decisions are evidence based, up-to-date data are needed. The next edition of the European Working Conditions Survey is foreseen for 2024. It will provide evidence on job quality, the quality of working life and progress in addressing the working life challenges identified by this special edition of the survey, the European Working Conditions Telephone Survey.

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All Eurofound publications are available at [www.eurofound.europa.eu](http://www.eurofound.europa.eu)

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# Annexes

## Annex 1: Survey methodology

The European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) assesses and quantifies the working conditions of employees and the self-employed, analyses relationships between different aspects of working conditions, identifies groups within the working population at risk and issues of concern, and monitors progress and trends. The survey aims to contribute to European policy development, particularly regarding quality of work and employment issues. The EWCS has been carried out by Eurofound every five years since 1991.

A new edition was planned for 2020; unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face data collection was interrupted in March 2020. Instead, Eurofound prepared and implemented a full non-contact and interviewer-administered probability survey pertaining to key elements of the EWCS, the European Working Conditions Telephone Survey (EWCTS). The EWCTS captures generalisable and high-quality data on working conditions, job quality and the quality of working life during the pandemic.

Eurofound contracted Ipsos to undertake fieldwork for the EWCTS, which was carried out between March and November 2021. Ipsos interviewed 71,764 workers in 35 European countries: the EU27, six candidate or potential candidate countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia), and Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

The questionnaire used for the EWCTS was adapted from the original questionnaire developed for the seventh EWCS. To adapt the survey from face-to-face to telephone interviewing, the total length of the original face-to-face questionnaire needed to be shortened. To achieve this reduction, substantive cuts were made, and parts of the questionnaire were modularised, meaning that in those parts, each respondent was asked only a subset of the questions (see Table A1).

- The selection of questions on job quality was guided by the work of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), as presented in its *Guidelines on measuring the quality of the working environment* (OECD, 2017). The guidelines include two sets of questions on the working environment. The condensed module asks 13 questions pertaining to 11 job characteristics; this module was added to the core part of the EWCTS questionnaire. The quality of the working environment indicator is calculated based on this condensed module.

- The extended module aims to conduct a more comprehensive assessment of the working environment and allows for a more in-depth investigation of the working environment and how it is changing; these questions are collected in Module 1 (M1 in Table A1).

The items included in the modules are those that are most relevant to workers' well-being and those with the strongest evidence for their statistical reliability.

Table A1 shows the general design of the computer-assisted telephone interview questionnaire. It is composed of three parts. One is fixed and mandatory for all respondents. The other two are modularised.

Each respondent answered three sections of the questionnaire: the core questionnaire, one version of Module 1 and one version of Module 2. The allocation of respondents to groups was randomised so that every respondent had the same probability of being asked one of the modularised questions.

The questionnaire was available in 55 languages. Great care was taken to ensure the highest level of equivalence between the translated versions of the questionnaire and the final version of the source questionnaire. Measures taken in this regard included training interviewers, carrying out advance translation, performing a translatability assessment and implementing a translation, review, adjudication, pre-testing and documentation process (TRAPD), whereby two independent translations are produced that are then combined in a third version with the support of a third party.

At the end of 2020, a pilot test of the full EWCTS and the translated versions of the questionnaire was carried out in all countries covered by the survey.

The sample used in the EWCTS is representative of those aged 16 and over, living in private households and in employment, who did at least one hour of work for pay or profit in the week preceding the interview. Random probability sampling using telephone numbers was used to generate nationally representative samples of each country except Sweden, where a high-quality population register containing telephone numbers was used. An unclustered, unstratified sampling design was used. This method is commonly known as random digit dialling, which is equivalent to a simple random sample.

Fieldwork was completed in 27 countries by July 2021, while in 8 countries interviews continued until October or November 2021. No proxy interviews were authorised. The overall response rate was in line with

Table A1: EWCTS questionnaire structure

Section	Details of questions			% of respondents allocated to the section
<b>Core questionnaire</b>				
<b>C</b>	Job and establishment characteristics			100%
	Sociodemographic characteristics			
	Work (activity) characteristics: place of work, contact with customers			
	Condensed OECD job quality questions			
	Key work-related outcomes (WHO-5 Well-being Index, health and safety risks, work-life balance)			
<b>Modularised job quality component to capture additional job quality questions (extended OECD job quality questions)</b>				
<b>M1</b>	<i>M1A</i> Job demands: unsocial working time, job insecurity Job resources: autonomy, job prospects, intrinsic rewards, training, organisational participation, flexible working arrangements	<i>M1B</i> Job demands: physical risks, physical demands, unsocial working time Job resources: autonomy, social support	<i>M1C</i> Job demands: physical demands, physical risks, job insecurity Job resources: job prospects, intrinsic rewards, training, organisational participation	67% for each dimension
<b>Thematic modules</b>				
<b>M2</b>	<i>Collective quality of working life module</i> Work organisation, job resources and well-being at work, work-life conflicts	<i>Individual quality of working life module</i> Paid and unpaid work, health and well-being, ability to make ends meet		50% in each module

industry expectations for this kind of survey, which is much lower than in previous editions of the survey. This can be explained by the method of contact and interviewing (by telephone).

