

A Better Work–Life Balance: Bridging the gender care gap

Care is a fundamental aspect of our lives, as everyone will either require or provide care at some point. Gender inequalities in informal care and its implications for carers and the labour market is of major concern in the EU. The COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on the significance of formal care services, unveiling the vulnerabilities of care systems. Failure to address the existing deficiencies in care provision and access to formal care services could result in a future care crisis and exacerbate gender inequalities. In most European countries, care is mainly provided by informal caregivers. The rising care needs keenly fall on women. Improving the formal care sector would help make informal care a choice rather than a necessity. This policy brief explores gender inequalities in the provision of two critical forms of informal care – childcare⁽¹⁾ and long-term care (LTC)⁽²⁾ – and in access to formal care services and the work–life balance of carers. Drawing on the 2022 European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) first EU-wide Survey of Gender Gaps in Unpaid Care, Individual and Social Activities, this brief offers much needed up-to-date insights into the gendered dynamics of caregiving.

The European care strategy

Adopted in 2022, the European care strategy sets out a European vision for care, addressing the challenges and inequalities in care provision across the EU. The strategy aims to improve services for early childhood education and care (ECEC) and LTC by expanding them to meet current and future care needs. Recognising the importance of improving care services, the European care strategy emphasises the need to increase the availability of formal care services while also improving their **quality, affordability and accessibility**. The strategy emphasises the need for care responsibilities to be shared equally between women and men.

Source: European Commission, *European Care Strategy – For carers and care receivers*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/858795>.

Executive summary

- Women bear the primary responsibility for childcare and are twice as likely to spend at least 5 hours on childcare per day than men. This unequal share of childcare responsibilities creates significant obstacles for women to participate in the labour market on an equal footing with men.
- Many people providing informal LTC in the EU are below retirement age, indicating potential work–life conflicts and dual caring responsibilities of also providing childcare. A lower percentage of LTC carers are employed, with a significant number working part-time, especially among women.
- Access to formal care services is crucial for reducing the burden of informal care, primarily provided by women. Women with young children who use ECEC services are less engaged in highly time-intensive childcare and are more likely to be employed than those who do not use these services.
- The affordability, availability and quality of formal care services for LTC and ECEC are persistent challenges, particularly affecting low-income carers and those in rural areas.
- Caregiving responsibilities significantly impact work–life balance, resulting in fewer working hours, limited career progression and financial consequences. This especially affects mothers of young children. Access to formal services can help carers manage their paid work and caregiving responsibilities more effectively.
- Addressing the barriers to accessing formal care services, improving work–life balance and supporting carers are crucial for promoting gender equality, financial independence and the well-being of carers and care receivers.



(1) Informal childcare refers to unpaid childcare, including parental childcare, grandparenting and any other forms of childcare outside of family care. Childcare includes personal care, assistance with school tasks, managing children's activities, leisure, supervision and emotional support.

(2) Informal LTC refers to unpaid care activities for family members, relatives, neighbours or friends (including children) who have needed others' support as a result of mental, physical frailty, disability or old age for at least 3 months. Informal care concerns daily living activities (e.g. dressing, showering, eating, moving around, using the toilet) and instrumental activities of daily living (e.g. grocery shopping, preparing meals, managing money and managing housework).

EIGE's Survey of Gender Gaps in Unpaid Care, Individual and Social Activities

EIGE's survey focused on gender differences in unpaid care to better understand how they impact job opportunities, the work–life balance, leisure and social activities of women and men. The survey aims to fill current data gaps and improve the capacity of the Gender Equality Index to capture changes in the time domain in a more conceptually sound, coherent and regular way. The findings from EIGE's survey will contribute to monitoring the 2020–2025 EU Gender equality strategy ⁽³⁾ and the European care strategy, as reducing the gender gap in care is a key objective of these strategies. The survey was carried out in the summer of 2022, with over 60 000 respondents aged 16–74 across the 27 EU Member States. See more in: EIGE, *Online panel survey of gender gaps in unpaid care, individual and social activities – Technical report*, Publications office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2023.

The state of play: informal care in the EU

Informal care plays a crucial role in providing childcare and LTC in the EU. Due to gendered social roles, stereotypes and power relations, women historically shouldered most caring responsibilities. The disproportionate burden of care on women continues to have a significant impact on their lives and is a primary reason why women do not engage equally in the labour market and public life, with far-reaching consequences.

