RESEARCH REPORT

Eurofound

Working conditions and sustainable work

Job quality and working conditions in the Western Balkans



Job quality and working conditions in the Western Balkans

Funded by the European Union

Eurofound

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

When citing this report, please use the following wording:
Eurofound (2026), *Job quality and working conditions in the Western Balkans*, Working conditions and sustainable work, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Authors: Mihail Arandarenko, Sonila Danaj, Marija Risteska, Aleksandra Anić, Dragan Aleksić and Aleksandar Radivojević

Research managers: Agnes Parent-Thirion, Stavroula Demetriades and Johannes Weiss

Research project: Comparative analysis of job quality and working conditions in the Western Balkans

Contributors: Nikica Blaževski, Svetlana Budimcevic, Amina Hadžiomerović, Jadranka Kaluđerović, Koli Sinjari and Kushtrim Shaipi

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2026

Print	ISBN 978-92-897-2545-3	doi:10.2806/2756988	TJ-01-25-040-EN-C
PDF	ISBN 978-92-897-2546-0	doi:10.2806/7490144	TJ-01-25-040-EN-N

© European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), 2026

Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

For any use or reproduction of photos or other material that is not under the Eurofound copyright, permission must be sought directly from the copyright holders.

Cover image: ©kerkezz/Adobe Stock

Any queries on copyright must be addressed in writing to: copyright@eurofound.europa.eu

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite European Union Agency established in 1975. Its role is to provide knowledge in the area of social, employment and work-related policies according to Regulation (EU) 2019/127.

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Tel.: (+353 1) 204 31 00
Email: information@eurofound.europa.eu
Internet: www.eurofound.europa.eu

Contents

Executive summary 5

1 Labour markets and the working population in the Western Balkans 7
Development of labour market indicators 7
Labour markets at the time of COVID-19 11

2 Job quality in the Western Balkans 13
Dimensions of job quality 13
Job quality – a timely topic in the Western Balkans 15
Physical and social environment 16
Job tasks 19
Organisational arrangements 20
Working time arrangements 21
Job prospects 22
Intrinsic job features 24
Job quality index 25

3 Quality of working life 31
Duration of paid work 31
Working hours 31
Work–life balance 33
Work–life conflicts 36
Working time preferences 40

4 Gender equality snapshot 45
The EU as a transformative force: gender equality in labour legislation 45
Aspects of gender inequality at work 46

Conclusions and policy pointers 55
Conclusions 55
Policy pointers 57

References 59

Executive summary

Introduction

This report analyses the working lives – including working conditions and job quality – of workers in the Western Balkans based on data collected by the European Working Conditions Telephone Survey (EWCTS), a probability survey conducted in 2021 in 36 European countries. The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) has been monitoring working conditions in Europe through its surveys since 1991. The collection and analysis of the data are part of Eurofound's mission to contribute to the improvement of working conditions. This report marks a first in its focus on job quality in the Western Balkans region, currently comprising five candidate countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia) and one potential candidate country (Kosovo ([1]), together referred to here as the WB6. The report brings new regional insights to the analysis of European working conditions and strives to raise awareness of this topic and broaden the perspectives of policymakers, social partners, researchers and the wider public in the region.

Policy context

The improvement of working conditions has been a goal of European integration since the Treaty of Rome (1958). Good working conditions were recognised as a prerequisite for the development of a competitive knowledge-based economy by the Lisbon strategy (2000) and as essential to achieving smart, sustainable and inclusive growth by the Europe 2020 strategy. The European Pillar of Social Rights (2017) set out 20 principles to guide the EU Member States towards a strong social EU that is fair, inclusive and full of opportunity. These principles are being implemented through a wide range of policy packages alongside plans for a just transition towards a climate-neutral and digitalised society.

The WB6, since embarking on the EU accession path in the late 1990s or 2000s, have been gradually implementing EU policy guidance. In the past decade, they have managed to reduce their labour market gaps with the EU, but the gaps are still substantial. They also need to take further steps in adopting policies for the improvement of working conditions, the promotion of gender equality at work and the creation of inclusive opportunities for their citizens.

Key findings

The EWCTS delivered a wealth of findings on the aspects of work that affect workers positively (job resources) and negatively (job demands) in the WB6, including the following.

- The physical environment is highly strained, with three out of four workers having to engage in repetitive hand and arm movements, and 62 % having to maintain tiring or painful physical positions at work. Both of these rates are well above the EU average. On the other hand, the social environment is more positive than in the EU, with less intimidation and more support from managers and colleagues, which reflects entrenched societal values of solidarity.
- Work is not overly intensive, in relative terms, in the WB6 – 4 out of 10 workers always or often work at high speed, and one in three work under tight schedules. This compares favourably with the EU-27, where the corresponding shares in both cases are slightly below one half. With regard to resources, the WB6 are at a disadvantage. Only one third of the workforce reports significant ability to choose or change their method of work, compared with almost one half in the EU. Similarly, while fewer than two in five workers in the WB6 can choose or change the order of their tasks, almost three in five workers can do so in the EU-27.
- Working time is very long in the WB6, with both men and women working over 40 hours per week, and 45 % of workers working six or seven days a week. The average working week ranges from 40.5 hours in North Macedonia to over 44 hours in Montenegro. For comparison, in the EU, the average working time is 36.9 hours, with women working significantly fewer hours than men.
- Workers in the WB6 have the most difficulty making ends meet among 36 European countries, taking the last six places in the overall ranking for that criterion. While, in the EU-27, 26 % of all workers have trouble making ends meet, this percentage is 46 % in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 54 % in North Macedonia, 57 % in Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia, and 69 % in Albania.

An index of job quality, calculated by comparing job demands with job resources, indicates that around one third of workers in the WB6 are in 'strained' (i.e. lower-quality) jobs, where job demands outweigh job resources. In the EU, the corresponding share is somewhat lower, with 3 out of 10 workers engaged in strained jobs. This result is expected, as it is driven by the differences in the levels of economic development in the EU-27 and the WB6, which are reflected in the different sectoral and occupational structures in each group. However, the relationship between the gross domestic product level and scores on the job quality index is far from deterministic. It is encouraging that many jobs throughout the WB6, most notably in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, show high levels of job resources despite the limitations associated with their level of economic development.

1 This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

The EWCTS data confirm well-known facts regarding the gender segregation of sectors and occupations in the WB6. Women are almost five times more likely than men to work in the health sector, four times more in the education sector and almost two times more in commerce and hospitality. Men represent the vast majority of workers in transport (with a share almost four times higher than that of women) and construction (10 times higher than that of women). Within occupational groups, women are two times more prevalent among professional and clerical support workers, while men are three times more prevalent among plant and machine operators and craft workers.

Gender disparities in the distribution of paid and unpaid work are striking. For full-time workers (the vast majority in the WB6), the ratio of paid to unpaid work for men is almost 3 to 1 (52 paid and 18 unpaid hours per week); for women, it is only 1.2 to 1 (46 paid and 38 unpaid hours per week). On average, women work a total of 84 hours per week between paid and unpaid work, while men work 14 hours less. Despite working many more (unpaid and total) hours, working women in the WB6 do not report more difficulties in achieving work–life balance than working men.

Despite much higher total and paid hours of work being reported in the WB6 than in the EU, the shares of workers in the WB6 who report that their working hours fit 'very well' or 'well' with their family and social commitments (32.1 % and 45.5 %, respectively) are not significantly smaller than those in the EU-27 (34.2 % and 46.9 %, respectively). Among those in the WB6 who report that their working hours fit 'not very well' or 'not at all well' with their other commitments, the highest shares are in Montenegro (29 %) and Serbia (27.8 %), whereas the lowest share is in Albania (15.1 %).

Policy pointers

Any effort to improve working conditions and job quality in the Western Balkans region would need to address three long-standing issues that were also highlighted by the findings of the EWTCS, namely long working hours, long unpaid hours for working women and widespread difficulty making ends meet. These weak spots call for two highly interconnected and synergetic policy directions. The first focuses on the continuation of economic and employment growth to ensure further convergence of the region towards the EU-27. A more developed economy leads to a higher share of modern knowledge-based service jobs and more high-skilled occupations, both associated with better working conditions and job quality. It also leads to better wages and more jobs, helping families to make ends meet. The second, equally important policy direction focuses on promoting workers' participation and voice in the workplace, gender equality at work and work–life balance to secure equitable, inclusive and robust improvements in working conditions and job quality in the region. There should be no trade-off between the quantity and quality of jobs, and there is no economic or social rationale for it.

At this relatively early stage, the role of social partners in supporting and actively pursuing the implementation of policies promoting job quality, good working conditions, better work–life balance and gender equality at work is essential. Socioeconomic councils should support the inclusion of a broad array of aspects of working conditions on the agenda in collective bargaining and collective agreements at all levels.

The academic community should be invited to engage in contextualising the theory behind the research on working conditions and in explaining and disseminating the results of empirical research. While the European Working Conditions Survey framework is relatively novel in the Western Balkans region, researchers in related fields, such as organisational science, occupational psychology, sociology of work, behavioural science, industrial relations and labour economics, should be involved in the creation of a wider regional expert community by contributing approaches and knowledge from their respective disciplines.

1 Labour markets and the working population in the Western Balkans

This chapter presents the socioeconomic and labour market context for the analysis of the working conditions, job quality and quality of working life in the six Western Balkan countries (WB6). It broadly follows the developments over the past decade or so and briefly addresses the variable impacts of COVID-19 on the region's economies and labour markets around the time that the European Working Conditions Telephone Survey (EWCTS) was conducted by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound). While the pandemic has probably left a significant mark on the results of the EWCTS, it appears that its general impact on the socioeconomic and labour market developments of the region has faded in the post-pandemic years, with the WB6 economies and labour markets largely returning to their long-term growth paths.

Development of labour market indicators

Population trends

In demographic terms, the region faces interlinked trends of depopulation and ageing. Table 1 presents the data from the penultimate and most recent censuses (or the closest available data) to illustrate this point. The ageing of the population is universal across the WB6 and quite fast, especially in countries with younger populations and extremely high rates of outmigration, such as Albania and Kosovo. Meanwhile, the population decline is very pronounced and almost universal, with the smallest country, Montenegro, being the only exception to the trend. The share of the emigrant population (as opposed to the resident population) ranges from well above 10 % (in Serbia) to over 30 % (in Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Table 1: Data on total population and average age from the last two censuses, WB6

Country	A (penultimate census)		B (most recent census)		Census year	
	Population	Average age	Population	Average age	A	B
Albania	2 821 977	35.3	2 402 113	42.5	2011	2023
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3 531 159	39.5	No data	No data	2013	No update
Kosovo	1 739 825	30	1 602 515	34.8	2011	2024
Montenegro	620 029	37	633 158	39.7	2011	2023
North Macedonia	2 022 547	No data	1 836 713	40	2002	2021
Serbia	7 186 862	42.2	6 647 003	43.8	2011	2022

Source: National statistical offices.

Key quantitative labour market indicators

The region shows a pattern of general steady improvement in all key quantitative labour market indicators – the activity rate (Table 2), the employment rate (Table 3) and the unemployment rate (Table 4) – although it has been uneven over time and across countries, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on standard EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) statistics, over the past decade, the WB6 have experienced average growth of 3.3 percentage points (pp) in the activity rate and 8.6 pp in the employment rate, and an average decline of 11.4 pp in the unemployment rate. This has brought about a convergence ([2]) (understood technically as a reduction in the negative difference between rates) with the EU-27 of 1.9 pp in the activity rate (in 2023, it was 53.3 % in the WB6 compared with 65.3 % in the EU-27), 3.7 pp in the employment rate (in 2023, it was 47.4 % in the WB6 compared with 61.3 % in the EU-27) and 6.6 pp in the unemployment rate (in 2023, it was 11 % in the WB6 compared with 6.1 % in the EU-27).

2 While in recent years Eurofound has developed a consistent methodology to investigate convergence, in this report, convergence is measured only as a reduction in the negative difference between WB6 rates and the EU average for various indicators. Future research will be dedicated to the full application of the Eurofound methodology to better grasp the convergence pattern of the WB6 towards the EU average (Eurofound, 2018).

Table 2: Activity rates of the population aged 15 and over, 2014–2023, WB6 and EU-27 (%)

Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2023 v 2014 pp change
Albania	53.7	55.7	57.5	58.3	59.4	60.4	59.5	59.8	62.4	64.1	10.4
Bosnia and Herzegovina	43.7	44.1	43.1	42.6	42.1	42.1	47.7	48.0	47.6	47.8	4.2
Kosovo	37.2	33.5	34.2	37.3	35.2	35.3	33.4	34.4	33.6	35.1	– 2.0
Montenegro	52.7	53.7	54.5	54.7	56.0	57.4	53.3	51.0	59.1	64.1	11.4
North Macedonia	57.3	57.0	56.5	56.8	56.9	57.2	56.4	56.0	55.2	52.3	– 5.1
Serbia	51.9	51.6	53.3	54.0	54.5	54.6	54.0	53.8	54.7	55.4	3.4
WB6	50.0	49.9	50.9	51.5	51.7	52.1	51.9	51.9	52.6	53.3	3.3
EU-27 ([1])	63.3	63.4	63.7	64.0	64.1	64.4	63.5	64.0	64.8	65.3	1.9

([1]) Prior to 2020, data cover the EU-28.
Notes: The activity rate is the share of active people (employed and unemployed) in the total adult population (defined here as being at least 15 years old). There were changes in methodology for Bosnia and Herzegovina (2020), Montenegro (2021), Serbia (2021) and North Macedonia (2023).
Source: EU-LFS, Eurostat.

Table 3: Employment rates of the population aged 15 and over, 2014–2023, WB6 and EU-27 (%)

Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2023 v 2014 pp change
Albania	44.3	46.2	48.7	50.3	52.1	53.4	52.5	52.9	55.5	57.2	12.9
Bosnia and Herzegovina	31.7	31.9	32.2	33.9	34.3	35.5	40.1	39.6	40.2	41.5	9.9
Kosovo	24.1	22.5	24.8	26.0	24.9	26.3	24.8	27.3	29.4	31.3	7.3
Montenegro	43.2	44.3	44.9	45.9	47.5	48.7	43.8	42.6	50.4	55.7	12.6
North Macedonia	41.2	42.1	43.1	44.1	45.1	47.3	47.2	47.2	47.2	45.4	4.2
Serbia	42.0	42.5	45.2	46.7	47.6	49.0	49.1	47.8	49.5	50.2	8.2
WB6	38.8	39.4	41.4	42.8	43.6	45.1	45.1	44.8	46.4	47.4	8.6
EU-27 ([1])	56.5	57.0	57.9	58.8	59.5	60.1	59.0	59.5	60.8	61.3	4.9

([1]) Prior to 2020, data cover the EU-28.
Notes: The employment rate is defined here as the share of employed people in the total adult population. There were changes in methodology for Bosnia and Herzegovina (2020), Montenegro (2021), Serbia (2021) and North Macedonia (2023).
Source: EU-LFS, Eurostat.

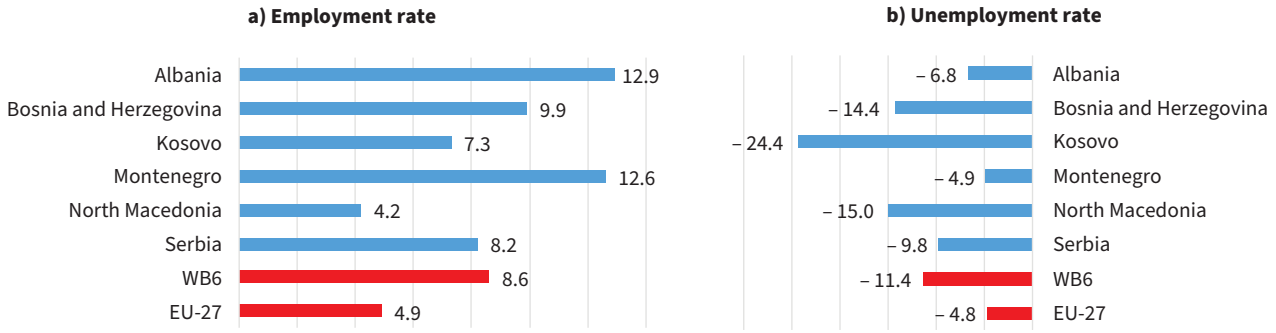
Table 4: Unemployment rates of the population aged 15 and over, 2014–2023, WB6 and EU-27 (%)

Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2023 v 2014 pp change
Albania	17.5	17.1	15.2	13.7	12.3	11.5	11.7	11.5	10.9	10.7	– 6.8
Bosnia and Herzegovina	27.5	27.7	25.4	20.5	18.4	15.7	15.9	17.4	15.4	13.2	– 14.4
Kosovo	35.2	32.8	27.5	30.3	29.4	25.5	25.7	20.6	12.5	10.8	– 24.4
Montenegro	18.0	17.5	17.7	16.1	15.2	15.1	17.9	16.6	14.7	13.1	– 4.9
North Macedonia	28.0	26.1	23.7	22.4	20.7	17.3	16.4	15.7	14.4	13.1	– 15.0
Serbia	19.2	17.7	15.3	13.5	12.7	10.4	9.0	11.1	9.5	9.4	– 9.8
WB6	22.4	21.2	18.7	16.9	15.7	13.4	13.0	13.7	11.8	11.0	– 11.4
EU-27 ([1])	10.9	10.1	9.1	8.2	7.3	6.7	7.1	7.1	6.2	6.1	– 4.8

([1]) Prior to 2020, data cover the EU-28.
Notes: The unemployment rate is defined here as the share of unemployed people in the total adult population. There were changes in methodology for Bosnia and Herzegovina (2020), Montenegro (2021), Serbia (2021) and North Macedonia (2023).
Source: EU-LFS, Eurostat.