The target sample size was generally 1,800 for each Member State. Due to different population sizes, which impacted the precision of the EU estimates, and the occurrence of top-ups financed by third parties, the achieved sample sizes are different in a number of Member States: Belgium (4,233), Cyprus (1,365), France (3,213), Germany (4,131), Italy (3,131), Luxembourg (1,363), Malta (1,472), Slovenia (2,631) and Spain (2,903). For each of the six candidate and potential candidate countries, the target was 1,100 interviews. Three other European countries participated in the EWCTS: Norway (3,301 interviews conducted), Switzerland (1,224) and the United Kingdom (2,134).

The answers to questions on occupation and sector were coded according to the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08) and the Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community (NACE Rev. 2).

The educational attainment of respondents was coded according to the International Standard Classification of Education, while place of residence was coded according to Eurostat's Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics and Degree of Urbanisation classifications.

Two types of weights were applied to ensure that results based on the EWCTS data could be considered representative for workers in Europe:

- design weights adjusted for differences in the probability of inclusion in the sample
- calibration weights adjusted for differences between the sample and the population on selected variables (age, sex, region, sector and occupation) and for non-response

The reference population statistics used for the calibration weights were EU-LFS annual estimates for 2021. For some non-EU countries, equivalent statistics were obtained from national statistical institutes.

As in all Eurofound surveys, a high number of quality checks before, during and after fieldwork were carried out, with 146 quality control targets monitored, covering all stages of the survey and the dimensions of quality identified by the European statistical system: relevance, accuracy, timeliness and punctuality, accessibility, coherence and comparability.

Owing to the use of a different method of data collection, comparing the data with previous EWCS datasets is not recommended.

Detailed information on the survey is available on Eurofound's website on the [European Working Conditions Telephone Survey 2021](#) web page. The EWCTS *Technical report*, to be published in 2023, describes the methodology used to produce the data in detail. Annex 4 to the present report describes the methodology for constructing the job quality index.

## Annex 2: Classification of occupations by gender

Table A2: ISCO-08 occupational groups (two-digit level) classified by dominant gender

	% of women	Classification
71 Building and related trades workers, excluding electricians	3.7	Very male-dominated
72 Metal, machinery and related trades workers	4.4	Very male-dominated
02 Non-commissioned armed forces officers	6.1	Very male-dominated
01 Commissioned armed forces officers	6.5	Very male-dominated
83 Drivers and mobile plant operators	6.7	Very male-dominated
74 Electrical and electronic trades workers	7.7	Very male-dominated
62 Market-oriented skilled forestry, fishery and hunting workers	8.1	Very male-dominated
03 Armed forces occupations, other ranks	15.5	Very male-dominated
54 Protective services workers	18.6	Very male-dominated
31 Science and engineering associate professionals	20.4	Male-dominated
35 Information and communications technicians	20.4	Male-dominated
25 Information and communications technology professionals	20.5	Male-dominated
96 Refuse workers and other elementary workers	24.5	Male-dominated
21 Science and engineering professionals	28.1	Male-dominated
93 Labourers in mining, construction, manufacturing and transport	28.8	Male-dominated
81 Stationary plant and machine operators	29.9	Male-dominated
95 Street and related sales and services workers	29.9	Male-dominated
82 Assemblers	30.7	Male-dominated
61 Market-oriented skilled agricultural workers	30.8	Male-dominated
13 Production and specialised services managers	31.2	Male-dominated
11 Chief executives, senior officials and legislators	31.6	Male-dominated
63 Subsistence farmers, fishers, hunters and gatherers	34.9	Male-dominated
14 Hospitality, retail and other services managers	35.1	Male-dominated
92 Agricultural, forestry and fishery labourers	35.2	Male-dominated
75 Food processing, wood working, garment and other craft and related trades workers	40.3	Mixed-gender
12 Administrative and commercial managers	40.7	Mixed-gender
73 Handicraft and printing workers	41.3	Mixed-gender
43 Numerical and material recording clerks	53.9	Mixed-gender
33 Business and administration associate professionals	54.5	Mixed-gender
24 Business and administration professionals	55.1	Mixed-gender
34 Legal, social, cultural and related associate professionals	55.5	Mixed-gender
51 Personal services workers	57.2	Mixed-gender
26 Legal, social and cultural professionals	60.3	Female-dominated
44 Other clerical support workers	63.7	Female-dominated
94 Food preparation assistants	64.2	Female-dominated
52 Sales workers	64.4	Female-dominated
42 Customer services clerks	68.0	Female-dominated
22 Health professionals	71.5	Female-dominated
23 Teaching professionals	72.3	Female-dominated
32 Health associate professionals	73.7	Female-dominated
41 General and keyboard clerks	74.7	Female-dominated
91 Cleaners and helpers	83.6	Very female-dominated
53 Personal care workers	83.9	Very female-dominated

## Annex 3: Data manipulation

### Latent class analysis for the COVID groups

The variables used in the model to identify the COVID groups of workers are shown in Table A3. Occupation (ISCO) and sector (NACE) were also used as variables in the model.

