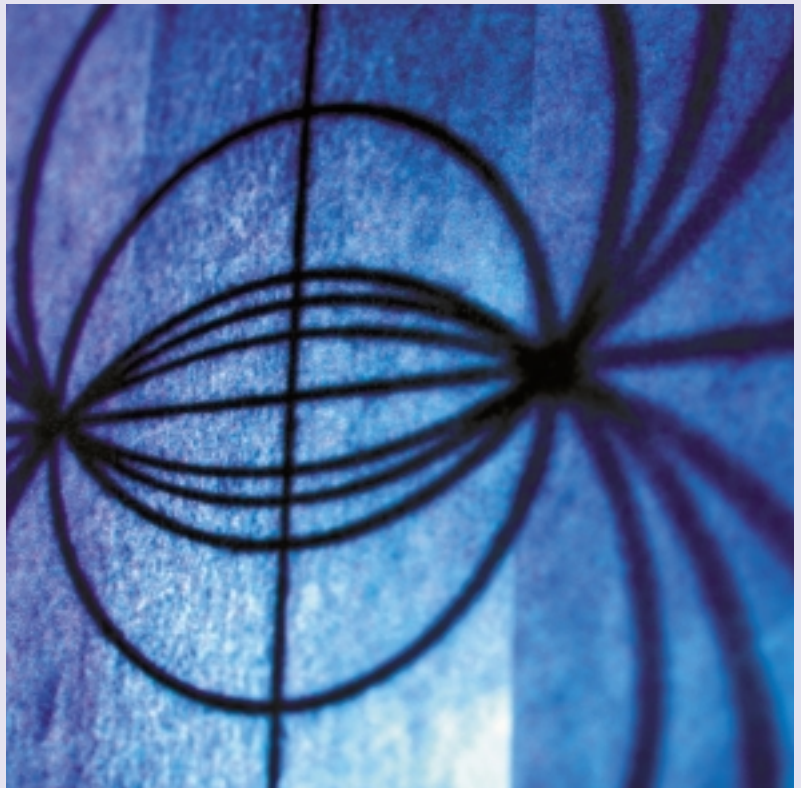




European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

# Quality of women's work and employment Tools for change



Foundation paper



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# Foreword

The aim behind the Foundation papers is to highlight knowledge and analysis from Foundation research over many years in the areas of employment, equal opportunities, social inclusion, time use and diversity. The objective is to make past, present and future work of the Foundation relevant and accessible in a concise format. The subject of each paper is linked to current social policy issues and provides therefore a timely contribution to the debate at European level.

Improving the quality of women's work and employment is the focus of this paper. It draws mainly, but not exclusively, on research carried out by the Foundation in this area over the past decade, which has highlighted both positive and negative change as well as persistent challenges faced by women in their working life. It also points to some tools and strategies identified by the Foundation's work which could enhance the quality of women's work and employment.

Raymond-Pierre Bodin  
Director

Eric Verborgh  
Deputy Director

# Introduction

The promotion of equal opportunities for women and men is an area of Community social policy that has received much attention in recent years. EU regulation in this field was initially designed to afford equal rights to individuals. In general, regulatory intervention has been successful whenever discriminatory rules have been challenged in court. The policy has failed, however, to address many aspects of gender inequality in the labour market (Fagan, 2002).

The Amsterdam Treaty has significantly strengthened the powers of the Community in the equal opportunities field. Following the entry into force of the new Treaty, the promotion of equality between women and men in the EU was included in most Community policies ('gender mainstreaming'). The Community has also now the power to take appropriate action to further combat discrimination on the grounds of sex. Last but not least, Community legislation no longer prohibits Member States from maintaining or adopting positive actions measures — i.e. providing for specific advantages in order to make it easier for the under-represented sex to pursue a vocational activity or to prevent or compensate for disadvantages in their professional careers. These new provisions have created a momentum for the revision of existing legislative policy, leading to the adoption of new pieces of legislation and the creation of programmes covering a wide range of issues related to equality in economic, social and civic life (European Commission, 2000a; 2000b).

In the face of high unemployment, raising employment rates has become one of the top priorities of EU decision makers (European Commission, 2002a). Gender equality has received an important impetus through the European Employment Strategy following the 1997 Luxembourg Jobs Summit. There has been an increasing awareness that women are important players in the shaping of the future EU labour market, constituting as they do the largest potential labour supply source (European Commission, 1999). At the Luxembourg Jobs Summit, equal opportunities was named as one of the so-called 'four pillars' of the European guidelines. The Lisbon European Council set out the ambitious target of raising women's employment rates in the Union to 60% by 2010.

The Stockholm European Council complemented the Lisbon target with an intermediate quantitative goal of 57% for 2005. The Nice European Council of December 2000 introduced the issue of 'quality' as the guiding thread of the social policy agenda, and in particular quality of work as an important objective of the European Employment Strategy. Evidence that family and

home care responsibilities play a key role in keeping women aged 25-54 years out of the labour market led also to the adoption of quantitative objectives concerning childcare facilities at the Barcelona European Summit in March 2002: 33% of children in the EU aged between 0-3 years and 90% children aged between 3-6 years should be covered by childcare facilities by 2010.

European labour markets in the last twenty-five years have been characterised by the growing participation of women. Over the period 1997-2001, it has been women who have benefited from the majority of the new jobs created and their employment rate has grown from 50.6% to 54.9 % (European Commission, 2002d). However, this renewed emphasis on job creation and mobilisation for an increased employment rate of women must not deflect attention from problems still remaining for women in the EU labour market in the area of job quality and working conditions (European Commission, 2002b, 2002d; European Parliament, 2002b).