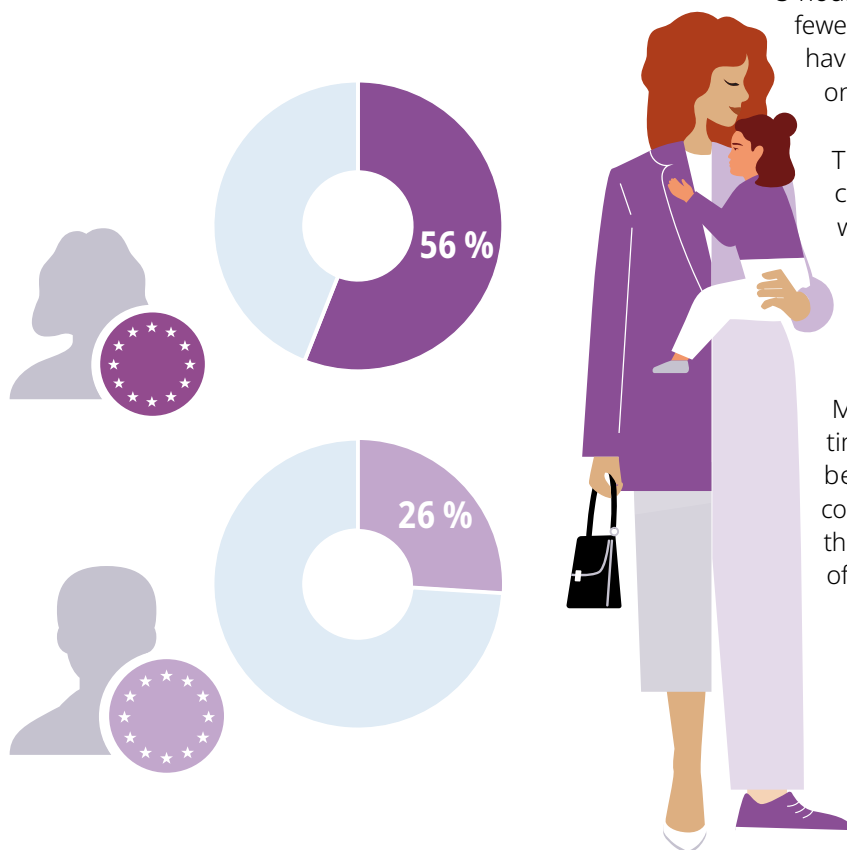
From home life to work life: unequal share of childcare shapes gender inequalities in the labour market

Taking care of children ⁽⁴⁾ has a profound impact on people's lives. It impacts how people spend their time and manage their work commitments and personal lives. In the EU, women are still the ones mainly responsible for childcare. About 56 % of women with children under 12 years old spend at least 5 hours per day on childcare, compared to 26 % of men (see Figure 1). Looking at parents of children aged 0–5, the percentage of parents who spend 5 hours or more a day on childcare varies considerably between Member States, with an EU average of 47 %. In countries where many parents provide at least 5 hours of childcare per day for their children aged 0–5, fewer parents use formal ECEC services. This suggests that having access to ECEC services reduces the time spent on intensive childcare (see Figure 3).

The gender disparity in childcare is evident in how couples with young children divide care tasks, with women disproportionately shouldering the responsibilities. For example, around 50 % of women and just 6 % of men in partnerships are primarily responsible for their children's personal and physical care, such as bathing, feeding or changing diapers.

Moreover, men who provide childcare spend more time on leisure activities ⁽⁵⁾, with 38 % of men spending between 1 and 3 hours a day on leisure activities, compared to 29 % of women. This discrepancy highlights the fact that women who primarily bear the responsibility of childcare have limited time for personal leisure.

Figure 1. Share of parents spending at least 5 hours a day on childcare, by gender (% , EU-27, 2022)



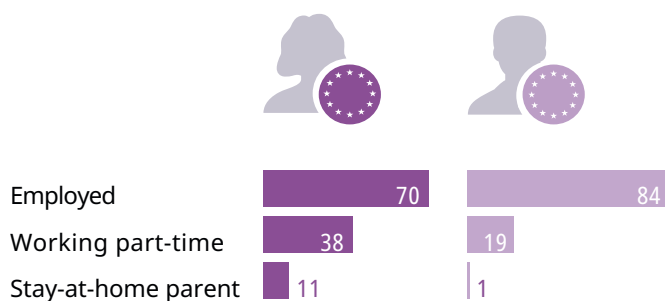
⁽³⁾ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX %3A52020DC0152](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0152).

⁽⁴⁾ The analysis on informal childcare is limited to parents of children up to 12 years of age as this is the most care-demanding group of children. The work–life balance directive also specifically addresses flexible work rights for parents of children up to 12 years old.

⁽⁵⁾ Leisure means time spent outside of paid and unpaid work. Leisure activities include sports, cultural activities, relaxing, religious activities, meeting family and friends, sightseeing, holidays, watching TV, listening to the radio and hobbies. Leisure excludes volunteering and life-sustaining activities (e.g. personal care, eating, sleeping, visiting doctor).

