

# Gender inequalities in care and pay in the EU

## Key findings

- There is a direct link between the unequal division of unpaid care in households and gender inequalities in the labour market.
- The bulk of unpaid care work is done by women, and this hinders their access to employment.
- The paid care sector has a large share of women employees who are often in low-income, precarious jobs, with few career prospects.
- Lower earnings and insecure job contracts usually make it more convenient for women to opt out of paid employment and care for their families, compared to men.
- Most countries with a more equal sharing of unpaid care between women and men, tend to have higher employment rates for women and lower gender gaps in earnings.
- The COVID-19 crisis in Europe has shown how essential care work is for the functioning of society and the economy. It reminds us why we need a more equal sharing of this vital, but often undervalued function in society.

## Unpaid care is still a 'woman's job'

Across the EU, gender inequalities in unpaid care work are striking. Women, regardless of whether they are employed, take on most of the unpaid care work at home. When considering the entire EU population, data shows that 92 % of EU women are regular carers – meaning that they provide unpaid care at least several days a week – as opposed to 68 % of men <sup>(1)</sup>.

On a daily basis, 81 % of women and 48 % of men provide care. This rises to 88 % for mothers and 64 % for fathers of children under 18 years.

### Unpaid care work also high for employed women

The same pattern of uneven care provision appears among employed people. Almost all employed women in the EU (94 %) are involved in unpaid care several times a week, compared to 70 % of employed men <sup>(2)</sup>.

Women's participation in unpaid care is very high, standing at over 85 % in all Member States when considering both daily and weekly engagement. However, there are variations across countries. These are due to big differences in men's engagement in care, which ranges from 41 % in Cyprus to 90 % in Denmark.

The most unequal sharing of daily care work happens in Greece, Cyprus and Poland, with women spending twice the amount of time on it, compared to men. In Denmark, Sweden and Slovenia, there is a more equitable sharing of care (Figure 1).