The Foundation has a long-standing commitment to the issue of equal opportunities for women and men in their social and working life. In contrast to the usual traditional focus on labour market issues and formal approach to equality, the work from the Foundation has promoted a more holistic approach to gender equality, putting the emphasis on the equality of outcomes and the promotion of full equality in practice between men and women. The Foundation's research demonstrates that it is possible to raise EU employment rates by supporting women's wishes to stay in a job or enter and re-enter the labour market. It is clear from these findings that one of the most determining factors in this process is the quality of the jobs offered to women (European Foundation, 2002). This is not just a women's issue nor one that can be solved by measures targeted at women alone, since it requires a complete re-assessment of the value of women's work, serious measures to challenge the persistent segregation of the EU labour market, an improved gender division of paid and unpaid work and a better work-life balance for men as well as women.

This paper will present findings documenting the hurdles and achievements along the road towards a better quality of women's work and employment in Europe. Drawing on the Foundation's studies in the field, it will then point to some tools and strategies aimed at improving the quality of women's working life.

# Overview of Foundation research

The Foundation has over the years developed a genuine gender-sensitive approach to living and working conditions in Europe. The monitoring tools and analyses used systematically include gender indicators. They constitute a valuable source of information in relation to women's past and present social and working life in the European Union, as well as serving as a valuable pointer to issues and areas of potential change. Drawing on this wide range of resources, the first part of the paper is an overview of the main issues at the core of the Foundation's analysis of the quality of women's work and employment in the EU: the persistence of gender differences in labour market participation in terms of employment rates and working time patterns, gender segregation, differentials in pay and income between men and women, and the reconciliation of work and family life.

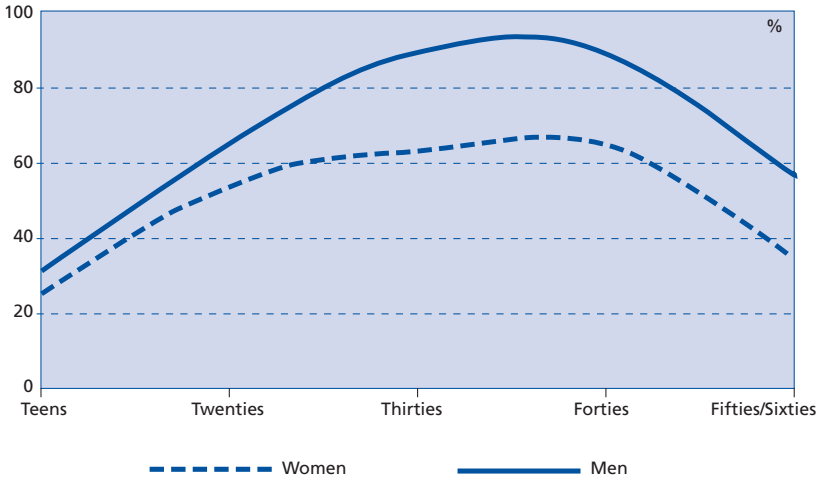
## Labour market participation of women

In charting the progress achieved in this field over the last two decades, the Foundation's work highlights two striking features of the EU labour market: women still have a lower employment participation rate and, when in employment, generally work shorter hours than men, particularly in countries with limited childcare and other measures to facilitate the combination of employment and family life.

### Employment rates

The Foundation's Employment Options of the Future survey confirms, in line with other EU sources, the existence of a gender participation gap of 20% on average in the EU. This survey, carried out in 1998, was based on a sample size of 30,556 interviews with economically active and inactive respondents aged 16-64 years in all EU Member States and Norway. Figure 1 shows that women are less likely overall to be in paid work than men during each age band. The figures reveal that the difference becomes most marked from the 20 to 40 age group, as the net entry rate of women slackens off during their twenties, while for men of similar age the employment rate continues to increase. As a result, as middle age approaches, almost all men (90%) are in paid work, but over a third of women are not. We observe that in later life both groups become less likely to be working in the paid economy, but the gap between them has narrowed.

**Figure 1 Participation in paid work, by age and gender**



Source: Atkinson, 2000. Based on data from the Employment Options of the Future Survey.

**Figure 2 The status of the non-employed (job seekers and non-participants)**



Source: Fagan et al, 2001. Based on data from the Employment Options of the Future Survey.

Figure 2 shows the reasons for non-employment by gender and age. It indicates that while unemployment is common for both men and women, domestic responsibilities figure highly among the reasons given by women

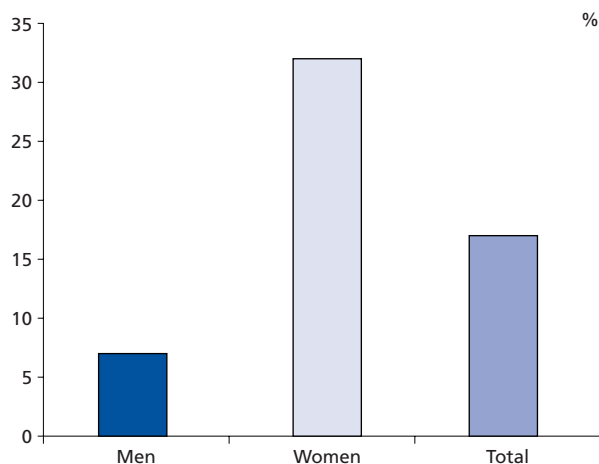
for their non-participation in the labour market. Just over one third of women in the 20-49 age group are not employed, and 70% of these are looking after their family and home. Of the 11% of men in this age group who are not employed, over half are unemployed and only 6% are looking after their home and family.