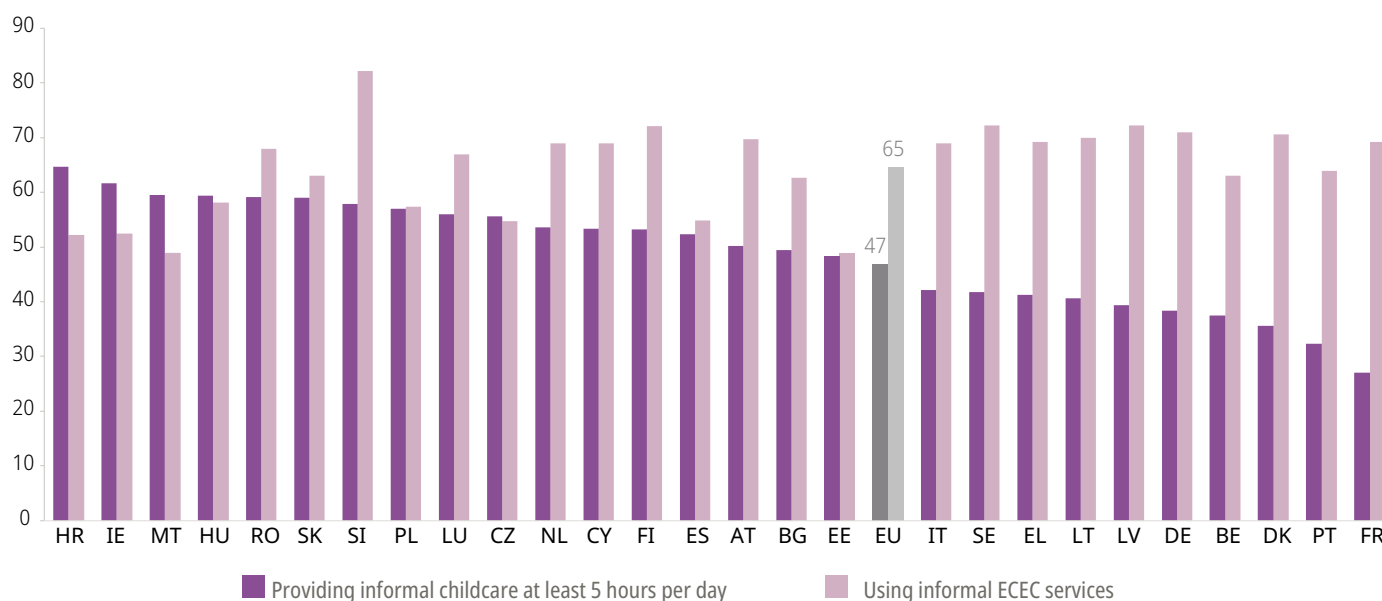
The unequal sharing of childcare responsibilities between women and men is a significant factor contributing to gender inequalities in the labour market, exacerbating the gender pay gap and gender pension gap ⁽⁶⁾. In the EU, 70 % of women with childcare responsibilities work in paid employment, compared to 84 % of men. Moreover, women with childcare responsibilities tend to work more frequently part-time ⁽⁷⁾ (38 %) than men (19 %), which can have long-term implications for their careers and financial prospects. Women caring for children are more likely to be stay-at-home parents ⁽⁸⁾ as their main occupation, with 11 % of women in this role compared to only 1 % of men. The unequal distribution of care responsibilities between women and men perpetuates beliefs and expectations that caregiving is primarily a women’s responsibility. It might also limit women’s opportunities for professional and career advancement, economic independence and work-life balance.

Figure 2. Employment status of parents, by gender (% , EU, 2022)



NB: Childcare refers to informal care for children under 12 years old.

Figure 3. Providing childcare for at least 5 hours per day to own children under 6 years old and use of ECEC services by Member State (% , EU-27, 2022)



NB: For Luxembourg and Malta the estimates of formal ECEC services use are based on 20 to 49 sample observations.

⁽⁶⁾ European Commission, ‘Women’s situation in the labour market’, 2022, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/women-labour-market-work-life-balance/womens-situation-labour-market_en#care-responsibilities-and-the-care-strategy.
⁽⁷⁾ If respondents worked less than 36 hours per week, they are classified as part-time workers in accordance with Eurostat guidelines.
⁽⁸⁾ This refers to parents who as their main occupation perform domestic tasks. Performing domestic tasks includes running a private household, including bringing up children, and may refer to people who see themselves primarily as a housewife or househusband, even if they also have a job, receive a pension or are retired.



The struggle to juggle: most LTC carers are of a working age and find it difficult to manage their care responsibilities and maintain a work-life balance

In the EU, an estimated 52 million people provide informal LTC, and informal LTC caregivers account for almost 80 % of long-term carers⁽⁹⁾. EIGE's survey shows that every fifth woman and man provide informal LTC (22 % and 21 %, respectively). A significant proportion of carers (42 % of women and 38 % of men) provide LTC on a daily basis (see Figure 4). Most of the carers are of working age, under 54 years old (73 % of women and 75 % of men), which might impede their ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Some carers provide LTC and have the added responsibility of caring for their children under the age of 12. In the EU, around 27 % of women and 31 % of men who provide LTC also care for their own children simultaneously. Such dual caring responsibilities add to the challenges carers face as they try to balance their caring roles with other aspects of their lives.

