Eurofound

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

The tripartite EU Agency providing knowledge to assist in the development of better social, employment and work-related policies

Online international conference ‘Balance for all’

The role of work-life balance

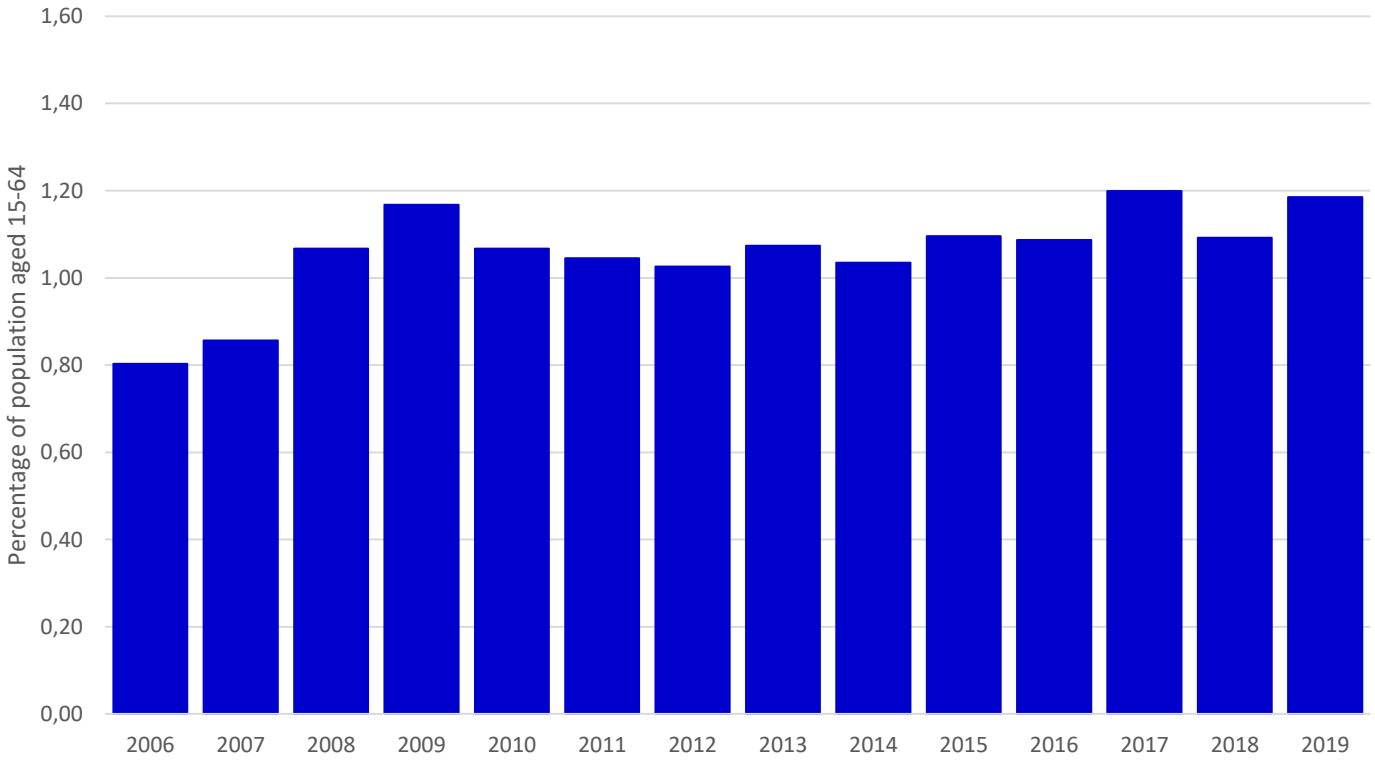
What is work-life balance?

“I like the phrase ‘work-life harmony.’ Balance implies there’s a strict trade-off. Being a productive member of a team at work makes me better at home. If I’m happy at home, it makes me a better employee, a better boss.”

Why is work-life balance important?

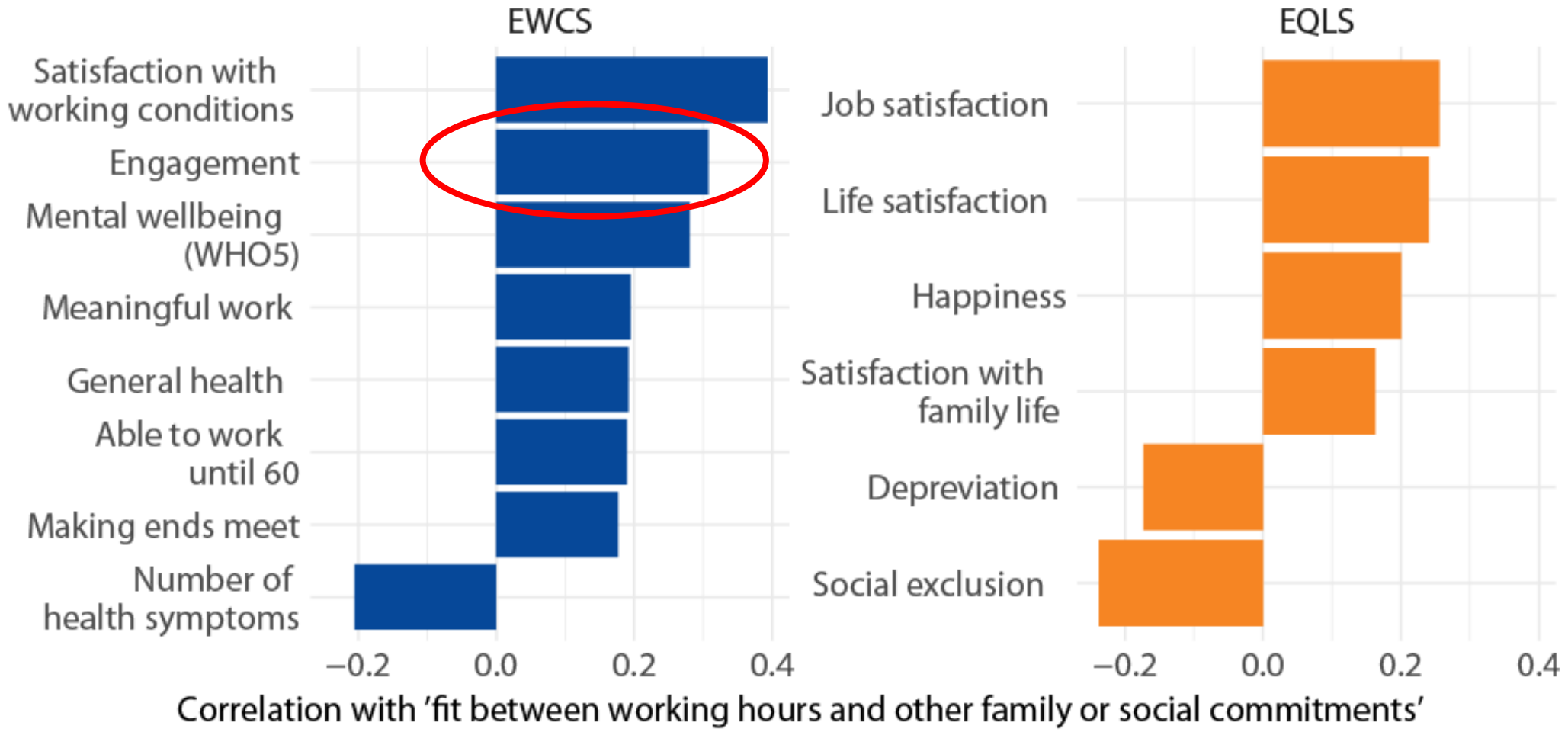
A barrier to work?

