Flexible working arrangements and gender equality in Europe

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FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS AND GENDER EQUALITY IN EUROPE

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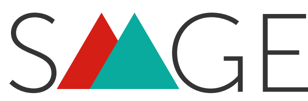

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

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

1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a seismic shift in the way people work and think about work. Different types of flexible working patterns have become more normalised. For example, only about one out of eight workers were able to work from home (a few times a month or more often) prior to the pandemic (Chung & Van der Lippe, 2020). However, during the peak of the first lockdown, this number was closer to 50 % of all workers, and in more recent years about one out of three workers teleworks to some degree (Eurofound, 2022b). Furthermore, the transposition deadline for the European Union (EU) Work–life balance directive[1] expired in August 2022, when governments were to have installed in their labour laws the right to request flexible working for workers with children up to a specified age (generally up to the age of 8) and carers. The Directive explicitly mentions flexitime, telework, and part-time work. Therefore, it is highly likely that that the use of flexible working arrangements will become common in the future in labour markets across Europe.

One of the key goals of the implementation of the right to flexible working, both at the EU and national levels, is to enhance gender equality at home and in the labour market. There is the hope that by providing flexible working arrangements to workers, this may enable better integration of work and home demands for working families, enabling better labour market participation of workers with caring responsibilities, especially that of mothers and women. Moreover, the assumption is that flexible working arrangements may encourage second parents and fathers to engage more in childcare and other domestic responsibilities, which may allow for a better division of labour within household (Carlson et al., 2021). This again can help improve the labour market capacities of women, especially in heterosexual couples. However, as many studies have noted (Chung et al., 2021; Chung & Van der Lippe, 2020; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001), the association between flexible working and gender equality is not so clear-cut with evidence pointing in different directions.

It is therefore an opportune time to gather literature and data on how flexible working relates to gender equality in Europe, and to create a coherent overview. This report aims to summarise the current state of art in the theory and evidence around flexible working with regards to gender equality, updating our current knowledge especially with regards to changes that have occurred during and 'post-pandemic'. More specifically, the patterns of gender inequality observed in this report include gender differences in the access to and use of flexible working arrangements as well as outcomes of flexible working with regards to equality at work (on one's career, job opportunities, training, etc.) and at home (division of housework and childcare).

1 Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work–life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU, OJ L 188, 12.7.2019, p. 79–93

The main research questions asked in this report follow from the overall question:

Can flexible working enhance gender equality in the labour market and at home?

RQ1: Who has access to and uses flexible working arrangements?

RQ2: How does access to and use of flexible working arrangements relate to employment outcomes and employment and working conditions?

RQ3: How does access to and use of flexible working arrangements relate to the division of labour within households?

RQ4: Which flexible working arrangements fare better with regards to achieving gender equality?

RQ5: What policy changes at the Member State and EU level are needed to ensure that flexible working can enhance gender equality?

RQ6: Can the general reduction of working hours (the so-called four-day week) work as an alternative policy to address gender inequality issues?

The main data sources used were the European Working Conditions Survey of 2021 (EWCS) and the European Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) as they provide the most recent and reliable cross-nationally comparable data set available that covers Europe. Whenever possible, data is compared from across the 27 Member States plus some associate countries like Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Note that due to Brexit, when using the EU-LFS data, all data for the United Kingdom is from the most recent year which is 2019.The findings in this report provide insights into whether flexible working arrangements can help to achieve the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 aimed at closing gender gaps in the labour market via increasing women's participation in the labour market and reducing the gender pay gap which will then have positive implications for the gender pension gap. The answer to this question is complex. It is already known that flexible working arrangements can help Europe achieve gender equality by enhancing women's labour market participation (Chung & Van der Horst, 2018), especially in more lucrative, higher-paying jobs (Fuller & Hirsh, 2018). However, flexible working also has the potential to entrench traditional gender roles (Chung & Van der Lippe, 2020) though this depends on the type of flexible working arrangements, how they are provided, and the context in which they are provided (Chung, 2022a).

Chapter 2 provides a definition of flexible working arrangements. It compares and contrasts existing definitions used in Eurofound, and DG EMPL reports (Chung & Van der Lippe, 2020; Eurofound, 2022a; European Commission, 2019; Plantenga & Remery, 2009) and provides a consolidated definition to be used for this study. It also briefly outlines the development of flexible working arrangements in European policy, including the European Union Work–life Balance Directive (European Commission, 2019), the EU Framework Agreement on Telework (ETUC, 2002) and other relevant policies at the EU level (Chung, 2022a). This chapter also introduces some of the key theories of access to flexible working that will frame the rest of the report. Other theories and studies on the outcomes of flexible working will be described in the relevant chapters, Chapters 3 to 5.

Chapter 3 examines part-time work, asking whether part-time work is a way for women to reconcile work and careers with family life demands, and what are its limitations. Part-time work is first explored as it has been the most established form of flexible working, especially pre-pandemic, as a way for parents, especially for mothers, to reconcile work with family life.

Chapter 4 considers flexible schedules and teleworking as an alternative solution that can potentially overcome some of the limitations of part-time working. Chapter 5 examines a relatively new development in labour market policies, the shortening of the standard full-time working hours, e.g. the four-day-week movement. It examines whether this could resolve some of the tensions and limitations of the other flexible working arrangements with regards to its impact on gender equality. The final chapter sets out key policy recommendations for flexible working to enhance gender equality outcomes rather than entrench inequalities.

Throughout the report, the issue is explored from an intersectional perspective, so that dimensions such as parental status and socioeconomic status, intersect with gender. This report provides academic, policymakers, policy stakeholders as well as the general public, including human resource (HR) personnel and managers, with a better understanding of the complexity of the relationship between flexible working and gender equality outcomes in order to make better decisions around flexible working and other related policy reforms and implementations.

2. Flexible working definitions, policy legislation and theories

Flexible working can entail a number of different arrangements. First and foremost, there needs to be a distinction made between flexible contracts – such as fixed-term contracts and temporary agency work – and flexible working arrangements. The former provides flexibility in the employment status of a worker, whereas the latter are arrangements provided within an organisation that are usually provided to its employees. A further distinction is needed between employer-led working time arrangements – such as shift work, zero-hours contracts and unusual (asocial) hours work – that are usually used by employers to better adapt to business cycles (Chung & Tijdens, 2013) and the more employee-led working arrangements that are examined in this report. More specifically, this report focuses on flexible working arrangements that give workers control over when and where they work, and flexibility in the number of hours worked (Kelly et al., 2011). Allen et al. (2015) define flexible working arrangements as alternative work options that allow work to be accomplished outside the traditional temporal and/or spatial boundaries of a standard workday. This report follows the European Commission definition, where 'flexible working arrangements' are defined as the possibility for workers to adjust their working patterns, including through the use of remote working arrangements, flexible working schedules or reduced working hours.[2] This chapter examines the definition of the terms and the legislative framework of flexible working arrangements, as well as some of the key theories on access to flexible working. The theories and summaries of the literature around the outcomes of flexible working are discussed in the relevant sections in the rest of the report.

2 Directive 2019/1158 on Work Life Balance https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2019.188.01.0079.01.ENG.

2.1 Definition of flexible working arrangements

Firstly, **part-time work** can be defined as work contracted for shorter hours than the standard full-time contract. In more legal terms, the European Commission defines 'part-time worker' as an employee whose normal hours of work, calculated on a weekly basis or on average over a period of employment of up to one year, are less than the normal hours of work of a comparable full-time worker.[3] More specifically, the International Labour Organization (ILO) defines part-time work as work of less than 30 hours, and in some cases work that is less than 35 hours.[4] Within the definition of part-time, a distinction can be made between substantial (21 to 30 or 34 hours), shorter (20 hours or less) and marginal (15 hours or less) part-time work. Distinctions can also be made between regular and variable part-time work – the latter where the number of hours changes week by week (Rubery et al., 2022). Across 27 EU Member States, the actual number of hours a part-time worker works is on average 21.9 hours a week (21.2 for men and 22.2 for women), a slight increase from 2013 when part-time workers worked on average 20.5 hours a week.

One reason behind the variation in these definitions of part-time work and the cut-off points are due to the large variation across countries, sectors and occupations with regards to what is considered a standard full-time contract (OECD, 2021). For example, although in most European countries the statutory normal working week is 40 hours, it is 35 hours in France and in other countries like Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, there are no specified national legal weekly hours. Similarly, the average number of hours in collective bargaining agreements across sectors varies. For example, the average number of hours in collective bargaining agreements in Germany is 38.2 hours a week and in that of the largest German metal workers' union, IG Metall, it is 35 hours.[5] This explains the variation in the way individuals consider whether they work part-time or full-time, depending on the sector, occupation, workplace, and their family contexts (Stovell & Besamusca, 2022). Due to this variation, this report uses **self-defined definitions of part-time work.** For example, for the data sets using EU LFS and EWCS 2021, part-time work is generally based on a spontaneous response by the respondent[6] that they work part-time.

Teleworking has a number of different definitions as well as different terms that are used to relate to similar working arrangements. These include telecommuting, remote work, telework, smart/agile work, telework and ICT-based mobile work (TICTM), and more recently, homeworking and hybrid working (Allen et al., 2015; Eurofound, 2022a, 2023). One of the key difference in the terms is whether or not digital technology is being used for the work. For example, remote work can refer to any work carried out outside the employer's premises regardless of the technology used. In contrast, teleworking or telecommuting can be defined as a work practice that involves members of an organisation substituting a portion of their typical work hours (ranging from a few hours per week to nearly full-time) to work away from a central workplace – typically principally from home – using

3 Council Directive 97/81/EC of 15 December 1997 concerning the Framework Agreement on part-time work.

4 See for the ILO definitions: https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/non-standard-employment/WCMS_534825/lang--en/index.htm#:~:text=Others%20have%20set%20a%20maximum,or%2030%20hours%2C%20per%20week.

5 https://www.epsu.org/article/working-hours-information-ig-metall.

6 In the EU LFS, the main exceptions are the Netherlands and Iceland where a 35-hour threshold is applied, Sweden where a threshold is applied to the self-employed, and Norway where persons working between 32 and 36 hours are asked whether this is a full- or part-time position.

technology to interact with others as needed to conduct work tasks (Eurofound, 2022a). Similarly, in the EU Framework Agreement on Telework 2002, telework is defined as any form of organising and/or performing work using information technology, in the context of an employment contract/relationship, in which work, which could also be performed at the employer's premises, is carried out away from those premises on a regular basis.

A more recent development, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, is hybrid working, where a part of the worker's working hours is spent at home (two to three days a week) and the rest in the office (Eurofound, 2023a). Prior to the pandemic, the majority of teleworking was done on more of an ad hoc rather than a regular basis (Chung & Van der Lippe, 2020), for example a few times a month for specific reasons, like needing to wait for a delivery or a repair person. However, post-pandemic, hybrid working has now been established as the norm for many workers across Europe (Eurofound, 2022b). In this study, the primary data used for the analysis comes from Eurofound, and hence their definition of teleworking is also used: **typical work hours being carried out outside of the employers' premises or central workplace using technology**. The definition of teleworking may vary in the summaries of the existing studies; however, in most cases they follow a similar approach. The report also sometimes distinguishes between the frequencies of teleworking – e.g. fully (daily), partially (hybrid) or occasionally (less often) – or between usually, sometimes and never. The study generally notes exactly what is being used in the analysis, but in the latter part of Chapter 4 where the working conditions and outcomes of teleworking are explored, teleworkers are defined as **those who are fully or partially teleworking**.

Flexible working schedules is defined in this report as arrangements **that allow workers control over the timing of their work**. This can entail worker's ability to change their schedules when they carry out their work, as well as the numbers of hours they work per day or week – which can then be banked to take days off in certain circumstances. This can be distinguished from employer-led flexible working arrangements, such as shift work, that was mentioned earlier in the chapter. The most common type of flexible working schedule is flexitime, where workers have flexible starting and ending times of work. For example, rather than working 9am to 5pm, they start early at 8am and end early at 4pm or start late at 10am and end late at 6pm. Working time autonomy gives workers more freedom to control their work schedule and the number of hours workers work,[7] where in many cases, work is based on outputs or projects. In other words, workers have the freedom to not only work when they want, but also how long they want, as long as they meet the output targets. The biggest difference between flexitime and working time autonomy is that some constraints still remain in flexitime. For example, in flexitime workers might need to adhere to core hours, such as being present at work between 10am to 3pm, although they can be flexible around the hours outside of these core hours. In addition, with flexitime there is usually a defined number of hours workers need to work in a day or a week (e.g. 8 hours a day or 37 hours per week), whereas with working time autonomy such restrictions often do not exist.

There are other types of flexible working schedules that can be considered. Condensed or compressed hours is where workers work full-time (e.g. 40 hours) but

7 See also ILO's vision of providing workers with working time sovereignty in their future of work agenda: https://www.ilo.org/digitalguides/en-gb/story/global-commission#intro.

condensed into, for example, 4 days (i.e. 10 hours a day).[8] This could obviously be applied to part-time working where 20 hours is carried out in two days of 10 hours rather than three days of 7 hours. Annualised hours is when workers work a certain number of hours over the course of a year, but they have some flexibility about when they work. There are variations to this annualised hours system, where hours can be calculated across a shorter period of time – for example, across three to six months. In the rest of the paper, **flexible schedules generally entail flexitime and working time autonomy**, sometimes distinguished from one another, in other cases combined. However, in the summary of the literature, the definitions used may slightly vary, depending on the study.

2.2 Legislative development of flexible working arrangements at the EU level

There is various legislation at both the EU and national levels that regulates flexible working arrangements (OECD, 2021).

The Council Directive 97/81/EC concerning the Framework Agreement on part-time working[9] stipulates that part-time workers cannot be discriminated against,[10] and treated differently from full-time workers. It also states that companies should aim to facilitate the workers' demand and need to work part-time at all levels of the company, including senior levels, and that opportunities should be provided. However, at the same time, although companies should facilitate workers' desired changes in their contracted working hours, the legislation states that workers should not be forced into part-time work from full-time and vice versa, and states that refusing to change contracts cannot be deemed a fair reason for dismissal.

Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work–life balance for parents and carers[11] gives all working parents of children up to at least 8 years of age and all carers a right to request flexible working arrangements. More specifically it states that 'they (workers with caring responsibilities) have the right to request flexible working arrangements for the purpose of adjusting their working patterns, including, where possible, through the use of remote working arrangements, flexible working schedules, or a reduction in working hours, for the purposes of providing care.' It further states that those who have exercised the right should be protected against discrimination and dismissal.

In 2001, the European Council invited key social partners to negotiate agreements modernising the organisation of work, including flexible working arrangements, as a part of their flexicurity strategy. A result of this was a **2002 Framework Agreement on Teleworking** which was an agreement with the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe/the European Union of Crafts and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

8 For example, this policy was introduced in Belgium in 2022 https://www.brusselstimes.com/325240/four-day-working-week-comes-into-effect-who-can-use-it-and-how-to-apply

9 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A31997L0081.

10 The Recast Directive 2006/54 implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation also forbids direct and indirect discrimination of women's employment. This can also be used to provide some protection against part-time workers, as part-time work is largely carried out by women.

11 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2019.188.01.0079.01.ENG.

(UNICE/UEAPME), and the Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation (ECPE). The agreement aims at establishing a general framework at the European level concerning the employment conditions of teleworker. The framework includes the following items:

i) ***Voluntary nature of teleworking*** – namely that employers cannot force workers to telework.

ii) ***Employment conditions*** – teleworkers benefit from the same rights as comparable workers at the employer's premises.

iii) ***Data protection*** – the employer is responsible for taking the appropriate measures to ensure the protection of data used and processed by the teleworker for professional purposes.

iv) ***Equipment*** – the employer is responsible for providing, installing and maintaining the equipment necessary for regular telework unless the teleworker uses their own equipment.

v) ***Health and safety*** – the employer is responsible for the protection of the occupational health and safety of the teleworker and that workers can ask for the inspection by the employer or an employee representative.

vi) ***Organisation of work*** – that within the framework of applicable legislation, collective agreements and company rules, the teleworker manages the organisation of their working time, and that the workload and performance standards of the teleworker are equivalent to those of comparable workers at the employer's premises.

vii) ***Training of teleworkers*** – teleworkers have the same access to training and career development as comparable workers at the employer's premises and are subject to the same appraisal policies.

viii) ***The collective rights of teleworkers*** – teleworkers have the same collective rights as workers at the employer's premises.

2.3 Theories on access to and use of flexible working arrangements

In addition to legal regulations and policies that support the provision of and access to flexible working arrangements, there are several theories that explain which companies are more likely to provide flexible working arrangements, and which workers are able to access and use them (Chung, 2019b, 2020a; Wiß, 2017). There are structural factors that can prohibit or enable companies to provide flexible working arrangements, such as sector or size of company. The type of work carried out has consistently been noted as one of the biggest constraints to the introduction of flexible working arrangements by managers (Wanrooy et al., 2013). There are jobs where it is harder to apply flexible working arrangements than in others due to, for example, production structure (machinery, clients demand, etc.) or sensitivities towards certain business cycles. Certain jobs in sectors where women are generally over-represented, such as education, retail, and health and social services may be restricted in their application of flexible

working arrangements, especially flexitime and teleworking. However, there are several male-dominated sectors such as manufacturing and construction that face a similar problem. This limitation is not as applicable when considering part-time work, as there can be flexibility in the amount of time each worker works on the job. Public sector employers have been seen as better at providing flexible working arrangements because they are not as sensitive to business cycles (Evans, 2001) but also are seen as the forerunners with regards to the provision of family-friendly working environments (Chung, 2008). As women are generally more represented in public sector jobs, this may enhance their flexible working arrangements access. Due to the administrative costs that are involved in providing these arrangements, larger companies may find it easier to administer and may have more resources to provide flexible working arrangements. Having said that, small and medium-sized companies may be able to provide more informal or ad hoc arrangements (Dex & Scheibl, 2001).

Other factors that shape companies' provision of flexible working arrangements include the willingness of managers and/or the push they get from workers to provide them. Some argue that more women in the company would mean a higher demand for and thus higher prevalence of flexible working arrangements in a company (Goldin, 2014; Goodstein, 1994). However, at least in the case of flexible schedules or teleworking in Europe, this is not shown empirically (Chung, 2019d; Magnusson, 2021). This may be because women's jobs are generally low-paying with worse working conditions than 'men's jobs' (Anker, 1997; Charles, 1992). It may also be because employers are more reluctant to trust women, especially mothers, to privilege work above care and housework (Budig & England, 2001; Williams et al., 2013) when working flexibly. This is why managers and co-workers could believe that women will abuse their ability to work flexibly to do less work (Munsch, 2016) and use that time and flexibility at work to meet family demands (Hilbrecht et al., 2008; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001). This then has the potential to result in a pay penalty, especially for women working flexibly (Chung, 2020a; Leslie et al., 2012; Lott & Chung, 2016). Powerful unions may drive employers to provide flexible working arrangements as a part of their efforts to improve working conditions or allow workers better access to existing policies without fear of retribution (Jacobi, 2023; Wiß, 2017). However, this may depend on unions' awareness of such policies and their willingness to put these issues in their agenda. Companies with supportive managers are also more likely to provide workers with flexible working arrangements (Hammer et al., 2009; Kossek et al., 2014; Minnotte et al., 2010) and are places where workers feel like they are more able to take up the arrangements (Cooper & Baird, 2015). Some studies argue that workers with female managers are more likely to access flexible working arrangements (Galinsky & Bond, 1998; Ingram & Simons, 1995), yet recent studies show this is not necessarily the case (Chung, 2019b, 2019d).

Aside from structural restrictions, employers' provision of flexible working arrangements can depend on the way employers see the nature of them (see also Swanberg et al., 2005; Lambert and Haley-Lock, 2004). Flexible schedules and teleworking can be seen as policies that are used to enhance performance outcomes as part of a high-performance work environment approach (Appelbaum et al., 2000; Wood & De Menezes, 2010). This is not necessarily the case for part-time work, despite the fact that several studies have evidenced how part-time workers may be more productive, working harder and longer than full-time workers (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; Künn-Nelen et al., 2013). When employers are genuinely interested in purely addressing the work–family needs of work-

ers,[12] those with the most family demands or most need of family-friendly arrangements – such as those with caring responsibilities, namely, women and especially mothers with young children – are more likely to have access to and use flexible work arrangements (Chung et al., 2020; Future Form, 2022; Golden, 2009). When employers' motivation for providing flexible working arrangements are driven by more by performance demands, it can be expected to be used more in knowledge-intensive fields (Brescoll et al., 2013) and provided to workers with higher occupational status and skill levels in expectation that it will enhance their productivity (Chung, 2019b).

There is, in fact, a wealth of evidence showing that those with higher education and in higher occupational levels are more likely to have access to and use flexible schedules and teleworking compared to those with lower education working in lower-paid jobs (e.g. Chung, 2019b; Chung & Van der Horst, 2018; Ortega, 2009; Präg & Mills, 2014; Wiß, 2017). Some scholars (e.g. Schieman, 2013) argue that arrangements that give workers more control over when and where they work, that is flexible schedules and teleworking, are only given to higher status workers, namely those who are valued in the organisation, high skilled and in a better bargaining position. Chung (2018) examines flexible schedule access among workers in disadvantaged positions within the labour market. Results show that although fixed-term contract status does not influence access to flexible working arrangements, low-skilled workers and those who perceive their jobs to be insecure were significantly less likely to have access to flexible working arrangements, even after controlling for a number of other factors that explain flexible working arrangements access. Given that women are generally in a more disadvantaged position in the labour market, this may mean they are also less likely than men to gain access to flexible working arrangements, especially those that give workers a lot of freedom over their work schedules and location, i.e. flexible schedules and teleworking and homeworking.

Meanwhile, in many European countries, part-time work is considered an outsider market job with poorer working conditions and fewer opportunities for career advancement, although this depends on the national contexts (Nicolaisen et al., 2019; Rueda, 2014; Schwander & Häusermann, 2013; Seo, 2023). Part-time contracts are usually given to those in lower-occupational groups, in low-paid sectors and with precarious contracts. Part-time work was developed in many cases to enable women to take part in the labour market while being able to meet childcare and other family demands (O'Reilly & Fagan, 1998). This is why part-time work is generally carried out by women, and is more often provided and used in female-dominated sectors as will be described in the next chapter.

12 It is important to note that addressing work–family integration demands of workers also results in positive performance and productivity outcomes. See Kelliher, C., & de Menezes, L. M. (2019). *Flexible Working in Organisations: A Research Overview*. Routledge; and Weeden, K. A. (2005). Is there a flexiglass ceiling? Flexible work arrangements and wages in the United States. *Social Science Research*, *34*(2), 454–482. This is also discussed in the last chapter of this report.

3. Part-time work: who has access to it, who uses it and what are its impacts?

This chapter examines part-time work, examining who is working part-time and why, and more importantly, its impact on gender equality both at home and in the labour market.

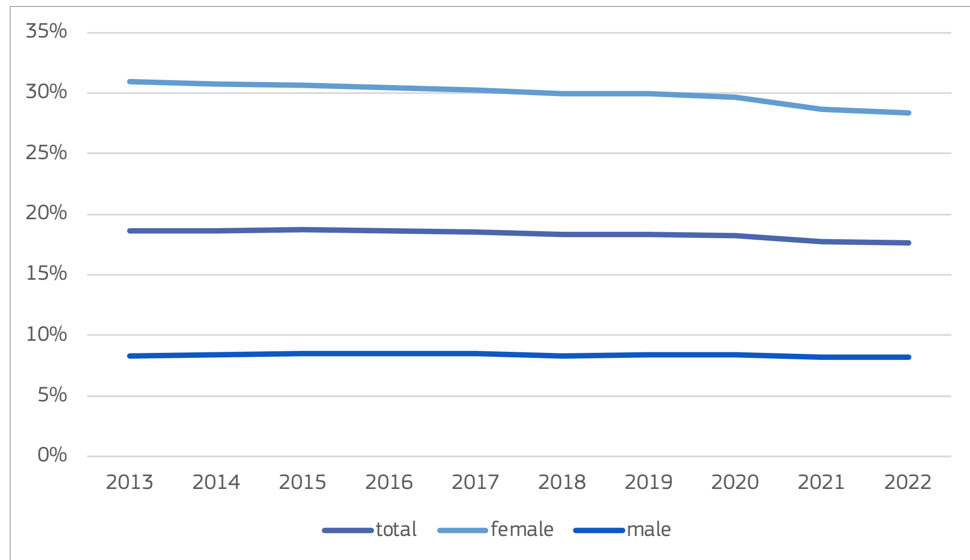
3.1 Use of part-time work

3.1.1 Distribution of part-time work by gender and parental status

Across the 27 European Member States, slightly less than one out of five workers work part-time (Figure 3.1). This proportion has been fairly consistent across the last decade without much change (19 % in 2013 and 18 % in 2022). However, when considering gender, a slight reduction can be seen in the proportion of employed women who work part-time, from 31 % in 2013 to 28 % by 2022.

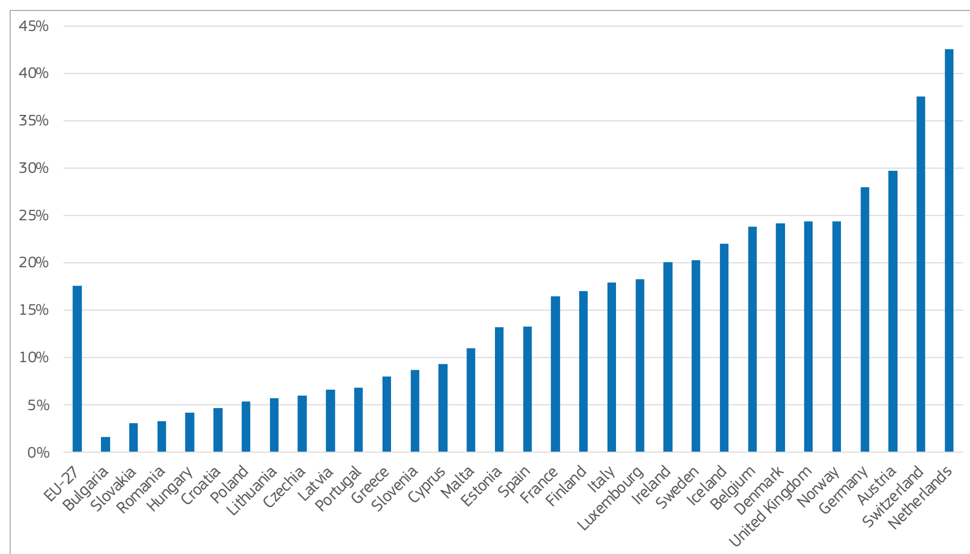
There are large cross-national variations in this number (Figure 3.2). In many Southern and Eastern European countries, part-time work is not as prevalent – with less than 5 % of the population in part-time employment in countries like Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia in 2022. In contrast, in many continental European countries, part-time work is widespread. For example, 43 % of employees in the Netherlands worked part-time in 2022: 24 % of all employed men and 64 % of all employed women. In Austria, Germany and Switzerland, almost a third of the total population works part-time.

Figure 3.1. Part-time employment as a percentage of total employment across the EU-27, by gender (%) 2013–2022



Source: EU LFS.

Figure 3.2. Part-time employment as a percentage of the total employment across the EU-27 and associate countries in 2022

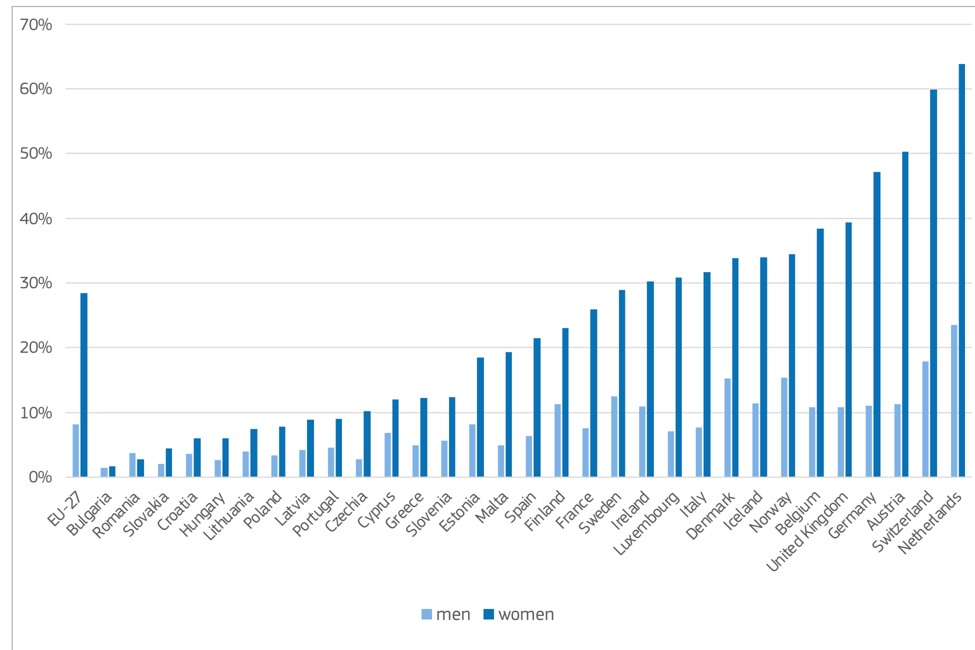


Source: EU LFS.

Part-time work is generally a woman's working time arrangement (Figure 3.3 and 3.4). As a European average, women are more than *three times more likely* to be in part-time employment compared to men. In countries like Austria, Germany, Italy and Luxembourg, where there is quite a large population of part-time workers in general, women are four times more likely to be part-time employed compared to men. These countries are generally those where traditional gender norms prevail with regimes of male breadwinners and secondary female earners (Crompton, 2006), where women drop out of the labour market or move into shorter part-time work after childbirth. The Netherlands, in contrast, has many workers in part-time work, both men and women, and women with and without

children. In countries like Romania, a very small proportion of workers are in part-time employment, and there are more men in such employment than women. In summary, there are large cross-national differences in the extent to which women work part-time but not the same degree of variation for men (Figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3. Part-time employment as a percentage of the total employment across the EU-27 and associate countries in 2022 by gender

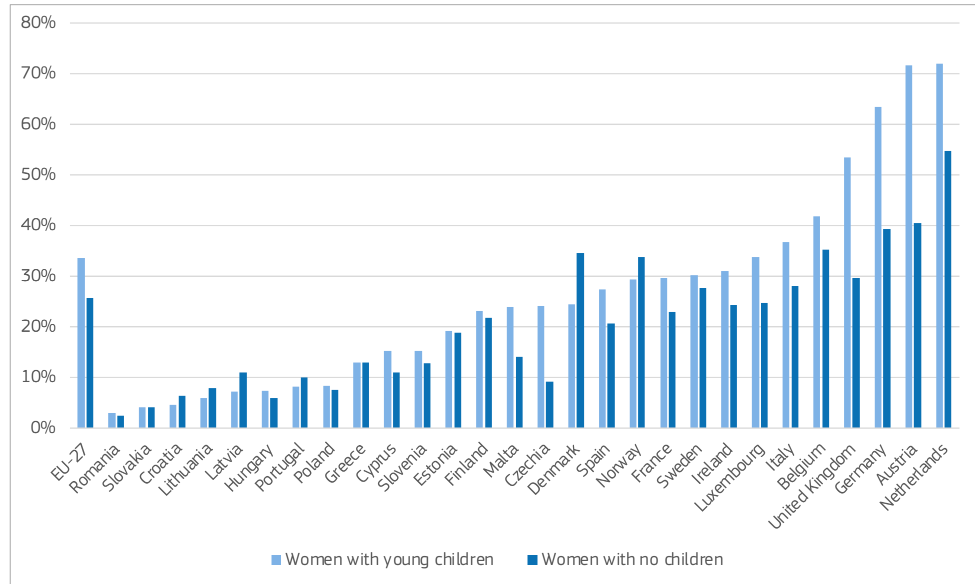


Source: EU LFS.

This high prevalence of part-time work is even more evident when examining the proportion of mothers with preschool children (here defined as children under 6 years of age) who work part-time. **Compared to women without dependent children (26 %), women with young children (under 6) are more likely to work part-time (34 %)** (Figure 3.4). This gap between mothers with young children and women without children varies across countries. More than half of women with preschool children in Germany and the United Kingdom and close to three quarters of women with young children in Austria and the Netherlands are in part-time employment. This again indicates – as will be shown later – that part-time work in many countries is a way for mothers, especially mothers with young children, to address both work and family demands at the same time. This may be especially true in contexts where gender norms are traditional (e.g. the continental European countries such as Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland) (Nicolaisen et al., 2019; Yerkes, 2009) or where public childcare provision is meagre (e.g. the United Kingdom where childcare is inaccessible and costly (Coleman & Cottell, 2019)). In fact, when countries like Denmark and Norway are examined, it can be seen that part-time work is more common among women without young children than it is among mothers with preschool children. This linkage between family policy provision and women's labour market participation – namely being in employment and working longer hours – has been evidenced by previous studies (Ferragina & Seeleib-Kaiser, 2015; Gornick et al., 1997; Misra et al., 2011). For men, in contrast, **fathers with young children are less likely to work part-time compared to men without children** (Figure 3.5). For example, 5.8 % of men with preschool children work part-time, which is lower than the 9.1

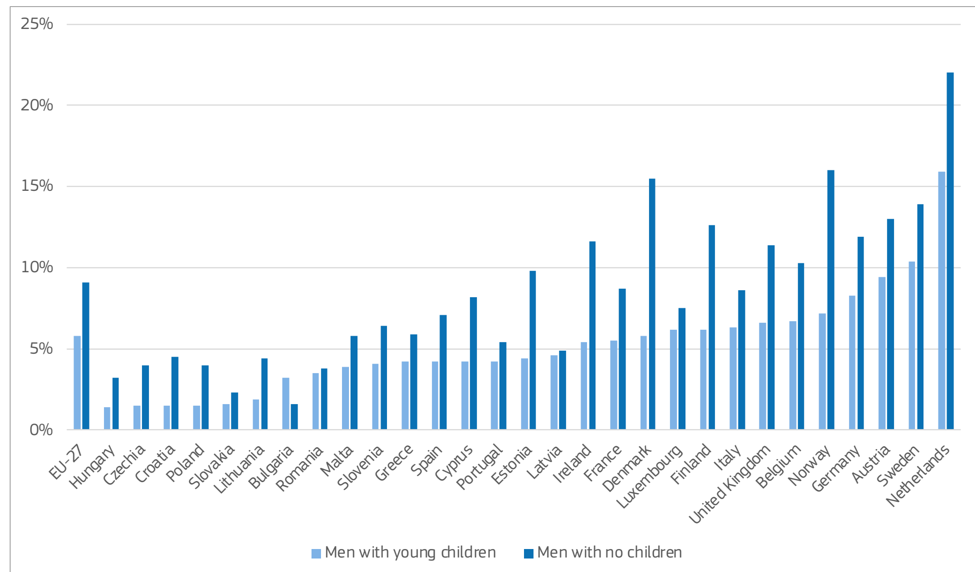
% of men without children who work part-time. This is again largely due to the gender roles assigned to men as the breadwinners, where the responsibility to earn from gainful employment is even stronger for men with children compared to those without (Hodges & Budig, 2010; Knight & Brinton, 2017). The impact of gender roles is also evident when exploring the main reasons workers cite for why they work part-time, which is examined in the next section.