## Working time

While illustrating the progressive alignment of women's work patterns towards men's ones, the Foundation's European Working Conditions surveys, carried out every five years since 1990, underline the persistence of a significant gender difference in the volume of hours worked. The 2000 survey, based on face-to-face interviews in the Member States with over 21,700 workers aged 16-64 including the self-employed, reveals that when employed, women generally work shorter hours than men (Fagan, 2001). Men tend to work the longest working weeks (more than 45 hours).

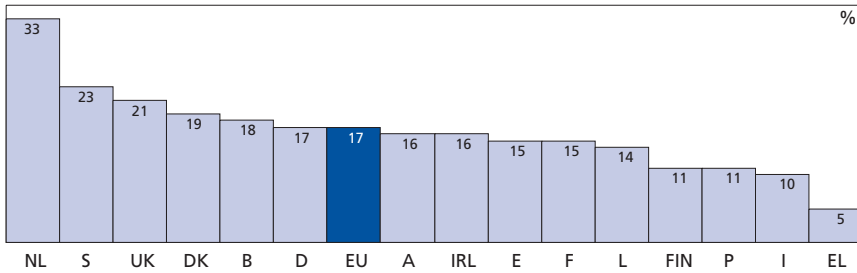
Figure 3 indicates that while 17% of workers interviewed work part time, this category includes 32% of women and only 7% of men (Merllié et al, 2001). Part-time work is, however, more widespread in some countries than in others, as is shown in Figure 4: for example, 33% of people work part time in the Netherlands, compared to as few as 5% in Greece. Differences also appear in relation to the form of part-time work: short part-time (under 20 hours) is widespread in the Netherlands and in the UK, whereas this is not the case in other countries where part-time work is also common, such as Sweden, Denmark or Belgium. In those countries, substantial part-time (20-34 hours) is favoured (Lilja and Hämäläinen, 2001).

**Figure 3 Part-time work in the EU by gender**



Source: Third European Working Conditions Survey 2000.

**Figure 4 Part-time work in the EU by country**



Source: Third European Working Conditions Survey 2000

It appears that in ‘male breadwinner’ type countries such as Austria, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, as well as the United Kingdom and Ireland, the share of women working full time is lower than average. On the other hand, it also appears that in the Nordic countries (with the weakest ‘male breadwinner’ model), apart from Finland, part-time work is quite common. These differences partly reflect cross-country variations in tax systems, childcare provisions or institutional arrangements for the use of part-time contracts and their impact on women's choices in the labour market (Lilja and Hämäläinen, 2001; Fagan, 2001).

In the Employment Options of the Future survey, questions were asked not only about current labour market participation and working times but also about individual preferences. The first lesson of the survey is the generally enthusiastic wish to take part in paid work in the near future on the part of both women and men (Bielenski et al, 2002). The results also show that a large proportion of women and men in full-time jobs would in fact prefer shorter working hours. Preferences for part-time work are widespread, particularly among women: in general more women than men express a preference for shorter working hours. The differences between current working times and working time preferences that emerge from the survey suggest there is a clear potential for change (Bielenski et al, 2002).

But it also indicates that the distribution of employment opportunities is systematically influenced by considerations of age and gender. It is clear that women's participation in paid work can be curtailed by the mismatch between existing social arrangements for childcare and work organisation. While there have been significant improvements in this regard in recent years, it nevertheless remains the case that during the course of a woman's working life this can have an influence on both the extent and quality of her participation in paid work. (Atkinson, 2000).

## Gender segregation of the EU labour market

Over the last four decades, women have increased their share of employment and have made important inroads into different types of jobs and sectors as well as the higher status professional and managerial occupations (Eurostat, 2000a). While pointing to progress achieved in this field, a number of Foundation studies demonstrate that a high level of gender segregation – the pattern whereby women are under-represented in some occupations and job status and over represented in others relative to their percentage share of total employment – remains a feature of employment structure in the EU, even in those countries where women have achieved high employment rates (Paoli and Merllié, 2000 and 2001; Kauppinen and Kandolin, 1998; Fagan et al, 2002).

The EU labour market is segregated both horizontally and vertically: across the economy as a whole, women are concentrated in certain sectors, occupations and job status ('horizontal segregation'); and in any given industry or sector, women are under-represented in senior, managerial and well-paid positions and over-represented in lower paid jobs and certain employment contracts ('vertical segregation').

### Horizontal segregation

First, research reveals that there is a high concentration of women in the public sector (see Table 1). When employed in the private sector, women tend to work in small and medium sized companies rather than in large ones (Fagan, 2002).

**Table 1 Employment of men and women in the public and private sectors**

% concentration of employees across workplaces			
	Men	Women	All
Public-sector or state-owned company	19	32	25
Private sector	81	68	75

Source: Third European Working Conditions Survey 2000.

Second, women's employment is largely concentrated in services in private households, health, education and in other care-related activities as well as in sales, hotels and catering. Men predominate in construction, manufacture, transport, agriculture and financial services (see Table 2). Thus, most people work in sectors which are occupied mainly or entirely by their own sex, so that we can largely categorise jobs according to whether they are 'male-dominated' or 'female-dominated', with only a small

proportion of employment which can be considered to be ‘mixed’ (Fagan, et al, 2002).