Examining the division of LTC tasks within partnerships, women predominantly shoulder the responsibility for all LTC tasks. For instance, approximately 41 % of women bear primary responsibility for providing the most demanding personal and emotional care compared to 16 % for men. These findings underscore the prevailing unequal division of caregiving responsibilities between women and men in relationships.

Figure 4. Share of carers providing LTC daily, by gender (% , EU-27, 2022)

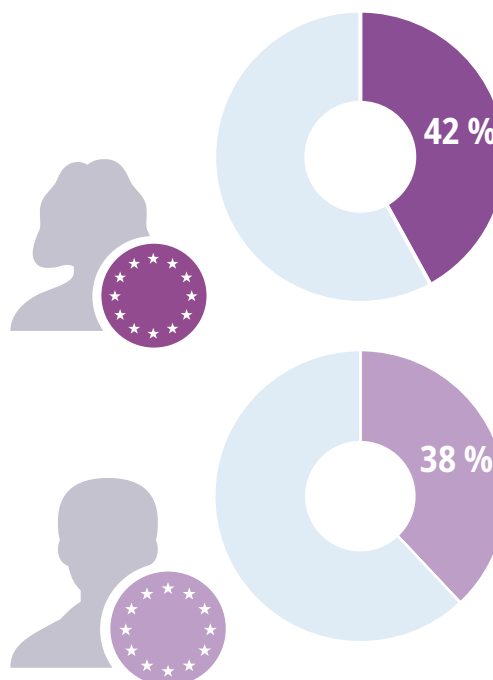


Figure 5. Providing LTC for at least 4 days a week, by Member State (% , 2022)



NB: For Luxembourg the estimates are based on 20 to 49 sample observations.

⁽⁹⁾ European Commission, *Study on exploring the incidence and costs of informal long-term care in the EU*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2021, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/06382>.

Men who provide LTC allocate more time to leisure activities than women, with 36 % of men spending 1 to 3 hours a day on leisure, whereas 29 % of women have the same opportunity. More than a half of women (55 %) dedicate approximately 1 hour a day to leisure activities, in contrast to 39 % of men. This disparity underscores the impact of women’s primary responsibility for care, leaving them with limited personal leisure time.

Among LTC carers, 58 % of women and 65 % of men are employed. Every 10th LTC carer is retired (10 % of women and 11 % of men). This highlights the importance of recognising the contributions of older adults who provide LTC care, even after retirement. Among women who provide LTC, a substantial 42 % work part-time compared to 29 % of men. Part-time rates among both women and men LTC providers are generally higher than among parents engaged in childcare, which hints towards high demands of such care and major issues in accessing formal LTC services.

Lifting the load: formal care services in the EU

Access to ECEC services ⁽¹⁰⁾ and LTC services ⁽¹¹⁾ is key to reducing the burden of highly time intensive informal care, typically provided by women. Despite the fast-increasing demands, they are still not affordable, available or accessible for many people. The unmet needs particularly affect women, who are often responsible for providing care that could otherwise be provided through formal care services.

Formal childcare services give mothers of children under 6 years old time to take up career opportunities

According to EIGE’s survey, 64 % of women and 66 % of men with children below the age of 6 use ECEC services. Lone parents use ECEC services slightly more often than parents in partnerships. Moreover, parents with higher incomes ⁽¹²⁾ are more likely to use ECEC services than those with lower incomes.

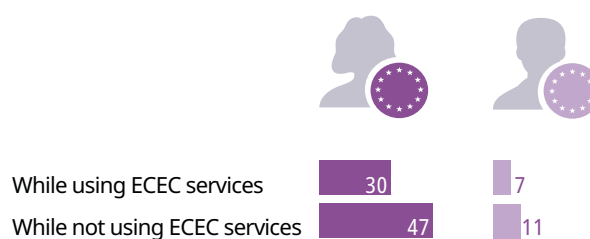
The use of ECEC services has a significant impact on parents’ time, particularly mothers with children under the age of 6 (see Figure 6). When mothers do not use ECEC services, 47 % of them spend more than 10 hours a day on childcare, whereas for mothers who do use ECEC services, the proportion of spending more than 10 hours a day on childcare decreases to 30 %.

The use of ECEC services can also impact the working lives of parents. Among parents with children under the age of 6 who spend more than 10 hours a day on childcare and do not use ECEC services, only 55 % of women are in employment,

while 72 % of men in similar circumstances are in work. When parents use ECEC services, their employment status undergoes a significant change, with 70 % of women and 86 % of men being employed. Many of the mothers of children under the age of 6 who do not use ECEC services and who are not in employment are stay-at-home parents (24 %). This high percentage highlights the challenges they face in balancing caregiving and participation in the labour market. This gender imbalance not only reinforces traditional gender roles but also limits women’s opportunities in the labour market ⁽¹³⁾.

Most women who use ECEC services for children under the age of 6 do so for 3 to 5 hours per day (33 %). This suggests that ECEC services effectively alleviate the time-consuming burden of childcare on mothers, enhance their employment opportunities and contribute to a better work–life balance.