Not working, or not working fulltime because of lack of **available** or **affordable** care services EU28



Source: EU Labour Force Survey 2006 - 2019

Wider benefits of work-life balance



Source: European Working Conditions Survey 2015 and European Quality of Life Survey 2016

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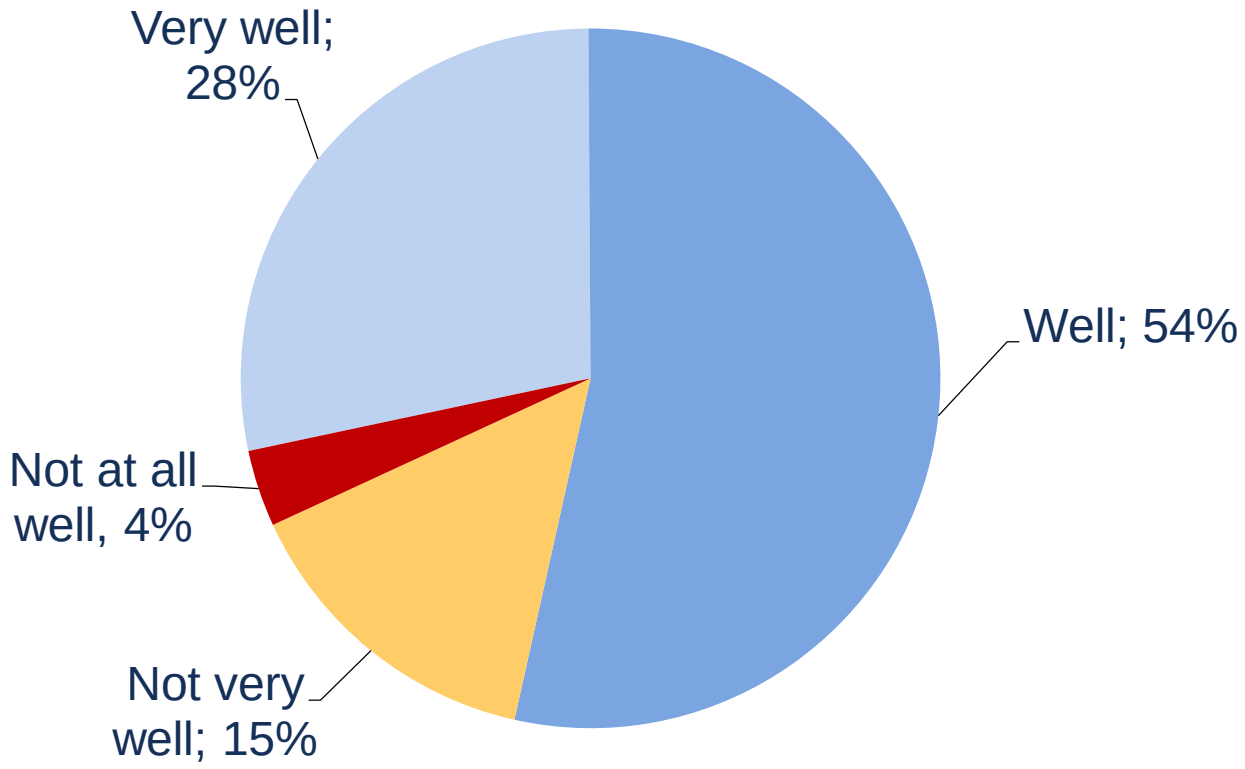
Work-life balance indicators

“How do your working hours fit with your family or social commitments outside work?”