Figure 3.4. Percentage of part-time employment of women 18 to 64 by parental status (women with young children<6 versus women without children) for 2022



Source: EU LFS.

Figure 3.5. Percentage of part-time employment of men 18 to 64 by parental status (men with young children<6 versus men without children) for 2022

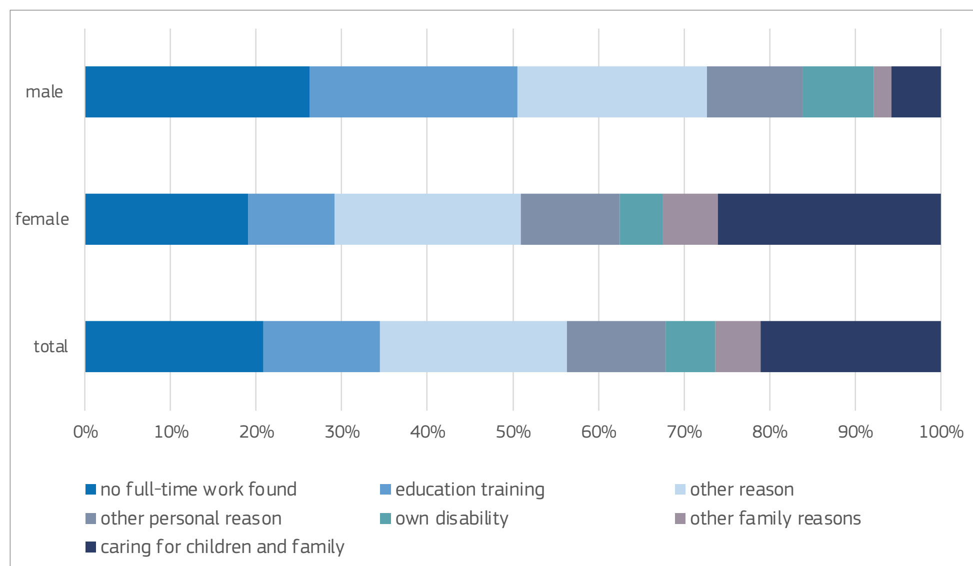


Source: EU LFS.

3.1.2 Gendered reasons for working part-time

There are a wide range of reasons why people work part-time, and one of the most important ones is because workers have other responsibilities outside of work. The main reason why women work part-time, and are much more likely to work part-time compared to men, is because they are largely carrying out, and are considered responsible for, childcare and care for elderly or disabled relatives (Tomlinson, 2006; Wishart et al., 2019). Similarly, some work part-time due to needing to care for themselves because of having a disability. Education and training is another reason why people may choose to work part-time. Finally, many workers end up working part-time as they were unable to find a full-time job or additional hours of work. Of these different reasons, a worker's inability to find full-time job is considered involuntary part-time work, whereas other reasons for working part-time are considered 'voluntary'. This goes against many feminist scholars' understanding of the choices women are asked to make (McRae, 2003), where women do not have the freedom to work full-time given their responsibilities at home. Therefore, working part-time for caring and other family reasons could also be considered 'involuntary' part-time working as the choice of whether to work full or part-time is constrained.

Figure 3.6. Main reason for working part-time cited by part-time workers in the EU-27 in 2022



Source: EU LFS.

There are clear gender differences in the main reason given as to why workers work part-time (Figure 3.6). More than 26 % of men working part-time indicate that they do so because they could not find a full-time job, and another 24 % say it is because they are undertaking education or training, compared to 19 % and 10 % for women, respectively. In contrast, unsurprisingly, **26 % of women say they work part-time due to their responsibility in caring for children and other disabled family members** and another 6 % note other family reasons as the reason. This number is only 6 % and 2 % for men respectively.

However, it is not true that few fathers wants to work part-time. In fact, many studies show that many fathers want to reduce their working hours to be more involved in childcare (Burgess & Goldman, 2021; Chung et al., 2020; Kelland, 2022; Working Families, 2017). However, many feel that there are biases at the

workplace that prohibit fathers from taking up family-friendly arrangements, especially arrangements that are more associated with mothers and caregiving such as leave taking and part-time work, due to the potential negative implication it can have for their careers. Moreover, men who work part-time may also experience a deviation away from their masculine breadwinner image, resulting in amplified stigma (Kelland et al., 2022; Rudman & Mescher, 2013). The stigma of flexible working and its relation to gender is explored in a further chapter on flexible schedules and teleworking. Men not reporting care and family as reasons for part-time working does not necessarily show a lack of demand for family-friendly arrangements. Instead, it shows how **men experience barriers in working part-time and/or reducing their working hours for caregiving**. A similar number of men and women note personal (11 %) or other reasons (22 %) as the reason for working part-time, and finally 8 % of men and 5 % of women note disability as the main reason why they worked part-time in 2022.

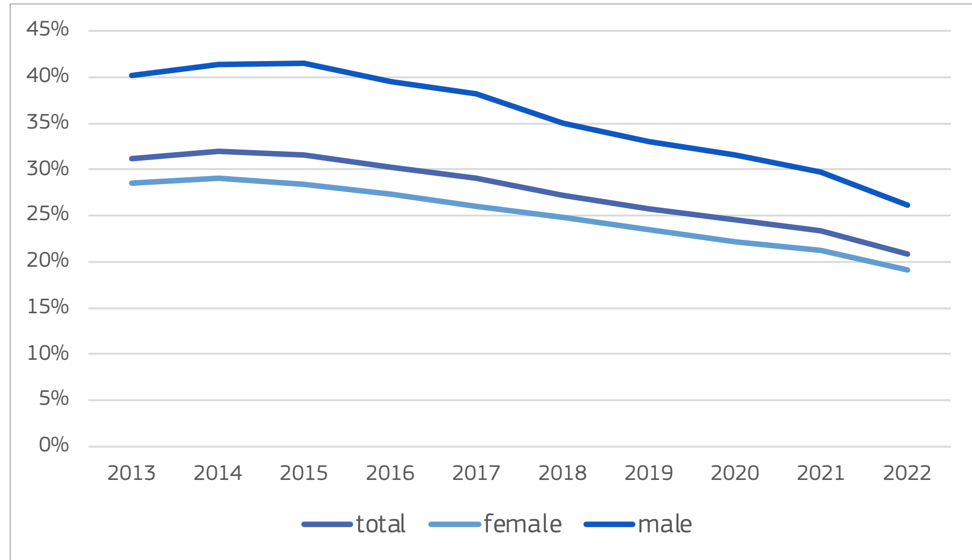
There are large cross-national variations in the main reason why workers work part-time. Especially in countries where a large proportion of women work part-time, a larger proportion of women state that they work part-time to meet their caring demands. For example, more than 40 % of women in Austria and the Netherlands and about one third of women in Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland state this as the main reason why they work part-time. Interestingly, in Luxembourg and Switzerland, a relatively large share of men also state caring as a reason why they work part-time, 14 % and 16 % respectively. This may be linked to the fact that in both countries long hours of work is relatively common and family policies are not as generous compared to some of the other European countries. This may leave parents – including some fathers – with no other option but to work part-time.

Has the main reason behind working part-time changed over time, especially as changes are seen in gender roles, attitudes towards work (see chapter 5), and the expansion of women's labour market participation? There is a general decrease in the proportion of workers that work part-time because they are unable to find full-time job (Figure 3.7). This is especially true of the male sample, where more than 40 % said they worked part-time because they could not find a full-time job in the early 2010s, but this dropped to 26 % by 2022. This drop was relatively smaller for women, there was still a significant shift from 29 % to 19 %.

There was a slight increase in the number of workers that say they work part-time for caring reasons, especially among men, albeit still a small minority, and for other family and personal reasons. The proportion of men who state caring reasons as the main reason why they work part-time has almost doubled in the past decade from 3.5 % in 2013 to 5.7 % in 2022, whereas for women it remain fairly consistent at around a quarter of all part-time workers (Figure 3.9). An even stronger increase is seen in the share of people who state personal or other family reasons as the main reason why they work part-time (Figure 3.8), especially around the pandemic lockdown periods. Just before the pandemic in 2019, the proportion of part-time workers who stated this was 12 % (6 % for men and 13 % for women). One year later in 2020, this was at 19 % (11 % for men and 21 % for women). This was most likely due to the fact that during the pandemic, many workers had to carry out a lot more childcare and housework due to many of the formal and informal support systems that once carried out these tasks being shut (Chung et al., 2021; Risman & Mooi-Reci, 2021). This may have restricted the amount of hours workers were able to commit to work (Collins et al., 2020). Other family and personal reasons may have also included the

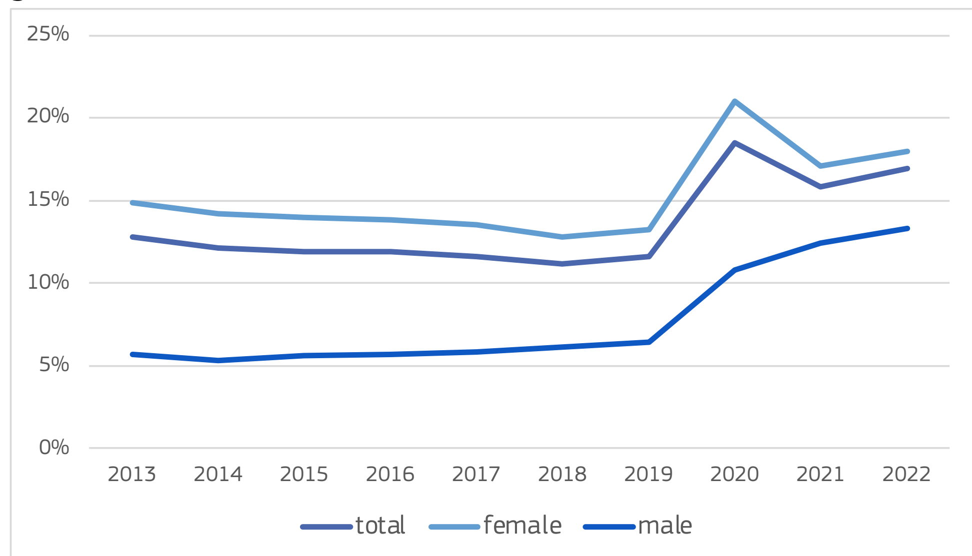
need to shield oneself from the virus or potentially those on part-time furlough schemes. It is difficult to know from using only this data. Although the share had declined somewhat by 2021, there was a **growing proportion of workers who stated 'personal reasons' as why they work part-time, especially among men**. This could potentially indicate a growing sentiment among European workers around the preference to work shorter hours to balance work with other aspects of their lives. This will be examined further when discussing the four-day week in Chapter 5.

Figure 3.7. Working part-time because not able to find full-time work in the EU-27 in 2013 to 2022, share of part-time workers, by gender



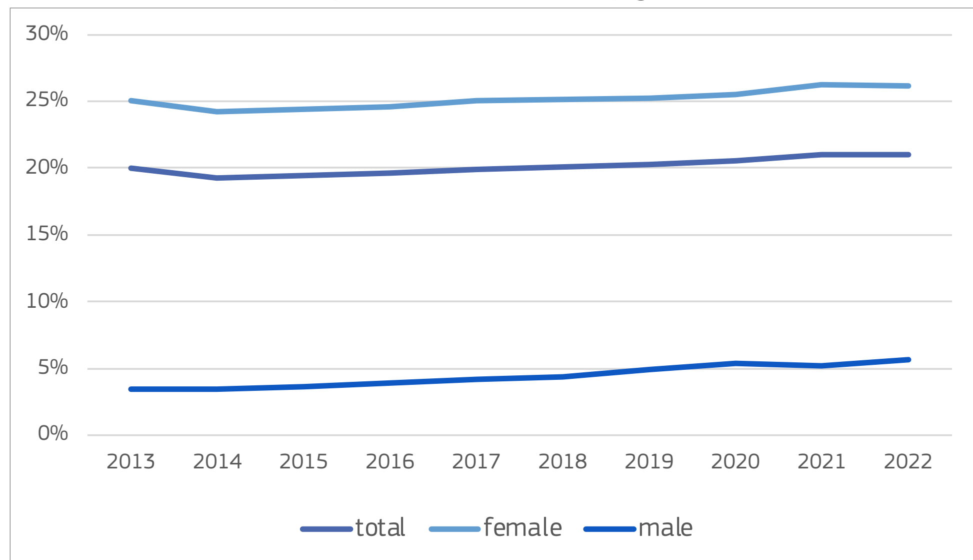
Source: EU LFS.

Figure 3.8. Working part-time because of other family and personal reasons in the EU-27 in 2013 to 2022, share of part-time workers, by gender



Note: In 2021 and 2022, 'personal' and 'other family reasons' are two separate categories and the aggregate share is shown.
Source: EU LFS.

Figure 3.9. Working part-time because of caring reasons in the EU-27 in 2013 to 2022, share of part-time workers, by gender



Source: EU LFS.

3.1.3 Part-time work across occupations and sectors

What types of jobs do part-time workers carry out? Although EU legislation stipulates that part-time work should be available to workers across all occupations and sectors, this is not necessarily the case, as will be described in this chapter. As Figure 3.10 shows, **very few managers work part-time** in the EU-27 Member States. There are significant cross-national variations in this. Only 2 % to 3 % of managers work part-time in Croatia, Greece and other Southern European countries. More managers work part-time in Switzerland (21 %), the Netherlands (15 %), the United Kingdom (13 %) and Germany (12 %). In countries with more managers working part-time, it is generally the female managers who do so. In Switzerland, 33 % of female managers work part-time, 24 % in Germany, 21 % in the Netherlands, and 20 % in Belgium. This low representation of part-time work in managerial jobs may be due to assumptions about managers (Schieman, 2013), where being professional means not working shorter hours. The ideal image of a manager is someone who is always available and always working (Mazmanian et al., 2013; Williams, 1999). For such workers, especially for men, it can be seen as unacceptable to work part-time.

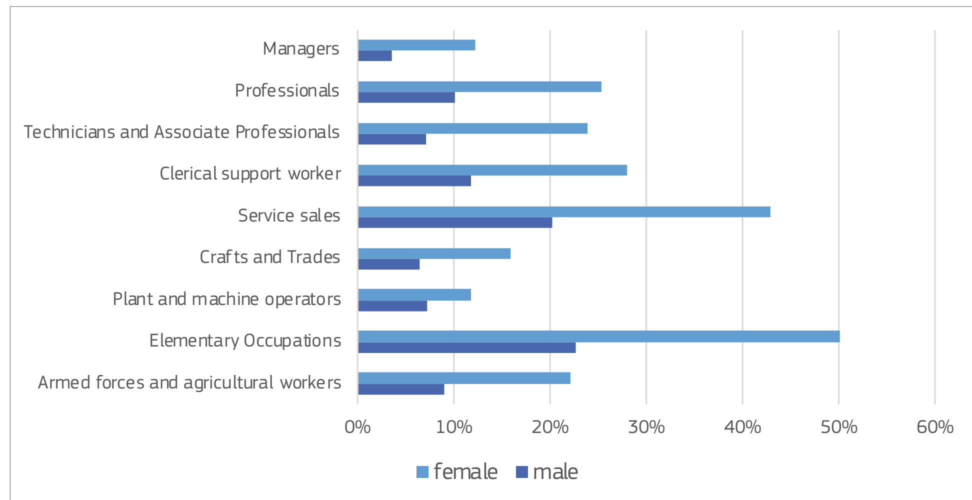
However, in occupations such as workers in crafts and related trades and plant and machine operators, the proportion of part-time workers is also lower than average for both men and women. This may be due to workers in these occupations needing to work longer hours possibly due to the low hourly pay levels or that these are generally male-dominated occupations which may not offer part-time work, given companies' assumptions around male workers' breadwinner status.

In elementary occupations, and service and sales occupations, part-time work is more prevalent for both men and women.[13] Interestingly, despite being in high-skilled occupations, **many professionals or associate professionals work part-time.** This may be because these are occupations that are generally female-dom-

13 See also CEDEFOP's report on involuntary part-time work: https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/skills-intelligence/involuntary-part-time-employment?year=2021&country=EU#1

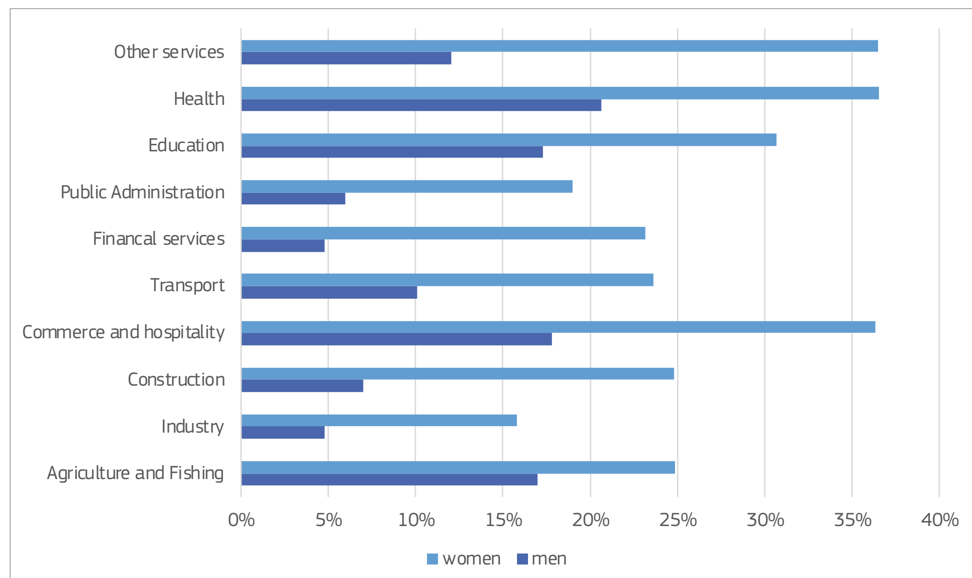
inated or where both genders are equally represented, which may allow part-time work to be more normalised (Nicolaisen et al., 2019). Similarly, part-time work is generally prevalent in sectors that are more female dominated, and generally in public sectors, such as health and social care, education, and commerce and hospitality, and less prevalent in sectors like industry (Figure 3.11). The gender composition of the workforce is important in determining the proportion of workers working part-time (Figure 3.12). In male-dominated workplaces, both men and women are the least likely to be working part-time, followed by workplaces where both genders are equally represented, and finally female-dominated workplaces where part-time work is most prevalent.

Figure 3.10. Proportion of part-time workers across different occupations across EU-27 Member States, by gender for 2021



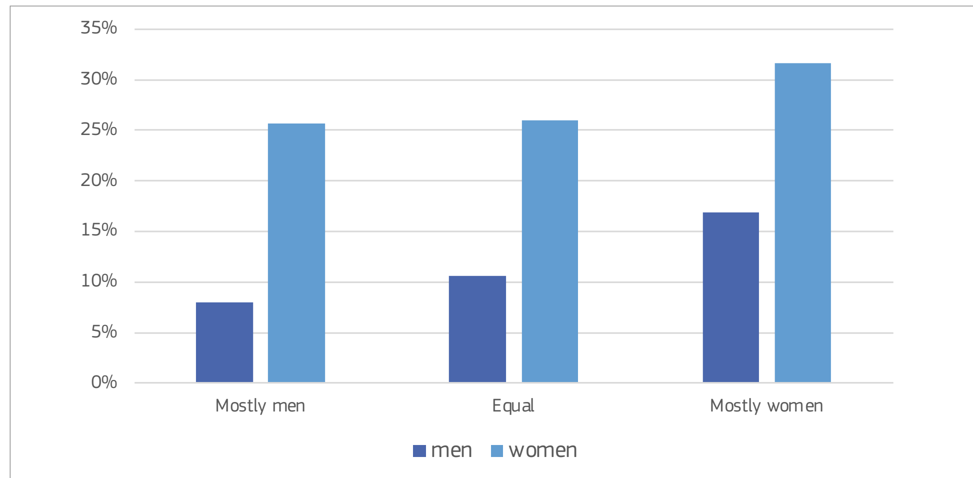
Note: Weighted averages.
Source: EWTCS 2021

Figure 3.11. Proportion of part-time workers across different sectors across EU-27 Member States, by gender for 2021



Note: Weighted averages.
Source: EWTCS 2021

Figure 3.12. Proportion of part-time workers across workplaces with different gender composition across EU-27 Member States, by gender for 2021



Note: Weighted averages.
Source: EWTCS 2021

3.1.4 Multivariate analysis of part-time work

Across the EU-27 countries, women are more likely to work part-time than men, even having controlled for a large number of different factors (Figure 3.13). Similarly, parents of preschool children are also more likely to be working part-time. This is largely driven by the female sample, as when this association is distinguished across gender (interaction term with child age and gender). Fathers with preschool children (coefficient -0.324, $p<0.01$) are less likely than men without children to work part-time, whereas mothers with preschool children are significantly more likely to work part-time (coefficient young child*female= 0.889, $p<0.001$)[14] compared to women without children. Moreover, when mothers and fathers are separated, it is found that men with school-aged children (aged 6–11) are also significantly less likely (coefficient -0.347, $p<0.01$) to work part-time than men without children, whereas mothers with school-aged children are more likely (coefficient school-aged child*female= 0.597, $p<0.001$). When controlling for other variables, there are no statistically significant differences between those with and without informal caring responsibility in their part-time working status, and there is no gender variation in this relationship. People who say they have a long-term illness are more likely to be working part-time. Part-time workers are more likely to feel income insecurity and job insecurity. This may be in part because they are likely to be in the outsider job markets as discussed. Those with lower education levels are similarly more likely to work part-time – again indicating that part-time jobs may be at the lower end of the labour market.

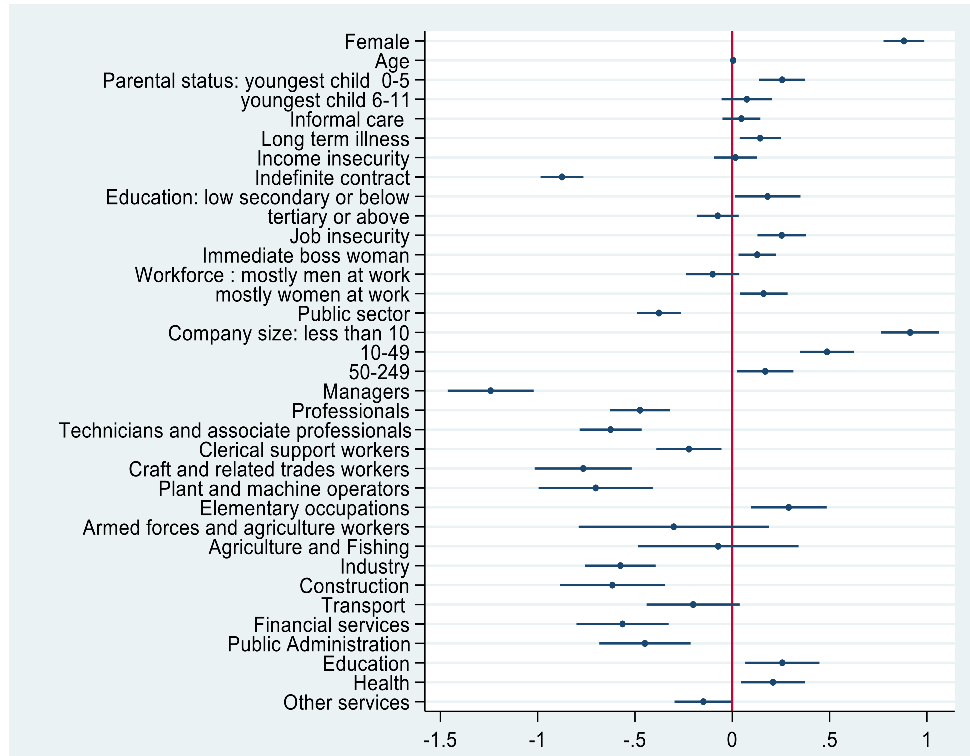
In terms of characteristics of companies, those whose immediate boss is a woman are more likely to be working part-time. Similarly, workers in workplaces of mostly women are more likely to work part-time compared to those who work in workplaces where both genders are equally represented or that are male dom-

14 When examining the model reverse coded (putting females as the reference category), preschool and school-aged children were both significant at $p<0.001$ level for women in their positive association with part-time work.

inated. This is true despite having controlled for both sector and occupational levels in the model. Unlike what was expected, public sector workers are less likely to work part-time than private sector workers. This may be due to the fact that there is already a control for sector – which as will be discussed, is an important factor explaining part-time work, which is highly associated with the public sector (e.g. education, health, social care). In relation to size of company, those in smaller companies are significantly more likely to be working part-time than those in larger companies. This may be due to the potential outsider nature of part-time jobs. Thus, rather than the willingness of companies to provide workers with part-time jobs, smaller companies may be those who may need to rely on fractional contracts to save money on labour costs. In contrast, it may also be that smaller companies are better able to provide informal shorter hours contracts to workers who need them. This data does not reveal this, but the issue could warrant further analysis.

Examining occupational variations, managers are less likely and elementary occupation workers alongside service, sales and clerical workers are more likely to work part-time. Similar to what was found in Figure 3.11, education, health and social care workers are more likely to work part-time, whereas industry, construction, financial services and public administration sectors have less frequent part-time work, even controlling for other relevant factors. Again, there is significant gender variation in the degree to which occupations and sectors have greater representation of part-time workers, i.e. the sectors and occupations where many female part-time workers are found are not those where many male part-time workers are found.

Figure 3.13. Multivariate analysis of part-time working across 27 European countries in 2021



Notes: Coefficient plot of regression table. N level 1 = 19 797, N level 2 = 27 countries. Age and income security have been standardized. All other variables are dichotomous variables. The parental status reference group is no children; education reference group is upper secondary; workforce composition reference group is men and women equally represented; size of company reference group is 250 or more; occupation reference group is service and sales workers; and sector reference group is commerce and hospitality.
Source: Authors' calculation. European Working Conditions Telephone Survey (EWCTS) 2021.

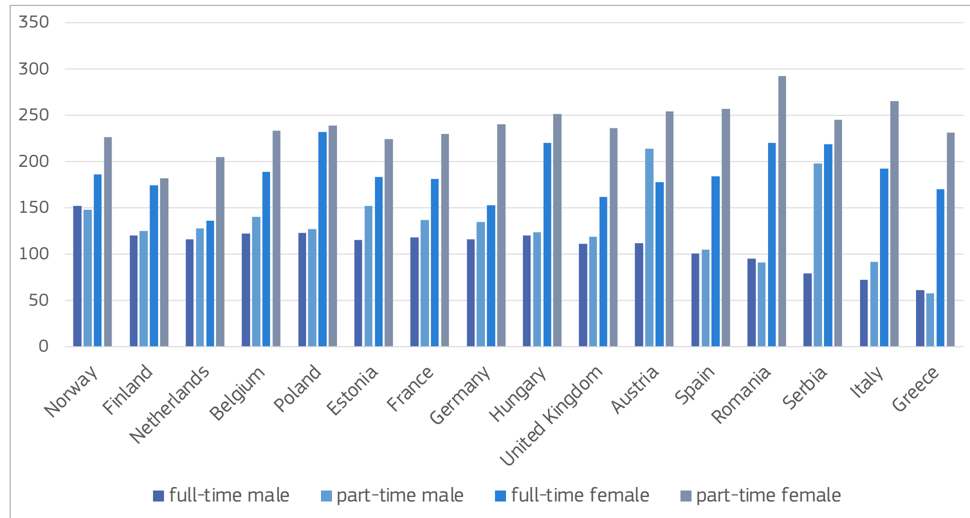
3.2 Part-time work for parents and carers division of housework and leisure

As already described, the main reason why women end up working part-time is due to responsibilities at home to carry out housework and childcare. In other words, despite advances in attitudes towards gender roles over the past decades, it is still assumed that it is a woman's responsibility to carry out housework and care work, including childcare, elderly care, and caring for ill or disabled family members. This is evident in Figure 3.14 which shows the amount of time spent on housework and caring activities by men and women working part-time and full-time across 16 European countries in 2010 using the European Union Harmonised Time Use Survey (EU HETUS). This data was the most recent comparable time use data available. There is a clear distinction between men and women in the amount of time they spend on unpaid domestic work. **Women, especially part-time working women, spend up to four times the amount of time men, especially full-time working men, spend on housework and caring activities**. For example, compared to full-time working men, who are the ones generally spending the least amount of time on these activities, part-time working women in Greece spend 3.8 times more time and part-time working women in Italy 3.7 times more time on these activities.

Even when part-time working men are compared with part-time working women, the gaps are large. The gender gap becomes even larger when comparing part-time working men and women in countries like Greece. Here it is seen that **full-time working women not only spend more time carrying out housework and care work compared to their full-time working male counterparts, but they also spend much more time than part-time working men**. This is due to the fact that in certain contexts, especially in countries where traditional gender norms are prevalent, men tend to reduce the amount of time they spend on housework and childcare when becoming unemployed or working part-time (Brines, 1994; van der Lippe et al., 2018). This may happen as men working part-time may indicate some problems with their capacities to work (e.g. illness, disabilities or needing to do education/training), or the fact that they may be working in the informal sector, which is not fully captured through this data.

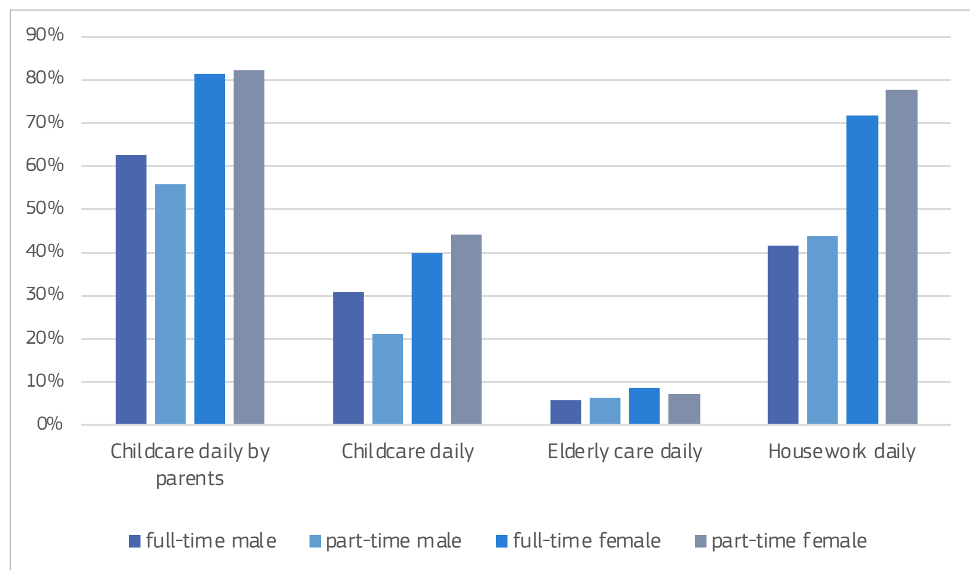
In addition to these reasons, scholars have shown that in many cases, this happens because men's masculine breadwinner status is disrupted, when men lose their jobs or work fewer hours, due to their lack of or reduction in the economic contribution they make to the household. To compensate for this, many men end up reducing their 'feminine' domestic work contribution even more, to ensure that their masculinity is not threatened further. It is not surprising then that in countries with more egalitarian gender norms, as well as better childcare provision, including Finland, the Netherlands and Norway, the gender gap in domestic work contribution is less prominent. This is even true when male full-time workers are compared to female part-time workers. Finally, if comparing the domestic work contribution of full-time and part-time working women, due to full-time working women having less time available, part-time working women spend more time carrying out domestic work. However, this gap is sometimes negligible in countries including Finland and Poland.

Figure 3.14. Number of minutes spent on average on household and caring activities by an individual across 16 European countries in 2010, by gender and employment status, data sorted by the gender gap in time spent



Source: EU HETUS 2010.

Figure 3.15 Proportion of workers carrying out unpaid domestic work (housework, childcare and elderly care) daily across the EU-27 member states in 2021



Note: Childcare daily by parents – uses sample of respondents who lives with at least one child under 18
Source: EWCTS 2021.

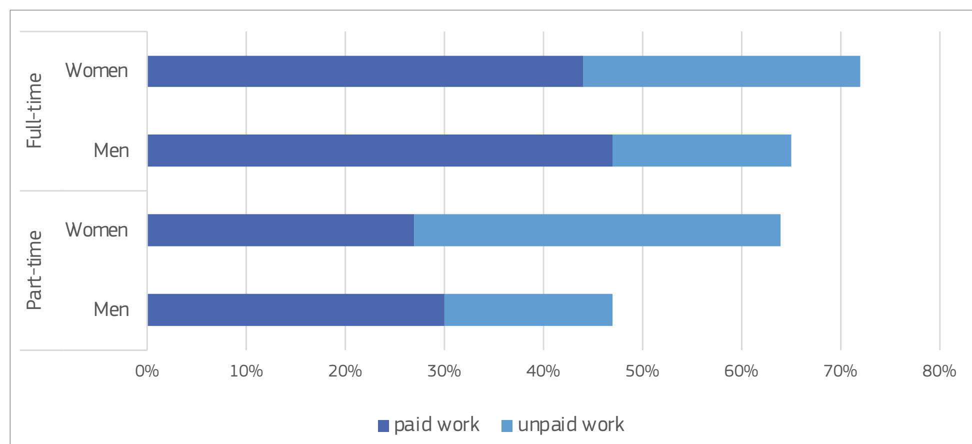
As the EU HETUS 2010 is quite dated, data from the EWCTS is examined to supplement this. The EWCTS was gathered in 2021 yet is not strictly time use data. Instead, it asks individuals if they take part in childcare, elderly or other family care, and housework activities monthly, weekly, daily or less often. Only those who do these activities daily are given the option to provide the number of hours they spend carrying out these activities. As seen in Figure 3.14 and 3.15, it is largely women who take part in these activities daily and men are much less likely to do so. This is especially true with regards to childcare by parents (workers

who live with children less than 18 years old) and housework where women are almost twice as likely to say they take part in these activities daily compared to men.

Eurofound uses data imputation methods (using information from other sources to try to predict data that is missing – in this case, those who note that they take part in the activities weekly or monthly but not daily) to calculate the average amount of hours workers spend a week on unpaid domestic work. As seen in Figure 3.16, men generally spend more time carrying out paid work. This is true when comparing part-time working men and women, or full-time working men and women, where men spend about three hours more in paid work in both cases. However, **women carry out much more unpaid work compared to men**. For example, full-time working women carry out on average 28 hours of unpaid work per week, whereas this figure is only 18 hours a week for full-time working men. Similarly, part-time working men only carry out 17 hours of unpaid work per week; for part-time working women, this is a whopping 37 hours a week. Unsurprisingly, women who work part-time carry out about 10 hours extra unpaid work compared to full-time working women. Having said that, full-time working women carry out about 17 hours more paid work compared to part-time working women, making them the population who works the longest hours when considering both paid and unpaid work. Compared to part-time working men, full-time working women spend 25 more hours a week doing work.