Figure 6. Parents of children under the age of 6 spending more than 10 hours daily on childcare, by gender (%), EU-27, 2022



⁽¹⁰⁾ ECEC services include kindergartens, creches and day-care centres. In the context of ECEC services, the data covers children aged 0–5 years.

⁽¹¹⁾ Formal LTC services include residential LTC facilities, day-care centres, care services provided by home-based personal care workers, healthcare assistants and live-in carers.

⁽¹²⁾ The survey measured income in deciles adjusted to the corresponding national income deciles of each Member State. The bottom three income deciles were classified as low income, the top three as high income and the middle four as middle income.

⁽¹³⁾ European Commission, ‘Women’s situation in the labour market’, 2022.

The revised Barcelona targets

The Barcelona targets for participation in ECEC aim to remove disincentives to women from joining the labour market and improve child development, particularly for children in vulnerable situations or from disadvantaged backgrounds, by increasing formal childcare provision. The revised targets are set to be achieved by 2030. Firstly, Member States should provide high-quality ECEC services for at least 45 % of children under 3 years old. Secondly, at least 96 % of children between the age of 3 years old and the starting age of compulsory primary education should receive ECEC.

Many parents rely on unpaid help from family, friends or others to manage childcare responsibilities. **Around 54 % of women and 56 % of men received unpaid help from relatives, friends or other people looking after their children under 12 years old in the last 12 months.** Employed mothers of children under the age of 6 are more likely to rely on unpaid help (60 %) than non-employed mothers of very young children (51 %), highlighting the difficulties many mothers face in combining work and caring responsibilities. Parents of young children who use ECEC services rely on unpaid help more often than parents who do not use these services (see Figure 7). This may be related to employment status, as a higher number of parents who do not use ECEC services are not in employment. This is especially the case for mothers, with 39 % of women not using ECEC services not being employed compared to 30 % of women who use formal childcare services. Women who do not use ECEC services for their children are also more likely to be stay-at-home parents. The fact that parents using ECEC services rely more on unpaid help than those who do not use services indicates that even when using care services, parents still need additional support from their networks to manage their childcare responsibilities. These findings suggest that ECEC services may not be adequate to meet parents' needs.

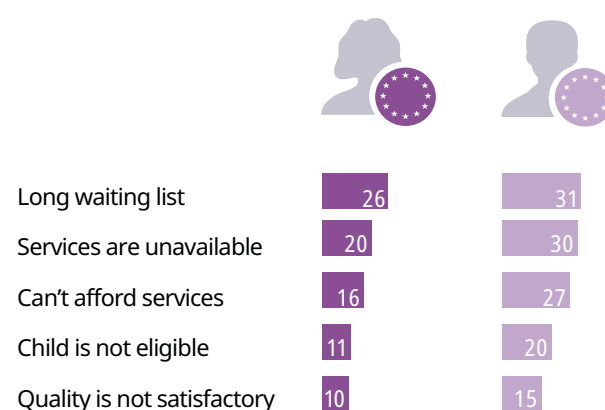
Figure 7. Parents of children under 6 years old relying on unpaid help from family, friends or others, by gender (% , EU-27, 2022)



Accessing all necessary ECEC services for their children remains challenging for many parents ⁽¹⁴⁾. **Among parents who use ECEC services, about 14 % of women and 10 % of men caring for children under the age of 6 cannot access all the services they need.** The main unmet needs voiced by parents include long waiting lists and the unavailability of required services (see Figure 8).

These findings underline the persistent gaps and challenges in the accessibility, availability, affordability and quality of formal care services, significantly affecting parents' ability to meet their children's care needs and reduce their care burden. Addressing these issues, the European care strategy recognises the crucial role of expanding care services and emphasises the need to improve their quality, affordability and accessibility simultaneously. It stresses that simply increasing the availability of care services is not enough.

Figure 8. Reasons for parents not being able to use all ECEC services for their children, by gender (% , EU-27, 2022)



NB: Figure refers to parents of children under 6 years old.



⁽¹⁴⁾ The data on the ability to access all formal childcare services parents needed refers only to parents who are using childcare services.

Every third long-term carer is unable to afford formal care services

Formal care services play a crucial role in addressing the growing demands for LTC due to ageing societies and women’s increasing participation in the labour market, offering valuable support to both caregivers and care receivers. These services help alleviate the burden of care responsibilities, facilitate a healthier work–life balance and provide professional assistance and care. In addition, high-quality and affordable LTC empowers older people by helping them to maintain their autonomy and live with dignity. EIGE’s survey shows a gender disparity in the use of formal LTC services, with a **higher proportion of men (73 %) compared to women (61 %) carers whose main care recipient uses care services at least 1 day a week.**

Figure 9. Carers providing LTC daily, by gender (% , EU-27, 2022)