The employment rates in all of the WB6 except North Macedonia showed some convergence towards the EU average, with Albania and Montenegro leading the way (Figure 1, panel a). Interestingly, these two countries had the lowest convergence levels with regard to unemployment rates. The findings presented here are only illustrative of the general positive trend, since there have been numerous methodological changes in the labour force statistics in the region, hampering the precision of comparisons over time and between countries.

Figure 1: Net changes in the employment and unemployment rates in the WB6, 2014–2023 (pp)



Source: EU-LFS, Eurostat.

In addition to its extensive dimension (i.e. the number of people who work), employment has an intensive dimension (i.e. the duration of work). In that respect, the WB6 constitute the European region with the highest average number of work hours per week (Table 5). This means that in terms of the average hours worked per adult, the region lags somewhat less behind the EU-27 than in terms of the employment rate ([3]). However, as will be shown in the following chapters, it also means that job quality and work–life balance are at an elevated risk because of long working time (e.g. long days at work, long working weeks and a higher incidence of working more than five days per week), often involving arrangements that negatively affect work–life balance.

Table 5: Mean weekly hours usually worked, 2014–2023, WB6 and EU-27

Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Albania	42.3	42.5	42.9	43.2	43.5	43.4	43.2	43.3	43.8	43.7
Bosnia and Herzegovina	42.5	42.5	42.6	42.1	42.5	42.5	41.6	41.8	41.9	41.9
Kosovo	43.1	43.5	44.4	44.7	45.3	44.1	43.6	43.2	42.8	42.4
Montenegro	43.5	43.6	43.3	43.4	44.0	44.4	44.1	44.4	44.6	No data
North Macedonia	41.3	41.1	41.5	42.0	41.6	41.3	40.9	40.9	40.8	40.5
Serbia	42.3	42.6	42.5	42.5	42.4	42.3	42.3	42.8	42.9	42.9
EU-27 ([1])	37.3	37.2	37.2	37.1	37.1	37.1	37.0	37.0	37.0	36.9

([1]) Prior to 2020, data cover the EU-28.
Source: International Labour Organization statistics repository (Ilostat) microdata processing; Eurostat for EU data.

Vulnerable and informal employment

In standard labour force statistics, the share of vulnerable employment in total employment often serves as a proxy for the quality of employment. Per the International Labour Organization (ILO) definition, vulnerable employment comprises self-employment and the unpaid work of helpers in family businesses. These two forms of employment are on average of lower quality than standard dependent (wage) employment – that is, they are less productive and provide lower earnings and less job security.

Vulnerable employment has been a long-standing feature in the Western Balkans region, and is well above the EU-27 average, especially the shares of unpaid family workers. However, these shares have shown significant reductions in most of the WB6, except Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro (in the former, probably because of methodological changes to the EU-LFS) (Table 6). In addition, the rates of informal employment, covering workers without written contracts or social insurance, have been falling steadily in all of the WB6 except Bosnia and Herzegovina (again, probably because of methodological changes). Nevertheless, these rates are still in double-digit territory (Table 7). Furthermore, the estimates of undeclared work (a broader concept that also includes informal work done by formal workers, who for instance may receive envelope wages or work informally at a second job) are much higher.

3 It should be noted, however, that in the WB6, as an almost universally accepted practice, the standard workday includes paid breaks, which is not always the case among the EU-27.

Table 6: Vulnerable employment rates in the WB6, 2014–2022 (%)

Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2022 v 2014 pp change
Albania	56.0	56.5	55.9	54.1	52.2	51.2	51.0	50.4	49.8	– 6.2
Bosnia and Herzegovina	18.5	20.2	20.1	18.2	16.4	19.1	19.1	19.0	18.9	0.4
Kosovo	24.9	22.8	22.9	23.1	19.6	18.8	17.0	12.7	13.3	– 11.6
Montenegro	15.1	16.8	17.3	17.5	17.6	16.6	17.4	17.4	17.1	2.0
North Macedonia	22.1	21.6	19.5	18.9	18.3	16.8	13.9	12.8	12.5	– 9.7
Serbia	28.1	26.4	28.1	26.3	24.7	24.3	23.9	24.2	23.8	– 4.3

Source: World Bank and Kosovo Statistical Agency.

Table 7: Informal employment rates in selected Western Balkan countries, 2014–2023 (%)

Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Albania	51.3	46.7	40.1	36.2	37.0	37.8	36.2	36.6	36.5	35.1
Bosnia and Herzegovina	19.7	19.9	20.7	14.3	23.1	22.1	24.8	30.5	30.1	29.3
North Macedonia	22.6	19.9	18.5	18.1	18.6	16.1	13.6	12.1	12.2	10.7
Serbia	21.2	20.4	22.0	20.7	19.5	18.2	16.4	13.0	13.0	12.5

Source: ILO for Bosnia and Herzegovina; Jobs Gateway Database of the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies for others.

Wages

In 2014, the average nominal gross wage in the WB6 was only 17 % of the Austrian and 49 % of the Croatian gross average wage ([4]). By 2023, it had grown to 23 % of the Austrian and 57 % of the Croatian gross wage (Table 8). The trend of wage convergence with the EU has accelerated since 2019, driven by growing labour shortages in the WB6 in an increasing number of sectors and occupations. The labour shortages are due partly to economic growth, but also to the fast shrinking of the working-age population.

The wage convergence is somewhat smaller if real wages in euro are considered, but the trend of faster growth in both nominal wages in euro and the consumer price index in the WB6 compared with the EU-27 is indicative of some convergence in living standards with the EU-27. Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro have the highest wages in the region, while Kosovo and Albania have the lowest. The most dynamic wage growth was recorded in Albania and Serbia. However, in net terms, the highest wage growth was observed in Montenegro due to an overhaul of the labour taxation system, including the abolition of health insurance contributions and an across-the-board reduction in the effective income tax rate.

Despite these recent improvements, low wages and insufficient income remain key issues for a large share of the WB6 working population. This has been clearly confirmed by the EWCTS, with the WB6 showing the highest rates of workers having difficulty making ends meet (Eurofound, 2022, p. 102, Figure 90). 46 % of workers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 54 % in North Macedonia, 57 % in Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia, and 69 % in Albania have difficulty making ends meet, compared with the average of 26 % for the EU-27.

Table 8: Average monthly gross wages in the WB6, Austria and Croatia, 2014–2023 (nominal EUR)

Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Albania	325.3	342.8	346.0	365.0	396.5	425.8	433.6	467.0	520.2	648.3
Bosnia and Herzegovina	659.3	659.1	665.0	675.6	696.7	726.7	754.6	788.4	881.0	995.5
Kosovo	403.0	415.0	422.0	431.0	453.0	477.0	466.0	484.0	521.0	570.0
Montenegro	723.0	725.0	751.0	765.0	766.0	773.0	783.0	793.0	883.0	987.0
North Macedonia	508.3	522.2	532.9	547.1	579.2	608.8	657.7	695.8	773.0	892.1
Serbia	523.6	506.4	515.6	543.7	580.3	643.3	705.8	772.1	879.6	1011.5
WB6	505.5	502.9	508.4	528.5	559.2	601.7	647.9	691.2	776.4	896.1
Austria	2 942.1	3 001.4	3 072.4	3 121.6	3 205.7	3 300.7	3 359.3	3 461.6	3 636.2	3 895.0
Croatia	1 041.7	1 058.0	1 029.0	1 079.2	1 138.8	1 181.7	1 222.5	1 275.0	1 379.9	1 584.0

Source: Jobs Gateway Database of the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies.

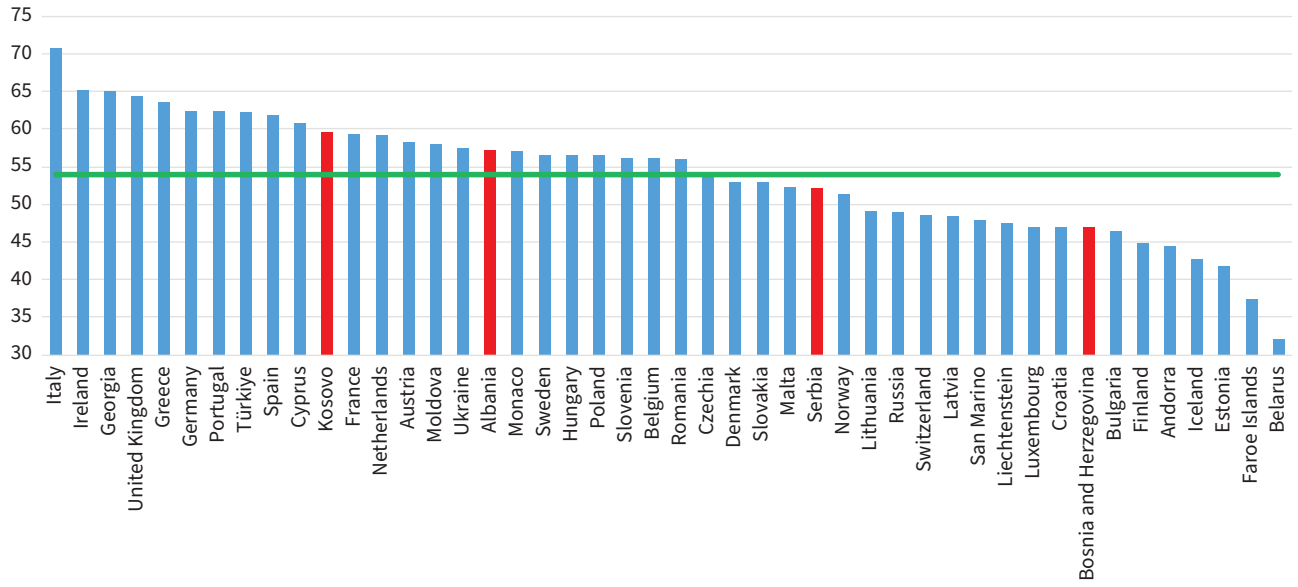
4 The Jobs Gateway Database of the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies regularly follows wage trends in the WB6 in parallel with several comparator countries in the wider EU neighbourhood, including Austria, representing old (pre-2004) Member States, and Croatia, representing new (post-2004) Member States.

Labour markets at the time of COVID-19

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to two specific challenges in the historical and cross-country comparability of the seventh wave of the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), conducted in 2021 (i.e. the EWCTS). Firstly, 2021 was a highly irregular year, with COVID-19 still, in various ways, disrupting the working lives of most workers in the WB6 (as well as in the EU-27 and across the globe). To some degree, these disruptions were idiosyncratic, with varying COVID-19 outbreak experiences and different restrictions applied in each country. Secondly, because of limitations on in-person contact due to COVID-19, the EWCTS was the only wave of the EWCS conducted over the telephone – hence the additional 'T' in its abbreviation. This iteration utilised a computer-assisted telephone interviewing technique, departing from the traditional face-to-face interviewing methodology employed in previous waves (Eurofound, 2022). This methodological shift makes comparison with previous survey results more difficult. Both challenges can be addressed to some degree by looking more carefully at the specific circumstances related to COVID-19 in the WB6 around the time the survey was conducted.

During the three-month full lockdown from March to June 2020, the WB6 implemented very strict containment policies. Measured using the COVID-19 Stringency Index ([5]), among 46 European countries, Kosovo had the third highest score, Albania the fifth, Serbia the eighth and Bosnia and Herzegovina the sixteenth (there are no data for Montenegro and North Macedonia). After the lockdown period, containment policies in the WB6 were relaxed relatively more than in the rest of Europe, as reflected in their average rankings from January 2020 to July 2021 (Figure 2). The stringency of containment policies in the WB6 was similar to that found in the rest of Europe, a bit above the average in Kosovo and Albania and below the average in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The EWCTS fieldwork was conducted between March and November 2021 in Albania and between March and July 2021 in the remaining five Western Balkan countries (Eurofound et al., 2022), at a time when the stringency level in the region was below average.

Figure 2: Average COVID-19 Stringency Index scores from January 2020 to July 2021 in Europe



Source: Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker.

5 The COVID-19 Stringency Index, created by researchers from Oxford University, is based on nine indicators, including school closures, workplace closures and travel bans. It is a simple sum of the scores for nine indicators rescaled to range from 0 to 100, where higher values indicate more stringent regulations.

2 Job quality in the Western Balkans

Dimensions of job quality

Most people spend a large amount of their adult life at work in highly structured labour markets. Labour force statistics, developed in their modern form roughly a century ago, capture workers' hours of work, their wages and other quantitative aspects of their jobs. Good working conditions go beyond fair wages and in-work benefits; they enhance worker well-being and improve productivity and innovation. The spread of high-quality jobs also reduces inequality, fosters social cohesion and prioritises health and well-being, which benefits both individuals and society.

The concepts of working conditions and job quality have been in the process of constant development for several decades. Some earlier definitions emphasised the 'hard', self-evidently important dimensions of jobs, such as wages, type of employment contract, social protection coverage, working time, and health and safety. Over time, these concepts have become more complex and have been enriched to include aspects of workers' well-being. This has gone hand in hand with the progress of the 'Beyond GDP' initiative (see Stiglitz et al., 2009). As a result, a very rich and creative literature on what constitutes good working conditions and job quality has developed in recent decades, highlighting the interdisciplinary and multidimensional nature of these concepts, but also the fact that they lie at the crossroads of research, public policies and ethics (Vendramin et al., 2019).

Workplaces and job tasks have various attributes that shape the overall quality of the work environment of each worker. The combination of negative and positive attributes determines how good a job is. Negative job attributes, such as time pressure, can be compensated for by a higher level of autonomy enjoyed by the worker, mitigating the adverse impact on individual well-being. These compensating and interacting effects can be captured only at the individual level using microlevel data.

Another advantage of defining the quality of the working environment at the individual level is that it enables us to examine inequalities beyond the level of country averages (Stiglitz et al., 2009). This means that differences in the quality of the working environment across the workforce can be assessed. This method requires using a single data source that provides information on various job characteristics at the same time and for the same person.

The job characteristics approach behind the Eurofound methodology

Studies of the quality of the working environment have relied on various theoretical perspectives, which differ in their subjective or objective approach. The approach underpinning the guidelines of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2017) lies at the objective end of this spectrum, as it focuses on the presence and the intensity of objective characteristics in the job (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011).

The **working environment** is understood in this report – as in the broader OECD and Eurofound framework on job quality – as a combination of job characteristics defining the setting where workers operate. The concept is multidimensional and encompasses a broad range of predominantly non-pecuniary characteristics of a job, including the nature of the work tasks assigned to each worker, the physical and social conditions under which these tasks are carried out, the characteristics of the firm or organisation where the work takes place, the scheduling of working time, the prospects for advancement that the job provides to workers and the intrinsic rewards associated with the job.

The **job characteristics approach** defines the quality of the working environment in terms of several specific features that influence workers' well-being, rather than focusing on individuals' subjective evaluations of their conditions. Workers are not directly asked if they are satisfied with their job / working environment. Instead, they are asked about the various aspects of their working environment that are scientifically proven to influence the quality of the working environment.

Conceptually, the job characteristics approach is an application of the **capabilities approach**, which states that, when making an evaluation of a person's position in society, it is important to focus on a person's opportunities to do and be what they have reason to value. Philosophically, the capabilities approach criticises utilitarianism, which assesses people's well-being through levels of utility, for excluding non-utility information from moral judgements (Sen, 1997) and for relying on misleading interpersonal or intertemporal comparisons. The capabilities approach is also critical of resource-based theories, which consider income, basic goods or material resources as the only means to enhance people's well-being, for not considering other aspects of jobs that matter intrinsically to workers. Both critiques are critiques of some of the basic postulates of economic theory.

The job characteristics approach is multidimensional and interdisciplinary, as it builds on insights from various disciplines on a common research question. It defines the quality of the working environment as the combination of good and bad job attributes that have an impact on individuals' well-being, as assessed through prospective epidemiological studies.

Thus, the approach rests on empirical evidence of how specific job features affect the well-being of workers. The quality of the working environment is defined as a combination of objective job characteristics that have both direct and indirect effects on workers' physical and psychological well-being. These characteristics pertain to either the demands confronting workers or the resources available to them to meet these demands. How job

characteristics are combined at the level of each worker defines the working environment that they experience. An abundant literature – from the fields of sociology, occupational health, organisational psychology and human resource management – has identified the most important dimensions and subdimensions of the working environment that contribute to workers' well-being.