Source: European Working Conditions Survey 2015

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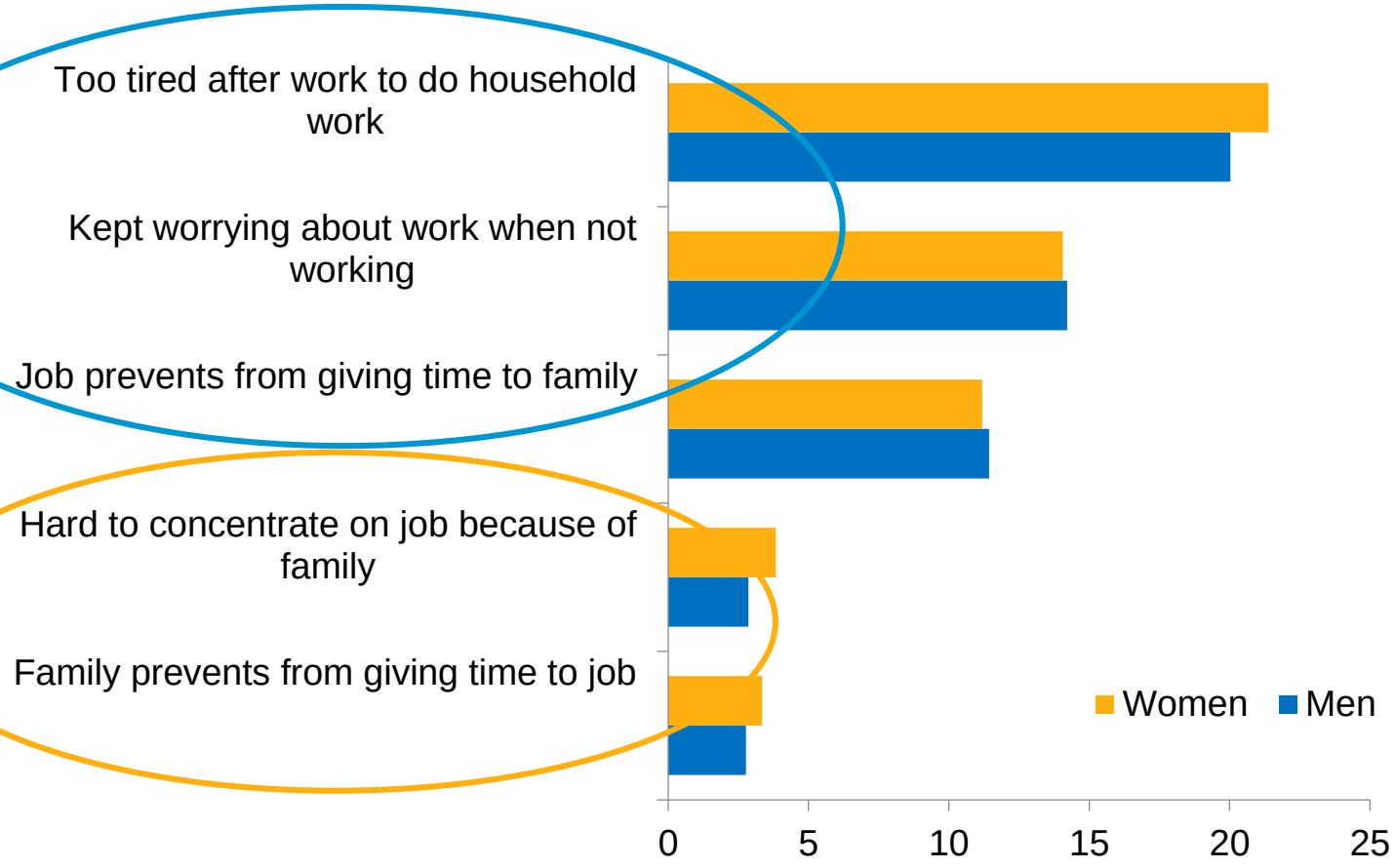
Work-life balance indicators



Source: European Working Conditions Survey 2015

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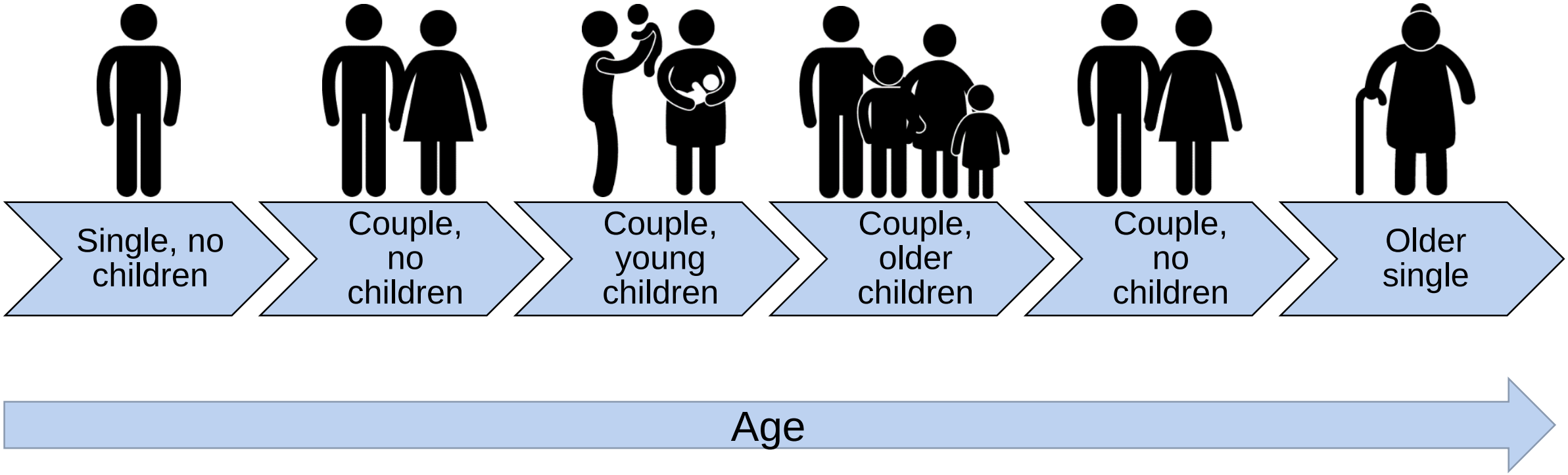
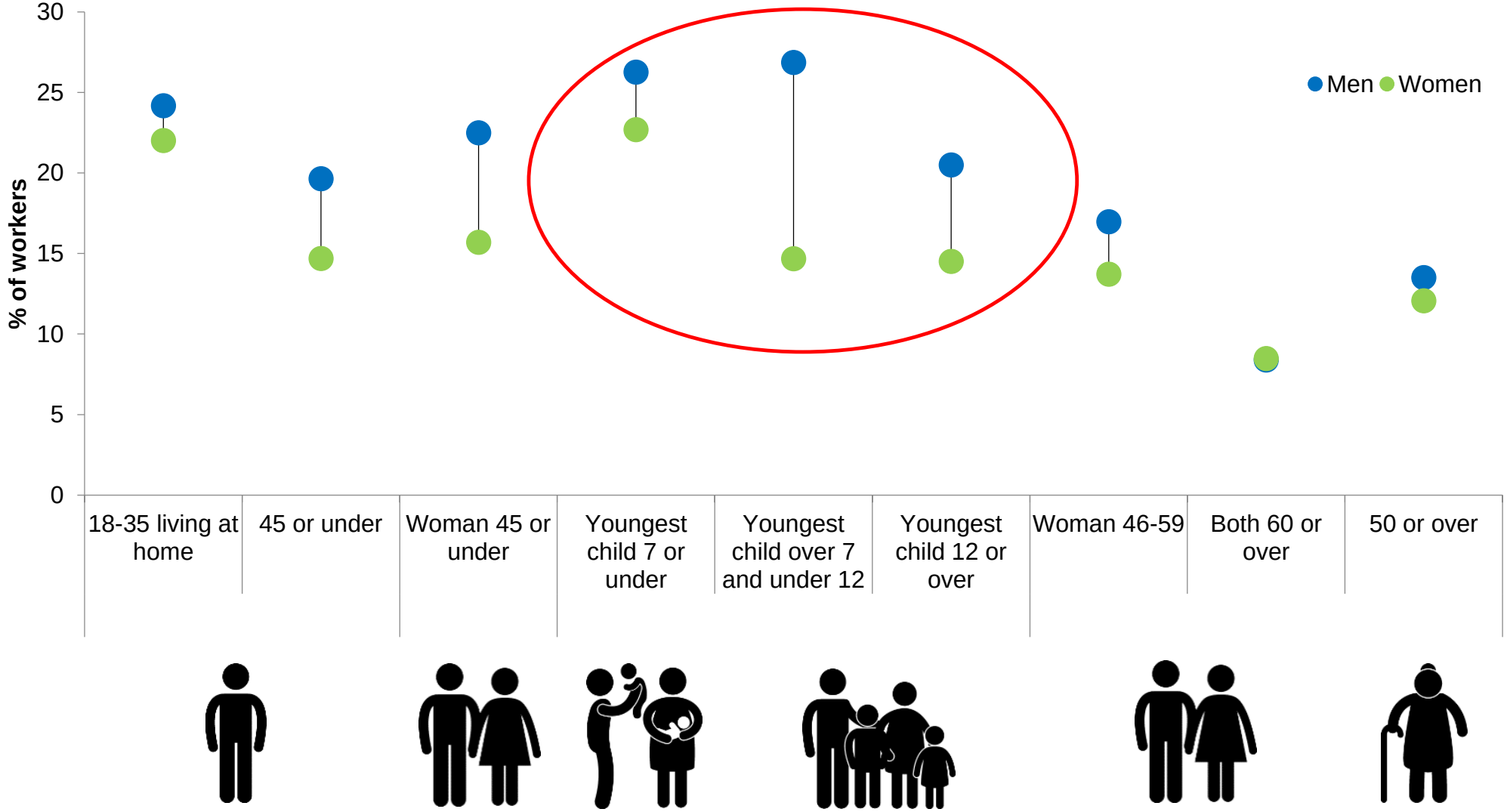
Life course perspective