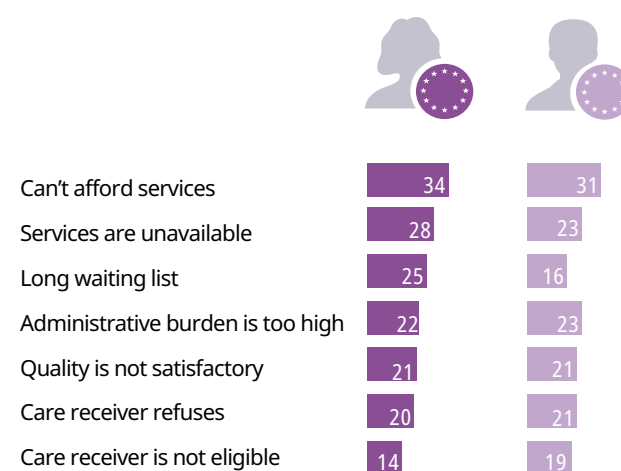
The employment rates of LTC carers are lower than the overall average. This may be attributed to the fact that many retired individuals provide LTC to their partners or friends. For women carers, in particular, the ability to rely on LTC services significantly impacts their employment status. When their main care recipient uses LTC services, women are more likely to be employed, with 60 % of them being employed compared to 52 % when their main care recipient do not use LTC services. This suggests that accessing formal LTC services can facilitate women’s participation in the workforce.

Many LTC carers rely on unpaid help from family, friends or others to manage care responsibilities; more men (58 %) than women (50 %) tend to use unpaid help with their LTC responsibilities. Employed LTC carers (54 % of women and 61 % of men) tend to rely more on unpaid help than those not in employment (46 % of women and 51 % of men), which indicates difficulties in combining work with care responsibilities.

The use of LTC services is still relatively low among both women and men, the sector is generally facing increasing demands and is relatively underdeveloped in many countries. As EIGE’s survey shows, many caregivers and care recipients in the EU still struggle to access the services they need. **Approximately 27 % of women and 24 % of men who provide LTC and use formal care services reported difficulties accessing all the required LTC services for their care recipient.** Affordability is the main barrier, with 34 % of women and 31 % of men saying they cannot afford

formal care services (see Figure 10). This percentage increases for carers residing in sparsely populated areas, indicating that rural and remote regions with low population density face particular challenges in accessing affordable LTC services in the EU. Most LTC caregivers who cannot afford to pay for formal care services have a lower income, 45 % of women and 27 % of men, representing a large gender gap. The lack of affordable services is often due to patchy and limited social protection coverage for formal LTC services in the Member States⁽¹⁵⁾. The findings highlight the multiple obstacles that hinder carers from accessing formal LTC services, exacerbating the strain on carers and care recipients. Addressing these barriers is crucial to ensure that carers and care recipients have access to affordable, high-quality LTC services, regardless of their location or specific circumstances.

Figure 10. Carers’ reasons for not being able to access all LTC services, by gender (% , EU-27, 2022)



Access to affordable, high-quality LTC

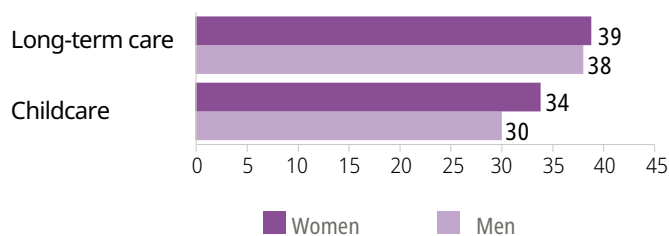
As part of the European care strategy, the Council of the European Union adopted a recommendation on access to affordable, high-quality LTC. It sets out a comprehensive policy framework to guide investment and reforms for LTC and several additional support measures. Moreover, it aims to close the territorial gaps in the availability of and access to LTC, particularly in rural and depopulating areas, ensuring compliance with quality criteria and standards across all LTC settings and promoting autonomy and independent living.

⁽¹⁵⁾ European Commission, Commission communication on the European care strategy, COM(2022) 440 final, 2022

Why carers need a better work–life balance

Providing informal care can have far-reaching impacts on carers, affecting their work, leisure and mental health. Caregiving responsibilities often require significant time, physical and emotional efforts, which can pose challenges for carers in maintaining employment or advancing in their careers. Acknowledging and addressing these effects is crucial for supporting caregivers in their caregiving roles and promoting their overall well-being.

Figure 11. Carers experiencing difficulties in combining paid work with care responsibilities at least 4 days a week, by gender (% , EU-27, 2022)



NB: Childcare refers to informal care for children under 12 years of age.