The indicators pertaining to job quality share several common, empirically tested features. Each indicator has an independent influence (positive or negative) on the health and well-being of workers. The indicators capture objective attributes of jobs – physical, psychological, social and organisational – that can be evaluated by a third party. However, they are not immune to the impact of the broader cultural environment. Furthermore, workers' exposure to the objective attributes of a job will depend on their organisational context and personal characteristics. These job attributes are experienced by the worker as they carry out their tasks in a specific job context and work environment that draws on their individual abilities and personal characteristics. This means that the experience of real work – that is, work performed under varying conditions – is captured and not simply a manager's idealised description of the work.

The indicators capture either job demands or job resources. Job demands are job attributes that require effort and increase a worker's risk of poorer health and well-being. Job resources are features that support workers in at least one of three ways: by reducing job demands and their physiological and psychological costs; by helping workers achieve their work goals; or by fostering personal growth.

Overview of job quality dimensions

The analysis in this chapter organises the aspects of job quality into the six broad dimensions described below and summarised in Table 9.

Physical and social environment. This covers the features of the physical space in which work is undertaken and the relationships between workers in the workplace. It captures three demands: exposure to physical risks, physical demands, and intimidation and discrimination. One resource is included: social support at work.

Job tasks. This covers the conditions under which workers carry out their tasks. It captures workers' work intensity (a demand) and level of autonomy (a resource).

Organisational characteristics. This covers the ability of workers to be part of decision-making processes at work. One resource is examined: the practices that give employees opportunities to be involved in decision-making concerning their work. This dimension also includes one demand, relevant only to self-employed workers: dependence, as measured by a lack of freedom to make important decisions on how to run the business and recruit staff.

Working time arrangements. This dimension covers the characteristics of work schedules and working time. It includes one demand, unsocial work schedules, and one resource, the working time flexibility available to workers.

Job prospects. This dimension covers opportunities to advance in one's career. One demand, job insecurity, is explored, which encompasses both the risk of losing one's employment and the risk of losing the valued characteristics of one's job. The dimension also includes two resources: opportunities to develop skills through training, and the career prospects of the job.

Intrinsic job features. This covers the opportunity for self-development, where a worker is able to work towards their own personal aspirations. It includes two job resources: intrinsic rewards and opportunities for self-realisation.

Table 9: Dimensions of job quality and corresponding job demands and job resources

Dimension	Job demands	Job resources
Physical and social environment	Physical risks	Social support
	Physical demands	
	Intimidation and discrimination	
Job tasks	Work intensity	Task discretion and autonomy
Organisational characteristics	Dependence (self-employed only)	Organisational participation and workplace voice
Working time arrangements	Unsocial work schedules	Flexibility of working hours
Job prospects	Perceptions of job insecurity	Training and learning opportunities
		Career advancement
Intrinsic job features	—	Intrinsic rewards
		Opportunities for self-realisation

Source: Eurofound, 2022.

Job quality – a timely topic in the Western Balkans

As can be seen from the statistics in Chapter 1, the WB6 constituted until quite recently one of the regions with the worst key labour market indicators in the world. Public opinion considered unemployment the key problem facing the region, according to multiple Regional Cooperation Council surveys during the 2000s and well into the 2010s. Consequently, the attention of policymakers has been almost exclusively on creating more jobs. In the past decade or so, quantitative labour market indicators have significantly improved throughout the region, partly due to economic growth on the back of the near-complete transition to a market economy, but also partly because of declining resident working-age populations (due to strong outmigration, natural decline or both). They are still well below the EU-27 averages, as presented in the preceding chapter, but there has been progress in convergence. The encouraging trend of more jobs and higher wages has been highlighted by an increasing number of periodic or topical publications by international organisations ([6]). The new phenomena of labour shortages and labour immigration are gradually but steadily gaining ground, alongside the existing issues of unemployment and outmigration.

What is still largely lacking in scientific and public discourse alike is systematic information and discussions on all aspects of working conditions, job quality and quality of working life in the WB6. While some discussion of 'good' or 'better' jobs in the region is found outside Eurofound's analytical framework and empirical research, it is largely limited to the context of tracking and assessing (i) trends in wage levels and formal employment; (ii) shares of vulnerable or temporary and other atypical forms of employment in total employment; and (iii) gender employment and wage gaps. Meanwhile, the more comprehensive concepts of working conditions, job quality and quality of work life remain very much neglected and sidelined in the analyses of the region's socioeconomic progress and convergence with the EU. In terms of relations with the EU, these aspects are not part of the requirements for economic convergence and are thus not regularly or systematically assessed. For example, in a recent European Commission publication assessing the fulfilment of economic criteria for EU accession (European Commission: Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs, 2023), only some negative aspects of labour market quality were mentioned, almost invariably from a pragmatic perspective, as potential obstacles to the creation of a level playing field for businesses and the establishment of a fully fledged functional market economy in the WB6. Typical weaknesses identified across the region include high levels of informal employment and outmigration and persistent gender pay and employment gaps.

Nevertheless, some limited progress has been achieved in the assessment of working conditions and gender equality at work in the region. Most notably, several annual assessments of where the region stands regarding the fulfilment of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights – including those related to equal opportunities and access to the labour market and fair working conditions – have been commissioned by the European Commission in recent years ([7]). These assessments, accompanied by the statistical social scoreboard, are very valuable contributions, but they make very little use of comparable primary data on job quality and working conditions, which are needed to have a more comprehensive view of the situation in the WB6 in this regard.

Based on indications from labour force surveys and recent censuses, the younger generations joining the labour force in the region in recent years are smaller in size, better educated and, as 'digital natives', better prepared for the twin transitions and the AI revolution than older generations, including their parents' cohorts. They care about job quality and prefer a hybrid work model, even putting work–life balance above career advancement and salary when choosing a job (Bajrami, 2024). As prospective employees, they consider it most important that their job provide 'good working conditions, recognition for the work performed, and the possibility of achievement' (Janićijević et al., 2024). A recent analysis based on the EWCTS finds that they are exposed to less job strain and have more resources in their workplaces compared with prime-age and older workers in the WB6. Importantly, this is unlike the experience of their peers in the EU-27, where the opposite is true (Eurofound, 2024, Figure 16).

The analysis in this chapter uses the rich database of the 2021 EWCTS. Eurofound's flagship working conditions survey has been developed gradually over time (in its standard incarnation as the EWCS) with the main objectives of assessing and quantifying the working conditions of both employees and the self-employed across Europe on a harmonised basis; analysing relationships between different aspects of working conditions; identifying groups at risk and issues of concern as well as progress; monitoring trends by providing homogeneous indicators of these issues; and contributing to European policy development on the quality of work and employment issues. During the pandemic, the crucial benefit of a working environment that reduces risks to health and well-being became even more important.

The analysis attempts to identify both common features and unique country-specific factors in the region. Insights on where individual countries and the region as a whole stand in comparison with Member States and the entire EU are also presented, relying on the EWCTS database and Eurofound's already published comparative study (Eurofound, 2022).

6 These include (but are not limited to) the European Commission's annual progress assessments of candidate and potential candidate countries; the World Bank's quarterly *Western Balkans regular economic report*; occasional country assessments by the International Monetary Fund; and various topical publications by the European Training Foundation, the Regional Cooperation Council, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the ILO.

7 Between 2019 and 2023, four assessment rounds were published. The fifth, covering developments in 2023 and 2024, was published in October 2025 by the Regional Cooperation Council.

Physical and social environment

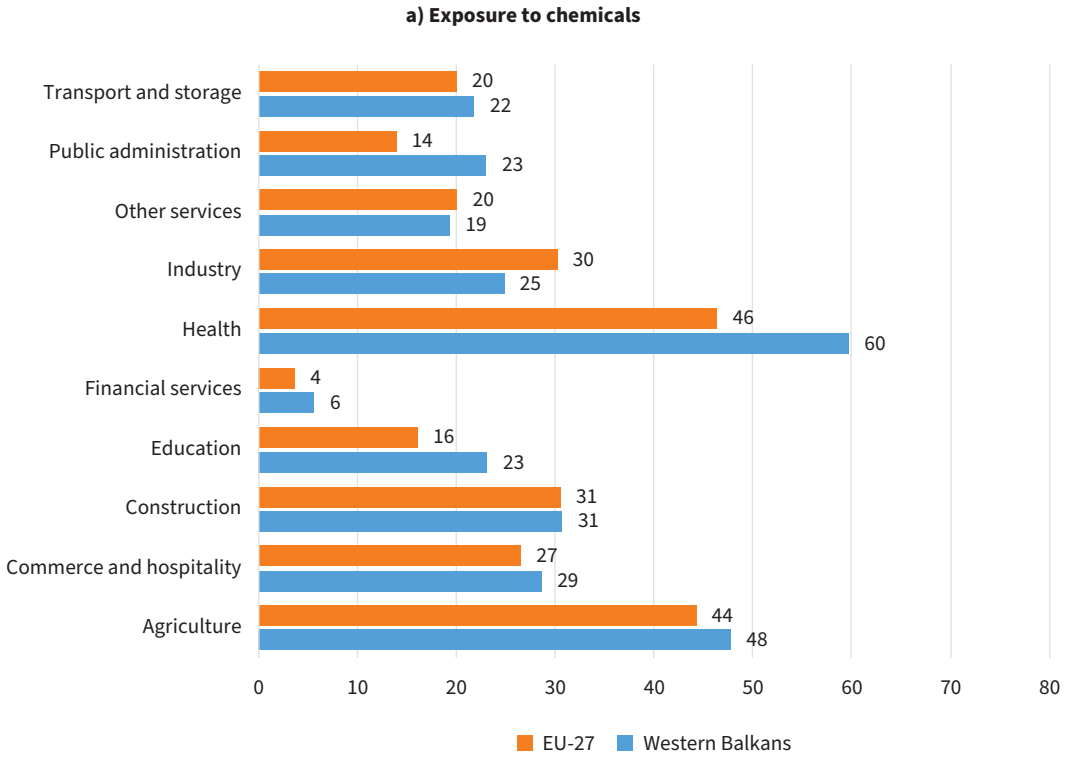
This broad dimension encompasses features of the physical space in which work takes place and the relationships between workers and managers and among co-workers. A safe and healthy work environment is beneficial for workers' health, preventing injuries and illnesses. At the same time, it is important for reducing absenteeism, ensuring efficiency and supporting productivity and quality. The physical and social environment dimension examines three demands (exposure to physical risks, physical demands, and intimidation and discrimination) and one resource (social support at work).

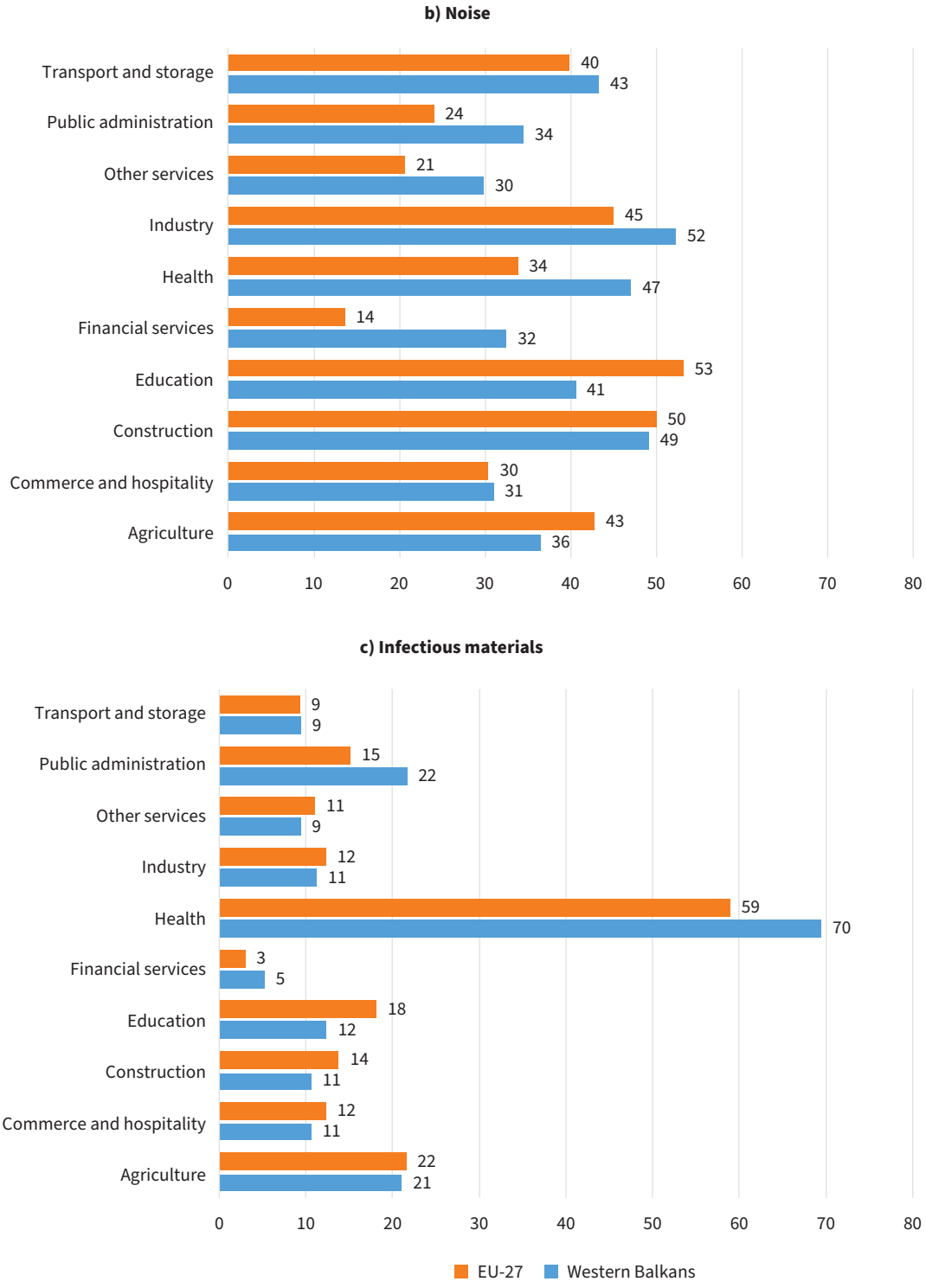
Physical environment

Based on EWCTS data, across the aspects of exposure to chemicals, exposure to noise and exposure to potentially infectious materials, the physical environment in most economic sectors in the WB6 is overall less safe than in the EU-27. The differences are, however, neither uniform nor typically large. A major exception is the health sector, where the levels of environmental risks are much higher than in other sectors and where, in all three aforementioned aspects, the WB6 fare much worse than the EU-27, with 60 % of health workers exposed to chemicals, 47 % to noise and 70 % to potentially infectious materials. The corresponding EU-27 percentages are 46 %, 34 % and 59 %, respectively (Figure 3). Further clarity on whether the differences between the WB6 and the EU-27 in this domain pre-existed or were aggravated by COVID-19 will be available once the results of the 2024 EWCS are processed.

Average exposure to noise levels is somewhat higher in the WB6 than in the EU-27. This is the case in almost all sectors (except agriculture, education and construction). Differences between the EU-27 and the WB6 are the largest in the financial services and health sectors.

Figure 3: Physical risk levels by sector, WB6 and EU-27 (%)





Source: 2021 EWCTS.

When it comes to physical demands, a comparison between the WB6 and the EU-27 indicates that jobs involving high levels of carrying or moving heavy loads, being in tiring or painful positions and making repetitive hand or arm movements are more prevalent in the WB6, while it is only jobs involving lifting or moving people that are somewhat more represented within the EU-27 (Table 10). A more differentiated analysis would be needed to assess whether these differences are largely due to a sectoral composition effect (with more workers presumably employed in sectors demanding high physical activity in the WB6) or to more advanced processes of automation and digitalisation being used in sectors exposed to higher physical demands.