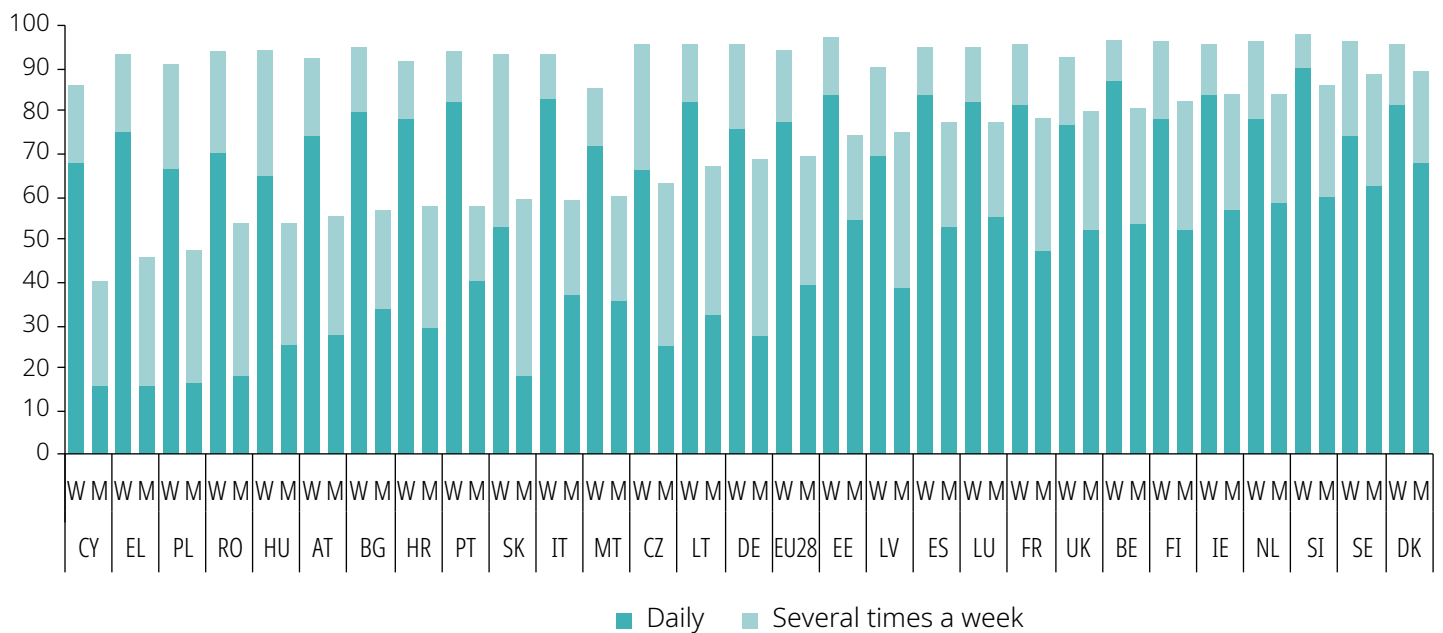


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<sup>(1)</sup> European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), *European Quality of Life Survey 2016 – Quality of life, quality of public services, and quality of society*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2018 (<https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2017/fourth-european-quality-of-life-survey-overview-report#tab-01>).

<sup>(2)</sup> Eurofound, *Sixth European Working Conditions Survey: 2015*, 2015 (<https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-working-conditions-surveys/sixth-european-working-conditions-survey-2015>).

Figure 1. Employed population participating in unpaid care work, by gender (% , 15 +, EU-28, 2015)



Source: European Institute for Gender Equality's (EIGE) elaboration based on Eurofound's *Sixth European Working Conditions Survey: 2015*.  
NB: Low reliability for men in Greece, Cyprus, Poland and Slovakia.

## Women in part-time or temporary jobs do more unpaid care work

Job status also affects gender inequalities in unpaid care work and pay. Women working part-time dedicate 1 more hour per day to unpaid care compared to women in full-time employment, but men working part-time do not<sup>(3)</sup>.

Women and men with caring responsibilities are more likely to work in precarious and informal jobs<sup>(4)</sup>. Women in temporary jobs, or with no formal contract, spend twice the amount of time on unpaid care, compared to women with permanent jobs. Gender inequalities in care work are greater for work-

ers in non-standard jobs than for those in permanent ones. Low-qualified women spend more time on daily care than women in high-qualified jobs<sup>(5)</sup>.

Women often use part-time work as a strategy to balance work and family responsibilities. Yet this negatively affects their earnings and future pensions, not only because it means fewer working hours, but also because hourly wages are lower than for equivalent full-time jobs<sup>(6)</sup>. In addition to this, women are also more likely to take career breaks due to caring responsibilities. In the EU, 29 % of women say that the main reason for working part-time is because of caring responsibilities, compared to only 6 % of men<sup>(7)</sup>.

(3) Eurofound, *Sixth European Working Conditions Survey: 2015*, 2015 (<https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-working-conditions-surveys/sixth-european-working-conditions-survey-2015>).