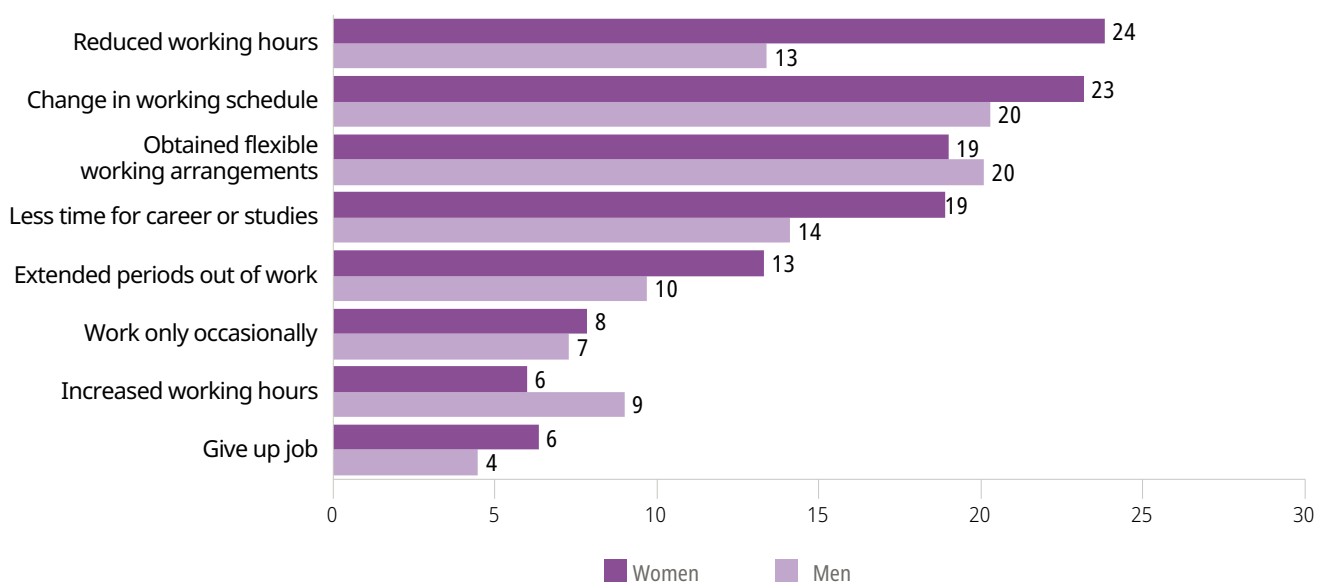
More mothers tend to adjust their working lives for care responsibilities to the detriment of their job prospects

As EIGE's survey shows, 34 % of women and 30 % of men with children under the age of 12 experience difficulties combining paid work with childcare responsibilities at least 4 days a week (see [Figure 11](#)). Lone parents are more likely to experience work–life conflict due to childcare, with 39 % of lone mothers and 43 % of lone fathers finding it difficult to combine paid work for at least 4 days a week ⁽¹⁶⁾.

Work–life balance conflicts often also lead to employment-related costs, such as reduced work hours, absenteeism and slower career progression. Many parents have to change their working hours in some ways to accommodate childcare responsibilities, for instance, by working during atypical hours such as early mornings or evenings (see [Figure 12](#)). Significantly more women than men had to reduce their working time because of childcare demands. Some parents took long periods of unpaid leave or career breaks, were only able to work part-time or had to stop working altogether.

Such patterns have long-term consequences for carers' financial security and well-being due to lost earnings and reduced social security contributions. They directly affect women's economic independence, which contributes to the gender pay gap and gender pension gap. Moreover, these work–life balance conflicts can impede career progression, as individuals who work fewer hours may have limited opportunities for promotions, skill development and professional growth.

Figure 12. Impact of caring responsibilities on working life of parents, by gender (% , EU-27, 2022)



NB: Childcare refers to informal care for children under 12 years of age.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Overall, women constitute a larger proportion of lone parents. In EIGE's survey, 56 % of lone parents were women and 44 % were men.

Access to care services put work–life balance tensions at ease

The demands of providing LTC can pose challenges for caregivers in balancing their paid work with their caregiving responsibilities. Around 39 % of women and 38 % of men who provide informal LTC have difficulties combining paid work with caring responsibilities at least 4 days a week (see Figure 11).

