

Living conditions and quality of life
COVID-19 pandemic and the gender divide at work and home



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When citing this report, please use the following wording:

Eurofound (2022), *COVID-19 pandemic and the gender divide at work and home*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

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Research project: Investigating the gender divide in the aftermath of COVID-19

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Acknowledgements: We are grateful for the feedback received from expert meeting participants: Francesca Bettio, Zsuzsa Blaskó, Jakub Caisl, Antonella Candiago, Liesbeth Claes, Daniela Del Boca, Lúdia Farré, Éva Fodor, Marie Hyland, Chiara Malavasi, Annarita Manca, Blandine Mollard, Rense Nieuwenhuis, Outi Niiranen, Enora Marie Perrot, Monika Queisser, Lina Salanauskaite, Giovanni Razzu, Martina Schonard, Rosamund Shreeves, Greet Vermeylen, and Mara A. Yerkes.

Discussions at events at the European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI), the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC) Annual Technical Meeting at the OECD, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Universiteit Hasselt and Barcelona Time Use Initiative for a Healthy Society have been valuable in enhancing the analysis. We thank Francesca Agosti for contributing to the analysis of the effect of school closures on work-family conflict (presented in Chapter 4). We also thank Umberto Cattaneo, Katharina Mader, Ilona Zelvyte, Marie Lecerf, the members of Eurofound's Advisory Committee on Living Conditions, Social Cohesion and Convergence, and Eurofound colleagues – especially Martina Bisello and Klára Fóti – for their useful feedback.

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2022

Print: ISBN 978-92-897-2276-6 doi:10.2806/738758 TJ-07-22-930-EN-C

PDF: ISBN 978-92-897-2275-9 doi:10.2806/015588 TJ-07-22-930-EN-N

This report and any associated materials are available online at <http://eurofound.link/ef22010>

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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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Executive summary

Introduction

Gender inequality in many aspects of life is a well-documented reality.¹ Paid and unpaid work are both heavily gender-segregated, reflecting deep-rooted social norms about gender roles of women as primary caregivers. These divides translate into gaps in the labour market, pay and well-being, including in poverty and work–life conflict. The COVID-19 crisis has raised concerns about its potential to widen many gaps between women and men in the workplace and at home.

This report examines pre-pandemic patterns in gender inequalities in the EU in the domains of the labour market, unpaid work and well-being and looks at how they have been impacted during the recent COVID-19 crisis. It also analyses policy responses of national governments across the EU to address gender divides, and to prevent their widening during the pandemic. Finally, the report describes the outlook for gender inequalities in Europe. The future of equality between women and men will be shaped by factors such as gender segregation in labour markets, gender divides in telework and hybrid work, and gender mainstreaming in policymaking – especially in relation to caregiving and care services.

Policy context

Gender equality is a core value of the European Union, and its promotion is enshrined in many EU-level strategies and policies. It has long been acknowledged that gender equality cannot be reached by treating it as a stand-alone goal, but needs to be incorporated into all policy areas (gender mainstreaming).

The Gender Equality Strategy for 2020–2025 and the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), along with its Action Plan, focus on gender inequalities in multiple dimensions through objectives and actions that foster gender mainstreaming and highlight the intersectional nature of inequalities. The importance of gender mainstreaming is recognised in the EU’s funding instrument, the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which requires explanations of how planned measures contribute to gender equality.

When it comes to gender inequalities in the labour market, several initiatives have been developed in recent years. These include the EPSR Action Plan with its target of halving the gender employment gap by 2030 and the Gender Equality Strategy which has guidance on how national tax and benefits systems can (dis)incentivise second earners. Both the proposed Pay Transparency Directive and the Directive on Minimum Wages have reducing the persistent gender pay gap as one of their main objectives. The European Parliament’s resolution in favour of the right to disconnect from paid work outside working hours is particularly relevant to women, as they are overrepresented among teleworkers.

In terms of gender inequalities in the home, the Gender Equality Strategy recognises that these are substantial and are interlinked with those in the labour market. It places importance on addressing the gender care gap, for example, by providing pension credits for care-related career breaks. The EPSR sets minimum standards for parental, paternity and carer’s leave, and presents options for flexible working arrangements under its Work–life Balance Initiative. The envisaged European Care Strategy is likely to include recommendations that are relevant to the well-being of informal and formal carers – a category in which women are disproportionately represented. Within the strategy, the revision of the Barcelona targets (to increase employment among parents of young children, especially women) aims to ensure further upward convergence among Member States concerning early childhood education and care.

Key findings

- In contrast to the Great Recession, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the employment rate, unemployment rate and hours worked has been remarkably gender-neutral at the aggregate EU level. However, employment losses have been concentrated among the lowest-paid women, while men’s job losses have been more evenly distributed. Women are overrepresented in sectors such as hospitality which were closed down for long periods and experienced job losses; they are also overrepresented in teleworkable and essential sectors which had the fewest job losses.

1 In this report, ‘gender’ is used to differentiate between people who identify as women and those who identify as men.

- The pre-pandemic trend of women carrying out around twice the number of unpaid working hours of men continued, while the crisis increased the need for households themselves to provide services such as childcare and cleaning. Gender segregation in unpaid tasks deepened, with women's share of time-intensive tasks (such as caring, meal preparation and cleaning) increasing, while men's share of less time-demanding tasks (such as gardening, house repairs and transporting family members) also increased. As an exception, in dual-earner families where the mother did not telework, the share of childcare duties among teleworking fathers went up.
- Among employed individuals, women's total weekly working time (when paid and unpaid work are combined) exceeds that of men by 7 hours in the EU.
- Women are more likely than men to report a deterioration in their general health. Women have also experienced higher levels of depression, lower levels of optimism about the future, and higher rates of being at risk of poverty or social exclusion.
- Work-life conflicts have increased dramatically, particularly among teleworking mothers of young children, with 31% reporting that they 'always' or 'most of the time' found it difficult to concentrate on their jobs because of family responsibilities.
- Working conditions in the care and human health sectors should be improved to guarantee adequate services of high quality. Examples of short-term pandemic-period policies in this direction include extra allowances for workers in elderly care (Germany), wage subsidies for childcare workers (Ireland) and mental health services for frontline workers (Ireland).
- During the pandemic, governments in countries like Luxembourg and Spain made amendments to parental leave policies, but this leave is predominantly taken up by mothers. Parental leave policies should include incentives for fathers to share childcare duties more equitably, for example by exclusively reserving a portion of (paid) leave for them. Besides the gender pay gap, gender norms play a significant role in fathers' decisions about taking parental leave. This emphasises the important role that company practices can play in encouraging fathers to take parental leave.
- Member States should support the provision of good-quality, accessible and affordable childcare services. The pandemic has emphasised how the provision of these services can support women's labour market participation, financial security and overall well-being.
- Gender balance should be ensured in all levels of decision-making, recognising that there is a two-way relationship between gender equality and public policy. The inclusion of women in policymaking leads to a virtuous cycle whereby more inclusive policies are debated and proposed.
- Post-pandemic recovery plans should explicitly address intersecting gender inequalities, underpinned by the gathering of gender-disaggregated data (including time-use surveys) that would lead to research-based policymaking and progress evaluation.

Policy pointers

- Eligibility criteria for welfare benefits should extend to people who work part time and/or have breaks in their careers. As more women than men work part time and take career breaks, they are less likely to receive adequate benefits, contributing to gender gaps in poverty and social exclusion. The problem is particularly acute among single mothers, highlighting the importance of considering intersecting inequalities.
- Pandemic-period telework – often compulsory, rapidly implemented and combined with lack of care services – correlates with poor work-life balance and time poverty for parents who had to juggle paid work with homeschooling and care tasks. Regulations on flexible work arrangements and remote work should recognise that, when voluntary, these are most likely to be adopted by women.

Introduction

This chapter defines gender equality and summarises the rationale for enhancing it. It also delineates recent EU policy developments that seek to reduce inequalities between women and men.

Defining and measuring gender equality

According to the European Institute for Gender Equality, gender equality refers to:

*... the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys ... Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men... Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development.*²

(EIGE, undated)

Equality between women and men is a fundamental right and a core value of the EU, as reflected in the Union's treaties and legislation. These principles and initiatives include those related to the following areas: equal pay for equal work; equality in opportunity and treatment in matters of employment, social security, and access to goods and services; gender equality in pension entitlements; entitlement to parental leave; combating discrimination; and eradication of violence against women. The importance placed on gender equality is also evident in the views expressed by individual citizens. According to survey data collected in 2017, 88% of women and 79% of men in the EU reported that promoting gender equality was important for them personally.³

According to the Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, gender equality is

... an essential condition for an innovative, competitive and thriving European economy. In business, politics and society as a whole, we can only reach our full potential if we use all of our talent and diversity. Gender equality brings more jobs and higher productivity – a potential which needs to be realised as we embrace the green and digital transitions and face up to our demographic challenges.

(European Commission, 2020, p. 1)

Despite being a fundamental guiding principle and a common aspiration, reaching gender equality in Europe is far from being a reality. As evidenced in this report, gender inequalities exist in many areas of life, preventing the full potential of societies and individual citizens from being reached. From an economic point of view, the positive consequences of enhanced gender equality include a boost to national income, the creation of additional employment and a reduction in poverty (Morais Maceira, 2017). The cost of the existing gender employment gap (made up of the sum of forgone earnings, forgone welfare contributions and additional welfare spending) in the EU has been estimated at €320 billion in 2018, or 2.4% of the Union's annual gross domestic product (Eurofound, 2020a).

Gender equality also has implications for demographics. Greater equality between women and men can raise fertility, which is particularly important for a Europe that is facing an increasingly ageing population in future years. As women are more likely than men to work in care-related professions, increased investment in the workforce in these sectors can help to narrow the gender employment and pay gaps, and to meet the need for increased provision of care and support of older age cohorts in the future. It is vital that gender equality is seen as a driver of post-pandemic recovery and as a part of the response to the challenges of the triple transition (digital, climate and social changes) that is transforming European societies. From a broader well-being point of view, more equitable sharing of tasks between women and men enhances the well-being of adults and children (de Looze et al, 2018; Trask, 2016). In general, societies that are more egalitarian (including in the dimension of gender) are also more cohesive (European Parliament, 2021).

Gender equality can be measured in different areas of life. One indicator that aims to simultaneously capture many aspects of parity between women and men is the Gender Equality Index, which encompasses indicators in the domains of work, money, knowledge, time, power and health.⁴ Between 2013 and 2021 in the EU, the average value of the index increased from 63 to 68 (with a hypothetical figure of 100 indicating absolute gender equality), suggesting that progress has been positive but slow, with stagnation occurring in some Member States. Between 2010 and 2018, there was an overall trend of upward convergence in the index

² Adapted from UN Women, 'Concepts and definitions', <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsanddefinitions.htm>

³ Author's calculations using Eurobarometer 87.4 data (European Commission, 2017). The figure reflects the sum of the answers 'totally agree' and 'tend to agree' to the question 'Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: Promoting gender equality is important for you personally'.

⁴ See EIGE (2021) for the latest update regarding the index.

within the EU, meaning that the general direction has been towards increasing gender equality; in this respect, the pace of improvement has been faster in countries that had been lagging behind, notably several Mediterranean and Baltic Member States. The achievements in the upward convergence in the domain of power – the representation of women and men in a range of the highest decision-making positions across the political, economic and social spheres – have been the main component driving the progress, while convergence has been modest in the other domains (Eurofound and EIGE, 2021). It has been estimated that, at the current rate of progress, it would take more than 60 years for the EU to reach gender equality as measured by the index (EIGE, 2020).

EU policy landscape

The enhancement of equality between women and men is enshrined in many of the EU's strategies and policies that have been recently adopted or are in various stages of development. The **Gender Equality Strategy** currently in place was adopted in 2020, setting out a five-year plan with the goal of enhancing equality between women and men in multiple domains in the EU. The Gender Equality Strategy Monitoring Portal was launched in 2022, providing data on the realisation of the strategy's policy objectives. The strategy adopts an intersectional approach which recognises that gender, in combination with other characteristics such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability and class, contributes to instances of discrimination (European Commission, 2020). Pointing to the persistence of stereotypes about women's and men's roles as the root cause of gender inequality, the strategy is responsible for running projects and campaigns to promote gender equality via media and the cultural sector. It addresses gender gaps in the labour market by providing guidance for Member States on how national tax and welfare benefit systems can incentivise (or disincentivise) second earners, and addresses gender gaps in education and training by encouraging women to engage more in digital education and information and opt for information and communications technology studies.

The **Work-life Balance Directive** sets minimum standards for family leave and flexible working arrangements, and promotes equal sharing of caring tasks between parents. In a related strand, the strategy addresses the gender care gap and its consequences by highlighting the importance of providing pension credits for care-related career breaks. When it comes to targeting the gender gaps in pay and pensions, the

Commission has proposed a **Pay Transparency Directive** aimed at strengthening the application of the principle of equal pay for work of equal value through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms. The Commission has also submitted a proposal for a **directive on adequate minimum wages**.

The **European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)**, proclaimed in 2017, makes many references to gender equality. The accompanying Action Plan, which dates from 2021, is the Commission's contribution to ensuring the implementation of the EPSR's principles, while the Social Scoreboard allows for monitoring of progress. Overall, the plan aims to increase employment and skills, and to reduce poverty and social exclusion. The plan includes a subsidiary target of increasing women's participation in the labour market. More specifically, it includes a target of halving the gender employment gap by 2030 from its 2019 level. The plan also sets out minimum standards for parental, paternity and carer's leave, asserting that parents and people with caring responsibilities have the right to suitable leave, flexible working arrangements and access to care services. It maps best practices in the provision of rights for care-related career breaks in pension schemes, emphasising the need for women and men to have equal opportunities to acquire pension rights. When it comes to options for flexible working arrangements, the EPSR includes a Work-life Balance Initiative that aims to improve access to family leave and work flexibility.

The European Parliament's **resolution on the right to disconnect** from paid work outside working hours, approved in January 2021, is particularly relevant to women, as they are overrepresented among teleworkers.

The current revision of the **Barcelona targets** aims to ensure further upward convergence among Member States concerning early childhood education and care, contributing to better work-life balance and supporting women's employment.⁵ The revision will be part of a broader **European Care Strategy**, planned to be adopted in 2022. The Care Strategy includes recommendations that are relevant to the well-being of groups in which women are overrepresented: informal carers and employees in long-term care and early childhood education and care.

Gender mainstreaming in policymaking is an EU priority, including when it comes to post-pandemic economic recovery, with the EU's **Recovery and Resilience Facility** (launched in 2021) requiring explanations of how the planned measures contribute to gender equality. The Commission has also adopted a proposal for legislation to combat gender-based violence.

⁵ The European Council meeting in Barcelona in March 2002 set out targets for Member States aimed at increasing employment levels among parents of young children, especially women, in an effort to achieve greater gender equality in the workforce.

1 Gender equality before COVID-19

The aim of this chapter is to highlight pre-pandemic gender inequalities in the labour market, in unpaid work, in time use and in multidimensional well-being in the EU, while exploring how these inequalities evolved in the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic.

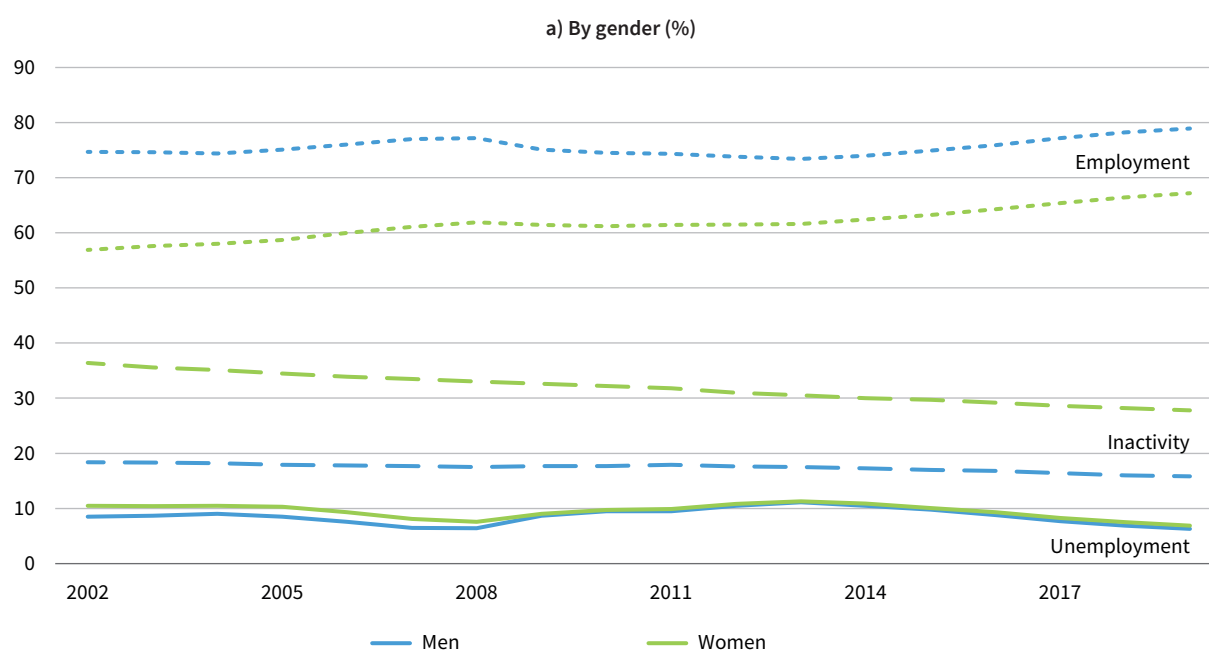
Labour market gender gaps

Notwithstanding the sizeable differences in progress between Member States, the EU overall has been transitioning from traditional gender roles of men as ‘breadwinners’ and women as carers and homemakers, towards a more equal participation of women and men in paid work in the form of dual-earner households (Eurofound and EIGE, 2021; Profeta, 2020a). Despite the changes in societal norms and the increase in women’s labour market participation, in 2017 as many as 46% of women and 51% of men in the EU believed that the most important role of a man was to earn money. Recognising the length of the road ahead, only 50% of women and 63% of men stated that gender equality in the realm of work had been achieved in their countries.⁶

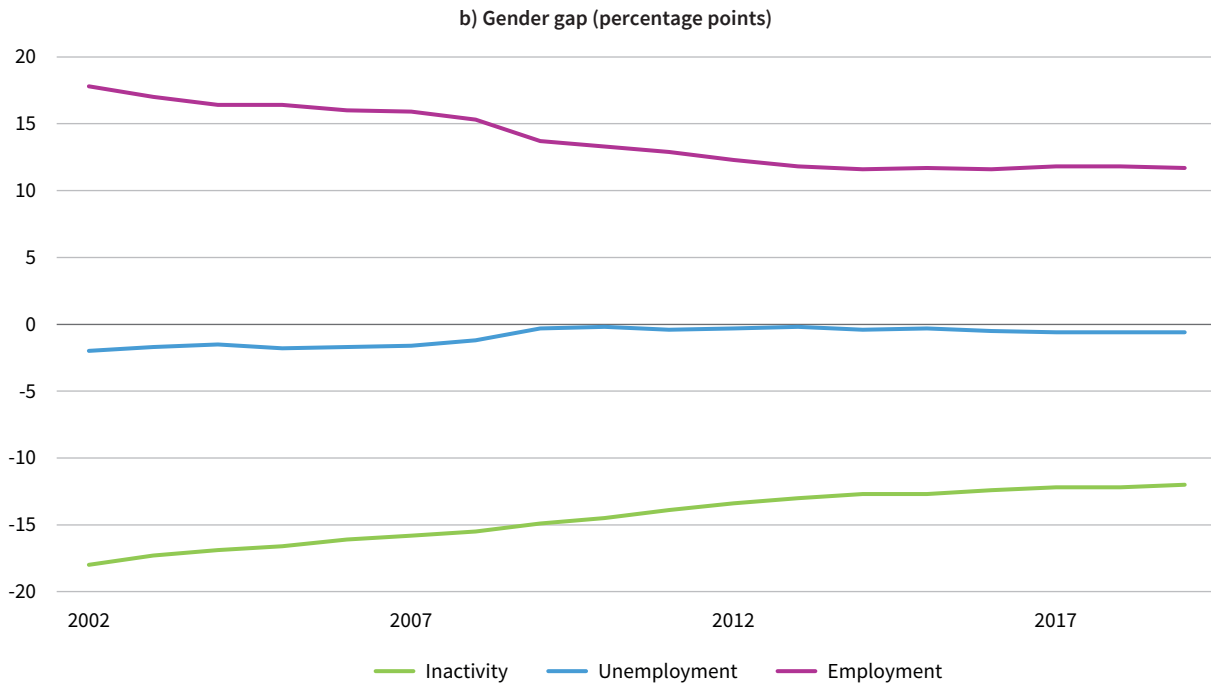
Persisting imbalances between men and women in the EU are reflected in labour market indicators, with men being more likely than women to be employed, while

women are more likely to be economically inactive (that is, of working age, but not employed, not looking for work and not available to take up a job). Figure 1 illustrates the evolution of three key labour market indicators – the rates of employment, unemployment and economic inactivity – for men and women aged 20–64 in the EU in the two decades preceding the pandemic. It also shows how gender gaps in these indicators changed over that period. In all three indicators, women’s rates have been converging with those of men. In 2002, men’s employment rate in the EU stood at 75%, while the rate for women was 18 percentage points lower, at 57%. By 2019, on the eve of the pandemic, the employment rate of men had increased slightly, to 79%, while that of women had increased to 67%, resulting in a gender employment gap of 12 percentage points. Similarly, in the case of economic inactivity, men’s rates have been relatively stagnant over time, whereas those of women have improved. Men’s inactivity rate decreased from 18% to 16% over this period, while that of women decreased more drastically, from 36% to 28%. Rates of unemployment have displayed less distinct long-term trends. Nevertheless, the gender divides have diminished over time, with the Great Recession (beginning in 2008) seeing women’s and men’s rates

Figure 1: Annual labour market indicators, 2002–2019, EU27



⁶ Author’s calculations using Eurobarometer 87.4 data (European Commission, 2017).



Notes: Panel a: dotted lines show employment rates. Dashed lines show rates of economic inactivity. Solid lines show unemployment rates. Panel b: gender gaps are calculated as men's figure less women's. Negative figures for unemployment and inactivity rates indicate women's rates being above those of men.

Source: Author's calculations using data from European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) (LFSA_ERGAN, LFSA_IPGA, LFSA_URGAN). People aged 20–64 years.

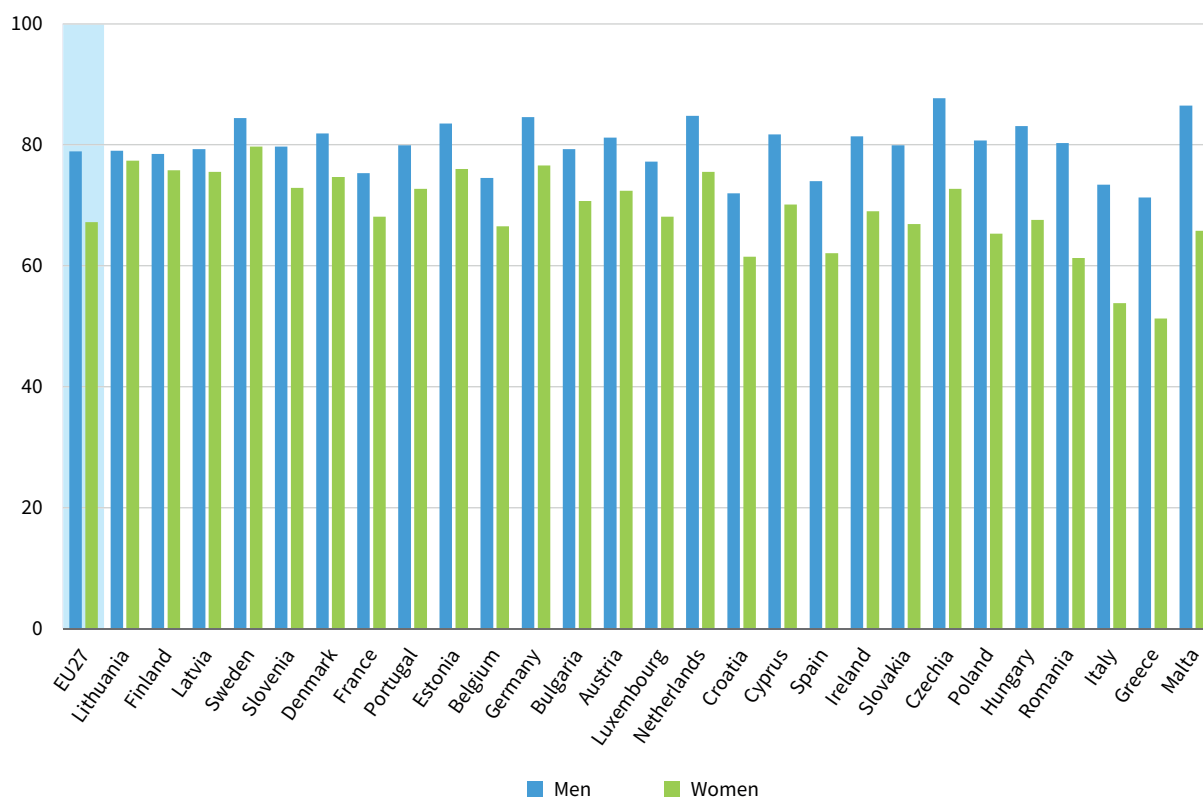
moving closer together. More generally, the Great Recession is a period during which developments towards more gender equality in the labour market are particularly noticeable. In terms of labour market outcomes, the Great Recession (at least initially) affected men particularly severely, hence narrowing gender gaps in employment and unemployment rates.

While the overall gender employment gap in the EU was 12 percentage points in 2019, the situation varied greatly between EU Member States. Figure 2 illustrates variation between countries in the gender gap in the employment rate. The countries are ordered based on the magnitude of the gender gap in the employment rate. A north–south divide is evident. The Member States range from Lithuania, Finland and Latvia on the left, with the smallest gender gaps (below 5 percentage points), to Italy, Greece and Malta on the right, with gaps of at least 20 percentage points.

While in most Member States the gender employment gap narrowed between 2000 and 2019, it widened in Hungary, Poland, Romania and Sweden. The gap widened most drastically (by 7 percentage points) in Romania, due to an increase in men's employment and a decrease in women's employment. In the other three countries, the widening of the gap was marginal. The largest narrowing took place in Ireland, Greece, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Spain and Malta, with reductions ranging from 13 percentage points in Ireland to 31 percentage points in Malta. In these countries, the gender gap narrowed because the increase in women's employment was coupled with a decline in men's employment – except for Malta, where employment of both genders increased, and the growth in women's employment outpaced that of men.⁷

⁷ Author's calculations using data from EU-LFS (LFSA_ERGAN). People aged 20–64 years. Not illustrated.

Figure 2: Employment rate in 2019, by gender and country (%)



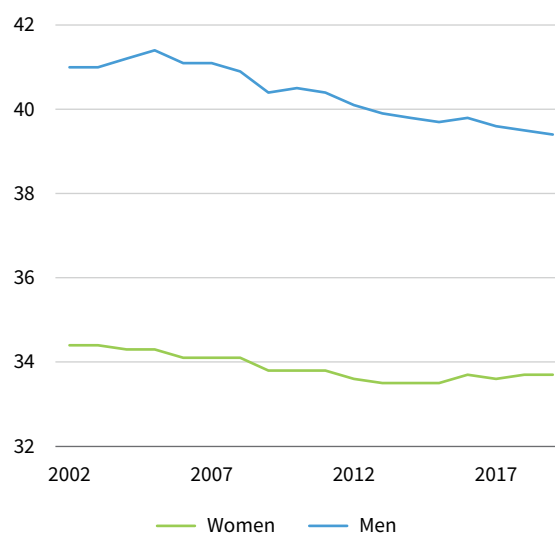
Notes: Member States are ordered by magnitude of the gender gap.

Source: Author's calculations using data from EU LFS (LFSA_ERGAN). People aged 20–64 years.

As well as being less likely than men to participate in the labour force, women also work shorter hours than men. Figure 3 illustrates the trend over time in actual hours worked a week, separately for working women and men, between 2002 and 2019. During this period, women's working hours remained relatively stable, with modest declines over time from 34.4 to 33.7 hours a week worked in the main job. Meanwhile, the working hours of men declined more drastically, from 41.0 to 39.4, leading to a narrowing of the gender gap from 6.6 hours a week in 2002 to 5.7 in 2019.

As a reflection of the gender imbalance in labour market attachment, women are much more likely than men to work part time. As of 2017, 31.7% of employed women in the EU worked part time compared with 8.8% of working men (Eurostat, 2022). While part-time work continues to be mainly undertaken by women, the growth rate of part-time employment as a percentage of total employment in the EU has been faster among men than among women. Between 2003 and 2019, this share grew from 5.2% to 7.8% among men, and from 25.7% to 27.6% among women.⁸

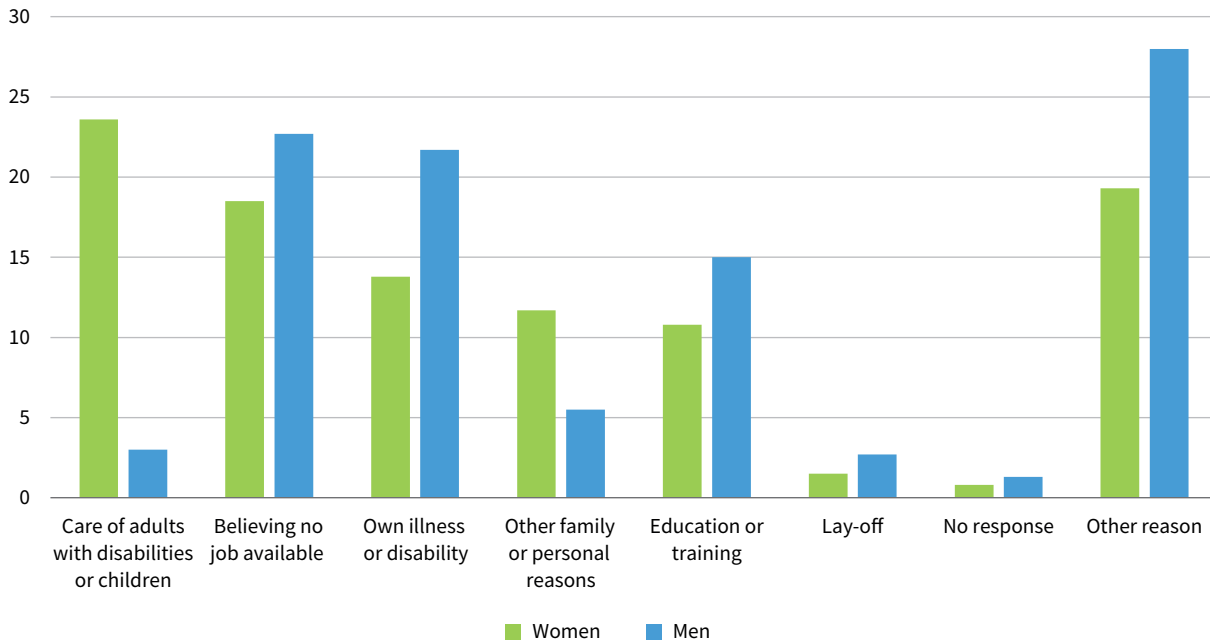
Figure 3: Average number of actual hours of work a week in main job, annual data by gender, 2002–2019, EU27 (hours)



Source: Author's calculations using data from EU-LFS (LFSA_EWHAIS). Employed persons aged 20–64 years.

⁸ Author's calculations using data from EU-LFS (LFSI_PT_A_H). People aged 20–64 years.

Figure 4: Main reason for economic inactivity, by gender, 2019, EU27 (%)

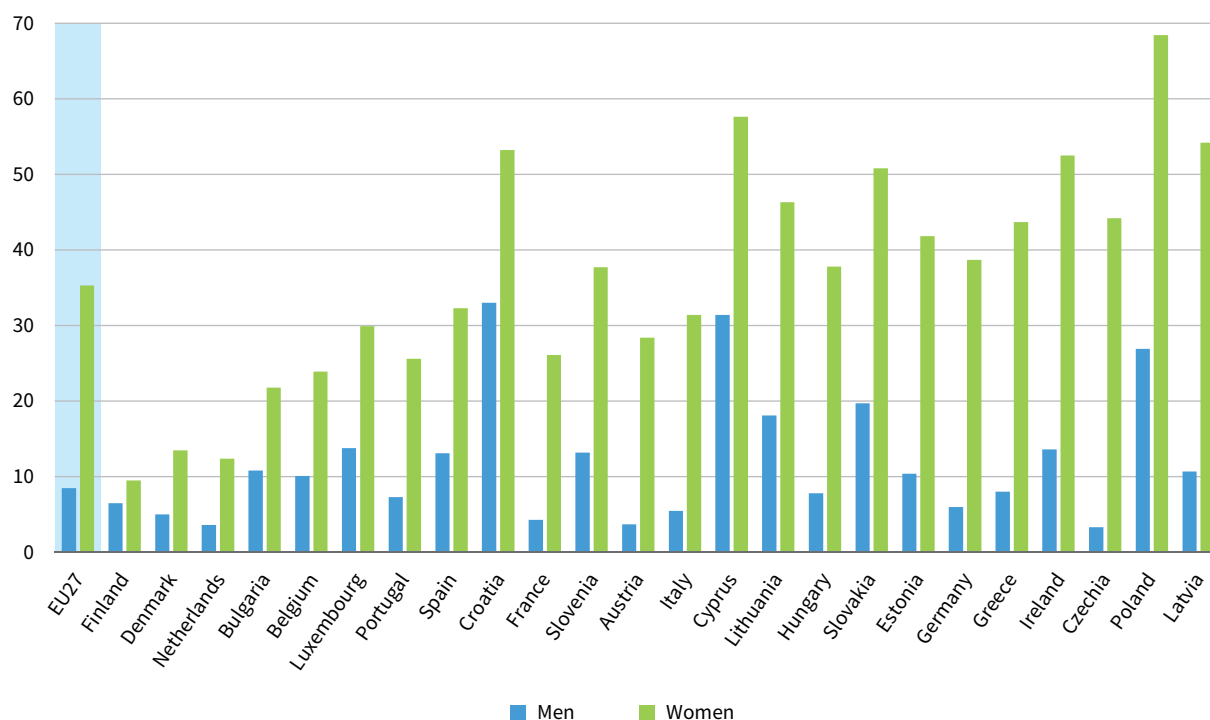


Notes: Percentage of population outside the labour force and not looking for work.
 Source: Author’s calculations using data from EU-LFS (LFSA_IGAR). People aged 20–64 years.