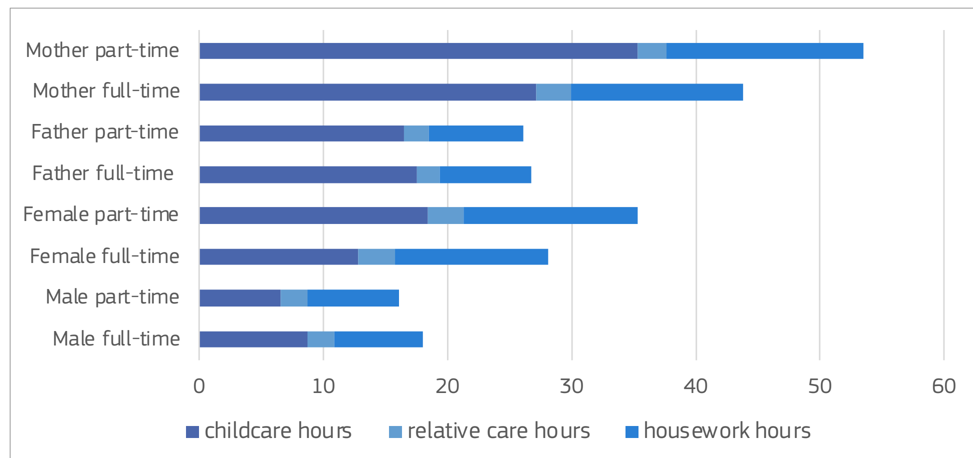
As noted in the previous section, **part-time working men, in contrast, do not do additional hours of unpaid work compared to full-time working men.** On the contrary, they carry out fewer hours (17 hours for part-time working men compared to the 18 hours full-time working men do). This again may be due to men feeling the need to regain their traditional notions of masculinity by reducing their contribution to unpaid work within the household, due to feeling that their masculinity is threatened when they deviate from the full-time working male breadwinner model.

Figure 3.16. Weekly hours spent on paid and unpaid work by men and women, by part-time and full-time status for the EU-27



Source: EWTCS 2021

Figure 3.17. Weekly hours spent on unpaid work by men and women, by part-time, full-time and parental status for the EU-27



Source: EWTCS 2021

When distinguishing between the types of activities carried out within these hours (Figure 3.17), there is not much of a gender difference seen in the number of hours men and women spend on elderly care or care for other family members (relative care hours). However, **women spend about twice as much time on housework and childcare compared to their male counterparts**. The **biggest difference between part-time and full-time working women,** especially among part-time and full-time working mothers **lies in the amount of time they spend on childcare.** Part-time working mothers spend two hours more than full-time working mothers on housework; however, they spend on average eight more hours on childcare. Part-time working mothers on average spend more than double the number of hours on childcare and housework compared to part-time working fathers – spending a total of 55 hours per week on unpaid domestic work. This explains why many mothers are unable to work full-time in paid work. The 44 hours of domestic work full-time working mothers carry out a week also explains why they do not work as many hours in their paid jobs compared to full-time working fathers.

3.3 Employment and career impacts of part-time work

As described, women often work part-time and are unable to work longer hours due to the housework and caring needs of their family. Part-time work allows women to stay in employment while addressing the demands of family life without their leaving the labour market altogether (Beham et al., 2020; Gascoigne & Kelliher, 2018; Lyonette, 2015; Tomlinson, 2006). Or put it another way, part-time working has allowed societies to gain access to mothers' labour force, without disrupting the household or labour market too much (Chung, 2022a).

With the expansion of part-time work, there has been an increase in the number of women in the labour market. Recent studies have shown, however, that women working part-time is one of the biggest reasons for a persistent gender pay gap, as part-time workers are generally more likely to be paid less and not experience as much pay or career progression as full-time workers (Costa Dias et al., 2018; Leythienne & Pérez-Julián, 2021; Olsen et al., 2018). Olsen et al. (2018) note how women dropping out of the labour market and moving into part-time work **can explain up to 40 % of the gender pay gap in the United Kingdom**.

Leythienne and Pérez-Julián (2021) using data from 2018 across the 27 EU Member States show that of the 14.4 % gender pay gap, 1.5 % (just over 10 % of the total gap) can be attributed to the difference in women's and men's working hours. Every year that women end up not working in full-time work results in pay penalties (Costa Dias et al., 2018). This is **especially true for highly educated women**, as they would have otherwise benefited from a greater progression in their wages. In an analysis of UK Panel Survey data, Costa Dias et al. (2018) show that a woman with a tertiary degree and who has been full-time employed prior to childbirth, on average would have her hourly wage boosted 6 % from each additional year of full-time experience compared to when working part-time after child birth. The equivalent wage boost for those with no more than lower-secondary levels of education would be just 3 %.

There are a number of reasons why part-time work leads to income and career penalties. Firstly, **part-time work generally results in occupational downgrading** (Connolly & Gregory, 2008; Fouarge & Muffels, 2009; Tomlinson, 2006), meaning that when women switch to part-time work from full-time, they are unable to maintain the same positions or job posts. In other words, moving to part-time work tends to entail women moving into jobs that are lower-skilled and less remunerated than their previous full-time jobs. Despite a rise in part-time work in many European countries, reduced working hours are still scarce in high-level professional and managerial jobs (Beham et al., 2020; Durbin & Tomlinson, 2010), although there are variations across countries as shown in section 3.1.3. Connolly and Gregory (2009) using UK data found that one quarter of women in high-skill jobs downgrade occupationally on switching to part-time work, rising to 43 % among those who also change employer. In fact, some scholars note that women end up moving into less lucrative jobs as they need the flexibility – namely part-time working opportunities – to better balance work with family life (Goldin, 2014).

The theory of compensating differentials goes on to argue that it is precisely because women are given better conditions at work – for example more flexibility at work to work fewer hours when family demands arise – that they are paid less. This is because the better conditions of work can be considered a trade-off for the financial compensation given at work to men without such conditions (Filer, 1985). Although part-time working may be more prevalent in female-dominated workplaces, flexible schedules and teleworking are not (Chung, 2019d; Magnusson, 2021). Moreover, in many countries, part-time work is commonly found in lower end of the labour markets with poorer working conditions, where not only pay and fringe benefits levels are lower but career opportunities are not widely available (Nicolaisen et al., 2019). This is something that will be examined in the next section (3.4), considering the working conditions of part-time workers using the EWCTS 2021.

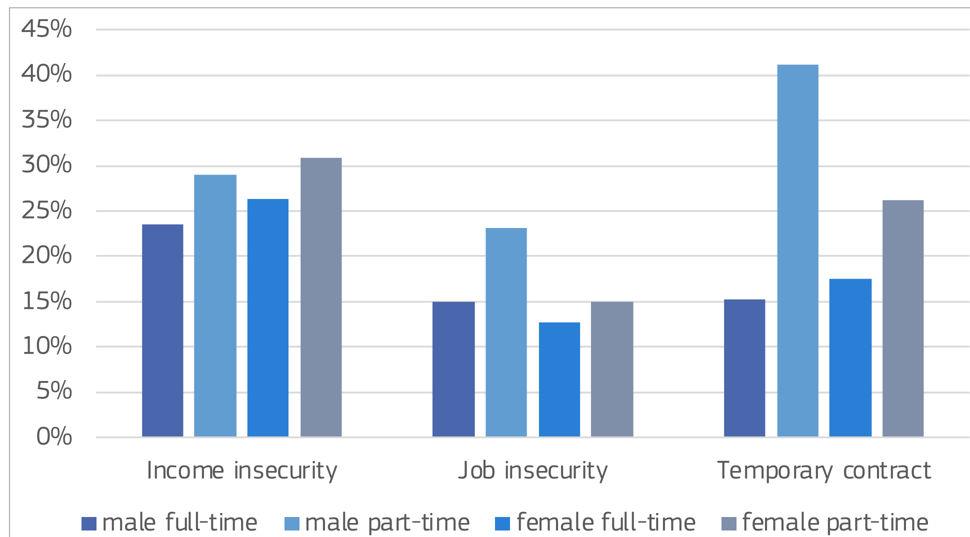
Another reason why part-time workers end up with career penalties is due to the flexibility stigma they can face (Williams et al., 2013). In other words, despite evidence of part-time working women being more productive (Künn-Nelen et al., 2013) and in many cases working longer than their contracted hours (Chung & van der Horst, 2018; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010), they end up being penalised as being not as productive, committed and motivated as those who work full-time (Chung, 2020b). The reason behind this is because working part-time makes workers deviate away from the 'ideal' worker image. It is argued that in many societies, an ideal worker is a worker that is devoted to work and works without any other responsibilities outside of work (Blair-Loy, 2009; Williams, 1999).

The ideal worker in this case would be working long hours and be always available, even if it is performative (Reid, 2011), to indicate their devotion to work. In such cases, part-time working, especially among mothers, is considered to be a sign that workers cannot devote themselves to work, and this alone can act as a mechanism to discriminate against part-time workers. This explains again why it is difficult for managers and higher status workers to work part-time (as seen in section 3.1.3), and why part-time work is less available for such positions. It can also explain why part-time working ends up with negative career outcomes with fewer chances for promotions and pay rises. For example, using UK data, Chung shows that **part-time working women were much more likely to state that they have directly experienced negative career outcomes due to flexible working** (Chung, 2020b). Drawing from the evidence showing the productivity outcomes of part-time workers, Chung argues that part-time workers are not necessarily penalised due to legitimate reasons such as reductions in productivity or performance. Rather, she argues that part-time workers are stigmatised **because it is largely an arrangement given to and used by mothers** (see also, Wang & Chung, in review). In other words, there are biases against mother's work capacities (Budig & England, 2001) not based on the realities of their productivity levels but rather on social norms and biases around their ability to work (Gray, 2019; Grimshaw & Rubery, 2015; Heilman, 2012). When part-time work is seen largely as serving the work–life balance demands of mothers, the arrangement itself can be linked to biases (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). This is examined in greater detail in the next section while exploring the working conditions of part-time workers.

3.4 Working conditions of part-time workers

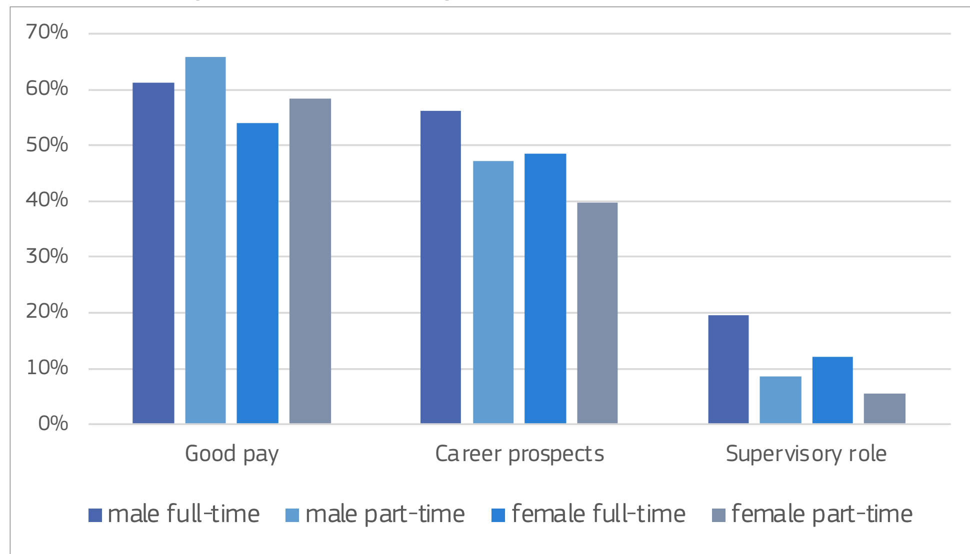
This section will use the EWCTS 2021 data set to explore the working conditions of part-time workers. First examined is perceived job and income insecurity and the contractual insecurity of part-time workers to confirm the thesis that part-time workers are generally in the lower ends of the labour market – i.e. labour market outsiders (Nicolaisen et al., 2019). Part-time workers are generally more likely to be in insecure jobs, and this is especially true for male part-time workers (Figure 3.18). Both male and female **part-time workers are slightly more likely to feel income insecurity and more likely to feel that they will lose their job in the next six months compared to full-time workers**. The gap between full-time and part-time workers is larger among men: 29 % of part-time working men feel income insecure compared to 23.5 % of full-time working men, and 23.2 % of part-time working men feel job insecurity compared to 15 % of full-time working men. In comparison, 30.9 % of part-time women feel income insecurity versus 26.4 % of full-time women and 15 % of part-time women feel job insecurity versus 12.7 % of full-time women. In terms of temporary contract status, **part-time workers are significantly more likely to be in temporary contracts that full-time workers:** 41.1 % of male part-time and 26.1 % of female part-time workers are on temporary contracts, compared to 15.3 % and 17.5 % of their full-time equivalents, respectively. With regards to income insecurity, this is more likely to be related to household income rather than just one's own income, however, so this level of insecurity may not fully capture the low pay individual workers receive.

Figure 3.18 Insecurity levels of workers across the EU-27 countries, by gender and working-time status



Notes: Income insecurity denotes those who reply 'with (great or some) difficulty' to the question 'Thinking of your household's total monthly income, is your household able to make ends meet?' and job insecurity denotes those who reply that they (strongly) agree to the statement 'I am likely to lose my job in the next six months'. Weighted averages.
Source: EWCTS 2021.

Figure 3.19 Pay and career prospects of workers across the EU-27 countries, by gender and working-time status



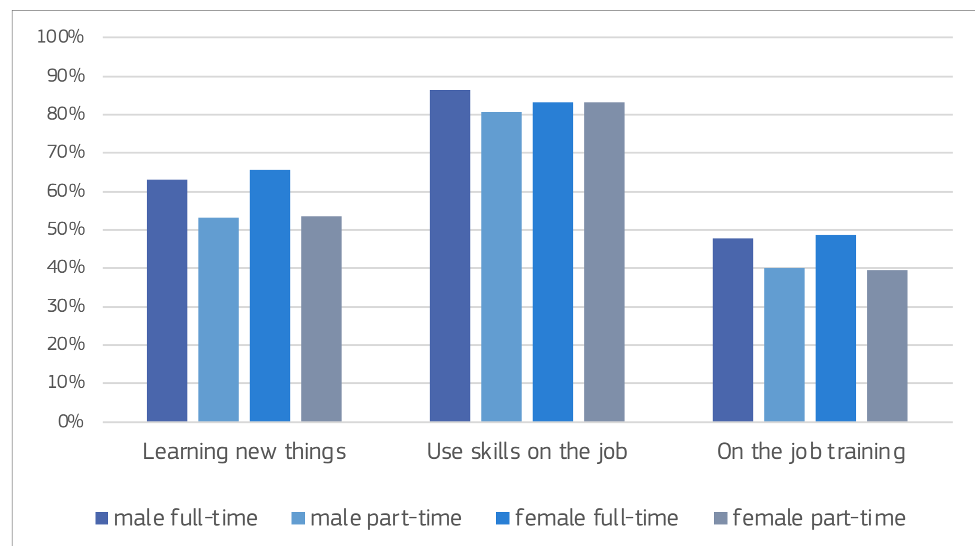
Notes: Good pay indicates those who agree that they are paid appropriately; career prospects indicates those who agree that their job provides them with good career prospects; supervisory role indicates those that are in supervisory roles. Note that the variable supervisory role has a lot of missing variables and thus needs to be taken with caution. Weighted averages.
Source: EWCTS 2021.

In terms of whether workers believe pay is appropriate ('good pay') (Figure 3.19), **women are less likely than men to feel that they are being paid appropriately.** Meanwhile, **full-time working women are statistically significantly less likely to feel that they are being well paid in comparison to part-time female work-**

ers, perhaps because women are generally paid less due to the devaluation of women's contribution to the labour market (Acker, 1990; Anker, 1997), and also because part-time women may have accepted and internalised the ideas that their contributions are less valuable. In other words, **part-time working women may feel that being penalised for working part-time is acceptable given that they are unable to live up to society's ideal worker norm**. At the same time, it is part-time working women who are the least likely to say that their jobs provide good career prospects, confirming previous studies (Connolly & Gregory, 2008; Costa Dias et al., 2018). Similarly, they are also the least likely to be in supervisory roles, again confirming the occupational vertical segregation pattern found in Figure 3.10 previously in the chapter. Full-time working men are the most likely to say they have better career prospects and are generally more likely to be in supervisory roles.

The lack of opportunities at work is shown in Figure 3.20 which examines the extent to which part-time workers have opportunities to learn new things, receive on-the-job training, and use their skills and knowledge on the job. Looking at all three aspects of skills and training at the job, it is again **part-time workers, both men and women in this case, that are less likely to be able to obtain new skills and training at their jobs**. This explains again why workers are less likely to have career opportunities when working part-time, putting part-time workers in dead-end careers. This confirms the theories put forward by scholars arguing that part-time work in many countries and organisations are outsider jobs – namely jobs that are stuck in the lower end of the labour market, with part-time workers having limited access to 'insider jobs' with good pay, benefits, employment security and career prospects (Nicolaisen et al., 2019; Rueda, 2014; Schwander & Häusermann, 2013; Seo, 2023). This again explains why part-time workers are less likely to experience career progression and end up with accumulative disadvantage over the course of their lives with regards to pay and other benefits. There may be, however, variations across countries, sectors and companies.

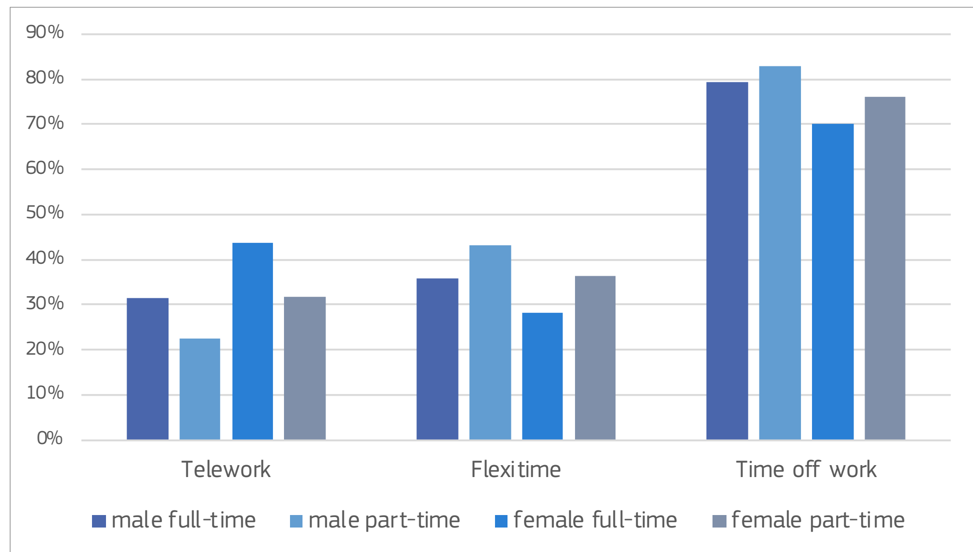
Figure 3.20. Use and opportunity for training for workers across EU-27 countries, by gender and working-time status



Notes: 'Learning new things' indicates those who responded sometimes, often and always to the statement 'Does your job involve … learning new things'; 'use skills on the job' indicates those who agreed (strongly or somewhat) to the statement 'I have enough opportunities to use my knowledge and skills in my current job'; and 'on-the-job training' are those who said they have undergone this to improve their skills since they have started their main job. Weighted averages.

Source: EWCTS 2021.

Figure 3.21. Workers' access to teleworking, flexitime, and time off work in EU-27 countries, by gender and working-time status



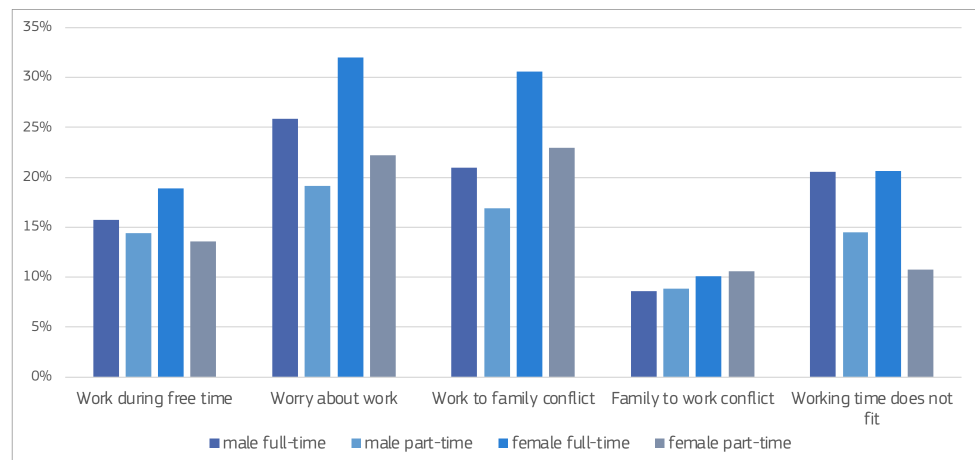
Notes: 'Telework' indicates those who teleworked occasionally, partially or fully. 'Flexitime' is those who have flexible starting ending times of work, and time off work are those who able to take an hour or two off work to tend to personal issues. Weighted averages.
Source: EWCTS 2021 and EWCS 2015 for flexitime.

Part-time workers' access to other types of flexible working arrangements is shown in Figure 3.21: teleworking (at least occasional), flexitime (flexitime and working time autonomy), and time off work (workers' ability to take a couple of hours off work to tend to personal issues). **Part-time workers, both men and women, have more access to flexitime than full-time workers** (see also Chung, 2019c). Part-time workers are more likely to access these arrangements as they work fewer hours and having variable starting and ending times of work can be easily facilitated compared to those working full-time. Similarly **part-time workers are more likely to be able to take a couple of hours off to tend to personal issues** compared to full-time workers. The gap is smaller among men, but there is a larger gap for part-time (76.1 %) against full-time working women (70.2 %). However, **part-time workers are less likely to be teleworking** (22.4 % of part-time working men and 31.7 % of part-time working women telework, compared to 31.3 % and 43.8 % of full-time working men and women respectively). This may be because of the types of jobs part-time workers carry out, which may be less able to be carried out remotely. This may also be linked to the fact that part-time workers are more likely to be in lower ends of the labour markets, with worse working conditions, as examined before, whereas teleworking is given to higher-skilled workers who managers are more likely to trust. This will be explored further when examining the working conditions of teleworkers.

Finally, workers' feelings about work–life balance (Figure 3.22) show that full-time workers, especially full-time working women, are more likely to work during their free time (15.7 % for full-time working men and 18.9 % for full-time working women) and worry about work when not at work (25.8 % for full-time working men and 32 % for full-time working women), compared to part-time workers (14.4 % and 19.1 % for part-time working men respectively and 13.6 % and 22.2 % for part-time working women respectively). Full-time workers, especially full-time working women (30.6 %), are the ones that also feel that work demands conflict with family commitments, more specifically that work prohibits them

from carrying out household demands. Meanwhile, part-time working women (23 %) feel that work conflicts with family demands more often than men (20.9 % for full-time working men, 16.9 % for part-time working men). This may be due to the fact that gender norms still dictate that women are responsible for meeting family demands, whether housework or care demands. In this sense, women may feel more responsible for household work and thus more likely to feel that work demands conflict with it. The levels of family-to-work conflict is low overall, but it is **part-time working women (10.6 %) who are most likely to feel that family demands do not allow them to concentrate on work** (10 % for full-time working women, around 9 % for both part-time and full-time working men). Finally, **part-time working women are the ones that feel like their working time fits with their family and other responsibilities outside or work** with only 10.7 % feeling like this is not the case. In contrast, 20.6 % of full-time working men and women feel that their working time does not fit with their life demands, and 14.5 % part-time working men feel the same. Again, the main reason why women work part-time is precisely because their family demands reduce their capacity to work longer hours. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that part-time working women are most likely to feel that their working hours fits with family demands.

Figure 3.22. Work–life balance of workers across EU-27 countries, by gender and working-time status



Notes: 'Work during free time' indicates the proportion of workers who say they have had to work during their free time to meet work demands at least several times a week or more often; 'worry about work' indicates the proportion of workers who say that they worry about work when not at work sometimes, most of the times or always; 'work to family conflict' indicates the share of workers who say that they felt too tired after work to do some of the household jobs which need to be done sometimes, most of the times or always; 'family to work conflict' indicates the proportion of workers who say they found it difficult to concentrate on their job because of family responsibilities sometimes, most of the times or always; and 'working time does not fit' indicates the share of workers who responded their working hours does not fit in with their family or social commitments outside work. Weighted averages.
Source: EWTCS, 2021.

3.5 Conclusions

As this chapter has shown, part-time work is still largely 'women's work' across Europe, where it is over-represented by women, especially mothers with young (preschool-aged) children. Despite legislative frameworks that should allow workers the right to work part-time in many countries and at the EU level, part-time work is still not widely available across all occupations or sectors. It is especially female-dominated workplaces and sectors that have a larger representation of part-time workers, although it could be also the case that those with part-time working opportunities drew in more women. In contrast, men and especially fathers were less likely to work part-time, not only compared to mothers, but also compared to men without children. This may be due to fathers resisting reducing working hours due to their responsibility as breadwinners, or due to the barriers at work which makes it difficult for men to ask to work shorter hours. However, there were also countries studied, especially where part-time working was not as prevalent, where this gender gap was less noticeable.

It was found that women and especially part-time working women spend a significant amount of time carrying out domestic work, with part-time working mothers spending on average 55 hours a week on unpaid domestic work. Part-time work can be seen as a way for the unequal gender division of household labour to persist with women seen as being responsible for carrying out the burden. This is especially true when it is considered that men generally work longer. Men are limited in their part-time working access despite surveys (Burgess & Goldman, 2021; Chung et al., 2020) which show a growing interest in fathers to work fewer hours to be more involved in childcare. Although part-time work may enable women to carry out domestic responsibilities without completely withdrawing from the labour market, women reducing their hours post-childbirth and working part-time is also one of the biggest reasons behind the persistent gender pay gap, above and beyond the fact that there are different types of jobs women carry out with regards to sector and occupations (Leythienne & Pérez-Julián, 2021; Olsen et al., 2018).

In fact, part-time working being seen largely as a mother's arrangement may also increase the bias against part-time workers as deviating away from the ideal worker image – namely being not as committed, motivated and productive as other workers, despite evidence that shows otherwise. This is especially true as heterosexual fathers, with supportive partners who either work part-time or not at all to meet family demands, are better able to work longer hours and meet the ideal worker standard (Williams, 1999). The two factors combined explain the motherhood penalty and the fatherhood bonus.

As found in the literature and EU LFS and EWCTS data, part-time work, especially among women, is generally in poorer working conditions with regards to pay and other benefits, and with fewer opportunities for career advancement, leading to dead-end jobs. This explains why fewer women, especially part-time working women, are represented in top managerial and supervisory positions, although variations across countries exist. On the positive side, part-time working women are generally more likely to feel that their work and family commitments do not conflict with one another, and also less likely to feel that work spills over to the family sphere. However, they are not completely immune to this, and a large number of part-time women feel that work conflicts with family demands, and vice versa family demands prohibit them from carrying out paid work. Especially with regards to gender equality, it is clear that part-time work has significant limitations in reducing the gender gap both at home with regards to division of labour, as well as in enhancing women's position in the labour market.

4. Flexitime, working from home who uses it and what are its outcomes?

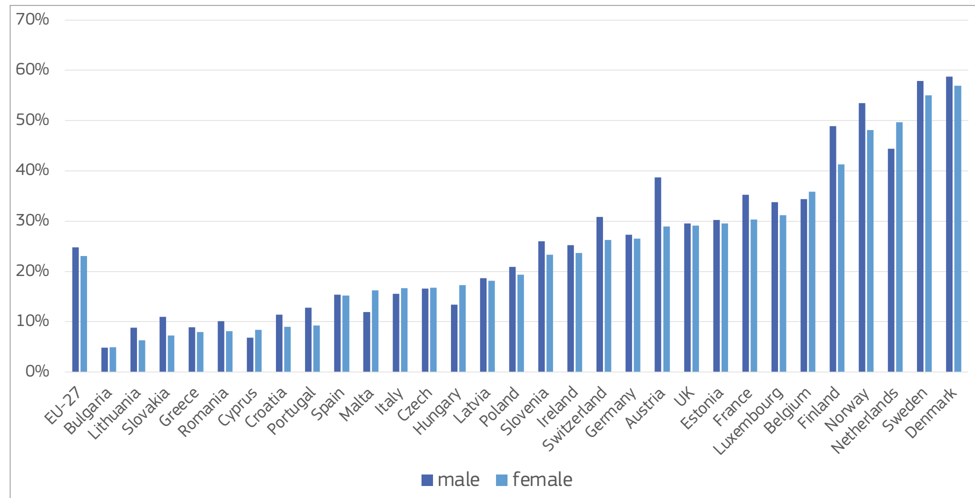
The previous chapter examined the positives and limitations of part-time work in enhancing gender equality in European labour markets, observing some of the gaps in working conditions between part-time and full-time workers. This chapter explores whether flexible schedules such as flexitime, working time autonomy and teleworking can be an alternative solution with regards to enhancing gender equality both at home and in the labour market.

4.1 Access to flexitime and teleworking

4.1.1 Bivariate analysis access to flexible schedules

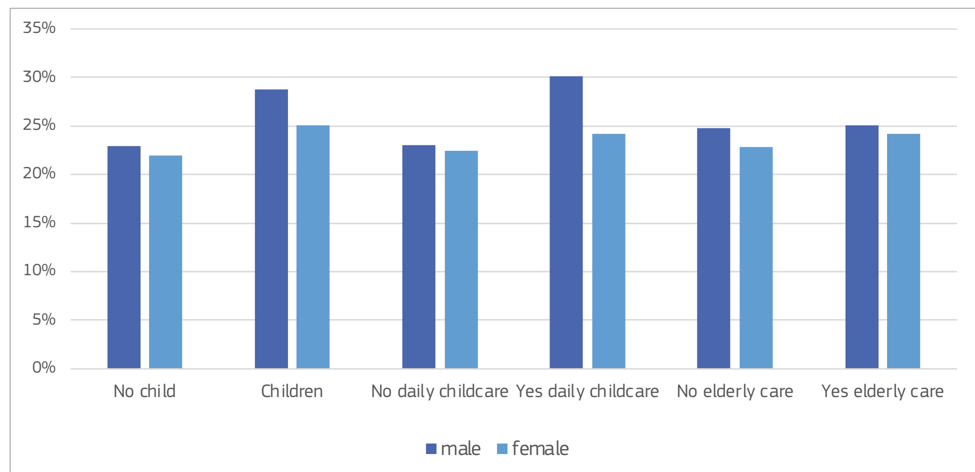
First examined is workers' access to flexitime and working-time autonomy (Figure 4.1). Unfortunately, neither the EWCTS 2021 nor the LFS contain sufficient information on these two arrangements in their most recent data sets. Therefore, this chapter relies on the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) 2015 data set. **There is huge cross-national variation in the degree to which workers have access to flexible schedules**. In 2015, in the Northern European countries, such as Denmark, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, and somewhat Finland, there were more workers with access to flexible schedules. In these countries, more than 40 % of workers had access to either flexitime or working time autonomy. In Denmark, 59 % of men and 57 % of women had access to flexible schedules. In contrast, in the Eastern and Southern European countries, these arrangements were less available. In countries such as Bulgaria, Lithuania, Romania, Cyprus, Slovakia, Greece, Portugal and Croatia, less than 10 % of women, and similarly very few men although slightly more than women, had access to flexible schedules. In most countries in 2015, men had better access to these arrangements than women. Austria, Finland, Norway, and somewhat France and Switzerland, are countries where men had a higher likelihood of having access to flexible schedules. In Austria, the gap was close to 10 percentage points. In contrast, in countries like Malta, Hungary and the Netherlands, women had better access, yet the gap was not as large. Overall, across the EU-27, men generally had better access to flexible schedules (24.8 % vs 23.1 %). Although it was not a very large difference, it was statistically significant. However, this changes when other factors that influence workers' access to flexible schedules are considered.

Figure 4.1 Employees' access to flexible schedules (flexitime and working time autonomy) across European countries in 2015, by gender



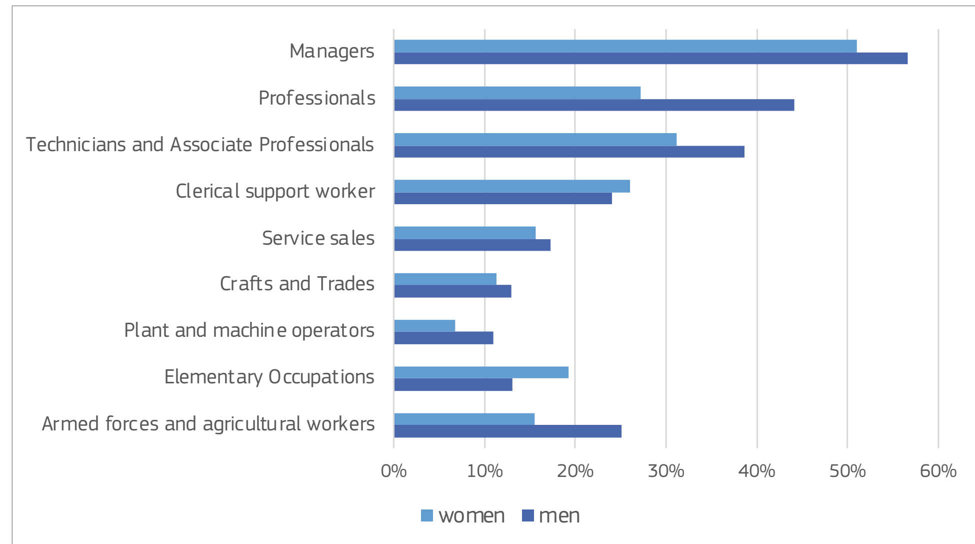
Note: Weighted averages.
Source: EWCS 2015.

Figure 4.2 Employees' access to flexible schedules (flexitime and working time autonomy) across the EU-27 countries in 2015, by gender and care status



Note: Weighted averages.
Source: EWCS 2015.

Figure 4.3. Employee' access to flexible schedules (flexitime and working time autonomy) across the EU-27 countries in 2015, by gender and occupational status



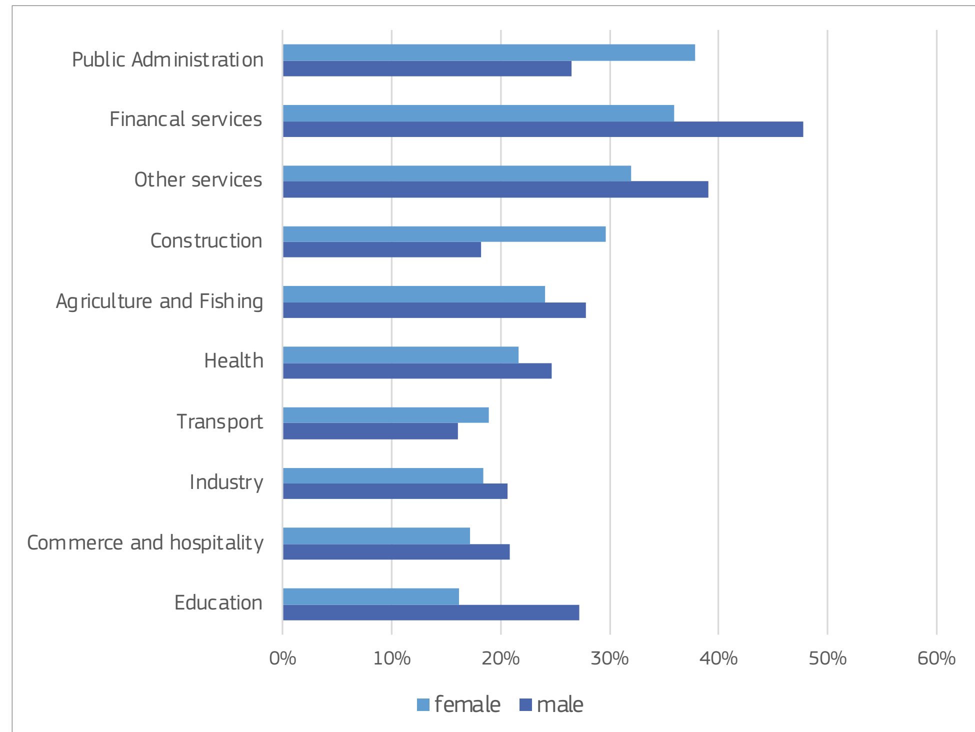
Note: Weighted averages.
Source: EWCS 2015.