**Table 2 Gender segregation by industrial sector**

% of the jobs in each sector that are occupied by men and women in employment

NACE sectors <sup>1</sup>	Men All	Women All	Total
Construction	91	9	100
Extraction	84	16	100
Utilities	84	16	100
Transport and communications	75	25	100
Manufacturing	73	27	100
Agriculture	66	34	100
Financial services	58	42	100
Public administration	56	44	100
Sales, hotels and catering	47	53	100
Other community services	44	56	100
Health and education	25	75	100
Private households and extra-territorial	5	95	100
All Employment	56	44	100

1. Sectors are ranked by the degree of male-dominated segregation.

Source: Third European Working Conditions Survey 2000.

Third, women and men are disproportionately represented in particular occupations relative to their overall share of employment (see Table 3 on p.12). Broadly speaking, women’s jobs involve caring, nurturing and service activities, while men monopolise management and the manual and technical jobs associated with machinery or physical products which are considered to be ‘heavy’ or ‘complex’. Thus, men hold 80% or more of the jobs in the armed forces, the craft and related trades and plant and machine operator jobs. In these occupational areas, women only have a presence of more than 30% of the jobs in food and textiles, craft work (34%) and as machine operators and assemblers (31%). Men also hold more than two thirds of the skilled agricultural and fishery jobs. In contrast, two thirds of clerical and service and sales workers are women, the so-called ‘pink-collar’ jobs (OECD, 2002).

The professional, related professions and elementary manual occupations are more evenly split between the sexes at this aggregate level, but in these occupational groups the segregation is only exposed at the sub-category level. Hence, men predominate in the physical, mathematical and

engineering professions and related professions, while the majority of health and educational professionals and related professions are women. In the elementary occupations women are disproportionately represented in cleaning and agricultural-related jobs, while men dominate general labouring activities. This average picture of occupational segregation for the EU-15 is largely replicated at the individual country level (Fagan, 2002).

**Table 3 Occupational segregation of women and men's employment**

% of the jobs in each occupation that are filled by men and women  
in full-time and part-time jobs

ISCO occupational groups <sup>1</sup>	Men All	Women All	Total
1. Senior officials and managers	63	37	100
<i>Legislators &amp; senior officials</i>	72	28	100
<i>Corporate managers</i>	71	29	100
<i>Managers of small enterprises</i>	58	42	100
2. Professionals	50	50	100
<i>Physical, mathematical &amp; engineering</i>	81	19	100
<i>Life science &amp; health</i>	33	67	100
<i>Teaching</i>	35	65	100
<i>Other professionals</i>	64	36	100
3. Technicians & associate professionals	52	48	100
<i>Physical &amp; engineering associates</i>	78	22	100
<i>Life science &amp; health associates</i>	20	80	100
<i>Teaching associates</i>	31	69	100
<i>Other associate professionals</i>	60	40	100
4. Clerks	31	69	100
<i>Office clerks</i>	32	68	100
<i>Customer services clerks</i>	28	72	100
5. Service workers and sales	33	67	100
<i>Personal &amp; protective services</i>	35	65	100
<i>Models, sales &amp; demonstrators</i>	31	69	100
6. Skilled agricultural & fishery workers	69	31	100
7. Craft & related trades	87	13	100
<i>Extraction &amp; building trades</i>	98	2	100
<i>Metal, machinery &amp; related trades</i>	96	4	100
<i>Precision, handicraft &amp; printing</i>	79	21	100
<i>Food, textiles, wood &amp; related</i>	66	34	100

cont.

8.	Plant & machine operators & assemblers	83	17	100
	<i>Stationary-plant &amp; related operators</i>	85	15	100
	<i>Machine operators &amp; assemblers</i>	69	31	100
	<i>Drivers &amp; mobile plant operators</i>	95	5	100
9.	Elementary occupations	50	50	100
	<i>cleaning, domestic services, refuse &amp; street vendors</i>	41	59	100
	<i>Agricultural, fishery &amp; related labours</i>	42	58	100
	<i>Other labourers</i>	76	24	100
10.	Armed forces	92	8	100
	All Employment	56	44	100

1. The ISCO classification is presented for the nine main occupational groups (1-digit classification) and the second level sub-category that exists within these groups (2-digit classification).

Source: Third European Working Conditions Survey, 2000.

## Vertical segregation

One major area of change is that across Europe women have increased their representation in management: the occupational hierarchy is less male-dominated than in previous periods. There are, however, still clear differences evident in the lines of supervision and management in the workplace: 63% of the workforce have a man as their immediate superior while only 21% are under the authority of a woman (the remainder do not have a manager). The small proportion of women who are managers or supervisors are more likely to be in charge of other women: less than 10% of employed men have a woman as their immediate line manager, compared to just over a third of employed men (Fagan, 2002). At the top of the occupational hierarchy, men occupy more than 60% of the legislative and managerial occupations, rising to over 70% in the sub-categories of corporate managers and senior government officials. The Foundation's work also points to less visible forms of vertical segregation: within each professional category women tend to be under-represented in the more prestigious sub-specialisations. For example, in the legal profession women are disproportionately found in family law and less visible in corporate law (Fagan, 2002).