As is evident from the data in Figure 1, women in the EU are more likely than men to be economically inactive (people of working age who are not working, not looking for work and not available to work). This higher likelihood among women is partly attributable to the societal expectation of women as primary caregivers, which is reflected in the gender care gap. As shown in Figure 4, in 2019, 24% of economically inactive women stated care-related issues as their main reason for inactivity, while a further 12% reported other family or personal reasons. The availability of affordable, good-quality care services is therefore key to facilitating women’s labour market participation and career progression (Fanelli and Profeta, 2021; Del Boca et al, 2021). Among men in the same situation, only 3% and 6%, respectively, reported these reasons. Men, on the other hand, were more likely to report reasons relating to education or training, their own illness or disability, lay-offs, or the belief that no jobs are available to them.

There is considerable variation between countries in the percentages citing care responsibilities as the main reason for economic inactivity. That reflects the variation in the gender employment gap. Figure 5 illustrates the variation between countries in the rates of women and men who state that their main reason for economic inactivity relates to care responsibilities, family reasons or personal reasons. The rates among women are relatively low in many northern Member States (in particular, Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands and Denmark, where these reasons are given by fewer than 15% of economically inactive women), while being particularly high (above 50%) in Slovakia, Ireland, Malta, Croatia, Latvia, Cyprus and Poland. Countries are ordered by the magnitude of the gender gap in this rate. Although the general pattern is that the gender gap in this indicator is wide in countries where many women are economically inactive for these reasons, there are some exceptions. A notable example is Croatia, where the rate of economic inactivity for these reasons is high among both women (53%) and men (33%).

Figure 5: Economic inactivity due to care responsibilities, family reasons, or personal reasons in 2019, by gender and country (%)



Notes: Share of economically inactive population with the main reason (for economic inactivity) stated as 'care of adults with disabilities or children and other family or personal reasons'. Member States are ordered by magnitude of the gender gap. Data for men missing for Malta, Romania, and Sweden.

Source: Author's calculations using data from EU LFS (LFSA_IGAR). People aged 20–64 years.

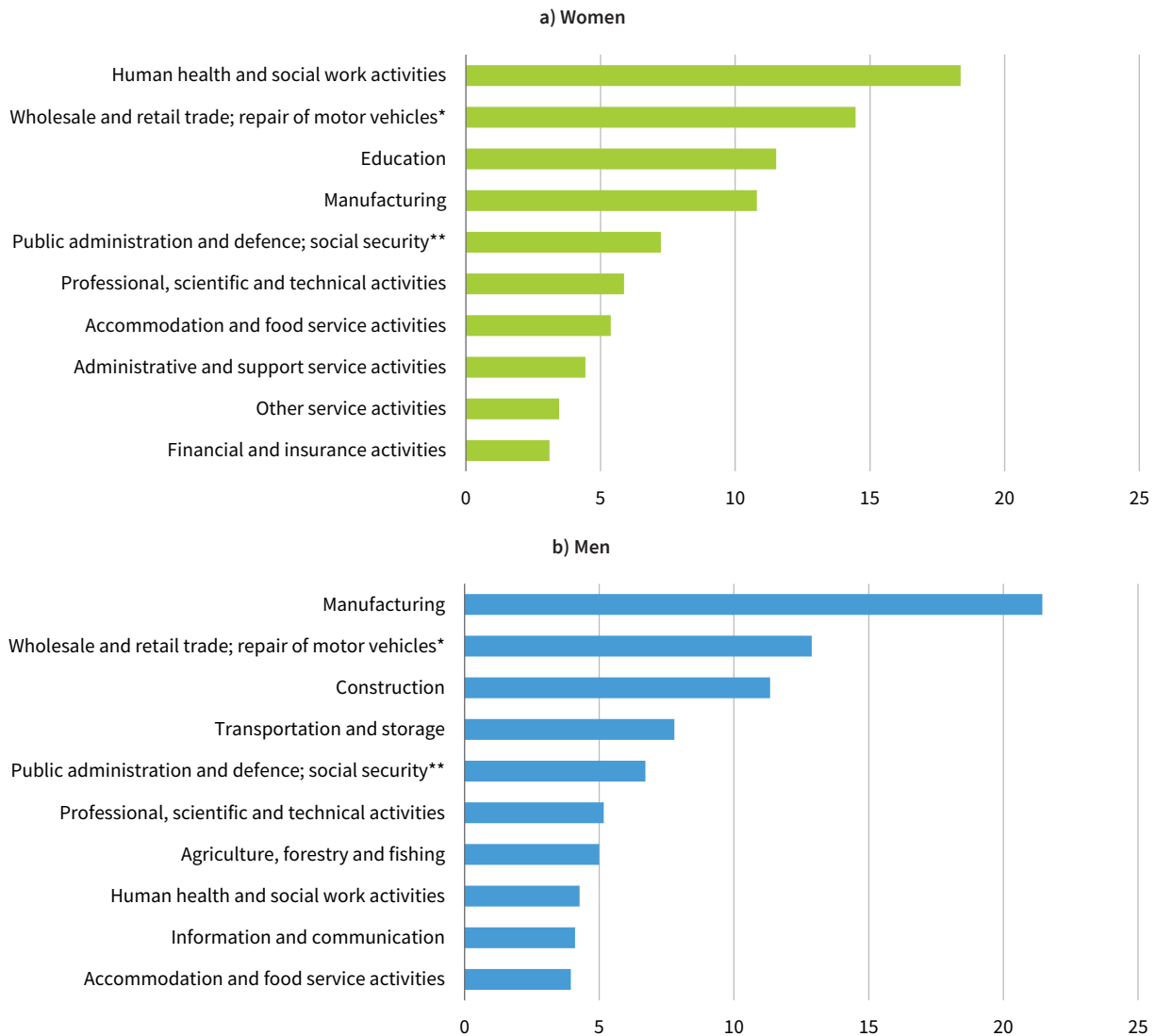
Sectoral gender segregation

Another important gender imbalance in the labour market is the segregation of women and men into different sectors and occupations. Men and women tend to concentrate in different jobs. For example, women are more likely than men to be employed in the health, social work and education sectors. These sectors accounted for 30% of women's employment (and 8% of men's employment) in the EU in 2019. In terms of variability across EU Member States, these sectors accounted for under 20% of women's employment in Romania, Bulgaria and Cyprus, and over 40% of women's employment in Finland, Sweden and Denmark. Among men, these sectors' employment share ranged from below 5% in Romania, Bulgaria, Latvia and Estonia to above 11% in Sweden and Denmark.⁹ Men, on the other hand, are more likely than women to work in manufacturing and construction. In 2019, these two sectors amounted to 33% of all employment among men (and 12% of all employment

among women) in the EU. Across Member States, these sectors accounted for under 25% of men's employment in Luxembourg, Greece, the Netherlands and Malta, and over 40% of their employment in Slovenia, Czechia and Slovakia. Among women, these sectors' employment share ranged from below 7% in Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden, to 20% or above in Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria and Czechia. This gendered division reflects the more general imbalance in employment between the public and private sectors: women are overrepresented in public sector employment, where employment growth has been strong among women over the past two decades (Eurofound and European Commission Joint Research Centre, 2021a). To illustrate the gender divisions in labour markets in more detail, Figure 6 shows the top 10 sectors in terms of employment numbers among women and men in the EU in 2019, with segregation clearly visible. Only wholesale and retail trade appears in the three highest-employing sectors for both women and men.

⁹ Author's calculations using data from EU-LFS (LFSA_EGAN2), population aged 20–64 years. Not illustrated.

Figure 6: Top 10 employment sectors, 2019, EU27 (% of total employment by gender)



Notes: Full category names: *wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles; **public administration and defence; compulsory social security. Sectoral classification based on Nomenclature of Economic Activities (NACE) Rev.2, one digit.
Source: Author’s calculations using data from EU-LFS (LFSA_EGAN2). People aged 20–64 years.

Interestingly, while the gender employment gap has narrowed considerably in the EU over the past few decades, sectoral gender segregation has deepened during the same period (Eurofound and European Commission Joint Research Centre, 2021a). Gender segregation might have been expected to reduce with more women entering the labour force. However, the opposite has been the case because much of the increase in women’s employment has occurred in jobs that were already dominated by women – for example, jobs that usually involve caring tasks in the

predominantly public sectors of health, education and social care.¹⁰ It has been estimated that the share of workers in gender-mixed jobs (meaning jobs in which men and women each represent at least 40% of total employment) declined in the EU between 1998 and 2019 from 27% to 18%. The largest growth in employment during that time occurred among women, and mainly in jobs that are more likely to be held by women than by men (Eurofound and European Commission Joint Research Centre, 2021a).

¹⁰ Jobs are defined using occupation–sector combinations, based on International Standard Classification of Occupations two-digit occupational classification and NACE one-digit sectoral classification, resulting in over 800 jobs.

Working from home and gender

Because of the gender segregation in employment in terms of sectors and occupations,¹¹ women and men differ in their likelihood of being in employment in which remote working is possible. In the EU, women are more likely than men to be in teleworkable employment – in other words, jobs in which working from home is technically possible, based on the task content. According to this classification, in estimates using data from 2018, 37% of employees in the EU could, in principle, work remotely (Sostero et al, 2020). While 30% of men are estimated to be in teleworkable employment, the corresponding rate is much higher for women, at 45%.

Sectoral, occupational and task-related segregation of men and women in the labour markets, as detailed above, explains this gender divide. Many sectors in which men are more likely to work have physical task requirements and are place-dependent. In sectors dominated by men such as agriculture, mining, manufacturing, utilities and construction, women tend to perform tasks that are easier to perform remotely, due to being more office-based, secretarial or administrative in nature, with a lower share of physical handling tasks. In construction, for example, only 6% of men's employment is teleworkable, compared with 69% of women's employment (Sostero et al, 2020).

While a much higher proportion of EU employment is potentially teleworkable, the actual prevalence of teleworking has been much lower. The incidence of employed persons working from home (at least sometimes) in the EU in 2002 was 9.3% among women and 9.4% among men, rising to 14.5% and 14.7% in 2019 among women and men, respectively.¹²

Gender differences in working conditions and pay

Many aspects of working conditions have been found to show discrepancies between women and men. In line with the findings that women are more likely than men to work part time, it follows that men are more likely than women to work long, often unsocial, hours (over 48 hours per week) (Eurofound, 2007, 2013a, 2020b). Working conditions such as the working environment, the nature and organisation of tasks, and exposure to physical risks have also been found to be highly gendered in their outcomes. While men report higher levels of quantitative demands, women are more likely to report exposure to emotional demands. Men receive less support from colleagues and managers, while women are more exposed to adverse social behaviours.

Women in blue-collar occupations are particularly likely to be exposed to monotonous tasks while being the least likely to have training opportunities. Women are also more likely than men to experience bullying or harassment, unwanted sexual attention and sexual discrimination in the workplace (Eurofound, 2007, 2013a, 2020b).

Although women's employment growth in high-paying jobs has outpaced men's in recent years, women are still largely overrepresented in low-paying jobs (Eurofound and European Commission Joint Research Centre, 2021a). Women are also less likely than men to work in managerial positions or to have supervisory responsibilities (Eurofound, 2007, 2013b, 2020b). The gender pay gap is persistent and has been narrowing at a rate that is slower than expected, given the substantial increase in women's labour market participation and the higher educational attainment among (especially younger) women than men. The hourly wages of women in the EU were on average around 14% lower than those of men in 2019 (Eurofound, 2021a).

Employment sector and working time are the main contributing factors to the portion of the gender pay gap that can be explained. The 'motherhood wage penalty' as a cause of the gender pay gap is an issue that has been widely documented and studied. The penalty is seen in earnings data that are studied at around the time when a worker becomes a parent; the penalty in terms of lower earnings after having children is observed only among mothers (Budig and England, 2001; Gash, 2009). Taking a wider life course perspective, the gender pay gap and its various dimensions translate into differences between women and men when it comes to financial security in older age, due to the different accumulations of pension benefits during working age.

Gender gaps in time use and unpaid work

Differences between men and women in time use and time spent on unpaid work tasks are deep rooted in traditional gender norms – the principles that govern people's behaviour – that portray men as being dominant in the area of paid work, while women take on the leading role in looking after the home and the family. Gender differences in time use reflect the fact that, while gender gaps in employment have diminished over time, progress has been much slower in the area of unpaid work.

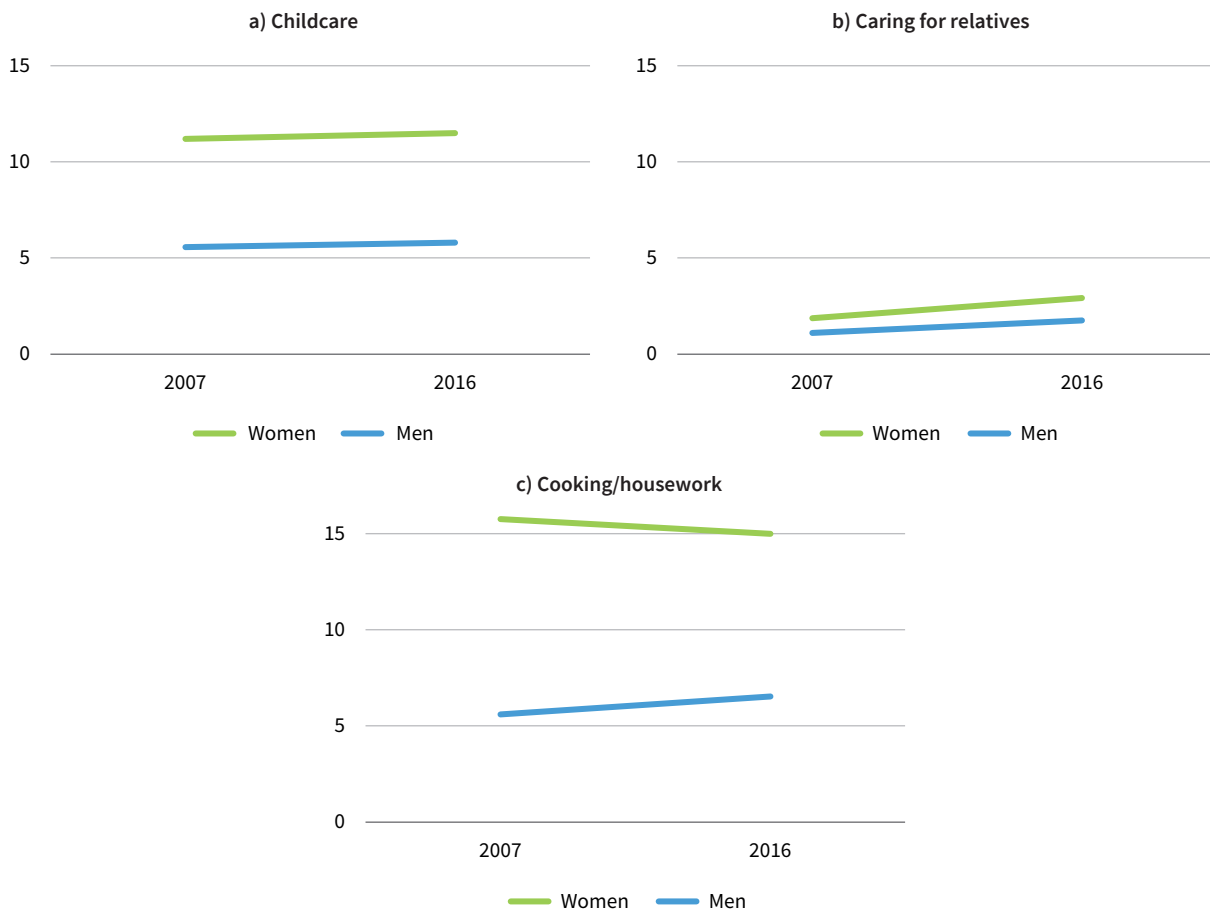
11 See Eurofound and European Commission Joint Research Centre (2021a) for further detail on gender segregation in sectors, occupations and jobs.

12 Author's calculations using data from Eurostat LFS (LFSA_EHOMP). Employed persons aged 20–64.

As a reflection of traditional gender norms, 51% of women and 52% of men in the EU stated in 2017 that the most important role of a woman was to take care of the home and the family. On the other hand, values that people hold in relation to gender equality are reflected in 84% of women and 78% of men stating that they were supportive of men taking parental leave, and 87% of women and 79% of men being in favour of women and men doing an equal share of household activities.¹³ While these statistics suggest that many Europeans value and aspire to gender equality, the statistics on actual behaviours – for example, the proportions of fathers who take up parental leave options available to them – reflect a less egalitarian reality. This suggests that social norms are quicker to change than behaviours.

The differences between women and men when it comes to time spent on unpaid work are long-standing. In comparison with labour market statistics, however, the hours that people spend on unpaid work tasks are less well captured in survey datasets. Available EU-wide evidence from Eurofound’s European Quality of Life Survey suggests that, before the pandemic, women were disproportionately involved in the provision of care and domestic work. As Figure 7 shows, between 2007 and 2016, men in the EU provided on average approximately 6 hours of childcare per week, compared to approximately 11 hours for women, making the gender gap in childcare around 5 hours per week. While the average hours and gender gaps in caring for other dependants are smaller in magnitude, women also carried out approximately twice as much of this work on average as men.

Figure 7: Mean hours spent on unpaid work, by gender and year, EU27 (hours per week)



Notes: Question was only asked if respondent indicated that they are involved in the activity daily/several times a week/once or twice a week. For those with lower involvement, hours were assumed to be zero. Question wording differs across survey years. In 2007, question in panel a referred to ‘caring for and educating children’. In 2016, question in panel a referred to the sum of two question items: ‘caring for and/or educating your children’ and ‘caring for and/or educating your grandchildren’. In 2007, question in panel b referred to ‘caring for elderly/disabled relatives’. In 2016, question in panel b referred to the sum of two question items: ‘caring for disabled or infirm family members, neighbours or friends under 75 years old’ and ‘caring for disabled or infirm family members, neighbours or friends aged 75 or over’.

Source: Author’s calculations using data from European Quality of Life Survey.

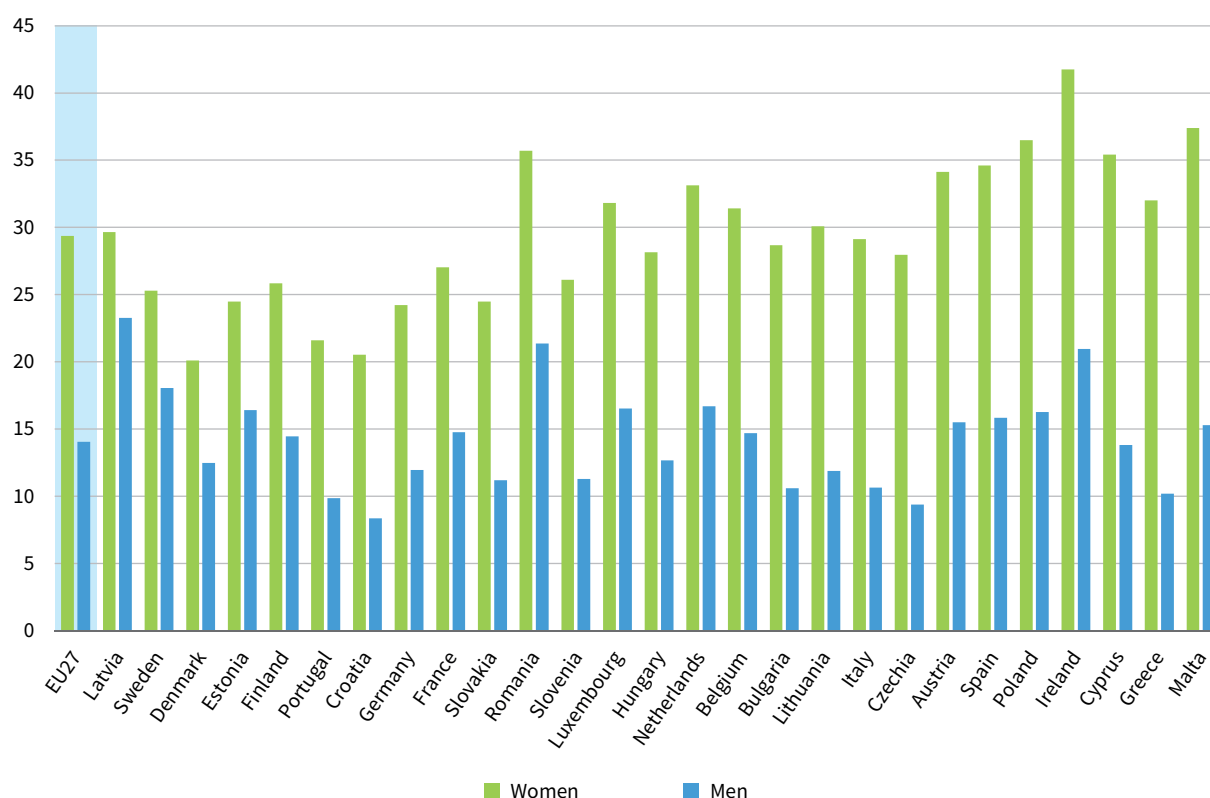
13 Author’s calculations using Eurobarometer 87.4 data (European Commission, 2017).

The gender divide in time use regarding cooking and housework tasks is wider, with men and women dedicating approximately 6 and 15 hours per week to these tasks, respectively. For unpaid childcare and other care work, gender discrepancies in average time use have not diminished over time. Conversely, the gender discrepancy in cooking and housework has reduced slightly over time, resulting from a decline in the number of hours spent by women and an increase in the number of hours spent by men on these activities.

Similar to the gender gaps in rates of employment, differences between women and men in the volume of unpaid work also vary considerably across EU Member States. Figure 8 illustrates country variations in the average hours of unpaid work carried out by men and women, calculated as the total time spent on cooking and housework, childcare, and caring for family members, neighbours or friends who have disabilities or other care needs, as reported in the European Quality of

Life Survey responses in 2016. Reflecting the traditional roles of men as the primary providers of paid labour and women as the providers of unpaid work, and the way in which time allocated to paid work reduces the time allocated to unpaid work, the country ordering in Figure 8 closely follows the ordering in Figure 2 (illustrating the country variation in gender employment gap). The countries with the widest gender divides in paid work also exhibit the widest gender divides in unpaid work. Broadly speaking, a north-south divide emerges, from Latvia, Sweden, Denmark and Estonia, with the smallest – but still considerable – gender gaps in unpaid work (below 10 hours per week), to Ireland, Cyprus, Greece and Malta, with gaps in excess of 20 hours per week. The most notable exception to the general pattern is Lithuania, which has the lowest gender gap in employment (2 percentage points) in the EU, and an above-average gender gap in unpaid work (18 hours).

Figure 8: Mean hours spent on unpaid work in 2016, by gender and country (hours per week)



Notes: Unpaid work includes caring for one's own children, caring for grandchildren, cooking and housework, and caring for disabled or infirm family members, neighbours, or friends. Member States are ordered by magnitude of the gender gap.

Source: Author's calculations using data from the European Quality of Life Survey 2016.

Total working time and time poverty

Although men engage in paid work to a greater extent than women do, while women carry out the majority of unpaid work, the gender imbalances in the two types of work do not cancel each other out. For this reason, women have longer total working weeks (including both paid and unpaid work), especially if they are engaged in full-time paid employment. Research into imbalances between women and men in total working time have uncovered nuanced gender divides that are driven by differences in time use between mothers and fathers (Craig, 2007; Hochschild and Machung, 1989). While gender equality has been increasing in paid work, progress towards gender equality has been slower in unpaid work. It has been proposed that the combination of greater gender balance in the former and gender imbalance in the latter contributes to lowering fertility over time in the US. The reason for the association is that incompatibility of the dual roles of women as labour market participants and principal child-rearers causes challenges that discourage women from having children (Torr and Short, 2004). Research from the US and Australia points to considerable gender discrepancies in total working time that are especially pronounced in dual-earner households with young children, with mothers carrying out significantly more work in total than men (Sayer et al, 2009).

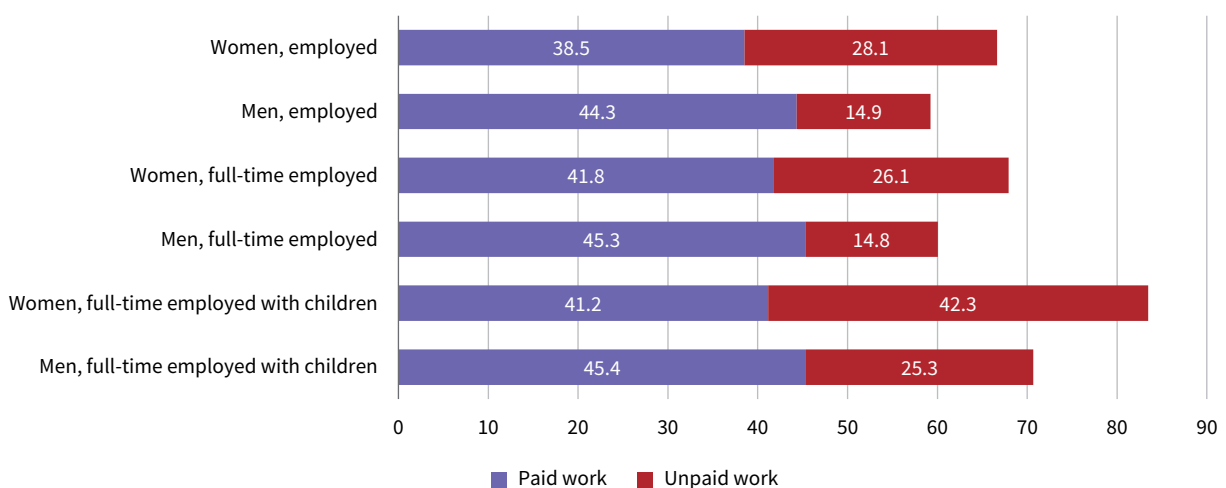
Based on data from the EU in 2016, Figure 9 illustrates that the general conclusions drawn in international literature also apply to the European case. When averaged across all working adults, it is evident that men carry out more paid work than women, while the gender roles are reversed when it comes to unpaid work. Working women carry out 7 more hours of work in total (both paid and unpaid) per week than working men. The gender gap results from men carrying out 6 additional hours of paid work and women carrying

out 13 additional hours of unpaid work. When only individuals in full-time employment are examined, the gender imbalance in total working time widens to 8 hours – the length of a standard working day – as the gap in paid work diminishes to 3 hours, while the gap in unpaid work falls less dramatically, to 11 hours. The widest gender divide in total working time is observed among parents who work full time. Among this group, fathers work for almost 71 hours per week (over 45 hours of paid work and over 25 hours of unpaid work), while the mothers work for an average of 83 hours (41 hours of paid time and 42 hours of unpaid time), making the gender gap in total working time 13 hours.

Time poverty is highly gendered, relating to the combination of paid and unpaid working hours and the needs of families and individuals. Hochschild and Machung (1989) were among the first to discuss the problem of time poverty and the ‘speeding up’ of professional and private lives with the increase of women’s labour market participation. Time can be seen as a limited resource that should be a means of generating personal well-being. The assumption is that some degree of leisure time – the residual time that remains in a person’s day after subtracting time spent on paid work, unpaid work and personal care (sleeping, eating and grooming) – is needed for well-being. It follows, therefore, that people who devote excessive time to total work are more likely to suffer from time poverty (Williams et al, 2016).

Figure 10 examines the variation in total working time across EU Member States, ranking countries by the magnitude of the gender difference. Latvia and Slovakia are the only Member States in which men’s total working time exceeds that of women. In Estonia, the total working time of women and men is virtually equal, whereas women’s total working week is longer than that of men – but by fewer hours than the EU average –

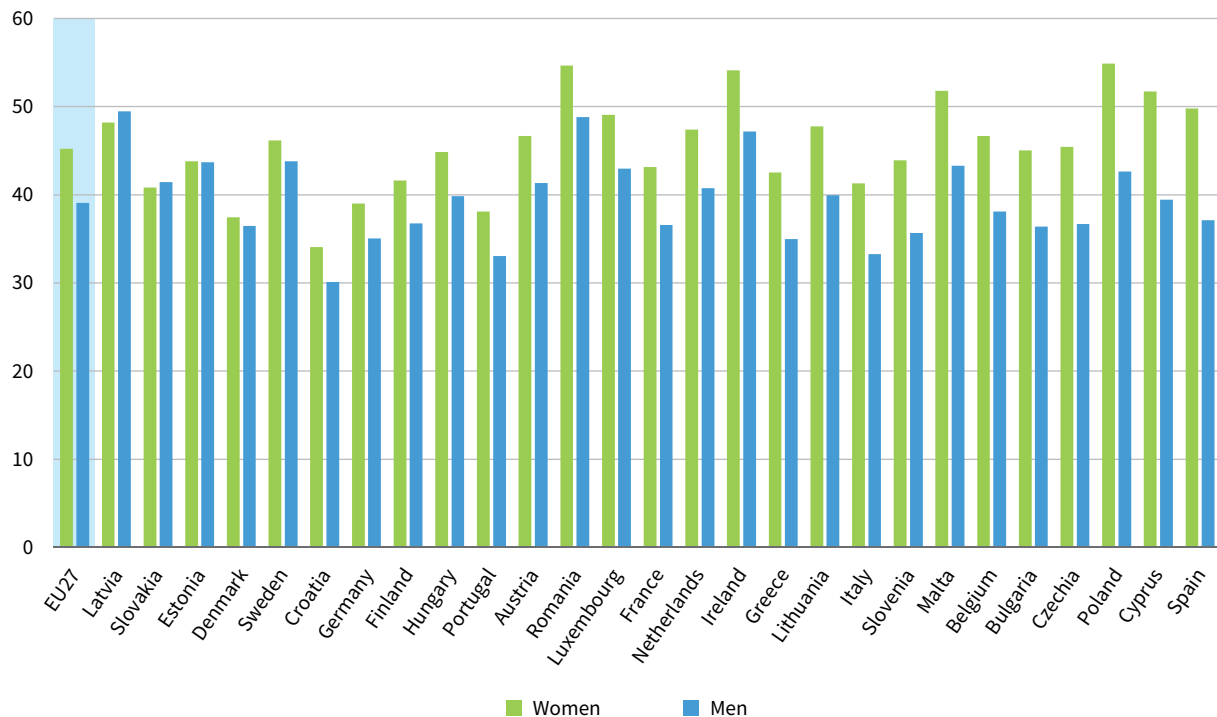
Figure 9: Mean total working time among employed individuals in 2016, EU27 (hours per week)



Notes: Paid work includes main job and additional jobs. Unpaid work includes caring for one’s own children, caring for grandchildren, cooking and housework, and caring for disabled or infirm family members, neighbours or friends.

Source: Author’s calculations using data from the European Quality of Life Survey 2016.

Figure 10: Mean hours spent on total work in 2016, by gender and country (hours per week)



Notes: See Figure 9 Notes. Member States are ordered by magnitude of the gender gap.
 Source: Author's calculations using data from the European Quality of Life Survey 2016.

in Denmark, Sweden, Croatia, Germany, Finland, Hungary, Portugal, Austria, Romania and Luxembourg. In Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Poland, Cyprus and Spain, the gender gap in total working time exceeds a standard 8-hour working day.

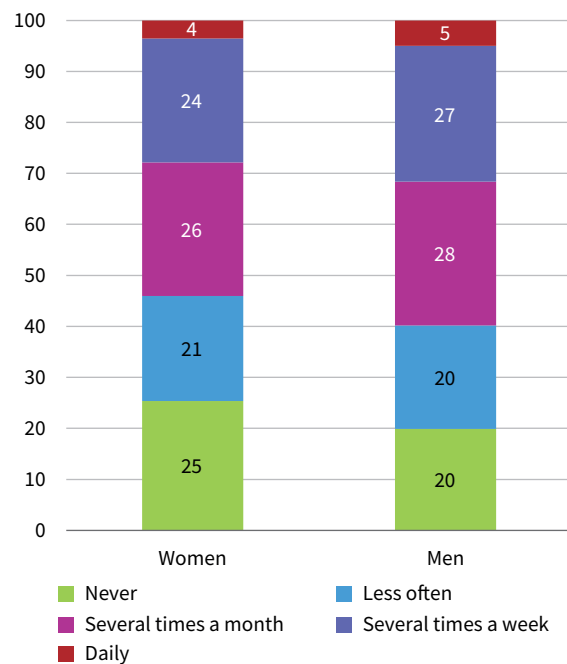
Leisure time

Due to the unavailability of time use data, gender equality in leisure time is a topic that is less often studied than the gender inequalities in work. However, understanding leisure time – and the lack of it – is important especially because the boundary between unpaid working time and leisure time becomes increasingly blurred as flexibility of paid work arrangements increases, for example, as a result of working from home.