Figure 4.2 examines access to flexible schedules of workers in the EU-27 across caring responsibilities, as the EU-WLB directive addresses the need for flexible working to be available especially for those with caring responsibilities. As shown, **for both men and women, those who live with children and or say that they have daily childcare responsibilities are those more likely to say they have access to flexible schedules.** For example, 23 % of men without children or no daily childcare responsibilities have access to flexible schedules, but this number rises to 29 % of fathers and 30 % of men with daily childcare responsibilities. For women, 20 % of women without children and 23 % of women without daily childcare responsibilities have access to flexible schedules, whereas 25 % of mothers and 24 % of women with daily childcare responsibilities have access to childcare. These differences between the caring responsibility types are all statistically significant. The gap between those with and without elderly care responsibilities is smaller, and not statistically significant. It is interesting, however, that it is generally fathers, not mothers, who have better access to flexible schedules, though as seen in Chapter 3, women are the ones who have greater childcare and housework demands. This indicates that although family demands are one factor in determining flexible working access, it is not the only or perhaps the most important factor (Chung, 2019b, 2020b). There are, however, cross-national variations in this report does not have the scope to go into greater detail (see also Chung, 2022a).

Figure 4.3 examines the occupational variation in workers' access to flexible schedules by gender. As expected, those in higher-skilled and higher-status occupations are more likely to have access to flexible schedules, contrary to what was found for part-time work in Chapter 3. **Those in managerial and (associate) professional occupations are much more likely to have access to flexible schedules**. For example, 57 % of male managers and 51 % of female managers have access to flexible schedules. **However, there are gender differences**. This is especially large in the professional occupation, which is a largely male-dominated occupation: 44 % of male professionals have access to either flexitime or working time autonomy while only 27 % of female professionals do.

Similarly, 39 % of male and 31 % of female technicians and associate professionals have access to flexible schedules. In contrast, more women in clerical support roles and elementary occupations have flexible schedules compared to men. All of these differences are statistically significant. The reason behind such gender variation in access to flexible schedules among workers in higher-skilled/status occupations may have to do with their types of jobs. For example, many female professionals and associate professional jobs are in the education, health and social care sectors, where there may be limitations in the degree to which flexibility in their jobs can be applied. However, this may also have to do with the fact that many **managers, especially prior to the pandemic, did not feel that they can trust women to work flexibly due to the inherent bias they have against women's devotion to work** (Acker, 1990; Williams et al., 2013). Such bias could result in women, and jobs which are largely done by women, having limited access to flexible working practices (Chung, 2019d; Magnusson, 2021).

Figure 4.4 Employee' access to flexible schedules (flexitime and working time autonomy) across the EU-27 countries in 2015, by gender and sector



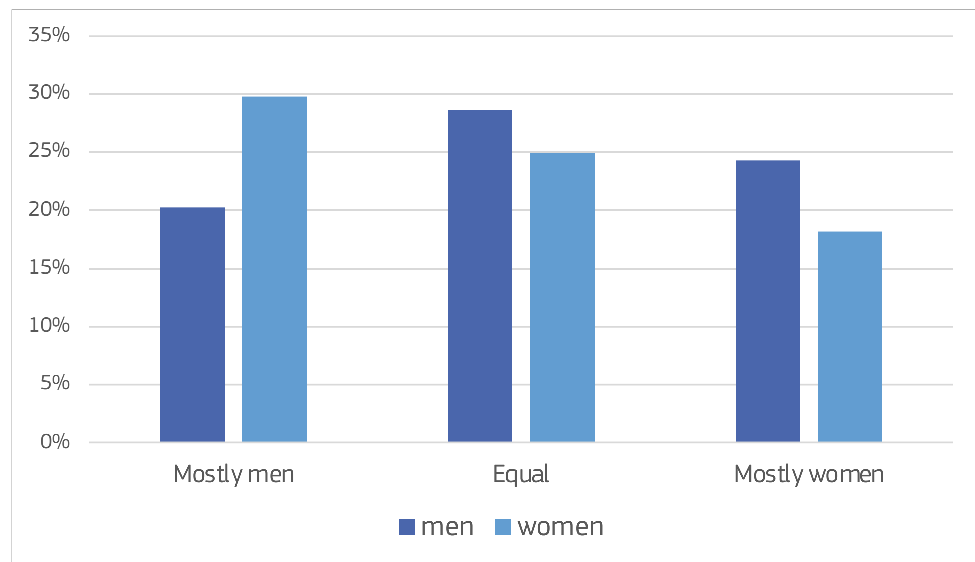
Notes: Data sorted by the proportion of women's access to flexible schedules. Weighted averages.
Source: EWCS 2015.

Figure 4.4 shows the variation in flexible schedule access for men and women across sectors. Public administration, financial services and 'other services' are where flexible schedules are more readily available for both men and women. In sectors like public administration and construction, women's access to flexible schedules (38 % and 30 % respectively) is significantly higher than that of men's (27 % and 18 %). This may indicate that despite being in the same sector, men and women may carry out very different types of jobs in these sectors.

In contrast, the **sectors with the least access to flexible schedules for women are education** (16 %) and **commerce and hospitality** (17 %). However, this is not necessarily true for men (27 % and 21 % respectively) who are significantly more likely to have access to flexible schedules. This may again be due to the roles men

and women perform in these generally female-dominated sectors. For example, men in female-dominated workplaces are likely to be in managerial roles that allow for more flexibility in their work schedules (Maume, 1999). It could also be the case that even within the same sectors, men and women are represented in different types of jobs that have different degrees of flexible working possibilities, e.g. in the education sector, more men work in tertiary education and more women work in primary and secondary education. There is also a significant gender gap in flexible schedule access in the financial services sector and 'other services' sector, where men are significantly more likely to have access to these arrangements. Again, it is unclear why these patterns emerge, but this may be due to the hierarchies of jobs men and women carry out within the sectors and/or due to the biases managers hold against female workers.

Figure 4.5 Employee' access to flexible schedules (flexitime and working time autonomy) across the EU-27 countries in 2015, by gender and gender composition of the workplace



Notes: Data sorted by the proportion of women's access to flexible schedules. Weighted averages.
Source: EWCS 2015.

Figure 4.5 examines access to flexible schedules across workplaces with different gender composition. The findings are complex. For women, male-dominated workplaces provide women with the most opportunities to have control over their schedules (30 %), potentially as they are carrying out different types of work. However, these are workplaces where men are least likely to have flexible schedules (20 %). In contrast, in workplaces which are female-dominated, men (24 %) have more access to flexible schedules than women (18 %). This could again be potentially explained by the glass escalator theory, where men are generally promoted quicker and are over-represented in managerial or higher occupational positions in female-dominated workplaces (Maume, 1999; Williams, 2013). **In workplaces where both men and women are equally represented, men (29 %) are most likely to have access to flexible schedules and women (25 %) are also much more likely to have access** to these arrangements in these workplaces compared to female-dominated workplaces.

4.1.2 Multivariate analysis access to flexible schedules

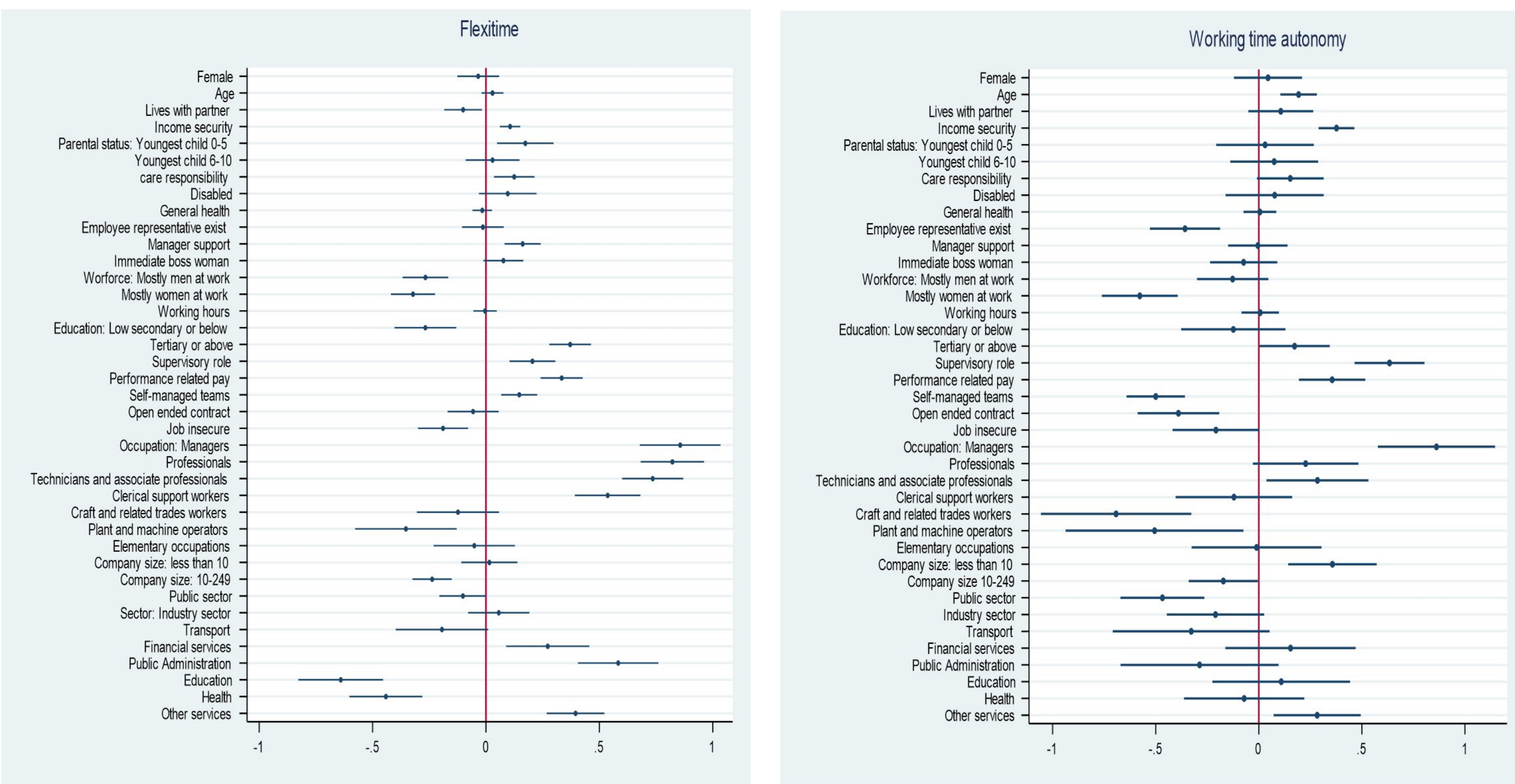
Figure 4.6 shows the results of the multivariate (multilevel) analysis examining the factors that are associated with worker's access to flexitime and working time autonomy. Here, working time autonomy means having full control over when and to a certain degree how much one works (as long as one gets the work done), while flexitime entails more limited discretion over one's work, e.g. controlling the starting and ending times of work.

Once other factors are controlled for, **there are no gender differences in workers' access to flexitime or working time autonomy**. There is some evidence that flexitime is provided to those in greater need of work–family policies – namely, those with preschool children, care responsibilities or disabilities are more likely to have access to it. Furthermore, those who have supportive managers are more likely to say they have access to flexitime. However, none of these variables are significant in explaining workers' access to working time autonomy – which is likely to be driven more by performance logic rather than to provide workers with better work–life balance outcomes (Chung, 2022a). **The high performance logic or the higher status logic is applicable in explaining access to both flexitime and working time autonomy**. Moreover, these factors are far more relevant than the family-friendly logic (see also Ortega, 2009; Chung, 2022a). Occupational status and educational levels are one of the most important factors in determining who has control over their schedules – may it be with flexitime or working time autonomy, with managers and (associate) professionals, and higher educated workers having greater access. In addition, those who have higher levels of income security – i.e. higher household income or those who are better paid, and those who are in supervisory roles are the ones with better access to these arrangements. This supports the idea that **flexible working arrangements that gives workers more control over their work is associated with the higher status in jobs/positions of workers**. On the contrary, those who feel that their jobs are insecure were less likely to have access to flexible schedules (flexitime/working time autonomy) again supporting the worker bargaining position thesis. However, unlike our expectations, those with permanent contracts were less likely to have access to working time autonomy.

Looking more at company level characteristics, workers working in companies that provide performance related pay are more likely to have access to both flexitime and working time autonomy, yet their use is not associated with self-managed teams. Public companies are less likely to provide working time autonomy arrangements to their workers, while for flexitime there are no clear differences between public and private sectors. This, however, largely depends on the country contexts (for more, see Chung, 2008). **Workplaces where men and women are equally represented are the ones where access was highest for both flexitime and working time autonomy. Female dominated work places are those where access was most limited especially for working time autonomy** (see also Chung, 2019d; Magnusson, 2021). This is an important finding especially with regards to debates around occupational segregation and its impact on working conditions (Glass, 1990; Hook & Pettit, 2016). Company size mattered. Medium sized companies with 50–249 employees are the ones where access to both flexitime and working time autonomy is most limited. Workers in small companies with less than 50 employees are most likely to have access to working time autonomy. This may be because larger companies are more likely to provide formal access to flexible working due to the resources they have, while smaller companies may be able to provide more informal ad hoc arrangements, and can

be more flexible with its provision (Dex & Scheibl, 2001). This may leave medium sized companies caught between the two where it is difficult to implement formal policies due to lack of resources or staff to implement these arrangements, while not being able to rely solely on informal arrangements due to its implication on the fairness across the company. Finally, looking at differences across sectors and lines of business, 'financial services', 'real estate' and 'public administration' have greater access to flexitime while 'education' and 'health and social care services' – both sectors where women are generally overrepresented – have worse access. For working time autonomy there is not much sector variation, other than the fact that workers in the 'other services' sectors have better access to working time autonomy. Workers in this sector, which includes research, arts, and also technical related sectors, also have better access to flexitime.

Figure 4.6 Access to flexible schedules (flexitime + working time autonomy) across Europe (28 countries) in 2015

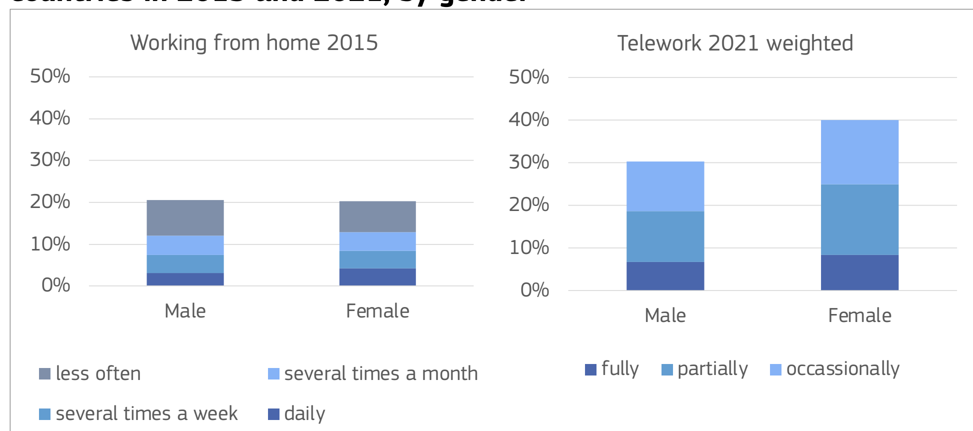


Notes: Coefficient plot of two regression tables. N level 1 = 23 408, N level 2 = 28 countries. Age, income security, general health and working hours have been standardised. All other variables are dichotomous variables. Parental status reference group is no children; education reference group is upper secondary; workforce composition reference group men and women equally represented; size of company reference group 250 or more; occupation reference group is service and sales workers; and sector reference group is commerce and hospitality.
Source: Chung 2022 and European Working Conditions Survey 2015.

4.1.3 Bivariate analysis patterns of teleworking

The Covid-19 pandemic has shifted the way people work, especially with regards to homeworking, as many governments have enforced homeworking as a way to contain the spread of the virus, especially in the early stages of the pandemic. Figure 4.7 shows the level of teleworking in 2021 compared to the proportion of workers homeworking in 2015. In 2015, only about one out of eight workers worked from home several times a month or more – 12 % for men and 13 % for women as an average for the EU-27 member states. Another 9 % of men and 8 % of women say they worked from home less often than that. Examining the EWCTS data from 2021, **30 % of men and 40 % of women teleworked at least occasionally.** When considering those who work regularly from home/teleworking and hybrid working (daily or partially teleworking), this number is 19 % and 25 % respectively. Thus, **there is a significant increase in the number of workers who are working from home regularly**.

Figure 4.7 Working from home and teleworking across the EU-27 countries in 2015 and 2021, by gender



Note: Weighted averages.

Source: EWCS 2015 and EWCTS 2021.

There has currently been a slight decline in these numbers as close to half of the population was working from home during the peak of the pandemic around 2020 (Eurofound, 2020). Like what was found for flexible schedules, there are significant cross-national differences in the extent to which workers telework. However, this variation is not as large as what was found for flexible schedules. In **Southern and South-eastern European countries, teleworking is not as common. Northern European countries**, other than Denmark, **are again countries where there are more workers working from home**. However, **the highest levels are found in the United Kingdom, Belgium and Luxembourg**. For Belgium, this is only for women, as men's teleworking levels are only around the European average. The reason why these countries have the highest levels of teleworking for both men and women may be due to the fact that the types of jobs done in the countries are more susceptible for teleworking (in the case of Luxembourg, this is along with the fact that many people live and work in geographically distant locations), or potentially these countries have a higher demand for homeworking due to high commuting costs and/or childcare costs (Luxton, 2017), or that these countries were the ones where lockdown measures were more stringent or long-lasting (e.g. UK and Belgium[15]), which may have paved the way for more home and hybrid working in these countries (Chung et al., 2021).

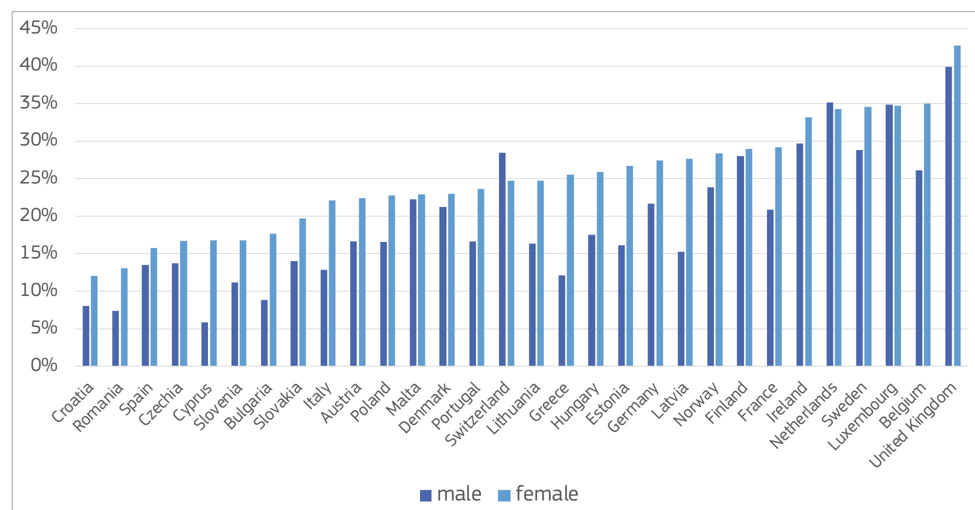
15 See for more detail: https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/covid-19-government-response-tracker.

One important finding is the gender differences in the levels of homeworking and the change in this gap post-pandemic compared to pre-pandemic (see also Abendroth et al., 2022). Prior to the pandemic, the gender differences in the levels of homeworking patterns was not as large (see Figure 4.7), and in many countries like Norway, Ireland, Germany and Czech Republic, men were significantly more likely to be working from home regularly compared to women. However, the pandemic has shifted women's working patterns significantly more than that of men. **By 2021, in most European countries, women were significantly more likely to be teleworking** (Figure 4.8). In countries like Greece, Cyprus, Italy and somewhat Latvia, women are (almost) twice as more likely to be teleworking compared to men.

This can be due to two factors. One is due to the different types of jobs men and women carry out. For example, although clerical jobs could have been carried out at home and away from the office, not many people in those jobs were able to telework prior to the pandemic. However, the pandemic has significantly changed where these types of jobs are carried out. Another factor is that the demands for homeworking may have been stronger among women (Chung & Van der Lippe, 2020; Singley & Hynes, 2005), who still carry out the bulk of the care work, and therefore, may be more likely to want to work from home, especially during the pandemic periods where children were out of formal childcare systems. Men, in contrast, despite wanting to work from home, may feel more cautious about the stigmatised views of employers against homeworkers. Men, therefore, especially given their breadwinner status, may be more fearful about the potential penalisation of homeworkers and the negative career outcomes that may come from it (Rudman & Mescher, 2013). **This gendered pattern of homeworking can exacerbate the stigmatized view on homeworkers**. When homeworking is largely seen as a woman's and especially a mother's arrangement, it is more likely to be associated with negative bias against homeworkers' commitment to work and productivity, regardless of the workers' gender and parental status (Correll et al., 2007; Wang & Chung, in review).

The following section explores the complex issues around how flexitime and teleworking shape the employment and career outcomes of flexible workers, especially that of women and mothers. To better understand the gender patterns of flexible working access and use, several different factors need to be controlled for that can explain such access and use.

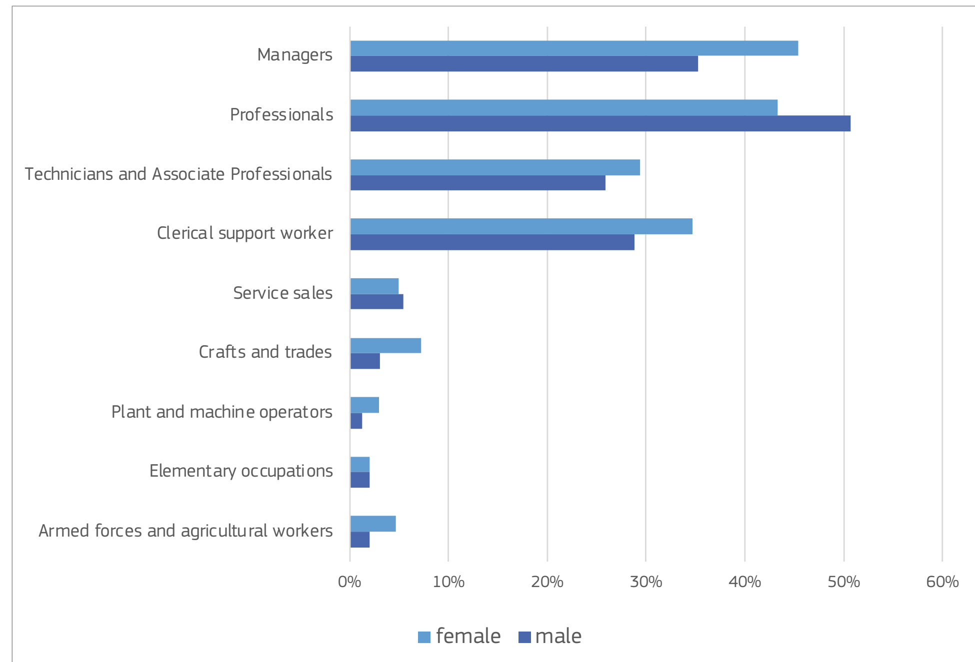
Figure 4.8 Proportion of employees teleworking fully or partially (hybrid) across 30 European countries in 2021, by gender



Notes: Data sorted by the proportion of women's teleworking. Weighted data.

Source: EWCTS 2021.

Figure 4.9 Proportion of employees teleworking frequently (full or partial) across the EU-27 countries in 2021, by gender and occupational status



Notes: Here teleworking includes those who telework fully or partially. Weighted averages.

Source: EWCTS 2021.

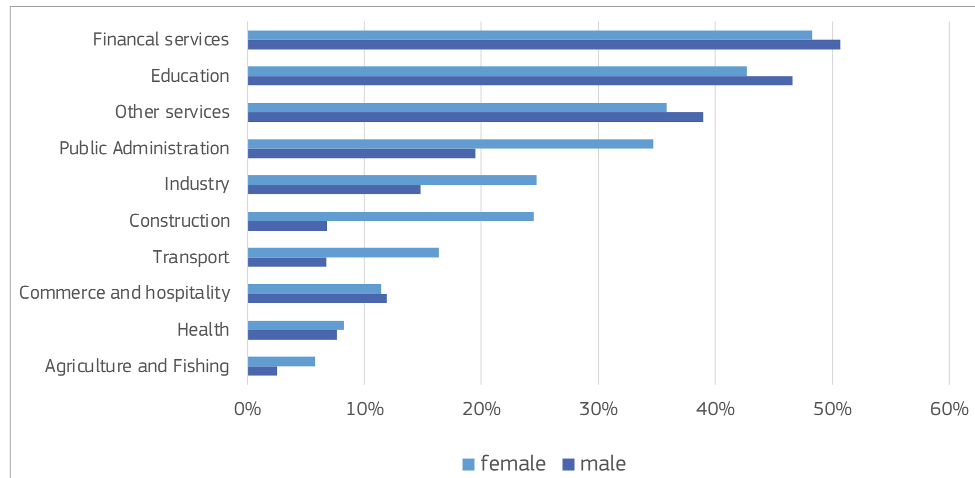
Figure 4.9 shows the proportion of workers across occupations that telework frequently, fully or partially (hybrid). A very clear difference is seen across occupations where it is **the higher-skilled workers that telework more often**. This includes managers (45 % of women and 35 % of men), professionals (43 % of women and 51 % of men), technicians and associate professionals (29 % of women and 26 % of men), and clerical support workers (35 % of women and 29 % of men). In the other occupations, less than 5 % of workers telework regularly (except for women working in crafts and trades).

There are **gender differences within occupational groups**. In most cases, it is women who are more likely to telework, as seen in the overall average for the EU-27. However, **among professionals, men (51 %) are significantly more likely to telework compared to women (43 %).** This may be because many of the jobs that are categorised as professional for women are jobs or are in sectors that are less likely to be conducive to telework, such as primary secondary school teachers and nurses. In contrast, within the professional occupations, men are more likely to hold jobs that are more easily done by telework, e.g. science engineering professionals (Eurostat, 2018; ILOStat, 2020).

This is further explored in Figure 4.10 which shows the proportion of workers teleworking frequently across different sectors. Half of all workers in the 'financial services' sector (51 % for men 48 % for women) telework frequently (at least partially or daily) closely followed by those in 'education', 'public administration', and 'other services'. As expected, the 'agriculture', 'health and social care' and 'commerce and hospitality' sectors are less likely to have teleworkers, largely due to the nature of the jobs carried out in these sectors. As was found for flexible schedules, a good proportion of women working in the 'construction' (25 %), 'industry' (25 %), and 'transport' (16 %) sectors telework, whereas few men working in these sectors telework (15 %, 7 % and 7 % respectively). This again is most likely due to the types of work carried out by men and women in these

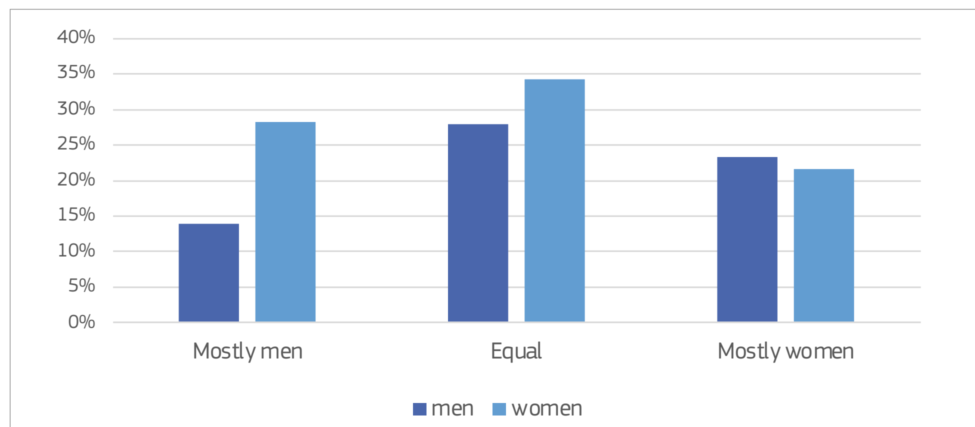
sectors, e.g. women are more likely to do the administrative clerical work. 'Public administration' is another sector where there are significant gender differences in the levels of teleworking (35 % for women versus 20 % for men). As this sector includes jobs in the police and fire services, which are more male dominated, this may drive this result. In the 'education' and 'other services' sectors, in contrast, men (47 % and 39 % respectively) are significantly more likely to telework than women (43 % and 36 %), although the gap is not as large. Women in the 'education' sector are largely in primary and secondary schools, which are jobs where teleworking can be limited. Many men work in 'tertiary' and 'other educational' sectors, and/or are in managerial positions within primary and secondary schools which allow for more control over where they work. Similar conclusions can be made about the 'other services' sector with regards to the types of jobs women do in this sector (e.g. hairdressing) versus those men (e.g. computer repair).

Figure 4.10 Proportion of employees teleworking frequently (full or partial) across the EU-27 countries in 2015, by gender and sector



Notes; Data sorted by the proportion of women's teleworking. Weighted averages.
Source: EWCTS 2021.

Figure 4.11 Proportion of employees teleworking frequently (full or partial) across the EU-27 countries in 2015, by gender and workplace gender composition



Note: Weighted averages.
Source: EWCTS 2021.

Figure 4.11 examines the proportion of workers teleworking across workplaces with different gender composition. Similar to flexitime, **it is the workplaces where men and women are equally represented that are most likely to provide teleworking opportunities for both men (28 %) and women (34 %).** Again, for women this is closely followed by male-dominated workplaces (28 %), where for men it is the place with the lowest likelihood of teleworking (14 %). This again can be explained by the different types of work carried out by men and women in such workplaces. In contrast, men in female-dominated workplaces are more likely (23 %) than women (22 %) to be teleworking, although this gap is not as large as the one found in male-dominated workplaces.

4.1.4 Multivariate analysis in the use of teleworking practices

Figure 4.12 presents the multivariate logistic regression results explaining workers' teleworking practices for workers across the EU-27 countries. Even **when other important factors explaining workers' teleworking practices are controlled for, on average, women are more likely to be teleworking compared to men**. However, when comparing workplaces with different gender compositions, it was the **workplaces with an equal representation of both men and women that have the most access to teleworking** even when other factors are considered. Teleworking is not as prevalent in both male-dominated and female-dominated workplaces. However, those with a female direct boss were more likely to be teleworking. Although parents with preschool children were not necessarily more likely to telework than those without children or older children, **parents with primary school-aged children (6 to 11 years old) were more likely to telework**. There are no gender differences in the way parental status and children's age influence teleworking access. Workers who had chronic or long-term illnesses are more likely to say that they are teleworking regularly as well. Those who feel income insecure are less likely to telework. At first glance, it could be understood that those who feel insecure about their income are likely in jobs that cannot be done as easily by telework. However, after controlling for sector, occupation and other job characteristics, this is found less likely to be the case. Instead, this result may be capturing workers' bargaining positions, where workers who feel insecure about their jobs and/or household income may fear the potential negative consequence of teleworking on their careers and may be less likely to do so (Chung, 2018). This is confirmed when seeing that those with permanent contracts are more likely to be teleworking. However, there are also legislative elements of flexible working that may not make these arrangements available for those on temporary contracts.[16]

Occupational and skills levels of the workers were one of the most important factors explaining teleworking practice. Those with tertiary education were significantly more likely to telework and those in higher-occupational groups were significantly more likely to telework. This may be linked to the fact that these workers generally work in knowledge-intensive fields, which are more likely to use digital technologies and more able to carry out their work anywhere.

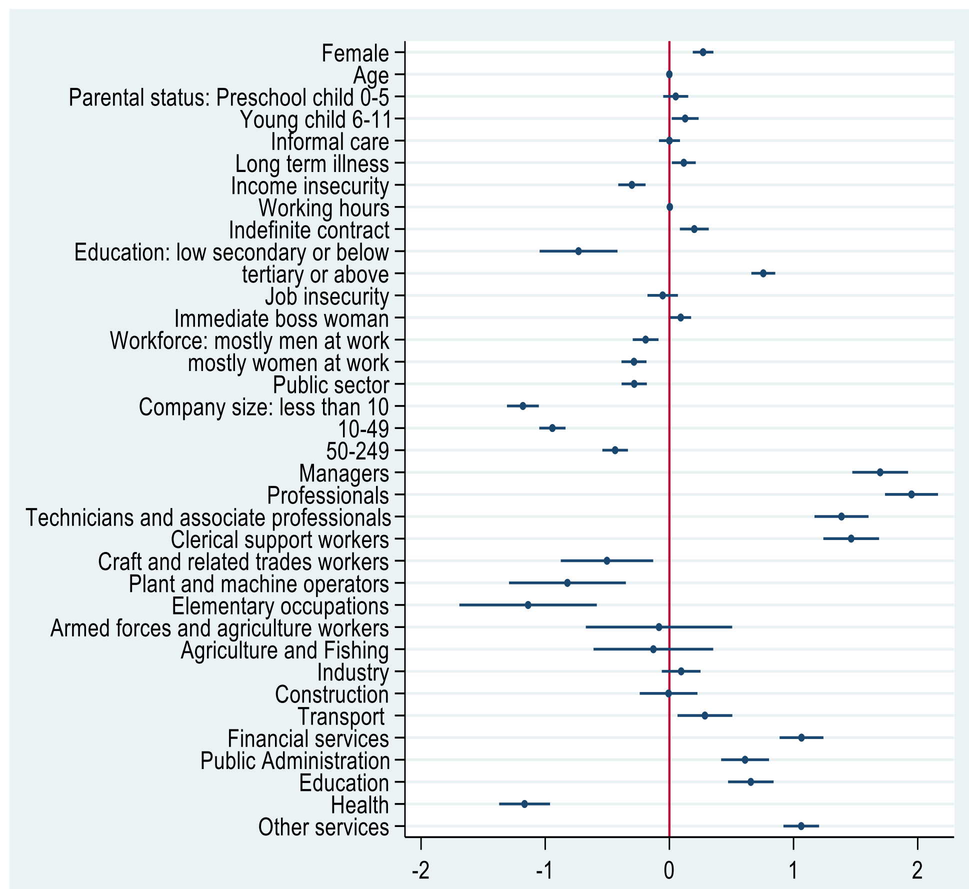
Moving to company-level characteristics, workers working in large companies (250 workers or more) are the most likely to telework, and those working in smaller companies (10 or less and 10 to 49) are significantly less likely to tele-

16 For example, a worker may have to have a permanent contract or be in the job for at least 6 months prior to making a request, which may restrict those on shorter contracts from requesting flexible working arrangements.

work compared to those in medium-sized (50 to 249) companies when other factors are considered. Interestingly, workers in public sector companies are less likely to telework compared to their private sector counterparts.