Gender differences also appear in relation to employment status. On the one hand, women are under-represented in self-employment: among the 17% of those who declared themselves to be self-employed, only one in three was a woman. The number of self-employed women with employees is even smaller: one in four (Huijgen, 2000; Paoli and Merli , 2001; Goudswaard and Andries, 2002). On the other hand, women are under-represented in permanent contracts: 44% of all women work in a full-time

permanent contract compared to 64% of all men. As has already been noted, more female employees are engaged in part-time jobs and differentials related to permanent versus non-permanent contracts also emerge in this area: 7% of all women and only 2% of all men have a non-permanent part-time job (Goudswaard and Andries, 2002). Regarding the nature of such non-permanent contracts, there is an over-representation of women in fixed-term contracts and an over-representation of men in temporary agency work contracts (Storrie, 2002).

### Gender pay gap

The issue of the quality of women's work and employment is closely related to the value attributed to women's work in our society. The degree of wage inequality in Europe is lower now than in previous decades due to a number of factors (Fagan et al, 2002). The rising qualification levels and employment experience of women has reduced the 'human capital' differences between the sexes. Equal treatment in recruitment, promotion and training and the principle of equal pay for work of comparable value have been promoted through a combination of legislation and case law, collective agreements and other policy instruments. Despite these crucial changes, it can be said, however, that women remain over-represented in the low income and low-medium income levels whereas they are seriously under-represented in the high income categories of workers in the EU labour markets (see Table 4). The presence of a gender pay gap – defined as the differential in average gross hourly earnings between men and women in percentage of men's average gross hourly earnings – in each Member State remains a significant feature of the EU labour market (European Commission, 2002f; European Community Household Panel, 1999; Eurostat, 2002a; Labour Force Survey, 2002).

**Table 4 Income levels classified by gender**

Income level	Women	Men	Total
Low income	26	9	16
Low-medium income	24	19	21
Medium-high income	17	22	20
High-income	10	22	17
No answer	23	29	26

*Source:* Based on data from the Third European Working Conditions Survey 2000.

It is increasingly acknowledged that pay differentials between men and women are the result of a complex combination of factors. The following factors have been identified as relevant explanatory variables of the gender pay gap: age, family situation and number of children, educational attainment and level, career interruptions, job security, contract type,

working time and contract status, sectors (in particular, the private and public sector), occupation, firm size and gender concentration (European Commission, 2002f). Even after gender differences in observed characteristics are controlled for, there remains a substantial gap between the hourly earnings of men and women (European Commission, 2002a; 2002b; 2002f; European Parliament, 2001; Rubery et al., 2001). The question is: to what extent are such differences themselves the outcome of potentially discriminatory processes? (Fagan, et al 2002). More in-depth analyses are still needed to explain the reasons underlying the lower value of women's work in European labour markets.

## **Work–life balance for women and men**

The growth of dual-earner arrangements for couples and the increase in single parent households mean that the issue of how to combine employment and family responsibilities is a concern for most of the population at some stage in their working lives. The extension of part-time work has provided one type of solution for some women, but the cost of this solution is often high in terms of reduced income and social protection coverage, limited job opportunities and promotion prospects. Childcare systems, parental leave, flexitime systems and so forth are other measures which make it easier to combine employment with family responsibilities but the extent of these provisions varies markedly between countries and workplaces.

The Foundation's research findings clearly document that women's employment can depend on factors such as childcare arrangements, access to social and public services and work organisation (Atkinson, 2000; Pillinger, 2000). The studies have also underlined the persistence of women's role as the main housework provider at home. They also point to the clear wish expressed by both men and women in the EU to work shorter working hours and devote more time to the private sphere (Bielenski et al, 2000).

## **Compatibility of working hours with family life**

The Foundation has looked at the impact of individuals' working time schedules on the work–life balance. In the Third European Working Conditions survey, men and women were asked how well their working hours fitted in with family and social commitments outside of employment, and the findings provide us with some basic insights into this issue (see Tables 5 and 6 on the following page).

**Table 5 Compatibility of working hours with family and other commitments, by gender and full-time/part-time status**

							%
	Men			Women			All
	FT	PT	All	FT	PT	All	
Very well	29	37	30	30	52	39	34
Fairly well	49	44	48	50	39	45	47
Not very well/not at all	22	19	22	20	9	16	19
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Fagan et al, 2002. FT = full-time. PT = part-time.

**Table 6 Compatibility of working hours with family and other commitments, by parenthood**

							%
	Father	Men without dependent children	Mother, employed full-time	Mother, employed part-time	All employed mothers	Women without dependent children	
Very well	27	31	27	50	38	40	
Fairly well	48	49	48	41	45	45	
Not very well/not at all	25	20	25	8	17	15	
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	

Source: Fagan et al, 2002.

A significant proportion of female and male workers report that their working time is relatively compatible with family life and other social commitments (very well for 34%, and fairly well for 47%). However, 22% of employed men and 16% of employed women said that the time demands of their job were incompatible with their family life. Part-timers seem to benefit from a better work-life balance: only 9% of female part-time workers report a lack of compatibility as compared to 20% of female full-time workers. This difference between full-timers and part-timers is not as significant for male workers: 22% of male full-time workers as compared to 19% of part-time workers report work-life compatibility problems. One quarter (25%) of fathers and mothers working full-time report work-life compatibility problems. This work-life balance problem was less acute for men and women without dependent children. Foundation research shows that compatibility problems increase when weekly working time goes over 45 hours. However, more detailed research would be necessary to obtain more precise data and to explore what people meant by ‘compatibility’, and what it was about their hours and other commitments that produced this sense of ‘compatibility’ (Fagan et al, 2002).