Leisure time is a basic human need, consisting of many activities that a person likes to engage in, including physical exercise, social or cultural activities, participation in political or community activities, and volunteering (Davaki, 2016). For many people, leisure is a luxury and a scarce resource. The important role of leisure time as a coping strategy in dealing with stresses in one's life, and its association with physical health and general well-being, has been highlighted in research (Trenberth and Dewe, 2002; Paggi et al, 2016).

The European Working Conditions Survey collects individual-level data on the frequency of engagement in different types of leisure activity. Figure 11 presents the frequency with which men and women reported taking

Figure 11: Frequency of sporting, cultural or leisure activity participation by gender in 2015, EU27 (%)



Notes: Based on the question: 'In general, how often are you involved in any of the following activities outside work?' Answers to question subsection: 'Sporting, cultural or leisure activity outside your home.'
 Source: Author's calculations using data from the 2015 European Working Conditions Survey.

part in sporting, cultural or leisure activities outside the home in the latest pre-pandemic wave of data collection in 2015. Men are more likely (32%) than women (28%) to report that they engage in these activities at least several times a week. Similarly, men are less likely (20%) than women (25%) to report never taking part in such activities.

Gender inequalities in well-being and health

Risk of poverty or social exclusion

Closely related to the gender gaps in employment and wages is the gender divide in poverty and social exclusion, with women more likely to experience these than men. In 2019, the at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) rate was 2.1 percentage points higher among women (22.1%) than among men (20.0%) in the EU. The gender discrepancy widens with age, increasing to 2.7 percentage points among people aged 50–64 (with women’s rate at 23.4% and men’s rate at 20.7%) and further to 5.8 percentage points among people aged 65 and over (with women’s rate at 22.0% and men’s rate at 16.2%).¹⁴

The gender differences in poverty are closely related to the fact that labour market attachment is lower among women than men, leading to less eligibility for adequate social protection. Gender differences in poverty have also been linked to gender-specific rates of marriage, parenthood and labour market outcomes, both in the extensive margin (taking on paid employment) and in the intensive margin (gender differences in occupations and employment sectors and in part-time work and temporary contracts) (Casper et al, 1994; Aisa et al, 2019). Related to these gendered patterns, poverty rates have also been shown to be particularly high among single households headed by women. Women are the heads of the vast majority (85%) of one-parent families in the EU, with 48% of lone mothers and 32% of lone fathers at risk of poverty or social exclusion (EIGE, 2016).

Work–life conflict

Many studies have examined how individuals balance their time allocations and commitments between paid work, unpaid work and family or home time, and their private or personal time. These studies often cite gender differences in the outcomes (Crompton and Lyonette, 2006; Hofäcker and König, 2013). Reflecting

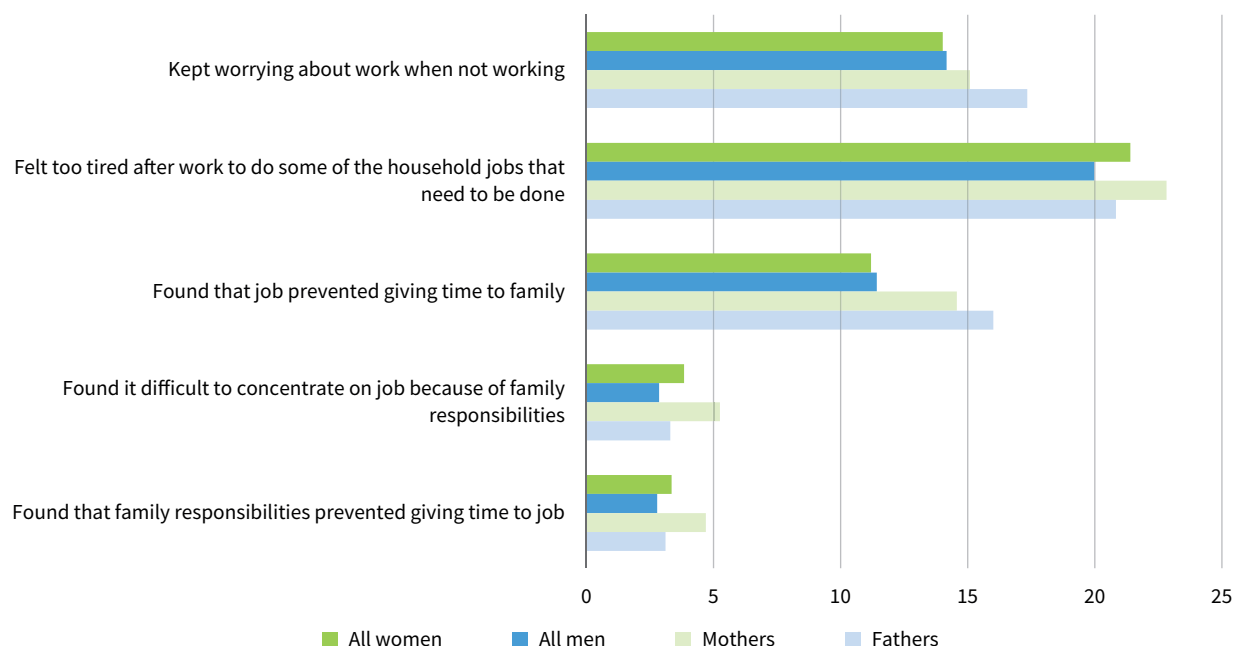
the traditional gender norms of women as the main providers of unpaid work at home, indicators of work–life balance also display gendered patterns. In interpreting statistics on work–life balance indicators, it is important to bear in mind that selection into entering labour markets is not random, meaning, for example, that individuals with care responsibilities – or major work–life conflicts – may opt out of paid work (and therefore are absent from work–life balance statistics).

Data from the European Working Conditions Survey provide pre-pandemic evidence about the prevalence of work–life conflicts among women and men in 2015. Figure 12 illustrates the shares of working women and men, and working mothers and fathers, who report various types of work–life conflicts. The deeper green and blue bars show the situation of all women and men (regardless of parenthood status): men were slightly more likely than women to report that they worry about work, or that work responsibilities negatively influence their family life. Worrying about work during free time was reported by 14.2% of men and 14.0% of women, while 11.4% of men and 11.2% of women reported that their job prevented them from giving time to their families. The gender patterns are reversed when it comes to measures of family responsibilities having a negative impact on paid work: 3.8% of women and 2.9% of men reported difficulties concentrating at work because of family responsibilities, while 3.4% of women and 2.8% of men reported family responsibilities preventing them from giving the necessary time to paid work. Similarly, women were somewhat more likely (21.4%) than men (20.0%) to report being too tired after work for household jobs.

As expected, the incidence of work–life conflict is higher among working parents than among the general working population. Focusing on the paler bars in Figure 12, it is evident that 22.8% of working mothers and 20.8% of working fathers reported that they were too tired after work for household jobs. Fathers were more likely (16.0%) than mothers (14.6%) to report that their job prevented them from giving time to their families, as well as being more likely (17.4%) than mothers (15.1%) to report worrying about work in their free time. Some 5.3% of mothers and 3.3% of fathers reported difficulties concentrating at work because of family responsibilities, while 4.7% of mothers and 3.1% of fathers reported family responsibilities preventing them from giving the necessary time to paid work.

¹⁴ Author’s calculations using data from EU SILC (ILC_PEPS01N).

Figure 12: Work–life conflict by gender and parenthood status, EU27 (%)



Note: Percentages of working people reporting these issues ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’ during the previous 12 months.
Source: Author’s calculations using data from European Working Conditions Survey in 2015.

The gendered patterns shown in the above analysis reflect the traditional gender norms of men being more heavily involved in paid work, while women bear the main responsibility for unpaid work. As a result, men are less likely than women to work part time. In a separate analysis of the data that focuses on full-time workers, all types of work–life conflict are more common among women than men (results not illustrated). This finding arises for two reasons: first, because conflicts generally increase as working hours increase and second, because women are more likely than men to work part time. Among people who work full time (regardless of parenthood status), 16.0% of women and 14.5% of men report worrying about work in their free time, while 24.2% of women and 20.7% of men report being too tired after work for household jobs, and 13.3% of women and 11.9% of men report that their job has prevented them from giving time to their families. On the other hand, family responsibilities having a negative impact on paid work is less sensitive to working hours,

probably because people working full time are more likely to have more substantial childcare arrangements in place and are likely to have smaller families.

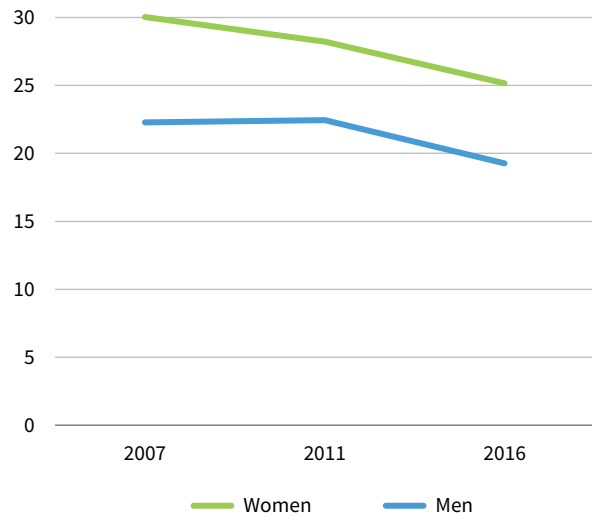
Health and well-being

When it comes to physical health, gender gaps are well documented in multiple dimensions. Women live longer than men. In 2019, life expectancy at birth in the EU was estimated at 84.0 years for women and 78.5 years for men, making the gender gap 5.5 years. Despite surviving for longer, women suffer more in terms of living a larger proportion of their lives in poor health, which stems from the fact that activity limitations are present in many of women’s additional life years: healthy life expectancy at birth in the EU (‘healthy life years’) in 2019 was estimated to be 64.2 years for men and only 0.9 years higher, at 65.1 years, for women. This means that men in the EU on average live 82% of their years free of disabilities, whereas this proportion is lower among women, at 78%.¹⁵

15 Author’s calculations using data from Eurostat (HLTH_HLYE).

Research conducted before the pandemic has shown that men and women experience different kinds of mental health problems, with women more likely to suffer from internalising disorders (for example, depression and anxiety), while men suffer more often from externalising disorders (for example, substance abuse and antisocial behaviour) (Rosenfield and Mouzon, 2013). This gender discrepancy in internalising disorders is reflected in the pre-pandemic data on the risk of depression in the EU (Figure 13). While the risk has been declining for both women and men over time, the gender gap is evident and persistent over time, with the prevalence 6 percentage points higher among women than among men on average between 2007 and 2016.

Figure 13: Risk of depression by gender and year, EU27 (%)



Notes: Based on the 5-item World Health Organization Well-Being Index (WHO-5). People with a WHO-5 score of 50 or lower are considered at risk of depression.

Source: Author's calculations using data from the European Quality of Life Survey 2016.

2 Gendered impact of the COVID-19 crisis on paid work

This chapter examines how the impacts of the pandemic and the resulting economic downturn have differed between women and men in the EU, and what lies behind these gender differences. The labour market indicators under examination are: rates of employment, unemployment and economic inactivity; actual hours worked; and absences from work for various reasons. The overall employment losses during the pandemic in the EU have been similar across genders, and the analysis of sectoral gender segregation and the pandemic's differential impacts on employment sectors illustrates the mechanisms behind this overall trend. Evidence about the gendered employment impact of the crisis on different socioeconomic groups of workers based on their age and level of earnings is also given. Additional topics examined are the gendered dimensions of working from home during the pandemic, working conditions, changes to labour supply and the impact on informal workers.

Gender differences in the Great Recession

Before analysing the gendered labour market impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in 2020, it is useful to consider the differences between the experiences of women and men during the most recent pre-pandemic global economic recession.

The experience during the Great Recession, which started in 2008, is that men were more negatively impacted than women in terms of employment, which gave rise to the term 'man-cession'. The factor leading

to the emergence of a 'man-cession' was that women's labour supply is commonly less volatile in terms of business cycle fluctuations than that of men. The lower volatility of women's employment stems from two factors: gender segregation in employment sectors and within-family insurance (Alon et al, 2020). The ways in which these two factors contribute to the higher likelihood of 'man-cessions' during economic downturns are discussed in the next two paragraphs. From this perspective, although a lower degree of gender segregation in sectors enhances overall gender equality in the labour markets, it also lowers the potential for within-family insurance in recessions. Gender segregation in employment sectors reduces the probability that both partners in a man-woman couple will lose employment in a recession, while lower gender segregation increases this risk.

During the Great Recession, the immediate labour market shock was more severe for men than women in the EU overall. This was mainly due to sectoral gender segregation, with men overrepresented in production occupations such as construction and manufacturing, making up 90% and 70%, respectively, of total employees in these two sectors in the EU.¹⁶ These sectors were severely affected by job losses. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to work in service occupations, which were less affected by job loss, particularly in the early stages of the Great Recession. The recovery period and the austerity measures brought in during the recession's aftermath, on the other hand, were more damaging to women's employment, because the downturn spread to women-dominated service sectors and cuts were made to public sector

Box 1: Comparing pre-pandemic data with pandemic-period data

It is important to bear in mind that, in many instances, statistics compiled from pre-pandemic survey data are not directly comparable with survey data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is because the survey mode was often changed during the crisis from a face-to-face interview to a telephone interview or an online survey. In addition, many surveys that had been carried out in pre-pandemic years were suspended during the crisis, and new surveys were launched. Although the representativeness of the surveyed samples can be adjusted with weighting, the population groups that have taken part in surveys, and the ways in which respondents have given their answers, are likely to differ between pre-pandemic and pandemic periods. Therefore, comparisons over time need to be made with caution.

16 Author's calculations from 2020 annual EU-LFS data (LFSA_EGAN2). People aged 15-64.

employment and public services provision (Périer, 2018; MacPhail, 2017).

The second mechanism that contributes to ‘man-cessions’ is that economic downturns can increase women’s employment if they boost women’s labour supply as a form of within-family insurance, in an attempt to cushion a household from the income shock resulting from a male partner’s job loss.¹⁷ The increase in employment may arise either from women entering employment or from working women increasing their working hours.

Employment impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The pandemic has led to significant falls in employment, paid working hours and income in many countries. In the EU, there were 5.5 million fewer people in employment in Q2 2020 – at the height of the initial lockdown period of the pandemic – than in the same period in 2019. This corresponds to a 2 percentage point decline in the employment rate. During the same period, average weekly working hours declined by 1.1 hours (or by 3%).¹⁸

The wide adoption of protective labour market policies, such as job retention schemes, has meant that employment losses and the rise in unemployment have been mitigated. In addition, income protection policies have lessened financial difficulties among those affected by job loss. Early estimates indicate that income from work declined by more than 7% during the first year of the pandemic. However, it is likely that social benefits and short-term work schemes counteracted these declines and cushioned the resulting shocks to disposable income (Eurostat, 2021a).

Labour markets in Europe and worldwide were particularly severely affected, especially in the early stages of the pandemic, due to the widespread restrictions on businesses and people’s daily lives. The nature of work was affected by the restrictions, as working from home became recommended or mandated for many workers. Compared with the alternative of not working at all, telework has served as an important tool in preventing job losses, reductions in working hours and furloughing among many European workers, by allowing people to work while socially distancing from others.

Employment has decreased in certain sectors while it has increased in others. The sectors most affected by declining employment and hours worked are those where activity was curtailed by government lockdown orders, for example arts, entertainment, leisure,

transport, retail and accommodation and food services (Eurofound and European Commission Joint Research Centre, 2021b). These sectors saw total losses of 2,455,000 jobs (or 5.1% of employment in these sectors) between 2019 and 2020. Employment also contracted – by 130,000 workers (or by 0.6%) – in the human health and social work sectors. Examining these data in more detail at the more granular level of sectoral breakdown, the job losses were driven by the steep employment declines in the residential care sector, which saw a net loss of 413,000 jobs (or 9.6% of employment), while the number of jobs increased slightly (by 36,000, or 0.3%) in human health activities – the sector that has been arguably the most visible as frontline workers have been under pressure to safeguard the basic functioning of our societies during the crisis. Employment also increased in non-residential social work activities – by 247,000 workers (or 5.5%). On the other hand, employment increased in many teleworkable sectors. For example, the number of people in employment in the information and communication sector increased by 475,000 (or by 7.8%) between 2019 and 2020, while in the financial and insurance activities sector employment increased by 153,000 workers (or by 3.0%).¹⁹

Concerns about a pandemic ‘she-cession’

The COVID-19 crisis differs in many aspects from the Great Recession. Aside from the direct impact of the virus on people, the widely adopted actions of governments in restricting the activities and movements of people had both immediate and longer-lasting impacts on both labour demand and labour supply in different sectors and occupations. The demand for labour declined in sectors that were closed down. The lockdown measures affected the provision of many services, for example through the closures of schools and childcare facilities. In this way, the pandemic created additional demand for unpaid work, mainly in the form of education and care of children when schools and childcare services were closed. The additional need for unpaid work at home resulted in reductions in labour supply, with some women exiting the labour market or reducing their working hours.

The crisis also caused changes in the delivery and availability of services such as healthcare. The nature of work changed for many workers, who switched their location of work from the employer’s premises to their own home. These defining characteristics of the pandemic and the resulting economic recession imply that their consequences – in the immediate pandemic period but also in the longer run – may also differ from what has been seen in the past.

¹⁷ See Lundberg (1985) and Killingsworth and Heckman (1986).

¹⁸ Author’s calculations using data from EU-LFS (LFSI_EMP_Q). Seasonally adjusted data (LFSQ_EWHAN2). People aged 20–64 years.

¹⁹ Author’s calculations using data from EU-LFS (LFS_A_EGAN2 and LFS_A_EGAN22D). People aged 20–64 years.

The characteristics of the pandemic recession discussed above have led to concerns that the consequences may be particularly detrimental for women, both at work and at home, meaning that the progress that had been made towards gender equality in the decades preceding the pandemic may be reversed to some extent, and the setbacks may take a long time to undo.

The main reason for the concern about a disproportionate negative impact on women’s employment – termed a ‘she-cession’ – is the overrepresentation of women in employment sectors, such as hospitality, that were severely affected by the lockdown measures widely implemented from the spring of 2020, thereby potentially reducing the employment prospects of women in particular.

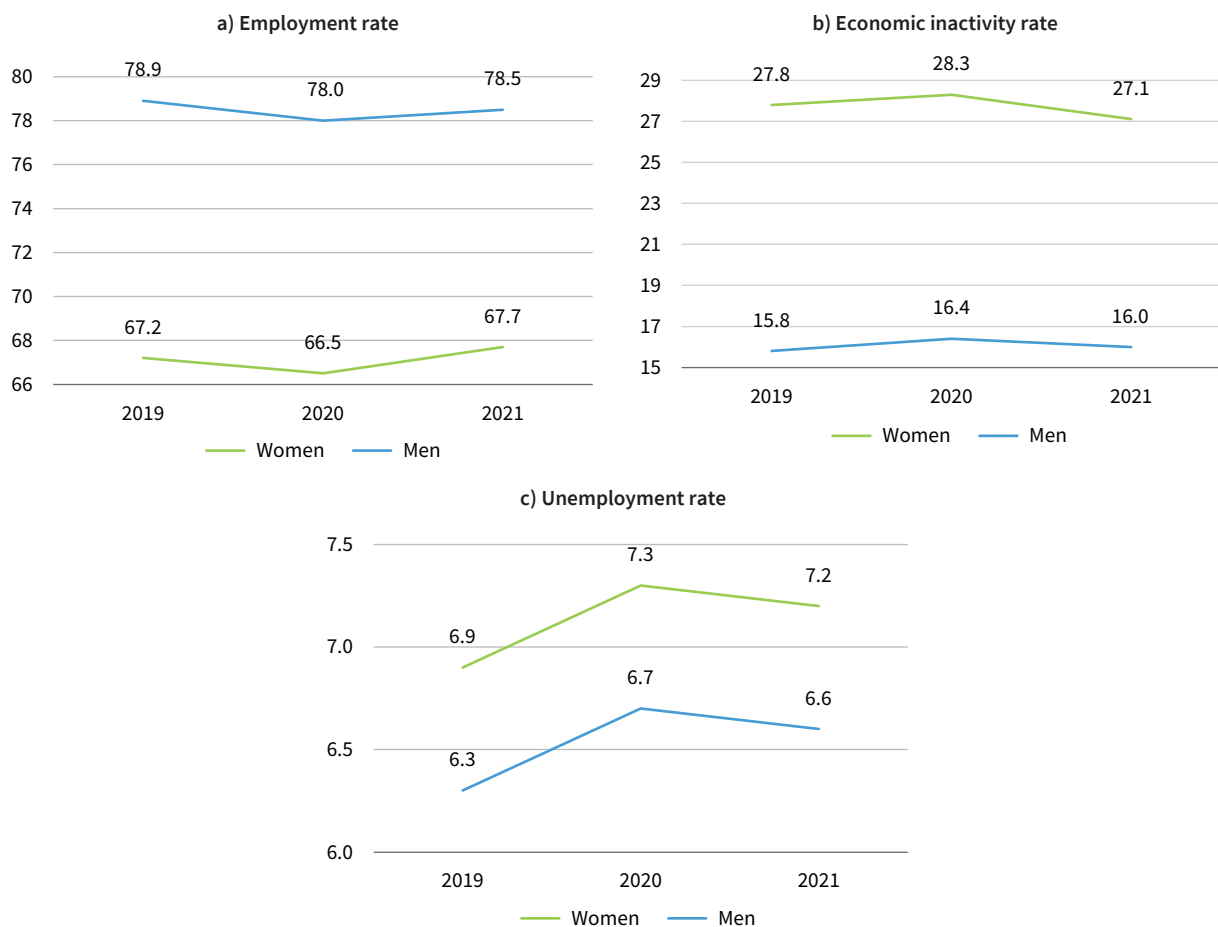
Impact of the pandemic on gender divides in paid work

As highlighted in Chapter 1 of this report, sectoral gender segregation implies that women are more likely than men to work in sectors that were effectively closed

by pandemic-related restrictions. Therefore, the initial expectation was that the labour market impact could be more severe on women than on men. Data gathered in different countries early in the pandemic pointed towards the emergence of a ‘she-cession’. Estimates suggested that, globally, women’s employment declined by 4.2% between 2019 and 2020, compared with a decline of 3.0% among men (ILO, 2021). In the US, women’s unemployment rate peaked at 14% in April 2020, compared with men’s at 12%.²⁰

Contrary to the initial concerns, the statistics that cover a longer time span uncover remarkably gender-equal aggregate employment impacts of the pandemic in the EU (see Figure 14). Over the course of 2020 and 2021, gender gaps narrowed slightly at the EU27 level in terms of employment rates and economic inactivity rates, while the gender gap in unemployment remained unchanged. The narrowing of the gender employment gap (from 11.7 to 11.5 percentage points between 2019 and 2020 and further to 10.8 percentage points in 2021) has resulted from a steeper decline (between 2019 and 2020) and a weaker recovery (between 2020 and 2021)

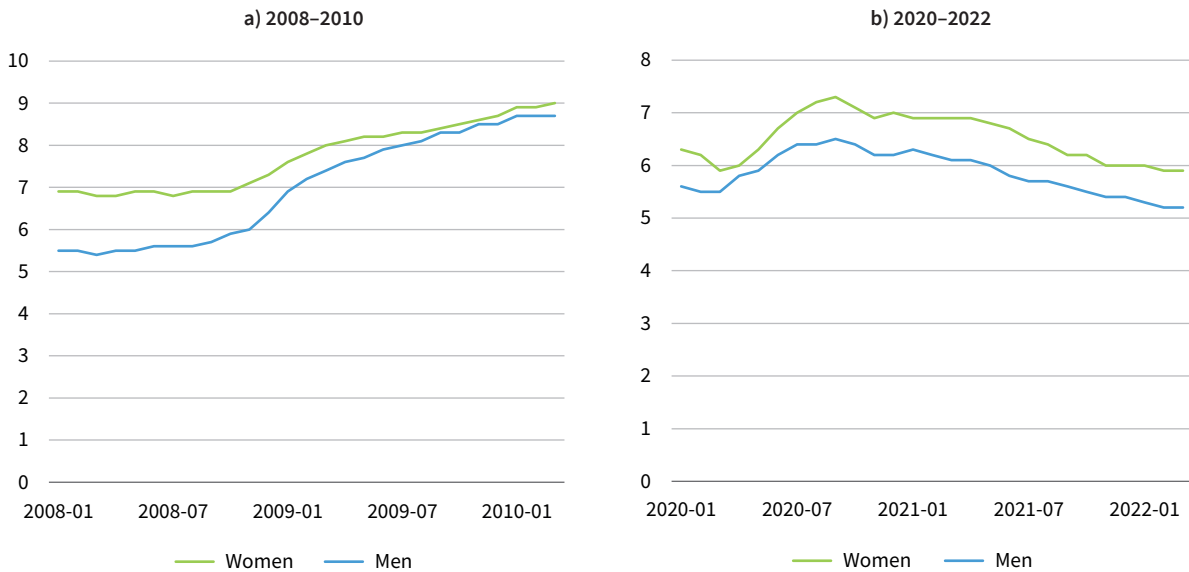
Figure 14: Annual labour market indicators, 2019–2021, EU27 (%)



Source: Author’s calculations using data from EU-LFS (LFSA_ERGAN, LFSA_IPGA, LFSA_URGAN). People aged 20–64 years.

20 Author’s calculations using data from Eurostat LFS (UNE_RT_M). People aged 25–74. Seasonally adjusted data.

Figure 15: Monthly unemployment rate by gender, EU27 (%)



Source: Author’s calculations using data from EU-LFS (UNE_RT_M). People aged 25–74. Seasonally adjusted data.

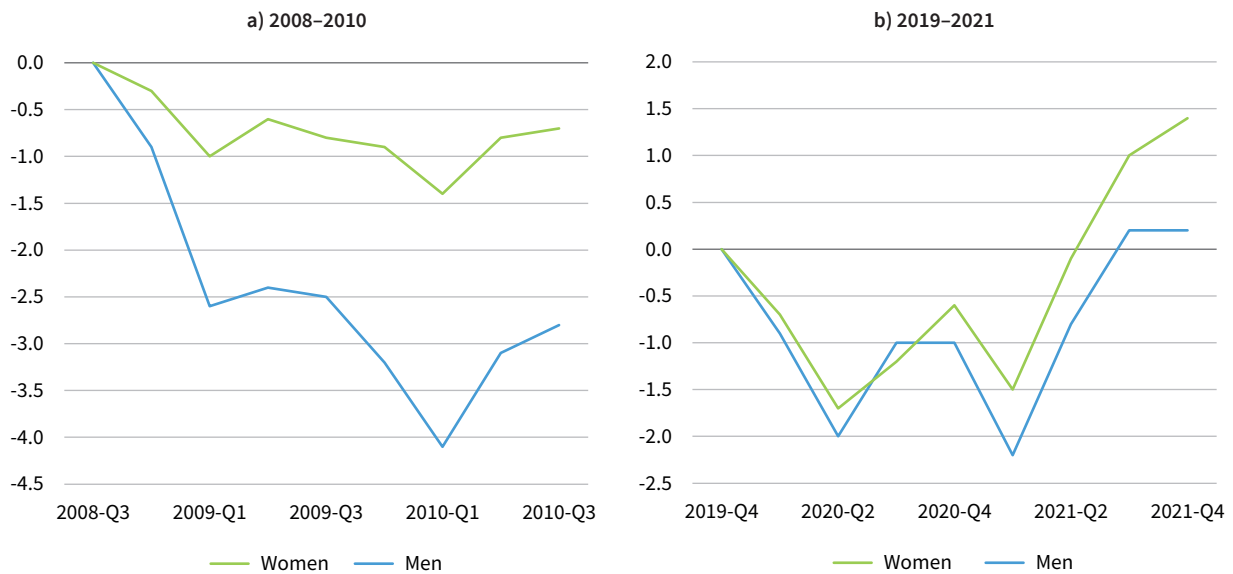
in men’s employment rate compared to that of women. The narrowing of the gender gap in the rate of economic inactivity (from 12.0 to 11.9 percentage points between 2019 and 2020 and further to 11.1 percentage points in 2021) has resulted from a steeper increase (between 2019 and 2020) and a weaker recovery (between 2020 and 2021) among men than women. Throughout this time period, the gender gap in the rate of unemployment remained at 0.6 percentage points, as men and women experienced initial increases and subsequent decreases of equal magnitude in terms of percentage point changes.

Figure 15 illustrates the experiences of men and women in EU labour markets, in terms of unemployment during the Great Recession (panel a) and the pandemic recession (panel b). It is evident that the initial impact of the Great Recession can be characterised as a ‘man-cession’, with men suffering larger employment shocks than women. During the Great Recession, men’s unemployment rate increased by 3.3 percentage points, from 5.4% in March 2008 to 8.7% two years later. Meanwhile, women’s unemployment rate increased by 2.2 percentage points, from 6.8% to 9.0%. While women’s unemployment rate exceeded that of men throughout this time period, the increase in men’s

unemployment rate was more substantial in both absolute and relative terms. During the pandemic, between January and September 2020 (when unemployment rates reached their peak), men’s unemployment rate increased by 0.9 percentage points, from 5.6% to 6.5%. Meanwhile, women’s unemployment rate increased by 1.0 percentage point, from 6.3% to 7.3%, meaning that the increase in unemployment during the pandemic has been more short-lived and less severe than during the Great Recession. The pandemic recession resulted in a rise in unemployment that has been similar in (both absolute and relative) magnitude for women and men.

A similar analysis of EU employment rates is presented in Figure 16. Characteristics of a ‘man-cession’ are evident when examining the Great Recession trends, with men suffering larger shocks to employment: men’s employment rate declined by 2.8 percentage points, from 77.8% in Q3 2008 to 75.0% two years later, while women’s employment rate fell by 0.7 percentage points, from 62.2% to 61.5%. During the pandemic, between Q4 2019 and Q2 2020, men’s employment rate declined by 2.0 percentage points, and women’s rate fell by 1.7 percentage points, suggesting a relatively gender-neutral shock to aggregate employment.

Figure 16: Quarterly employment rate by gender (change from Q3 2008/Q4 2019), EU27 (percentage points)

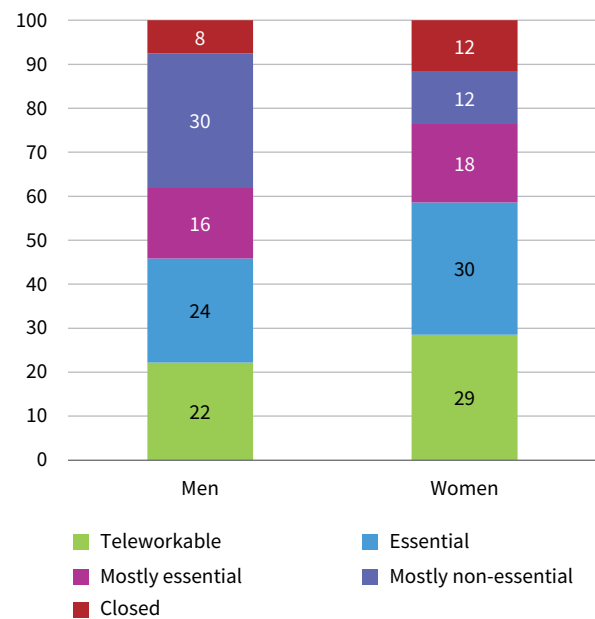


Source: Author's calculations using data from EU-LFS (LFSQ_ERGAN). People aged 20–64.

Sectoral differences in employment loss

In analysing the labour market effects of the pandemic situation, it is useful to categorise employment sectors into groups that were affected in different ways by non-pharmaceutical interventions imposed by governments, in attempts to control the spread of the coronavirus. Following the classification of employment sectors developed by Fana et al (2020), sectors can be divided into five broad groups: those that were classified as providing essential or mostly essential goods and services, those that were deemed non-essential or widely closed during the pandemic, and those in which social distancing was achievable by telework. Figure 17 characterises the pre-pandemic sectoral gender segregation from the viewpoint of this categorisation. It is evident that the earlier observation that women are more likely than men to work in sectors that were widely closed as the virus spread is correct. However, examining the gender imbalance in the other sectors adds a layer of nuance to the narrative, allowing a deeper understanding of why the expectations of a ‘she-cession’ did not materialise, at least in the EU aggregate data. Many more men than women in the EU work in ‘mostly non-essential’ sectors which mainly consist of manufacturing and construction activities. Women, on the other hand, are more likely than men to work in ‘essential’ and ‘mostly essential’ sectors, which include food production, utilities and healthcare, as well as some key retail and manufacturing activities. Moreover, women are more likely than men to work in teleworkable sectors, which has protected the employment of many people and has therefore contributed to the overall gender balance in the labour market impact of the crisis.