Finally, looking at sectoral differences, workers working in the 'financial services' sector and 'other services' sectors had the highest likelihood of teleworking, followed closely by 'education' and 'public administration'. The 'health and social care' sector was the sector with the least likelihood of workers teleworking. Having looked at the gender interaction with sector, as confirmed in Figure 4.10, this sectoral variation is different for men and women.

Figure 4.12 Coefficient plot for the multivariate logistic regression explaining workers' teleworking (fully or partially) for European workers across the EU-27



Notes: Coefficient plot of a multilevel regression table. N level 1 = 19 833, N level 2 = 27 countries. N level 1 = 19 793. Age and working hours have been standardised. All other variables are dichotomous variables. Parental status reference group is no children; education reference group is upper secondary; workforce composition reference group men and women equally represented; size of company reference group is 250 or more; occupation reference group is service and sales workers; and sector reference group is commerce and hospitality.

Source: Author's own calculations and EWCTS 2021.

4.2 Employment and career outcomes of flexible schedules and teleworking

4.2.1 Employment outcomes of flexible working

One of the biggest reasons why flexible schedules and teleworking have been promoted across different countries is to support better work–family integration for working parents and carers.[17] There are several reasons why **workers having flexible time and space boundaries between work and family life can help support their work–family integration**. The work demand–control–support (DCS) model (Karasek, 1979) and work–family border or boundary theory (Clark, 2000; Voydanoff, 2005) argue that flexible schedules and teleworking arrangements can be a great resource to reduce work–family conflict as they provide workers with the ability to flexibly shape their time and place boundaries of work to fit around family demands. This may be especially true when family demands can be unpredictable (e.g. a sick child), the supportive systems to meet family demands (such as nursery places) have fixed schedules that do not fit with work schedules (e.g. school pick up time at 3pm, work ending at 5pm) or can be unreliable (e.g. sudden illness of childminder) (Tomlinson, 2006).

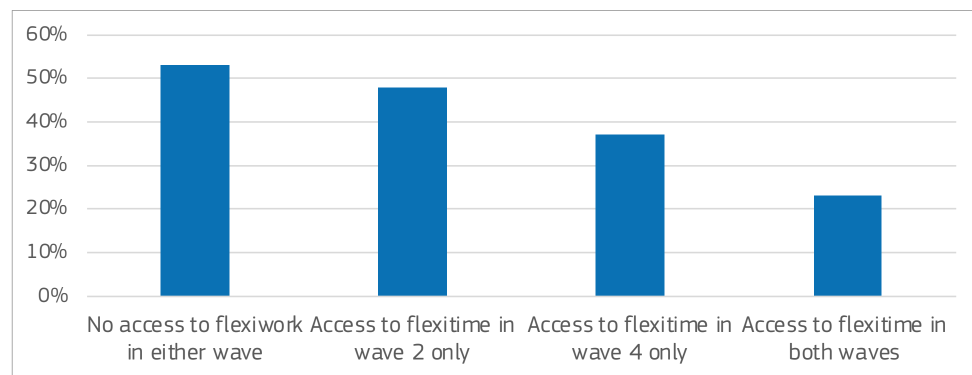
In this sense, when there are strong borders or restrictions in the family domain, a better work–life balance can be facilitated by the flexibility and permeability of the work domain (Clark, 2000). For example, the flexibility of time afforded by flexible working could allow parents to work full-time while meeting family demands during normal working hours, for example, doing school pick-ups and dinner time between 4pm and 6pm, and catching up on work in the mornings or evenings, for example, by working after children are asleep from 8pm to 10pm.

Flexible schedules also allow the use of tag-team parenting to extend family time. This is when, for example, one parent starts work late but does the school drop-offs and the other ends work early and does the pick-ups (Chung & Van der Horst, 2018). Such flexibility facilitates parents to care for children without reducing their working hours (Craig & Powell, 2012). **Teleworking allows for a certain level of blending of activities, where work and family demands can be met at the same time** (e.g. taking care of a sick child while working from home, doing a load of laundry when working from home during breaks) (Kossek et al., 2006). Workers with long commutes will have more time for childcare, housework and/or paid work when they do not need to travel and prepare for work when working from home (Allen et al., 2015), which allows workers to spend this additional time on more hours at the job and/or spend more time meeting family demands. Such flexibility and control over work is especially important in contexts where there is a general lack of affordable and accessible full-time formal childcare provision (Chung, in review). This may be especially true for women, as they are more often than men the primary carers of children (Dotti Sani & Treas, 2016; Wishart et al., 2019), and are more likely to drop out of the labour market or move into part-time work due to these demands (Monica Costa Dias et al., 2018; Vlasblom & Schippers, 2006) (see also Chapter 3).

17 This is not to say there are no other reasons why flexible schedules and teleworking are promoted, for example, to enhance the work capacities of disabled workers, to address worker's burnout and mental health issues, and to address environmental issues as a part of reducing carbon footprints of the workforce. See H. Chung (2022a). *The Flexibility Paradox: Why flexible working can lead to (self-)exploitation*. Policy Press.

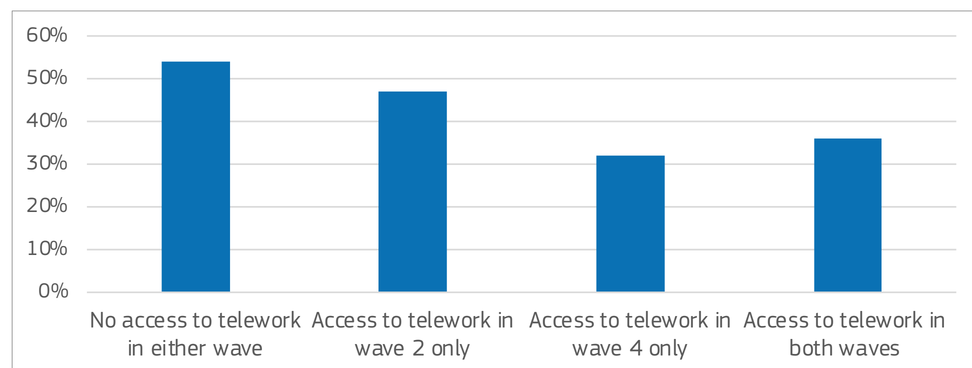
There have been several studies that provide empirical evidence of this **positive impact of flexible schedules and teleworking on enhancing women's employment status**. Chung and van der Horst (2018) used data from the UK household panel study, Understanding Society (University of Essex, 2015), to run a quasi-experiment to see whether flexitime and working from home will reduce the likelihood of women dropping out of the labour market or reducing their working hours post-childbirth. They found that more than half (53 %) of women who were not using flexitime in waves 2 and 4 reduced their working hours by at least half a day after the birth of a child. Flexitime significantly reduced this likelihood. For example, among those who were using flexitime in both waves, only 23 % reduced their working hours post-childbirth (see Figure 4.13). In other words, being **able to use flexitime reduced the likelihood of mothers moving into part-time jobs and working shorter hours after childbirth by half**. Similar results were found for teleworking (Figure 4.14), where half of those who did not have access to teleworking reduced their working hours compared to only about a third of those with access to teleworking who did so. Moreover, they also found evidence that the access to and use of flexitime and working from home arrangements helped first-time mothers to not drop out of the labour market after childbirth (Chung & Van der Horst, 2018).

Figure 4.13 Comparing women's likelihood of reducing their working hours on flexitime



Source: Chung and van der Horst, 2018: 61.

Figure 4.14 Comparing women's likelihood of reducing their working hours on teleworking



Source: Chung and van der Horst, 2018: 60.

This is not an isolated finding. Fuller and Hirsh (2018) examined a Canadian-linked workplace–employee data set from 1999 to 2005 to see how flexible schedules and teleworking arrangements helped moderate motherhood pay penalties, namely the relative low-income mothers are paid in comparison to women without children (Budig & England, 2001). They found that flexitime helped reduce the barriers into employment in better paying establishments for mothers, while teleworking or the ability to work from home allowed mothers to compete better within high-paying establishments (Fuller & Hirsh, 2018). In sum, they argue that **flexible working was key in allowing mothers to stay in higher waged establishments or higher waged jobs**.

Although both studies only looked at mothers and their employment patterns, this could hold true for other workers with similar care and other family and social responsibilities. For example, studies have provided some evidence that flexible working may help workers with informal care responsibilities to maintain their labour market positions (Henz, 2006; Loretto & Vickerstaff, 2015). Similar results are found relating to labour market outcomes for disabled workers (Hoque & Bacon, 2022). There is also some evidence that teleworking helped women maintain their labour market positions during the Covid-19 pandemic. Lyttelton et al. (2022b) used the Current Population Survey of 2020 gathered in the United States to examine how teleworking shapes parental time spent on paid and unpaid labour. They found that mothers working from home spent significantly more hours in paid work (39 hours), compared to women who were working from the workplace (37 hour). They found, on the contrary, that fathers working from home (42 hours) spent fewer hours carrying out paid work compared to those going into the office (43 hours).

There are also studies that indicate that **men's flexible working can also help women's labour market participation, by enabling fathers to be more involved in housework and childcare** (Carlson et al., 2021; Petts et al., 2023), relieving women from the burden of domestic work (see Chapter 3 for the pattern of unequal division of domestic labour across genders). This explains why some studies have shown that women with flexible working partners (flexible schedules in this case) have better career outcomes (Langner, 2018).

Understanding that moving into part-time work and dropping out of the labour market is one of the most important causes of the persistent gender pay gap – and with it the pensions gap (Government Equalities Office 2019) (see also Chapter 3) – the positive impact of flexible schedules and teleworking on enhancing women's labour market participation is welcome. However, the picture is complicated when considering the potential consequence of flexible working on workers' careers, which will be explored in the next section.

4.2.2 Career outcomes of flexible schedules and teleworking

Although women's labour market participation may potentially be enhanced with both women and men using flexible working arrangements, **flexible working can also result in negative career outcomes**, **largely due to biased views against flexible workers**.[18] Flexibility stigma is the belief that workers who use flexible working arrangements – namely flexible schedules or teleworking (although other scholars in the United States (Coltrane et al., 2013; Rudman & Mescher, 2013) include part-time working and leave as a part of this) – are not as productive,

18 Some of the text in this section has been adapted from H. Chung (2022). Flexibility stigma and the rewards of flexible working. In *The Flexibility Paradox*: Policy Press: 120–130.

committed and motivated as workers who do not take up these arrangements (Munsch et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2013). There are several reasons why both managers and workers have such perceptions. Firstly, some believe that the stigmatised views against flexible workers are justified because they are based on the direct experiences of workers or managers. This is, however, contested by evidence showing that flexible workers – namely **those with flexible schedules and those who telework/work from home on occasion are generally as, if not more, productive than those who do not work flexibly**. Similar findings were found during the pandemic with regards to homeworking (CIPD, 2021), although this may depend on the context of the company and individuals (gender, parental status, age, etc.) in question (Awada et al., 2021; Etheridge et al., 2020; Farooq & Sultana, 2022). What is clear is that **flexible workers are generally more loyal, committed to their jobs, and generally happier with their working conditions, leading to fewer problems with regards to sickness, absenteeism and retention** (Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Kelliher & de Menezes, 2019; Kerkhofs et al., 2008; Masuda et al., 2012; Moen et al., 2017; Ruppanner, Lee, et al., 2018; Weeden, 2005).

Secondly, the reason why workers may experience stigma against their work capacities and negative career outcomes is due to the proximity or 'face-time' bias of managers (Cristea & Leonardi, 2019; Howell et al., 2016). This idea is that **those who can actively display their work to their manager or colleagues are seen as being more competent, engaged and productive, and are evaluated more positively in their performance appraisals, ending up with career advancements and higher pay** (Thompson et al., 1999). As workers who work flexible schedules or remotely away from the office are less likely to be seen by their managers and colleagues compared to those who work fixed schedules and are in the office, flexible workers are more likely to experience a prejudiced view about their competence and productivity.

This is especially true when considering the third important factor driving flexibility stigma, which is the work culture in many societies. Scholars (e.g. Berdahl et al., 2018; Chung, 2020; Chung & Seo, 2023; Williams et al., 2013) have argued that one of the most important reasons why workers who work flexibly are penalised for doing so is not necessarily due to objective evidence of the decline in productivity or commitment due to flexible working, but rather the fact that **flexible working makes workers deviate away from the so-called 'ideal worker' image**. The ideal work norm or culture is where workers are expected to devote themselves to work, and only to work, without any other responsibilities outside of work (Acker, 1990). This symbol of work devotion is performed through working long hours in the office, constant connectivity to work, and being always available (Blair-Loy, 2009; Perlow, 2012; Williams et al., 2013). Flexible working, especially when done to meet family demands, makes workers deviate away from this ideal worker image. Addressing work–life balance demand in itself is seen as having other commitments outside of work, which is assumed to conflict with performance outcomes. Experimental studies (e.g. Brescoll et al., 2013; Leslie et al., 2012; Munsch, 2016) have shown that it is especially **when flexible working is considered something used to meet the individual's personal needs, for example, childcare needs, workers are considered less committed to the workplace and thus were more negatively assessed with regards to career progressions.** In contrast, when flexible working was seen to meet business needs, it enhanced the perceived commitment and career prospects of the workers.

This flexible working attribution is important when considering whose flexible working will be stigmatised more – men's or women's. Some scholars argue that men face stronger prejudice when using flexible working arrangements due to 'femininity stigma' (Rudman & Mescher, 2013). In other words, when men work flexibly, not only do they deviate away from the ideal worker image, they also deviate away from the masculine breadwinner image, which is prevalent in most societies (Kelland et al., 2022; Vandello et al., 2013), leading men to experience a double stigma. However, it is important to note that the majority of the studies that have evidenced stronger stigmatised views against father's flexible working focus mostly on (parental) leave taking and or part-time working. These arrangements are largely considered 'a mothers' arrangement', as seen in Chapter 3. Flexible schedules and teleworking, in contrast, can be a performance-enhancing arrangement (Angelici & Profeta, 2020). As observed in previous sections, it is more often given to workers in higher-skilled and higher-paid occupations, and workers in female-dominated workplaces are less likely to gain access (Chung, 2019d).

Rather, when considering flexible working attributions, it is likely that **employers will associate women's flexible working with personal and family reasons, while men's flexible working will be associated with performance attributions**. This is largely due to societal gender norms that assume that it is still the women's responsibility to meet family demands. Women, especially mothers, are often perceived as having greater need to balance work and family responsibilities (Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015), and therefore are assumed to use flexible working for care and family purposes more often than men and fathers (Munsch, 2016). As men are still considered breadwinners, not only are they less likely to be pressured with the same family demands when working flexibly, they are also more likely to use the flexible boundaries between work and family life to devote more time and energy to work (Chung, 2022a; Chung & Van der Lippe, 2020; Glass & Noonan, 2016; Kim, 2020; Kurowska, 2020; Lott & Chung, 2016). In other words, **because of gendered assumptions by employers and work colleagues on work identity and devotion, women may be more likely to suffer from negative career outcomes** when taking up flexible schedules and teleworking. This may be more apparent during parenthood, as the motherhood penalty and fatherhood bonus have shown in regards to pay trajectories (Budig & England, 2001; Hodges & Budig, 2010).

Several studies provide evidence that confirm this. For example, Lott and Chung (2016), using German Household Panel Data, found that flexitime and working time autonomy led to income growth for workers. This was partly because workers ended up working longer overtime when working flexibly which resulted in higher pay. Men, however, gained higher income above and beyond the overtime compensations. But women in general were only compensated for the overtime. Moreover, the mothers in the data set were not given additional pay for overtime; it seemed that they were working overtime in exchange for the ability to work flexibly. These results are mirrored in Glass and Noonan (2016)'s study in the United States that examined the additional income gained by workers when working overtime, separating those who did those overtime hours in the office (or in the employers' premises) versus those who did those hours at home. They concluded that the overtime done in the office was rewarded significantly more than the hours done at home. They also argued that this gap was especially larger for women than men. This again highlights the fact that when women work from home, managers are likely to assume that they are unable to carry out work as effectively as they do in the office. In contrast, it is assumed that men will be

able to have stronger boundaries between work and home, influencing how their hours worked at home are compensated.

There is also evidence for a **fatherhood bonus when requesting flexible working arrangements**. Munsch (2016), using vignette survey approaches, showed that fathers were evaluated more positively than men without children and women with children, when requesting teleworking even when requested for childcare purposes. Interestingly, the study did not find any evidence of a further motherhood penalty with flexibility stigma in the data. Female workers who requested flexible working for childcare purposes were perceived more favourably than those who requested flexible working for environmental reasons. Brescoll et al. (2013) argued that rather than just gender, the status of the worker also makes a difference. They found that lower-status working men asking to work flexible schedules for childcare purposes were seen more favourably by managers compared to higher-status men requesting the same policy. In contrast, higher-status men requesting flexible schedules for career-progressing purposes – e.g. to get additional training – were also seen favourably by managers. They did not find a similar pattern for women, arguing that 'motherhood status is so strong in employment decision-making that neither high-job status nor career justification for a flexibility request can modify it' (Brescoll et al., 2013: 382). In contrast, examining teleworking and part-time working (working 35 hours or less), Fernandez-Lozano et al. (2020) argued that although flexible working does result in lower ratings for promotion, largely due to lower levels of perceived commitment, especially for those in part-time work, there are no clear differences between gender and parental status.

Recently, during the post-pandemic lockdowns, there have been several experimental studies that examine the stigmatised views against home and hybrid workers using survey vignette studies. Vignette studies provide respondents with hypothetical scenarios of workers and work contexts (e.g. different organisational or national contexts) aiming to capture the unconscious bias of respondents (Auspurg & Hinz, 2014). Wang and Chung (in review) examined employers' bias against homeworkers who worked from home 2 to 3 days a week, to see how the workers' gender intersected with parental status and shaped managers' biases against homeworkers using data from Singapore in late 2022. They found that **although mothers' work competencies and commitment were generally viewed lower than that of fathers' or that of workers without children, the penalty of working from home did not increase this bias further**. Rather, it was fathers' homeworking that resulted in a heavier stigma against the workers' work capacity, later resulting in career penalties. This is largely because fathers who work in the office were viewed as the most 'ideal worker', receiving the highest scores with regards to commitment, motivation and being a team player, with the highest likelihood of gaining a promotion. In this case, homeworking, especially when it is specified as done for family or personal reasons, is a violation of manager's perceptions of what fathers should do. This is especially true in societies with conservative gender norms such as Singapore.

In contrast, **mothers ranked the lowest in all accounts with regards to commitment, motivation, being a team player and their chances for promotion. Working from home in this case confirmed managers' bias against them. However, the penalty experienced is not necessarily amplified**. A similar conclusion was made by Kasperska et al. (2023) using a conjoint experiment setting in the United Kingdom at the end of 2022 to examine how full-time home workers (5 days a week) and hybrid workers (2 to 3 days a week) are met with bias from managers. They found that home and hybrid workers were less likely to gain promotions as well as training, largely due to the negative assumptions around

these workers' performance and commitment levels. The penalising effect was stronger for fathers compared to mothers.

Daviss et al. (2023) examined how workers' in-office, full-remote and hybrid (three days remote) status shaped hiring decisions, depending on the candidates' gender and parental status in the United States in mid–2022. They found a consistent motherhood penalty where women with children were less likely to be hired compared to women without children. However, this gap was largest in the in-office scenario, and reduced or disappeared altogether in situations where workers were full-time remote or hybrid working. Although there was no gap in hiring likelihood between men without children and fathers in the in-office scenarios or hybrid working scenarios, fathers experienced a bias in the full-time remote working scenario. Moens et al. (2023) found similar findings in hiring scenario experiments in Flanders, Belgium.

In summary, there is evidence to show that **homeworking for mothers may not result in a severe bias against their work commitment, capacities and career, sadly as mothers already face bias due to social assumptions around mothers** (see also Pedulla, 2018). Homeworking even for childcare purposes would be in line with employers' assumptions around mother's priorities (Blair-Loy, 2009). In contrast, for **workers without children and fathers, as they do not face such biases against their work commitment and capacities, homeworking, especially for care purposes, may be seen as a stronger deviation from the assumed roles, and therefore comes with more severe consequences**. This is not to say that home and hybrid working mothers fare better in comparison to home and hybrid working fathers or workers without children. Rather what is seen is a reduction in the gap in assumed competence and commitment levels of mothers versus other workers when workers work from home (Wang & Chung, in review). In other words, it can be expected that when *all* workers work from home, there could be a reduction in the penalty mothers and women face in the paid labour market.

Stigma against flexible workers, however, is not inevitable. Chung and Seo (2023), examining the Eurobarometer 2018 data, show that stigmatised views against flexible workers are stronger in countries such as Bulgaria, Romania, Italy and Poland, where there is a work culture of long hours and work-centric views around life. They also found that countries with traditional gender norms – again Eastern and Southern European countries such as Italy, Bulgaria, Poland, but also Lithuania – were also those where stigmatised views against flexible workers were more present. In contrast, in countries (generally the Northern European countries such as Denmark, Finland, Sweden and the Netherlands) where workers had stronger bargaining or negotiation power – either due to collective bargaining, strong unions or favourable labour market conditions – were countries where stigmatised views against flexible workers were less present. They also found that in countries with more generous national- level family policies, such as childcare provision (again in Northern European countries), stigmatised views against flexible workers were less present. They argue that this is due to the isomorphic powers of national policies (den Dulk et al., 2013) where national policies that support a better work–life balance for all workers change the normative views around what is an acceptable form of working conditions and work–life balance behaviours (Been et al., 2017; Hobson & Fahlén, 2009). In other words, **supporting a more balanced view around how work and family should be integrated may reduce the deviation of flexible workers away from the standard of ideal worker norm, enabling a reduction of the potential negative bias against them.**

Similarly, Wang and Chung (in review) explored how organisational and national contexts may shape bias against homeworkers. The results show that **when homeworking policies were generally framed as policies only for mothers, or when it was perceived that it was generally mothers who worked from home, employers were more likely to stigmatise homeworkers – not only mothers but also fathers and workers without children**. When policies were framed as something for parents, this stigma reduced somewhat but still existed, again for all workers not only parents. In contrast, **when homeworking policies were framed as a policy for all workers, regardless of their gender and parental status, the stigma against homeworkers was reduced.** This was again for all workers, not only parents or women. Similar results were found in the United States (Daviss et al., 2023; Munsch et al., 2014), and Spain (Fernandez-Lozano et al., 2020), where the normalisation of flexible working policies resulted in a reduction in the penalties flexible workers experienced.

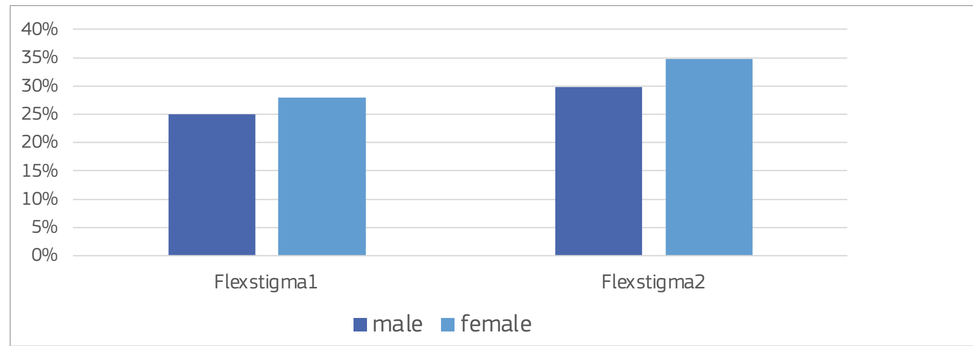
Given what is known about the importance of contexts in shaping flexibility stigma, it is worrying to see that it is largely women who are currently working from home regularly across Europe (see Figure 4.8). Moreover, the current European Work–life Balance Directive stipulated the right to request flexible working only for parents of children and carers. Many companies are now asking workers to come back to the office, stating productivity reasons (The Economist, 2023). There are fears that it will be mostly men that return to the office (Sasso, 2023). Therefore, there is the possibility of **a further 'gendering' of homeworking.** In other words, **homeworking may be seen as a woman's or mother's arrangement**, as it is largely women who will be working from home, while men and fathers return to the office. Based on the empirical evidence examined here, when this happens, **homeworking is likely to be stigmatised even further, resulting in a more severe career penalty, and with it, widening the gender pay gap and other types of gender inequality patterns in the labour market.** The gendering of homeworking will also **result in the reinforcement of traditional division of gender roles with regards to the division of housework** (Chung & Booker, 2023), as examined in the following section.

4.2.3 Empirical evidence of flexibility stigma

This section explores the levels of stigma workers face in relation to work flexibility ('the flexibility stigma') using the Eurobarometer 2018. Figure 4.15 shows the proportion of workers who perceive that there are stigmatised views against flexible workers. Flexstigma1 is the proportion of people who believe that colleagues perceive flexible working badly, and Flexstigma2 indicates the share of people who agree that flexible working has a negative impact on one's career. Note that due to the structure of the survey, this question is only asked to those who work in a company where some flexible working arrangements[19] are provided. **Over a quarter and up to a third of workers in the EU-28 countries believe that there is flexibility stigma present in the labour market**. This number is significantly higher for women (28 % for flexstigma1 and 35 % for flexstigma2) compared to men (25 % and 30 % respectively), confirming previous studies (Chung, 2020b; Munsch, 2016). This may indicate that women have experienced negative career outcomes due to flexible working more often than men, or that they fear the potential negative repercussions of flexible working, as they are already in a weaker labour market position.

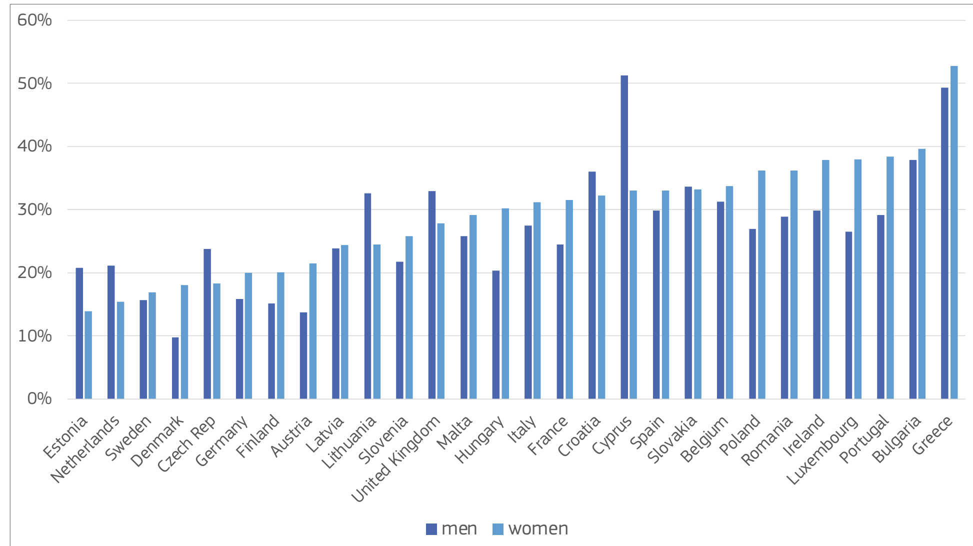
19 Here, however, flexible working arrangements include a wide range of arrangements including but not limited to part-time, flexitime, other types of flexible schedules such as annualised hours, and homeworking.

Figure 4.15 Flexibility stigma across 28 European countries by gender



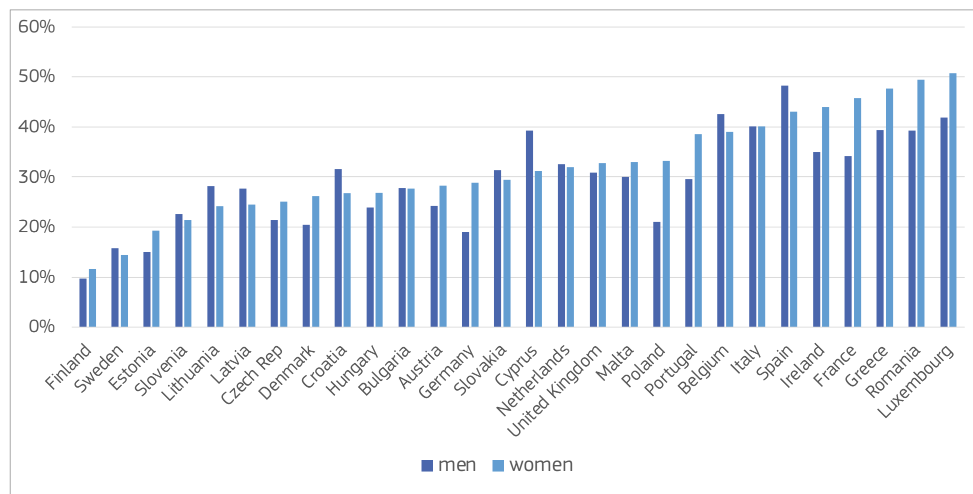
Notes: Flexstigma1 = 'Flexible working is/was badly perceived by colleagues', Flexstigma2 = 'Flexible working has/had a negative impact on one's career (i.e. promotion, bonus, type of work allocated etc.)'.
Source: Eurobarometer 2018.

Figure 4.16 Proportion of workers agreeing that flexible working is badly perceived by colleagues across 28 European countries in 2018



Source: Eurobarometer 2018.

Figure 4.17 Proportion of workers agreeing that flexible working results in negative career outcomes across 28 European countries in 2018



Source: Eurobarometer 2018.

Figure 4.16 examines the cross-national variation in the perception that flexible working is badly perceived by colleagues. There is a large variation across countries. In countries like Greece, half of all workers feel that flexible working is negatively viewed by colleagues. Again in the Northern European countries, such as Estonia, the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark, this share is less than one out of five. This pattern is similar but not exactly the same when examining the proportion of workers who agree that flexible working results in negative career outcomes (Figure 4.17). Here, the country with the highest proportion of workers who agree with this statement is Luxembourg with over half of women in Luxembourg agreeing with this statement, closely followed by countries like Romania and Greece. Finland, Sweden and Estonia are countries where fewer people believe this to be the case. In relation to the gender gap, **in most countries women are (slightly) more likely to agree that there is flexibility stigma in society**. The gender gaps are significantly large in countries such as Denmark, Finland and Ireland for the perception that flexible working is badly perceived by colleagues, and Germany, Poland, Ireland, France and Romania with regards to perceptions that flexible working leads to negative career outcomes – in all cases with more women perceiving this. However, this is not always the case. In countries like Cyprus and Lithuania, more men than women believe that flexible working is badly perceived by colleagues, and in Greece and Cyprus, slightly more men believe that it leads to negative career outcomes, although the difference is not statistically significant.

Studies (Chung et al., 2020; CIPD, 2021; CMI, 2020; Forbes et al., 2020; Future Form, 2022; ONS, 2021a) have indicated that **there have been some changes in the perception of flexible working during the Covid-19 pandemic, not only with regards to workers' preferences but also with regards to managers' and co-workers' perceptions towards flexible working**. Especially when homeworking was enforced by states and employers, as part of health and safety measures, negative views against flexible working, especially homeworking, reduced significantly. For example, during the pandemic period, only 10 % of those surveyed felt that working from home can lead to negative career outcomes (Chung et al., 2021). However, **the negative perception against flexible workers and homeworkers** is noted more recently as coming back, with a growing trend of managers asking workers to return to the office, citing a drop in productivity of homeworkers as the main reason behind this move (Sasso, 2023).

4.3 Division of housework and childcare and flexible working

4.3.1 Flexible working division of housework and childcare

A large number of studies provide evidence that flexible working can allow working parents to take a larger role in housework and childcare (e.g. Carlson et al., 2021; Chung & Booker, 2023; Kim, 2020; Kurowska, 2020; Lyttelton et al., 2022a, 2022b; Noonan et al., 2007; Wang & Cheng, 2023) by providing workers with the flexibility and control over the temporal and physical boundaries between their work and home domains.[20] That flexibility and control over work borders allows workers to adapt work to fit around family demands. However, individuals do not necessarily get to choose how they use that flexibility in the boundaries between work and family nor to prioritise one or the other domain, since external demands and social norms heavily shape workers' capacities to make real choices (Hobson, 2013). **The societal norms on gender roles in combination with the rise of the intensive parenting culture** (Hays, 1998) **shape and limit what workers do or can do when they are given 'freedom' and control over their work, with men and women being constrained by these external forces in very different ways**.

Freedom and control over work for the worker, who largely bears the responsibility of breadwinning for the family, means that they will have to expand or prioritise the work domain more, especially in light of the increased competition in the labour market and the rise in insecurity which workers are facing in recent times (Chung, 2018, 2020d, 2022a). Freedom over work when there are societal pressures that dictates that an individual is responsible for the general up-keep and wellbeing of their family, and possibly more importantly the future labour market outcomes of their children means that it is likely that they will have to use the control and flexibility over their work to meet household and childcare demands (Chung, 2022a; Chung & Van der Lippe, 2020). Moreover, these external contexts shape how others – employers, colleagues and co-residents (partners, children and other family members) – expect the workers to use the flexibility and control over their work, possibly reinforcing these gendered outcomes of flexible working.

Several studies (e.g. Chung & Booker, 2023; Hilbrecht et al., 2013; Kim, 2020; Kurowska, 2020; Lott, 2019; Singley & Hynes, 2005; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001; Wang & Cheng, 2023) have shown that **flexible working is likely to be used by women, by choice or necessity, to meet care purposes and when women do work flexibly, they are likely to expand their care and housework**. **Men, in contrast, do not take up flexible working for care purposes as often and are not likely to increase their involvement in domestic work when they do work flexibly**. Sullivan and Lewis (2001) found that childcare was rarely brought up by men as the motive for working from home, whereas for women it was the main or original reason why they chose to do so. Moreover, when workers work from home, the blurred boundaries between work and family life led to more housework and childcare for women, whereas for men, it ended up resulting in over work, with work encroaching family life. **Men were able to keep stronger boundaries between work and family life when working from home, not only due to the choices they made, but also the societal norms around 'protecting their work sphere'**, namely, their co-residents enabled this stronger boundary keeping.

20 Some of the text in this section has been adapted from Chung, H. (2022). Gendered flexibility paradox. In *The Flexibility Paradox* (pp. 105-119). Policy Press.

In contrast, **female teleworkers were usually alone in the house without help available to them from their spouses, making them need to combine both childcare and paid employment at the same time**. This is largely due to the assumption from family members – including children – that mothers' teleworking meant they were available for caregiving and housework at the same time as they were working (see also Hilbrecht et al., 2008; Radcliffe & Cassell, 2014). In fact, other studies have shown that when men work from home, they work in separate office spaces shielded away from children by their partners, while **women tend to work in communal areas**, such as dining room tables, while multitasking childcare and housework (Andrew et al., 2020; Huws et al., 1990).

Such gendered patterns of homeworking outcomes have also been found in quantitative studies that look at large-scale representative data. Chung and Booker (2023) examined the UK Understanding Society household panel study to see how flexitime and teleworking was associated with the division of housework and childcare for men and women. Results show that **women's flexible working – especially homeworking – was more likely to result in an unequal division of labour** – namely women being largely responsible, especially for childcare. Flexitime in contrast has shown more positive results, especially when men took flexitime. Wang and Cheng (2023) examine couple data to show that when women in a heterosexual couple work flexibly (from home or flexitime), a more unequal division of housework was found, especially for routine housework. The husband's flexible working patterns did not change this association. **Similarly, men's flexible working did not lead to an increase in their share of housework, even when their female partners were not using flexible working arrangements**.