Poor work-life balance across the life course



Source: EWCS, 2015

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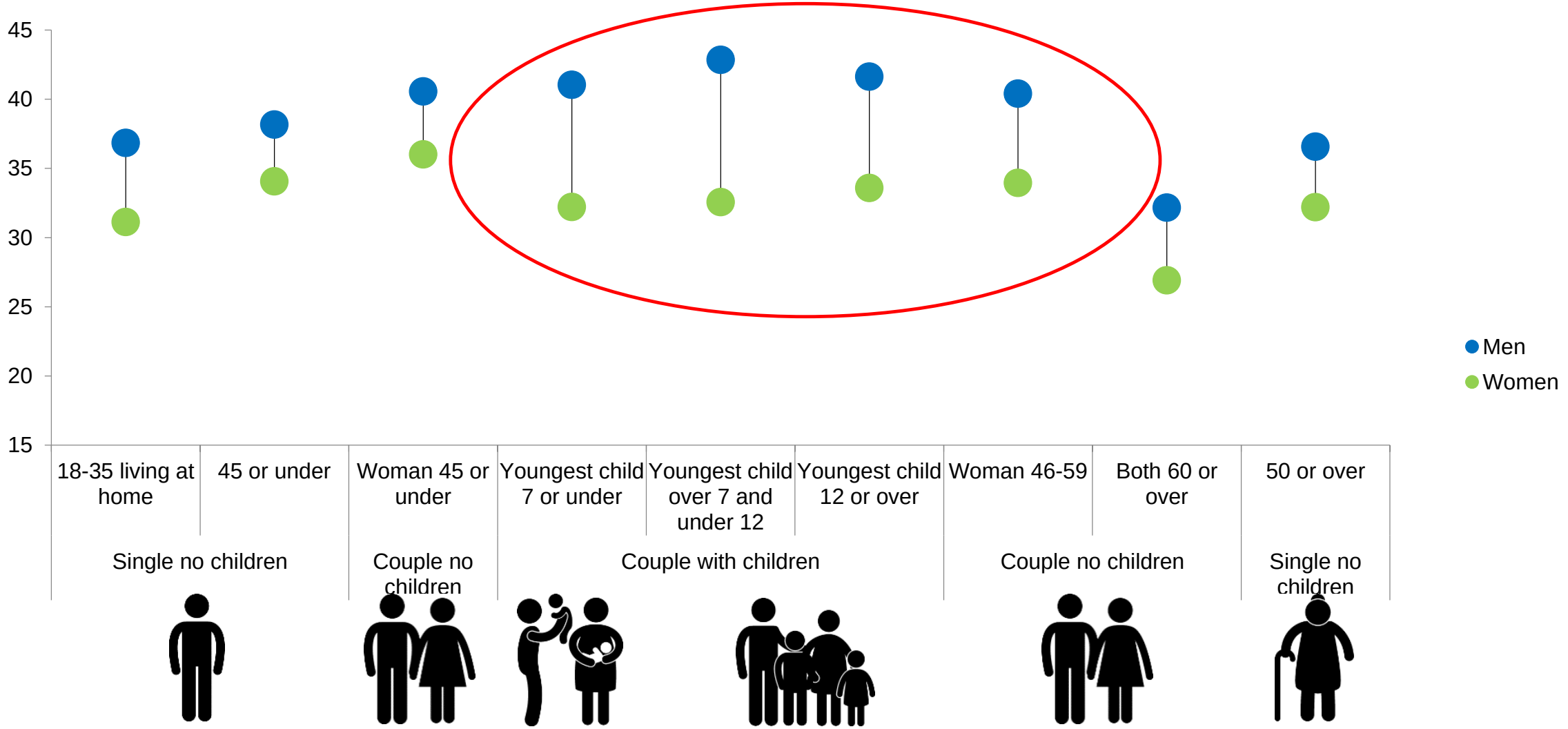
Working hours across the life course