Figure 17: Share of employment in sector groups by gender in 2019, EU27 (% of total employment by gender)

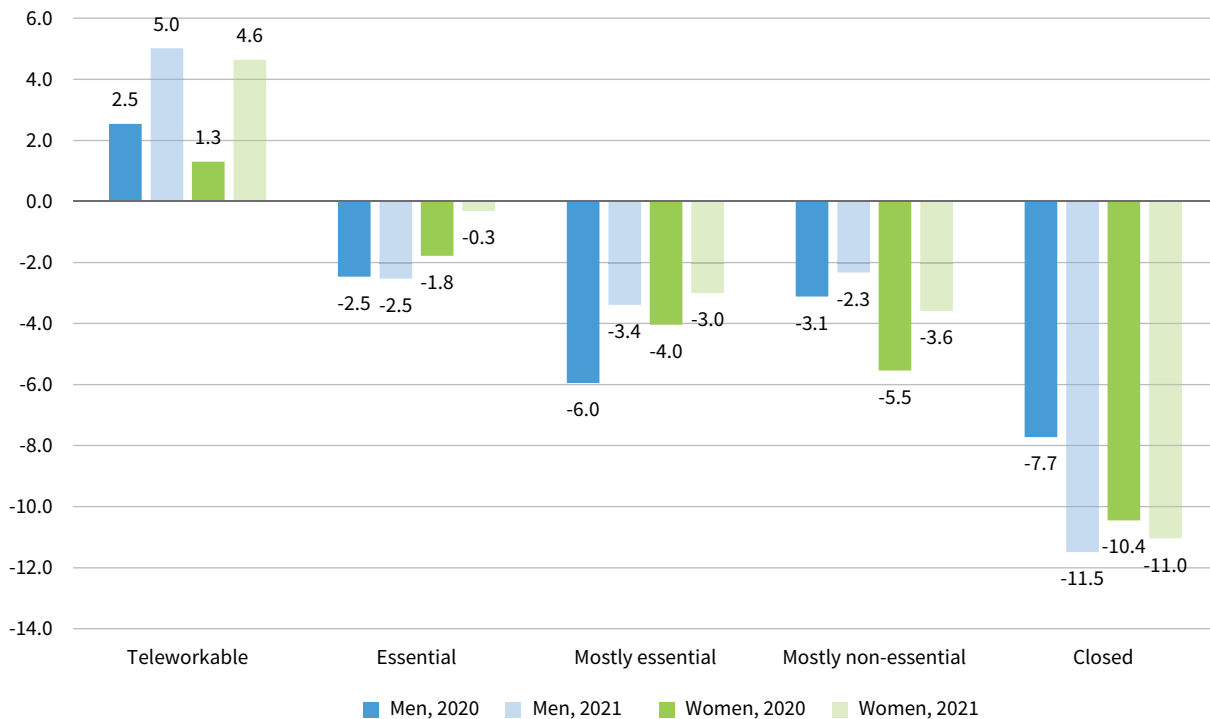


Notes: Percentage of total employment by gender. Classification of sectors during lockdown based on Fana et al (2020).

Source: Author's calculations using data from Eurostat (LFSQ_EGAN22D, 20–64 years), Q2 2019. Seasonally adjusted data.

The next part of the analysis examines the employment outcomes for women and men who were working in these five groups of sectors in the EU during the COVID-19 crisis. As shown in Figure 18, between Q2 2019 and Q2 2020, employment increased in teleworkable

Figure 18: Change in employment compared with Q2 2019, in sector groups by gender, EU27 (%)



Notes: Classification of sectors during lockdown based on Fana et al (2020).

Source: Author’s calculations using data from EU-LFS (LFSQ_EGAN22D, 20–64 years), Q2 2020 and Q2 2021, in comparison with Q2 2019. Seasonally adjusted data.

sectors. In contrast, employment declined in the other four sectoral groups. The change in employment was more pronounced among men than among women in all sectoral groups, with the exceptions of non-essential and closed sectors, which suffered the largest falls in employment, and in which women lost a larger share of employment than men. Examining the longer-run trends, employment numbers continued to increase into 2021 in teleworkable sectors, while the situation recovered somewhat in the three middle sectoral groups. The exception is the closed sectors, where employment continued to decline. An explanation for this is the continuation throughout the pandemic period of varying degrees of restrictions that have been placed on these sectors, which include hotels, restaurants and accommodation, estate agencies, travel agencies, and leisure and recreation services.

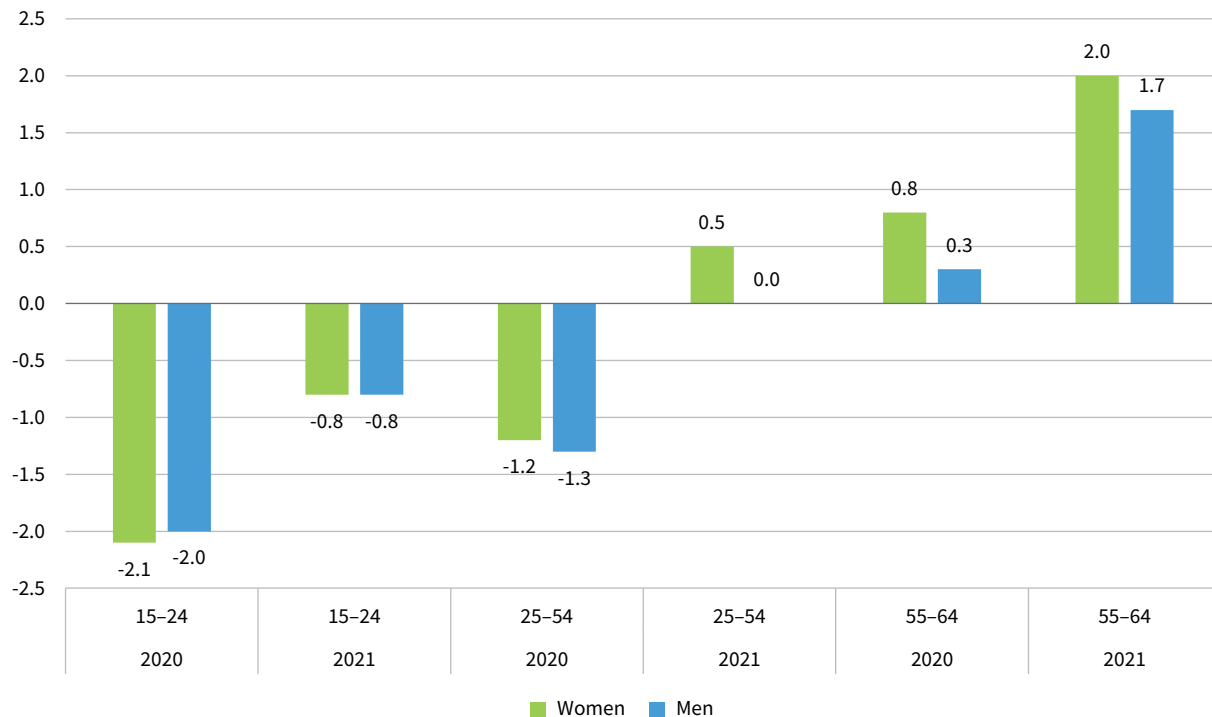
Variation in employment losses by age and earnings

A more granular picture emerges when the figures are presented for subgroups of women and men. The general picture painted by the data is that employment losses in the EU were concentrated among the youngest and lowest-earning groups of workers. As analysis by

Fana et al (2020) reveals, these demographic groups are overrepresented in closed and non-essential sector groups, while workers in teleworkable sectors are more likely to be older, more highly educated and higher-earning.

The rates of job loss across workers’ age groups are presented in Figure 19. It is evident in annual data that a decline in the rate of employment was observed between 2019 and 2020, while a recovery can be seen in the 2021 data. For both women and men, job losses were concentrated among the youngest age group (aged 15–24 years), which is also evident in the fact that only among this age group has employment not returned to the 2019 level. Among the oldest age group (55–64 years), employment expanded between 2019 and 2020, and it continued to expand into 2021. The gender breakdown provided in the figure illustrates that the employment changes have been similar across women and men in the youngest age group, while recovery in 2021 has been more positive for women than for men in the middle age category, and the gains in employment across 2020 and 2021 were more significant for women than for men in the oldest age group.

Figure 19: Change in annual employment rate compared with 2019, by gender and age group, EU27 (percentage points)

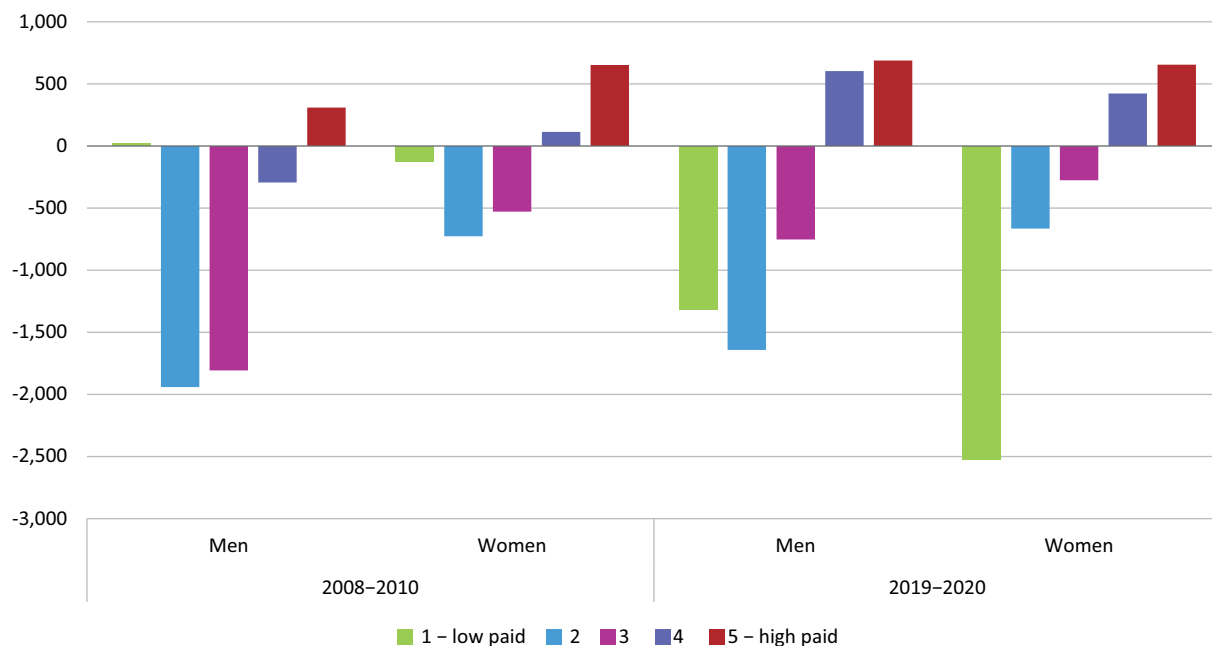


Source: Author's calculations based on data from EU-LFS (LFSI_EMP_A).

Figure 20 illustrates how employment losses varied by earnings and gender during the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic. In contrast to the Great Recession – when the sharpest losses were recorded in the middle of the job–wage distribution – employment falls have

been sharpest in low-paid jobs during the pandemic. That highlights the sharp contraction in employment among the bottom earnings quintile, especially among women (Eurofound, 2021b).

Figure 20: Employment shifts (thousands) by gender and job–wage quintile: two crisis periods compared, EU27



Note: Based on EU-LFS data from Q2 of each year. Seasonally adjusted data. Source: Eurofound (2021b).

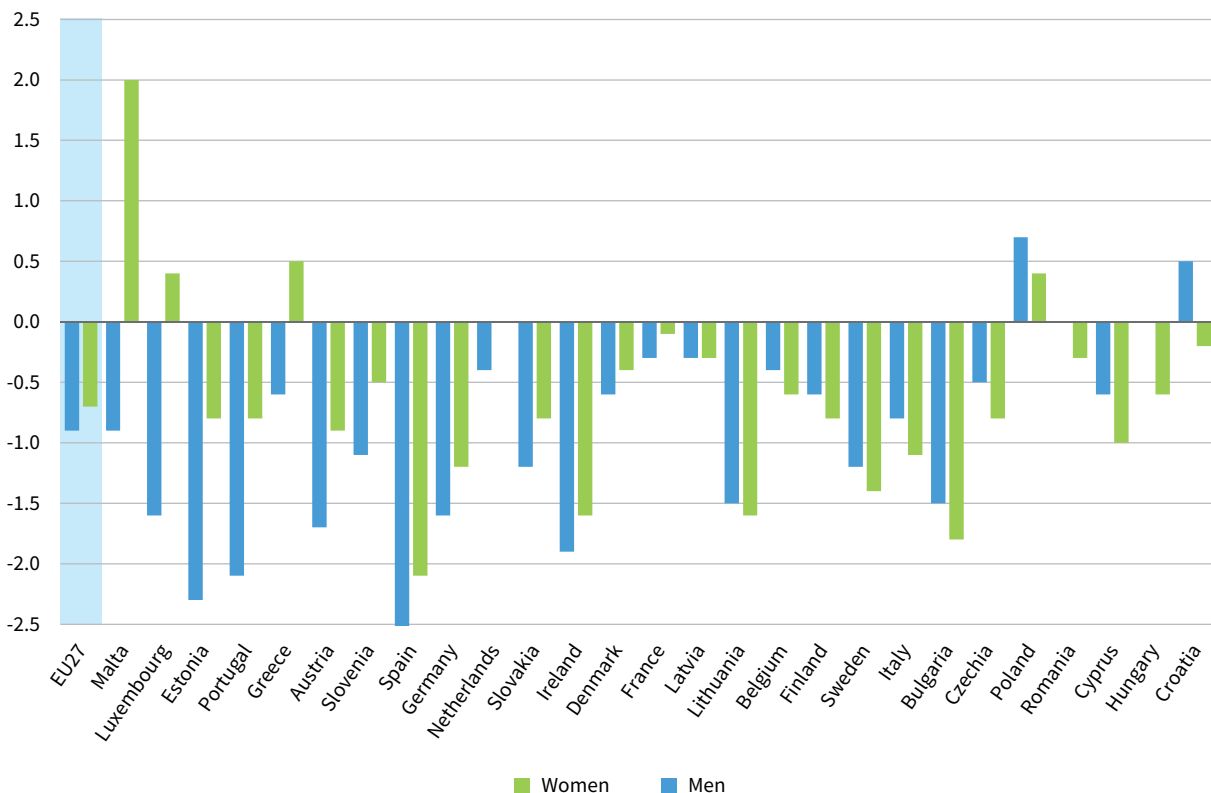
Country variation in gendered employment losses

The EU averages of the labour market impacts of the pandemic – and the gender differences in the patterns – disguise considerable variability between Member States. Figure 21 explores gender differences across countries in the initial employment rate impact of the pandemic, effectively measuring the degree of ‘man-cession’ or ‘she-cession’ experienced in each EU Member State. The employment rate of men declined more than that of women (characterised as a ‘man-cession’) in the EU overall between 2019 and 2020, and the same pattern was evident in 14 individual Member States, most notably in Malta, Luxembourg, Estonia, Portugal and Greece, where the gender gap in change in employment rate was more than 1 percentage point to the disadvantage of men. At the other end of the spectrum, a relative ‘she-cession’ was evident in 12 Member States in the sense that women’s employment rate declined more than that of men. However, the gender differences were marginal: in no Member State was the gender gap in change in

employment rate greater than 1 percentage point to the disadvantage of women.

Many reasons have been put forward in the literature to explain the variability across countries when it comes to gender differences in the employment loss effects of the pandemic. These include gender disparities in both labour demand factors and labour supply factors, as well as differences in policy environments. Previous research has found that women’s employment suffered comparatively large losses in countries with high labour market participation among women (especially mothers), in countries with a lot of employment among women in hard-hit sectors such as tourism, in countries with high COVID-19 infection rates that led to strict restrictive measures and long closures of schools and childcare facilities, and in countries with weaker policy responses in terms of employment retention (for example in the US). On the other hand, men have suffered greater employment losses relative to women in countries (for example Portugal and Austria) that had also witnessed pronounced ‘man-cessions’ during past downturns (Dang and Nguyen, 2021; Alon et al, 2022).

Figure 21: Change in annual employment rate by gender and country (from 2019 to 2020) (percentage points)



Notes: In the cases of women in the Netherlands and men in Romania and Hungary, there was no change over this time period, and therefore just one bar is shown in each case.

Source: Author’s calculations using data from EU-LFS (LFSA_ERGAN). People aged 20–64.

Changes to labour supply by workers

During the pandemic, labour markets have been affected not only by the decisions of employers and governments in terms of labour demand in certain sectors and industries, but also by shifts in labour supply on the part of the workers. Some have decided to reduce their labour supply by cutting back their working hours, while others have exited the labour market altogether by transitioning into inactivity or into retirement. Due to these shifts (as well as widespread employment support measures), the rise in unemployment has been lower than it could otherwise have been. Labour supply has also increased in certain industries that have become more attractive to people entering the labour force or to workers who have changed jobs during the pandemic.

The so-called ‘Great Resignation’ of workers from their jobs during the pandemic – either to move to another job or to leave the labour market altogether – has been a topic of much discussion, especially in the US. Possible pandemic-related drivers of resignations from jobs include increased demands to provide unpaid work in the home, changing priorities in life, exhaustion at work and improvements in workers’ financial situation due to savings accumulated during the crisis. The ‘Great Retirement’ is a term coined to describe the pandemic-period increase in rates of retirement. The phenomenon is not necessarily crisis-induced, but rather reflects the fact that many workers of the ‘baby boomer’ generation, born after the Second World War, are approaching retirement.

Although definitive statistics for examining reductions in labour supply are scarce, labour market statistics offer some indications. There is no evidence of an increase in the rate of retirement among older worker groups in the pandemic-period labour market statistics: the labour force participation rate of the 55- to 64-year-olds continued to increase between 2019 and 2021 among both women and men in the EU, maintaining the pre-pandemic upward trend over time.²¹ At the EU level, there is some evidence of an increase in exits from the labour market, especially among women. The rate of transition from employment to inactivity increased by 0.6 percentage points (from 3.6% to 4.2%) between 2019 and 2020 among men, while it increased by 1.0 percentage point (from 5.4% to 6.4%) among women.²² Labour market statistics from early 2020 suggest that, in the EU, women were also more likely than men to transition from unemployment to inactivity (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021b).

National-level studies suggest that more women than men have reduced their working hours or left the labour market altogether in order to meet increased unpaid work demands during the pandemic. For example, examining data from the US, Collins et al (2020) find that mothers with young children reduced their working hours four to five times as much as fathers, while German data suggest that women’s likelihood of reducing their working hours was 4 percentage points higher during the pandemic than that of men (Hipp and Bünning, 2021). In a survey carried out in France in the spring of 2020, women were more likely than men to leave their jobs to provide unpaid work at home (Lambert et al, 2020). In Luxembourg and Germany, evidence suggests that more women than men have left the labour market during the pandemic for care reasons (G. Menta, personal communication, 25 January 2022; P. Poutvaara, personal communication, 20 January 2022). To combat this trend, government support measures for the formal care sector have potentially prevented mothers working in other sectors from reducing their labour market input (see Chapter 5 for policy analysis).

Temporary lay-offs and working hours

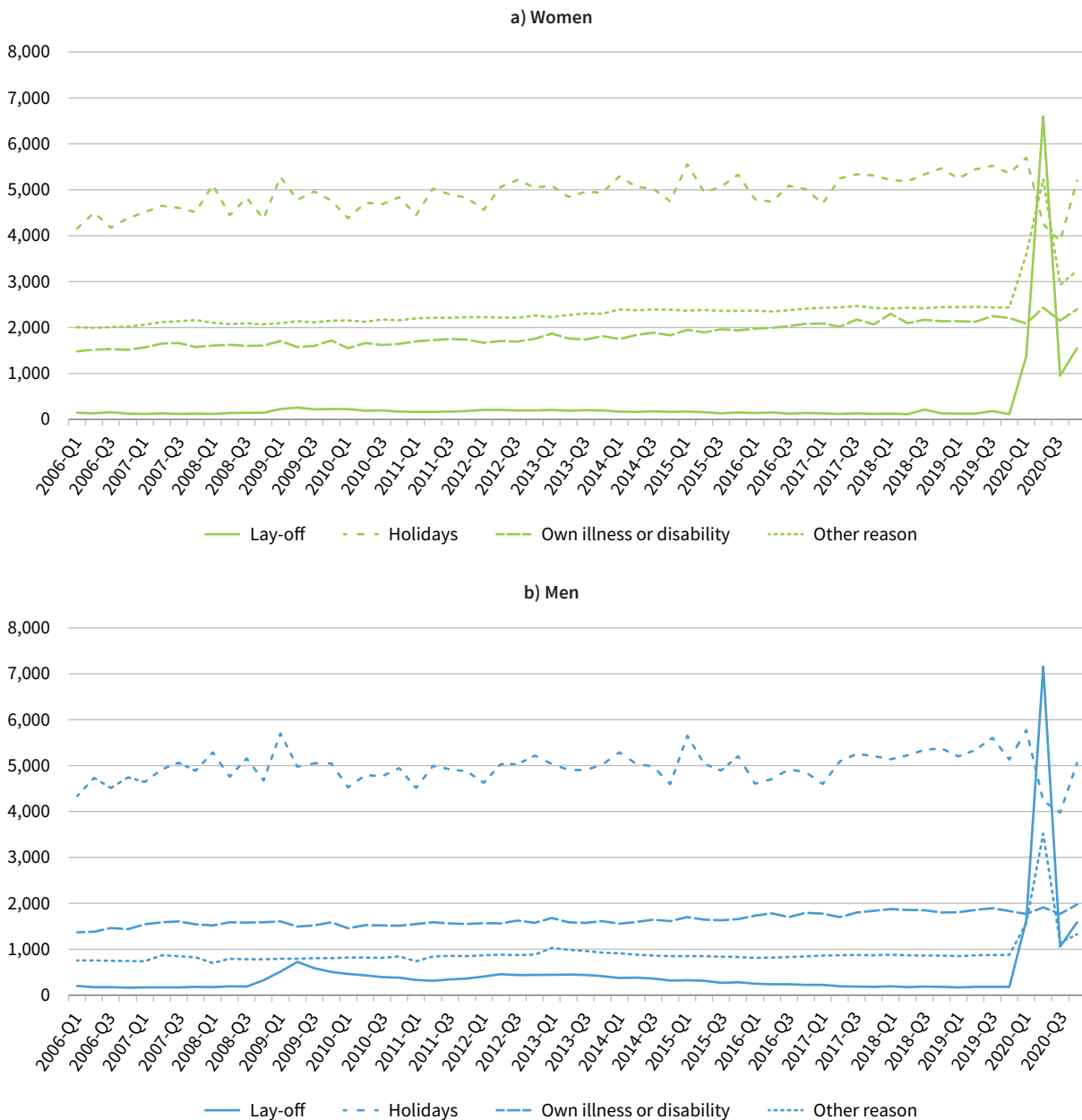
Examining statistics of employment and unemployment rates, resignations and job switches paints only a partial picture of the pandemic’s impact on labour markets. In the EU, it is evident that unemployment rates have increased relatively modestly during the pandemic, largely due to extensive job retention schemes. In some Member States, for example in Italy, unemployment rates declined in Q2 2020, even as COVID-19 infections were widespread. Therefore, moving beyond the numbers of people at work, information about the volume of work among those who did not lose their jobs can be informative. For this purpose, it is useful to examine actual hours worked and the share of workers who have been furloughed in the pandemic.

The impact of job furloughing (putting workers’ jobs ‘on ice’, with governments supporting income through pandemic unemployment benefit, temporary lay-offs or short-time working schemes) can be examined using data on absences from work because of temporary lay-offs. Figure 22 presents the time trend in numbers of employees in the EU with various reasons for absence from work, including holidays, their own illness or disability, and temporary lay-offs. Among women, absences due to lay-offs increased by nearly 6.49 million (from 111,400 to 6,596,400) between Q4 2019 and Q2 2020. The corresponding increase among men was almost 6.98 million (from 178,000 to 7,155,600).

21 Author’s calculations based on data from EU-LFS (LFSI_EMP_A). Percentage of total population.

22 Author’s calculations based on data from EU-LFS (LFSI_LONG_A). Percentage of total employment.

Figure 22: Absence from work by main reason, EU27 (thousands)



Source: Author's calculations using data from EU-LFS (LFSI_ABS_Q_H). Seasonally adjusted data. People aged 20–64.

The rates peaked among both women and men in Q2 2020, at 7.1% of employed men and 7.7% of employed women. In comparison, the corresponding rates had been 0.2% and 0.1% one year earlier.²³ Previous research has highlighted that job furloughing was heavily concentrated among lower-paid women. Half of furloughed women in Q2 2020 were working in the lowest-paid job quintile, compared with fewer than a third of men (Eurofound and European Commission Joint Research Centre, 2021a).

The pandemic recession also saw considerable changes in absences for other reasons. Among both women and men, the numbers of absences were relatively constant over time between 2006 and 2019, except for lay-offs increasing during the Great Recession – slightly among women, and more dramatically among men. Men's lay-off figures remained elevated for approximately a decade after the start of the Great Recession. During the pandemic recession, absences due to one's own illness or disability continued to follow the pre-pandemic time

²³ Author's calculations using data from Eurostat LFS (LFSI_ABT_Q). Seasonally adjusted data. People aged 20–64. Percentage of total employment (LFSI_EMP_Q_H).

Figure 23: Changes Q4 2019 to Q4 2021 in average number of actual weekly hours of work in main job by gender, EU27 (hours)



Source: Author's calculations using data from EU-LFS (LFSQ_EWHAIS). Employed persons aged 20–64.

trend, whereas holiday absences decreased and absences for other reasons increased.

As illustrated in Figure 23, the average number of actual weekly hours worked declined sharply among both women and men between Q4 2019 and Q2 2020, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The decline in hours was slightly steeper among men (1.6 hours per week) than among women (1.2 hours per week). Comparing the Q4 data of 2020 and 2021 to those of 2019, it is evident that average working hours have not recovered to their pre-pandemic levels for either women or men. To better understand the scale of the reduction in working hours, it is useful to compare the magnitude of the declines experienced during the pandemic with those recorded before. Examining annual data on actual hours worked during the Great Recession, men's working time was 0.2 hours less per week in 2008, and 0.7 hours less per week in 2009, than it had been in 2007. Among women, working hours did not decline between 2007 and 2008, and were 0.3 hours lower in 2009 than they had been in 2007.²⁴

Working from home

A key labour market effect of the pandemic was a shift from working at the employer's premises to teleworking (that is, working from home). In the pandemic, telework has been widely recommended or mandated. As

highlighted earlier in this chapter, telework is highly gendered in the sense that women are more likely than men to work in teleworkable sectors. This gender divide is reflected in data collected during the pandemic: women were more likely than men to start working from home (Eurofound, 2021b). The incidence of employed persons working from home (at least sometimes) in the EU increased from 14.5% in 2019 to 21.7% in 2020 and 25.6% in 2021 among women, and from 14.7% in 2019 to 20.2% in 2020 and 23.3% in 2021 among men, meaning that, while men were slightly more likely than women to work from home on the eve of the pandemic, the gender balance reversed during the crisis, with women 2.3 percentage points more likely than men to telework according to the latest estimates.²⁵

The implications of telework are nuanced. On the one hand, teleworking may enhance flexibility and work–life balance, with the potential to benefit women's employment and labour market participation (Bloom et al, 2015; Dockery and Bawa, 2018). During the pandemic, the possibility of working from home has safeguarded the employment of many workers, especially highly educated ones, as well as protecting the health of people by allowing social distancing while working. On the negative side, pandemic-period telework – often compulsory and rapidly implemented –

²⁴ Author's calculations using data from EU-LFS (LFSQ_EWHAIS). Employed persons aged 20–64.

²⁵ Author's calculations using data from EU-LFS (LFSQ_EHOMP). Employed persons aged 20–64.

correlates with a poor work–life balance for parents who have been juggling paid work with homeschooling and care tasks (Eurofound, 2020a; Hjálmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir, 2021). Chapter 4 of this report includes an examination of the relationship between telework during the pandemic and work–life conflict.

Working conditions

The COVID-19 pandemic has had profound impacts on working conditions, and experiences have varied greatly across worker groups. As outlined above, while for some people, especially women, work moved from the office to the home, others worked in jobs requiring on-site proximity or social contact, while essential staff (more likely to be women than men) ensured that societies' necessary functions continued in the crisis. Some workers lost their jobs, others were furloughed or had their working hours cut, and others worked longer hours than before. While employment in most sectors declined, some sectors and occupations experienced employment expansions.

The health workforce – predominantly women – on the front line of the pandemic response risked their health while carrying out their jobs. At the height of the first wave of infections in the spring of 2020, many people took part in public displays of appreciation for frontline personnel. What has emerged in debates and discussions throughout the crisis is the fairness of pay and the quality of overall working conditions of healthcare workers. The resilience of the health workforce is a key factor in enabling healthcare systems to recover from the pandemic.

Research from many countries has documented the experiences of healthcare professionals working on the front line during the pandemic. Workers reported feeling a sense of duty to provide healthcare in exceptionally demanding times, while experiencing strain that carried over to their families and private lives (Morawa et al, 2021; Palacios-Ceña et al, 2021). The risk of potential infection – especially before COVID-19 vaccines were available – possibly led to negative mental health outcomes. In the summer of 2020, 42% of workers in general and 67% of workers in the health sector in the EU reported that they were at risk of contracting the virus because of their jobs. Aside from the overrepresentation of women, there were also gender differences within the sector, with 63% of men and 69% of women working in healthcare reporting this risk.²⁶ Various studies have also demonstrated an increase in symptoms of depression and anxiety among healthcare workers during the pandemic (Morawa et al,

2021; Hannemann et al, 2022). Many healthcare workers were stretched to their limits, struggling with issues including work overload, lack of rest, shortages of personal protective equipment, and challenging moral and ethical issues at work during the demanding crisis period. As discussed above, some also lost their jobs, while others left their professions or considered reducing their working hours, resigning or taking early retirement (Sheather and Slattery, 2021).

While stress and burnout among healthcare workers have received considerable attention, less focus has been placed on similar psychological distress faced by workers in other professions, including those working in service industries requiring personal contact that were closed or restricted during surges of pandemic waves (Jiskrova, 2022). As shown in this chapter, women are overrepresented in such employment sectors in the EU. Emotional distress can stem from concerns about potential job loss or loss of earnings, fears of infection at work or coping with the wide-ranging impacts of the measures to contain the spread of the virus.

Workers in teaching professions – who are more likely to be women than men – often found the transition to telework challenging, requiring a swift transition from traditional in-person classroom settings to remote teaching, while balancing professional and personal commitments, leading to a decrease in their sense of achievement (Kraft et al, 2020).

Informal workers in the pandemic

Informal workers have been in a particularly vulnerable situation during the COVID-19 crisis. An estimated 2.8% of workers in the EU provide undeclared services, and 21% of these workers rely solely on undeclared income sources (Williams and Kayaoglu, 2020). Informal workers were vulnerable because they have been less able to access government support and, therefore, relief measures have been less likely to reach some people in need. Although data on the situation of informal workers are less readily available than on that of formal workers, some evidence has emerged on their situations during the pandemic, with some situations likely to lead to gendered outcomes.

The size of the informal economy in the EU varies in different ways depending on the dimension considered. Eastern and southern Member States have higher shares of informal work than the western and northern ones (Williams, 2014). The shares of informal employment have been estimated at 15% among men and 13% among women in northern, southern and western Europe, whereas they are estimated at 34% and 28%

26 Author's calculations using data from Eurofound's *Living, working and COVID-19* e-survey, round 2 (June to July 2020).

among men and women, respectively, in eastern Europe (ILO, 2018). In terms of sector, the share of informal employment in total employment in agriculture has been estimated at 48% in northern, southern and western Europe, and at 65% in eastern Europe. In northern, southern and western Europe, the shares of informal employment in industry and the service sectors are 10% and 14%, respectively. In eastern

Europe, the corresponding figures are 30% and 27% (ILO, 2018). On the one hand, informal workers were more likely than formal workers to lose their jobs in the pandemic recession. On the other hand, a reallocation from wage and salaried work to own-account and contributing family work has helped mitigate some of the impact of the pandemic employment shock (ILO, 2022).

3 Gender gaps in unpaid work during the pandemic

This chapter examines evidence from the COVID-19 pandemic about differences between women and men regarding unpaid work. During the crisis, the need for people to engage in unpaid work increased due to closures of schools and childcare facilities, restrictions on employing domestic workers, closures of restaurants and the general curtailment of social interactions. The analysis presented here draws from rich and detailed data that were collected during the pandemic period about the volume of various kinds of unpaid work carried out by women and men in the EU, and how this work was shared between partners within cohabiting couples. It includes a focused analysis on the impact of working from home on the division of childcare tasks between couples. Looking at the wider issue of time use, the chapter also explores differences between women and men in total working time (including paid and unpaid work), as well as time allocated to recreational activities.