This pattern was also found in other countries such as the United States (Kim, 2020; Lyttelton et al., 2022a), Germany (Lott, 2019) and Poland (Kurowska, 2020). In the German study, Lott (2019) found that women who were working from home tended to spend three hours more on childcare per week compared to mothers who did not work from home, while fathers on average did not significantly increase their time spent on childcare. Fathers in contrast, worked longer overtime hours when working from home – an increase of about three hours per week. Mothers working from home also worked longer overtime but only by about an hour.

Recent quantitative evidence show how **mothers are also more likely to be multitasking** care and paid work tasks compared to fathers. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic first lockdown in the United Kingdom in April and May 2020, more than half of mother's working hours at home were done while multitasking childcare. Fathers also multitasked somewhat but it was significantly lower at around one third of their time (Andrew et al., 2020). Studies have shown how multitasking activities can lead to feelings of time pressure, which can negatively impacting one's wellbeing levels (Craig & Brown, 2017; Ruppanner, Perales, et al., 2018). This may explain why a study using the UK Household Panel Survey found that although mothers working part-time had lower levels of bio-markers of stress, flexible working did not help (Chandola et al., 2019). This also explains why teleworking has been associated with higher levels of work–family conflict for women in many studies (e.g. van der Lippe & Lippényi, 2020; Yucel & Chung, 2023).

4.3.2 Exploitation model and traditionalisation of gender roles through flexible working

This pattern of high levels of stress among flexible working women can also be better understood by considering the 'exploitation model' of flexible working (Haddon & Silverstone, 1993; Silver, 1993). A study by Hillbrecht and colleagues (2013) showed that the intensive parenting culture ideology prevalent in Canadian society meant that professional mothers used flexible working arrangement – homeworking – to fit work around their children's school and leisure activities, that is, working around their children's needs. They also used time saved from working from home, i.e. not having to commute, and sacrificing their leisure time to ensure that they could meet both the demands of motherhood and their paid work without reducing time spent on either (see also the previous section on the employment outcomes of flexible working).

So, flexible working can be seen as **a helpful tool facilitating women to meet both the demands coming from work and the home**. However, flexible working has done little to disrupt the gendered division of housework and childcare, enabling mothers to add more paid working hours into their day without reducing their unpaid hours. In fact, **flexible working demanded that mothers use their freedom and control over their work to meet the demands of work and family even if this meant sacrificing other domains of life, such as leisure and sleep** (Armstrong, 2018; Schulte, 2015; Wishart et al., 2019). Kurowska (2020) explores how homeworking relates to the 'total necessary work' – that is combining both paid and unpaid hours – to show that **homeworking increased the number of total necessary work for women but not for men**, especially in countries like Poland where gender norms are traditional.

Sullivan and Lewis argue that teleworking and other types of flexible working 'perpetuates the exploitation of women in terms of both paid work and the domestic burden of responsibility ... subject to demands from both family and employer, and subject to control by their husband' (Sullivan & Lewis, 2001:124–125). Thus, flexible working enabled employers and male partners in heterosexual relationships to have easier access to female labour market potential – and with it, additional household income – without having to address the unequal division of domestic work. Flexible working did not disrupt the gender normative assumptions or the power dynamics within households that determine the person who mainly carries out housework and childcare, but rather has enabled the endurance of traditional gender roles.

Flexible working has enabled heterosexual couples to 'do gender' (Clawson & Gerstel, 2014; Fleetwood, 2007; West & Zimmerman, 1987) in that they are able to fulfil the social normative roles prescribed within societies (Chung, 2022a; Chung & Van der Lippe, 2020). In fact, **flexible working has enabled the enactment of a revised traditional gender role, where women carry out both paid and unpaid work, while the unequal division of domestic labour within households, where women carry out the bulk of it, remains untouched** (Chung, 2022; Chung & Booker, 2023).

Flexible working also enables employers access to female labour without having to change the notions of work, or the masculine work environment (Acker, 1990; Berdahl et al., 2018). In other words, women have to take part in the labour market built for male workers, who do not have any other responsibilities outside of work. The labour market has not transformed significantly to enable better labour market participation for both men and women and for other workers with caring and other personal responsibilities.

Finally, flexible working arrangements relieve governments from addressing the pressing need for responding to the demands coming from dual-earning working families (Collins, 2019; Korpi et al., 2013). In other words, in some countries, such as the United Kingdom, the expansion of flexible working, or introducing policies such as the right to request flexible working at the national level, have been seen as a way to meet working parents' demands or ensuring female labour market potential, without the government (or organisations) having to provide other types of family policies, such as public childcare or generous parental leave for both parents (Lewis et al., 2008). In this way, flexible working has enabled the 'freeing up' of women's work for free. However, it should also be noted, as shown by previous studies (Chung, 2022a; Kurowska, 2020), that this is not necessarily the case in countries like Sweden **where gender norms are more egalitarian and there are national policies that enable dual-earning, dual-carer regimes to exist** (Hobson, 2011; Korpi et al., 2013). In such cases, rather than exploiting women's labour, **flexible working could potentially be a genuine work–family integration tool**.

4.3.3 The Covid-19 pandemic, flexible working and the division of domestic work

The association between flexible working and the division of household labour seems to have altered somewhat during the pandemic. Although women still carried out the larger share of the housework and childcare tasks both before and during the pandemic, there is evidence showing that **fathers carried out more housework and childcare during the pandemic lockdown periods compared to pre-pandemic times** (Chung et al., 2022; Craig & Churchill, 2020; Leshchenko & Chung, 2023; Petts et al., 2023; Schieman et al., 2021; Steinmetz et al., 2022; Yerkes et al., 2020). Of fathers, it seems that those who worked from home that were especially likely to have increased their time spent on childcare and housework (Carlson et al., 2020a; Chung et al., 2021; Hipp & Bünning, 2020; Zamarro & Prados, 2021). For example, in the United Kingdom, it was found that **when fathers worked from home, couples were more likely to say they were sharing cleaning and laundry, routine childcare (generally looking after children), and to some extent home-schooling children** (Chung et al., 2022).

Moreover, fathers who worked from home exclusively (compared to those going into their employer's premises fully or partially) were up to 3.5 times and 3.6 times more likely to say that they are doing more routine childcare and home-schooling compared to pre-pandemic times respectively (Chung et al., 2022). Routine childcare is not often carried out by fathers (Walthery & Chung, 2021), but there was an increased demand for routine childcare during the pandemic lockdown periods, due to school and childcare facilities closures. It seems that homeworking during the pandemic may have enabled couples to juggle these increased demands between them, with homeworking fathers being more involved, possibly ensuring that mothers were also able to work during the lockdown periods.

Why did the pattern of flexible working and the division of unpaid labour change during the pandemic? Firstly, it was because homeworking was enforced by the government and then later by employers to keep infection rates down. Homeworking was widely available and normalised during this period (Chung, 2022a; Chung et al., 2021). This has significantly changed the views of managers and workers alike with regards to the efficacy of homeworking and flexible schedules (Chung et al., 2020; CIPD, 2021; CMI, 2020; Forbes et al., 2020), reducing stigmatised views around flexible working. This then impacted the way workers, especially men and fathers, used flexible working **over the pandemic where they**

felt not only better able to work flexibly but also to use it to meet family demands, which was perceived not only permissible but inevitable during this period. The changes seen during the pandemic also provided evidence that **the normalisation of flexible working for all workers can help remove barriers of flexible working for caring purposes, especially for men**.

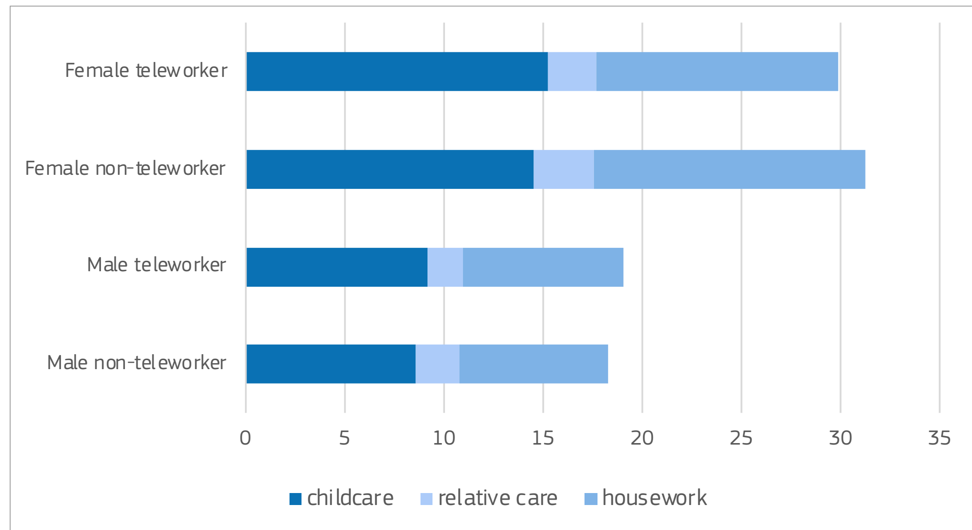
4.3.4 Empirical analysis of flexible working and division of domestic work

The number of hours spent on domestic work by teleworking status of the worker and their gender are shown in Figure 4.18. **Female teleworkers tended to spend more time on childcare (15.3 hours) compared to women who did not work from home (14.6 hours)**. However, the gap was relatively small and was not statistically significant. In contrast, female teleworkers spent less time on elderly or relative care (2.4 hours) or housework (12.2 hours) compared to non-teleworkers (3 and 13.7 hours respectively). These gaps were statistically significant according to the t-test of means. In comparison, **male teleworkers tended to spend more time both on childcare (9.2 hours) and housework (8.1 hours) compared to male non-teleworkers** (8.6 and 7.5 hours respectively), with the latter gap being statistically significant. However, male teleworkers spent less time on relative care (1.8 hours) compared to male non-teleworkers (2.2) – a gap that is statistically significant. When only considering parents within the sample in Figure 4.19, the gaps between teleworking parents and non-teleworking parents become more evident, especially with regards to hours spent on childcare. **Teleworking mothers spend 33.5 hours per week on childcare compared to 30.8 hours of non-teleworking mothers** (significant difference at $p<0.05$ level). Similarly, **teleworking fathers spend 20.5 hours on childcare compared to the 17.8 hours of childcare of non-teleworking fathers** (significant difference at $p<0.001$ level). It is worth noting that the difference in the time spent on childcare between teleworking fathers and non-teleworking fathers (2.7 hours) is the same difference found between teleworking and non-teleworking mothers, although mothers generally spend close to twice the amount of time on childcare regardless of their teleworking status.

The association between teleworking and fathers' childcare involvement contradicts many studies prior to the pandemic (Chung & Booker, 2023; Kim, 2020; Kurowska, 2020; Lyttelton et al., 2022b; Wang & Cheng, 2023), where it was found that women who work from home/telework generally tended to increase the amount of time spent on childcare and/or increased their relative burden of childcare. For men, teleworking was associated with no changes and/or even a decline in the involvement in and time spent in childcare. This contradicting result can be due to three factors. Firstly, the time spent on domestic work in the Eurofound data is measured in a way which is not precise in the sense that only those who were doing this activity daily were asked about their time spent. Therefore, the amount of time may be less precise compared to other studies. Secondly, this may be due to the fact that the figures below do not control for other factors that may explain the division of and time spent on domestic work, such as working hours, education and income contribution to the household, which other studies have controlled for. Therefore, once these factors are controlled for, there may be a different result. Finally, this may have to do with the time period examined in the data. Many studies (e.g. Chung et al., 2021; Chung et al., 2022; Craig & Churchill, 2020; Dunatchik et al., 2021; Leshchenko & Chung, 2023; Petts et al., 2023; Steinmetz et al., 2022; Zamarro & Prados, 2021) have found that during the pandemic, especially during the lockdown periods, homeworking fathers have in fact increased the amount of time spent on childcare and other domestic work.

This has been attributed to the fact that there has been a steep rise in the demand for such activities given the lockdown and reduced formal support for domestic work and childcare, or due to the fact that teleworking has been normalised as it was enforced by the government as described previously. This explains why fathers may have felt better able to take part in childcare and housework while working from home during this period.

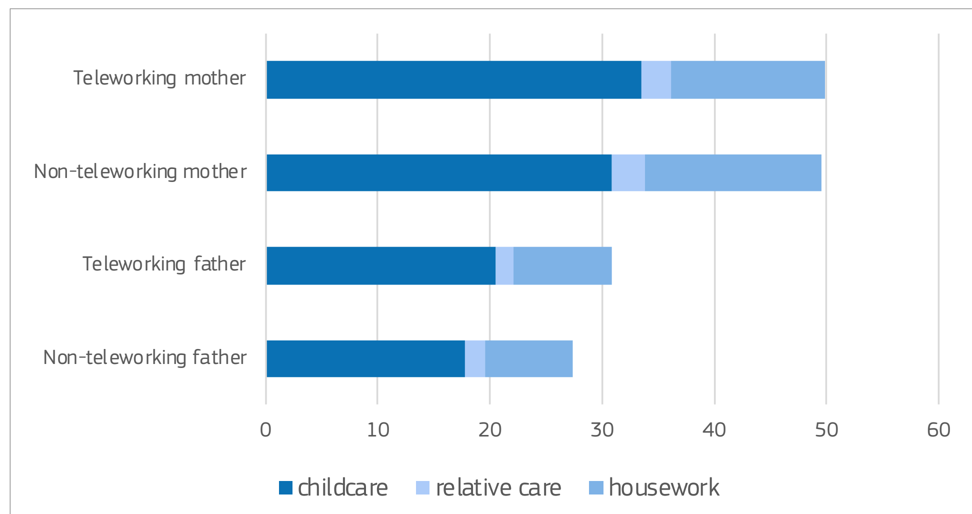
Figure 4.18 Average hours spent per week on domestic work of teleworkers and non-teleworkers by gender across the EU-27 countries



Note: Weighted averages.

Source: EWCTS 2021, Eurofound.

Figure 4.19 Average hours spent per week on domestic work of teleworking and non-teleworking parents by gender across the EU-27 countries

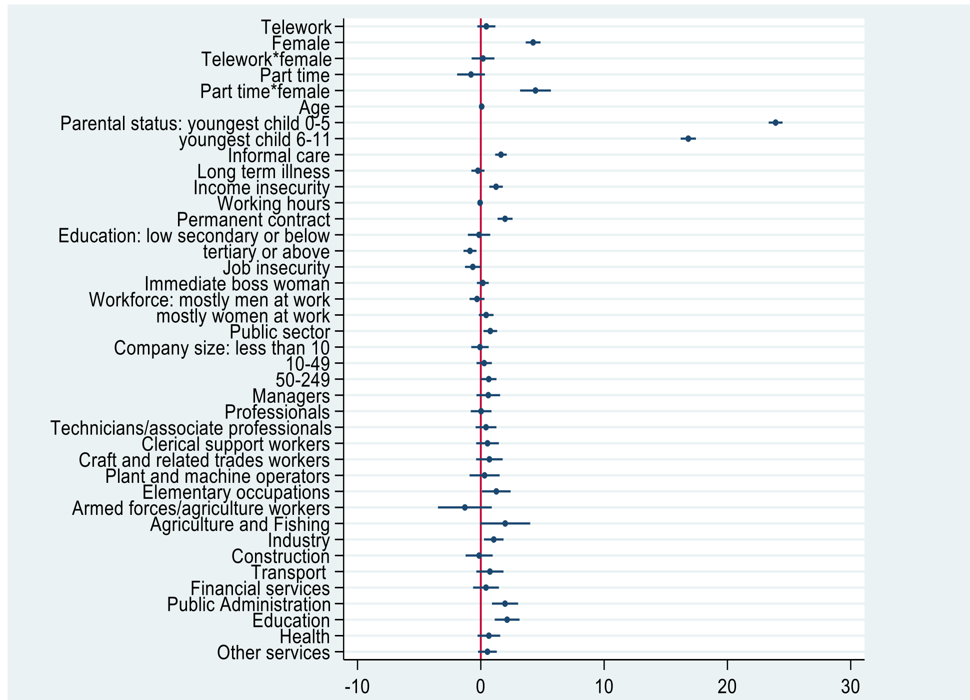


Note: Weighed averages.

Source: EWCTS 2021 and Eurofound.

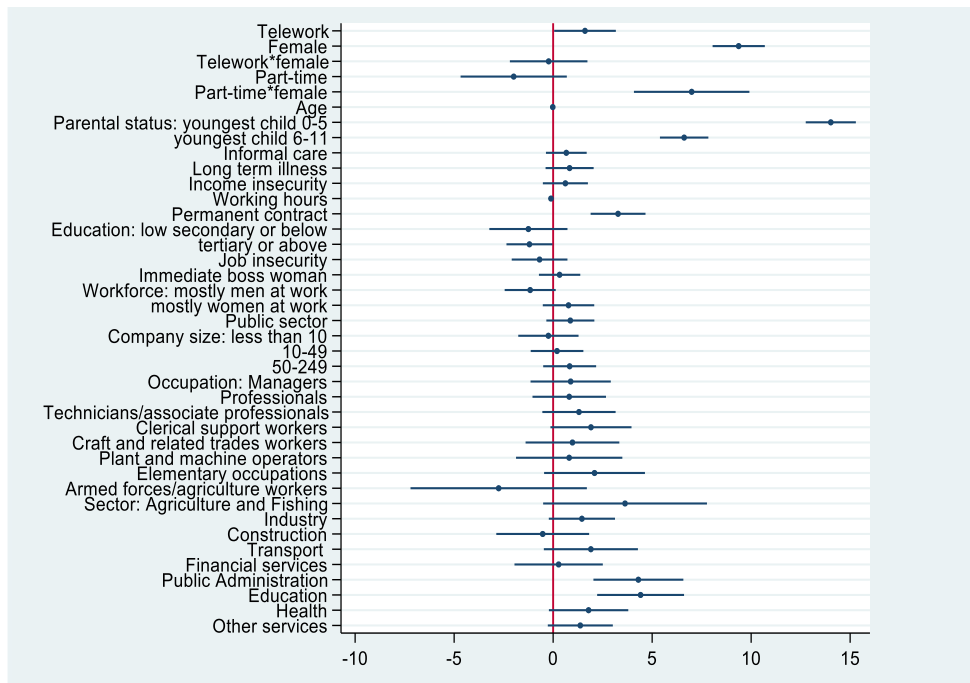
A similar analysis for flexitime could not be made as the EWCTS does not contain data on flexitime, and the EWCS 2015 does not contain imputed data for time respondents who do carry out some domestic work, but do not do them on a daily basis.

Figure 4.20 Explaining respondent's hours spent on childcare per week for workers across EU-27 countries in 2021



Notes: N level 1 = 19 793, N level 2 = 27. Age and working hours have been standardised. All other variables are dichotomous variables. Parental status reference group is no children; education reference group is upper secondary; workforce composition reference group men and women equally represented; size of company reference group is 250 or more; occupation reference group is service and sales workers; and sector reference group is commerce and hospitality.
Source: Author's own calculations and EWCTS 2021.

Figure 4.21 Explaining respondent's hours spent on childcare per week for parents across EU-27 countries in 2021



Notes: N level 1 = 7 667, N level 2 = 27. Age and working hours have been standardised. All other variables are dichotomous variables. Parental status reference group is no children; education reference group is upper secondary; workforce composition reference group men and women equally represented; size of company reference group is 250 or more; occupation reference group is service and sales workers; and sector reference group is commerce and hospitality.
Source: Author's own calculations and EWCTS 2021.

Figure 4.20 presents the multivariate multilevel regression model which examines explanations for the number of hours workers spent on childcare. Figure 4.21 examines this only for parents with children under the age of 18. As seen in Figure 4.20, **for the general worker, teleworking does not increase the amount of time people spend on childcare, when controlling for a number of different factors that may explain this.** There are no clear gender differences in this association. In contrast, when only examining parents in the data in Figure 4.21, it is seen that **both fathers and mothers who telework are significantly more likely to spend more time on childcare,** about 1.6 hours extra per week. This association, interestingly, does not vary across gender. In contrast, although part-time working mothers spend a lot more time on childcare – approximately 4 hours extra – than full-time working mothers, part-time working fathers do not spend more time on childcare compared to full-time working fathers, even when other factors are controlled for. In addition to flexible working arrangements, women generally spend more time on childcare (approximately 4 hours more when comparing all workers, and 9.4 hours when comparing fathers against mothers), and those with younger children generally spend more time on childcare. Further, those on permanent contract, and those working in the public administration, education and, for the general worker analysis, those working in the industry sectors spend more time on childcare. Also, in the general worker model (Figure 4.20) it is shown that those who are income insecure and are carrying out informal care spend more time on childcare.

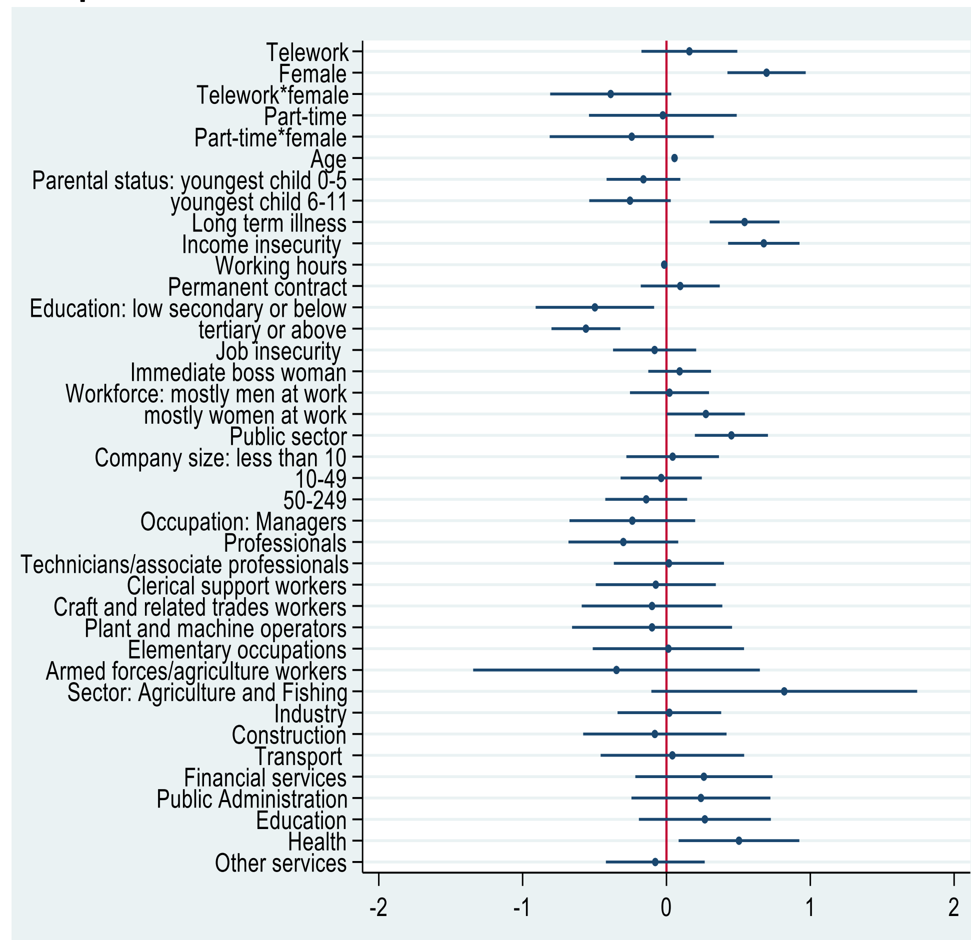
Figure 4.22 examines how teleworking and part-time working relates to the number of hours workers spend on elderly and family care across the 27 European countries. **Neither teleworking nor part-time working status is associated with the number of hours workers spent providing informal care** (care for the elderly or other family members), **once a number of different factors are controlled for**. However, even when these factors are controlled for, women carry out a bit less than an hour more of informal care per week compared to men. Moreover, those who are older, and those who have a long-term illness, income insecurity and upper secondary education (compared to tertiary or lower secondary) carry out more informal care. Those working in workplaces that are mostly women and those who work in public sector companies also carry out more informal care.

Figure 4.23 examines how teleworking and part-time working relates to the number of hours workers spend on housework per week across the 27 European countries. **Men who telework on average spend about an hour extra on housework compared to those who do not telework. But, for women, teleworking does not make a big difference with a tendency for teleworking women to do slightly less than non-teleworking women.** Meanwhile, **women working part-time spend about 0.6 hours longer per week doing housework compared to those who work full-time,** whereas for men, part-time working does not make a significant difference. Even when all other factors are controlled for, women spend about five hours more on housework compared to men. Parents with smaller children also spend more time doing housework, most likely because having younger children generally results in more housework (Craig & Mullan, 2010).

Older workers tend to do a bit more housework as well. Those who work longer hours tend to do less housework, as do those who have higher education levels (tertiary education compared to those in upper secondary or lower secondary) or are in higher occupational groups (managers and professionals). This is most likely because they are bringing in financial resources to the family and feel that they do not need to contribute further to the household by carrying out (more)

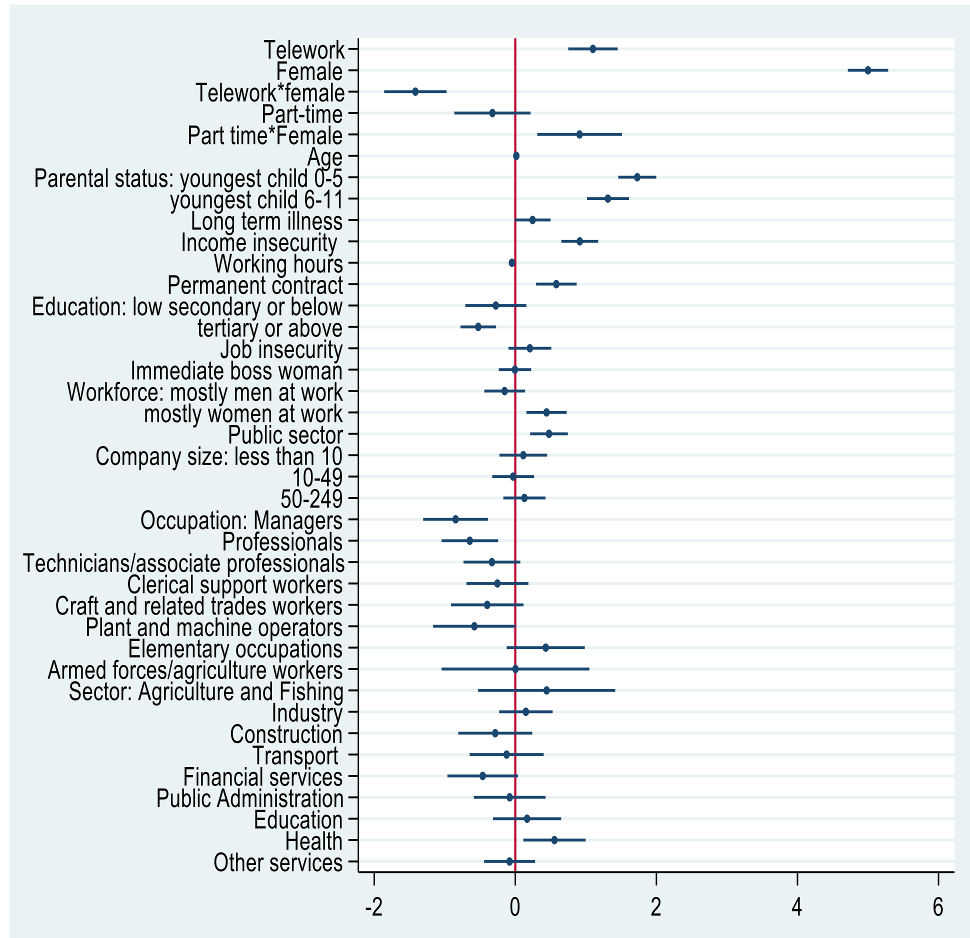
domestic labour. These workers may also be those who are able to outsource housework such as cleaning or meal preparation. In the same vein, those with income insecurity spend more time doing housework, as they have no other resources to outsource housework, and end up having to spend more hours doing it themselves. Interestingly, those who work in workplaces which are female dominated, a public company or in the health and social care sector tend to do more housework, above and beyond the impact of their gender.

Figure 4.22 Explaining respondent's hours spent on elderly and family care per week for workers across EU-27 countries in 2021



Notes: N level 1 = 19 793, N level 2 = 27. Age and working hours have been standardised. All other variables are dichotomous variables. Parental status reference group is no children; education reference group is upper secondary; workforce composition reference group men and women equally represented; size of company reference group is 250 or more; occupation reference group is service and sales workers; and sector reference group is commerce and hospitality.
Source: Author's own calculations and EWCTS 2021.

Figure 4.23 Explaining respondent's hours spent on housework per week for workers across EU-27 countries in 2021



Notes: N level 1 = 21 014, N level 2 = 27. Age and working hours have been standardised. All other variables are dichotomous variables. Parental status reference group is no children; education reference group is upper secondary; workforce composition reference group men and women equally represented; size of company reference group is 250 or more; occupation reference group is service and sales workers; and sector reference group is commerce and hospitality.
Source: Author's own calculations and EWCTS 2021

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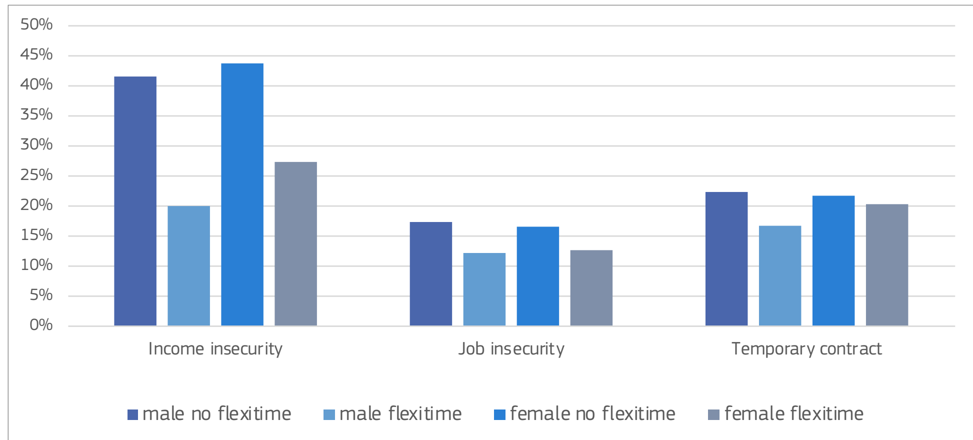
4.4 Working conditions of workers working flexitime and teleworking

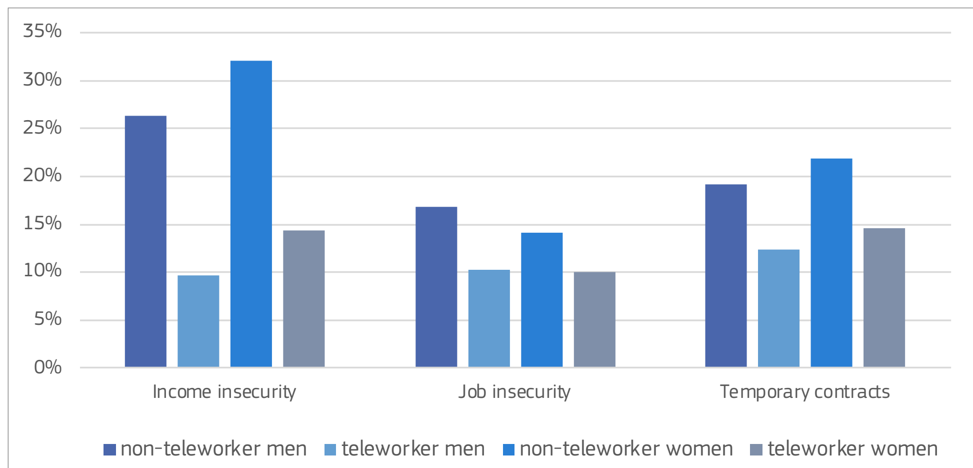
This section will use the EWCS data set of 2021 and 2015 to explore the working conditions of flexitime workers and teleworkers. This will include comparing workers with regards to the levels of hourly pay, feeling of being paid appropriately, perceived career progression opportunities at work, recognition at work, training opportunities, overall satisfaction on working conditions, and work–life balance/conflict outcomes. This analysis will aim to distinguish between male and female flexible workers and when possible, across parental status.

Figure 4.24 Insecurity levels of workers across the EU-27 countries, by gender and flexible schedule status



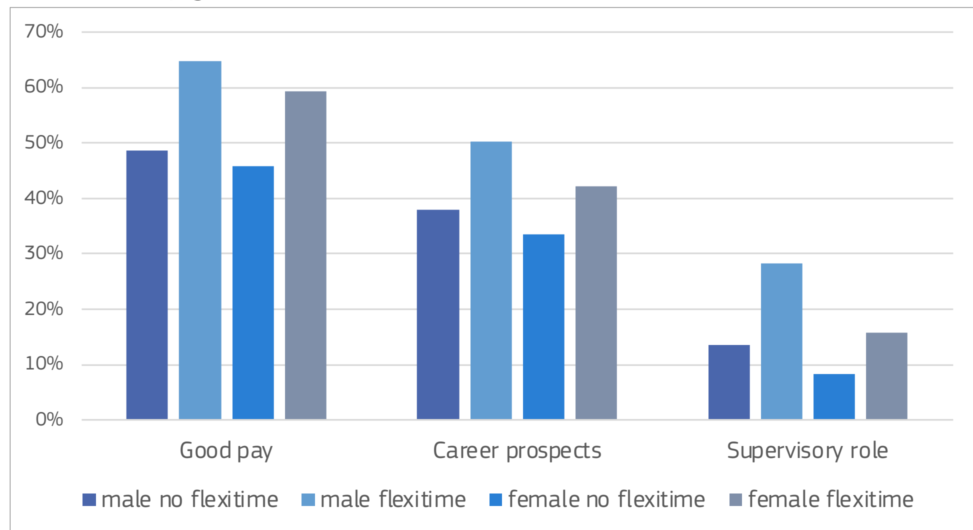
Notes: 'Income insecurity' denotes those who reply 'with (great or some) difficulty' to the question 'Thinking of your household's total monthly income, is your household able to make ends meet?' and 'job insecurity' denotes those who reply that they (strong) agree to the statement 'I am likely to lose my job in the next six months'. Weighted averages.
Source: EWCS 2015.