**Table A3: Variables used to identify COVID groups (other than occupation and sector)**

Variable	Variable breakdown
Employment status	Permanent contract Temporary contract Solo self-employed Self-employed with employees
Public or private sector	Private sector Public sector Joint public–private organisation or company Not-for-profit sector or a non-governmental organisation Other
Usual number of hours worked per week	Up to 20 hours 21–34 hours 35–40 hours 41–47 hours 48+ hours
Ability to take time off work during working hours	Very easy Fairly easy Fairly difficult Very difficult
Location of work	Employer’s premises and home Home Employer’s premises Employer’s premises and other (not home) Home and other (not employer’s premises) Client’s premises Vehicle Various locations
Health and safety delegate or committee in the workplace	Yes No
Directly dealing with customers	Never Rarely
Exposure to infectious materials	Sometimes Often
Computer use	Always

- Employment status was included because it was assumed that some types of workers, such as temporary employees on fixed-term contracts or solo self-employed workers, were more likely to lose their jobs during the pandemic.
- Working in the public or private sector was included because it was assumed that private sector jobs were more at risk.
- The usual number of hours worked per week was chosen because it was assumed that some types of workers worked longer hours due to the additional burdens created by the pandemic while others were on short-time working schemes.
- Being able to take time off during working hours is a proxy for working time flexibility, which was especially challenging for frontline workers in the health sector, but also for those in various other jobs, for example jobs in public administration and some service jobs.
- Risk of infection in the workplace and health and safety in the workplace cover the risks to health caused by the pandemic.
- Further variables that played an important role during the COVID-19 pandemic include:
  - the location of work – that is, where work is performed (see Chapter 1, ‘Place of work’)
  - directly dealing with customers, clients, patients or students, among others, in the workplace
  - computer use, as a proxy for digitalised jobs enabling workers to telework all the time

The variables contributing most to the model were computer use, working in the public or private sector, and the risk of exposure to infection.

### Unpaid work: Imputing missing hours

The EWCTS asked how frequently working women and men carried out unpaid work. When respondents said that they performed unpaid work daily, they were asked for the number of hours and minutes per day. The survey did not ask respondents about weekly hours spent on unpaid work when it was done several times a week, several times a month or less often.



To estimate the number of hours performed in these cases, data were imputed based on European Quality of Life Survey 2016 data. This survey asked for the number of hours worked regardless of the frequency with which unpaid work was performed. As the hours spent on unpaid work were higher in 2021 owing to COVID-19-related circumstances, including limited availability of external care support for households, the exact hours were not taken directly from the European Quality of Life Survey 2016 data; instead, the coefficients for those performing unpaid work daily and those doing it several times a week were calculated.

We estimated how many weekly hours in each country women and men performing a specific unpaid activity several times a week spend compared with women and men doing the same unpaid activity daily. We then used these figures (coefficients), together with the observed hours people spent doing unpaid work daily in 2021, to estimate the missing weekly hours for people performing that unpaid work less often than daily. Thus, the imputations allow for country and gender differences in unpaid work patterns while accounting for the increased hours spent on unpaid activities in 2021 compared with 2016. A more detailed explanation will be included in the EWCTS *Technical report*, due for publication in 2023.

## Annex 4: Construction of the job quality index

The job quality index was constructed on the basis of the condensed question module included in the EWCTS core questionnaire given to all respondents. It builds on the OECD methodology, which had been shared with Eurofound.

The following describes the steps in constructing the index.

- For every respondent, questions were classified either as job demands or job resources and allocated to their thematic dimension as shown in Table A4. Demands are job attributes that require an effort and increase workers' risk of poorer health and well-being; resources are job attributes that support workers by reducing job demands, their physiological costs or their psychological costs.
- Each job quality question was recoded into a binary or dichotomous (0/1) variable, based on respondents' answers. The recoding was based on substantive considerations and well-being scores. For example, for the question on working at high speed, there are five answer categories: never, rarely, sometimes, often and always. We categorised the answers as exposure to work intensity (a demand) when respondents answered 'always' or 'often'. For any other answer ('sometimes', 'rarely' or 'never'), there was an absence of exposure to work intensity. Indeed, working never, rarely or only sometimes at high speed would not constitute a regular job demand.