The research reveals a widespread wish among both male and female workers in the EU for shorter working hours (Atkinson, 2000). But the

patterns for men and women show significant differences. Men want to reduce their hours but stay in full employment (i.e. 31-39 hours per week). Women, on the other hand, indicate a strong interest in a 21-30 hour working week (27% as compared with 14% who work part-time at the time of the interview). Both sexes want a better work–life balance: women, however, strongly indicate a wish or need to have enough time for children (only 5% of men aged 30-39 years gave this as a reason for wanting to reduce working time, while the corresponding figure for women was 77%).

In the context of public debates and initiatives to promote ‘family-friendly’ working time and conditions, it would be worth further investigating how to provide concrete solutions in order to help women and men to combine their care responsibilities with employment (European Commission, 2001).

**Table 7 Who does what at home?**

% of respondents doing it for 1 hour or more every day		
At home, who ...	Women	Men
Takes care of the children and their education ?	41	24
Does the cooking ?	64	13
Does the housework ?	63	12

Source: Third European Working Conditions Survey 2000.

**Figure 5 Involvement in the care of elderly and disabled relatives, by gender**



### Sharing of paid and unpaid work between men and women

Some of the gender differences in working conditions have to do with the broader pattern of gender relations and inequality in society, such as women’s ‘double shift’ of paid and unpaid work since they do more of the care work in the home (Fagan et al, 2002). The unequal sharing of unpaid work in the home between women and men makes women’s everyday life both physically and mentally more demanding and stressful when they

participate in the labour market. Several analyses commissioned by the Foundation have pointed out that the double workload faced by many people, predominantly women, could have serious health and safety consequences (Bielenski and Hartmann, 2000; Fagan et al, 2002; Yeandle et al, 1999; Bercusson and Weiler, 1999; Kauppinen and Kandolin, 1998).

Workers interviewed in the context of the Third European Working Conditions survey report significant gender differences concerning time spent caring for children, elderly and disabled relatives and on household chores (see Table 7 and Figure 5 on previous page).

There is no doubt that a better sharing of such responsibilities would both improve the quality of women's working life and facilitate women's participation in the labour market. As systematically revealed and substantiated by the Foundation's work, public authorities as well as social partners have a key role to play in developing measures to promote the reconciliation of work and family life. They are at the core of the tools for change.

# The tools for change

Public authorities have an essential role to play in redefining a new welfare architecture aimed at facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life through a complete review of care in the EU, an individualisation of social security schemes, and a review of tax systems and institutional settings governing part-time work, etc (Bielenski et al, 2001; Lilja and Hämäläinen, 2001; Fagan, 2001). While the Foundation's work has systematically reiterated this point, it has also highlighted the potential impact of collective bargaining, on the one hand, and corporate initiatives, on the other, in the promotion of equal opportunities for men and women in the EU.

## Strategies within industrial relations: the role of collective bargaining

Collective bargaining (defined in the broadest sense to include all forms of joint consultation and regulation) has enormous potential as a mechanism for strengthening and mainstreaming equal opportunities (Bercusson and Dickens, 1996; European Parliament, 2002a). One of the most extensive gender equality projects carried out by the Foundation in the last few years has been the project on 'Equal opportunities and collective bargaining'. The objective was to identify good practices in collective agreements and bargaining processes through an analysis of 237 collective agreements across the 15 EU Member States. The topics of the agreements varied, but six broad categories were listed in the research framework as shown in the box below.

### **Pay discrimination/pay equity**

Pay levels, opportunities, systems, pay and grading structures, evaluation of jobs, access to benefits, etc.

### **Gender segregation**

Access to/nature of training, recruitment, promotion, job definitions and qualifications, work organisation, restrictions on women working, etc.

### **Job access/job security**

Redundancy, termination, security of hours, contractual status, etc.

### **Family-work interface**

Maternity/paternity/parental and dependent leave, childcare, working time, etc.

### **Organisational cultures/structures**

EO/awareness training, career paths, sexual harassment, etc.

(Bercusson and Dickens, 1996)

One especially innovative agreement was selected from each country for closer scrutiny. The bargaining process leading to the collective agreement was also analysed. The examples given in the reports were not designed to be seen as ideal references but rather as practical illustrations of what was done in concrete situations. Examples of innovative features of agreements related to the promotion of equal opportunities were as follows:

### ***Tackling gender gaps***

Provisions directed at improving women's job access, reducing sex segregation and diminishing pay discrimination to contribute to closing gender gaps in employment.

#### ***Improving women's job access and career progress***

- Elimination of sex stereotyping in job descriptions and advertisements;
- Opportunities to combine work and caring and flexible time arrangements;
- Removal or raising of age limits and the elimination of discriminatory requests for information;
- Positive action recruitment advertising (to encourage applications from the underrepresented sex);
- Setting of recruitment targets;
- Checking for suitable internal candidates and inviting all female candidates for interview or putting female candidates on the shortlist for jobs in which they are under-represented, at least in proportion to the number of women among the applicants.

#### ***Promotion and training***

- Commissioning studies of the gender composition of the workforce;
- Identifying obstacles to the promotion of women;
- Mapping of career paths to facilitate access by women to higher posts.
- Equal or preferential access to training and work experience;
- Special training (for example, enabling women to acquire 'male' skills and for managers and others in equal opportunities awareness);
- Training funds and places reserved for women;
- Arrangements for care facilities during training.