Table 10: Physical demand levels in the WB6 and EU-27 (%)

Country	Carrying or moving heavy loads		Lifting or moving people		Tiring or painful positions		Repetitive hand or arm movements	
	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
Albania	41.5	58.5	13.1	86.9	67.4	32.6	86.2	13.8
Bosnia and Herzegovina	39.5	60.5	8.1	91.9	65.3	34.7	65.4	34.6
Kosovo	32.3	67.7	10.7	89.3	65.2	34.8	88.9	11.1
Montenegro	37.8	62.2	11.1	89.0	62.5	37.5	73.6	26.5
North Macedonia	37.5	62.5	16.6	83.4	56.3	43.7	84.1	15.9
Serbia	42.1	57.9	8.5	91.5	59.9	40.1	71.3	28.7
WB6	40.3	59.7	10.5	89.5	62.2	37.8	75.5	24.5
EU-27	35.3	64.7	11.7	88.3	50.0	50.0	70.8	29.2

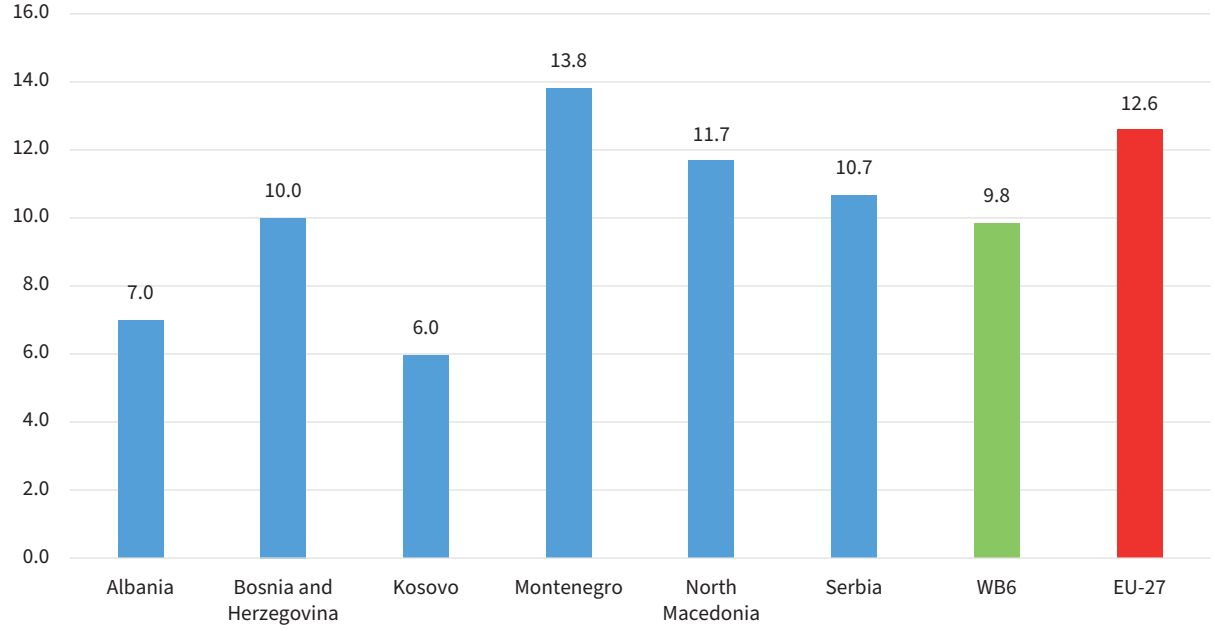
Note: *The data cover workers who responded 'sometimes', 'often' or 'always' to each item. 'High' corresponds to 'always', 'sometimes' or 'often', whereas 'low' corresponds to 'never' or 'rarely'.*
Source: *2021 EWCTS.*

Social environment

Exposure to any form of workplace intimidation adversely affects workers' psychological stability and undermines individual and team performance and productivity. Intimidation encompasses exposure to any of the following three types of behaviour: verbal abuse or threats; unwanted sexual attention; and bullying, harassment or violence.

Across the WB6, there are significant differences in workers' exposure to workplace intimidation, with Kosovo and Albania recording the lowest levels (6.0 % and 7.0 %, respectively) and Montenegro recording the highest level of 13.8 % (Figure 4). When comparing results for this indicator, we observe that while only 1 in 10 workers in the WB6 experience workplace intimidation, one in eight workers in the EU-27 do. Furthermore, looking beyond the EU-27 average to how the results for this indicator are distributed across Europe, an interesting pattern is found: northern and more affluent Member States have on average higher levels of intimidation than southern, eastern and less affluent ones (Eurofound, 2022, p. 33, Figure 22). Entrenched cultural patterns and public awareness of what constitutes intimidating behaviour are plausible explanations for these findings within the WB6 and across Europe.

Figure 4: Rates of exposure to at least one type of intimidation, WB6 and EU-27 (%)



Notes: Intimidation encompasses exposure to any of the following three types of behaviour: verbal abuse or threats; unwanted sexual attention; and bullying, harassment or violence.
Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Table 11: Levels of support from managers and colleagues, WB6 and EU-27 (%)

Country	Support from managers			Support from colleagues		
	High	Moderate	Low	High	Moderate	Low
Albania	59.4	34.2	6.4	59.2	34.5	6.4
Bosnia and Herzegovina	48.4	40.8	10.8	51.6	41.8	6.6
Kosovo	61.3	27.5	11.1	71.0	24.3	4.7
Montenegro	46.5	38.3	15.2	51.5	40.0	8.5
North Macedonia	63.3	25.4	11.4	62.6	30.2	7.2
Serbia	52.3	38.2	9.6	55.6	37.8	6.6
WB6	54.2	35.9	9.9	57.0	36.4	6.6
EU-27	41.1	44.1	14.8	46.7	45.2	8.1

Notes: Levels are based on responses to the statements 'Your manager helps and supports you' and 'Your colleagues help and support you'. High corresponds to 'always'; moderate corresponds to 'sometimes' or 'often'; and low corresponds to 'rarely' or 'never'.
Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Another indicator of the quality of the social environment is the level of support workers get from their co-workers or managers. The more support they receive, the more resource-heavy their social environment is. Support from colleagues and peers fosters communication and productivity, reduces stress and facilitates the acceptance of organisational change among workers.

In terms of support from managers, the WB6 fare well compared with the EU-27 average of 41.1 %; a high level of support of above 50 % is recorded for all the WB6 except Montenegro (46.5 %) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (48.4 %), with values of over 60 % for North Macedonia and Kosovo (Table 11). The situation is very similar with regard to support from colleagues, with 57 % of employees receiving a high level of support on average across the WB6, and no individual country showing a result below 50 %, compared with the EU-27 average of 46.7 %. For both subindicators, no significant gender differences are observed.

Overall, in the WB6, there appears to be a somewhat different pattern of trade-offs between physical and social environments than in the EU-27. While, judging by most subindicators, the physical environment is more strained in the WB6 than in the EU-27, the social environment appears to be more resource-heavy in the WB6 than in the EU-27. There is an especially large difference between the average levels of strong support from managers in the WB6 and the EU-27, with the former surpassing the latter by 13.1 pp. Such results do not come as a complete surprise. Researchers of organisational culture in the region, inspired by Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (e.g. Hofstede, 2011), have long claimed that employees in the WB6 attach the greatest 'valence' (i.e. the level of affective attention - whether positive or negative - granted to some values) to the dimensions of the working environment that contribute to the satisfaction of their relatedness needs, which they value more than existential or growth needs (e.g. Janićijević, 1998).

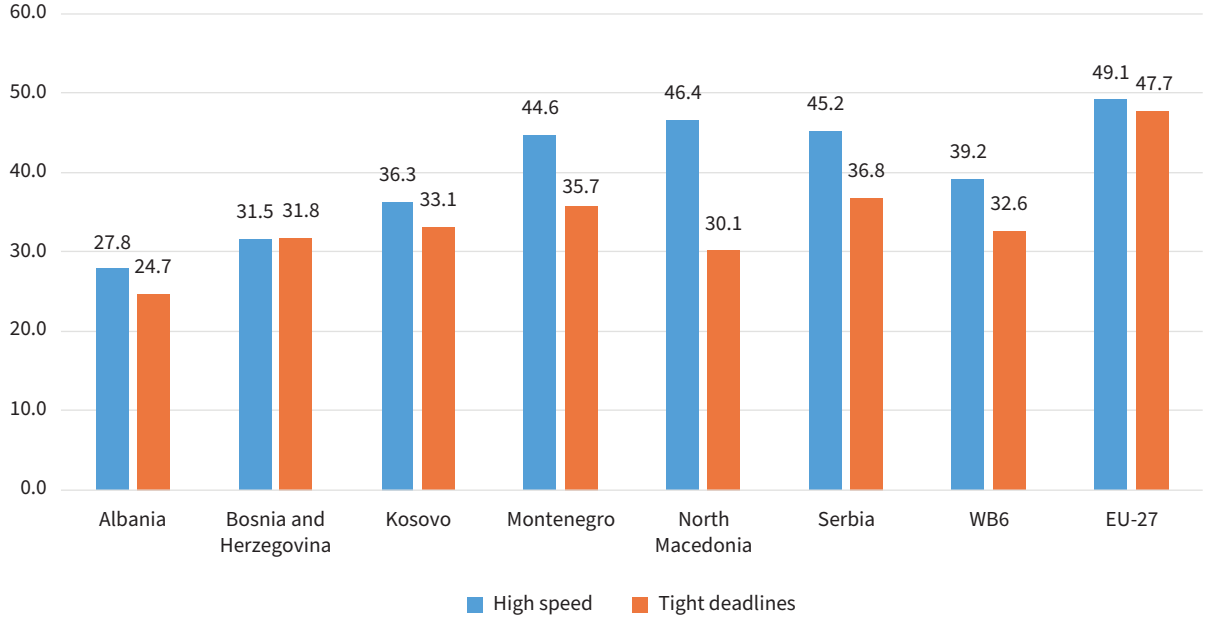
Job tasks

Although jobs involve a precise set of tasks that individuals execute, the conditions under which the same jobs are carried out in different organisations fluctuate significantly depending on organisational structure and culture. The level of autonomy and choice employees have in carrying out their duties and the intensity of their work are key factors in determining their health and well-being. In our empirical operationalisation, the job tasks dimension captures, through specific survey questions, workers' work intensity as a demand and their level of autonomy as a resource.

In the EWCTS, the demand side of this dimension of job quality is captured by asking respondents to specify the frequency with which their jobs require them to work at very high speed, to tight deadlines and in emotionally disturbing situations. Task discretion and autonomy refer to the scope workers have to decide their working methods and their pace of work. Both are resources that enable workers to deal with the demands of their jobs, use their skills and adapt those skills to the demands of the tasks in a way that fit them best.

In the WB6, 39.2 % of workers always or often work at high speed and 32.6 % work to tight schedules (Figure 5). This compares favourably with the EU-27, where the corresponding percentages are 49.1 % and 47.7 %. There is significant variability within the WB6, with Albanian workers having the lowest levels of strain in this respect (27.8 % and 24.7 %, respectively), and Serbian workers the highest (45.2 % and 36.8 %, respectively), but all are still below the EU-27 averages. Regarding the third aspect, emotionally disturbing work, there are no significant differences between the WB6 and the EU-27 – while the WB6 has a somewhat lower share of highly emotionally disturbing jobs (17.4 % versus 18.5 %), it also has a lower share of jobs with low levels of emotional disturbance (51.1 % versus 57.7 %).

Figure 5: Working at high speed and under tight deadlines always or often, WB6 and EU-27 (%)



Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Turning to the resource side, the WB6 are at a clear disadvantage relative to the EU-27. In the WB6, only just over a third of the workforce report having a high ability to choose or change their method of work, while in the EU-27, almost half of the workforce do. Similarly, while fewer than two in five workers in the WB6 claim that they can choose or change the order of their tasks, almost three in five workers in the EU-27 do (Table 12).

It can be hypothesised that the key reason behind the very different trade-offs between task intensity and task autonomy in the WB6 and the EU-27 could lie in the differences in sectoral structure and workforce skill structure between these economies. While service-dominated high-skilled jobs in the EU-27 offer more task autonomy but demand more task intensity, jobs in the WB6, where the service sector is less dominant and somewhat lower average skills are required, offer less task intensity at the price of lower task autonomy.

Organisational arrangements

Organisational participation and employee voice are key resources for employees' motivation and the opportunity to transform their knowledge and experience into added value at work. On the demand side, self-employed people are potentially faced with challenges if they do not have the authority to hire or dismiss employees or make the most important decisions on how to run the business. They could be considered economically dependent workers in these cases.

For this dimension, the differences among the WB6 and between the WB6 and EU-27 averages are not excessively remarkable (Table 13). Among the negative outliers are self-employed people in North Macedonia, where the share of those who are not able to make decisions regarding their own business is 29 %, which is far more than the WB6 average of 16 % and the EU-27 average of 15 %. Employees in Serbia are also outliers, as they participate less in organisational processes within their firms than their peers elsewhere (47 %, compared with the WB6 average of 54 % and the EU-27 average of 57 %).

Table 12: Ability to choose or change methods of work and order of tasks, WB6 and EU-27 (%)

Country	Ability to choose or change methods of work			Ability to choose or change order of tasks		
	High	Moderate	Low	High	Moderate	Low
Albania	35.3	25.6	39.1	34.6	27.6	37.8
Bosnia and Herzegovina	39.2	26.5	34.2	44.9	28.1	27.1
Kosovo	47.4	25.4	27.3	42.3	25.3	32.5
Montenegro	36.5	28.2	35.3	35.4	30.3	34.3
North Macedonia	30.8	37.2	32.1	22.5	40.9	36.6
Serbia	30.6	34.7	34.6	40.9	31.1	28.0
WB6	34.1	31.2	34.7	38.1	30.7	31.2
EU-27	49.5	24.2	26.4	57.4	21.2	24.4

Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Table 13: Aspects of organisational participation and employee voice, WB6 and EU-27 (%)

Country	High ability to influence decisions			Participate in the organisation of work processes (employees)			Consulted in relation to own work tasks (employees)		
	All	Employed	Self employed	High	Intermediate	Low	High	Intermediate	Low
Albania	66.9	53.6	83.1	65.6	14.8	19.7	67.1	14.1	18.8
Bosnia and Herzegovina	59.5	54.4	82.8	57.2	18.9	24.0	59.4	19.0	21.6
Kosovo	63.3	58.8	80.5	57.4	24.9	17.7	56.4	21.1	22.6
Montenegro	62.0	58.4	84.9	57.1	17.7	25.2	62.8	18.0	19.2
North Macedonia	56.4	54.1	71.4	55.8	22.7	21.5	62.9	19.5	17.6
Serbia	59.4	51.3	89.1	47.1	24.1	28.9	55.1	23.2	21.7
WB6	60.8	53.3	84.5	53.6	21.5	25.0	59.0	20.3	20.7
EU-27	59.9	55.9	85.2	57.5	19.4	23.2	56.6	17.4	25.9

Source: 2021 EWTCS.

Working time arrangements

Working time affects the health and well-being of workers. The duration and organisation of working time have a twofold impact on job quality. First, prolonged working hours are a health risk, not only because of more strain but also because various workplace risks increase disproportionately with the duration of work. A good balance between working time and non-working time is always important. Second, as individual physical and mental resources and the structure of work incentives vary significantly over the life course, the flexibility of working hours and working time arrangements is crucial to enable workers to continue working up to the standard retirement age, and arguably even more so for female workers (Loretto et al., 2015).

Hours of work, as the usual synthetic quantitative expression of working time, omit information on the quality of working arrangements – for example, whether these arrangements are intrusive or flexible regarding private life. This section explores working time demands (various aspects of working time arrangements that are considered unsocial) and resources (understood as the flexibility of working hours) in workers' main jobs in the WB6. (The overall allocation of available hours to paid work, care and housework, and the influence of gender roles are discussed in Chapter 4.)

The EWCTS captures four types of working time that are generally regarded as unsocial: regularly working in one's free time, regularly working at night, working long hours and regularly being required to work at short notice. Although these aspects are captured by separate questions, they can overlap.

As shown in Chapter 1, the WB6 represent the region of Europe with the highest average weekly hours of work. This, all other things being equal, increases the probability of frequent unsocial work hours and of health hazards and psychological strain connected with long hours of work. Data from the EWCTS confirm this assumption (Table 14).

On the positive side, two fifths of workers (40 %) found it very easy to arrange to take an hour or two off during working hours to take care of personal or family matters, an indicator of worker-friendly working time flexibility. This compares favourably with the EU-27, where the corresponding share was 33 %.

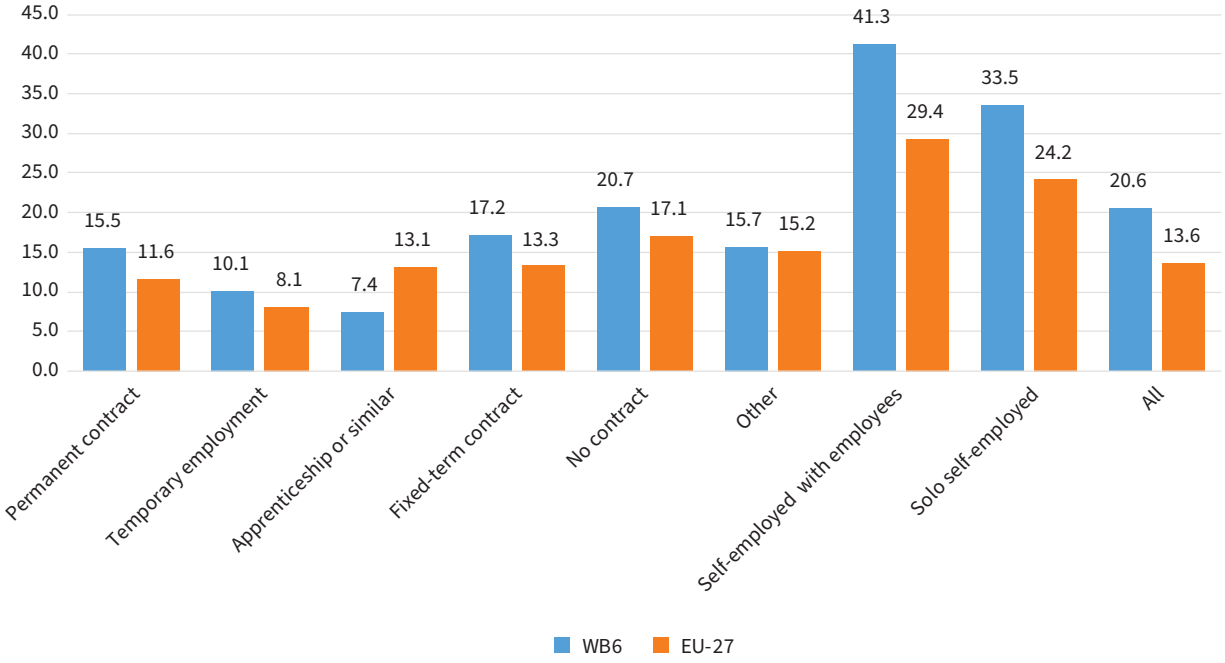
As presented in Figure 6, frequent work at short notice is most widespread among self-employed people with employees (41.3 %) and solo self-employed people (33.5 %).