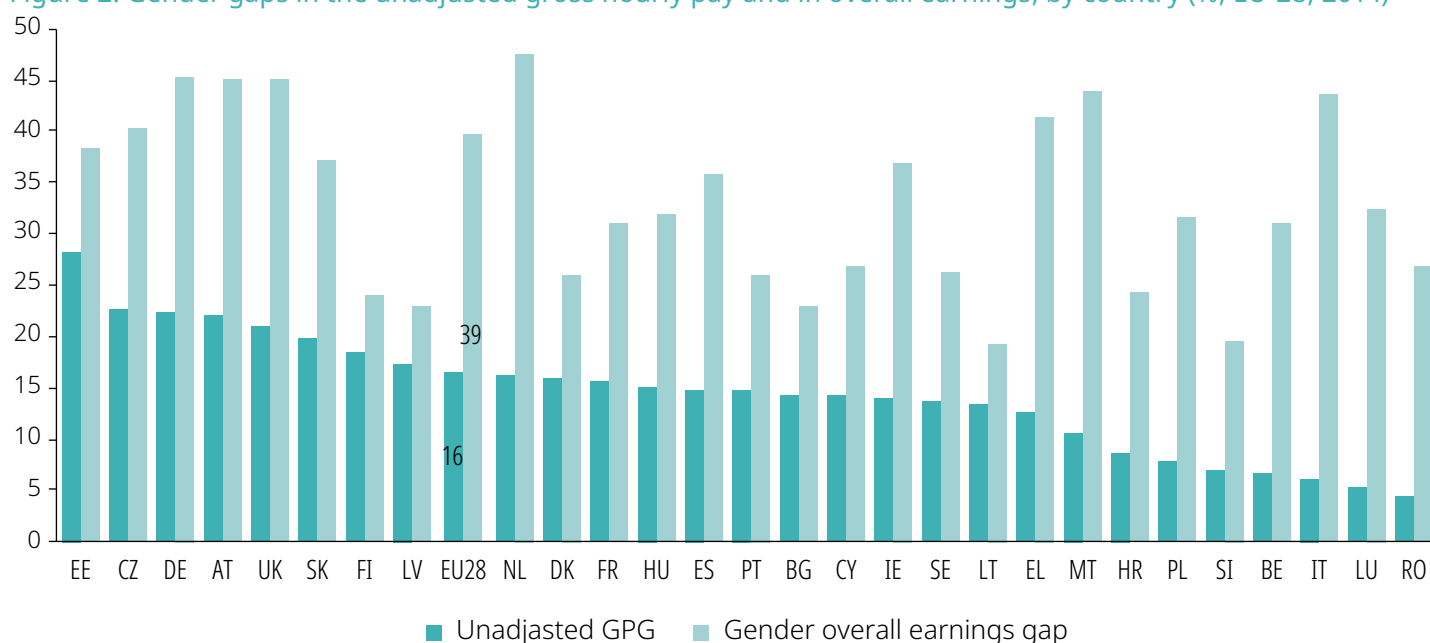
(4) International Labour Office, *Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work*, International Labour Organization, Geneva, 2018 ([https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS\\_633135/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_633135/lang-en/index.htm)).

(5) Eurofound, *Sixth European Working Conditions Survey: 2015*, 2015 (<https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-working-conditions-surveys/sixth-european-working-conditions-survey-2015>).

(6) Eurostat, *Reconciliation between work, private and family life in the European Union*, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg, 2009 (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-statistical-books/-/KS-78-09-908>).

(7) Eurostat, 'Why do people work part-time?', 2019 (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20190918-1>).

Figure 2. Gender gaps in the unadjusted gross hourly pay and in overall earnings, by country (% , EU-28, 2014)



Source: Eurostat online database (earn\_gr\_gpgr2; teqges01).

## Inequalities in care reduce job prospects

Gender inequalities in caring responsibilities at home have a direct impact on women's opportunities in the job market. A clear indicator of these inequalities is the **unadjusted gender pay gap**. It measures the difference between the average gross hourly earnings of women and men employees, and it currently stands at 16 % across the EU. A second indicator is the **gender gap in overall earnings**, which takes gender gaps in employment rate and working time into account. It gives an even clearer picture of this divide and is much higher across all countries, reaching almost 40 % at EU level <sup>(8)</sup> (Figure 2).

It is useful to look at these two measures together to get a full picture of what is happening in certain countries. For example, the gender pay gap in Romania (4.5 %), Italy (6.1 %) and Malta (10.6 %) is low, falling below the EU average. This is due to a low full-time employment rate for women in these countries, and the fact that the few women who are in employment tend to be highly educated and earn well. For this reason, the overall earnings gap in these three countries is much higher – respectively 26.8 %, 43.7 % and 43.9 % – as it also considers the low full-time employment rates for women.

## Gender segregation is one of the root causes of gender pay gaps

The gender pay gap arises because women are concentrated into low-paid jobs and sectors due to socio-cultural expectations. There are two types of gender segregation in the workplace: vertical and horizontal.

**Vertical segregation** describes the concentration of women at the bottom of an organisational hierarchy and of men at the top. It reflects the career obstacles women face, which prevent them from reaching highly paid positions.