Source: EWCS, 2015

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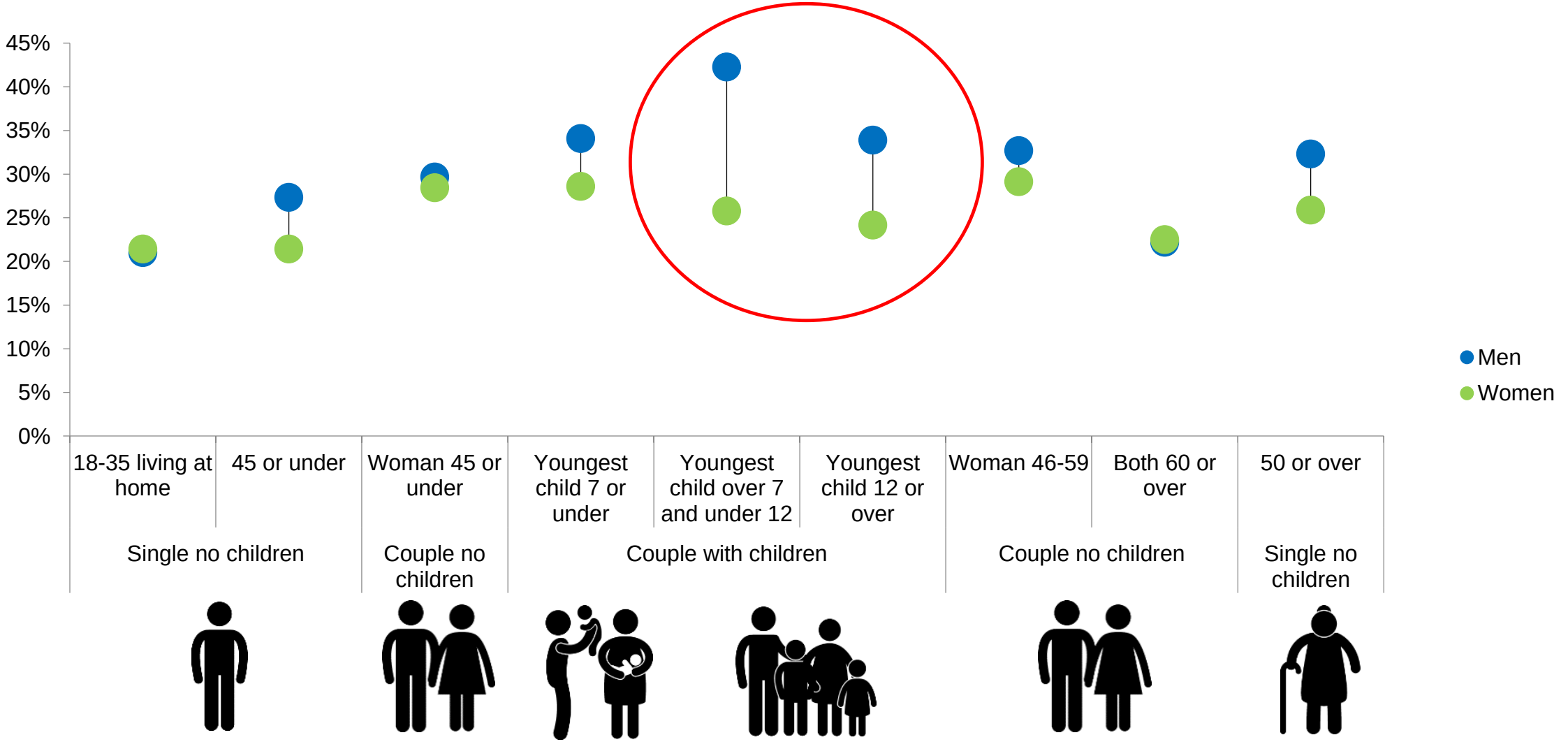
Preference to work less



Source: EWCS, 2015

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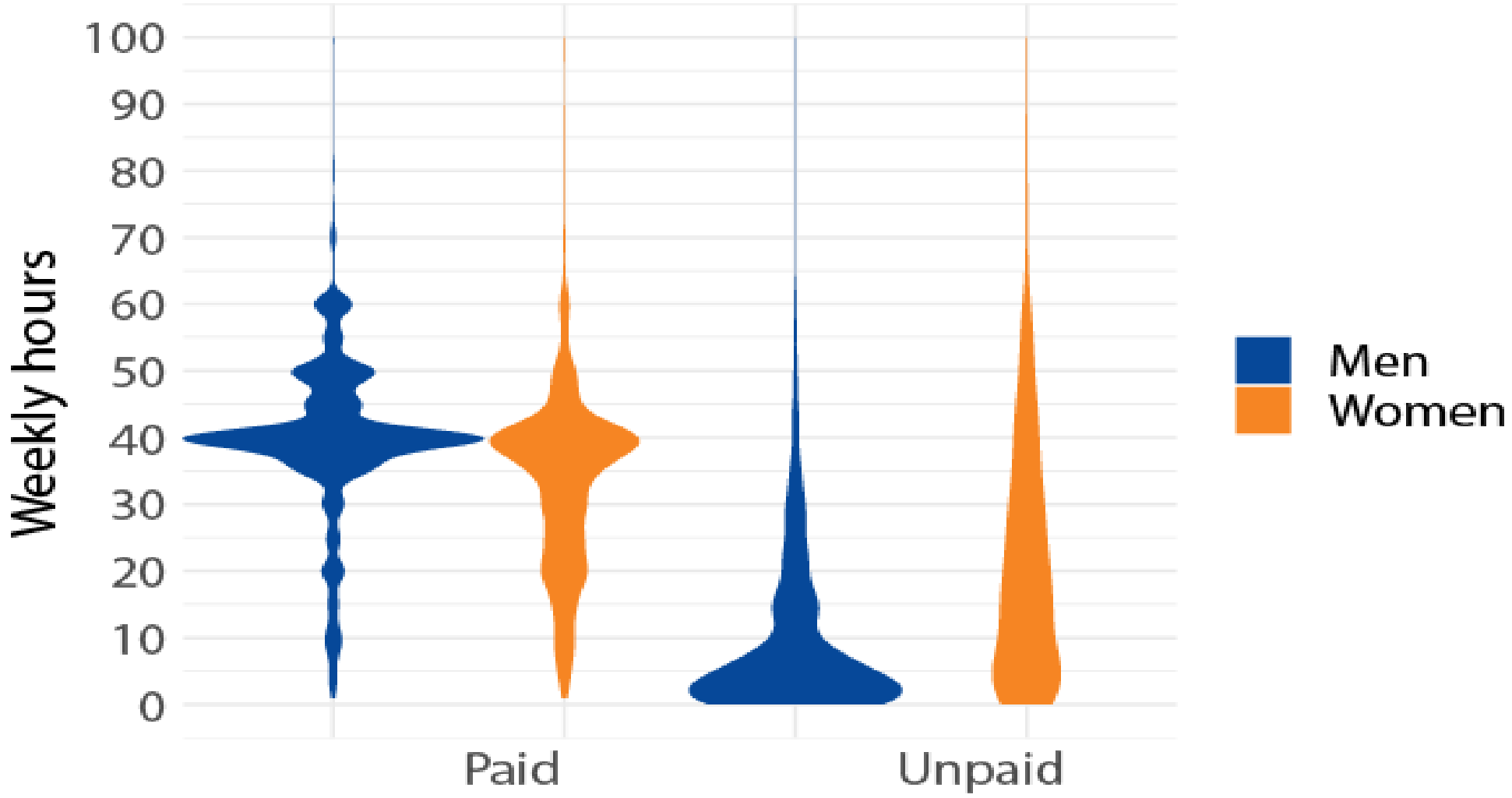
Is work shared equally?