Table 14: Working time arrangements in the WB6 and EU-27 (%)

Country	Working in free time to meet work demands (several times a week or more)	Working at night (sometimes or more often)	Long working hours (48 or more per week in main job)	Working at short notice (often)	Arranging to take an hour or two off work (very easy)
Albania	26	29	52	17.6	52
Bosnia and Herzegovina	15	23	27	15.5	43
Kosovo	29	24	40	25.8	35
Montenegro	21	28	34	25.2	30
North Macedonia	25	31	29	22.2	46
Serbia	20	29	29	22.7	34
WB6	21	28	33	20.7	40
EU-27	16	21	17	13.7	33

Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Figure 6: Working at short notice (daily, several times a week, several times a month), WB6 and EU-27 (%)



Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Job prospects

Job prospects are those elements of a job that relate to a person's need for work and career advancement. This need touches on both psychological aspects (i.e. a person's identity and self-worth) and material aspects (i.e. having a source of income). Job prospects can have positive or negative effects on people's experiences at work. A positive impact arises, for example, when employment offers opportunities for learning, training and career progression. A negative impact arises when there is uncertainty around how work duties will develop in the future (qualitative insecurity) or when employment insecurity is present. Opportunities to develop and acquire new skills at work and opportunities for professional advancement are both job resources. On the job demand side of this dimension, job insecurity is explored. It encompasses both the risk of completely losing one's job and the risk of losing positive features of one's job (e.g. working time flexibility, task autonomy, a relaxed pace of work).

The results of the EWCTS show that one fifth of employees in the WB6 fear (strongly or to some significant degree) that they may lose their job in the next six months (Table 15). This is significantly more than in the EU-27, where the corresponding share is only one in seven employees. All of the WB6 show rates well above the EU-27 average for this indicator (from Bosnia and Herzegovina with 18 % to Kosovo and Montenegro with 25 % and 26 %, respectively).

There is a similar situation among self-employed people, whose employment is statistically known to be less secure. In the WB6, 20.2 % of self-employed people are afraid that they may lose their job in the next six months, while only 16.9 % of self-employed people in the EU-27 say the same.

Table 15: Fear of job loss among employees, WB6 and EU-27 (%)

Country	May lose job in the next six months		
	Agree	Disagree	Neither
Albania	22	71	7
Bosnia and Herzegovina	18	56	26
Kosovo	25	66	9
Montenegro	26	60	14
North Macedonia	22	66	12
Serbia	19	66	15
WB6	20	65	15
EU-27	14	78	8

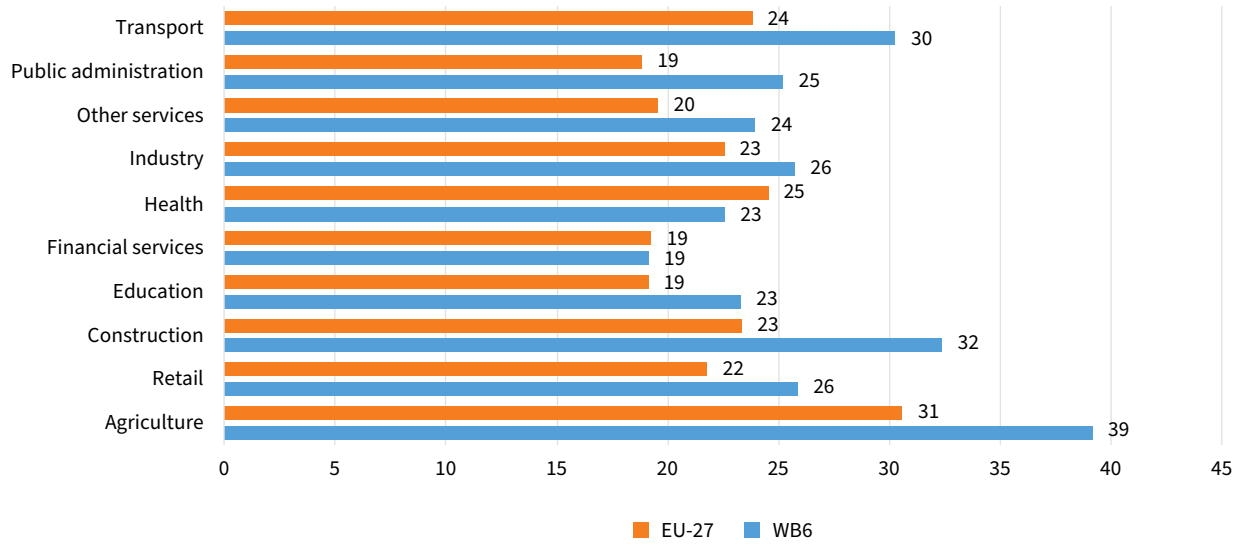
Notes: 'Agree' comprises the survey responses 'strongly agree' or 'tend to agree'. 'Disagree' comprises the survey responses 'strongly disagree' or 'tend to disagree'
Source: 2021 EWCTS.

The second aspect of job insecurity, related to potential deterioration in one's workplace situation, is best analysed by sector. Workers in the agriculture (39 %) and construction (32 %) sectors have the highest levels of concern about undesirable changes in their workplace situation (Figure 7). On the other hand, such concerns are lowest in the financial services and education sectors.

The data on training and learning opportunities show consistently poorer results for workers in the WB6 compared with their counterparts in the EU-27. While almost half of employees in the EU-27 had a chance to participate in training paid for or provided by their employer in the past year, less than a third of employees in the WB6 did (Table 16). Similar variation is found regarding on-the-job training for both employees and self-employed people. The disparity is much smaller regarding the opportunity for employees to learn new things in the workplace (58 % in the WB6 compared with 61 % in the EU-27), but it is large for the self-employed (53 % versus 71 %).

Career advancement is the only aspect of this dimension in which employees in the WB6 fare better on average than employees in the EU-27. 58 % of workers in the WB6 strongly agree or tend to agree with the statement that their current job offers good prospects for career advancement, compared with 50 % of workers in the EU-27. However, the opposite trend holds true for the self-employed (51 % agree in the WB6 versus 57 % in the EU-27).

Figure 7: Shares of employees who fear undesirable changes in their workplace situation, by sector, WB6 and EU-27 (%)



Notes: Data refer to respondents who selected 'strongly agree' or 'tend to agree'.
Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Table 16: Prevalence of opportunities for training and learning and career advancement, WB6 and EU-27 (%)

Aspect	Employment category	WB6			EU-27		
		Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Training and learning opportunities							
Training paid for or provided by employer	Employee	32	30	31	47	44	46
On-the-job training provided (by co-workers or supervisors)	Employee	41	39	40	50	47	49
	Self-employed	20	13	18	33	33	33
Learning new things (always or often)	Employee	55	60	58	60	61	61
	Self-employed	54	49	53	71	71	71
Career advancement							
Job offers good prospects for career advancement (strongly agree or tend to agree)	Employee	60	56	58	55	45	50
	Self-employed	54	45	51	59	54	57

Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Intrinsic job features

The final job quality dimension addresses the inherent qualities of a job and focuses exclusively on resources, such as intrinsic rewards. One peculiarity of the EWCTS is that extrinsic rewards (monetary income) have been omitted because of certain characteristics of telephone surveying at the time of COVID-19. Intrinsic rewards include the acknowledgement of one's contributions, avenues for personal expression and chances for individual growth. They are bolstered by external acknowledgement and recognition of one's achievements and abilities. These job characteristics play an important role in promoting the mental well-being and personal drive of workers (Eurofound, 2022).

Like their counterparts in the EU-27, the vast majority of workers in the WB6 (almost 9 out of 10) think that their work is well done and useful (Table 17). Two out of three (64.3 %) workers from the WB6 believe that they receive appropriate recognition for their work; this rate is lower than in the EU-27 (72.2 %). On the other hand, 55.8 % of workers in the WB6 believe that they have enough opportunities to use their knowledge in the workplace, which is more than in the EU-27, where the corresponding percentage is 48.3 %.

Beyond these regional averages, there are some substantial differences among the WB6, most notably regarding recognition at work. On the unfavourable end of the spectrum, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia show rates below 60 %; on the other, Kosovo's and North Macedonia's rates are significantly above the EU-27 average, standing at 78.8 % and 77.1 %, respectively (Table 18). These very large differences, possibly resulting from different models and configurations of cultural values at work, certainly deserve further exploration.

Table 17: Shares of employees reporting high levels of selected intrinsic resources, WB6 and EU-27 (%)

Statement	WB6			EU-27		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
I receive the recognition I deserve for my work	64.6	63.8	64.3	73.4	70.7	72.2
I have enough opportunities to use my knowledge	57.9	52.7	55.8	50.3	46.0	48.3
My work is well done	86.3	86.4	86.3	85.9	86.5	86.2
My work is useful	87.6	87.9	87.7	88.2	88.5	88.3

Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Table 18: Shares of employees receiving recognition at work, WB6 and EU-27 (%)

Country	I receive the recognition I deserve for my work		
	Agree	Disagree	Neither
Albania	67.9	25.0	7.1
Bosnia and Herzegovina	59.7	27.1	13.2
Kosovo	78.8	14.4	6.8
Montenegro	56.8	32.4	10.9
North Macedonia	77.1	18.3	4.6
Serbia	59.7	24.1	16.2
WB6	64.3	23.8	11.9
EU-27	72.2	17.6	10.2

Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Job quality index

Eurofound's job quality index measures job quality through a composite indicator comprising the six dimensions analysed in this chapter, based on the conceptualisation of Bakker et al. (2023). Juxtaposing workers' total demands and total resources at their workplaces, Eurofound assesses the net difference between these demands and resources for each job and assigns that job to one of two broad categories – strained (lower quality, when the number of job demands exceeds the number of job resources) and resourced (higher quality, when the number of job resources exceeds that of job demands). These two broad categories are further differentiated into three subcategories, so that eventually every job can be classified into one of six possible groups, as follows (in ascending order of quality): extremely strained, highly strained, moderately strained, poorly resourced, moderately resourced and highly resourced. Comparisons between aggregates and subaggregates (countries, sectors, gender and age groups, etc.) can be made only by comparing the relative shares of these six graduated categories, which means that, depending on the distribution of jobs across them, in some cases the comparison will be indeterminate. Still, comparisons will be possible at various partial intersections – for example, comparing the shares of extremely and highly strained jobs among countries or gender categories. On the plus side, the information on job quality distribution – and ultimately on job quality inequality – will thus be preserved.

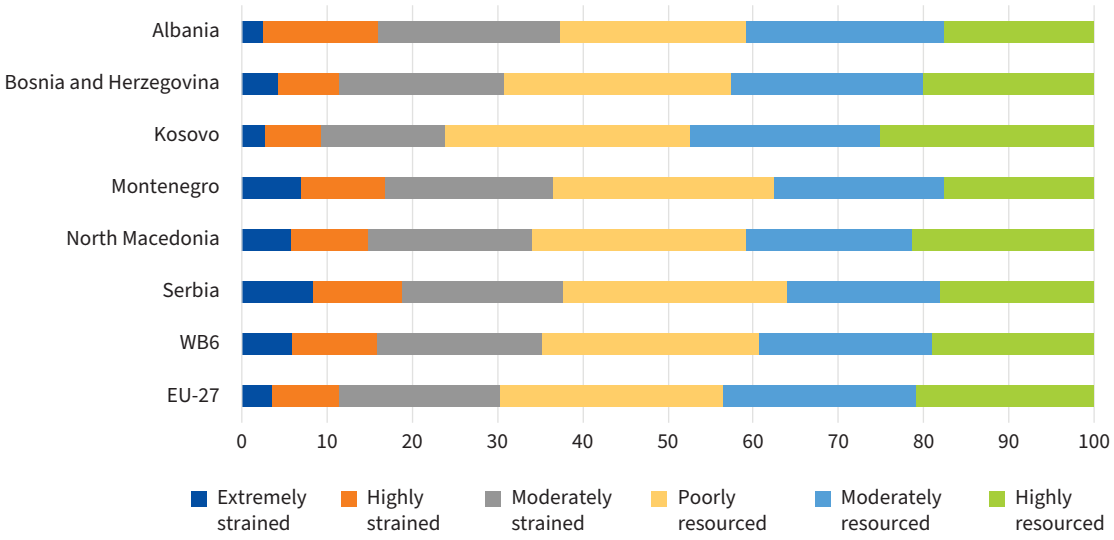
Job quality index scores across the Western Balkans

A comparison between the WB6 and the EU-27 indicates that job quality in the WB6 is consistently lower than in the EU-27. Not only are the shares of strained jobs higher and resourced jobs lower in the WB6, but the WB6 also perform more poorly when job quality is compared at any given point along the job quality distribution. This result is expected, and is presumably driven by the differences in the level of economic development between regions, as reflected, for example, in the contrasting sectoral and occupational structures in the EU-27 and the WB6.

However, the relationship between the gross domestic product level and scores on the job quality index is far from deterministic. Looking beyond the regional averages, there is significant diversity between countries and in the levels of strain and resources. Strikingly, it turns out that job quality in Kosovo is superior to that in the EU-27 (and also to that in the rest of the WB6) across the entire job quality distribution. In three countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo), the share of extremely strained jobs is lower than in the EU-27. In Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, there are fewer strained jobs (in all three degrees of strain) than in the EU-27. These are encouraging findings, suggesting that many jobs in the WB6 are resource-heavy despite the limitations associated with the level of economic development.

Furthermore, in the WB6, the correlation between key quantitative labour market or economic indicators – such as the employment rate, the average wage and the national income per capita – and the job quality index score appears to be non-existent or weakly negative. The individual results are difficult to interpret. As frequently mentioned throughout the analysis, factors related to culture and formal and informal institutions certainly play some role. Nevertheless, there are significant differences in individual dimensions or overall job quality scores between pairs of culturally very similar countries, such as Montenegro and Serbia or Albania and Kosovo. Somewhat different COVID-19-related regulations at the time of the survey may have played a role, but their role appears to be far from straightforward. On balance, the net impact on working conditions and job quality of all factors other than those related to the level of economic development has apparently been positive, albeit unevenly distributed, throughout the WB6. In any case, further research is needed to get a more precise insight into the effects of cultural, organisational, institutional and other factors on job quality in the WB6.

Figure 8: Distribution of job quality across the working population, WB6 and EU-27 (%)



Source: 2021 EWCTS.

In 2021, more than 35 % of workers in the WB6 had strained jobs, where they experienced more job demands than job resources (Figure 8). Broken down by the degree of strain, the results show that 5.9 % of workers were in extremely strained jobs, 10.1 % were in highly strained jobs and 19.3 % were in moderately strained jobs. The remainder (slightly less than two thirds) were in resourced jobs, meaning they had more access to job resources and were less exposed to job demands: 25.5 % were in poorly resourced jobs, 20.3 % were in moderately resourced jobs and 19 % were in highly resourced jobs.