Figure 4.25 Insecurity levels of workers across the EU-27 countries, by gender and teleworking status



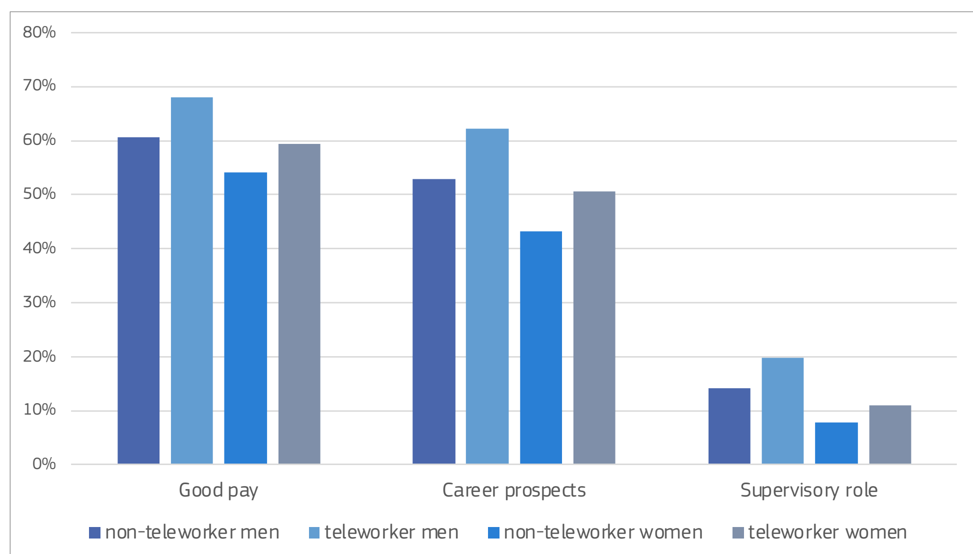
Notes: 'Income insecurity' denotes those who reply 'with (great or some) difficulty' to the question 'Thinking of your household's total monthly income, is your household able to make ends meet?' and 'job insecurity' denotes those who reply that they (strongly) agree to the statement 'I am likely to lose my job in the next six months'. Weighted averages.
Source: EWCTS 2021.

Figure 4.26 Pay and career prospects of workers across the EU-27 countries, by gender and flexible schedule status



Notes: 'Good pay' indicates those who agree that they are paid appropriately; 'career prospects ' indicates those who agree that their job provides them with good career prospects; and 'supervisory role' indicates those that are in supervisory roles. Weighted averages.
Source: EWCS 2015.

Figure 4.27 Pay and career prospects of workers across the EU-27 countries, by gender and teleworking status



Notes: 'Good pay' indicates those who agree that they are paid appropriately; 'career prospects' indicates those who agree that their job provides them with good career prospects; and 'supervisory role' indicates those that are in supervisory roles. Note that the variable supervisory role has a lot of missing variables and thus needs to be taken with caution. Weighted averages.
Source: EWCTS 2021.

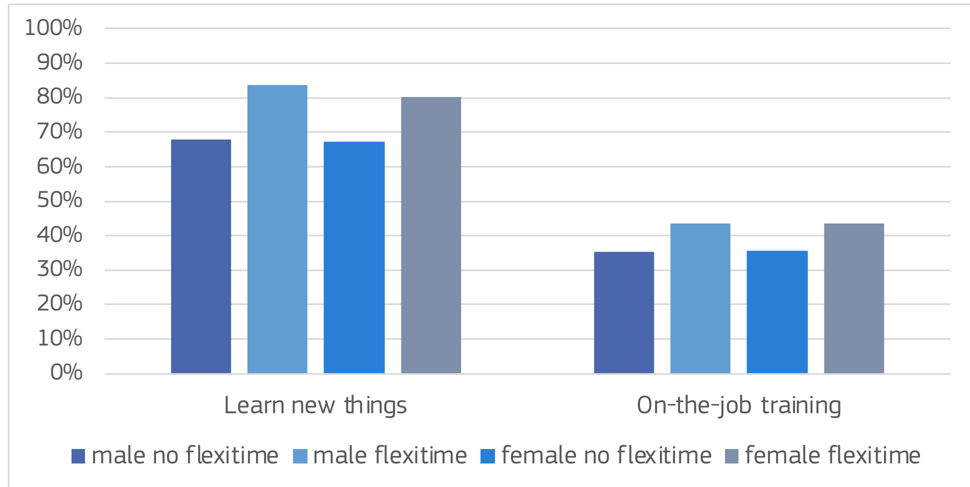
First, Figure 4.24 and Figure 4.25 compare men and women who use flexible schedules or telework and those who do not, on a number of insecurity characteristics. **Generally, workers who use flexitime and teleworkers are those who are secure, not only in their income levels but in their jobs – objectively** (with regards to fewer workers in temporary contracts) **and subjectively** (with regards

to their perceived job insecurity). These differences are all statistically significant. For example, more than 40 % of those who do not use flexible schedules feel insecure about their income, whereas this is only about 20 % for men who use flexible schedules and just over 25 % workers for women who use flexible schedules. Similarly, 26.4 % of men and 32.1 % of women who do not telework feel income insecurity compared to only 9.6 % of male and 14.3 % of female teleworkers. Meanwhile, 16.8 % of men and 14.1 % of women who do not telework feel like they may lose their jobs in the next 6 months but only about 10 % of both male and female teleworkers. Finally, 19.1 % of men and 21.8 % of women who do not telework are on temporary contracts compared to only 12.4 % of male and 14.6 % of female teleworkers. Comparing male and female teleworkers, women who telework generally feel more insecure about their income and are more likely to be in temporary contracts compared to men who telework.

As seen in Figure 4.26 and Figure 4.27, **workers who are working flexibly (that is teleworking or using flexible schedules) are more likely to say that they are paid well, they have good career prospects and are generally more likely to be in supervisory roles** than workers who do not work flexibly. These differences observed are all significant at a $p<0.001$ level. Caution is needed to not extrapolate that there are no penalties for those who work flexibly. Rather, these results are more likely to be related to the fact that workers who are most likely to have access to flexible schedules or teleworking arrangements, are those generally in higher status jobs and higher-skilled occupations (see section 4.1). Therefore, these results are not necessarily the outcomes of flexible schedules or teleworking but can be seen as antecedents or characteristics of workers who are more likely to gain access to these opportunities across Europe. Nonetheless, it is also important to note the positive association.

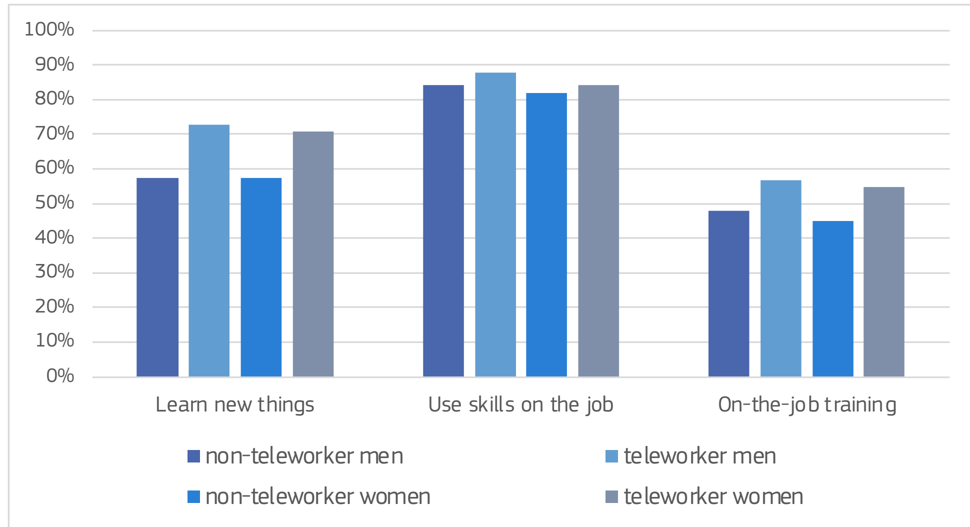
A similar conclusion can be made considering Figure 4.28 and Figure 4.29, which look at workers' opportunities to learn new things, use their skills on the job, and their opportunities to gain on-the-job training. In all cases, **men and women who work flexibly are more likely than those who do not work flexibly to say they have training opportunities at work,** at a statistically significant level. **Flexible workers are more likely to say they have opportunities to learn new skills on the job and able to gain on-the-job training and teleworkers are more likely than non-teleworkers to say they use their skills and knowledge on the job**. This question was not asked for the 2015 data set. Again, the results could indicate that flexible working may have enhanced learning and training opportunities at work. This may be especially true because as teleworking has become more normalised, so have online meetings and workshops. The opportunity to gain new skills and training online has in fact been identified as one of the important positive changes workers saw as work has moved to online digital platforms (Chung et al., 2024). However, as previously discussed, this is also likely to be a result of the fact that teleworkers and workers who have access to flexible schedules are those who are in high-skilled occupations and workers who generally have a higher likelihood of gaining new skills and using skills at their jobs. Therefore, without controlling for different occupations and other important factors, it is difficult to come to a clearer conclusion using these bivariate analyses alone. What can be concluded, however, is that those who are working flexibly are those who are getting more skills opportunities at their workplace.

Figure 4.28 Use and opportunity for training of workers across the EU-27 countries, by gender and flexible schedule status



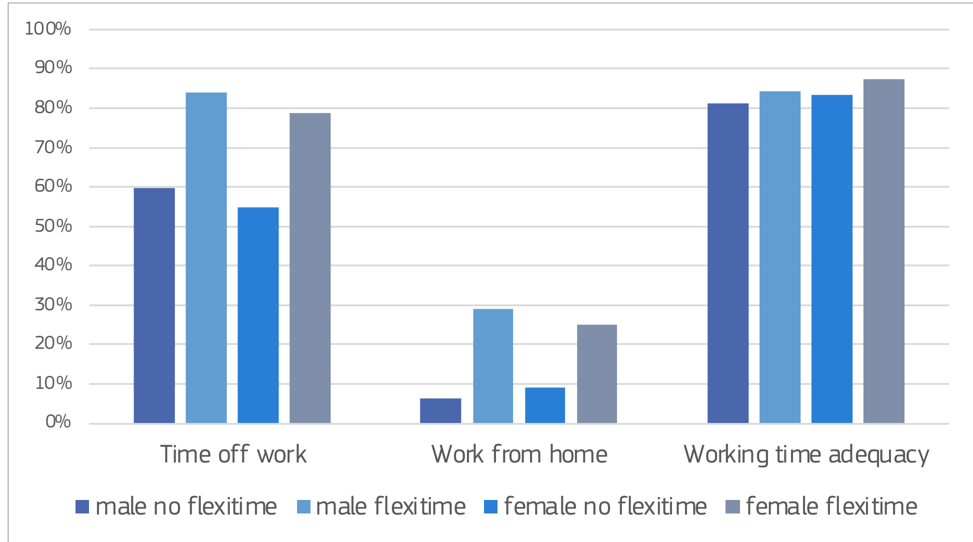
Notes: 'Learn new things' indicates those who responded sometimes, often and always to the statement 'Does your job involve … learning new things'; and 'on-the-job training' indicates those who said they have undergone on-the-job training to improve their skills since they have started their main job. Weighed averages.
Source: EWCS 2015.

Figure 4.29 Use and opportunity for training for workers across EU-27 countries, by gender and teleworking status



Notes: 'Learn new things' indicates those who responded sometimes, often, always to the statement 'Does your job involve … learning new things'; 'use skills on the job' indicates those who agreed (strongly or somewhat) to the statement 'I have enough opportunities to use my knowledge and skills in my current job'; and 'on-the-job training' are those who said they have undergone on-the-job training to improve their skills since they have started their main job. Weighed averages.
Source: EWTCS 2021.

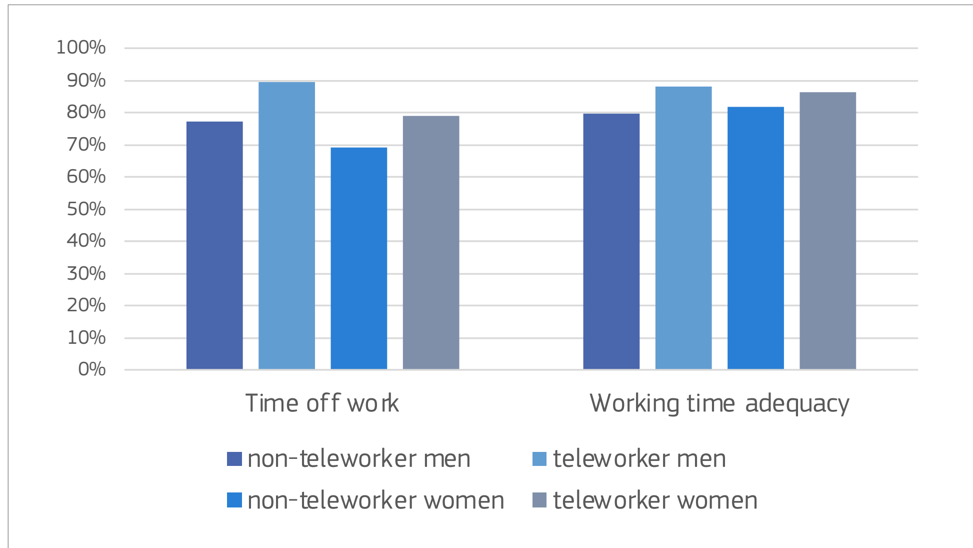
Figure 4.30 Use of other types of flexible working arrangements and working time fit of workers across the EU-27 countries, by gender and flexible schedule status



Notes: 'Time off work' indicates the proportion of workers who are able to take a couple of hours off work to tend to personal issues; 'work from home' is having worked from home in the past 12 months at least several times a month or more; and 'working time adequacy' indicates the proportion of workers who responded their working hours fit in with their family or social commitments outside work. Weighted averages.

Source: EWCS 2015.

Figure 4.31 Use of other types of flexible working arrangements and working time fit of workers across the EU-27 countries, by gender and teleworking status



Notes: 'Time off work' indicates the proportion of workers who are able to take a couple of hours off work to tend to personal issues; 'working time adequacy' indicates the proportion of workers who re-sponded their working hours fits in with their family or social commitments outside work. Weighted averages.

Source: EWTCS 2021.

Figure 4.30 and Figure 4.31 show that **workers with flexible schedules and teleworkers are more likely to gain the ability to take a couple of hours off work to tend to personal issues**. This is most likely due to the fact that those who have flexible schedules are less likely to be restricted to the strict timing of work, allowing workers to better adapt work according to their family and other personal demands. Those who work remotely are generally given more autonomy over when they carry out their work, in addition to the flexibility of where they carry out their work (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). A share of 29 % of men who have flexible schedules and 24.9 % of women **who have flexible schedules also worked from home regularly** (at least several times a month or more) compared to those who do not have flexible schedules. This ability to have more flexibility in one's schedules and be able to better adapt to family and private demands can possibly explain why **flexible workers (those who use flexible schedules and teleworkers) are more likely to say that their working hours fit with their family and other personal responsibilities.** Although the gaps in working time adequacy is smaller than found in other aspects, the gap is statistically significant.

There are some gender gaps with regards to men's and women's ability to take time off work, both those who work flexibly and those who do not. In general, **men are more able to take a couple of hours off work much easier than women**. This is true for workers who use flexible schedules and teleworkers, and among those who do not work flexibly. The association between flexitime and teleworking is stronger for men than women. For women, even among those who do not have flexible schedules, 9 % telework regularly. This share is 25 % for women with flexible schedules. In contrast, 29 % of men who have flexible schedules telework regularly but only 6 % of men who do not have flexible schedules telework. This could mean that for men, flexibility at work may equate to greater autonomy and control over their work, compared to women whose flexible working may be limited to specific areas of work (Clawson & Gerstel, 2014). **Women generally feel that their working time fits with their personal demands compared to men.** This may be due to the fact that women are likely to work fewer hours than men. The exception is when comparing teleworking men to women, where the men are more likely to say their working hours fit with personal demands.

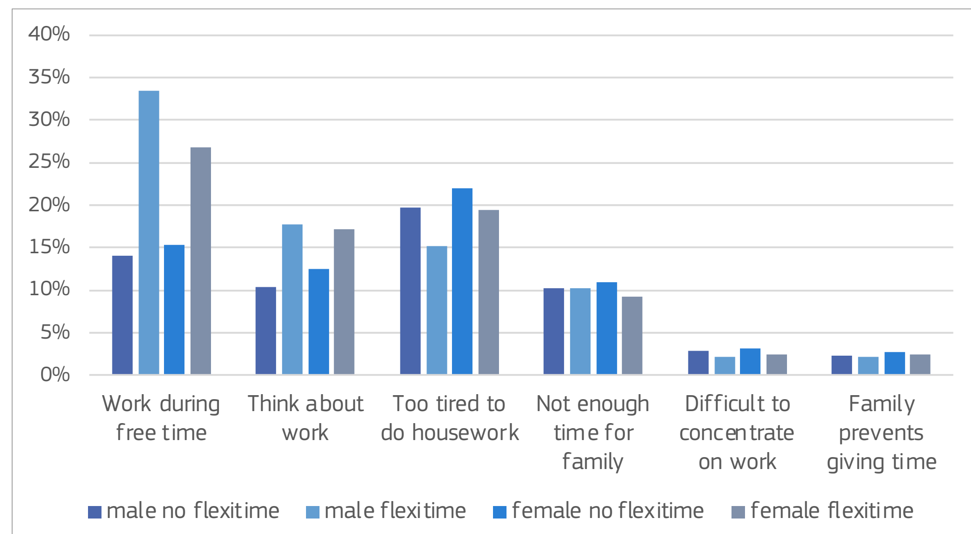
Although **flexible workers** are more likely to say their working hours fit with the personal life, Figure 4.32 and Figure 4.33 show that **they are also significantly more likely to work during their free time to catch up on work, and to think about work when not at work**. The flexibility in the boundary between work and family life can end up with work encroaching on the family sphere, where workers end up working and thinking about work everywhere and all the time (Chung, 2022a; Eurofound and the International Labour Office, 2017; Glass & Noonan, 2016; Lott & Chung, 2016). This so-called 'flexibility paradox' (Chung, 2022a; Mazmanian et al., 2013; Putnam et al., 2014) is a phenomenon where rather than workers shirking away from work – as expected by many as discussed in the section on flexibility stigma – flexible workers generally work longer and harder (Glass & Noonan, 2016; Lott & Chung, 2016). This explains why previous studies have shown how flexible workers – especially teleworkers – were also more likely to experience more work-to-family and family-to-work conflict than non-teleworkers or those without flexible schedules (Golden et al., 2006; Lott, 2020; van der Lippe & Lippényi, 2020; Yucel & Chung, 2023).

This was not the case in the bivariate analysis reported here. Figure 4.32 shows that **workers with flexitime were less likely than those who do not have flexi-**

ble schedules to say that they 'most of the time' or 'always' felt too tired to carry out housework due to their work demands, and female flexitime users were those who were less likely to say they 'most of the time' or 'always' felt that their work prevented them from giving time to their family. In fact, as flexitime can be used as a way to schedule work around family demands this may explain these results. Among men, it was men without flexitime that felt that it was difficult to concentrate on work due to family demands compared to men with flexitime. This possibly indicates the ability of men with flexible schedules to use flexibility at work to ensure family demands are met without interference to work, or because those with flexible schedules are generally those in higher-skilled and higher-paid occupational levels, enabling them to have stronger protection against family demands.

Comparing teleworkers to non-teleworkers in Figure 4.33, there was no difference between female teleworkers and non-teleworkers in their perception that they were too tired after work to do some of the necessary housework. However, **male teleworkers were significantly less likely to experience such work-to-family conflict than men who do not telework**. Among **women, those who were teleworking were more likely to say that family interfered with work responsibilities**. Yucel and Chung (2023) argue this may be especially true among women with traditional gender role attitudes, as they may feel more pressure to take on additional family responsibilities when working from home. This may have especially been the case during the pandemic where there was an increase in housework and childcare demand due to lockdown measures.

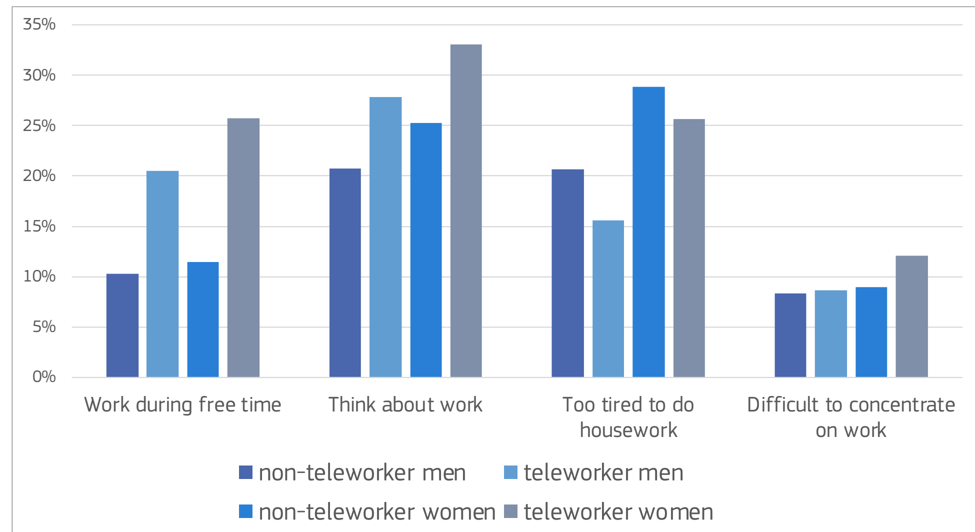
Figure 4.32 Work–family conflict of workers across EU-27 countries, by gender and flexible working status



Notes: 'Work during free time' indicates the proportion of workers who respond that they have had to work during their free time to meet work demands at least several times a week or more often; 'worry about work' indicates the share of workers who say that they worry about work when not at work most of the times or always; 'too tired to do housework' indicates the share of workers who say that they felt too tired after work to do some of the household jobs which need to be done most of the times or always; 'not enough time for family' indicates the proportion of workers who say that they felt that their jobs prevent them from giving time they wanted to their family most of the time or always; 'difficult to concentrate on work' indicates the share of workers who say they found it difficult to concentrate on their job because of family responsibilities most of the times or always; and 'family prevents giving time' indicates the proportion of workers who say that family responsibilities prevented them from giving the time they wanted to their job most of the time or always. Weighted averages.

Source: EWCS 2015.

Figure 4.33 Work–family conflict of workers across EU-27 countries, by gender and teleworking status



Notes: 'Work during free time' indicates the proportion of workers who respond that they have had to work during their free time to meet work demands at least several times a week or more often; 'think about work' indicates the proportion of workers who say that they worry about work when not at work sometimes, most of the times or always; 'too tired to do housework' indicates the share of workers who say that they felt too tired after work to do some of the household jobs which need to be done most of the times or always; and 'difficult to concentrate on work' indicates the proportion of workers who say they found it difficult to concentrate on their job because of family responsibilities most of the times or always. Weighed averages.
Source: EWTCS 2021.

4.5 Conclusions

As this chapter has shown, flexible schedules and teleworking can mean that workers have to take on other competing responsibilities, i.e. childcare or other caring responsibilities, but they can also have better access to the labour market, in terms of access to better paid, more lucrative jobs, the ability to work and work longer hours. This in turn can provide workers, especially women with caring responsibilities, better opportunities in the labour market compared to part-time work and other arrangements to reduce working time. This is especially true as there is evidence that part-time work is a major cause of women's lack of career progression and the gender pay and pension gaps (Costa Dias et al., 2018).

Flexible schedules and teleworking also have the potential to encourage men and fathers to be more involved in domestic housework and childcare (Carlson et al., 2020b), which can further encourage women's labour market participation and career progression (Langner, 2018). However, studies have shown that flexible working can potentially lead to a contemporary enactment of traditional gender roles by allowing female partners to work while maintaining the unequal division of unpaid work at home (Chung & Booker, 2023). In fact, it can exacerbate the gender pay gap as flexible working can result in a situation where women end up doing more housework and childcare and men more paid work (Chung, 2022a; Chung & Van der Lippe, 2020).

However, much of this pattern of outcomes of flexible working is linked to the social norms around gender roles (Kurowska, 2020) where flexible working acts as an amplifier of some of the societal beliefs around men's and women's roles (Chung, 2022a). There is evidence to show that when gender norms are more equal and when work cultures are more friendly to work–life balance, men and women are more likely to be able to take up flexible working arrangements to better balance work with family responsibility, and a more equal division of labour can be facilitated (Been et al., 2017; Chung, 2022a; Kurowska, 2020).

Although the empirical analysis examined here did not show that flexible workers have significantly worse work–life balance outcomes or experience higher work-to-family or family-to-work conflict, previous studies (e.g. Yucel & Chung, 2023) have shown why this may be the case. It could be because of workers, especially women, ending up doing more housework and childcare when working flexibly, but also the tendency of flexible workers to work harder and longer with work encroaching on private time and workers' mental space (Chung, 2022a; Glass & Noonan, 2016; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; Lott, 2020; Lott & Chung, 2016). In fact, flexible workers were found to be more likely to work during their free time and think about work when not at work.

With regards to working conditions and the career outcomes of flexible workers, it was found that generally workers with flexible schedules and teleworkers have better working conditions than other workers. They are generally more secure with regards to their income, job and employment contracts, and they have better access to training and opportunities to use their skills and better career opportunities. However, this may not necessarily be a result of flexible working but rather an antecedent. In fact, the regression analysis of access and use of flexible working arrangements and previous studies have shown that flexible working arrangements, that give workers more control over when and where they work, are generally given to workers in higher occupational levels and with higher education. This can in part be due to the restrictions of the jobs that can be done flexibly, but also in part due to employers' decisions to only provide such flexible working arrangements to workers they trust with these arrangements.

Previous studies have shown that flexible workers are likely to experience a flexibility stigma, in other words, to be perceived as being less committed, motivated and productive compared to other workers, and suffer a negative career outcome as a consequence. The empirical analysis showed that about a third of European workers believe that flexible working is badly perceived by colleagues and that it leads to negative career outcomes. However, there is significant cross-national variation, indicating that context factors such as institutions, policies and cultural norms may shape the extent to which flexible working can lead to negative career outcomes (Chung & Seo, 2023). Indeed, as summarised, changing contextual contexts, such as normalising flexible working and de-gendering flexible working so it is provided not only to mothers or parents but to all workers, seems to provide better outcomes in removing stigmatised views against flexible workers (Wang & Chung, in review). Moreover, previous studies have shown that a more generous family policy at the national level, and with it a less work-centric work culture of long hours, and egalitarian gender norms, stronger workers' bargaining power either through union collective bargaining power or higher labour market demands, all help make flexible working result in more positive outcomes (Chung, 2022a).

When considering the more recent trends of flexible working, especially post-pandemic, it is seen that more women telework. Moreover, with many employers calling for a return to office, more men are returning to the office while women

aim to continue working remotely and from home (Sasso, 2023). If this persists, this would lead to the gendering of flexible working (Chung et al., 2021), where it is considered to be a women's or mother's arrangements, largely used for work–life balance rather than to enhance work performance (Leslie et al., 2012; Wang & Chung, in review).

Based on the summary of the recent studies reviewed in this chapter (e.g. Daviss et al., 2023; Fernandez-Lozano et al., 2020; Kasperska et al., 2023; Munsch, 2016; Wang & Chung, in review), the gendering of flexible working has the potential to exacerbate the negative perceptions against flexible workers where its use is likely to lead to weaker career progression, lack of promotions and income penalties. Moreover, again based on existing empirical evidence (e.g. Chung et al., 2021; Chung et al., 2022; Dunatchik et al., 2021; Lyttelton et al., 2022b; Wang & Cheng, 2023), when only women work flexibly, this is likely to result in women largely carrying out the bulk of the domestic work without men's involvement. This in turn can further exacerbate gender inequalities both at home and in the labour market.

In summary, although flexible schedules and teleworking can be better arrangements to enable working parents, especially mothers and women with informal caring responsibilities, to better integrate work and family demands compared to part-time work, it is not without problems. Flexible working alone cannot meaningfully contribute to solving gender inequality. Also needed are serious debates on cultural norms about work and workers' bargaining power, including whether workers can effectively gain access to such arrangements without fear of repercussions on their careers, The next chapter explores how reducing the hours in the standard working week may contribute to gender equality.

5. Working time reduction, is this the future?

In recent years, there has been an explosion of interest in the shorter working week or the 'four-day week' with discussions across the world, including in Scotland, Spain, India and New Zealand, in using a four-day week approach to address the challenges facing countries worldwide.[21] This includes issues around addressing workers' work–life balance, workers' and family's mental health issues, enhancing productivity, the rise of AI and automation and with it potential reduction in jobs in the future, tackling the global climate crisis, and most importantly for this report, addressing gender equality challenges (Chung, 2022b; Coote et al., 2020; Nanda, 2019; Stronge et al., 2019). This chapter will explain what the four-day-week is and explore whether this can address some of the limitations of the other types of flexible working practices in meeting gender equality goals both at home and in the labour market. The main argument here is that a general reduction in working hours can be a real game changer in addressing many of the obstacles in achieving gender equality. However, company-level policy implementations are limited, and may result in the exacerbation of gender inequality patterns. Therefore, a much larger national or EU-level intervention is needed for the four-day-week approach to be able to appropriately address issues around gender inequality.[22]

21 For more, see: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/15/spain-to-launch-trial-of-four-day-working-week; https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/india-four-day-work-week-new-labour-code-b1800331.html; https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/new-labour-codes-india-four-day-week-7182376/; https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/20/jacinda-ardern-flags-four-day-working-week-as-way-to-rebuild-new-zealand-after-covid-19; http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20210217000870.

22 Parts of the text of this chapter are adapted from H. Chung (2022). A social policy case for a four-day week. *Journal of Social Policy.* 51(3): 551–566.

5.1 Definition of four-day week and its popularity

The idea behind the movement for a four-day working week is that the full-time standard, which is currently around 36 to 40 hours in most countries, should move to **four days or 30 to 32 hours a week as a full-time standard without a reduction in workers' pay** (see also Coote et al., 2020; Pang, 2019). The four-day week does not necessarily mean that workers work four days, but that there should be a general reduction in the number of hours that are considered to be the 'full-time equivalent'. Thus, the four-day week can be distinguished from part-time work in that the latter entails a reduction in the number of hours of work but with a proportional reduction in the pay received, i.e. four days of work for 80 % of full-time pay. The four-day week can also be distinguished from policies such as the condensed work week, where a full-time equivalent hours (e.g. 40 hours) is carried out in fewer number of days (e.g. 4 days of 10 hours), where although there is a reduction in the days worked, there is no reduction in the full-time equivalent hours (Chung, 2022b).

One of the key reasons why the four-day week has initially gained a lot of interest across the world was largely due to its potential productivity gains (for example, see Pang, 2019; Stronge et al., 2019). The reason why shorter working can result in increased productivity levels is because **short, focused hours can prove to be much more efficient in finishing jobs** (Künn-Nelen et al., 2013; Pencavel, 2014). In fact, Parkinson's law states that 'work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion' (Parkinson & Osborn, 1957). There is evidence gathered pre-pandemic on how, for the average UK worker, the majority of the eight-hour work days in the office are used for non-work activities, such as making coffee, reading the news and talking to colleagues about non–work-related issues (Vouchercloud, 2016).

Shorter working may result in more effective work when considering how long working hours inhibit workers' recovery time, which can increase sickness, health problems and the likelihood of making mistakes on the job. **Workers need sufficient recovery periods away from work, both physically and mentally, to be able to maintain their wellbeing and to increase work engagement and proactive behaviours. This ultimately impacts job performance outcomes** (Sonnentag, 2012). Moreover, long hours of work, without ample rest, can result in negative health outcomes (Caruso et al., 2006), increasing sickness, absenteeism and intentions to leave the job, all of which can be costly for a company (Health and Safety Executive, 2019).

This explains the evidence of productivity gains from shorter working hours in a wide range of different sectors and occupations, including the knowledge-intensive sectors but also the more lower-paid, manual and routine occupations, such as working in fast food restaurants, social care settings and on production lines (for detailed case studies, see Pang, 2019). Recent large-scale trials carried out across the world, including in the United Kingdom, United States, Ireland, Spain and recently South Africa, have all concluded that not only does the introduction of a four-day week bring real benefits to workers' wellbeing and work–life balance, and with it greater retention and easier recruitment, but it also brings real and direct benefits to productivity outcomes for companies (Lewis et al., 2023).

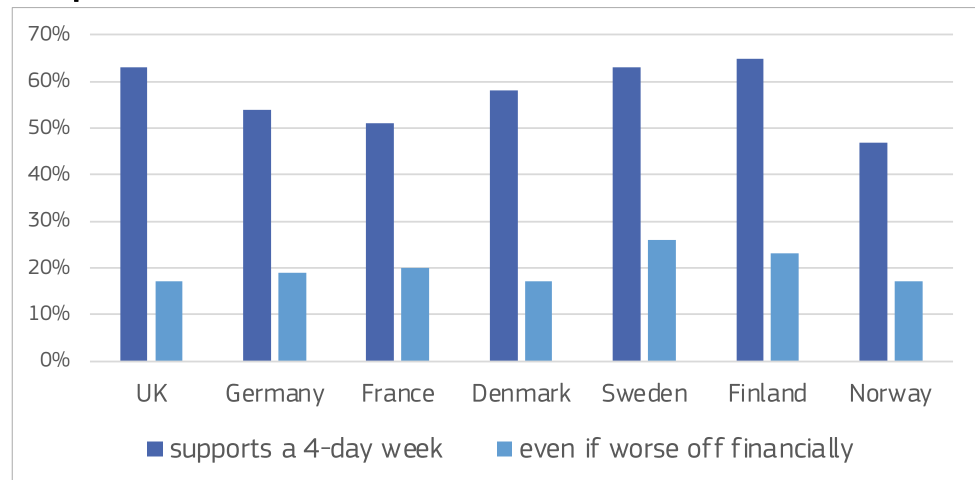
With the success of these trials and increased media attention, the **four-day week has gained astonishing popularity over recent years** (Carrell, 2023). There is overwhelming support for a four-day week among workers.

For example, in the United Kingdom in 2023, 78 % of workers in one survey supported a four-day-week,[23] citing better work–life balance and more time for hobbies as key reasons for their support, while 52 % said they would actively seek for a job in the future that offers a four-day week. Similarly, a recent survey in the United States found that 87 % of workers (and 93 % of millennials) supported a move to a four-day week and 82 % (85 % of millennials) believed it will be successful.[24]

In a slightly older survey in 2019 carried out by YouGov (Figure 5.1), it was shown that in the countries surveyed, with the exception of Norway, half or more of the population supported a move to a four-day week. Countries which already have a norm of shorter hours, such as France (a 35-hour week), and Norway, showed lower support than countries with long average working hours such as the United Kingdom. Interestingly, there was relatively high support, ranging from 17 % in Denmark, UK and Norway to 26 % in Sweden, for a four-day week even if it were to result in lower economic growth and the population being in a worse financial situation. This indicates the demand for the concept, above and beyond the potential positive impact it may have on productivity gains.

Even managers and company leaders have shown support for this movement, with only just over a quarter of managers surveyed in the United Kingdom in 2023 opposing it, and only 3 in 10 believing it will result in the United Kingdom becoming less economically productive.[25] This movement is increasingly being taken on board by unions, politicians and policymakers and could one day become a reality (Chung, 2022b). It is therefore important to consider how this movement can potentially tackle issues around gender inequality. Before examining the potential positive changes from a four-day week in terms of gender equality, the problematic nature of the current work culture of long hours will be explored.

Figure 5.1 Support for a move to a four-day week across selected European countries in 2019



Note: 'Even if worse off financially' indicates those who support a four-day week even if it definitely means that the national economy will shrink and people would be worse off financially.
Source: YouGov Eurotrack.

23 https://startups.co.uk/news/four-day-week-uk-survey/.

24 https://www.computerworld.com/article/3705553/as-uaw-seeks-four-day-workweek-the-idea-gains-ground-with-us-workers.html.

25 https://business.yougov.com/content/45630-business-backs-four-day-workweek.