Source: European Working Conditions Survey 2015

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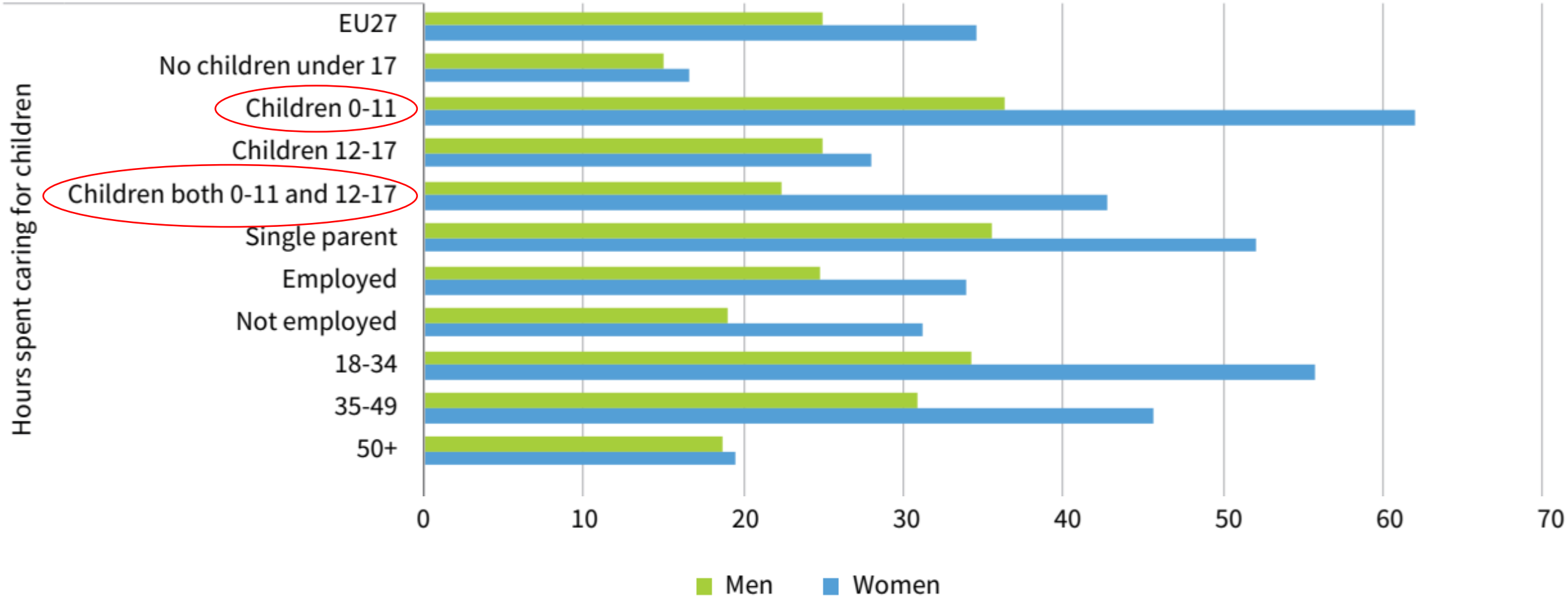
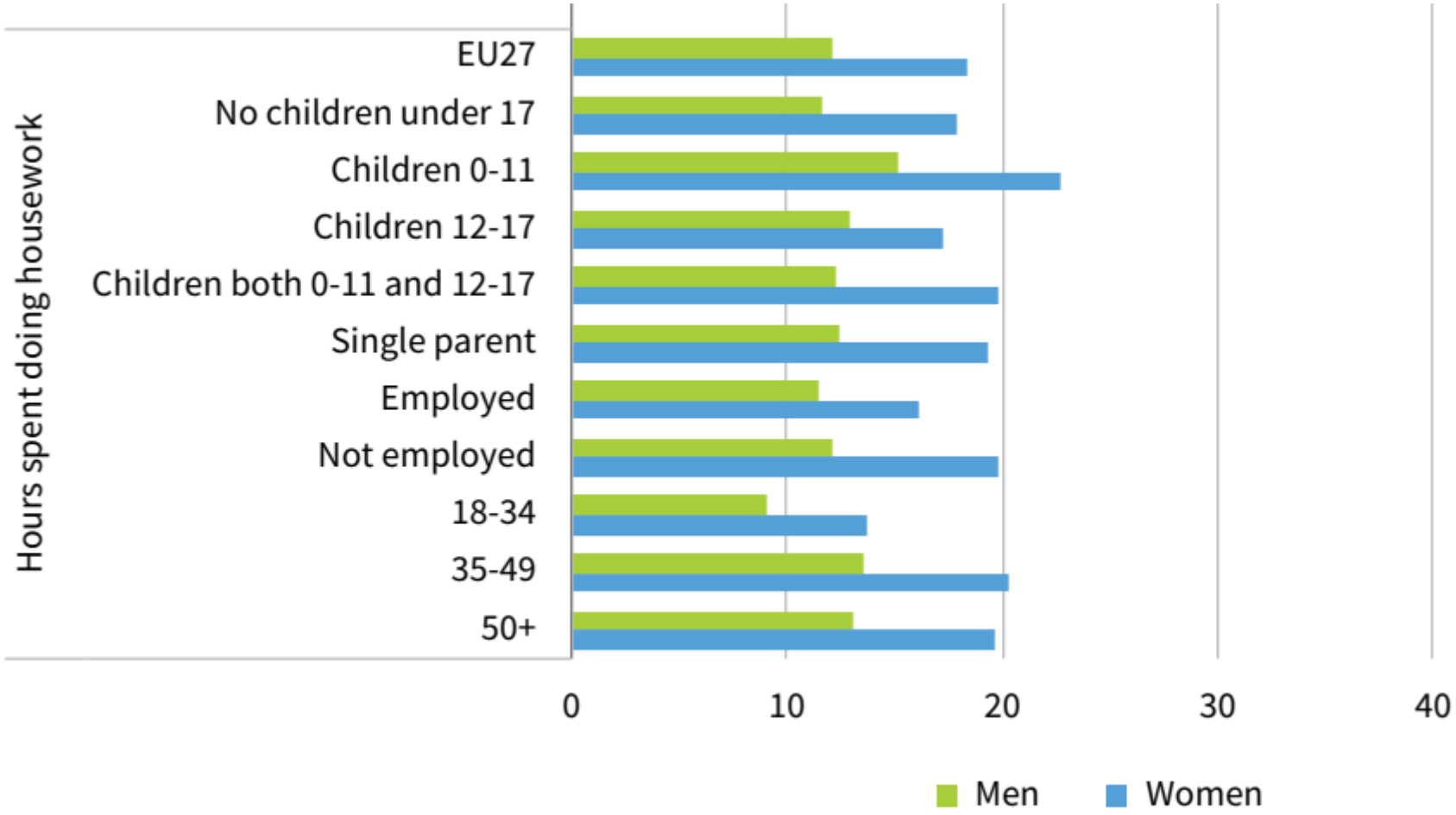
Differences in hours per week spent on childcare in July 2020, by gender, EU27 (%)