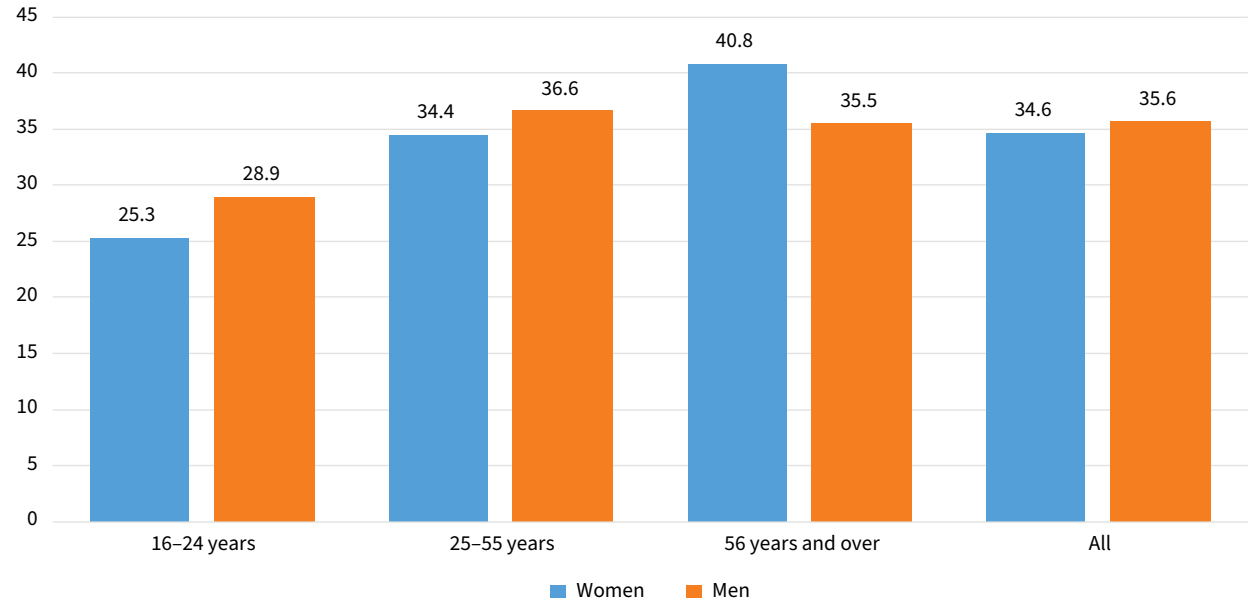
Structural distribution of the job quality index

This section presents findings on how the distribution of job quality varies across the working population based on different characteristics of workers and their work.

Gender

Gender differences in relation to job strain in the WB6 are slightly in favour of women, as fewer women (34.6 %) have strained jobs than men (35.6 %) (Figure 9). This also compares favourably with the EU-27, where the difference is more than 3 pp to women's disadvantage. A potential explanation for this result is a trade-off between the employment rate gap and the job quality gender gap, similar to the relationship between the high gender employment gap and the moderate gender wage gap in the region.

Figure 9: Share of employees in strained jobs by gender and age, WB6 (%)



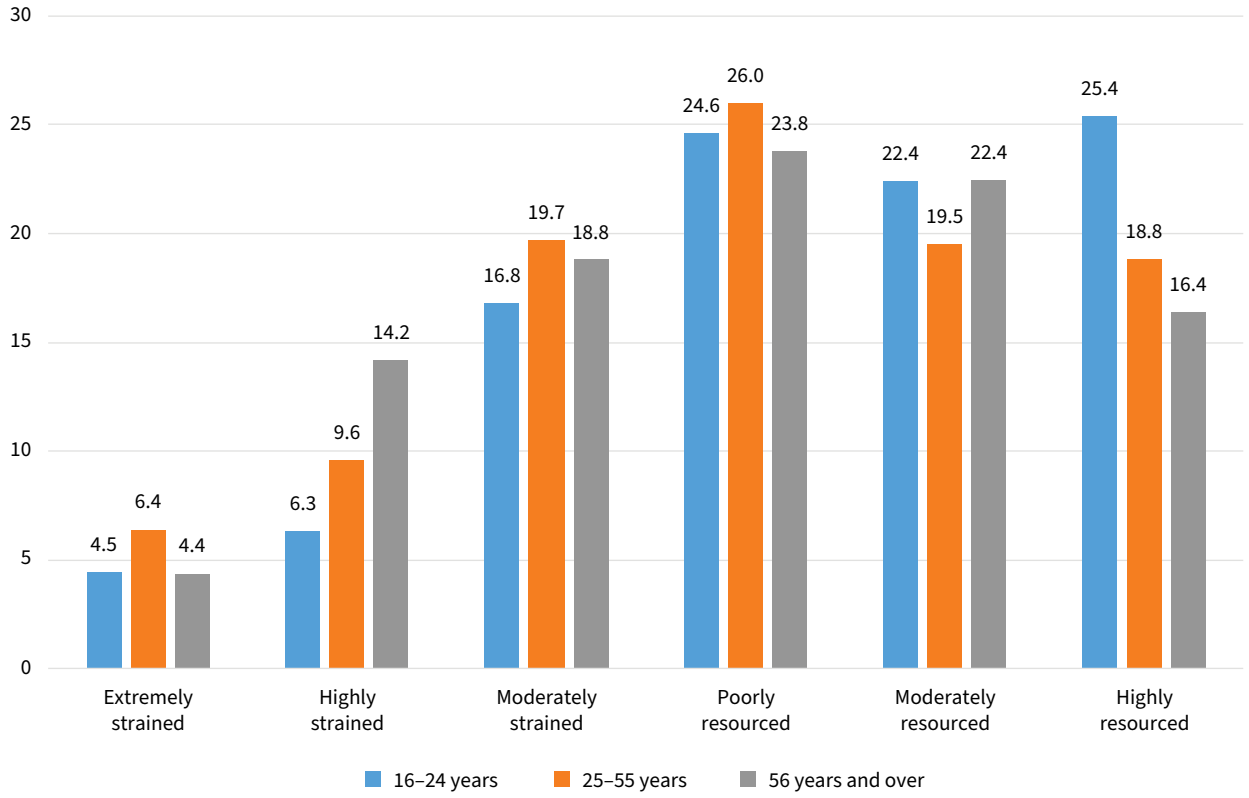
Notes: Data include extremely, highly or moderately strained jobs.
Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Age groups

Among three broad age groups (16–24 years, 25–55 years and 56 years and over), young people (16–24 years) in the WB6 have the lowest share of strained jobs (27.6 %) and the highest share of highly resourced jobs (25.4 %) (Figure 10). The prime age group's (25–55 years) share of strained jobs is 35.7 %, while that of older workers (56 years and over) is 37.4 %. The opposite pattern is observed in the EU-27, where younger workers are exposed to more strenuous working conditions than older workers.

This result may be partially explained by the higher level of self-selection of the youngest and oldest age groups into the labour force and employment, given the comparatively low employment rates for young people in the WB6. Over the life course, the decision to opt out of the labour force and employment is the least viable among prime-age workers. The significant advantage the youngest age group has over the oldest in job quality distribution may also be explained by the much higher percentage of older workers involved in agriculture, which is typically poorly resourced.

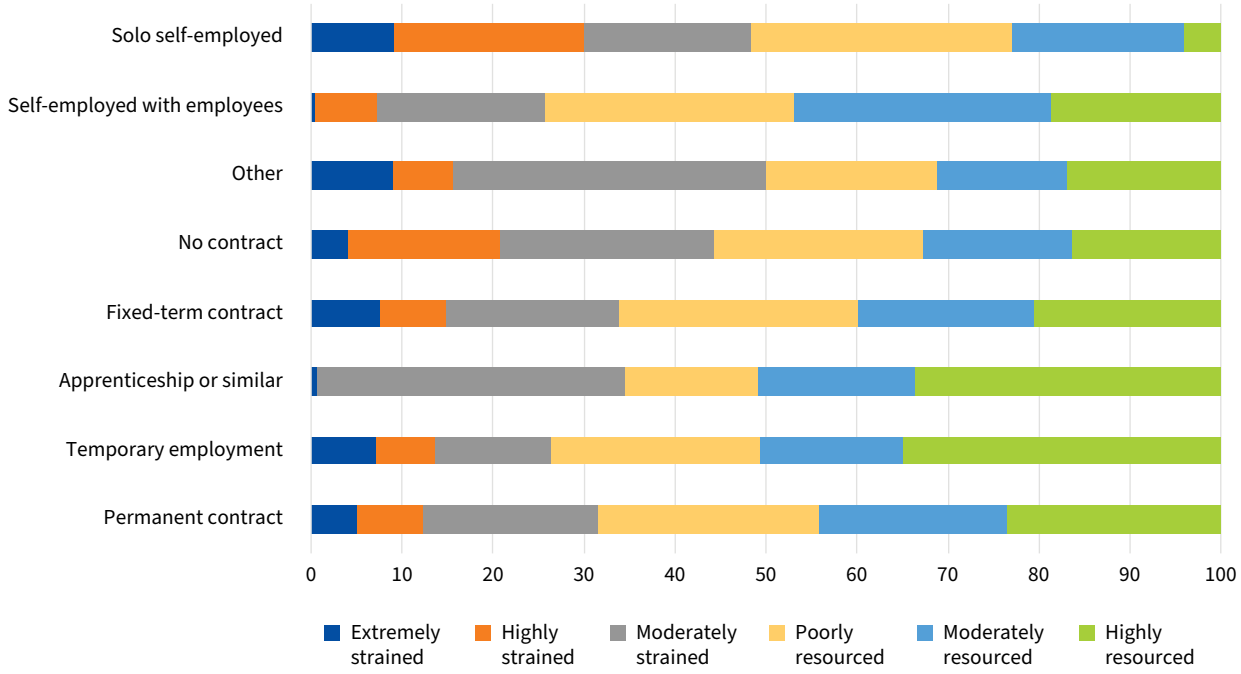
Figure 10: Job quality index distribution by age group, WB6 (%)



Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Employment status and contract type

Figure 11: Job quality index distribution by contract type, WB6 (%)



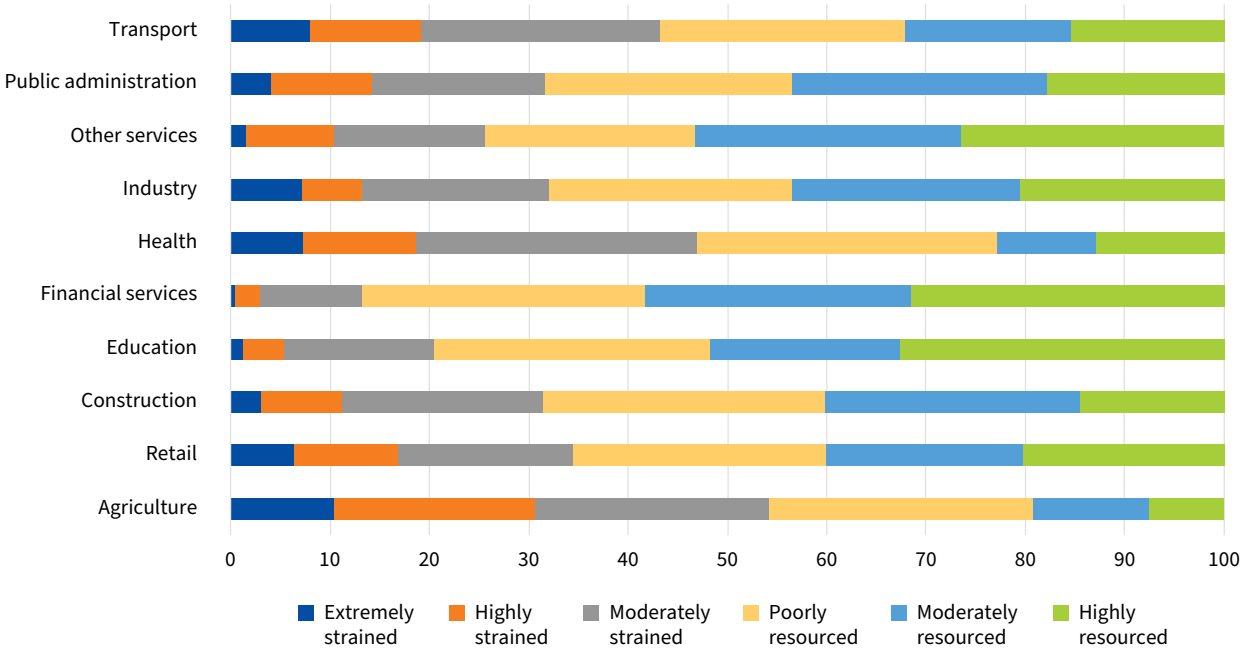
Source: 2021 EWCTS.

In the WB6, self-employed workers without employees hold the highest share of strained jobs (48.5 %) and by far the lowest share of highly resourced jobs (4 %) compared with workers in other types of employment and with other types of job contracts (Figure 11). The situation is different in the EU-27, where solo self-employed people and employees with permanent contracts work in strained jobs in similar proportions (about 30 %). This suggests that the quality of solo self-employment in the WB6 is much lower than in the EU-27. Several mutually reinforcing factors are likely to have caused this, including higher shares of (i) agricultural self-employment and (ii) involuntary self-employment due to job scarcity in dependent employment because of the transitional restructuring of the economy.

Self-employed people with employees have the lowest shares of strained jobs in the WB6 (slightly above one quarter). In contrast with findings in the EU-27, temporary employees' share of highly resourced jobs (35 %) is the highest among all contract types in the WB6.

Sector

Figure 12: Job quality index distribution by sector, WB6 (%)

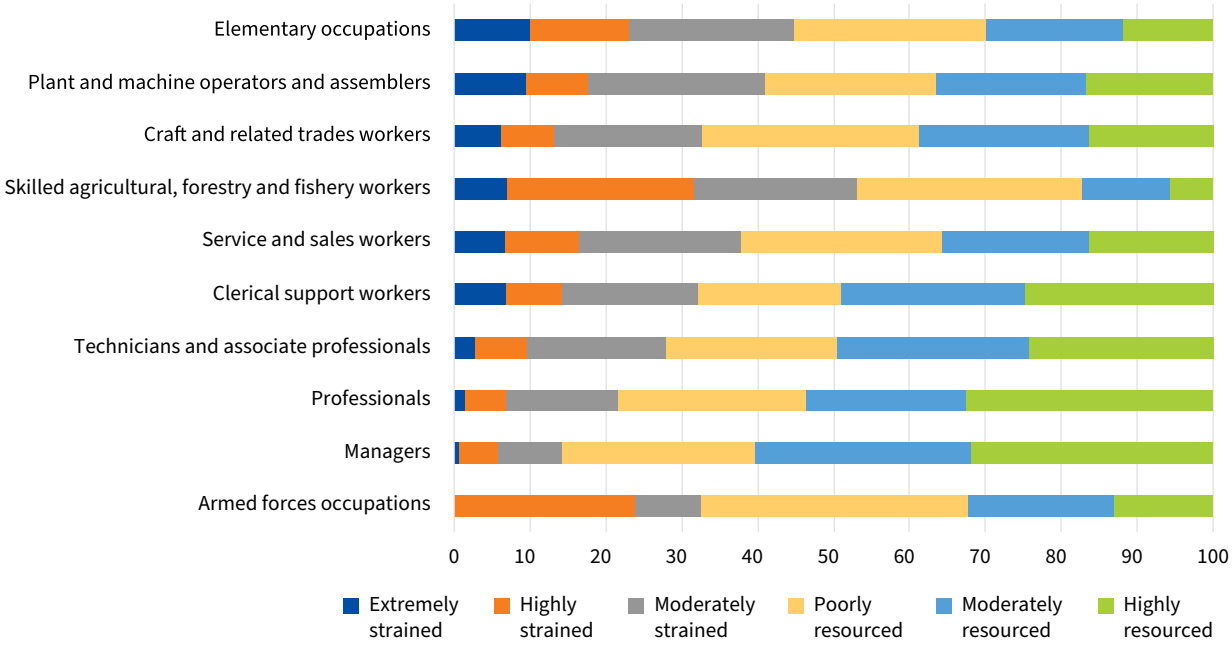


Source: 2021 EWCTS.

In the WB6, the highest shares of strained jobs were found among workers in the agriculture (54.2 %), health (47 %) and transport (43.1 %) sectors (Figure 12). A high share of extremely strained jobs was also found in the industry sector. The three most strained sectors are the same in the EU-27, but ordered differently (health, transport and agriculture). The COVID-19 pandemic clearly had a strong impact on job strain in the health and transport sectors, while agriculture appears to be poorly resourced in 'normal' times as well. The very high share of strained jobs in agriculture, coupled with the large share of agriculture in total jobs in the WB6, has significantly contributed to the overall lower job quality in the WB6 in comparison with the EU-27.

Occupational groups

Figure 13: Job quality index distribution by ISCO-08 one-digit occupational groups, WB6 (%)



Notes: ISCO-08, International Standard Classification of Occupations 2008.
Source: 2021 EWCTS.

The patterns of job quality distribution across broad occupational groups in the WB6 are fundamentally similar to those found in the EU-27 and elsewhere. Occupational groups that require higher levels of education and autonomy – primarily managers and professionals, followed by technicians and associate professionals and craft workers – have higher shares of resourced jobs (Figure 13). In contrast, occupational groups that require lower levels of education, have less autonomy and often involve manual work – such as elementary occupations, plant and machine operators, skilled agricultural workers and service and sales workers – have relatively high shares of strained jobs.

3 Quality of working life

Chapter 3 provides insights into the relationship between work and private life in the WB6, examining several facets: working time spent in paid work; total working time including unpaid work (i.e. time spent providing care or sustaining the household); work–life balance; work–life conflicts; and working time preferences expressed by workers.

Duration of paid work

Working week

While in the EU-27 the norm for the working week in 2021 continued to be five days for the large majority (70 %) of men and women (Eurofound, 2022), in the WB6, only 47.9 % of all workers report a five-day working week, and nearly as many (45.2 %) report working six to seven days per week. In addition, when we examine the number of working days in a week by employment status, only 6.9 % of respondents report working up to four days a week, indicating that most people in the WB6 work five or more days a week (Figure 14).