For example, in the education and healthcare sectors, women are under-represented at management level, despite making up the majority of the workforce. At EU level, for 1 000 workers employed in the education sector, there are 55 men in management positions, but only 32 women. In healthcare, there are 47 men managers and only 26 women managers per 1 000 workers <sup>(9)</sup>. Vertical segregation is higher in these sectors, compared to the overall economy.

<sup>(8)</sup> Eurostat, 'Gender pay gap statistics', in *Statistics Explained*, 2020 (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/pdfscache/6776.pdf>).

<sup>(9)</sup> EIGE's calculations based on EU-LFS 2018 microdata.

**Horizontal segregation** is the concentration of women or men in certain occupations. It reflects the traditional division of roles in the domestic sphere, which extends to the job market. For example, caring is stereotypically regarded as women's work. Due to this expectation, women tend to work in 'traditionally feminine' occupations such as childcare, care for older people, teaching and nursing. These jobs are paid significantly less compared to sectors dominated by men, such as information technology. The care industry is dominated by women. They make up 37 million of the 49 million workers (76 %) in the EU. The share of women ranges from 72 % in education to 89 % in domestic work, and is even higher in those jobs that are considered 'women's only', such as pre-primary education, nursing and midwifery, secretarial and personal care work, and domestic and related help <sup>(10)</sup>.

This double gender segregation in the labour market, combined with a high rate of part-time employment for women, has the effect of segregating women into care roles in the home. This further reinforces the uneven share of caring responsibilities between women and men.

### More equal sharing of care reduces gender pay gaps

One way to reduce the gender pay gap is with a more equal sharing of unpaid care. Women's disproportionate burden of



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unpaid care work affects and hinders their participation in the labour market. Care responsibilities keep some 7.7 million women out of the labour market, compared to just 450,000 men <sup>(11)</sup>.

Among women who are employed, 18 % report a reduction in their working hours due to childcare responsibilities, compared to 3 % of employed men. <sup>(12)</sup>.

In countries with low inequalities in time spent caring for children, grandchildren, older people and people with disabilities, the employment rate for women tends to be higher and gender pay gaps lower.

## The use of care services can balance unpaid care at home

*So in terms of all of the housework, I externalise it by bringing somebody in. It was disapproved of greatly in my family because 'Oh you're only working part-time, you're at home, why can't you do it?'* (Woman, Ireland).

One of the main ways that families across the EU deal with inequalities in care provision is to externalise or outsource unpaid care activities to other people and/or paid services. EIGE's findings from focus group discussions <sup>(13)</sup> highlighted that the use of care services can have a positive impact on family dynamics and contribute to a reduction of gender imbalances in caring responsibilities. In some cases, it also seems to avoid or resolve conflicts about who is in charge of specific care-related tasks.

There are different factors influencing families' decisions to use external care services. These include costs, availability of places, quality of care, accessibility, opening hours and location. Another factor that was reported mostly by women, as a deterrent to use care services, was the 'guilt' they felt about outsourcing the care workload, which is traditionally regarded as a family responsibility. Men did not seem to have the same feeling and found it easier to use care services compared to women. EIGE's findings show that in countries where the general expectation is that a women's most important role is to take care of her home and family, the use of childcare services is low. This is the case in Czechia, Poland and Slovakia.

<sup>(10)</sup> Eurostat, 'Employment by sex, age and economic activity (from 2008 onwards, NACE Rev. 2) - 1 000 [lfsa\_egan2]', 2020 ([https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=lfsa\\_egan2&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=lfsa_egan2&lang=en)).

<sup>(11)</sup> EIGE elaboration of ISSP 2012 data.

<sup>(12)</sup> EIGE calculations based on Eurostat, EU-LFS ad hoc module on reconciliation between work and family life, lfsa\_18ceffed

<sup>(13)</sup> One pilot focus group conducted in Croatia and another 10 in Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Finland.

## The division of household work usually follows traditional gender roles

In many cases, individuals describe an equal sharing of care activities in their household, but when looking closely at the type of household tasks, they follow clear gender roles. In many families, women usually do the housework and provide personal care (to children, older people and people with disabilities), while men usually take care of gardening, do-it-yourself (DIY) work and more physically intense outdoor tasks.