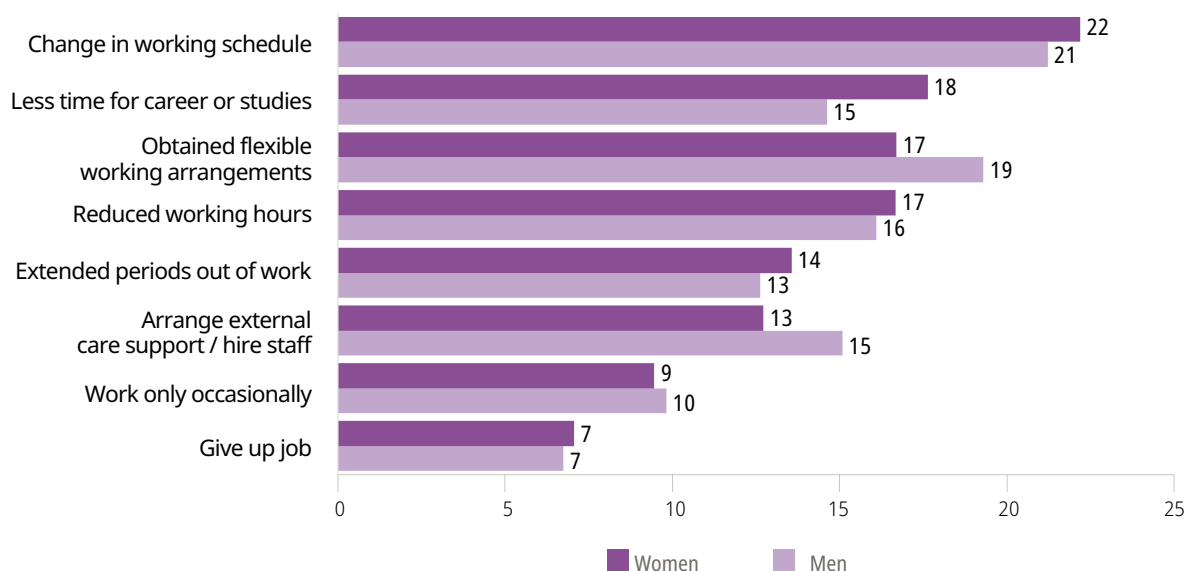
When carers use formal LTC services, the percentage of individuals facing daily work–life conflicts decreases.

Around 21 % of women and 17 % of men who use formal LTC services experience daily work–life conflicts due to their caregiving responsibilities, compared to 28 % of women and 21 % of men who do not use LTC services. These findings highlight the potential benefits of accessing formal LTC services in reducing work–life conflicts for carers.



A significant number of LTC carers struggle to reach work–life balance, resulting in the need to make adjustments to their working hours (see Figure 13). About 22 % of women and 21 % of men who are LTC caregivers have had to change their working hours because of their caregiving responsibilities. These figures are slightly higher for carers using formal LTC services, suggesting that even with external support, informal caregiving still poses a challenge to their work–life balance. Moreover, a notable percentage of carers had to reduce their working hours or had less time for their career or studies. To address the demands of caregiving, many individuals have sought flexible working arrangements, such as working from home, to better reconcile their work and care duties. Furthermore, many carers have resorted to taking extended periods of time off work, such as unpaid leave or career breaks. The challenges of combining work and care have led some carers to stop working altogether, as around 7 % of both female and male carers have had to give up their job due to the demands of their caring role.

Figure 13. Impact of caring responsibilities on working life of LTC carers, by gender (% , EU-27, 2022)



The work–life balance directive

The work–life balance directive promotes a more equal sharing of care responsibilities. It introduces non-transferable parental leave and flexible work arrangements for both women and men, with a specific focus on encouraging men’s participation. The directive also emphasises that carers exercising these rights should not face unfavourable treatment or discrimination at work. To ensure effective

implementation, it is crucial to raise awareness among workers about their new rights and encourage employers to adopt policies that favour a work–life balance, considering the evolving (tele)working arrangements. Member States were required to transpose the work–life balance directive into national law by August 2022.

Recommendations for the European Commission

- 1 Ensure that the objectives of the work–life balance directive and the European care strategy are integrated into relevant policy initiatives and the framework for the EU's long-term budget. Consistently monitor and evaluate the implementation progress.
- 2 Ensure the collection of EU-wide gender statistics on unpaid care, work–life balance and access to formal care services. Set ambitious quantitative targets at the EU level to foster increased coverage of LTC services at a national level.

Recommendations for the European Commission and Member States

- 1 Strengthen, earmark and increase investment and funding in formal care services to improve quality, accessibility and affordability, particularly in areas with limited access, such as rural and remote regions. Make better use of funding opportunities for care infrastructure, inclusive labour markets and work–life balance offered by the Recovery and Resilience Facility fund, the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund Plus, and explicitly connect investments to gender equality objectives.
- 2 Take targeted measures to challenge traditional gender roles and actively promote the equal sharing of caring responsibilities and equal engagement in paid work of both women and men in all their diversity. Operationalise these priorities into all relevant actions in the areas of care, labour market and social services.

Recommendation for Member States

- 1 Take measures to transpose the work–life balance directive and implement the Council recommendations on ECEC and on affordable high-quality LTC. Ensure that the measures achieve gender equality objectives and reach relevant beneficiaries from a gender perspective.



Read more about

- > [EIGE's Gender Equality Index](#)
- > [Gender Statistics Database](#)
- > [Gender Mainstreaming Platform](#)

European Institute for Gender Equality

We are an independent centre and the primary source for information on gender equality in the European Union. We contribute to making the European Union become a Union of Equality, where women and men, girls and boys in all their diversity are free to pursue their chosen path in life, have equal opportunities to thrive, and can equally participate in and lead our societies.

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European Institute for Gender Equality
Gedimino pr. 16
LT01103
Vilnius
LITHUANIA
Tel. +370 52157444
Email: eige.sec@eige.europa.eu

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