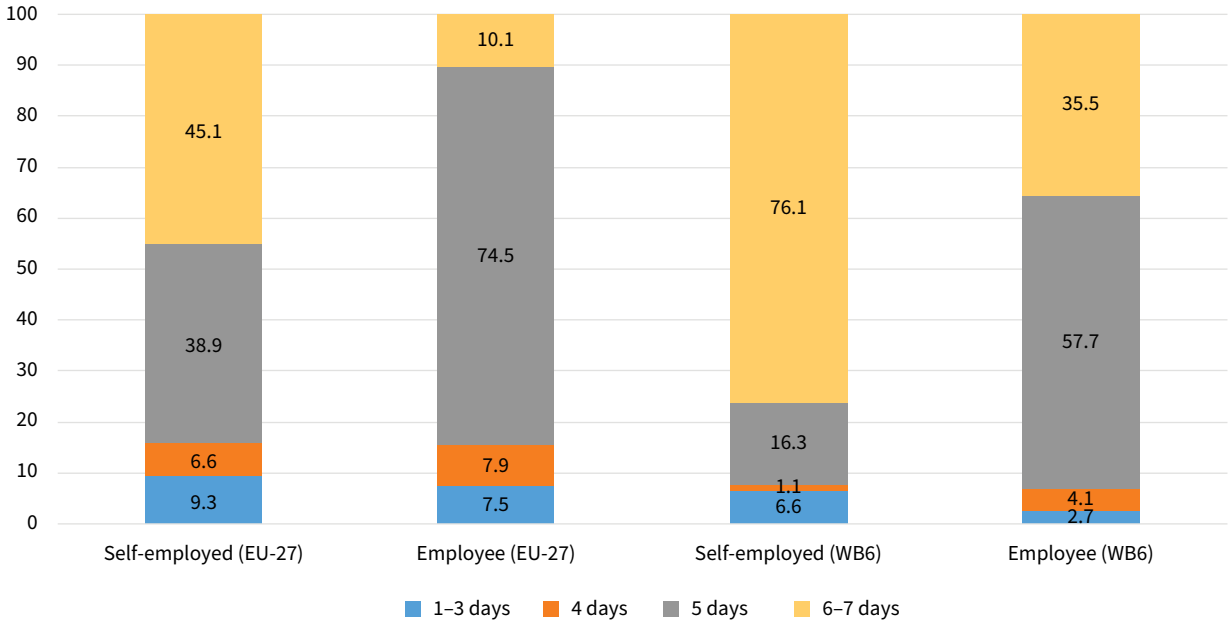
There are stark differences between employed individuals and the self-employed, as more than half of those in permanent employment and temporary employment report a five-day working week. The group with the highest rate of a five-day working week is those in permanent employment, of whom 64.8 % report working five days a week. Meanwhile, the vast majority of solo self-employed workers (77.5 %) and self-employed workers with employees (72.4 %) report working six to seven days. The share of self-employed people with employees who report working up to four days is the lowest among all categories by employment status (5 %).

More than three quarters of the self-employed in the WB6 work six to seven days a week (76.1 %), compared with less than half of their counterparts in the EU (45.1 %). Nearly 3.5 times more employees work six to seven days a week in the WB6 than in the EU, where the rate is only 10.1 %. Most employees in the EU work five days a week (74.5 %), compared with 57.7 % of employees in the WB6. Fewer employees (2.7 %) and self-employed people (6.6 %) in the WB6 work up to four days a week than in the EU (7.5 % of employees and 9.3 % of self-employed people) (Figure 14). These results are broadly consistent with other data sources, confirming that people in the WB6 have longer working weeks than those in the EU.

Working hours

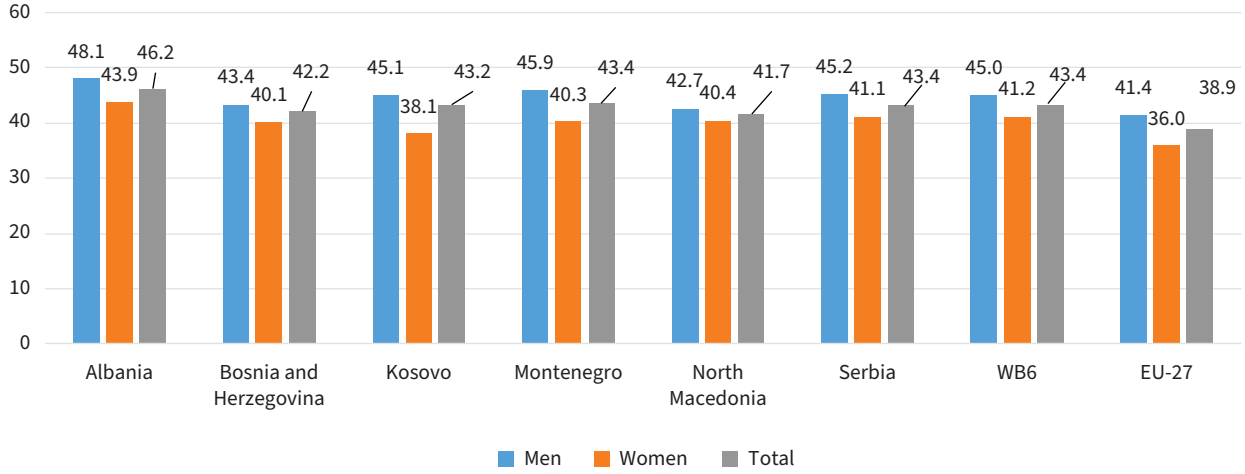
In line with the findings in the previous section, in 2021, workers in the WB6 worked more hours per week on average (43.4) than workers in the EU-27 (38.9). Both men and women in the WB6 worked more than 40 hours per week, while women in the EU-27 worked less than 40 hours (i.e. 36.0). Like in the EU-27, men in the WB6, on average and in each country individually, report working more hours than women. Men in Albania report working more hours (48.1) than both men and women in the rest of the WB6, whereas women in Kosovo report working fewer hours per week (38.1) than other women and men in the region (Figure 15).

Figure 14: Usual number of days in a working week, by employment status, WB6 and EU-27 (%)



Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Figure 15: Usual weekly hours worked by gender, WB6 and EU-27

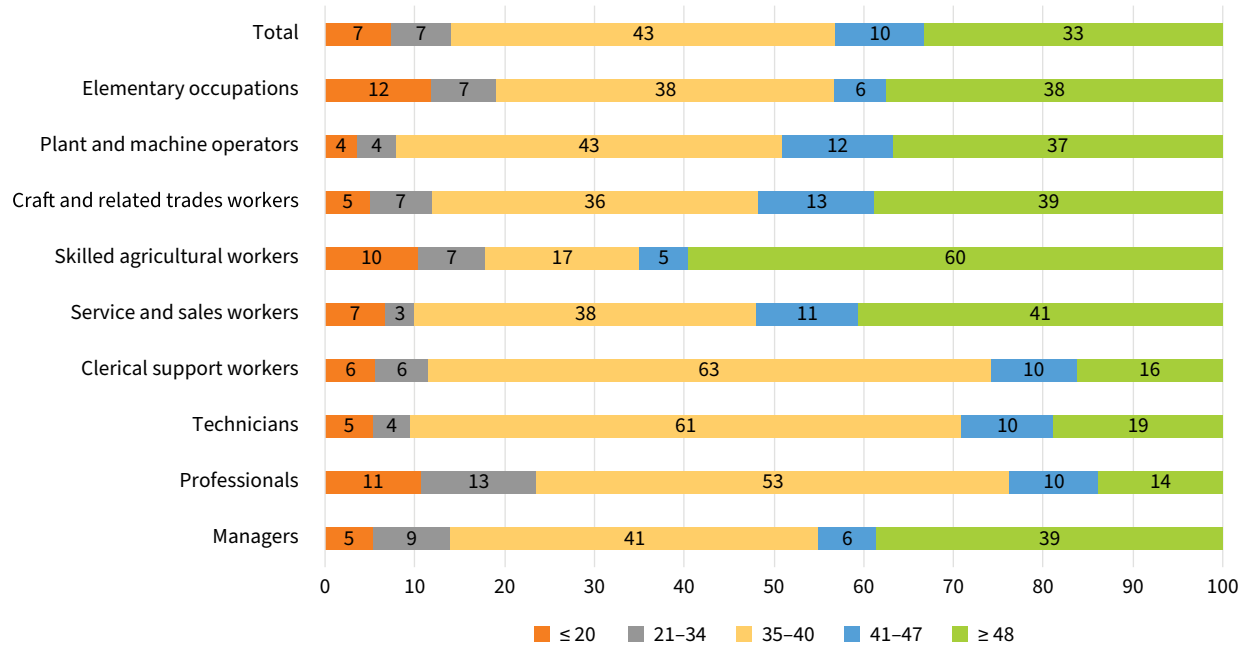


Source: 2021 EWCTS.

More than two fifths (43 %) of all workers in the WB6 report working 35–40 hours a week. However, examining their usual weekly hours by occupational group provides interesting insights. Among skilled agricultural workers, only 17 % report working 35–40 hours a week. Regardless of skill level, significant shares of workers in various occupations in the WB6 (except professionals, clerical support workers and technicians) work 48 or more hours a week (Figure 16). The groups with the largest shares of longer work hours are skilled agricultural workers (60 %), followed by service and sales workers (41 %), craft and related trades workers (39 %) and managers (39 %).

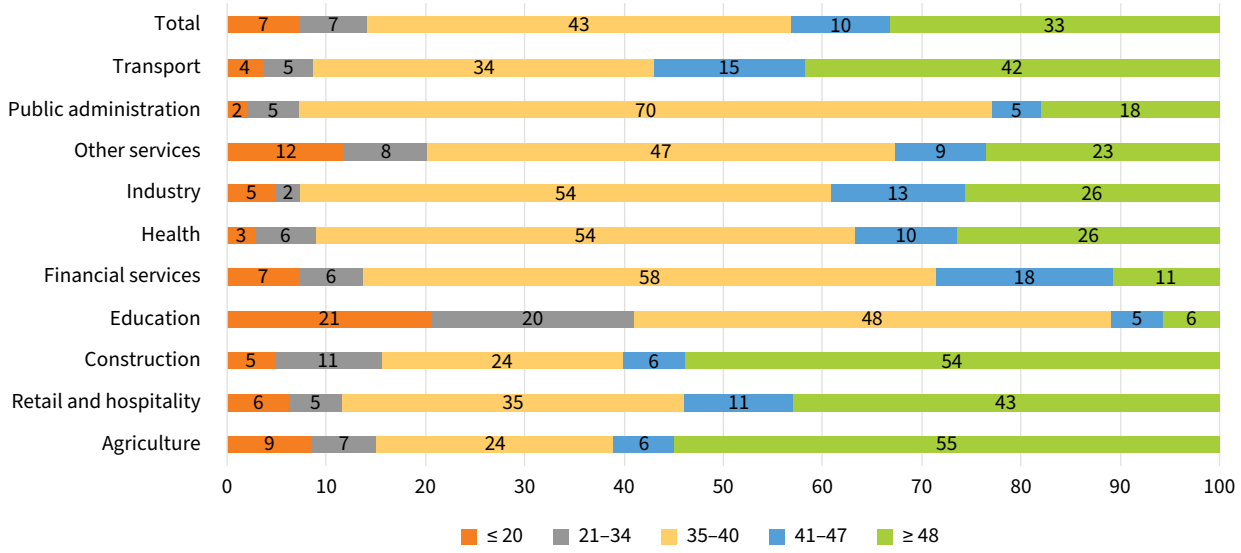
The EWCTS data on the usual weekly hours by sector show that more than half of the workers in agriculture (55 %) and construction (54 %) and slightly less than half of workers in retail and hospitality (43 %) and transport (42 %) report working 48 or more hours a week. Sectors like health (26 %), industry (26 %), other services (23 %) and public administration (18 %) also report significant shares of long weekly hours (Figure 17).

Figure 16: Usual weekly hours worked by occupational group, WB6 (%)



Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Figure 17: Usual weekly hours worked by sector, WB6 (%)



Source: 2021 EWCTS.

By workplace size, in the WB6, more people employed by microenterprises (40 %) and small companies (32 %) work long weeks of 48 or more hours than those employed in medium-sized (21 %) or large companies (25 %).

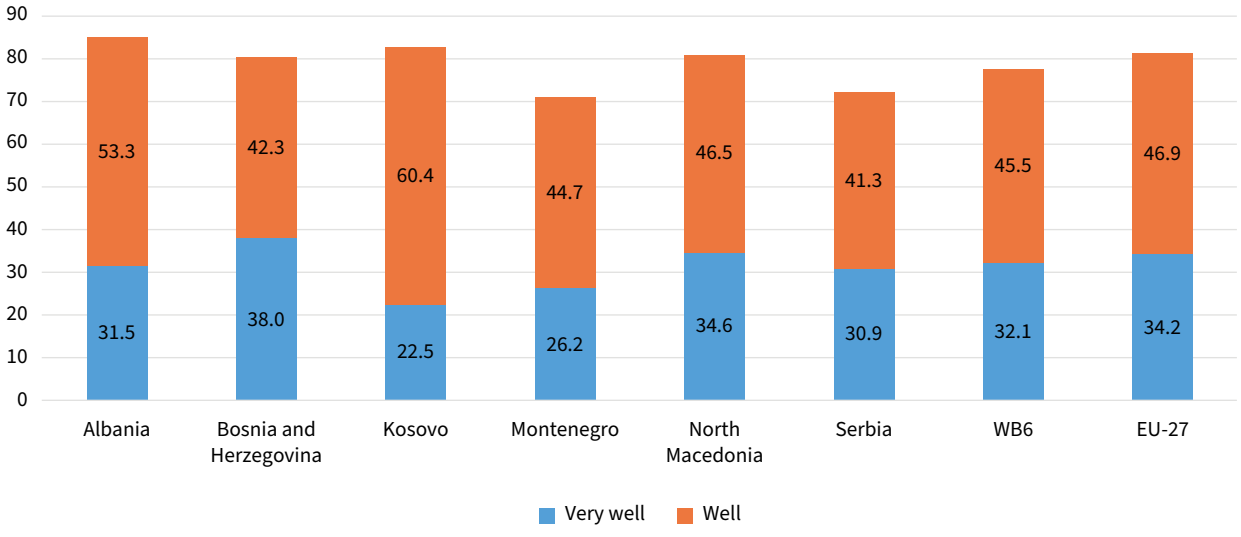
Work–life balance

Work–life balance is a key dimension of working life for working men and women, as acknowledged by the European Pillar of Social Rights and Directive (EU) 2019/1158 on work–life balance for parents and carers. In the 2021 EWCTS, respondents were asked to report how well their working hours fit with their family and social commitments outside work. Fewer respondents in the WB6 report that they fit 'very well' or 'well' (32.1 % and 45.5 %, respectively) than in the EU-27 (34.2 % and 46.9 %, respectively), although the differences in both categories are small. Among the WB6, the smallest share of workers who report that their work fits 'very well' with their personal life is in Kosovo (22.5 %), although Kosovo still reports high levels of work–life balance when those who responded 'well' (60.4 %) are also taken into consideration (Figure 18).

Overall, most workers in the WB6 (more than 70 %) report that their work and life fit either very well or well, which is close to, but a bit below, the EU-27 average. Among those who report that their work and life fit 'not very well' or 'not at all well', the highest shares are in Montenegro (29 %) and Serbia (27.8 %), whereas the lowest share is in Albania (15.1 %).

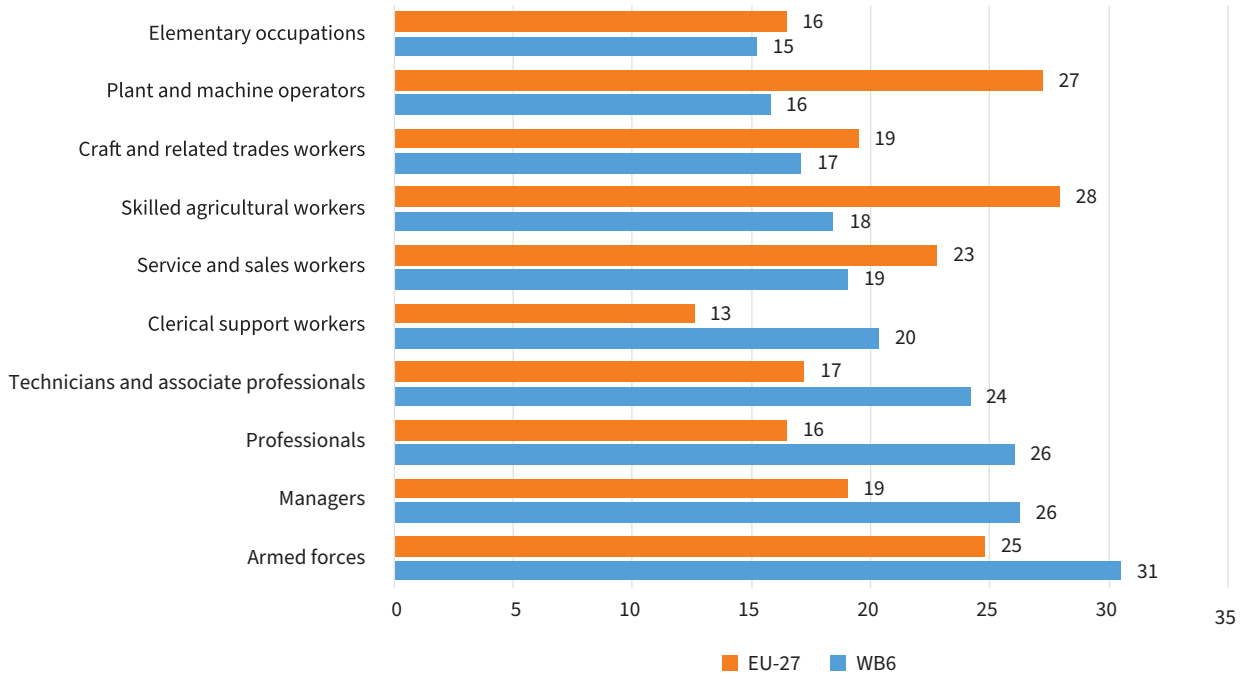
Comparing the average WB6 and EU-27 responses to the work–life balance question across different occupations, it seems that in the WB6, the higher the skill level of the worker, the poorer the fit between working hours and social commitments outside work, which is not the case in the EU-27 (Figure 19). This means that in the WB6, on average, those in higher-skilled occupations have more difficulty in terms of work–life balance.