Gender segregation in unpaid work tasks

Unpaid work during the Great Recession

When it comes to gender differences in unpaid work in economic downturns, existing evidence is mixed. Some studies from past recessions report a decrease, and others an increase, in unpaid working time among women and men. During economic crises, shifts from external providers towards households for tasks such as care services, household work, food production, etc.

can help to alleviate the worsening of households' financial situations. Research on data collected in the US during the Great Recession found that men were more likely than women to increase their unpaid working hours because they were more subject to job losses. The increase in unpaid work has been found to be particularly high among poor households who potentially have a greater need in times of recession to switch from market goods to household provision (Khitarihvili and Kim, 2014). Evidence from Canada, on the other hand, reveals that women's unpaid working time increased more than that of men during the Great Recession (MacPhail, 2017).

Unpaid work during the COVID-19 pandemic

During the pandemic, paid work was not the only thing that moved into the realm of the home. Social distancing and measures to curb the spread of the virus meant that a wide range of activities had to be carried out at home. Many services became the responsibility of families instead of being provided externally. This temporary shift to home provision included responsibilities such as caring for dependents, children's education, and domestic tasks such as meal preparation, cleaning and house repairs. While before the pandemic these responsibilities might have been provided to varying degrees by external bodies (such as schools, childcare facilities, other care facilities, restaurants, cleaners, maids and grandparents), social distancing and pandemic-related restrictions increased the need for households to undertake this work.

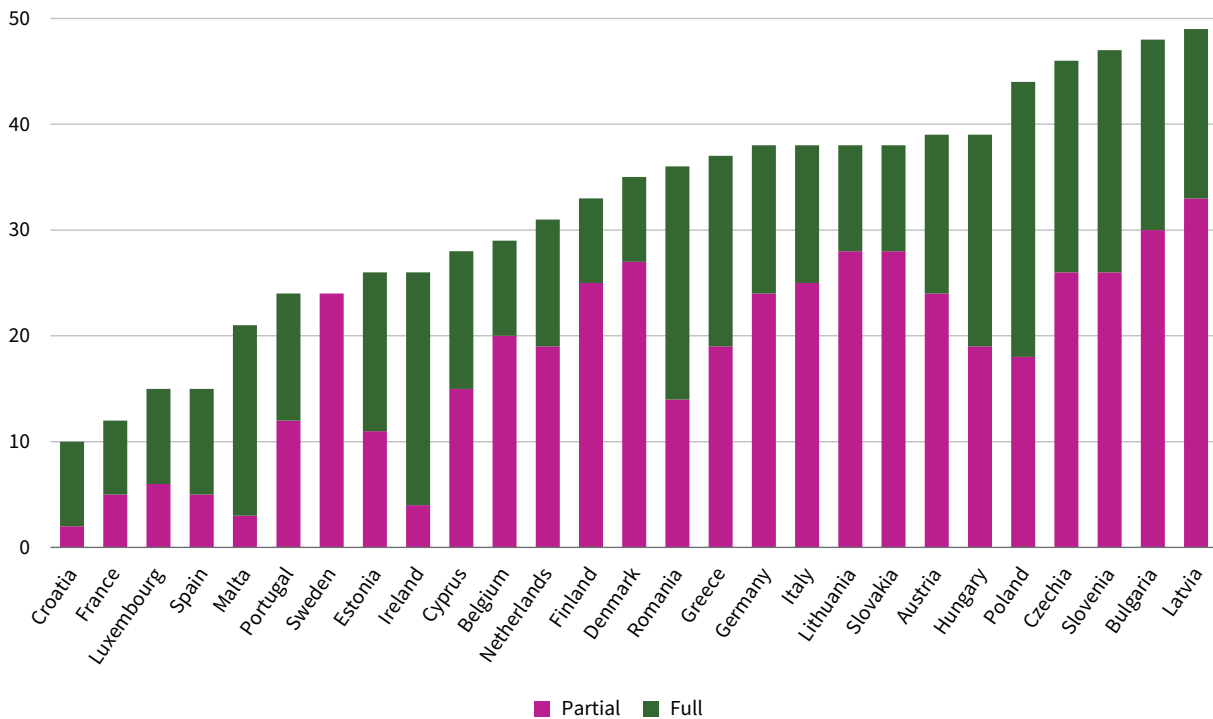
Box 2: Eurofound's *Living, working and COVID-19* e-survey

Since the start of the pandemic, Eurofound has conducted several rounds of its online survey on the impact of the crisis on living and working conditions, covering adults aged 18 and over living in the EU. The first round of the survey was launched in April 2020. The e-survey used many of the same questions used in Eurofound's earlier surveys such as the European Quality of Life Survey and the European Working Conditions Survey. The recruitment of the participants was carried out through snowball sampling methods and through promotions on social media. As it was a non-probabilistic survey, and therefore not representative of the underlying population, an a posteriori weighting was performed. All analyses in this report are weighted with respect to population benchmarks to account for survey design and non-response, in order to reflect the sociodemographic composition of the EU and its Member States.

Although they provide vital information about the living and working situations of Europeans during the crisis, caution must be used when comparing survey data that were collected using different methodologies before and during the pandemic (see Box 1).

For more information on the e-survey, see <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/data/covid-19>

Figure 24: Total duration of school closures up until March 2022, by country (weeks)



Notes: Figures correspond to pre-primary, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels of education (International Standard Classification of Education levels 0–3).

Source: Author’s calculations based on Unesco data on school closures (<https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>).

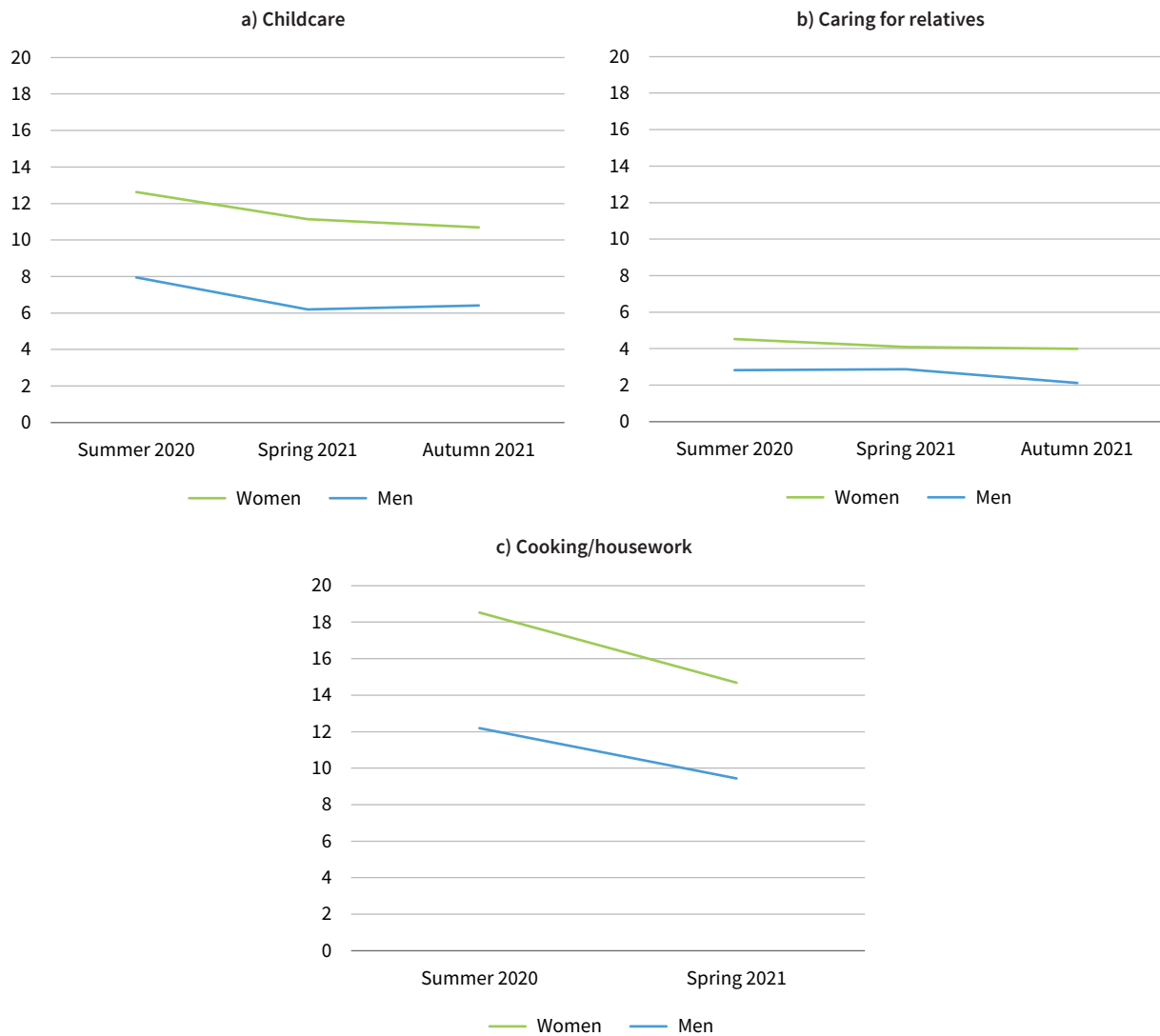
In relation to the increased demands that were placed on parents to provide additional care and education for their children, Figure 24 illustrates the total duration of school closures during the pandemic in EU Member States. The length of closures varies considerably between countries, ranging from less than 20 weeks in Croatia, France, Luxembourg and Spain to over 40 weeks in Poland, Czechia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Latvia.

As detailed in Chapter 1 of this report, pre-pandemic data show that women in the EU had been carrying out approximately twice as many hours of unpaid work as men in the areas of caring for children and other dependants, as well as cooking and housework. Against this background, data collected during the pandemic are used to estimate gender differences in the volume of unpaid work. Figure 25 illustrates the average weekly hours that women and men spent on different types of unpaid work at various points in time during the pandemic. Comparing the figures with the

pre-pandemic data, it is evident that the volume of these types of unpaid work has increased, with women continuing to carry out more unpaid working hours than men. Similar findings have also been confirmed by research carried out by Farré et al (2020) in Spain, Hupkau and Petrongolo (2020) in the UK, and Derndorfer et al (2021) in Austria, among others.

Overall, the volume of unpaid work carried out has decreased since the start of the pandemic, having been at its highest level early in the crisis in 2020. The hours spent on caring for relatives and on cooking and/or housework have been higher during the pandemic than before it, while childcare hours have remained at a similar level to the hours recorded prior to the pandemic. The relatively unchanged aggregate volume of childcare hours can be explained by the survey period excluding the initial lockdown period of spring 2020 (when additional childcare hours would have been highest) and also by the fact that the measure captures childcare provided by both parents and grandparents.

Figure 25: Mean hours spent on unpaid work, by gender, EU27 (hours per week)



Note: Panel a refers to 'Caring for and/or educating your children, grandchildren'; panel b refers to 'Caring for elderly/disabled relatives'; panel c refers to 'Cooking and housework'. 'Cooking and housework' was not covered with the same question item in autumn 2021, so comparable data are not available.

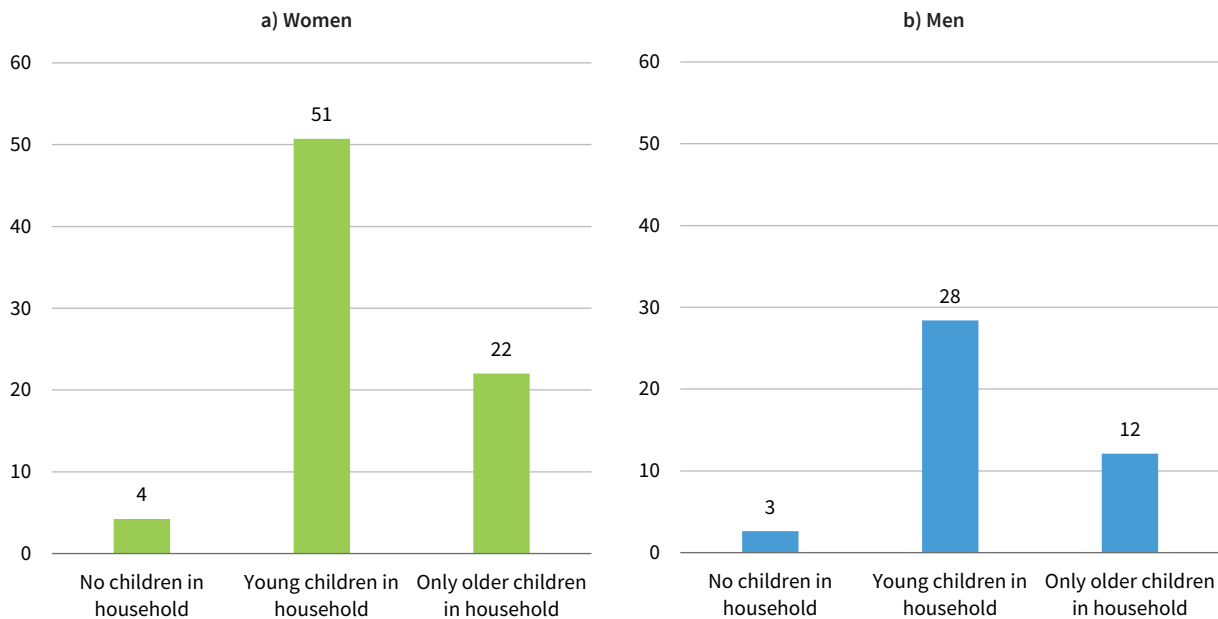
Source: Author's calculations based on data from the Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey rounds 2 (June to July 2020), 3 (February to March 2021) and 4 (October to November 2021).

As shown in Figure 26, during the pandemic, the average number of childcare hours provided by women without children was 4 hours per week (compared with 5 hours per week recorded by non-parent women in 2016).²⁷ For mothers, on the other hand, the volume of childcare work is considerably higher in the pandemic period: they provided an average of 34 hours of childcare in 2016, but 40 hours during the pandemic period, with mothers of younger children providing a very high level

(51 hours) of care per week. Among men, the patterns are similar to those among women, in the sense that childcare hours increased for parents only. Men without children provided an average of 2 hours of childcare per week in 2016 and 3 hours per week during the pandemic. The corresponding rates among men with children were 18 hours in 2016 and 24 hours during the pandemic.

27 Author's calculations using data from the European Quality of Life Survey 2016.

Figure 26: Mean hours spent on childcare, by gender and presence of children in the household, EU27 (hours per week)



Source: Author’s calculations based on data from the Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey. Aggregated data from survey rounds 2 (June to July 2020), 3 (February to March 2021) and 4 (October to November 2021).

The figures presented here reaffirm the broad picture that has emerged from studies of many national-level data sources during the pandemic, showing that the heightened workload has equated to a full working week for families. It has also been shown that additional childcare hours are less sensitive to mothers’ than fathers’ employment situations, meaning that the additional childcare work taken on by women has been more likely to lead to exhaustion, work–family conflicts and potential negative consequences in career advancement (Sevilla and Smith, 2020; Fodor et al, 2021).

In the autumn of 2021, Eurofound’s *Living, working and COVID-19* e-survey gathered granular information from a total of 21,000 adults living in the EU about their time spent on different types of unpaid work. The battery of questions captured a wide variety of unpaid work tasks, including those traditionally mainly carried out by women and those mainly carried out by men.

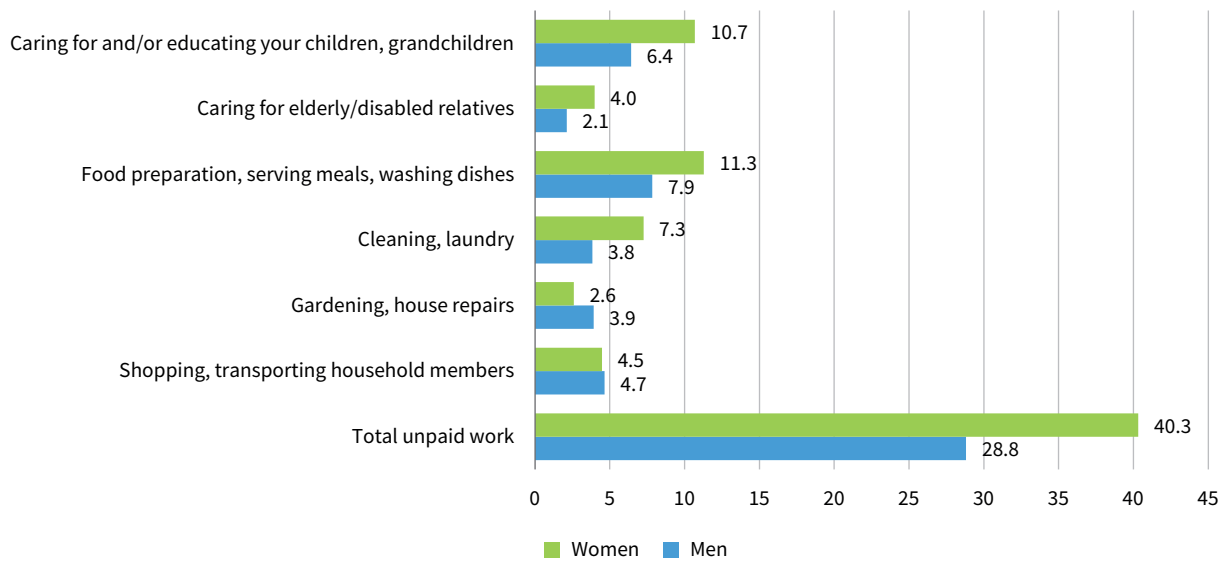
While virtually all Europeans (96% of women and 97% of men) engage in unpaid work of some kind, the types of tasks are segregated by gender. Women are more likely than men to provide childcare (36% and 30%, respectively), care for relatives (21% and 18%), prepare meals (95% and 90%) and carry out cleaning tasks (96% and 82%), while men are more likely than women to do gardening work or repairs around the home (60% among men compared with 50% among women).

Men are also slightly more likely than women to carry out shopping tasks or transport family members (93% versus 91%) – these tasks are combined into one answer category, preventing separate analyses. Whereas the prevalence of the other types of unpaid work is similar across parents and the general population, parents are – as expected – much more likely to carry out tasks related to children’s care and education (87% among fathers and 85% among mothers, versus 15% of all men and 22% of all women), and slightly more likely to engage in tasks related to meal preparation, cleaning or laundry, and shopping or transport of family members.²⁸

Figure 27 presents the pandemic-period numbers of hours that women and men on average spend carrying out the various types of unpaid work. The data reveal stark discrepancies between women and men in the weekly hours spent on the detailed categories of unpaid work. Women spend an average of 40 hours per week on unpaid tasks in total, while the corresponding figure for men is 29 hours. The gender discrepancies are largest (in absolute terms) when it comes to childcare tasks, tasks related to meal preparation (food preparation, meal serving and dishwashing), and cleaning or laundry work. While women are more likely than men to engage in time-consuming, non-discretionary household tasks (meal preparation, cleaning, laundry), men are more

²⁸ Authors’ calculations based on data from Eurofound’s *Living, working and COVID-19* e-survey, round 4 (October to November 2021). Percentage reporting weekly hours greater than 0. Mothers and fathers are defined as women and men living in households with children (under the age of 18). Not illustrated.

Figure 27: Mean hours spent on unpaid work by gender, EU27 (hours per week)



Source: Author's calculations based on data from the Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey, round 4 (October to November 2021).

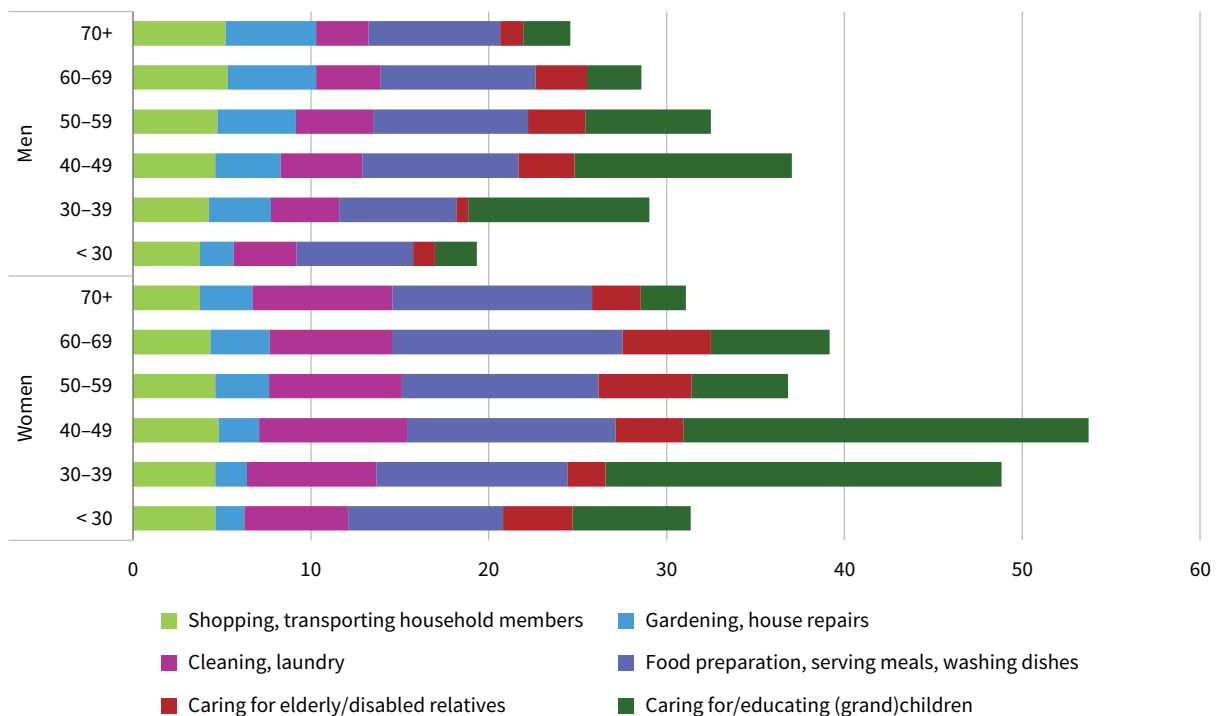
likely to carry out occasional, discretionary tasks (such as gardening and home repairs) (Coltrane, 2000).

While the granular data provide useful information about gender segregation in unpaid work tasks, existing research suggests that the inclusion of further task categories in surveys could reveal more about the nature and time intensity of unpaid work, and the gender divides that exist. Less visible forms of unpaid

work (including cognitive work such as family/household coordination, and emotional work such as facilitating interaction and giving comfort) are more likely to be carried out by women than men and are often overlooked in surveys (Meier et al, 2006).

Figure 28 presents the average weekly hours spent on different unpaid tasks by women and men in the crisis period, examining variations according to age.

Figure 28: Mean hours spent on unpaid work, by age and gender, EU27 (hours per week)



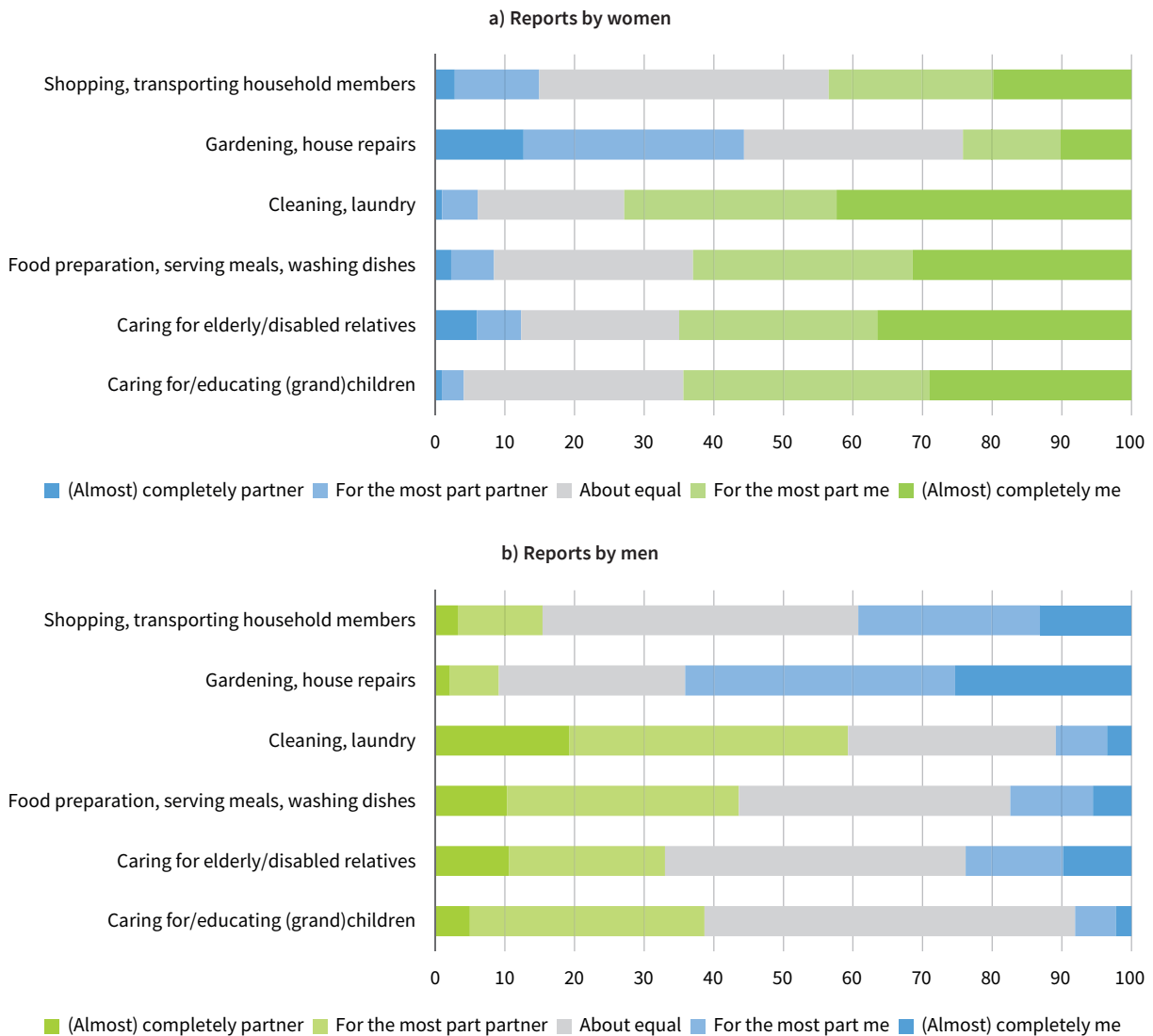
Source: Author's calculations based on data from the Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey, round 4 (October to November 2021).

An inverted U-shaped relationship emerges between age and total time spent on unpaid tasks, with the largest amount of time spent on unpaid work recorded among people in their 40s. This pattern is evident among both women and men. The task that contributes the most to the variation by age is childcare. Among men, childcare hours increase during their 30s, and decline in their 50s and beyond. The pattern is similar among women, although their hours spent on childcare increase more dramatically during their 30s, with sustained high levels during the 40s, creating a stark gender imbalance between women and men in these age groups. Among people aged 50 and over, average hours spent on unpaid work are more gender-balanced.

Changes in the division of tasks during the COVID-19 pandemic

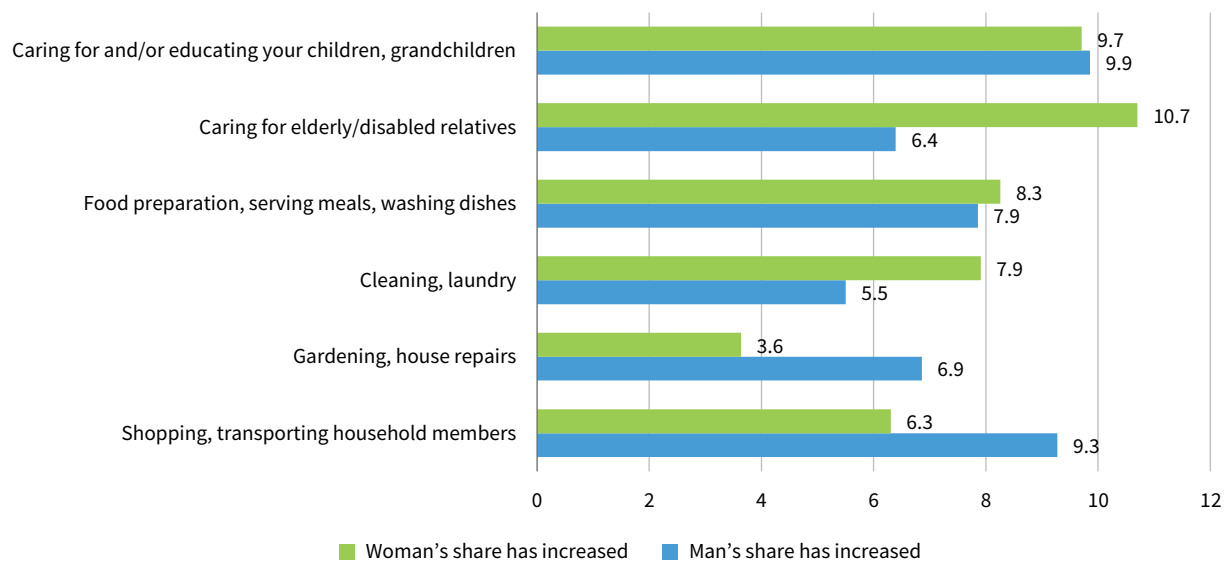
This section focuses on the sharing of unpaid work tasks between partners within couples. The data are presented in Figure 29. It is evident that both men and women report that (assuming that partners are opposite genders) women carry out most tasks related to caring for children, grandchildren, elderly relatives and relatives with disabilities. The same goes for food preparation, serving meals, washing dishes, and cleaning and laundry. Both genders report that the man carries out the majority of the gardening and house repair tasks. The activity category in which both genders report that they themselves do most of the work is shopping and transporting household members.

Figure 29: Sharing of unpaid work within couples, EU27 (%)



Source: Author's calculations based on data from the Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey, round 4 (October to November 2021).

Figure 30: Change in division of unpaid work within couples, EU27 (%)



Source: Author's calculations based on data from the Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey, round 4 (October to November 2021).

In all of the activities, the survey answers suggest that respondents tend to overestimate their own share of the work and underestimate their partners' share, which is a common finding, especially among men's survey responses (see, for example, Nordenmark, 2000).

Figure 30 presents evidence about the change that has happened during the pandemic in the division of unpaid work within couples. Although the vast majority of people report that task division has remained the same as before the pandemic, the data suggest that traditional gender norms have been reinforced. When it comes to giving care and providing education for children and grandchildren, reports of each gender's increased involvement are nearly equally as likely. An increase in women's share of the work is reported when it comes to caring for other relatives and for food-related activities. The same pattern is repeated for cleaning and laundry, with women's share increasing; while men have taken on a larger share of gardening and house repairs, and shopping and transport duties.

Despite the increased exposure of men – and particularly fathers – to unpaid work during the pandemic, the pre-pandemic gender gaps in the division of unpaid work have remained, and tasks segregation deepened, with increases in women's share of time-intensive tasks (care, meal provision, cleaning) and men's share of less time-demanding tasks (gardening, house repairs, transport). The way in which much activity was confined to the realm of the home offers one possible reason why the gender divides in unpaid work persisted during the pandemic. Some research suggests that, with social distancing measures in place and public life hence curtailed, there was an absence of societal judgement regarding the norm-confirming division of unpaid work.

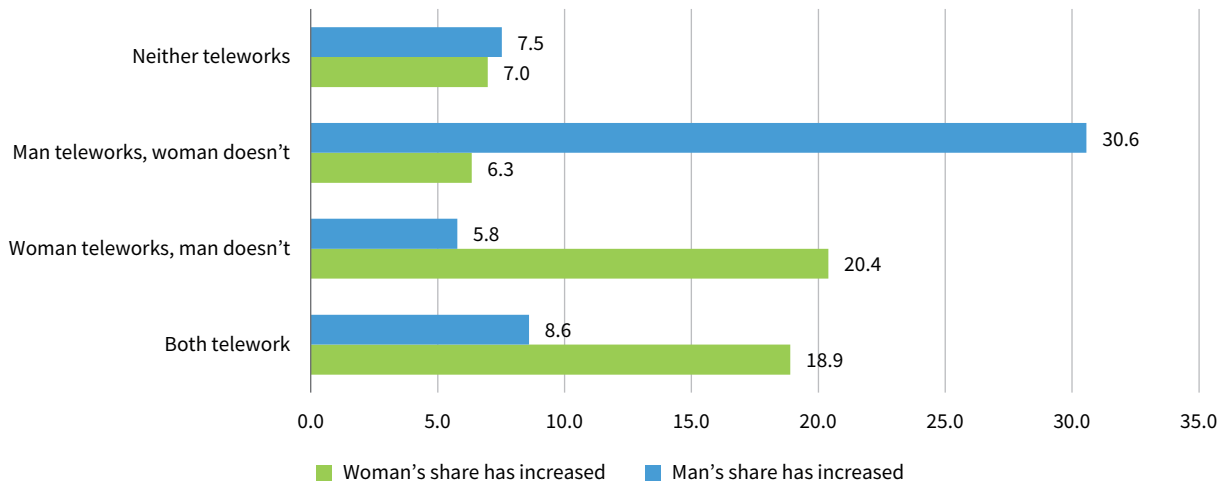
In light of this, there might be fewer incentives for renegotiation between partners in certain households, further reinforcing gender roles (Van Tienoven et al, 2021).