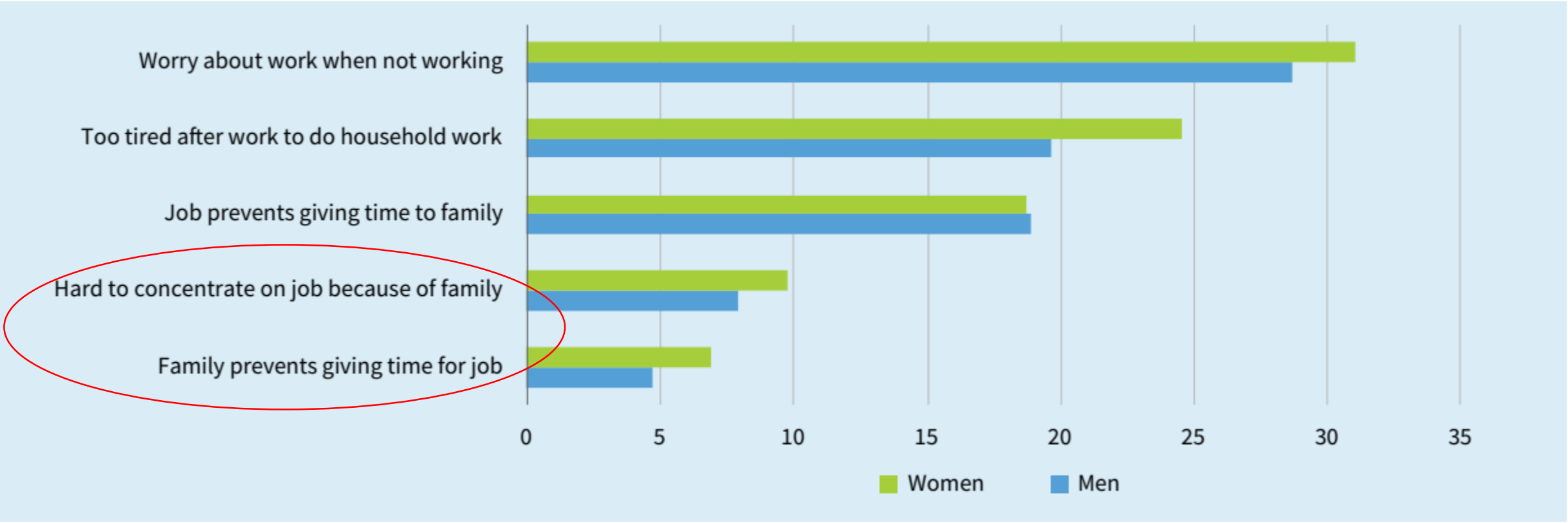
Source: Eurofound, Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey, second round

Differences in hours per week spent on housework in July, by gender, EU27 (%)



Source: Eurofound, Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey, second round

Percentage of women and men with young children in the household experiencing work–life conflicts, EU27, April 2020



Note: The chart shows the percentage of women and men with children aged 0–11 years in the household who responded ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’ when asked about each point.
Source: Eurofound, Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey, first round

What is the role of work?

Variable	Positive	Mixed	Negative
Working time, commuting time			✓
Working time regularity	✓		
Atypical working hours			✓
Job intensity			✓
Support at work	✓		
Care responsibilities			✓
Flexibility of working hours		✓	
Working at home		✓	

Controlled for country, household characteristics, occupation and individual characteristics.

Working time flexibility

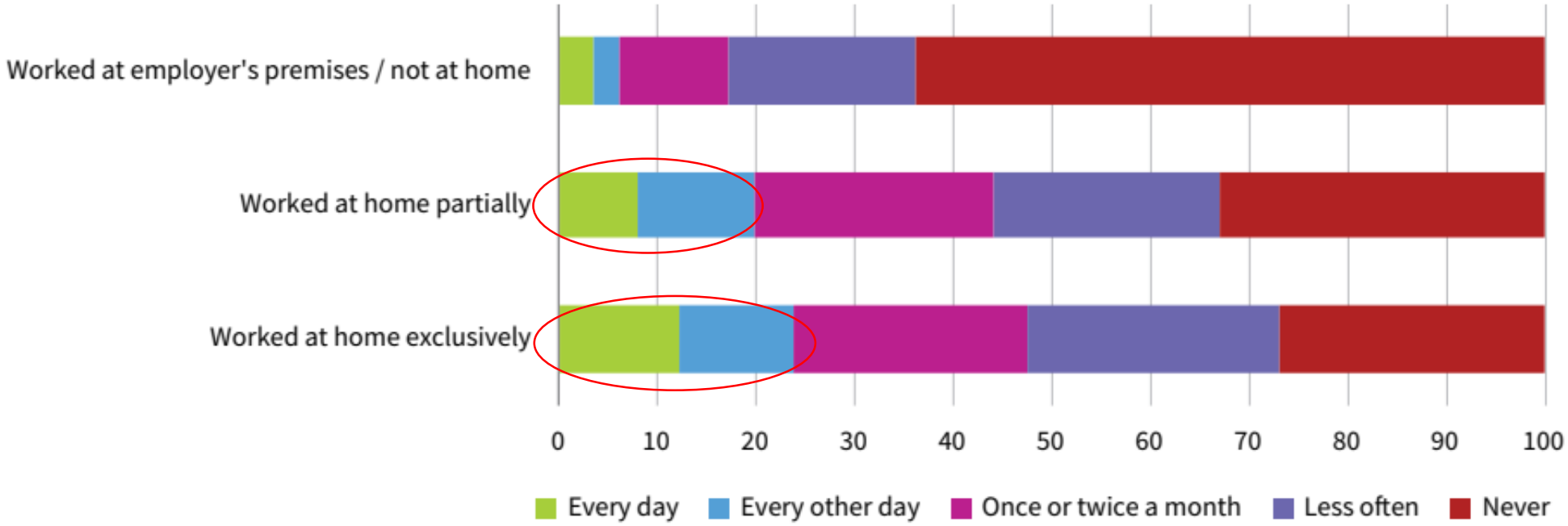
- Being able to take an hour or two off:
  - Very positive effect
  - More likely if flexible working arrangements are in place