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*My partner feels very comfortable with his father role and feels responsible; albeit we share the main care work tasks nearly equally, it's me who is completely responsible for the so called mental load of organising care work (Woman, Germany).*

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Couples also report that women still tend to take on the mental load of organising care, with women's skills and efficiency used as the main arguments to justify this allocation of responsibilities.



## What can policymakers do?

EU funds such as the European Structural Funds and the European Regional Development Fund can support Member States' investment in care services and infrastructure, which contribute to better work-life balance and lower employment and care gaps. To support the integration of gender equality in the EU funds, EIGE has developed a tool that outlines financing opportunities for measures to support working parents and carers, in all their diversity, in today's EU. This is in line with the EU gender equality strategy 2020–2025, which highlights the need for EU funds to support work-life balance measures.

### 1. Increase the availability, affordability and quality of care services for children, older people and people with disabilities by promoting large-scale investments in the care sector.

This would help to solve the care gaps and would create new jobs, not only for those directly employed in the care sector, but also for those working in related sectors, such as people producing medical equipment, cleaners, delivery drivers and hospitality workers. The COVID-19 pandemic has also shown just how essential care jobs are for the well-functioning of society and the economy, and why it is so important to invest wisely in the care sector.



### 2. Strengthen the legal framework and establish binding measures to ensure greater pay transparency.

Compulsory wage reporting by companies is one measure that can address the lack of information for employees on pay or wage structures within an organisation. The European Commission is working on the proposal for a [directive on pay transparency for women and men](#), with the aim to introduce binding pay transparency measures, make pay systems more transparent, improve public understanding of the relevant legal concepts and strengthen enforcement mechanisms.

Other initiatives, such as raising awareness about important legal concepts, such as 'pay', 'same work' and 'work of equal value' would also be a step forward. Another important meas-

ure is gender-neutral job classification and evaluation systems, which determine pay and bonuses. The value of work should be assessed and compared on the basis of objective criteria, such as professional requirements, responsibility, work undertaken and the nature of tasks involved. This is needed to combat stereotypes and prejudices with regard to women's work.

### 3. Combat both horizontal and vertical gender segregation in the labour market.

Tackle horizontal segregation with measures to not only attract more women into fields dominated by men (such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics and information and communications technology) but also to attract more men into the care sector. One way to do this would be to define a standard in terms of qualifications and career progression opportunities for the care sector. This would help to recognise the complexity of these jobs and better compensate their value.

Another crucial step is to recognise skills gained through care work, both paid and unpaid. This can support informal carers, especially women transitioning to other jobs in the labour market. The EU gender equality strategy 2020–2025 calls for the European Commission to present the updated skills agenda for Europe and to propose a Council recommendation on vocational education and training, addressing gender balance in the labour market and gender stereotypes in education and training<sup>(14)</sup>.

Tackle vertical segregation with measures to address the under-representation of women in key decision-making positions in most sectors of the labour market. For example, the EU gender equality strategy 2020–2025 encourages the European Commission to adopt the 2012 proposal for a directive on improving the gender balance on corporate boards, which aims for a minimum of 40 % of non-executive members of the under-represented sex on company boards<sup>(15)</sup>.

EIGE regularly produces reports reviewing different areas of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), as requested by the presidencies of the Council of the European Union. This factsheet is based on the report *Gender inequalities in unpaid care work and on the labour market in the EU* (forthcoming), prepared at the request of the German Presidency. You can explore all of EIGE's previous BPfA reports and publications at <https://eige.europa.eu/beijing-platform-for-action>

<sup>(14)</sup> European Commission, 'Gender equality strategy 2020–2025', 2020 ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda\\_20\\_357](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_357)).

<sup>(15)</sup> European Parliament, Question for oral answer O-000123/2018 to the Council – Rule 128 – Subject: Women on boards directive proposal, 2018 ([https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/O-8-2018-000123\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/O-8-2018-000123_EN.html)).

#### European Institute for Gender Equality

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is the EU knowledge centre on gender equality. EIGE supports policymakers and all relevant institutions in their efforts to make equality between women and men a reality for all Europeans by providing them with specific expertise and comparable and reliable data on gender equality in Europe.

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