Telework and sharing of childcare

One particularly concerning aspect of the increased home provision of care during the pandemic has been the situation of people who have had to juggle the double burden of paid work and unpaid work in an unprecedented way. We know from the evidence presented in Chapter 2 of this report that, in the EU, women have been more likely than men to work from home during the pandemic. In many ways, teleworking has been a double-edged sword for workers who have worked from home while also caring for and educating their children. Alon et al (2022) suggest that – especially in countries with a high rate of teleworkable jobs – gaps in unpaid work between men and women may have widened if teleworking women have taken on more of these additional tasks than men.

To shed light on this issue, Figure 31 presents data on reported changes in the sharing of childcare tasks among two-parent households where both partners work. The figures are shown separately for different households depending on whether one or both partners were either exclusively working from home (teleworking) or working outside the home. The findings suggest that when both partners work outside the home, fathers are slightly more likely than mothers to have increased their share of providing care and education for their children. When only one partner teleworks, the teleworking parent is more likely to have

Figure 31: Change in division of childcare and education of children within couples, depending on both partners' teleworking status, EU27 (%)



Source: Author's calculations based on data from Eurofound's Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey, round 4 (October to November 2021).

increased their childcare-related tasks. When both partners telework, mothers are substantially more likely than fathers to increase their share of providing care and education for their children. In short, the only scenario in which parents report a significantly higher likelihood of the father increasing their share of tasks related to childcare is when the father works from home but the mother does not. Similar findings have also been confirmed in research carried out by Derndorfer et al (2021) in Austria and Yerkes et al (2020) in the Netherlands. As noted in Chapter 2 of this report, women in the EU are more likely than men to work in teleworkable sectors and in essential sectors (where teleworking is less likely to be an option).

To summarise, survey evidence gathered during the pandemic period suggests women undertook a disproportionate amount of housework and childcare, even in instances when both parents were working remotely. The same gendered pattern has been documented in separate country-level studies by Del Boca et al (2021) in Italy, Farré et al (2020) and Seiz (2021) in Spain, and Jessen et al (2021) in Germany.

Gender differences in total working time

As discussed in Chapter 1 of this report, it has been shown in pre-pandemic data that, while men have longer paid working hours than women do, the opposite is the case for unpaid work. Taking paid and unpaid

work together, working women have longer total working weeks than working men. In terms of this comprehensive measure of total working time, employed men in the EU carried out 59 hours of total work a week in 2016, while women carried out 67 hours, implying a gender gap of 7 hours (see Figure 9). As shown in Figure 32, the situation has not changed substantially during the crisis, with working men in the EU carrying out 59 hours of total work and working women carrying out 66 hours. Although total working time remained virtually unchanged, the composition of it shifted, with both women and men spending less time on paid work and more time on unpaid work during the crisis than before. As expected, when examining people working full time, there has not been a downward adjustment in paid working time, but the increase in unpaid work has led to an increase in total working time (an additional 6 hours for both women and men). A widening gender discrepancy is evident among full-time working parents: in 2016, the gender gap was 13 hours,²⁹ whereas this widened to 19 hours during the pandemic.

Gender differences in total working time have implications for men's and women's time use in general, and affect the time available for sporting, cultural or leisure activities. Reflecting a persistence of pre-pandemic gender discrepancies in participating in these activities, data collected during the pandemic also reveal inequality between women and men, and the effect that having children has on recreational time.

29 See Figure 9.

Figure 32: Mean total working time among employed individuals, EU27 (hours per week)



Note: Unpaid work includes caring for and/or educating your children, grandchildren, caring for elderly/disabled relatives, and cooking and housework.

Source: Author's calculations based on data from Eurofound's Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey. Aggregated data from survey rounds 2 (June to July 2020) and 3 (February to March 2021).

Among people without children, women in the EU engaged in 5.6 hours per week in sporting, cultural or leisure activities during the pandemic, while the corresponding figure for men was 0.8 hours higher, at 6.4 hours. Among parents, the hours spent on these activities are fewer among both women and men, and the gender gap widens to 1.6 hours, probably reflecting the longer total working time of mothers than fathers, and the time available for recreational activities.

Mothers spend an average of 4.1 hours on recreational activities, in comparison with an average for fathers of 5.7 hours. The levels fall more, and the gender gap widens further, if the analysis is focused on full-time working parents, particularly full-time working parents of younger children (aged under 12).³⁰

³⁰ Author's calculations using data from *Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey*. Aggregated data from survey rounds 2 (June to July 2020), 3 (February to March 2021) and 4 (October to November 2021).

4 Well-being of women and men during COVID-19

As outlined in earlier chapters of this report, the COVID-19 crisis has had profound impacts on people’s situations at work and at home, and in their daily activities. The restrictions imposed by governments to limit the spread of the virus have had both direct and indirect impacts on people’s well-being on multiple dimensions. This chapter describes the situation of women and men – outlining the gender differences – during the pandemic regarding different measures of well-being, in terms of their physical and mental health, optimism about the future, risk of poverty, financial fragility and work–life conflict. Focusing on the specific matter of school closures, an analysis sets out to assess whether the result of the burden – in terms of increased risk of depression and a higher incidence of work–family conflict – was borne more by women than by men.

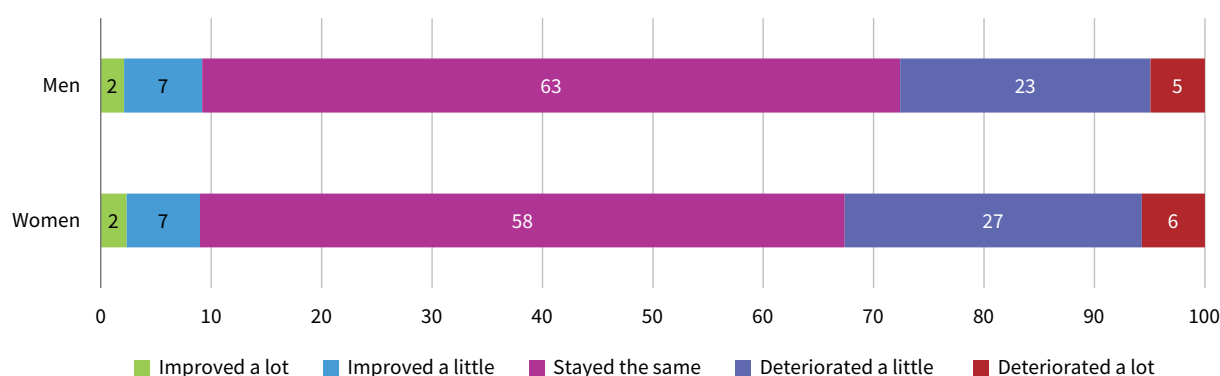
Physical and mental well-being

The COVID-19 pandemic’s health and well-being impacts have not been gender-neutral. Similar numbers of men and women have been diagnosed with the illness, but men have been at a higher risk of becoming severely ill or dying from COVID-19 (Global Health 50/50,

2021). The increased mortality caused by the pandemic is reflected in the overall downward trend in most recent estimates of life expectancy, reversing the pre-pandemic trend of increasing length of life. Between 2019 and 2021, life expectancy at birth for men in the EU declined by 1.3 years (from 78.5 years to 77.2 years). Over the same time period, the figure fell by 1.2 years among women (from 84.0 years to 82.8 years). As a result of higher pandemic-period mortality among men, the gender gap in life expectancy increased from 5.5 to 5.6 years, with women living longer lives than men on average.³¹

Looking at changes in people’s self-assessed health status generally, in the autumn of 2021, the same proportions of men and women reported that their health had improved, either by a little or by a lot, since the start of the pandemic (see Figure 33). Among both women and men, 9% reported an improvement in their health status, while more than half reported no change. A higher proportion of women than men reported that their health had deteriorated: 27% of women by ‘a little’, with a further 6% by ‘a lot’. The corresponding figures among men were considerably lower, at 23% and 5%, respectively.

Figure 33: Changes in health during the pandemic by gender, EU27 (%)



Notes: Answers to the question ‘Compared to before the start of the pandemic, would you say your health has ...?’

Source: Author’s calculations based on data from the Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey, round 4 (October to November 2021).

31 Author’s calculations using estimated, provisional data from Eurostat (DEMO_MLEXPEC).

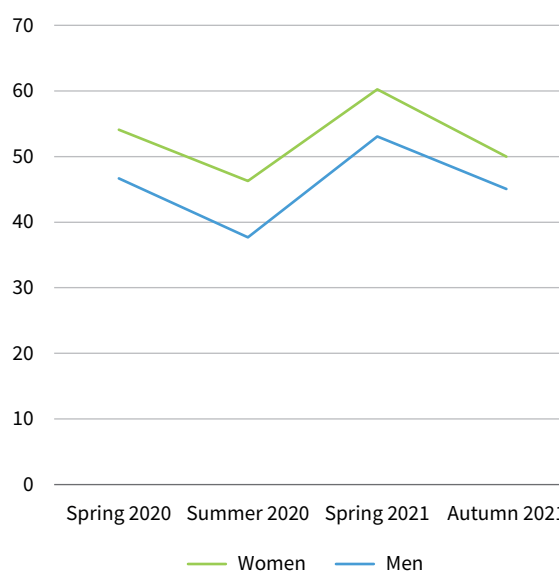
The COVID-19 crisis affected the delivery of and access to healthcare services. For example, there was a shift from formal to informal long-term care, from residential care to home care, and from face-to-face consultations to e-healthcare (Eurofound, 2022). During the pandemic, 17% of women and 15% of men in the EU reported having a medical problem for which they could not receive a medical examination or treatment. Among people with disabilities, this share rises to 26% and 22% among women and men, respectively.³²

A potential increase in intimate partner violence, due to pandemic-period measures (such as lockdowns and restrictions on movement) and the related increases in stress, disruption to social networks and reduced access to services, has been a widespread concern during the crisis (European Parliament, 2020; WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2021). Existing evidence indicates that gender-based violence, particularly sexual and domestic violence, increases during crises (EIGE, 2021c). The evidence collected during the pandemic suggests that, on the one hand, based on calls to helplines, there has been an increase in demand for non-governmental organisations' services during pandemic lockdowns. On the other hand, health service data indicate a decrease in service demand related to all violence types while police data point to decreases in sexual violence, and mixed findings across Member States about cases of violence against women (WHO, 2021). Rather than being an indication of a true decline in incidence, the reduced demand for services and lack of reporting may result from victims fearing the consequences of seeking help or reporting abuse (Usta et al, 2021).

When it comes to mental health impacts of the pandemic, Figure 34 illustrates the changes during the COVID-19 crisis in the proportions of women and men in the EU who are deemed at risk of depression. As mentioned in Chapter 1 of this report, in the years before the pandemic, about one-quarter of women and just under one-fifth of men were at risk of depression. It is evident that mental health deterioration has been severe among both women and men since the onset of the pandemic – the situation being most worrying during the spring months of both 2020 and 2021, when normal life was curtailed to a great degree by pandemic-related restrictions. Depression risk has been consistently higher among women than men, with the gender gap varying between 5 and 8 percentage points over the course of the pandemic. Gender disparities in mental health impacts of the pandemic have also been

shown by Peters et al (2020) and González-Sanguino et al (2020), who report deteriorations especially among (younger) women. A pan-European study by Toffolutti et al (2022) suggests that the gender gap in mental well-being widened during the COVID-19 crisis due to the introduction of restrictions including stay-at-home requirements, internal movement restrictions, school closures and workplace closures.

Figure 34: Risk of depression during the pandemic by gender, EU27 (%)



Notes: Based on WHO-5. People with a WHO-5 score of 50 or lower are considered at risk of depression.

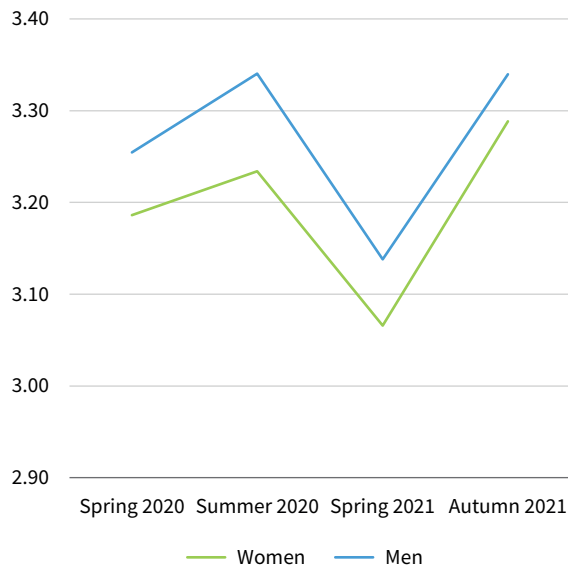
Source: Author's calculations based on data from the Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey, rounds 1 (April to May 2020), 2 (June to July 2020), 3 (February to March 2021) and 4 (October to November 2021).

Related to mental well-being, the findings show gender differences in measures of optimism about the future, with men consistently reporting higher levels of optimism during the pandemic, as also found in pre-pandemic survey data.³³ Figure 35 illustrates the variation in women's and men's optimism levels over the course of the pandemic, revealing considerable fluctuations as the pandemic events unfolded during 2020 and 2021. Optimism levels were at their lowest among both women and men during the surge of new waves of infections that led to widespread lockdown measures being adopted in many countries, with optimism rising during periods of greater societal opening as the waves of infection receded.

³² Author's calculations using data from *Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey*. Aggregated data from survey rounds 3 (February to March 2021) and 4 (October to November 2021).

³³ Author's calculations based on the European Quality of Life Survey 2016.

Figure 35: Optimism about future during the pandemic by gender, EU27 (scale 1–5)



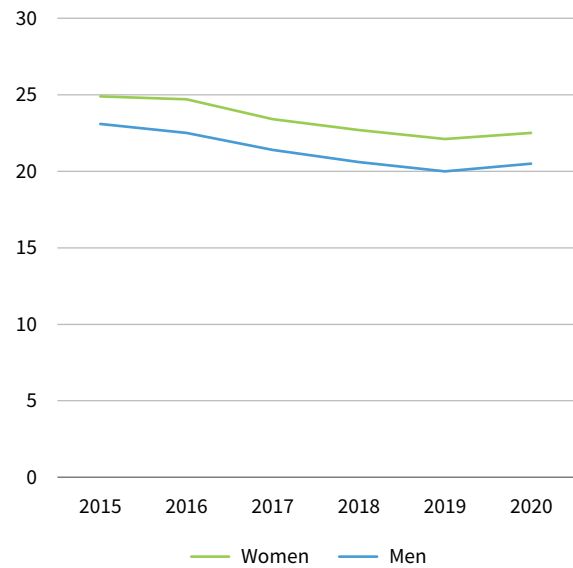
Notes: Based on the statement 'I am optimistic about my future'. Answers on a scale of 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).
Source: Author's calculations based on data from the Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey, rounds 1 (April to May 2020), 2 (June to July 2020), 3 (February to March 2021) and 4 (October to November 2021).

Financial fragility

The risk of poverty or social exclusion has increased during the pandemic, reversing the longer-run trend of declining risks among both women and men in the EU since 2015. Figure 36 presents the time trends between 2015 and 2020 in the EU, showing that the risk of poverty or social exclusion increased by 0.5 percentage points among men and 0.4 percentage points among women between 2019 and 2020.

While the pandemic has taken a toll on women and mothers in general, the situation has been especially difficult for single parents, who are more likely to be women than men. While single parents were already at a disproportionate risk of poverty in the pre-pandemic years, the situation has been exacerbated during the crisis (Nieuwenhuis, 2020; Profeta et al, 2020). The risk of poverty or social exclusion among households composed of one adult with dependent children in the EU increased by 1.6 percentage points (from 40.8% to 42.4%) between 2019 and 2020.³⁴ Importantly, some Member States recognised the case of single parents and included increased compensation rates for them in parental allowances. For example, the Czech government introduced a lump sum payment for households at increased risk of poverty, primarily affecting single

Figure 36: Risk of poverty or social exclusion by gender, EU27 (%)



Source: Author's calculations based on data from EU SILC (ILC_PEPS01N).

mothers (see next chapter for a discussion of policies implemented during the crisis). The variation in financial fragility by household type is also evident in pandemic-period survey data. Single-headed households have been more likely than couples to have difficulties in making ends meet: the rate reporting difficulties (or great difficulties) was 26% among single persons without children, and 29% among single parents. In contrast, the rate was 17% among couples without children, and 24% among couples with children.³⁵

Work–life conflict

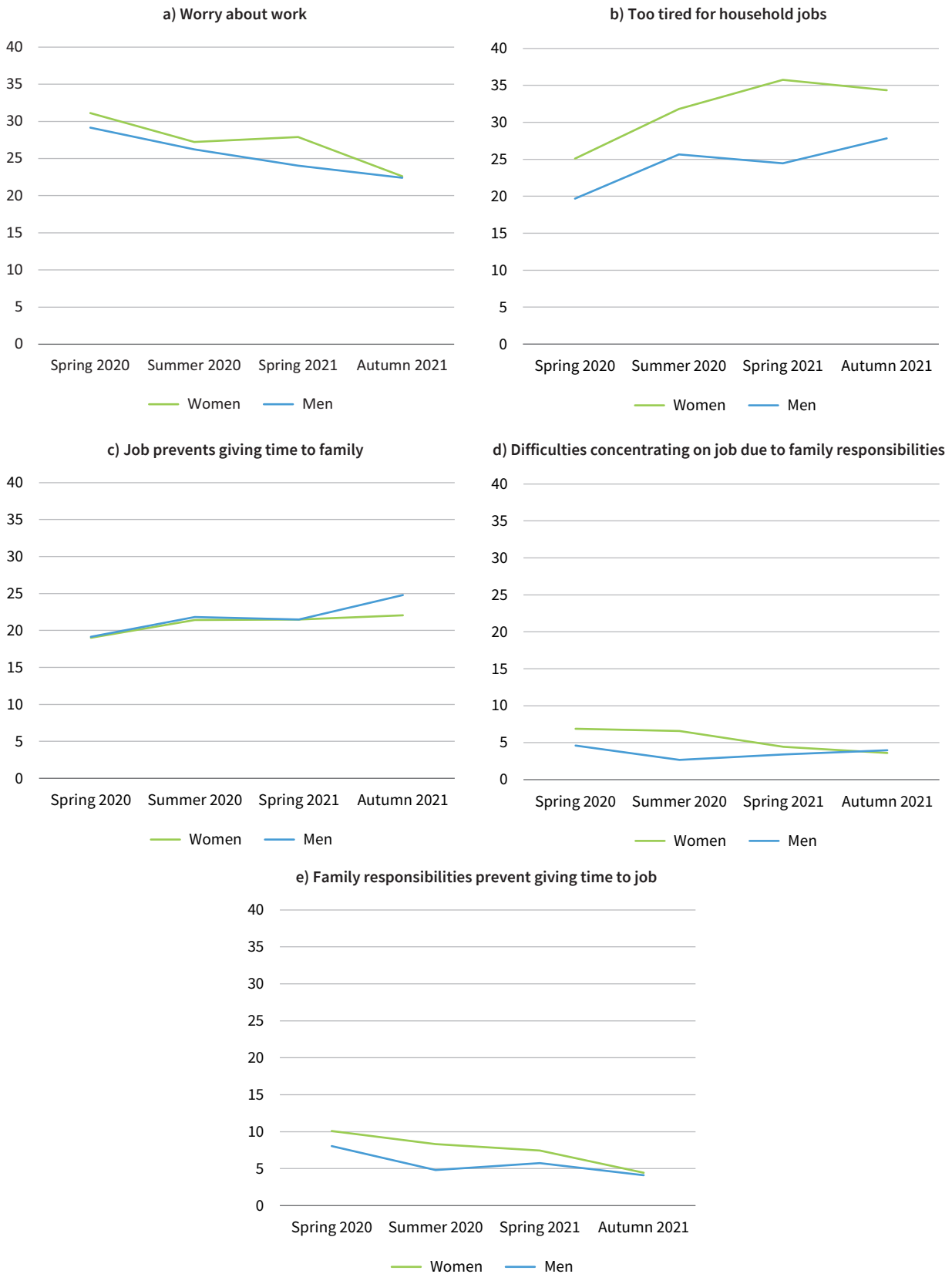
It can be challenging to combine the various aspects of one's life, including paid and unpaid work. Conflicts naturally occur, manifesting themselves as difficulties on the job, struggles in finding time for family, lack of personal time and exhaustion. Past research has demonstrated the potential negative effects of work–life conflict, including the risk of depression, stress, difficulties in developing parental functions, dissatisfaction, absenteeism and job change (see, for example, Allen et al, 2000; Cazan et al, 2019; Spector et al, 2005).

The prevalence of work–life conflicts among women and men in the EU before the pandemic is detailed in Chapter 1 of this report (see Figure 12). The pandemic-period time trends in reported work–life conflicts are presented in Figure 37. There has been a

³⁴ Authors' calculations based on data from EU SILC (ILC_PEPS03N).

³⁵ Author's calculations using data from *Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey*. Average values across survey waves 1, 2, 3 and 4 (2020/2021).

Figure 37: Work–life conflicts by gender, EU27 (%)



Notes: Survey question: ‘How often in the last two weeks have you ...’ ‘kept worrying about work when you were not working?’, ‘felt too tired after work to do some of the household jobs which need to be done?’, ‘found that your job prevented you from giving the time you wanted to your family?’, ‘found it difficult to concentrate on your job because of your family responsibilities?’, ‘found that your family responsibilities prevented you from giving the time you should to your job?’. In round 4, the survey question referred to the ‘last month’. Lines represent the sum of answers ‘always’ and ‘most of the time’.

Source: Author’s calculations based on data from the Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey, rounds 1 (April to May 2020), 2 (June to July 2020), 3 (February to March 2021) and 4 (October to November 2021).

striking increase in all measures of work–life conflict when pandemic-period data are compared with pre-pandemic figures, and this is particularly the case for the measures of conflicts between paid work and family responsibilities. For example, between 3% and 4% of workers reported before the crisis that their family responsibilities prevented them from giving time or focus to their paid work, whereas these figures increased two- to three-fold at the start of the pandemic, with gender gaps becoming noticeable.

Among working people, conflicts between work and family life can go in two directions: on the one hand, work commitments may prevent people from giving enough time to their families; on the other hand, family responsibilities may prevent people from giving enough time and attention to paid work tasks. Issues of the former kind have increased over the course of the prolonged pandemic, showing how the disruption to normal life has placed strains on family life. The latter types of conflict were most prevalent at the start of the pandemic – when lockdowns and school closures were widespread – and have declined since then. Despite the decline, work–life conflicts have remained well above pre-pandemic levels throughout the crisis.

Work–life conflict among parents

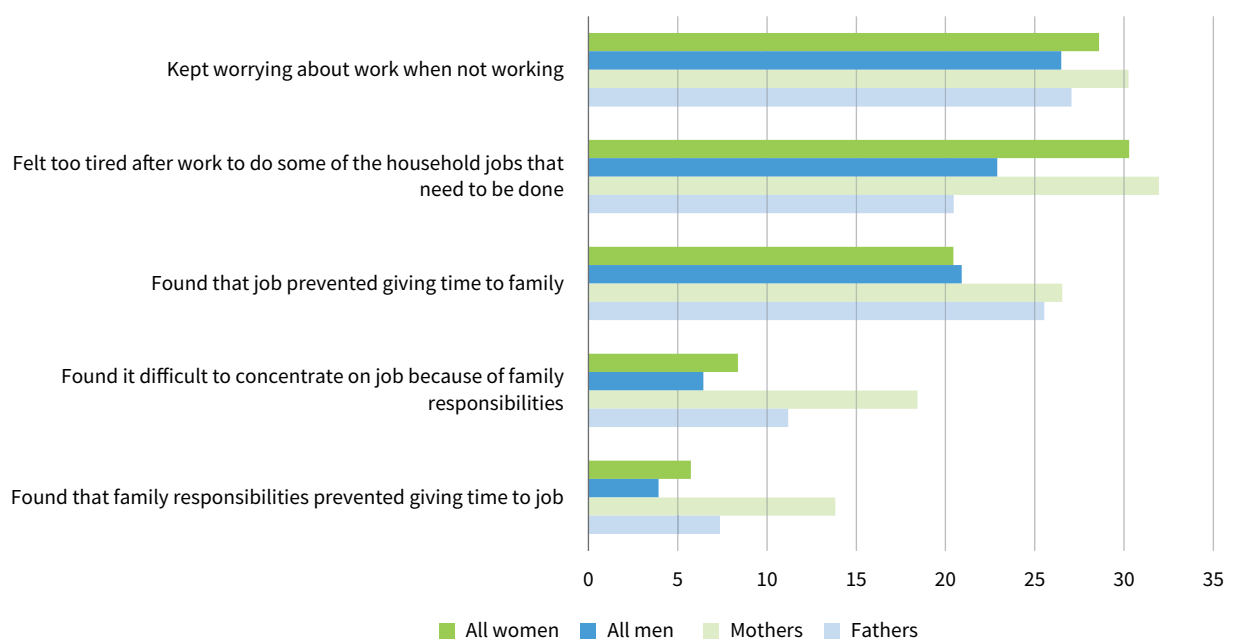
Working parents of young children are typically obliged to cope with a multitude of demands, with resources being stretched on the job and at home. During the pandemic, the gender imbalance in childcare tasks meant that mothers took on most of this additional work. Meanwhile, working from home was widely

recommended or mandated. As discussed above, women have been more likely than men to work from home during the pandemic. As a result, working mothers especially have struggled to simultaneously meet the demands related to their jobs and their children. In addition to increases in work–life conflict, there is evidence that these competing demands have caused some women to leave the labour market altogether (Albanesi and Kim, 2020; Petts et al, 2021).

The prolonged strain on working parents' work–life balance caused by the pandemic situation is evident in Figure 38, which depicts averages of data collected at different points in time during the pandemic. It points to the gaps between all working women and men, on the one hand, and working mothers and fathers, on the other. Gender disparities are evident in measures of conflict between paid work and the family, and these gender differences are particularly pronounced among parents. Reflecting the increased demand for parents to provide care and education for their children, 14% of working mothers and 7% of working fathers reported that family responsibilities prevented them from giving time to their paid work. The prevalence of difficulties with concentrating on paid work due to family responsibilities is even higher, at 18% among working mothers and 11% among working fathers.

When it comes to parents reporting that their jobs prevent them from giving the time that they want to their families, the gender discrepancy is smaller (as expected, as women are more likely than men to work part time), but prevalence rates are higher, at 27%

Figure 38: Work–life conflicts, by gender and parenthood status, EU27 (%)



Notes: See notes to Figure 37.

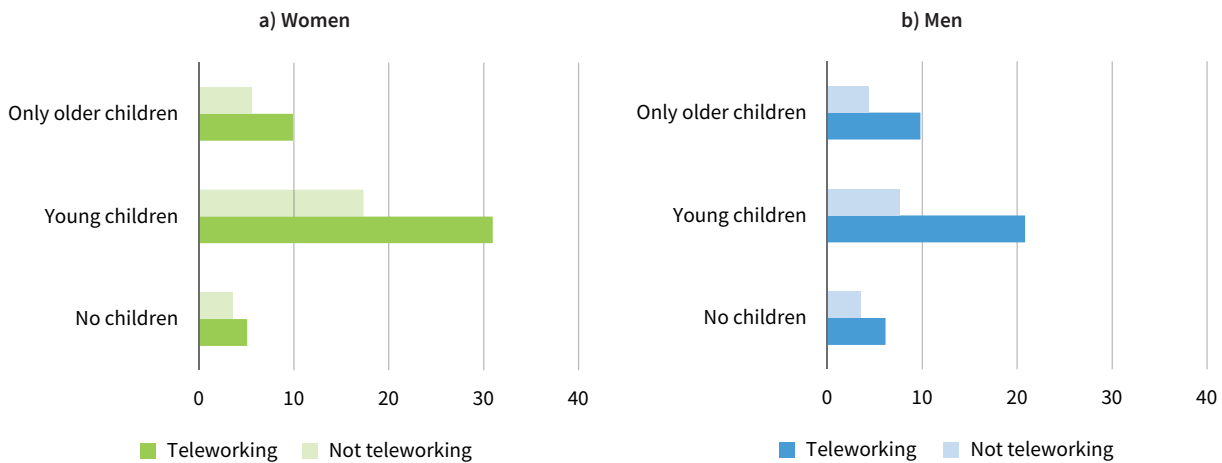
Source: Author's calculations based on data from the Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey. Aggregated data from survey rounds 1 (April to May 2020), 2 (June to July 2020), 3 (February to March 2021) and 4 (October to November 2021).

among working mothers and 26% among working fathers. Finally, being too tired after work to do household jobs is much more prevalent among women than among men, reflecting gender discrepancies in participation in housework, but the rates do not vary significantly between parents and the general population, which is to be expected, as household jobs are not exclusive to parenthood.

Focusing on difficulties with concentrating on paid work because of family responsibilities as reported during the COVID-19 crisis, Figure 39 illustrates how its prevalence among working parents varies by gender, teleworking status, parenthood and the age of children. It is evident, as discussed above, that these conflicts have been more common during the pandemic among women than

among men, overall, and that they are intensified among working parents. It is also clear that the prevalence of these issues is higher among people working from home than among those working exclusively from the employer’s premises or from other locations outside the home. Although the differences between location of work are relatively minor among non-parents, these discrepancies widen considerably among parents, and especially among parents of younger children. The cumulative effect of many risk factors is shown among teleworking mothers of younger children, 31% of whom report ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’ having difficulties concentrating on paid work because of family responsibilities during the COVID-19 crisis.

Figure 39: Difficulties concentrating on job because of family responsibilities, by teleworking and parenthood status, EU27 (%)



Notes: Survey question: ‘How often in the last 2 weeks have you found it difficult to concentrate on your job because of your family responsibilities?’ Bars represent the sum of answers ‘always’ and ‘most of the time’. Young children = children under 12; older children = children aged 12–17.

Source: Author’s calculations based on data from the Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey. Aggregated data from survey rounds 1 (April to May 2020), 2 (June to July 2020), 3 (February to March 2021) and 4 (October to November 2021).

In focus: School closures and work–family conflict

With the bulk of family responsibilities resting on women’s shoulders, the closure of schools during the pandemic triggered a higher level of work–family conflicts among working parents. School closures have been especially detrimental for working parents with young children in terms of paid work negatively affecting family life. Family responsibilities causing problems for paid work has been particularly pronounced among working mothers of young children.

The issues were examined by analysing the longitudinal element of Eurofound’s *Living, working and COVID-19* online survey, which followed the same individuals through up to four points in time during the pandemic. The panel sample consisted of 84,531 observations collected from 30,497 individuals. These data were matched with the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT), which gives details on pandemic-related spells of school and workplace closures.

Work–family balance was measured on two dimensions: work-to-family balance (work responsibilities interfering with family life) and family-to-work balance (family responsibilities interfering with paid work). The former was measured as an average of responses to questions 1 and 2 below, and the latter as an average of responses to questions 3 and 4, with higher values indicating more frequent conflicts:

How often in the last two weeks* have you ...

- 1) ... felt too tired after work to do some of the household jobs which need to be done?
- 2) ... found that your job prevented you from giving the time you wanted to your family?
- 3) ... found it difficult to concentrate on your job because of your family responsibilities?
- 4) ... found that your family responsibilities prevented you from giving the time you should to your job?

Random effects models were estimated, with the two measures of work–family balance as the dependent variables. The main independent variables of interest were gender, age of children and restrictive policies (school closures). Additional control variables included survey wave, country, age group, educational level, family composition, employment status and teleworking status.

As expected, the analysis reveals that the closure of schools had a detrimental effect on both work-to-family balance and family-to-work balance of parents of younger children (aged 0-11 years) because they led to an increase in parental responsibilities. Furthermore, while the effect of school closures on work-to-family balance was similar for mothers and fathers, the closures had a more detrimental impact on the family-to-work balance of mothers. This result stems from women being traditionally in charge of most of the childcare, and highlights the difficulties that working mothers in particular faced when combining paid work and childcare in the absence of childcare services.

*In round 4 of the survey, the survey question referred to the ‘last month’.

5 Pandemic-period policies with potential impact on gender divides

The COVID-19 crisis instigated a widespread governmental policy response. The initial stages of governmental actions in the EU are described, for example, by Eurofound (2020o). This chapter investigates actions taken during the pandemic by EU Member States' governments to address gender divides, and to prevent their widening during the COVID-19 crisis. The analysis includes policies that concern gender divides in paid work, unpaid work and well-being. Where information is available, the shortcomings and particularly successful aspects of the policies are discussed, in order to extrapolate examples of best practices.

Procedure for selection of policies

Despite united efforts across the EU to promote gender equality during the past few decades, Member States vary in the extent to which they mainstream gender into their public policies. This is not only true during normal times, but it has also been the case during the pandemic. In order to understand when and how Member States have taken specific actions to prevent women from emerging from the crisis disadvantaged in comparison with men, the research undertook a three-step process to identify common issues and related best practices that should be extended into the recovery period.

First, preliminary desk-based research identified policies adopted by EU Member States between March 2020 and November 2021, forming a database of more than 200 policies that, according to the existing literature on gender inequalities, could be expected to have differential impacts on women and men. These data were extracted from Eurofound's COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, the United Nations Development

Programme (UNDP) COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Country Policy Tracker. A thematic categorisation of the measures was established (see Annex 1). A review of the existing gender equality literature and empirical research on the gendered effects of the COVID-19 crisis ensured the robustness of the categorisation.