5.2 Problems of long-hours work culture and gender equality

Despite a general trend in reduction of working hours in most industrialised countries, this is not the case for certain countries, sectors, and occupations, especially in some of the most lucrative jobs (Cha & Weeden, 2014). This can be largely explained again by the ideal worker norm that dominates these jobs and occupations. **The ideal worker is considered as someone who prioritises work above all else, and does not have any other responsibilities outside of work** (Acker, 1990; Williams, 1999). **The ideal workers are always available for work, and always-on and connected to work, especially in the age of digitalisation of work and mobile technologies** (Mazmanian et al., 2013; Perlow, 2012). In such contexts, long hours working, preferably in the office, is necessary to signal one's commitment, motivation, productivity, and performance (Berdahl et al., 2018). It is considered the ultimate sign of commitment because time is a limited resource. By providing a significant proportion of your time to work, you are effectively crowding out everything else in your life, signalling the importance of paid work in your life to your employer. Scholars have criticised **long hours worked by workers as being merely performative** rather than being necessary or even real hours worked (Reid, 2011). In fact, a study based on the United States (Yanofsky, 2012) show that people, especially those who report working very long hours at their paid work, largely exaggerate the number of hours they work. For example, those who say they work 70 hours a week exaggerated up to 20 hours – meaning they only really worked 50 hours a week. However, given that many organisations still consider the long hours worked as a symbol of commitment of workers or indicate professionalism at work (Mazmanian et al., 2013), many workers, especially male workers, 'perform' or pretend to work long hours to ensure their competitive edge in the labour market (Reid, 2011). Long working hours may also help individuals perform social status and self-worth. Ideal worker cultures push our societies become more work-centred than ever before (Frayne, 2015) by eliminating or possibly crowding out the value non-paid activities hold. In such societies, work not leisure, becomes the signifier of dominant social status. The assertion of **busyness owning to long hours spent at work reflects one's position in or an aspiration to high social status, and superiority over others in terms of achievement** (Gershuny, 2005). It is not only a source of conspicuous consumption – to show others of the superiority of one's position – but also is a basis of how individuals evaluate their self-worth (Bellezza et al., 2017). In other words, when individuals do not feel busy at their paid work, they may feel that they are not making valuable contributions to society.

One of the biggest problem with this **ideal worker culture, centred around long hours work, is that it is largely exclusionary towards those who have responsibilities outside of paid employment** (Berdahl et al., 2018; Chung, 2022b, 2023). Several studies have shown that long hours work (culture) as the biggest culprit of why women are excluded from the some of the most lucrative jobs, or why gender pay gaps are highest in certain occupations (Cha & Weeden, 2014; Goldin, 2014). As women do and are expected to bear the brunt of housework and childcare in heterosexual coupled relationships (Dotti Sani & Treas, 2016; Wishart et al., 2019), unlike men and other workers without care and other obligations, they are unable to 'perform' long hours work**. Long hours work culture also enforces a strict division of household labour between men and women.** Men's long hours work prohibit them from taking a more active role in housework

and childcare (Craig & Mullan, 2011; Walthery & Chung, 2021) leaving women to take up the larger bulk (Wishart et al., 2019). Not being able to rely on your partner to share or carry out some of the domestic work limits women's labour market capacity (Cha, 2010). In such contexts, women are not left with many choices, especially when they have children, other than leaving the labour market altogether or to work in badly-paid and career-dead end part-time jobs as their capacity to work long-hours in full-employment are limited (Chung & Van der Horst, 2018; Connolly & Gregory, 2008; Vlasblom & Schippers, 2006). This leads to a vicious cycle where men's breadwinning responsibility is emphasised in heterosexual coupled relationships, leading men to work/perform longer hours to ensure the financial security of the household. Such divergent labour market patterns impacts the unconscious biases people hold against women and mother's capacity to work (Budig et al., 2012), which limits women's progress up to leadership positions even further, as we have seen in the previous sections. Women, especially with caring responsibilities, are not the only ones who are excluded from this long-hours labour market. Anyone who cannot perform long hours work, may it be due to informal care responsibilities or self-care, namely those with disability or long standing illnesses, who may also be limited in carrying out long hours work are excluded, resulting in a two-tiered labour market system (Chung, 2023).

5.3 Working-time reduction and gender equality

A move to a four-day-week can address gender inequality in many ways (Chung, 2022b; Milkie et al., 2023). Firstly, it can allow **women, and workers with other responsibilities outside of work, better access to lucrative jobs** through the reduction of number of hours workers are expected to spend at their jobs. As mentioned before, many of the lucrative jobs expect workers to work long-hours, something many women with caring responsibilities cannot do. When such jobs are offered with shorter working hours, it removes the barriers women faced in taking part in these jobs. For example, the 35 hour work week introduced in France reduced the number of part-time workers, especially among women, by allowing women more access to full-time jobs that now only required them to work 35 hours a week rather than the previous 39 (Askenazy, 2013). Moreover, shorter working encourages workers, especially **fathers or others who were working long hours be more involved in childcare and housework**. As mentioned, lack of time to carry out domestic work was one of the key reasons why men were unable to contribute more in the household, despite their interest in taking a larger part in domestic work, especially childcare (Parker & Wang, 2013; Working Families, 2017). Shortening the number of hours men spend on paid work can allow them to do more at home, which can result in a more equal division of domestic work. Such an equal division of domestic work can provide further support for mothers and women to participate more in the labour market by relieving some of their housework and care responsibilities. In other words, a **four-day week could enable a more equitable distribution of paid and unpaid work among the population**. In fact, in many of the four-day week experiments carried out, not only a better involvement is seen in housework and childcare among parents, especially fathers, but also a better division of housework among heterosexual couples (Haraldsson & Kellam, 2021; Lepinteur, 2019; Lewis et al., 2023).

Moreover, when full-time work is shifted to shorter hours, this can help **dismantle the stigmatised view against part-time workers, flexible workers or any**

workers that balance work with other responsibilities. First and foremost, for part-time workers, as the general working population will work fewer hours, part-time working will be less considered as a deviation away from the norm; this could help tackle stigma against part-time workers. Moreover, as everyone – not only mothers – work part-time, or shorter hours, the notion of part-time or shorter working as being questionable with regards to work commitment will lessen, as seen in experiments on flexible working (Chung & Seo, 2023; Wang & Chung, in review).

At the heart of the four-day week is a move away from working long hours as a measure of commitment, motivation and productivity of workers. By indicating that the hours worked in paid employment do not equate to productivity, commitment, or social contributions, this helps remove the stigmatised views against workers whose commitment was questioned due to their inability to work long hours and 'devote themselves fully to work'. As workplaces develop better ways to measure work commitment and productivity – through real tangible outcomes – working part-time or shorter hours no longer becomes a signifier of a lack of commitment. This provides opportunities for workers to better balance work with family and other responsibilities, without the potential suspicion about their work performance. In other words, shorter working is likely to bring about a **shift in people's view of the 'ideal worker' norm to be someone who is productive while balancing other responsibilities outside of work** (de Laat, 2023).

A move to shorter working hours, when done effectively, can change people's assumptions that rather than activities outside of work prohibiting work engagement, that only through engaging in other activities outside of work can workers can be more productive at work (Pang, 2017; Sonnentag, 2012). Such changes in perceptions around the ideal worker norm is likely to help support women's careers more, on one hand, as they are usually the ones with such responsibilities, and on the other hand, the norm is likely to change to remove men's fear of taking part in such activities. Removing the femininity stigma against men using family-friendly arrangements, could also enable increased involvement of men in unpaid domestic work.

Another important change a four-day week could bring is to move away from a social model where paid work is at the centre, to one where equal value is placed on the spheres of lives that do not generate market income, especially **giving more value to care work** (Chung, 2023; Milkie et al., 2023). One silver lining of the pandemic has been that many workers have shifted their priorities in life, revaluing notions of care work (Stevano et al., 2021). Many workers, especially those who were able to work from home, reported having spent more time with their family and children or other leisure activities during the pandemic due to not having to commute or not having to deal with other engagements due to lockdown measures (Chung et al., 2020; ONS, 2020).

This has led to changes in people's preferences, with many wanting to work flexibly and even reduce hours in the future to take a larger part in caring roles (Alexander et al., 2021; Burgess & Goldman, 2021; Chung et al., 2020; ONS, 2020). Similarly, it can be expected that **shorter working can further bring about changes in the way people think about non-paid work activities, or activities that do not generate market income,** as a smaller proportion of people's lives is devoted to paid work. This could lead to profound changes in the way individuals' contribution towards society are valued, including caring and voluntary activities.

Many feminists scholars (e.g. Fraser, 1994) have already argued how caregiving, despite playing a crucial role in society, is not given the recognition it deserves, purely based on the notion that it does not garner market income. Similarly, many activities carried out by individuals that provide a crucial function in society are not currently valued in the same way paid employment is (Taylor-Gooby et al., 2018). Yet these activities can help reduce social costs, e.g. the reduction of health and mental health costs, including workers' burn out, children's depression, mental health issues disorders and problematic behaviours (Chung, 2021).

As societies move away from a work culture of long hours, shifts can be expected in the norms around the notions of valuing non-work, non-monetary, non-value-generating activities (Chung, 2023; Corneo, 2005; Kallis et al., 2013) with care, voluntary activities and other non-paid work activities becoming valued more. This can help gender equality in a number of ways. **The more care becomes a valued way of spending time, it is expected that men will be not only willing but able to spend more time in care work**, as they will no longer face the femininity stigma (Rudman & Mescher, 2013) and carrying out feminine caring tasks will not come with a stigma. With this, it is expected that it would increasingly be seen as appropriate for men to change their work patterns to better fit their work around care responsibilities, enabling a more equitable gendered division of labour at home. Moreover, many studies have shown that much of the work women carry out in as paid labour in the market is not valued highly and not renumerated sufficiently (Anker, 1997; Reskin, 1988). Much of this work is classified as feminine labour and much of it is related to care work. **As care becomes more valued, it could be expected that not only will 'women's work' be remunerated in a more appropriate manner**, but more men may participate in these jobs, which may further enhance the pay potential of these occupations (Levanon et al., 2009). This can help reduce the gender inequality patterns found in the labour market.

5.4 The limitations of the four-day week

As described previously, the reduction of working hours or a move to a four-day week has great potential to address many issues related to gender inequality that flexible working arrangements have not been able to do. However, this four-day week movement is not without its own limitations. At the moment, four-day week policies are introduced mostly at the company level, mainly for productivity-enhancing purposes or to address certain firm-level issues (Pang, 2019). Even the government experiments carried out were specifically for certain public sector companies. When companies are left to voluntarily introduce such four-day weeks, **it will be difficult for companies in lower-paid sectors to have the capacity to or feel a need to introduce this policy.** It will be especially difficult to implement it for an hourly-paid labour force (Chung, 2022b). As many women are in lower-paid sectors, they may not be able to benefit from a four-day working week.

Possibly more problematic is if women choose to work for companies which allow a four-day week or reduced working hours, while **men and more male-dominated organisations maintain their norms of working long hours**. As described in previous sections, flexible working arrangements are not as accessible in male-dominated organisations compared to other organisations, especially for men. They are also where stigmatized views against flexible workers are more prevalent, again restricting flexible working arrangements. In such organisations,

where the ideal worker norm is stronger, it is unlikely that they will introduce four-day weeks (Berdahl et al., 2018). This is especially true considering that certain workers may select into or select out of such jobs and occupations (Cech & Blair-Loy, 2019). In such cases, there may be a scenario where women work shorter hours, and men work long hours in more lucrative jobs. This would **enforce gender inequality patterns at home and in the labour market, similar to the gendered outcomes of flexible working** (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020; Wang & Chung, in review). This is why when considering the four-day week or working-time reduction, **it should not be left for companies to address this issue individually; state-level intervention is needed.**

State intervention can provide **a nudge for companies to value their workers' time**, and consider how to make more efficient use of it, by making additional hours of work more costly for companies (Chung, 2022b). For example, countries introduced limits with regards to excessive long hours work via laws around working time (e.g. the Working Time Directive), but also introduced overtime premiums that are protected by labour laws and collective bargaining agreements in many countries that makes longer hours more costly for employers. Similarly, governments can provide legal measures to nudge companies to move to a four-day week, e.g. by lowering the maximum hours of work (e.g. France and the 35-hour week) or by increasing overtime premiums above certain hours of work.

Secondly, a state intervention is needed as a move to a four-day week will have to coincide with the **minimum income and living wage debates** to ensure that working shorter hours does not lead to further income insecurity, especially for the weaker segments of the labour markets. This is especially important when considering that it may mainly be women moving into such jobs and occupations. It must be ensured that the gender pay gap is not further entrenched and debates around fair and decent pay are needed. These types of debates needs to be held more across societies and nations.

Thirdly, a government approach is needed in light of **the social costs of a work culture of long hours**, which in many cases companies do not need to bear. A national agenda towards a four-day week will involve raising the public's awareness of the social costs of the working long hours and a work culture of long hours, and concurrently the social benefits of shorter working. For example, although individual companies may not benefit directly from enhancing female labour market participation, its impact on society can be immense. Such benefits cannot be calculated if applied at the company level, and its value can only be truly measured when looked at an aggregate level.

Finally, the four-day week movement needs to be **developed as a part of enhancing human rights of individuals,** in this case by enhancing the individual's (and their family's) right to time for rest, leisure, care and other types of activities that provide social value. Such interventions will be especially important for those in more disadvantaged positions, who may be unable to gain access to four-day week policies through individual negotiation processes. Providing workers with a legal basis to use their limited resources of time as they wish outside of work will facilitate a collective approach to re-examining working hours and ultimately work cultures.

5.5 Conclusions

This chapter examined whether a general reduction in working hours – the so-called 'four-day week' – can help address some of the limitations of using other types of flexible working arrangements to meet gender equality goals, as well as to enhance workers' rights and improve their wellbeing. As this chapter has shown, the four-day week movement can question the prevailing work culture of long hours work in many countries, which is important in tackling many of the underlying root causes of gender inequality patterns at home and in the labour market.

The four-day week could help enable a more equitable division of housework and childcare within households, and enable better labour market participation for workers with other competing responsibilities – such as childcare and elderly care. Moreover, it has the potential to help change societal values around work and value of care, which could also influence societal perceptions around the appropriate remuneration of 'feminine' activities in the labour market.

However, there are limitations to the four-day week. If only done at the level of individual companies, it could even exacerbate gender inequality. To overcome this, a more general national-level or at a minimum a sectoral or collective bargaining approach is needed (see the case of IG Metal in Germany[26]). If a four-day week is implemented at the national and collective level, a better understanding of the social value of such reduction of working hours could be achieved. Moreover, the monitoring of the social costs of work-centric cultures with long hours needs to be carried out at the national level to better understand such costs, which are largely unobservable at the company level.

Despite the previously described potential benefits of the four-day week, it should not be seen as an alternative to the introduction and provision of other types of flexible working arrangements. It is true that when the four-day week is introduced, many workers may no longer need other types of flexible working arrangements such as part-time work. But even so, above and beyond the reduction of the full-time working week, flexible schedules and teleworking will still be useful in providing workers with the autonomy and control over the boundaries of their work to better integrate work with family and other private responsibilities. They should all be seen as complementary policies that should be used together, with the introduction of a four-day week potentially eliminating many of the unintended negative consequences of flexible working.

Flexible workers' tendency to work harder and longer when working flexibly (Chung, 2022a) can be somewhat mitigated when the working hours norms are changed through the introduction of the four-day week, as it changes the notions of the ideal worker, and how the productivity and commitment of workers are measured. Flexible workers will no longer need to perform long hours of work to ensure they are not penalised when working flexibly, as they will be measured by their outputs rather than their presenteeism, even digitally, i.e. the practice of being present at one's place of work for more hours than is required. In this way, shortening the full-time norm can also support the legislative developments such as the right to disconnect, which will be discussed in the next chapter, where the time boundaries of the rest hours that need to be protected becomes clearer.

26 https://www.industriall-union.org/working-towards-a-four-day-week-for-steel-industry

Similarly, a four-day week can also help remove the flexibility stigma and enhance workers' access to flexible working, allowing them to use flexible working to achieve a better work–life balance.

Being able to use flexible working to better integrate work with family demands can help workers to be more rather than less productive, especially in the longer run. The removal of the flexibility stigma can also allow fathers to feel that they can use flexible working arrangements to better engage in childcare and other domestic work without fearing consequences for their careers and income. This can then help mitigate the problems of flexible working if potentially amplifying and exacerbating traditional gendered division of labour.

Nonetheless, reducing workers' working hours alone will not fully address the problems. Fundamental changes are needed in views of gender roles with regards to the division of paid and unpaid labour. Furthermore, despite the potential benefits of the introduction of the four-day week in changing some of the normative views around the performance of the ideal worker, protective mechanisms for workers are needed so they are protected from the demand for constant availability, which has grown with the rise of flexible working and the use of digital technologies at home and work, and from the potential negative impact on their careers where workers are penalised for working flexibly or working reduced hours. The next chapter therefore proposes policy recommendations to ensure flexible working can meet gender equality challenges.

6. Policy recommendations

In summary, part-time work, flexible schedules and teleworking all help to support women's labour market participation, especially during the period when they have high caring demands – namely after childbirth. However, part-time work usually ends up with a downgrading of jobs and career penalties. Women moving into part-time jobs after childbirth is a leading cause of the persistent gender pay gap in many countries. Flexible schedules and teleworking help women to work longer hours, not move into lower paid and lower skilled part-time jobs. Flexible working fathers can also support their female partners to take better part in the labour market by using flexibility at work to share the domestic load. However, flexible schedules and teleworking can also lead to workers working longer overtime, with work encroaching on family life, and women carrying out more unpaid domestic work, while men increase their paid working hours. Flexible working in this way can result in the enactment of a contemporary form of the traditional gender roles, where women continue doing the large bulk of unpaid domestic work but through flexibility at work also carry out paid work on top of that. Moreover, flexible working, especially when done for caring purposes, is generally met with biased views around the worker's commitment, motivation and productivity, which can result in career penalties. This may result in flexible working penalising women's careers more. However, this is not a problem of flexible working itself, but rather the contexts in which flexible working is used. This chapter outlines policy recommendations that can help address some of the issues raised in this report to ensure that flexible working can help meet gender equality goals. While the focus is mostly on policy recommendations for governments and the European Commission, some recommendations could also be easily adapted at the company or sectoral levels.

6.1 Stronger right to flexible working for all workers

The first and foremost policy change that is needed is to **strengthen workers' right to flexible working and ensure that this right is given to all workers**. The current right to request flexible working in many countries and in the EU Work–life Balance (EU-WLB) Directive, for example, is limited only to working parents and carers. As this report has shown, **limiting access to parents and carers alone increases the view that flexible working is a family-friendly rather than a smart-working tool where flexibility at work can enhance work productivity and effectiveness and reduces costs.** Such an approach can enforce stigmatised views against flexible workers. Moreover, requests can be currently rejected by managers for a number of reasons. This explains why despite the legislative framework to provide workers with flexible working arrangements, its use is skewed and limited in certain sectors and occupations, above and beyond any structural barriers that may exist. The report also provides evidence of how many workers were unable to access arrangements, due to barriers set up by their

managers and/or due to the work culture and stigmatised views against flexible workers. The non-legislative element in the EU-WLB directive provides protection for workers who work flexibly from possible negative career consequences and penalty, and provides some legal protection for workers. However, this has not been implemented fully in many countries (de la Corte Rodríguez, 2022), and even when instated at the national policy level, this may not be sufficient to eradicate the cultural normative views around the stigma of work flexibility, limiting access to flexible working policies for workers in practice (Chung & Tijdens, 2013).

Therefore, policies are needed to **ensure the normalisation of flexible working for all workers, and introduce it as a smart-working tool as well as a work–life balance arrangement**. There have been empirical evidence of success stories where flexible working is widely adopted and seen as a productivity-enhancing tool when introduced as a smart-working rather than only as a work–life balance tool (e.g. Angelici & Profeta, 2020; Kelly et al., 2014). In fact, **only when flexible working is normalised and is seen as a smart-working tool can it help support companies' productivity and profit generation**, as the potential negative consequences of flexible working, such as boundary blurring and workers working longer and harder, are less likely to occur in such contexts. One of the most urgent changes needed is to ensure is that the **right to request flexible working is revised to be provided for all workers** rather than restricting it as a right for parents of young children and carers. This, in a way, is a social justice issue, as all workers, not only parents, have work–life balance issues they have to deal with (Kelliher et al., 2019). Moreover, as empirical evidence examined in this report has shown, only when flexible working is seen as something for all workers, can the stigma flexible workers face be eliminated, not only for mothers, but for all workers. Governments, including the European Commission, can also start discussing flexible working not only as a work–life balance measure that helps address gender equality, but as a productivity measure for better using and managing the workforce and its skills. This is especially true in light of the digitalisation of work, and the rise of new technologies at work. Moreover, changes are needed in managers' and workers' views around flexible working and other family-friendly policies, to ensure that a **better work–life balance is not perceived as being in conflict with productivity enhancement goals but is rather a necessary precursor to it**.

It is also important to maintain and enforce **legal protections provided to workers who take up flexible working arrangements** from unlawful dismissal or discrimination. These policies are fundamental to ensure that all workers are able to take up existing policies. As many studies have shown, having the right to request flexible work and other protective policies will not be sufficient alone to encourage policy take-up (Chung & Tijdens, 2009; Kaufman, 2018; Thébaud & Pedulla, 2022). It is important to ensure that both employers and workers themselves are aware of the existing policies as well as the protection they are entitled to when taking up flexible working arrangements. Further actions to prevent employer non-compliance or finding exit loopholes are important. This could potentially **involve works councils or union representatives** (Hickland et al., 2020; Johnson, 2020). **Providing workers with greater bargaining power**, through collective bargaining or ensuring easy access to tribunals, could also be ways for flexible working to be used without fear of repercussions, in addition to the legal protective mechanisms.

6.2 Changing views around gender roles and work–life balance

Another important step to ensure that the expansion of flexible working does not exacerbate gender inequality patterns in the labour market and at home is to **challenge existing normative views around gender roles**. Some evidence shows that many of the gender inequality patterns associated with flexible working relate to traditional gender norms and attitudes at the societal level (Kurowska, 2020) and at the individual level (Leshchenko & Chung, 2023; Yucel & Chung, 2023). Despite past progress, in many societies, it is still considered women's responsibility to take care of children and maintain the household (Knight & Brinton, 2017), including the mental workload that is involved in managing the household and ensuring the wellbeing of its members (Dean et al., 2022). Enforcement of traditional gender roles through flexible working, where mothers end up carrying out more housework and childcare (Chung & Van der Lippe, 2020; Haddon & Silverstone, 1993), is largely based on these deeply embedded gender roles, much of which is institutionalised through existing policies such as poorly paid leave and parental leave that is routinely transferrable (Mandel & Semyonov, 2006). Even in situations where parental leave is 'gender neutral', given socially engrained norms about whose role it is to care for children and the existing gender pay gap where women are paid less, it will generally be mothers who take up such leave (Korpi et al., 2013). **Long and generous gender-neutral parental leave with short or no earmarked periods for the second parent reinforces traditional gender roles in society, since this leave is mostly taken up by women. This puts mothers in charge of children in the first years of their lives, reinforcing this role into the future** (Budig et al., 2012; Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007; Wray, 2020).

The EU WLB directive aimed to change this, by ensuring that each parent receives non-transferrable, earmarked and generously paid parental leave, which can help change and challenge views around whose role it is to care for children and whose role it is to do the housework. If possible, the European Commission should continue such policy interventions to ensure that there are **sufficient incentives for fathers to take up as much leave as possible, potentially equal to the leave allocated for mothers**, **especially in the early stages of a child's life**. Evidence shows such interventions in the early stages of a child's life are crucial in engendering changes in family dynamics in the longer term (Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007; Norman, 2019; Tanaka & Waldfogel, 2007). Given that in many heterosexual-couple households, men earn the higher income, providing better income replacement during the period of leave can help the take-up of such policies (Kaufman, 2018). **Campaigns for raising awareness of policymakers, employers and workers of the societal benefits of having fathers involved, especially in childcare** (Chung, 2021), will also be of benefit. Studies (Chung, 2021) have shown that when fathers are involved in childcare, it benefits children's mental health and cognitive outcomes (Norman & Davies, 2023) and reduces children's social and behavioural problems (Vanchugova, 2023). Further, fathers' involvement in childcare and a more equal division of domestic labour improves couple's relationships, reducing conflict and dissolution (Goldacker et al., 2022; Petts & Knoester, 2019; Ruppanner, Brandén, et al., 2018; Schober, 2013). It can also help mothers' employment outcomes (Andersen, 2018), and improve fathers' wellbeing outcomes (Chung, 2021; Walthery & Chung, 2021). More importantly for this report, **fathers' take-up of parental leave will result in scenarios where it is more likely that both fathers and mothers will use**

flexible working arrangements to be better involved in childcare and housework (Kurowska, 2020). Moreover, women's flexible working will be met with less suspicion as both men and women will use flexible working in a similar manner (Chung & Seo, 2023). Finally, stigmatised views against flexible working for care purposes may weaken, as it will be normalised (Chung, 2022).

However, in addition to the potential revision of parental leave schemes, there needs to be more done directly to **better enable men, especially fathers, to take up flexible working arrangements for caring purposes**. Policies, such as earmarked leave for fathers, will help change norms around gender roles and therefore some of the cultural barriers in taking up such policies. However, for these policies to genuinely help support working parents, there needs to be more of a push to get fathers, and not only for mothers, to take up policies. This can be done by ensuring the normalisation of flexible working and strengthening the rights to flexible working by ensuring it is a right given to all workers, as described above.

Specifically targeting men and fathers to take up flexible working arrangements for caring purposes can also be useful. This could be done through monitoring countries, sectors and companies with regards to flexible working practices, analysed by gender and parental status, working with local bodies to ensure that flexible working practices are not only directed at mothers (or just parents). In other words, **it is important not only to look at how much the policy is being used but who is using it**, and the potential consequences. An awareness campaign could also help, but only alongside other policy measures mentioned above, which provide workers better protection and legal rights to be able to take up policies. Employers also hold an important role here in publicising and encouraging and requiring fathers to take up their share of flexible working arrangements, leave and other family-friendly policies. Taking such steps can help change gender norms so that flexible working does not end up reinforcing the traditional gender division of housework and paid work, and can help to reduce the likelihood of women being penalised when they work flexibly.

The development of other supportive family policies, such as generous childcare, can also help to change normative views around work–life balance, and with it how flexible working relates to gender equality outcomes. Studies have shown that in countries where national family policies are more generous, a work–life balance is seen as the norm rather than the exception (Been et al., 2017). Especially with changes around leave and flexible working, where policies aim to provide opportunities not only for women but also for men to be more involved in domestic work, **changes are likely to be seen in people's ideals and societal views around the acceptable forms of work and family integration for both men and women** (Bünning & Hipp, 2022; Hobson & Fahlén, 2009). Stigmatised views on flexible working for care purposes and the negative consequences of flexible working – for example on workers' wellbeing or work–life balance – are less likely to occur (Chung, 2022a). Moreover, **easily accessible and affordable good quality childcare provision will also help remove stigmatised views around parents' and especially mothers' flexible working** (Chung & Seo, 2023). One major reason why women need flexibility in their work to address family demands is the lack of other resources to meet these demands, for example, public childcare (Durbin et al., 2010; Tomlinson, 2006). When there is accessible, cheap and good-quality childcare readily available, parents and especially mothers are less likely to have to meet additional family demands through the flexibility at their work. They will be less likely to multitask to meet these demands as children

are most likely be at good-quality childcare facilities, allowing parents to focus on work (Chung, 2022a). This allows mothers better work–life balance and reduces stigmatised views around mothers' flexible working, as it will less likely to be seen as a way mothers work to meet childcare demands (Chung & Seo, 2023). In other words, rather than seeing flexible working as a separate policy, a combination of policy tools should be considered that provide synergies between policies to provide supportive contexts that allow workers real choices for work–family integration (Hobson, 2013).

6.3 Right to rest and disconnect

One reason why flexible working can exacerbate gender inequality patterns in the labour market is due to the blurring of boundaries between home and family life (as is the case for flexible schedules and teleworking), which can lead to the expectation that the worker is available all the time, can work everywhere (Mazmanian et al., 2013; Perlow, 2012), and be able to work under all circumstances (e.g. bad weather or even during an illness) (ONS, 2021b). Although such expectations are applicable to all workers, women are less able to perform such presenteeism behaviours, and due to it, can experience negative career outcomes compared to men who may be more likely to be able to work longer hours and perform presenteeism (Cech & Blair-Loy, 2014; Lott & Chung, 2016). Such pressures for availability can also further prevent fathers from using flexible working arrangements to better engage in childcare and other domestic activities (Chung & Booker, 2023; Kim, 2020). Therefore, to enable flexible working to be used better to meet work–family integration without resulting in the exacerbation of gender inequality patterns, **legal mechanisms are needed to help protect the boundaries of private life and help protect workers' right to rest**.

In many EU Member States, existing labour laws are limited in providing such protections for workers. For example, working time regulations restricting maximum hours of work (e.g. the EU Working Time Directive) are difficult to enforce when the definitions of working hours becomes blurred. When work was carried out in the office, many workers considered all hours that the worker spent in the office, regardless of whether work was carried out or not, as working hours (Vouchercloud, 2016). As working hours boundaries become blurred with flexible schedules, and when work is carried out at home, **it becomes difficult to know when work starts and ends.** Moreover, with the rise of digital technologies, workers are now able to check in on work much more easily, e.g. checking emails on a smartphone before going to bed (Abendroth et al., 2023). This also complicates the issue of regulating working hours. Therefore**, it may be better to legislate mechanisms to protect workers' right to time and rest – recovery away from work** – rather than defining and restricting the maximum number of hours of work.

The EU right to disconnect, currently being discussed in the European Parliament (European Parliament, 2021) [27], is an interesting development and is a welcome step in the right direction to protect workers' right to time. The right states that employers should not require workers to be available outside their working time and co-workers should refrain from contacting colleagues for work purposes. The right further states that EU countries should ensure that workers who invoke their

27 See also https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-a-europe-fit-for-the-digital-age/file-al-legislative-proposal-to-the-commission-on-the-right-to-disconnect

right to disconnect are protected from victimisation and other repercussions and that there are mechanisms in place to deal with complaints or breaches of the right to disconnect. Finally, the right to disconnect states that remote professional learning and training activities must be counted as work activity, and must not take place during overtime or days off without adequate compensation.

Similar laws already exist across Europe including in Ireland, Belgium, France, Italy, Spain and Portugal with their introduction being discussed in other countries (Eurofound, 2023b). The main elements of these laws are: **ensuring that employees are protected from having to perform work outside their normal working hours; the right to not be penalised when refusing to work outside of normal hours; and better defining what constitutes as working hours** – e.g. training and workshops. The right to disconnect does not restrict workers from working during non-working hours, which allows workers more flexibility in when they carry out their work. However, it protects them from having to and being expected to work in the evenings and at night, weekends or other non-work hours. **Such mechanisms can help stop the work cultures of long hours and competition that can develop when boundaries between work and non-work are unclear, where workers feel that they are expected to always be available** (Mazmanian et al., 2013). As described, given the current gendered division of domestic responsibilities, this situation is likely to further exacerbate gender inequality patterns where it is mostly men who are always available for work and reap the associated benefits in their careers.

The right to disconnect is a protective mechanism not only for workers, enhancing workers' labour rights, but can also be seen as legislation that can help employers from misusing their labour force to their own demise. Scientific research has shown the benefits of physical and mental detachment away from work, and the problems of overwork, long working hours, and the always-on work culture (Perlow, 2012; Sonnentag, 2012), which, as this report has shown, is likely to happen with the rise of flexible working such as flexible schedules and teleworking. In this light, the right to disconnect, rather than being legislation that restricts employers' freedom, can be seen as **a legal mechanism to support employers. It aims to support employers in better using their labour force, by making them understand that maintaining a healthy and happy workforce that are able to disconnect physically and mentally from work leads to a more productive workforce**. A combination of policies – such as shortening the normal full-time working week – is needed to help change notions of productivity, as the right to disconnect alone will not be sufficient in terms of bringing about change in the entrenched notion around productivity being linked to working long hours. In summary, the key message is that protecting workers' right to time for recovery and rest is crucial in order to achieve a productive and creative economy in the long run.

6.4 Changing the notion of the 'standard worker'

Finally, to ensure that flexible working results in positive outcomes, a **reconsideration is needed of the notion of 'the worker' in our societies**. Many of the problems of flexible working relate to current norms around paid work, the centrality it holds in people's lives, and with it, the notions of the ideal worker. In many societies, the notion of **the ideal worker is still heavily based on the male breadwinner who has a supporting partner who carries out the reproductive work**. This is why much of society still believes that someone who is devoted and committed to work, and is therefore considered more productive, works long hours, is always available and privileges work above all else, potentially sacrificing other aspects of their lives to do so. There are variations across countries in the extent to which this is the case; however, this notion of the ideal worker still rings true in many European societies and in many occupations, especially the more lucrative well-paid occupations, within these societies. As mentioned in Chapter 5, a systematic move to a four-day week, or shortening the notion of a full-time working week could be of real benefit to challenge these beliefs. Changing the definitions of what constitutes full-time work can thus help change the norms around how much time should be spent on paid employment. This could also help change the notion around the value of care and other non-remunerative activities in society. Shortening the full-time working week also entails changing the notion of the 'standard worker' from someone without other responsibility, to someone with other competing important demands they need to tend to. Much of the existing labour market norms, and with them labour market legislation, are still based on the 1950s male breadwinner model. It does not match up to the current social changes resulting in a different 'standard worker' (Lott et al., 2022), with diverse needs (Kelliher et al., 2019). **The standard worker is and should be redefined as someone who has responsibilities outside of work, and only when their work demands and private life and family demands are better integrated will they be happy and therefore productive** (Weeden, 2005).

A changed definition also meets the new challenges seen in the future of work, with the development of automation and artificial intelligence (AI) which may radically reconfigure the role of paid work in people's lives. It is predicted that a quarter of all existing jobs in Europe can be automated or carried out by AI, with particularly high exposure in administrative work (46 %) and the legal profession (44 %) (Hatzius et al., 2023). In other words, routine parts of jobs may be replaced by machines with humans only carrying out creative thinking or other aspects of work that only uniquely humans can carry out. This may eliminate the need for long hours of work, especially when it is understood that creative thinking and problem solving can benefit from or perhaps can only be done while working shorter, focused hours (Pang, 2017). One job that cannot be done by machines is care work, a sector that is in crisis due to global labour shortages (Addati et al., 2018). Again, the shortening of working hours for everyone can help address this problem, not only through providing workers with more time for care work, but also ensuring the re-evaluation of care work in our societies. Shortening working hours in the care sector without a pay reduction can also help enhance the attractiveness of jobs in this sector, which would help with the global care worker shortage (Pang, 2019).

In summary, **to truly address gender inequality at home and in the labour market, fundamental change is required in conceptions of paid and unpaid work and their relationship to each other,** as well as to redefine 'the standard worker'. This change cannot happen only in policy debates, but has to be mirrored in the way policies – not only family-friendly policies, but also labour market, employment and human resource policies at national, sectoral and company levels – are developed. Without such change, it will be difficult to meaningfully address gender inequality. But making authentic change to allow more flexible working can pave the way for solving not only problems of gender inequality and social justice, but also many other pressing social challenges facing society now and in the future.

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