A third step was to look at the well-being score for each answer category and compare it with the mean for the proposed recoding to ensure that we would combine answers that had similar (and expected) associations with well-being. For example, in the case of working at

high speed, the well-being score for the answer 'always' is 61.7, while for 'often' or 'always' it is 62.7; however, for 'sometimes', 'often' or 'always' it increases to 65.8, which is close to the average score for the overall population. Using 'sometimes', 'often' or 'always' as the cut-off point no longer differentiates between workers with low and high well-being. This difference in gradient suggests that collapsing the categories 'always' and 'often' captures the demand dimension of the item.

- For each dimension, a domain-specific demand and resource summary indicator was constructed based on one or more items. If any of the underlying items were 'true', it indicated that the respondent was exposed to that demand or resource. For example, if one or more of the three demands within the work intensity dimension were met, the respondent was considered to be exposed to demands. (Note that this was usually the case, but not always. In some cases, two or more had to be true – for example, the physical demands indicator required two or more of the four variables to be true in order for the respondent to count as exposed to physical demands.)
- The job quality index was calculated for both self-employed workers and employees. A specific additional demand was created for the self-employed, which was called 'organisational dependency', to capture situations in which their freedom to operate is reduced.
- Next, all demand indicators were summed as were all resource indicators. The numbers of demands and resources are unequal and depend on respondents' employment status. Self-employed respondents have seven demands and eight resources. Employees also have eight resources, but only six demands (one of the indicators, organisational dependency, is based on questions that were put only to the self-employed).

**Table A4: Overview of the job quality dimensions and job characteristics of the quality of the working environment**

Dimension	Job demands	Job resources
Physical and social environment	Physical risks	Social support
	Physical demands	
	Intimidation and discrimination	
Job tasks	Work intensity	Task discretion and autonomy
Organisational characteristics	Dependence (self-employed only)	Organisational participation and workplace voice
Working time arrangements	Unsocial work schedules	Flexibility of working hours
Job prospects	Perceptions of job insecurity	Training and learning opportunities
		Career advancement
Intrinsic job features		Intrinsic rewards
		Opportunities for self-realisation

- The previous step resulted in a total number of demands on the one hand and resources on the other for each respondent. These summed indicators were standardised on a scale from -100 (minimum) to +100 (maximum). This was done to correct for the unequal number of possible demands and resources.
  - The job quality index was calculated as the difference between exposure to demands and access to resources; a job is 'strained' when the exposure to demands exceeds exposure to resources. In cases where the number of demands is lower than the number of resources, the job is characterised as 'resourced'.
  - A categorical variable was created, capturing the degree of strain. The six mutually exclusive categories ranged from jobs with the highest demands relative to resources and jobs with the lowest demands relative to resources: extremely strained, highly strained, moderately strained, poorly resourced, moderately resourced and highly resourced. The approach to assigning respondents to these categories is described below.
    - **Extremely strained:** Cases where the gap between the proportion of job demands and the proportion of job resources is greater than 50%. This would occur, for example, when an employee was exposed to five of their possible six demands, but only two of their possible eight resources.
    - **Highly strained:** Cases where the gap between the proportion of job demands and the proportion of job resources is greater than 25%, but no greater than 50%. This would occur, for example, when an employee was exposed to three of their possible six demands, but only one of their possible eight resources.
    - **Moderately strained:** Cases where the proportion of job demands is greater than the proportion of job resources, but the gap between the two is no greater than 25%.
    - **Poorly resourced:** Cases where the proportion of job demands is lower than or matches the proportion of job resources, and the gap between the two is less than 25%.
    - **Moderately resourced:** Cases where the proportion of job demands is lower than or matches the proportion of job resources, and the gap between the two is greater than 25% but no more than 50%.
    - **Highly resourced:** Cases where the proportion of job demands is lower than or matches the proportion of job resources, and the gap between the two is greater than 50%.



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The strict public health restrictions implemented by governments in 2020 to control the COVID-19 pandemic abruptly changed working life and continued to shape it over the two years that followed. Between March and November 2021, over 70,000 interviews were carried out in 36 countries by the European Working Conditions Telephone Survey (EWCTS), a high-quality probability-based survey. The aim was to provide a detailed picture of the working lives of Europeans in that exceptional time.

The report documents the working conditions of Europeans in 2021. It examines variation in job quality and identifies its positive association with well-being, health, work engagement and the financial sustainability of work. It highlights the divergences in the experiences of workers depending on workers' own attributes and their place in the workforce. From this analysis, the report aims to derive lessons for the future, particularly in relation to the enduring marks on how we work and the implications for work organisation, the quality of work, and the interaction between work and private life.

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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.**