Second, after analysing the objective of each policy in the database, and its target population, a longlist of 44 measures was selected for further exploration. To comprehensively account for the pandemic situation across the EU, a balanced set of policies under each of the thematic categories was selected while also ensuring a variety of Member States according to their socioeconomic characteristics and geographical locations. Special attention was paid to measures targeting intersectional inequalities.

Third, secondary research on the 44 policies identified ones with differential impacts on women and men. A sample of 12 policy measures was selected for in-depth analysis. To construct an informed and detailed case for each of these 12 measures, secondary data analysis (from statistics, reports and studies, among other sources) was combined with primary data gathered through qualitative interviews with experts. The interviews covered at least two experts for each country, representing a wide range of knowledge across the social sciences (see Annex 2). Interviewees included academics, politicians at national and European levels, and experts from think-tanks.

The procedure outlined above allows rigorous comparisons across measures to be made, and contributes to the identification of best practices for the pandemic recovery period and beyond.

36 The longlist of the 44 policy measures, with details on the background and implementation of each policy, is published in a working paper available on the web page of this report at <http://eurofound.link/ef22010>

Table: Gender equality policy measures analysed as part of the research

| Number | Name of policy measure | Country |
|---------------------------------------|---|------------|
| Policies regarding paid work | | |
| 1 | Additional support for the service voucher sector | Belgium |
| 2 | Regularisation of irregular employment | Italy |
| 3 | Tax relief for women who have been unemployed for more than six months | Italy |
| 4 | Premia for care workers in elderly care | Germany |
| Policies regarding unpaid work | | |
| 5 | Rules on leave for family reasons in connection with the epidemic | Luxembourg |
| 6 | Pregnant self-employed women get temporary dispensation from the employment requirement for maternity pay | Denmark |
| 7 | Temporary Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme | Ireland |
| 8 | Right to flexible schedule and reduction of working hours for workers with care responsibilities | Spain |
| 9 | Maternity and paternity leave | Spain |
| Policies regarding well-being | | |
| 10 | Simplified procedures to obtain a one-time benefit for people in material distress | Czechia |
| 11 | New permanent regulation on remote work under consideration | Poland |
| 12 | Online mental health service launched for frontline workers | Ireland |

Note: Policies were adopted during the period between March 2020 and November 2021.

Policies regarding paid work

Virtually all EU Member States introduced measures to address the pandemic shock to the labour market. Such support came through the implementation of job retention schemes, income support measures and extended unemployment benefits. Most Member States increased the level of compensation and relaxed the eligibility criteria for schemes to include groups in which women tend to be overrepresented (such as part-time workers, temporary workers and self-employed people) (Müller and Schulten, 2020).

During normal times, however, and despite a 2019 EU recommendation on the matter,³⁷ women face disproportionate challenges in accessing protection schemes and are thus generally less protected during typical crises (Council of the European Union, 2019; Rubery and Tavora, 2020, p. 77). When women do access such benefits, compensation tends to be low due to their typically low earnings and low levels of contributions. For the most part, even if pandemic interventions in the labour market did not generally include gender-specific clauses, preliminary evidence suggests these may still have had an indirect impact on women and women's lives due to the relationship between labour market patterns and the nature of the crisis. In this regard, the unprecedented policy changes

brought about by the pandemic have served to demonstrate that, in some cases, rapid innovation, adaptation, and structural and institutional change to support workers are possible.

Gendered patterns of employment produce differential labour market outcomes for women and men, but also raise the issue of intersectional inequalities: low-skilled and migrant women face a higher risk of being unprotected in the labour market during times of crisis. Despite relaxations of eligibility criteria, in virtually all Member States domestic workers have been particularly vulnerable. There are, however, exceptions: countries such as Belgium and Italy implemented complementary measures to protect this category of workers (see policy examples 1 and 2). In the EU on average, 90% of domestic workers are women (European Commission, 2021a).

While Italy explicitly excluded domestic workers from its redundancy fund, protection measures for non-standard workers were implemented as a reaction to the crisis. By promoting the regularisation of irregular employment, the government provided an opportunity for agricultural and domestic workers to benefit from protection schemes and sick leave allowances at a time of increased vulnerability. The Italian policy nevertheless excluded other important female-dominated sectors,

³⁷ Council Recommendation of 8 November 2019 on access to social protection – making social protection systems fit for the future (2019/C 387/01).

such as tourism and food services, that not only are characterised by a sizeable concentration of informal work but were also hard hit by the crisis (see Chapter 2). This is crucial in the Italian context, as it was one of the Member States in which a ‘she-cession’ was more evident (see Figure 21). At the same time, this policy was of short duration. A similar measure targeting informal workers was also implemented in Portugal, although for longer (Eurofound, 2020c; see also longlist of policy measures published in a working paper at <http://eurofound.link/ef22010>).

Health and care sectors were also heavily affected during the pandemic. While frontline workers faced increased challenges, the COVID-19 crisis helped to increase awareness of the working conditions characteristic of the sectors, which are typically dominated by women (see Chapter 2). Many Member States, including Austria, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania and Slovenia, have implemented temporary financial bonuses for health and care staff. Germany was one of the few countries to explicitly consider workers in elderly care (see policy example 4). Even though at first the policy was of short duration, the German government has since implemented other measures to periodically increase the salaries of health and care workers going forward.

The strengthening of the care sector is essential to close the gender gaps in unpaid work and in time use. In countries such as Germany and Italy, for instance, women carry out a disproportionate amount of care work for the elderly. The German policy represents a good practice in not merely improving employment conditions for people in care jobs, but also improving the structures that facilitate women’s entry into the labour market. Similarly, in light of the long-term effects of the pandemic on paid employment, the Italian government has implemented tax incentives for women to take up employment (see policy example 3 below). Importantly, the measure explicitly targets women who typically have less chance of participating in paid work, such as women from the south of Italy, older women and mothers of young children.

Detailed analyses of four policies follow, yielding insights that inform best practices, but also highlighting the limitations of policies that attempt to enhance gender equality in economic opportunities.

Policy example 1: Additional support for the service voucher sector (Belgium)

A service voucher system has operated in Belgium since 2004. As it targets the service sector, and particularly domestic work, the policy is inherently gendered: 97% of workers employed under the voucher scheme are women (Safuta and Camargo, 2019, p. 5).

In 2014, the scheme went from being managed by the national government to being administered by the regional ministries of employment (European

Commission, 2015). Although it operates at regional level, there are minor differences in provisions across the three Belgian regions: Brussels Region, Flemish Region and Walloon Region. Vouchers (*dienstencheques/titres-services*), each equivalent to one hour of service, are purchased by private individuals from a designated issuing company (Federal Public Service, undated; Eurofound, 2020d). Individuals can buy up to 500 vouchers a year, the first 400 at €9 each and the remaining 100 at €10 each. Two people sharing a household can purchase a total of 1,000 vouchers, but households with specific needs (for example, households with single parents, people with disabilities and older persons) have an increased allowance of 2,000 vouchers. Through the system, the individual utilises the vouchers to pay the employee, who has a contract with the issuing company. The services that can be purchased through the vouchers also vary regionally, although domestic and care duties are common to all three regions (Eurofound, 2020d).

Prior to the pandemic, voucher service providers received €22.48 per hour worked. Each regional government intervened to cover the difference between the price paid by the user and the amount collected by the company (between €12.48 and €13.48 per hour). Even before the pandemic, the scheme placed a considerable strain on the national budget, and was one of the most heavily subsidised schemes in Europe, with 70% of the costs being publicly funded (I. Marx, personal communication, 24 January 2022; European Commission, 2015).

Pre-pandemic monitoring data at national level suggest that the policy has been effective in creating new jobs. As of 2013, about 33% of voucher beneficiaries were unemployed before entering the system (IMPact, undated). More than half of the workers were over 40 when entering the scheme, and thus it could prove beneficial for mothers re-entering the labour market or older women choosing to work on a part-time basis. Considering that another objective of the scheme is to enhance work–life balance, it is encouraging to note that, pre-pandemic, 23% of beneficiaries declared that they had more time to provide educational support to their children. However, given that most beneficiaries are women, special attention needs to be paid to complementary policies to heighten the involvement of fathers in the household and in childcare. This is especially relevant considering that women in Belgium still spend 1.55 times as many hours on unpaid childcare and housework as men (WEF, 2021).

The system underwent temporary changes during the pandemic, given that the service workers were unable to telework (Eurofound, 2020d). If they had made use of temporary unemployment benefits, the compensation would have been less than adequate due to the low levels of pay in the sector. For this reason, the three Belgian regions moved to amend their voucher scheme

policies (Eurofound, 2020d). The Walloon Region's government intervened by temporarily stipulating that all voucher scheme companies could claim a subsidy of €18.00 (instead of €13.48 or €12.48) per hour per worker who was not in receipt of temporary unemployment benefit, while the company Sodexo was declared able to benefit from a reimbursement of €27.00 (and thenceforth so were all companies of more than 250 workers). The regional government of Brussels granted a lump sum of €4,000 to service voucher companies and stipulated an additional subsidy of €2.50 per declared hour of temporary unemployment. The Flemish Region's government increased its contribution to service voucher companies to €23.00 per voucher.

Both during the pandemic and more generally, the voucher scheme has important implications for gender equality. The scheme's main objectives include raising employment levels for low-skilled workers, reducing the size of the informal economy and helping workers to achieve a better work-life balance (Raz-Yurovich and Marx, 2018, p. 105). While the pandemic has served to emphasise the effects of gendered segregation in the labour market, it is likely that the new provisions of the voucher system have prevented some low-skilled women in Belgium from losing their jobs during the crisis (European Commission, 2021b). Importantly, given that the voucher system allows workers in the service sector to enter the formal labour market, it enhances their financial security in times of crisis (Raz-Yurovich and Marx, 2018, p. 106; D. Mortelmans, personal communication, 28 January 2022). In contrast, while many informal workers could not access welfare benefits during the crisis, people in Belgium working under the voucher scheme had access to sickness benefits, which have been particularly useful during a pandemic.

Although the system has had an impact on increasing formal employment, Raz-Yurovich and Marx (2018) suggest that the impact is limited relative to the policy's subsidisation level. They report that 40% of voucher workers are not low-skilled, and some of them are also not entering the scheme from unemployment (p. 112). While the scheme had an immediate and positive impact on the creation of low-skilled jobs, the average service voucher employee is subsidised by the state for about three years. In the medium to long term, there have been no observable effects on low-skilled employment. A potential solution to the issue would involve the voucher system being transformed into a stepping stone for informal workers to eventually achieve non-subsidised regular employment.

The scheme appears to have had an impact on women at the other end of the skills spectrum, who typically purchase the vouchers. The vouchers are primarily used by two-adult households in which both individuals are highly educated and work on a full-time basis

(Raz-Yurovich and Marx, 2018, p. 107). It is possible to identify the policy effect on women's employment rates in Belgium and find that there was an increase in the employment rates for high-skilled women in Belgium as a consequence of the policy. In this regard, it is plausible that the voucher system permits high-skilled parents to progressively enter the labour market as they delegate housework and childcare to voucher workers. The gender gap in full-time unemployment in Belgium is relatively narrow and lies below the EU average (EIGE, 2021).

Policy example 2: Regularisation of irregular employment (Italy)

This measure was temporarily implemented during the crisis to provide, for one month, an opportunity for undeclared workers to regularise their employment relations. Law Decree No. 34 aimed to target undocumented migrant workers in particular. The measure was initially established to cover irregular migrant farmworkers, and it was later extended to also include domestic and personal care workers (Palumbo, 2020). Approximately 90% of the requests for the regularisation of an employment relation were made for domestic workers (Eurofound, 2020e).

The measure provides two channels to declare an irregular employment relationship (C. Saraceno, personal communication, 14 January 2022; see also Eurofound, 2020e). The first channel allows employers to apply to conclude a fixed-term employment contract with foreign nationals or to declare the existence of an irregular employment relationship. In the case of foreign citizens, they must have been present in Italy before 8 March 2020 to receive a resident permit for work reasons. The second channel allows foreign citizens with a permit that expired on or after 31 October 2019 to apply for a temporary residence permit lasting six months, with the purpose of looking for employment in a specified sector. If the person has a job, the temporary permit can be converted into a residence permit for work reasons. Between June and July 2020 (when the measure was active), 93,371 requests were made, although the government expected to receive approximately 300,000 applications (Eurofound, 2020e).

Law Decree No. 34 represents a unique measure in the pandemic context, with important gender equality implications. The situation of domestic workers in Italy is similar to that in other Member States, with 90% being women, and 70% being immigrant women, primarily from eastern European countries (Istituto Nazionale Previdenza Sociale, 2021).

Despite its short duration, such policies serve to integrate informal workers into the labour market and help them become eligible for welfare benefits. The consequences of the COVID-19 crisis might incentivise some workers to forgo greater incomes in exchange for

the security provided by formal employment (Webb and McQuaid, 2020, p. 1013). Therefore, it is essential that policies such as Law Decree No. 34 be considered during the recovery period, extending to other economic sectors such as construction, tourism and food services (Palumbo, 2020).

Policy example 3: Tax relief for women who have been unemployed for more than six months (Italy)

This measure was included as part of the 2021 Budget Law (*Legge di Bilancio 2021*) and applies to employment contracts created between 1 January 2021 and 31 December 2022 (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2021). The main objective of this measure is to directly target gender inequalities, as it seeks to increase women's employment rate by exempting women who have been unemployed for more than six months from making tax contributions for 36 months upon being hired and up to the amount of €6,000. In this way, it modifies and further extends the provisions of the Fornero Law, which provided a tax exemption of 50%, and only under certain conditions (Carta and de Philippis, 2021).

The tax exemptions stipulated in the measure target particular women workers in terms of employment contracts and socioeconomic indicators. Incentives are provided to women who are hired under full-time contracts, fixed-term contracts and part-time contracts in a cooperative or in public administration (Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, 2021). The measure therefore excludes domestic workers. The measure covers women over 50 years of age, women residing in southern regions, women in disadvantaged sectors and women who have been unemployed for more than two years. Since this legislation seeks to aid those sectors particularly affected by COVID-19, it targets employers who were in difficulty prior to 31 December 2019, or who encountered difficulties in the months following the onset of COVID-19 (Donna in Affari, 2021).

Even though its labour market was characterised by a strikingly low women's employment rate of 52.7% at the onset of the pandemic (Eurostat, 2021b), Italy has also been one of the Member States particularly hit by a 'shecession' (see for example Profeta et al, 2020). Although the women's employment rate had virtually returned to its pre-pandemic level at the beginning of 2022, in the Italian socioeconomic context the measure in question has implications for gender equality in the recovery period. First, the measure seeks to increase the employment of women under permanent contracts. Women in Italy are disproportionately employed under part-time and temporary contracts, with 49.9% of women working part time compared with 21.4% of men

(WEF, 2021), and 17.5% of employed women working on a temporary basis compared with 16.8% of employed men.³⁸ Second, this measure provides incentives for the hiring of women in the traditionally male-dominated employment sectors. This measure relates to a prevalent issue in Italy: marked and significant regional inequalities. While the northern and central regions have average employment rates for women of 58.9% and 55.5%, respectively, a mere 37.4% of women are employed in the southern regions (ISTAT).

Policy example 4: Premia for care workers in elderly care (Germany)

In the German context, elderly care has been a significant issue during the pandemic. With 22% of its population above 65 years of age, Germany has established compulsory long-term care insurance to cover the costs of care expenses (Federal Ministry of Health, 2018). Long-term care and outpatient care are the health expenditure categories in which the German government spends the most (OECD, 2018). Remuneration in the care sector is low, and workers in residential long-term care in Germany earn 18% less than the average worker (Eurofound, 2021c).

With older people being at higher risk from COVID-19, care workers have faced challenges in keeping residents safe. The German parliament acknowledged the challenges faced by nursing homes and outpatient care centres and stipulated a one-time COVID-19 premium of up to €1,500 for workers in elderly care (Eurofound, 2020f). While the state provided €1,000 per worker, employers (both private and public) were encouraged to add €500 to reach the maximum benefit amount. This measure particularly targeted nursing specialists and assistants, everyday caregivers and companions, assistants and attendants, and employees in domestic care, working either full time or part time.

In Germany, women represent 85% of care workers, and nearly 65% of care workers are employed on a part-time basis (Destatis, 2021). In the short run, the bonus may have represented a financial alleviation for many care workers. However, it is estimated that 90% of care work in Germany is carried out on the black market, and mostly by migrant women (Theobald and Luppi, 2018, p. 636). Traditionally in Germany the family provides a large amount of social welfare and care in the area of long-term care. Families that require assistance tend to obtain it through private means (Hipp and Bünning, 2021). In the context of the pandemic, where social distancing has been especially encouraged when dealing with older people, it is likely that some care workers, especially live-in carers, found themselves without employment and ineligible to receive benefits.

38 EU-LFS indicator LFSA_ETPGAN. Employees aged 15-64 years.

The issue of elderly care during the pandemic period helps depict how increasing the women's employment rate is not sufficient, and how there also ought to be a change in the quality of employment in the female-dominated sectors in the recovery period and beyond (L. Romeu Gordo, personal communication, 16 December 2021). On the one hand, while women remain segregated into such vulnerable employment sectors, the pandemic has served to emphasise the importance of improving work conditions for care workers. Promisingly, a minimum wage for elderly care workers of €15.00 per hour was introduced by the German government in July 2021 (P. Poutvaara, personal communication, 20 January 2022; see also Bundesministerium für Gesundheit, 2021). On the other hand, the pandemic has also helped raise awareness of how a lack of access to formal care for the elderly can contribute to a sizeable amount of unremunerated work, which is typically undertaken by women at the expense of their participation in the labour market (L. Romeu Gordo, personal communication, 16 December 2021). Even before the pandemic, women in Germany carried out a higher share of unremunerated tasks, while being more likely to work part time (P. Poutvaara, personal communication, 20 January 2022; see also WEF, 2021). Similarly, during the pandemic, the increase in demand for childcare has been primarily met by women; the share of heterosexual households in which mothers do most of the childcare almost doubled, and mothers were also observed to reduce their participation in paid employment (P. Poutvaara, personal communication, 20 January 2022). That is, while 24% of mothers said they had reduced their working hours in April 2020, only 16% of fathers stated this. Importantly, Jessen (2021) finds that, even when both parents were working remotely, the mother took on more childcare. If left unaddressed, reduced participation of women in the labour market has the potential to accentuate the gaps in employment and earnings.

Policies regarding unpaid work

Schools across the EU were, on average, completely closed for 18 weeks and only partially open for an additional 14 weeks between March 2020 and December 2021 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021). As a result, most Member States implemented policies aimed at helping workers to combine paid employment with unpaid care work. Support for parents during the pandemic came primarily in the form of special leave allowances (Rubery and Tavora, 2020, p. 68).

Evidence from the pandemic period suggests women undertook a disproportionate amount of housework and childcare, even when both parents were working remotely. This has been documented in Chapter 3. The issue of time use in the pandemic context has therefore shown that additional incentives, such as the provision of free and accessible childcare, are needed for women to enter the labour market.

Special parental leave also alleviated the burdens on carers. While 20 countries in the EU established leave allowances for care reasons, some Member States explicitly made their allowances increasingly inclusive of women (Rubery and Tavora, 2020, pp. 88–89). Germany, for instance, reformed its existing parental leave to make explicit provisions for part-time workers and *Minijobbers*,³⁹ the Netherlands and Portugal included special provisions for families of frontline workers, and Croatia, Denmark and Hungary implemented special allowances for when both parents were not allowed to telework (see Eurofound, 2020g; Government of the Netherlands, 2020; Rubery and Tavora, 2020, p. 90; see also Annex 2). As with policies relating to paid work, the fast implementation of special care leave has demonstrated that swift adaptation to changing situations is possible.

A detailed analysis follows of five policy measures depicting best practices that it would be important to carry on into the future, while also highlighting the limitations in the narrowing of the care gap, which should be addressed in the recovery period.

Policy example 5: Rules on leave for family reasons in connection with the epidemic (Luxembourg)

While most of the family policies implemented across the EU had an indirect impact on gender inequalities, the Luxembourg government explicitly recognised the gendered impact of the pandemic by amending the existing parental leave between May 2020 and October 2021 (Gouvernement du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg, 2021; Eurofound, 2020h).

The COVID-19 rules on leave for family reasons amended the existing parental leave, making it possible for parents who had to look after children under the age of 13 to take leave while receiving their full salary, paid by the National Health Fund (Gouvernement du Grand-Douché de Luxembourg, 2021; Eurofound, 2020h). The measure first relaxed the eligibility criteria of parental leave by including the self-employed, temporary workers and apprentices. At the same time, it included incentives to encourage parents to alternate leave periods. For instance, limitations did not apply

39 Mini-jobs are part-time jobs where a person earns a salary of less than €450 per month and thus is not liable to pay taxes or social security contributions.

when one of the parents was teleworking – it was understood that telework remains a productive time during which a parent cannot provide childcare. This aspect of the Luxembourg policy is unique in the pandemic, and it tackles some of the issues highlighted by the EU’s Work–life Balance Directive (see European Commission, 2018a).

Despite the novel provisions, women were observed to be the main beneficiaries of parental leave, at least in the short term (G. Menta, personal communication, 25 January 2022; I. Schmoetten, personal communication, 20 January 2022; see also Todorovic et al, 2021, p. 3). Gender differences in the take-up rates diminished in 2021. Qualitatively, both men and women were found to increase their unpaid working time, keeping the gender care gap constant (G. Menta, personal communication, 20 January 2022), following the country’s ingrained pattern in which women do almost twice as much unremunerated work as men (WEF, 2021). In this way, the case of Luxembourg is therefore consistent with other studies suggesting that, when parental leave or flexible work arrangements are optional, they are disproportionately taken up by women (see for example Farré et al, 2020).

Policy example 6: Pregnant self-employed women get temporary dispensation from the employment requirement for maternity pay (Denmark)

This measure represents one of the few measures in the EU to have directly targeted women during the pandemic period. Specifically, the measure targeted self-employed women, who tend to be excluded from regular support schemes (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2021). Although Denmark has the smallest proportion of self-employed workers in the EU (Eurofound, 2021b), the Danish Ministry of Employment temporarily intervened between 1 December 2020 and 30 April 2021 to protect these workers during the pandemic, adding a gender dimension to the measure. Although no data are available for the evaluation of the measure yet, the ministry estimates that the measure directly affected 40 self-employed women (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2021).

The measure automatically enrolled all self-employed women, providing extraordinary maternity pay for those who became pregnant up to the first quarter of 2021. It also applied retroactively to all self-employed women who commenced maternity leave on or after 1 December 2020 (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2021; Eurofound, 2020i). This has required individual municipalities and the Danish Public Benefit Administration to reopen cases where maternity benefits had been refused during the period in question.

Women represent a minority of entrepreneurs in Denmark. Self-employed women represent 5.5% of the women in the labour force in the country, which is below the EU average. In contrast, self-employed men represent 11.2% of the men in the labour force (E. Chevrot-Bianco, personal communication, 24 January 2022). At the same time, self-employed women in Denmark earn less than self-employed men (E. Chevrot-Bianco, personal communication, 24 January 2022). Sectoral gender segregation is also evident amongst the self-employed, with women heading businesses primarily in health, retail and scientific activities, while men span a more diverse range of industries. Measures incorporating maternity benefits for women who are typically not entitled to receive them could reduce the gender gap in entrepreneurship.

Policy example 7: Temporary Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme (Ireland)

The Temporary Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme (TWSCS) is an extension of the Irish government’s Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS), implemented in the early stages of the pandemic (from 26 March to 31 August 2020) (Revenue, 2022; Eurofound, 2020j). The TWSS served as a relief measure that subsidised up to 70–85% of the net wages of employees whose employers were severely affected by the pandemic, up to a maximum of €410 per week (K. Doorley, personal communication, 17 January 2020; see also Revenue, 2022; Eurofound, 2020j). To qualify for the scheme, companies had to prove they were in significant distress because of the crisis (Revenue, 2022; Eurofound, 2020j). The main difference between the TWSS and the TWSCS was that, unlike other sectors, childcare facilities did not have to prove a significant loss in earnings to receive financial assistance from the TWSCS (U. Barry, personal communication, 14 January 2022). The main objective of this measure was to ensure that educational and childcare facilities were available to provide services once the economy reopened (Eurofound, 2020j). The measure also helped childcare institutions retain staff by providing childcare facilities with 100% of the childcare workers’ pre-pandemic wages, up to a limit of €585 per week (DCEDID, 2020; Eurofound, 2020j).

Policies assisting the childcare sector in Ireland are uncommon; institutions are privately owned, with limited state support (U. Barry, personal communication, 14 January 2022). Although investment in childcare has been increasing in recent years, Ireland still stands below most EU Member States in this matter, with spending well below the target set by Unicef (10% of national income) (S. McCullagh, personal communication, 27 January 2022; see also Robello Britto, 2017). The introduction of the TWSCS had a wide reach: of about 4,600 facilities in Ireland,

3,533 signed up for the scheme (K. Doorley, personal communication, 17 January 2022; see also Eurofound, 2020j). It is expected that the cushioning effects of the TWSCS will have been significant for women's employment, as women represent 72.3% of workers in education (CSO, 2019). On the other side, support for the formal care sector is believed to have potentially acted as a cushion for mothers working in other sectors to remain in employment. School closures have raised awareness that the availability of formal care services is important for gender equality, as established by the 2002 Barcelona targets (Profeta et al, 2020, p. 22; see also European Commission, 2013). Even though the Irish government unprecedentedly provided financial assistance to childcare institutions during the crisis, it has not addressed the broader issues stemming from a privately run childcare system (S. McCullagh, personal communication, 27 January 2022). There is evidence to suggest that only in countries where care is decommodified is care work appropriately compensated and valued (TASC, 2021).

In the Irish context, both high- and low-income families are reliant on expensive childcare services (U. Barry, personal communication, 14 January 2022). Prior to the crisis, only about 25% of children under the age of three were formally cared for, limiting the labour market participation of mothers (OECD, 2017). This rate stands below an OECD average of 32% and below the Barcelona target of 33% (OECD, 2017). At the age of three, 45% of children in Ireland are enrolled in early childhood education, compared with an OECD average of 71% (OECD, 2017). The pandemic has exacerbated the situation for women, who have been more likely than men to reduce their hours of paid work – or to leave paid work altogether – to compensate for the absence of childcare services (U. Barry, personal communication, 14 January 2022; see also Clark et al, 2020, p. 1350).

Policy example 8: Right to flexible schedule and reduction of working hours for workers with care responsibilities (Spain)

Royal Decree 8/2020 introduced a range of measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of those measures was the temporary enhancement of flexible work arrangements. The measure regulated allowances between 17 March 2020 and 30 June 2021, introducing the right to request the adaptation and/or reduction of their working time to accommodate care responsibilities (Eurofound, 2020k). Such provisions provided employment security for persons with care responsibilities. At the same time, the measure served to make up for the closure of formal care institutions.

It is worth noting that, before the pandemic, employees in Spain were entitled to working time reductions if they cared for children under the age of 12, without running the risk of being made redundant (J. I. Conde Ruiz,

personal communication, 10 December 2022). Such provisions were established as a protection mechanism following the Great Recession, so, when the pandemic began, most companies were already operating under these flexible arrangements. Given that Decree 8/200 was, in essence, a re-enactment of existing provisions, it is unlikely to have created a novel, significant impact on workers (L. González, personal communication, 11 January 2022). However, given the widening of the gender care gap during the pandemic, the measure displays the nature of flexible working arrangements: in practice, most workers requesting allowances or flexible working arrangements are women. Although there are no data on how many people requested flexible working arrangements during the pandemic, it is estimated that, due to the flexibility inherent in teleworking, few workers have done so (J. I. Conde Ruiz, personal communication, 10 December 2022). In addition to women being more likely to telework when employed, a study by Seiz (2021) finds that labour market participation in Spain is 8 percentage points higher for childless women than for mothers (p. 350).

Policy example 9: Maternity and paternity leave (Spain)

Although enhanced maternity and paternity leave allowances were not part of the Spanish pandemic response in itself, a new policy equalising leave periods between mothers and fathers at 16 weeks each came into force in January 2021 (de la Corte Rodríguez, 2020). This measure forms part of the broader Spanish plan to comply with the Work-life Balance Directive. Paternity leave in Spain has been progressively expanded since 2007, with dramatic progress being made in 2017 when paternity allowances were doubled from two to four weeks (Dallo, 2020). Since then, paternity leave allowances have been increased yearly, reaching 12 weeks in 2020. The 2021 provisions established non-transferable leave of six weeks, and a recommended additional period of 10 weeks for parents to remain on care duty. The same provisions apply to mothers (de la Corte Rodríguez, 2020).

Although the measure was implemented only recently, there are data (such as number of fathers opting for the full 16-week leave period) to evaluate its impact (L. González, personal communication, 11 January 2022). The measure is a decisive step towards narrowing the gender care gap, but in the Spanish context there is a need to tackle pervasive norms that place women at the forefront of informal care and household duties. There is anecdotal evidence hinting that companies are not content with the novel parental provisions (L. Gonzalez, personal communication, 11 January 2022). Relatedly, some fathers feel pressure not to take their parental leave allowance (Seiz, 2021, p. 351). Thus, public policies need to be accompanied by a shift in corporate culture.

Another set of research suggests that such policies can have fertility implications (Farré and Gonzalez, 2019; J. I. Conde Ruiz, personal communication, 10 December 2021). Based on data following the introduction of paternity leave in 2007, it emerged that families who used paternity leave took longer to have a second child, while many families chose not to have any more children (Farré and Gonzalez, 2019). Although the idea of multiplying the initial parental leave eight-fold seems promising in terms of gender equality, there exists the possibility that, in the long term, there could be fewer incentives to have children, given that the labour market costs of having children are also multiplied.

Policies regarding well-being

The increased risk of poverty especially among women during the pandemic, coupled with the gender care gap, jeopardised the well-being of many women across the EU (Profeta et al, 2020). The difficulties faced by specific groups of women, for example single mothers and teleworking mothers of young children, are highlighted in Chapter 4 of this report.

Considering the differential well-being patterns incurred by women and men during the pandemic and common patterns of interventions by Member States, a detailed analysis of three policies follows, highlighting both their lessons for best practices and their limitations.

Policy example 10: Simplified procedures to obtain a one-time benefit for people in material distress (Czechia)

This measure, implemented by the Czech government in October 2020, provides special assistance to vulnerable households with children under the age of 10, and particularly to parents unable to work due to care responsibilities during school closures (Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí České republiky, 2020; Eurofound, 2020l). Although similar provisions had been implemented in the years before the pandemic, the government relaxed the qualifying criteria for applicants. The measure was administered by the Labour Office (E. Kodyšová, personal communication, 3 January 2022; see also Eurofound, 2020l).

The main objective of the measure was to assist vulnerable households in covering costs related to rent or mortgage, food, clothes, energy, the internet and phones. An amount of CZK 59,671,531 (about €2,287,580) was allocated for the scheme. Despite its potential, the policy did not have extensive uptake due to the bureaucratic issues associated with it. The criteria for being granted the benefit were not transparent, making many people unaware of whether they qualified (F. Pertold, personal communication, 2 February 2022).

The Czech government estimated that during the pandemic there were 18,097 beneficiaries, of whom a considerable proportion were single mothers at a disproportionate risk of poverty or social exclusion (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020). Before the pandemic, women represented 98% of the claimants of parental allowance in Czechia (Koldinská, 2015). It has been estimated that 90% of single-parent households are headed by women. Requests for assistance submitted by single mothers increased significantly during the pandemic, in comparison with 2019 levels (FRA, 2020). Significantly, the nature of assistance changed as well: whereas in previous years assistance had been requested to pay for school lunches or Christmas gifts for children, in 2020 assistance was requested to cover basic necessities.

Policy example 11: New permanent regulation on remote work under consideration (Poland)

This measure proposes to update remote work regulations in the Polish Labour Code and to adjust them to the current social, economic and technological context (Eurofound, 2020m). At the start of the pandemic, the Polish regulation on telework dated back to 2007. Given that remote work was well received by both employers and employees, the Polish government sought to permanently regulate telework and introduce updated provisions into the Labour Code.

The novel measure allowed employees to request telework on an individual basis, although employers are not obliged to grant it (Eurofound, 2020m). Discussion on the proposal has mainly been about ergonomics, while the gender dimensions of the measure have not been explicitly considered (A. Matysiak, personal communication, 24 January, 2022). It remains unclear whether the measure will continue to be discussed by social partners and the government (Eurofound, 2020m). At the time of writing, discussions have been put on hold.

Independent of gender-specific considerations, remote work – like other flexible work solutions – can facilitate greater flexibility and thus provides a potential incentive for women to enter the labour market. It also has the potential to lower the productivity of workers who have care duties and responsibilities related to other unpaid tasks. Time-use issues brought about by the pandemic have heightened the awareness of the importance of work–life balance. If remote work policies are to have the desired effects on well-being, it is crucial that policies on remote work be complemented with measures that promote the equal distribution of unpaid work between women and men.

In the Polish socioeconomic context, this measure has implications for enhancing the living conditions of workers living in rural locations. In Poland, the

rural–urban divide is associated with significant intersectional gender inequality, with rural citizens being disproportionately disadvantaged in accessing the economy (Profeta et al, 2020). Although rural women may face greater difficulties with connectivity, this measure seeks to deal with some of these difficulties by stipulating that employers are required to provide safe equipment for remote work. It also reduces the time and money costs of commuting.

