

Gender inequalities in care and pay in the EU



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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 50% of EU women are regular carers – meaning that they provide unpaid care at least several days a week – as opposed to 48% of men (1).

On a daily basis, 81% of women and 49% of men provide care. This rises to 85% 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 (2).

Women's participation in unpaid care is very high, standing at over 45% in all Member States when considering both daily and weekly engagements. However, there are variations across countries. There are also big differences in men's engagement in care, which ranges from 41% in Estonia to 50% 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).



(1) European Commission (2019) Employment of caregivers (background), background study of 18 survey 2016 – Study of the working conditions and needs of adult dependants in the European Union, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&code=sdg10.5.2>

(2) Working Time Survey Working Conditions Survey 2015, 2016 (data provided by Eurostat) and the European Commission (2019) Study of the working conditions and needs of adult dependants in the European Union, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

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[EIGE's resources on Covid-19](#)



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