### *Closing the gender pay gap*

- Reviewing the context in which the agreement is to be implemented (for example, making sure that all employees are covered by the agreement – whether working part time or on non-permanent basis);
- Developing new tools for gender-neutral job evaluation.

### *Reconciling work and family life*

- Training measures during parental leave and in relation to reintegration into employment;
- Maintaining contact while on leave;
- Building up seniority rights and social security rights during periods of leave.

### **Tackling sexual harassment**

- A clear, contextual definition of sexual harassment;
- Detailed provisions on preventative measures;
- A complaint procedure and complaint officer;
- Protection and support for harassed employees;
- Sanctions for those found guilty of harassment;
- Supportive initiatives such as special training programmes, designed to raise awareness of the issue and to equip those with responsibility for operating the procedures.

(Bleijenbergh et al, 1999)

While emphasising the high degree of interaction between the different levels of decision-making in the employment and social field, the research also underlined the high degree of innovation and autonomy to be found among many social partner organisations.

The Foundation's research also highlighted the impact the overall context has on collective bargaining for equality (Dickens, 1998). The following factors were identified:

- **Environmental factors:** economic context, labour market, legislative and non-legislative interventions;
- **Organisational factors:** employers' interests and concerns, unions' interests and concerns, facilitating internal contexts, human resource policy;

- **The significance of gender in collective bargaining:** the identity of the negotiators, the importance of women's presence, nature and quality of the bargaining relationship.

Another element highlighted by the project is the crucial role of the post-agreement phase to ensure the effective implementation of the agreement concluded. However, there is little data available on this particular phase. In order to ensure good practice at this stage, the study (Bleijenbergh et al, 1999) recommended including the following elements in the agreements:

- Binding targets or goals;
- Timescales for implementation;
- Allocation of responsibility for implementation and systematic monitoring and review;
- Training for those responsible for implementation;
- Mobilisation and active participation of women in implementation;
- Provision of information and criteria for transparent evaluation of progress;
- Effective sanctions.

The research suggested that improving equality awareness may also be achieved by creating expertise centres, including more female bargainers, and drawing up equality guidelines. It also recommended making available equality expertise and information to social partners and establishing a European database on equal opportunities in collective bargaining (Bleijenbergh et al, 1999). Last but not least, the project also highlighted interesting opportunities regarding the transnational transfer of good equal opportunities agreements and practices (Bercusson and Weiler, 1999).

In the last ten years, there has been growing consensus about mainstreaming equal opportunities within the general policies of the EU (European Commission, 1996). Following the entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty, this measure is now effective. Since collective bargaining plays an important role in determining the terms and conditions of employment of large numbers of citizens in the EU, it is therefore a key mechanism for mainstreaming equality in employment (European Commission, 2002d). The Foundation's work in this field has revealed innovative and effective practices in the field of equal opportunities at national, sectoral and company level. It has also pointed to concrete elements for cross-fertilisation, exchange of good practices and further improvements. It has certainly paved the way for further initiatives in the field (European Commission, 2000b; European Parliament, 2002b; Garcia Ada, 2002).

## Strategies at company level: equality plans as a motor for change

The Foundation's work on equal opportunities and collective bargaining and on gender and working conditions in the European Union has raised the issue of the critical role of corporate strategies in promoting gender equality at the workplace: in other words, action at company level which is not necessarily initiated by or directly related to social dialogue. (Bercusson and Weiler, 1999; Bleijenbergh et al, 1999; Dickens, 1998; Kauppinen, 1998). Faced with the persistent lack of EU comparative data on company plans for equality programmes, the Foundation commissioned a research project in 1999 on promoting gender equality in the workplace. The research centred around such questions as: What can employers do and what have they done to improve equality at the workplace? Do companies' equality plans have an impact? What are the key factors for successful action in this promising *albeit* complex area?

### Main research questions

- How can equality actions be sustained over time?
- In what areas is most equality action focused?
- What is the impact of equality action?
- How has effective equality action been achieved?
- What is the relationship between equality and organisational change?

### Selection criteria

Sector: from manufacturing to services, public and private sector

Type of company: national/multinational.

Size: SMEs and multinationals

Unionised versus non-unionised enterprises

Composition of the workforce: male dominated, female dominated and gender balanced

Duration of experience with gender equality

Innovative equality action

(Olgiati and Shapiro, 2002)

The project covered seven EU-Member States (Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom), and a total of 21 equality plans (three from each country) were analysed. 'Equality plans' were defined as 'plans designed by management to incorporate an equality perspective and programme into all company policies'.

The equality plans cover a wide range of topics. They frequently formed a part of a larger human resources strategy, and in many cases, issues on diversity (i.e. differences based on ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, etc) were discussed at the same time. Four major categories emerged:

1. Recruitment and selection;
2. Professional development;
3. The organisation of work; and
4. The equality environment.

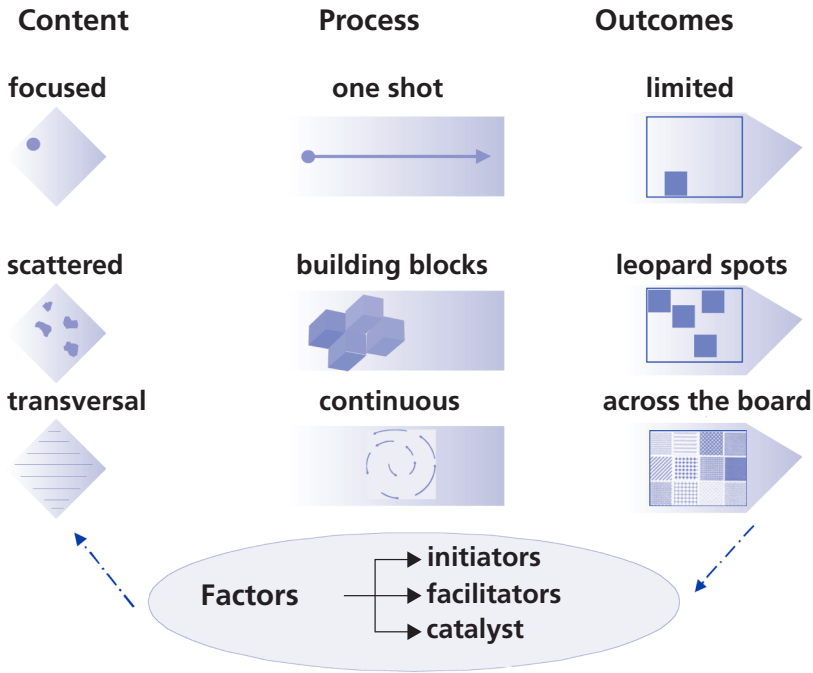
The research showed that there were a variety of companies which were successful in using equality plans as a part of their human resources strategies, and it also gave good indications on where the problems might arise in the process. Organisations with a track record in the equal opportunities sphere often undertook equality action in all four areas simultaneously, whereas those with less experience seemed to concentrate on one or two areas only (Olgati and Shapiro, 2002).

To briefly summarise the findings, the more transversal the approach of the company, the more likely the end-result would be changes in the overall strategy and working environment of the company – provided that proper resources were allocated to the process and there was real long-term commitment from all those involved. It clearly emerged that a focused approach only produced limited changes. On the other hand, the company often encountered problems when it announced an ambitious plan for equality but the relevant organisational structures, training and human resources were not put in place, i.e. the organisational culture was not prepared for this. In these cases, the end results were quite limited – despite the attempt at transversality (Olgati and Shapiro, 2002).

One of the most concrete results from the project was a gender equality ‘tracking model’ (Figure 6) that could be used to track the direction of equality within the company. It was designed to help practitioners and researchers to identify:

- the reasons why an organisation is at a particular stage in its development of equality;
- the different options available and challenges present in developing equality further and sustaining it over time;
- the reasons why equality developments may be blocked.

**Figure 6 The dynamic equality model**



(Olgiati and Shapiro, 2002)

On the basis of the case study analysis, the project identified essential ingredients for the effective implementation of gender equality plans:

- Initial analysis of problem areas;
- Goal setting and planning;
- Integrating equality into Human Resource Management strategies and policies;
- Involving and mobilising different actors;
- Ensuring sufficient investment of financial and human resources;
- Monitoring results;
- Communicating the need for action/results achieved internally.

The Foundation project on equality plans clearly demonstrates that equality strategies at company level can be very beneficial for both the company and its employees. Examples of successful practices include:

- More women in management and supervisory positions;
- Increase in the number of women recruited;
- Increase in women in non-traditional areas;
- Improved skills and career development;
- Improved flexible working opportunities;
- Improved work–life balance;
- Cultural and behavioural change in valuing gender equality;
- Changing perceptions of women’s skills, worth and role;
- Improved employee retention, attendance and satisfaction;
- Improved maternity return rates;
- Improved public image;

(Olgiati and Shapiro, 2002)

While the research undoubtedly showed that equality plans could be – and still are – a very good way of embedding equality into corporate strategies, as well as a potential strategic tool in the company’s overall aspirations/strategies (acquiring competent personnel, having less turnover of employees, etc), it also demonstrated the key role of legislative and non-legislative measures in facilitating the adoption of such measures. In the context of increased policy interest in corporate social responsibility in the EU, the research emphasised the positive impact of corporate initiatives whereby companies integrate quality of work and equal opportunities concerns in their business operations (European Commission, 2002g; forthcoming Foundation report on corporate social responsibility).

# Issues for debate and development

Raising the quality of women's work and employment is one of the key challenges of the European Employment Strategy. The Foundation's work demonstrates the important role played by EU and national level public authorities and social partners in the development and implementation of strategies aimed at tackling gender segregation and pay differentials in labour markets across the EU. The Foundation's research also emphasises the progressive blurring of boundaries between living and working conditions and therefore confirms the added value of an integrated approach to the promotion of equal opportunities for women and men.

While highlighting the availability of essential data and research findings on the issue of the quality of women's work and employment in the EU, this paper also points to the following problem areas and unanswered questions: How to explain and tackle the lower value of women's work in EU labour markets? What comprehensive strategies have been put in place in the Member States to address the obstacles to labour market participation for women with dependent children? How can we bring a life-course perspective to women's and men's working lives?

In the context of the present reshaping of the architecture and competences of an enlarged European Union, a number of issues can also be identified for future research and initiatives:

- More in-depth country comparative research;
- Developing gender-sensitive indicators on quality of work and employment (status, occupation, income levels and wages, social protection, health and safety, work organisation, competence development, work-life balance);
- In-depth analysis of the factors behind gender segregation of labour markets in the EU and of the strategies in place to address this issue;
- Further research on how to balance working and non-working time with a life-course perspective;
- Relationships between paid and unpaid work and their links to social protection and pensions;
- The quality of women's work and employment in the candidate countries where there seems to be higher participation rates of women and less gender segregation than in the EU.

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