Policy example 12: Online mental health service launched for frontline workers (Ireland)

This measure was implemented by the Irish Department of Health on 23 November 2020, introducing an online mental health service for frontline workers during the COVID-19 pandemic (Eurofound, 2020n). The service was provided through the Turn2Me platform, where workers could access therapy and coaching sessions through an instant chat function. The platform provides group services, including ones for specific jobs and others based on shared issues, namely stress, burnout and maintaining a healthy work–life balance.

Across the EU, women represent the majority of workers in the health and care sectors. As of 2019, 79.1% of employees in the Irish Health Service were women, accounting for 91% of nurses, 84% of health and social care professionals, and 77% of workers in patient and client care (CSO, 2019; U. Barry, personal communication, 14 January 2022). Given the increased pressure faced by the sector during the pandemic, it is expected that this policy may have had a gendered impact on well-being. The Frontline Worker Support (FLoWS) project, jointly carried out by researchers at the National University of Ireland, Galway, and the University of Milano-Bicocca, is seeking to empirically assess the mental health effects of the pandemic on frontline workers in Ireland and Italy, as official data are still unavailable. Preliminary findings of the FLoWS project suggest that frontline workers reported high rates of anxiety and depression. Nurses, doctors and other healthcare providers have reported burnout, stress from carrying out unfamiliar roles and feelings of loneliness (O'Connor et al, 2021).

The online health service established by the Irish government was found to be lacking in reach (U. Barry, personal communication, 14 January 2022). One of the possible explanations is frontline workers' lack of time to participate in the sessions. Considering the long-term mental health effects of the pandemic, the Irish government has also introduced a €10 million fund to support free mental health provision during the recovery period (Killeen, 2022). Such services are available for people who are suffering from issues such as isolation, depression and stress because of the pandemic (Killeen, 2022). All workers in the frontline sectors, and workers in the hard-hit sectors, will be eligible to receive the service (Killeen, 2022). In Ireland, the most affected sectors were accommodation, retail and wholesale, and construction (Coates et al, 2020, p. 6) – employment in the first two of those sectors is dominated by women (CSO, 2019).

Outlook

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought increased prominence to the issue of equality between women and men, and its determinants. The unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 crisis has helped highlight gender gaps in paid work, unpaid work, money, time use, power and well-being. The crisis has also emphasised the lack of policies addressing such inequalities. While virtually all EU Member States have adopted pandemic measures to assist vulnerable groups in distress, women have been mostly indirectly targeted by such measures. Explicit consideration of how legislation addresses gender inequalities has not been addressed in many instances. This, in turn, leads to a lack of gender-disaggregated data collection and restricted mechanisms to evaluate progress.

In the light of the above, there is a need to intervene to explicitly address gender gaps in paid and unpaid work, and in well-being. The pandemic experience has demonstrated that policy changes are possible and that non-traditional employment patterns are crucial. In this regard, future policies need to enhance the value of paid and unpaid work and to foster norm-changing processes and the evolution of workplace cultures. Social partners have the potential to initiate and to contribute to these processes.

6 Future outlook for gender inequalities

Extrapolating from the long-standing gender imbalances and how they have evolved (or remained unchanged) during the COVID-19 crisis, some reflections can follow about possible future developments in gender inequalities in the EU. A pessimistic view is that the pandemic has stalled the narrowing of many gender gaps – or has even exacerbated some of the divides. A more optimistic view interprets both the crisis and recovery periods as opportunities for change to take place in gender norms and individual-level values and behaviours, as well as for policy innovation to stir institutional change in EU Member States. This chapter considers some key developments in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic that may have implications for gender inequalities going forward.

Post-pandemic recovery, policies and decision-making

Post-crisis recovery plans need to explicitly consider and address gender inequalities. With this in mind, the EU's current multiannual financial framework places a greater emphasis on gender mainstreaming than its predecessors. Gender divides are also considered in the NextGenerationEU recovery instrument, which requires explanations of how planned measures are expected to contribute to gender equality, and to equality of opportunities more broadly. It is of key importance to ensure that initiatives implemented in the recovery period are supported by data collection that provides gender-disaggregated statistics. The availability of timely, high-quality data on the situations of European citizens will allow the monitoring of progress being made. Granular data, including about individual-level time use, allow evidence-based policy decisions to be made. Data collection should consider many aspects such as gender, family composition, migration background, disabilities and age, to facilitate the evaluation of intersecting inequalities, as stressed also in the Gender Equality Strategy. High-quality data allow tools such as the Gender Equality Strategy Monitoring Portal (used for evaluating the progress being made towards the goals set in the Gender Equality Strategy) and the Social Scoreboard (which monitors progress in relation to the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan) to be used to their full effect.

Understanding that enhancing gender equality allows societies to better achieve their full potential, it follows that equality between women and men can act as a driver of post-crisis recovery and can aid a move

towards a more sustainable path of development for Europe. Gender is related to climate issues through the gendered differences in the causes of climate change, such as choices in the use of transport and energy (Tschakert and Machado, 2012; Pearse, 2017). Incorporating a gendered lens is important when developing policies that aim to support the transition to a greener society that 'puts people first' and ensures that 'no-one is left behind'. The gender focus is crucial for many reasons, chief among these being because the effects of climate change are most detrimental on disadvantaged groups (in which women are overrepresented), because women play a large role in tasks such as food preparation and energy use in the home, and because attitudes towards climate change and the necessary mitigation measures are gendered (Allwood, 2020).

As discussed in the introduction to this report, power is the domain in which the Gender Equality Index has improved most in recent years, thanks to the introduction of gender quotas on corporate boards. Still, room for improvement remains in this area. The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan and the Gender Equality Strategy both include targets for enhancing gender balance in positions of power in Europe. Considering that there is a two-way relationship between gender equality and gender issues being incorporated into public policy – with the inclusion of women in policymaking leading to more inclusive policies being debated – better gender balance should be ensured at all levels of decision-making. The Gender Equality Strategy emphasises the importance of gender balance in the leadership of companies, communities and countries alike.

Gender segregation in employment sectors

When it comes to paid work and labour markets, developments between and within employment sectors are particularly relevant to gender equality. As evidenced in this report, despite women's increasing labour market participation in recent decades, gender segregation in employment sectors has been deepening over time. Increasingly, women are more likely than men to be employed in certain sectors such as in jobs with 'caring' content, and vice versa, while gender-balanced sectors are on the decline in terms of employment numbers. Public sector employment has been key in increasing women's labour market participation, in particular in relatively highly paid jobs

in sectors such as health, education and public administration. Future decisions about investment and public expenditure on employment in these sectors have direct gendered impacts on the quality and levels of employment, as women's employment is particularly high in these sectors, accounting for 37% of women's employment and 15% of men's employment in the EU in 2019.⁴⁰ The barriers that prevent women's greater participation in certain sectors of employment include societal expectations and stereotypes about gender roles, and the lack of mentoring and career progression prospects. Recognising that gender plays a role in the digital transformation of the EU, it is important to attract more women and people from diverse backgrounds into emerging sectors such as artificial intelligence (EIGE, 2022).

One particularly gendered sector of employment is human health and social work activities, which accounted for 18% of women's and 4% of men's total employment in the EU in 2019. Although labour shortages have been an issue in many sectors in the post-pandemic economic recovery, the issue of staff shortages has been heightened when it comes to the employment of nurses, general practitioners and long-term care workers, whose services were in particularly high demand during the crisis (Eurofound, 2021d). The deficit of labour in healthcare is structural in the EU, with an estimated deficit of 1.6 million workers in the sector in 2013, and the shortfall has been predicted to rise to 4.1 million by 2030 (WHO, 2016). As well as public spending on these sectors, which affects the number of jobs available, the attractiveness of work in these sectors has an impact on the supply of labour on the part of the workers. Poor career prospects, the demanding nature of the work, low pay and poor working conditions reduce the supply of labour. These difficulties have been brought to the fore during the pandemic, and need addressing in the recovery period, with a care-centred perspective – on a par with the emphasis that is given to the green and digital transformations (Barry, 2021). The proposed European Care Strategy is likely to include recommendations that are relevant to the well-being of groups in which women are overrepresented: informal carers as well as employees in long-term care and early childhood education and care.

Hybrid work and telework

Hybrid forms of working and telework are another dimension of paid work with potential implications for the future that differ for women and men. As documented in this report, there are wide gender gaps in the teleworkability of jobs and in actual working from home during the pandemic. This report has also highlighted the challenges faced by workers who have shifted to working from home, in terms of work–life balance and the high levels of work–family conflict, which are particularly pronounced among teleworking mothers of younger children.

The experiences of working from home during the pandemic should not be generalised to draw conclusions about what the experiences of teleworkers and hybrid workers will be after the pandemic. The reason for this is that working from home during the COVID-19 crisis has been an extraordinary situation from many viewpoints, and hence its consequences have also been unique, at least to some extent. The pandemic forced employers to rapidly implement telework arrangements, which were combined with school closures and other drastic measures to curb the spread of the virus. In many cases, working from home during the crisis was mandatory.

Having the option to work from home in future is popular among workers. That suggests that, from the viewpoint of many people, the benefits of telework outweigh its downsides – at least in non-pandemic times. The desire to work from home in the post-pandemic future is higher among women than men. In the autumn of 2021, 52% of women workers reported that they would like to work from home at least several times per week even after the pandemic subsides. The corresponding rate among men was 49%.⁴¹

On the one hand, given the current division of unpaid work between women and men, flexible work arrangements can facilitate women to take up positions that in the past required considerable time away from the home (Goldin, 2022). Telework has the potential to improve work–life balance by reducing commuting and providing workers with more freedom and flexibility to organise their time. On the other hand, telework can blur the boundaries between work and private life and is associated with isolation, longer working hours and working in free time (Eurofound, 2021c). These concerns have contributed to the European Parliament's recent resolution on the right to disconnect from work.⁴²

40 Author's calculations using data from EU-LFS (LFSA_EGAN2). People aged 20–64 years.

41 Authors' calculations based on data from Eurofound's *Living, working and COVID-19* e-survey, round 4 (October to November 2021).

42 European Parliament resolution of 21 January 2021 with recommendations to the Commission on the right to disconnect (2019/2181(INL)).

Working from home also has potential wider consequences for career progression and financial well-being (Goldin, 2022). The concern is that not being physically present in the workplace reduces a worker's visibility, hampers career progression, leads to lower pay and ultimately lowers future pension receipts.

An additional concern is the implication that the increased flexibility due to working from home may lead to greater involvement in unpaid work, with potential consequences for productivity (Goldin, 2022). In the context of weak institutional support for parenting and care provision, particularly in terms of time-intensive childcare tasks, while working from home may offer mothers a mechanism for maintaining paid working hours, it nonetheless can exacerbate inequalities in unpaid work and disruptions to paid work (Lyttelton et al, 2022). This perspective highlights the importance of the provision of good-quality, accessible and affordable care services that support women's labour market participation, financial security and overall well-being.

Scope for shifting gender norms and behaviours

A pessimistic outlook for the future of gender equality stems from the fact that a large part of gender inequality in the labour market is related to the gender gap in unpaid work. Even though the employment rates of women have moved closer to those of men in many EU countries in recent decades, women continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of unpaid work, and this discrepancy has prevailed during the pandemic, as highlighted in this report.

Some silver linings are presented in the form of shifts taking place in underlying gender norms that prevail in societies. These shifts have the potential to reduce gender inequality in the future by instigating a more equal division of unpaid work between women and men. As a downside, it has been shown that social norms are faster to change than observed behaviours. This emphasises the important role of policies and regulations that incentivise people to change their behaviour to align with their (new) norms. As a result of the disruptions brought about by the COVID-19 crisis, employers are becoming increasingly aware of workers' childcare needs and are adopting more flexible working arrangements, therefore potentially accelerating the evolution of social norms and expectations. As women are more exposed to the competing demands of paid and unpaid work, they stand to benefit disproportionately from this development (Alon et al, 2020).

Another opportunity for shifting social gender norms takes place within families. As discussed in this report, traditional role models were questioned during the crisis in some families, for example in dual-earner households in which only the father worked from home (Hupkau and Petrongolo, 2020). Going forward, policy changes that stimulate similar changes can have persistent effects on gender roles (Alon et al, 2020). One example of such policies is parental leave that encourages greater involvement of fathers in childcare duties by reserving a portion of the leave exclusively for them. Further, the gender-role attitudes of offspring are shaped by the experiences and attitudes of their parents (Thornton et al, 1983). Many children grew up during the pandemic in households in which the father's involvement in unpaid work increased, and their experiences will potentially contribute towards the shifting of attitudes of future generations of parents.

Conclusion

There are many issues in the area of gender equality that need to be revisited in the years after the pandemic, as representative data continue to be constructed and developed. In this way, the pandemic-induced crisis has also instigated a rich research agenda for the future.

Clearly, the degree of gender equality (in all aspects of life) directly influences the extent to which crises have differential impacts on men and women. The fact that the Great Recession had a more severe labour market impact on men than on women is a consequence of gender inequalities in the labour market, including gaps in labour market participation and sectoral gender segregation. In a world of perfect gender equality in all dimensions of life, the consequences of any shock or event would be gender-neutral by definition. As a result, one can think of progress towards gender equality as a continuum: the closer a society is to gender equality, the more gender-equal are the impacts of shocks. On the other hand, persisting gender inequalities mean that outcomes are also gendered. As a result, gender-unequal outcomes of crises mean that policy responses to alleviate the negative impacts of shocks need to incorporate a gender-sensitive approach.

The pandemic experience has brought to the fore the fact that the different areas of gender equality must not be examined in isolation. Imbalances between women and men are an issue in many dimensions of life, and they are closely interlinked and influence each other. Positive effects in one area can have positive knock-on effects in other areas, and vice versa. As an example of this, reducing gender gaps in unpaid care work has the potential to reduce gender gaps in the labour market.

At the root of gender inequalities lie societal norms and individual-level behaviours, which are often slow to change. Crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic offer opportunities for these norms and behaviours to evolve,

offering progress towards women and men, and girls and boys, having the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities in life.

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Annexes

Annex 1: Classification of policies by theme

| Policies addressing the gender gap in paid work | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| Target population | Objectives | | |
| | Protecting essential workers | Enhancing telework | Assisting workers in vulnerable employment (e.g. part-time, temporary, informal, affected sectors, 'non-telecommutable') |
| All households | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mobilisation of healthcare professionals (Terveydenhuollon ammattilaisten työvelvoite), FI Measures to deploy a larger workforce in public healthcare and allow for the reassignment of public sector staff and teachers to other duties, IE Temporary extension of working hours in the health sector (Extension temporaire du temps de travail dans le secteur de la santé), LU Exceptional suspension of termination of employment contracts in National Health Service (Suspensão excepcional da cessação de contratos de trabalho no Serviço Nacional de Saúde), PT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> COVID-19 income support for workers (or the 60:40 measure) (COVID - 19 мярка: Подпомагане на работещите в реалния сектор), BG Support for preservation of jobs in sectors affected by COVID-19 (Potpora za očuvanje radnih mjesta u sektorima pogodeniima koronavirusom), HR Special scheme for complete suspension of business (Ειδικό σχέδιο πλήρους αναστολής εργασιών της επιχείρησης), CY Flexibilisation of temporary contracts (Disciplina dei contratti a termine), IT Creative workers employment programme (Radošo personu nodarbinātības programma), LV Support for beauty care industry (Atbalsts skaistumkopšanas nozarei), LV Interruption of the calculation of the maximum duration of temporary contracts (Interrupción del cómputo de la duración máxima de los contratos temporales), SP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-start bonus (combination wage allowance) ((Neustartbonus (Kombilohnbeihilfe)), AT Assistance in hiring the unemployed (Помощ при наемане на безработни), BG New employment programme 2021–2023 (Uus tööhõiveprogramm 2021–2023), EE Tax relief for women who have been unemployed for more than 6 months (Sgravi contributivi per le donne disoccupate da più di 6 mesi), IT Temporary job-search benefit for unemployed who would otherwise not be eligible to receive benefits (Laikinoji darbo paieškos išmoka), LT |
| Households with children | | | |
| Disadvantaged households (e.g. lower-income, those with older adults) | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional support for the service voucher sector (Bijkomende steun voor de dienstcheque sector), BE Regularisation of irregular employment (Emersione di rapporti di lavoro irregolari), IT Protection of self-employed and informal workers (Proteção de trabalhadores independentes e informais), PT | |

| Policies addressing the gender gap in unpaid work | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Objectives | | | |
| Target population | Protecting essential workers | Enhancing telework | Assisting workers in vulnerable employment (e.g. part-time, temporary, informal, affected sectors, 'non-telecommutable') |
| All households | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Premia for care workers in elderly care (<i>Sonderprämie in der Pflegebranche</i>), DE Adjustments to parental allowances (<i>Reform des Elterngeldes</i>), DE Voluntary interruption of parental leave to resume essential professional activity (<i>Interruption volontaire de votre congé parental</i>), LU Childcare services for essential workers, NL Care for children or other dependants of workers of essential services (<i>Acolhimento dos/as filhos/as ou outros dependentes a cargo de trabalhadores/as de serviços essenciais</i>), PT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stricter rules on leave for family reasons in connection with the Coronavirus epidemic (<i>Mise à jour Congé pour raisons familiales lié au coronavirus</i>), LU Right to flexible schedule and reduction of working hours for workers with care responsibilities (<i>Derecho de adaptación del horario y reducción de jornada</i>), ES | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Care jobs for temporary unemployed (<i>Zorgjobs voor tijdelijk werklozen</i>), BE Temporary unemployment in case of school closure (<i>Tijdelijke werkloosheid in geval van sluiting school</i>), BE Assistance for families with children at home during COVID-19 (<i>Hjælp til familier med hjemsendte børn og udsatte grupper</i>), DK Allowance for parents of children with special needs (<i>Ervajadusega lapse vanema erakorraline toetus</i>), EE Work stoppage to care for a child under 16 years of age (<i>Arrêt de travail pour garder un enfant de moins de 16 ans</i>), FR Compensation of income losses for parents affected by lockdowns (<i>Lohnfortzahlung für Eltern</i>), DE |
| Households with children | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> COVID-19: Assistance for parents taking unpaid leave due to a state of emergency (<i>COVID-19: Помощь за родителі, които ползват неплатен отпуск поради извънредното положение</i>), BG Special paid leave for the caring of children (<i>Ειδική Άδεια για την Φροντίδα Παίδων</i>), CY Care allowance during emergency period for homeschooling 6 to 13 year-old children (<i>Ošetřování člena rodiny – „Ošetřovné“ v době krize</i>), CZ Pregnant self-employed get temporary dispensation for employment requirement for maternity pay (<i>Gravide selvstændige icorona-klemme kan få barselsdagpenge med tilbagevirkende kraft</i>), DK Temporary Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme (<i>TWSCS</i>), IE Additional child-bonus for employees entitled to the allowance for idle time (<i>Papildus maksājums dīkstāves pabalstu saņēmējiem par katru bērnu vai apgādībā esošu personu</i>), LV Procedure for calculating maternity, paternity and childcare benefits for employees (<i>Palankesné motinytěst, těvystěst ir vaiko priežiūros išimokų skaičiavimo tvarka prastovose esantiems/buvusiems darbuotojams</i>), LT Childcare benefits, NL Care allowances for working parents forced to provide personal daycare for young children due to school/pre-school system lockdown (<i>Zasilki opiekunów dla pracujących rodziców zmuszonych do sprawowania osobistej dziennej opieki nad dziećmi w związku z zamknięciem placówek oświatowych</i>), PL Exceptional support to workers' families (<i>Apoio excepcional à família para trabalhadores</i>), PT Parental leave (<i>Concediu parental</i>), RO Cash for care (<i>prestación extraordinaria para los padres que tengan que cuidar a sus hijos</i>), ES | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> COVID-19: Assistance for parents taking unpaid leave due to a state of emergency (<i>COVID-19: Помощь за родителі, които ползват неплатен отпуск поради извънредното положение</i>), BG Special paid leave for the caring of children (<i>Ειδική Άδεια για την Φροντίδα Παίδων</i>), CY Care allowance during emergency period for homeschooling 6 to 13 year-old children (<i>Ošetřování člena rodiny – „Ošetřovné“ v době krize</i>), CZ Pregnant self-employed get temporary dispensation for employment requirement for maternity pay (<i>Gravide selvstændige icorona-klemme kan få barselsdagpenge med tilbagevirkende kraft</i>), DK Temporary Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme (<i>TWSCS</i>), IE Additional child-bonus for employees entitled to the allowance for idle time (<i>Papildus maksājums dīkstāves pabalstu saņēmējiem par katru bērnu vai apgādībā esošu personu</i>), LV Procedure for calculating maternity, paternity and childcare benefits for employees (<i>Palankesné motinytěst, těvystěst ir vaiko priežiūros išimokų skaičiavimo tvarka prastovose esantiems/buvusiems darbuotojams</i>), LT Childcare benefits, NL Care allowances for working parents forced to provide personal daycare for young children due to school/pre-school system lockdown (<i>Zasilki opiekunów dla pracujących rodziców zmuszonych do sprawowania osobistej dziennej opieki nad dziećmi w związku z zamknięciem placówek oświatowych</i>), PL Exceptional support to workers' families (<i>Apoio excepcional à família para trabalhadores</i>), PT Parental leave (<i>Concediu parental</i>), RO Cash for care (<i>prestación extraordinaria para los padres que tengan que cuidar a sus hijos</i>), ES | |

| Policies addressing the gender gap in unpaid work | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| Target population | Objectives | | |
| | Protecting essential workers | Enhancing telework | Assisting workers in vulnerable employment (e.g. part-time, temporary, informal, affected sectors, 'non-telecommutable') |
| Disadvantaged households (e.g. lower-income, those with older adults) | | | Aiding the unemployed (temporary, long-term) |
| All households | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coronavirus hazard bonus in collective agreements in the social care and healthcare sectors (<i>Corona-Prämien in Kollektivverträgen im Sozial- und Gesundheitssektor</i>), AT Protection of workers in retail, including change of working hours (<i>Corona Schutzpaket für Beschäftigte im Handel</i>), AT Encouragement premium for care personnel (<i>Aanmoedigingspremie zorgpersoneel</i>), BE COVID-19: Assistance for frontline workers in health care services (<i>COVID-19: Помощ за лица от първа линия</i>), BG Civil protection authority entitled to set working time in retail trade (<i>Radno vrijeme u trgovini</i>), HR Protection of workers and the public (<i>Προστασία Εργαζομένων και Κοινού</i>), CY COVID-19 recognised as a work injury (<i>Ansattar kan få sygdom med COVID-19 anerkendt som arbejds-skade</i>), DK Bonus for hospital staff (<i>Prime pour le personnel hospitalier</i>), FR Recognition of COVID-19 as an occupational disease (<i>Reconnaissance de la COVID-19 comme maladie professionnelle</i>), FR Premium for hospital workers (<i>COVID-19 Prämie für Klinikbeschäftigte</i>), DE | <p>Policies addressing the gender gap in well-being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teleworking and working from home in the public and broader public sector (<i>Τηλεργασία και εργασία από το σπίτι στο δημόσιο και ευρύτερο δημόσιο τομέα</i>), CY National Remote Work Strategy aims to make remote working a permanent option after the pandemic, IE Simplifying the adoption of the smart working regime (<i>Disposizioni per semplificare l'accesso al regime di smart working</i>), IT New permanent regulation on remote work under consideration (<i>Praca zdalna</i>), PL New rules for teleworking (<i>Výkon práce z domácnosti zamestnanca</i>), SK Preference for remote work (<i>Carácter preferente del trabajo a distancia</i>), ES Increasing the number of Public Administration workers in teleworking (<i>Aumentar o número de trabalhadores da Administração Pública em teletrabalho</i>), PT | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suspension of the degenerativity of unemployment benefits (<i>Opsporthing degressiviteit van de werkloosheidsuitkering</i>), BE Extension of temporary unemployment due to force majeure (<i>Verruiming van de tijdelijke werkloosheid wegens overmacht</i>), BE Increased access to unemployment benefits and sickness benefits (<i>Øget adgang til dagpenge og sygedagpenge</i>), DK State-funded unemployment security during the waiting period (<i>Valtion rahoittama työttömyysetuus omavastuujalla</i>), FI Extension of unemployment benefit entitlements for jobseekers (<i>Prolongation des droits à l'allocation chômage pour les demandeurs d'emploi</i>), FR COVID-19 pandemic unemployment payment introduced, IE Assistance benefit for unemployed with expired unemployment benefit period (<i>Bezdarbnieka palīdzības pabalsts</i>), LV Automatic extension of unemployment benefits (<i>Prolongation automatique des indemnités de chômage</i>), LU Unemployment benefit, MT Extraordinary extension of unemployment benefit and social benefit (<i>Extensão extraordinária do subsídio de desemprego e de benefícios sociais</i>), PT Extension of the support period for unemployment benefit (<i>Predĺženie podporného obdobia na dávku v nezamestnanosti</i>), SK |

| Policies addressing the gender gap in well-being | | | | |
|--|--|--------------------|---|---|
| Target population (cont'd) | Objectives | | | |
| | Protecting essential workers | Enhancing telework | Assisting workers in vulnerable employment (e.g. part-time, temporary, informal, affected sectors, 'non-telecommutable') | |
| All households (cont'd) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extraordinary financial support to personnel of public health and civil protection institutions (Εκτακτη οικονομική ενίσχυση προσωπικού υσολογείων, κέντρων υγείας και άλλων δομών του Υπουργείου Υγείας καθώς και της Γενικής Γραμματείας Πολιτικής Προστασίας), EL Healthcare workers' reward for COVID-19 work (Az egészségügyi és egészségügyben dolgozók bruttó 500.000 forintos egyszeri rendkívüli juttatása), HU Online mental health service launched for frontline workers, IE Reward for employees exposed to risk in March (Premio ai lavoratori dipendenti), IT COVID-19 recognised as an occupational disease (Arodslimību sarakstā iekļauta saslimšana ar Covid-19), LV Wage increases for medical staff (Darbo ūzmokesčio padidinimas sveikatos priežiūros įstaigų darbuotojams), LT Bonuses for employees working in social service institutions (Priedai socialinių paslaugų įstaigų darbuotojams), LT Compensation for doctors and other officials infected with COVID-19 during their duty (Kompensācijas medicīnos ir kitiems darbuotojams, uzsīrētusiems COVID-19 vīrusu darbo metu), LT Temporary substantial salary increases for public health staff in the pandemic conditions (Cresteri salariale in conditii de pandemie), RO Bonus for hazardous work (Dodatek za delo v različnih razmerah), SL | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allowance for seasonal workers in tourism, entertainment, sports and spas (<i>indenmità per i lavoratori stagionali del turismo, degli stabilimenti termali, dello spettacolo e dello sport</i>), IT Social support for artists, authors, technicians and other arts professionals (<i>Linha de apoio social aos artistas, autores, técnicos e outros profissionais das artes</i>), PT Wage related compensation due to force majeure (<i>Nadomestila plač delavcem zaradi višje sile</i>), SL | <p>Aiding the unemployed (temporary, long-term)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exceptional unemployment benefits (<i>Začasno denarno nadomestilo</i>), SL Measures to speed up the processing and payment of unemployment benefits (<i>Medidas para agilizar la tramitación y abono de prestaciones por desempleo</i>), ES Unemployment benefit and extension of protection to the cultural sector (<i>Prestación por desempleo y ampliación de la protección al sector cultural</i>), ES Temporary reinforcement of unemployment insurance (<i>Tillfälligt förstärkt arbetslöshetsersättning</i>), SE |

| Policies addressing the gender gap in well-being | | | |
|---|--|--|---|
| Target population | Objectives | | |
| | Protecting essential workers | Enhancing telework | Assisting workers in vulnerable employment (e.g. part-time, temporary, informal, affected sectors, 'non-telecommutable') |
| Households with children | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergency child supplement (<i>Notfall Kinderzuschlag</i>), DE A lump sum payment for children on top of child benefit (<i>Vienkartinė išmoka vaikams</i>), LT In-work benefit for working parents, MT Temporarily strengthened housing allowance for families with children (<i>Tillfälligt tilläggsbidrag till barnfamiljer inom bostadsbidraget</i>), SE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lump-sum payments for unemployed and children (<i>Einmalzahlung für Arbeitslose und Kinder</i>), AT COVID-19 family hardship fund and family crisis fund (<i>Corona-Familienhärtefonds und Familienkrisenfonds</i>), AT |
| Disadvantaged households (e.g. lower-income, those with older adults) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offset of additional coronavirus-related income against pension removed (<i>In dtægter fra ekstra corona-arbejde skal ikke længere modregnes i pension</i>), DK | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplified procedures to obtain a one-time benefit for people in material distress (<i>Mimořádná okamžitá pomoc COVID-19</i>), CZ Temporary compensation for basic social assistance clients due to an epidemic outbreak (<i>Välitaikainen epidemiakorvaus perustoimeentulotuen saajille</i>), FI Easing access to the basic income scheme (<i>Vereinfachter Zugang zur Grundsicherung (BMAS/ BMFSFJ)</i>), DE Emergency income (<i>Reddito di emergenza</i>), IT Suspension of conditionality requirements for income support measures (<i>Sospensione delle misure di condizionalità per l'attribuzione di alcune prestazioni di sostegno al reddito</i>), IT Increasing social assistance for low-income households (<i>Socialinės paramos nepasiturintiems didinimas</i>), LT Extension of the extraordinary subsidy for lack of activity to domestic workers (<i>Beneficiarios del subsidio extraordinario por falta de actividad para las personas integradas en el Sistema Especial de Empleados de Hogar del Régimen General de la Seguridad Social</i>), ES New minimum living income introduced (<i>Nuevo Ingreso Mínimo Vital</i>), ES | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online application for unemployment benefit and top-up of emergency assistance (<i>Online Anmeldung für Arbeitslosengeld und Aufstockung der Notstandshilfe</i>), AT Extension of expired or expiring unemployment benefit payments (<i>Παράταση χορήγησης επιδομάτων ανεργίας που έληξαν ή λήγουν</i>), EL One-time solidarity allowance for retired persons, large families and other vulnerable groups (<i>Enkratni solidarnostni dodatek za upokojeince in druge ranljive skupine</i>), SL |

Annex 2: List of experts interviewed

| Belgium | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Dimitri Mortelmans | Senior Full Professor of Sociology, University of Antwerp |
| Ive Marx | Professor and Director of the Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy, University of Antwerp |
| Czechia | |
| Eliska Kodysova | CEO, Aperio; Vice-chair, Czech Women's Lobby |
| Filip Pertold | Post-Doctoral Fellow in Economics, Center for Economic Research and Graduate Education – Economics Institute (CERGE-EI) |
| Denmark | |
| Birthe Larsen | Associate Professor of Economics and Academic Director of the Inequality Platform, Copenhagen Business School |
| Esther Chevrot-Bianco | Post-Doctoral researcher, Goethe University |
| Germany | |
| Laura Romeu Gordo | Deputy Research Director, German Centre of Gerontology (DZA) |
| Panu Poutvaara | Professor of Economics, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich; Director, IFO Center for International Institutional Comparisons and Migration Research |
| Ireland | |
| Ursula Barry | Emeritus Associate Professor, School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice, University College Dublin (UCD) |
| Karina Doorley | Senior Research Officer, Tax, Welfare, and Pensions Team, Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) |
| Sandra McCullagh | Women's Economic Equality Coordinator, National Women's Council (NWC) |
| Italy | |
| Tommaso Nannicini | Member of the Italian Parliament (Senate); Full Professor of Political Economy, Bocconi University |
| Chiara Saraceno | Emeritus Professor, Collegio Carlo Alberto, University of Turin, and Berlin Social Science Centre (WZB) |
| Luxembourg | |
| Giorgia Menta | Postdoctoral researcher, Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER) |
| Isabelle Schmoetten | Responsible for socio-political projects, CID Fraen an Gender |
| Poland | |
| Iga Magda | Associate Professor, Warsaw School of Economics; Vice President of the Board, Institute for Structural Research (IBS) |
| Anna Matysiak | Associate Professor, Faculty of Economic Sciences, University of Warsaw |
| Spain | |
| José Ignacio Conde Ruiz | Professor of Economic Analysis, Universidad Complutense de Madrid; Deputy Director, Fundación de Estudios de Economía Aplicada (FEDEA) |
| Libertad González | Associate Professor of Economics, Universitat Pompeu Fabra and Barcelona School of Economics (BSE) |

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The COVID-19 pandemic has accentuated inequalities in many dimensions of European societies, including inequalities between women and men in several key domains. This report looks at gender inequalities that existed prior to the COVID-19 crisis and describes in what ways the pandemic has impacted on gender divides. It also analyses the various policy responses of national governments across the EU to address gender divides, and to prevent their widening during the pandemic. The effects of the pandemic on employment at EU-level has been remarkably gender-neutral on the whole, with nuances emerging within different sectors and socioeconomic groups. The pre-existing gender gaps in unpaid work have persisted, leading to work-life conflicts, especially among teleworking mothers of young children. Finally, the report describes the outlook for gender inequalities in Europe, pointing to factors that will shape the future of equality between women and men: gender segregation in labour markets, gender divides in telework and hybrid work, and gender mainstreaming in policymaking – especially in relation to caregiving and care services.

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.