- Flexible working time arrangements: positive effect
  - If these arrangements lead to actual flexibility as described above

Working at home

1. Working at home helps when it **substitutes** working hours spent at the employers location
2. Working at home does not help when it **supplements**
   - Working at home associated with **‘working in free time for work demands’**

Working during one's free time during COVID-19, by work location, EU27 (%)

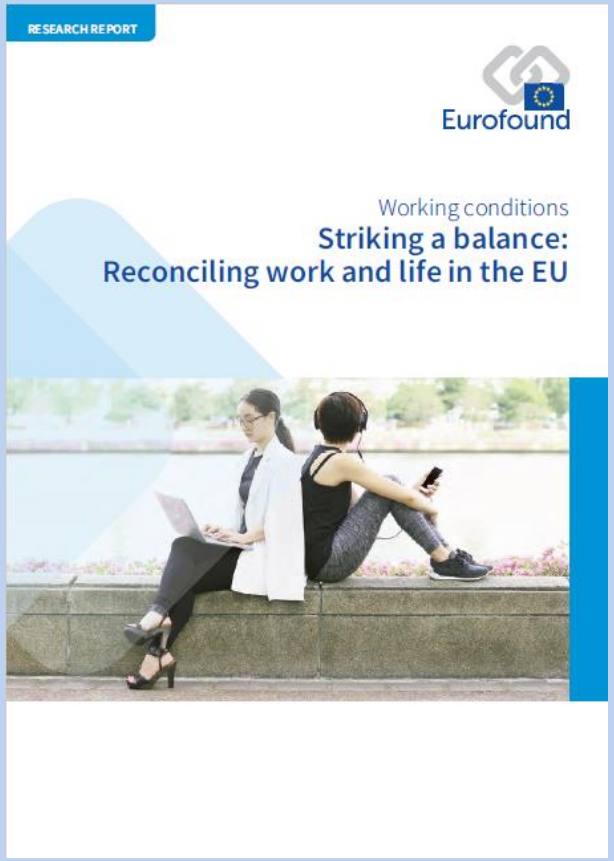


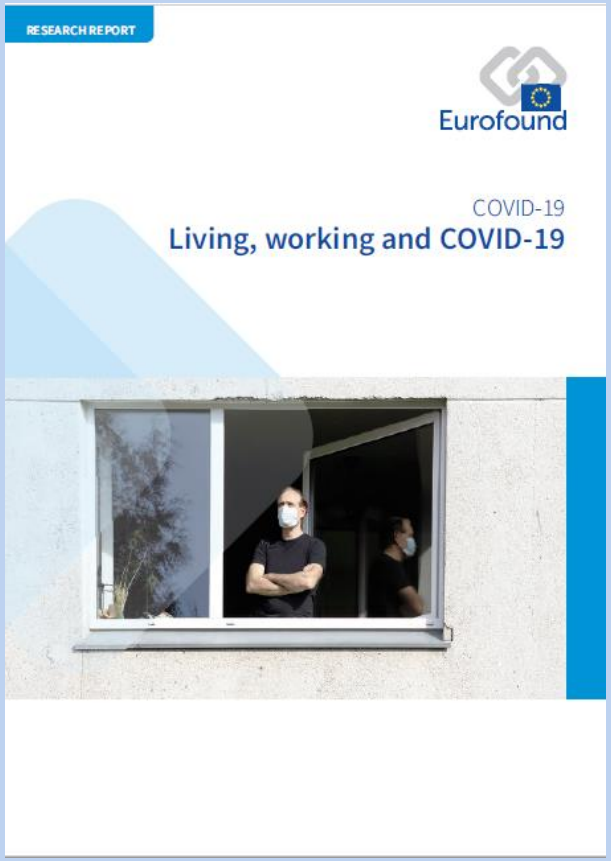
Source: Eurofound, Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey, second round

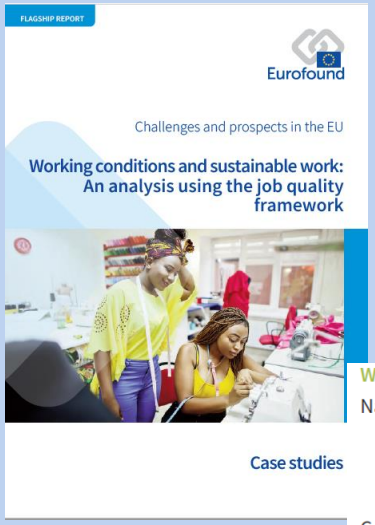
Take aways

- Benefits of better work-life balance are wide
- Taking a life course perspective is key
- Volume of work is crucial but other factors at work can also improve work life balance
- Working from home can improve work life balance but only if it substitutes not supplements work done at the employer’s premises
- Unequal sharing of unpaid work between men and women is a contributing factor

For more information: www.eurofound.europa.eu







Work–life balance

National policies extending access to leave for fathers
- Making paternity leave more similar to maternity leave: Spain
- Extending paid paternity leave: Slovenia
- Extending length and coverage of paternity leave: Estonia

Company practices
- Raising awareness of work–life balance for fathers: Pilot project
- Equalising leave entitlements between mothers and fathers: Diageo
- Supporting childcare arrangements: Bitė Lietuva
- Supporting childcare arrangements: Edding
- Reducing working time: MAKAvA delighted GmbH
- Reducing working time: Femma
- Reducing working time: Sherpas
- Reducing working time: Donar
- Enabling highly flexible working time and location arrangements: Swiss Re
- Enabling highly flexible working time and location arrangements: Draugiem Group
- Enabling highly flexible working time arrangements: Marbles
- Enabling highly flexible working time arrangements: ING