Figure 18: Respondents reporting good work–life balance, WB6 and EU-27 (%)



Notes: Data cover those responding 'very well' or 'well' with regard to their work hours fitting with their personal life.
Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Figure 19: Respondents reporting poor work–life balance by occupation, WB6 and EU-27 (%)

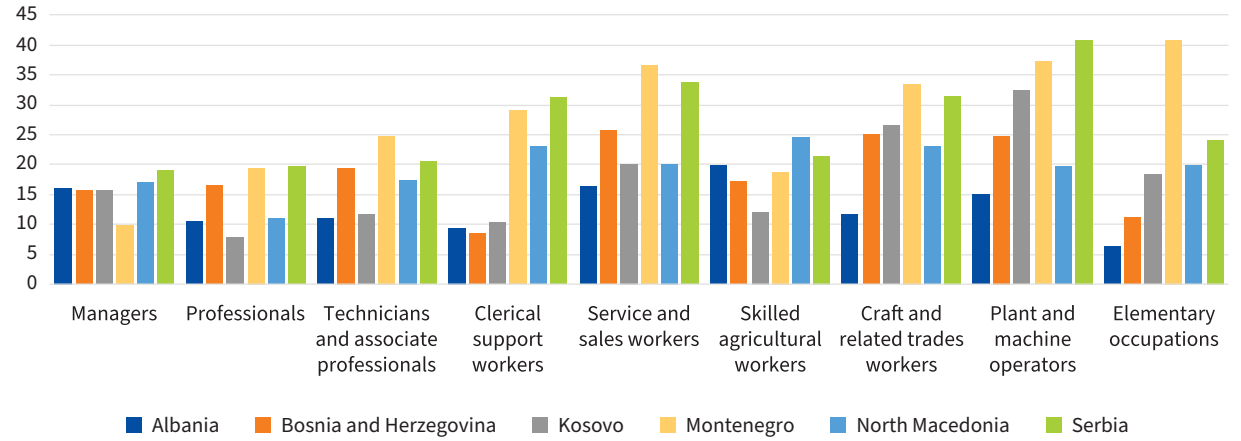


Notes: Data cover the survey responses 'not very well' and 'not at all well'.
Source: 2021 EWCTS.

In the WB6, there seems to be variation in work–life balance levels among occupational groups. In most groups (e.g. elementary occupations, service and sales work and craft and related trades workers), the highest share of workers reporting poor work–life balance is in Montenegro, followed by Serbia. In Serbia, 41 % of plant and machine operators report poor work–life balance, among the highest such shares in the region across all occupational groups. Nearly 41 % of workers in elementary occupations in Montenegro report poor work–life balance, whereas this share is lower than 10 % in Albania. The lowest shares of workers reporting poor work–life balance are those in elementary occupations in Albania (6.2 %) and professionals in Kosovo (7.8 %) (Figure 20).

Sectoral comparative analysis shows that workers in the transport sector have the highest share of poor work–life balance in both the WB6 and the EU-27, on average, although the share in the WB6 is higher (37 %) than in the EU-27 (31 %). A higher share of workers report poor work–life balance in the WB6 than in the EU-27 in every sector except for education and agriculture. When the WB6 and EU-27 averages are compared, there are no differences in the shares of solo self-employed workers (both 23 %) and self-employed workers with employees (both 28 %) who report poor work–life balance. However, more employees in the WB6 report poor work–life balance than in the EU-27, especially those with temporary contracts.

Figure 20: Respondents reporting poor work–life balance by occupation and country, WB6 (%)

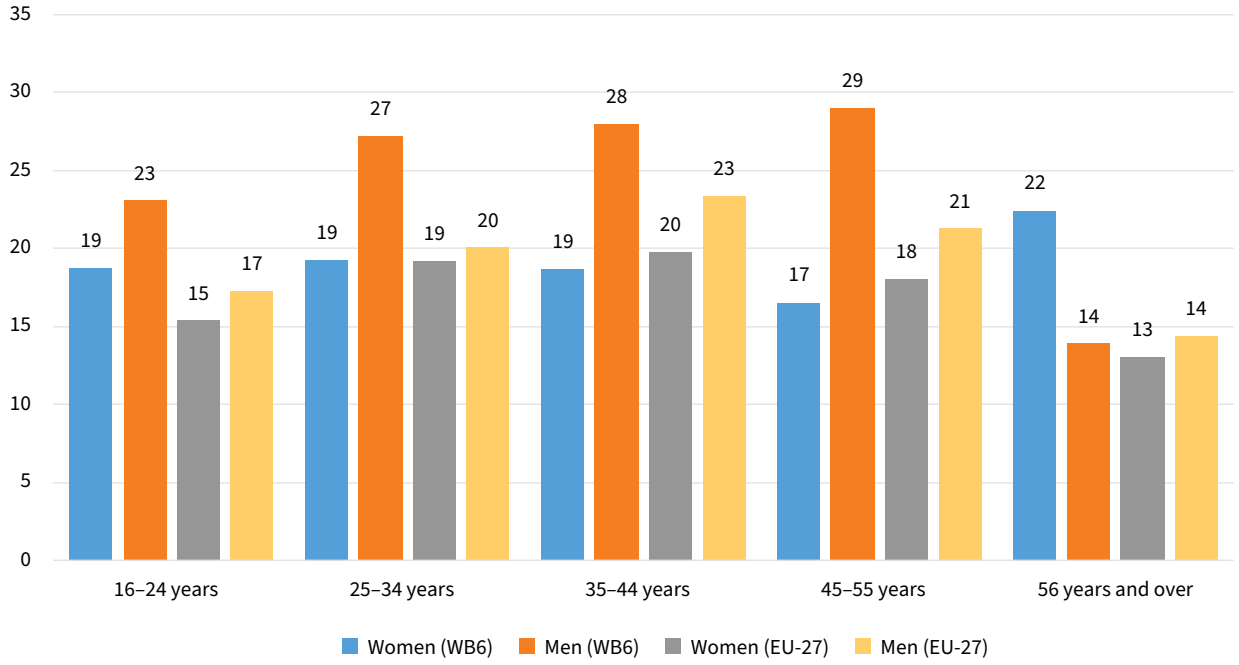


Notes: Data cover the survey responses 'not very well' and 'not at all well'.
Source: 2021 EWCTS.

When respondents are grouped by gender and age in the WB6 and the EU-27, men in the WB6 (except for those 56 years and over) report the poorest work–life balance (Figure 21). The share of women in the WB6 reporting poor work–life balance does not seem to change much according to age. For women aged 16–24 years, 25–34 years and 35–44 years, the rate of poor work–life balance remains the same (19 %). It is only slightly lower for women aged 45–55 years, and slightly higher (at 22 %) for women aged 56 years and over. The shares of women in the WB6 aged 35–44 and 45–55 reporting poor work–life balance are also lower than those of comparably aged EU-27 women, although only by 1 pp. The gender-balanced results of work–life balance rates – despite women working many more unpaid hours – have already been explained in the literature on working conditions (e.g. Borjas, 2023) as a result of women's adaptive preferences, reflecting what is known in empirical labour economics as the higher elasticity of the female labour supply.

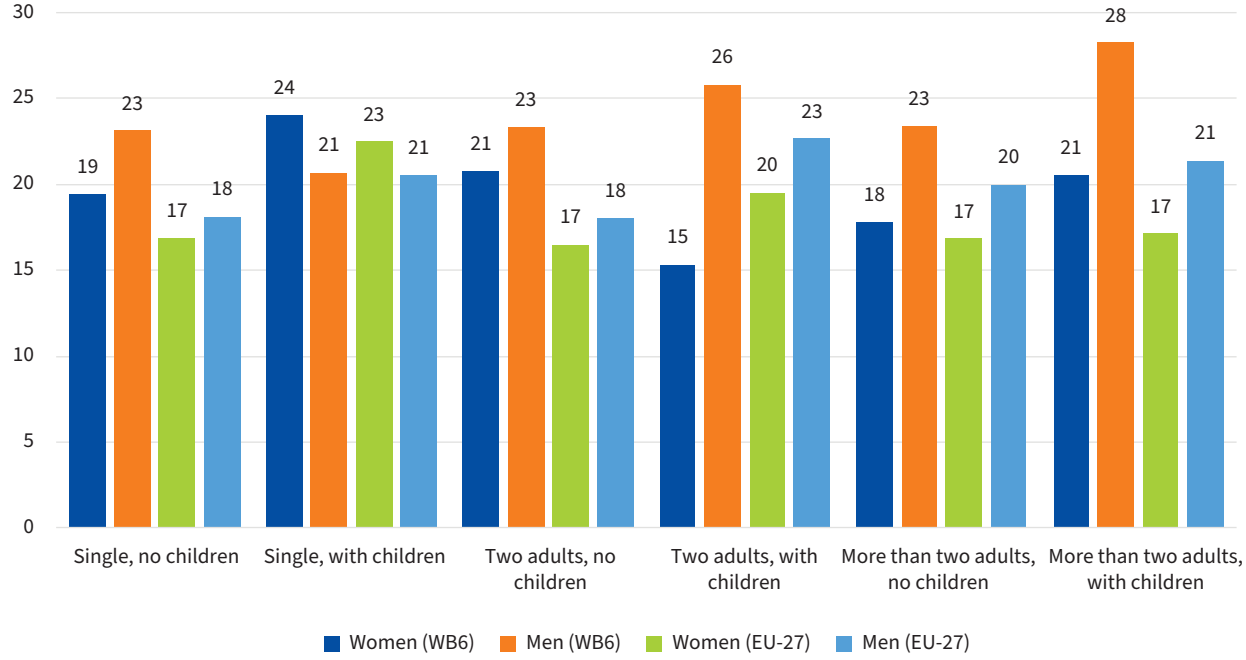
As expected, the shares of both women and men reporting poor work–life balance in the WB6 and the EU-27 increase if they have children. The shares are higher in the WB6, especially among men. Single women with children also report a poorer work–life balance in the WB6 than in the EU-27 (Figure 22). The age of the child also affects the reported work–life balance, especially for men in the WB6. Among men with children in the WB6, the share reporting poor work–life balance is highest for those with teenage children (32 %), while among women with children in the WB6, the share is lowest for those with teenage children (16 %). Among all those with children below the age of five, men in the WB6 report the highest rates of poor work–life balance (Figure 23). The higher rates of men with children in the WB6 reporting poor work–life balance could to some degree be explained by the limited paternity leave days granted to men in most of the WB6 (7–10 days, paid mostly as sick leave) (see Dobrotić, 2022).

Figure 21: Respondents reporting poor work–life balance by age group and gender, WB6 and EU-27 (%)



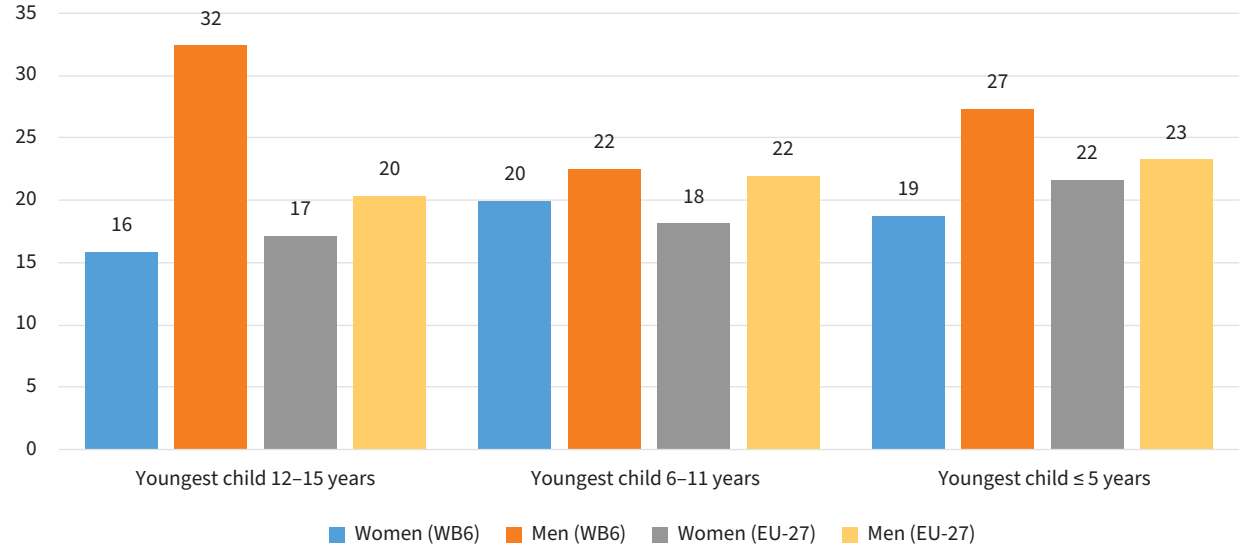
Notes: Data cover the survey responses 'not very well' and 'not at all well'.
Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Figure 22: Respondents reporting poor work–life balance by household type, WB6 and EU-27 (%)



Notes: Data cover the survey responses 'not very well' and 'not at all well'.
Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Figure 23: Respondents reporting poor work–life balance by age of youngest child, WB6 and EU-27 (%)



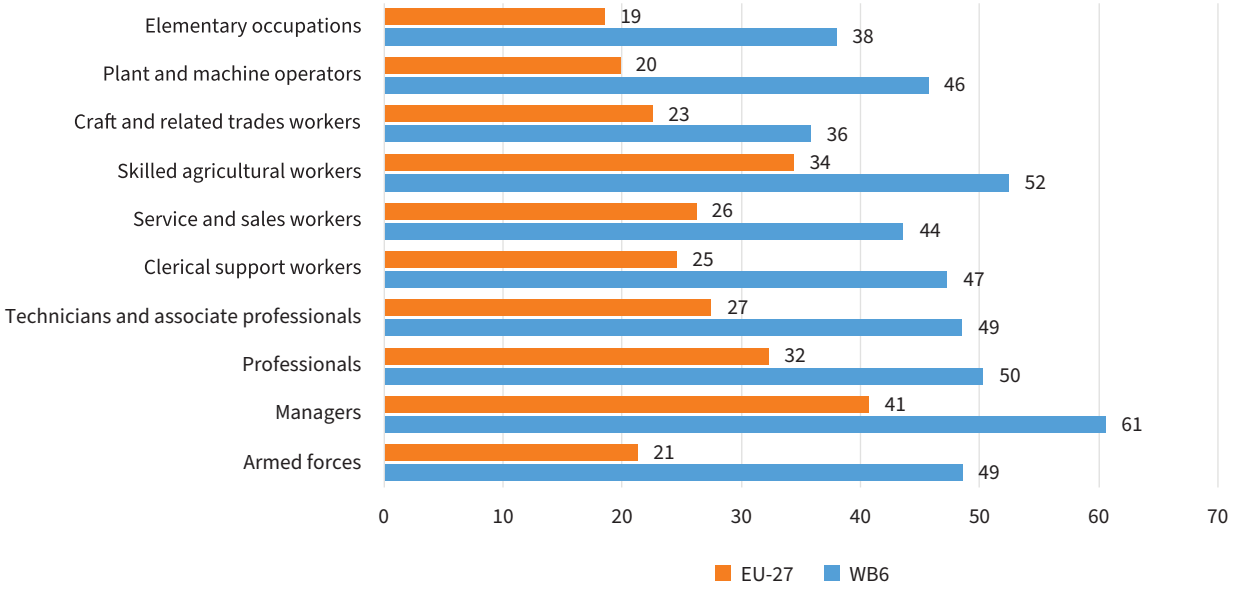
Notes: Data cover the survey responses 'not very well' and 'not at all well'.
Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Work–life conflicts

The 2021 EWCTS captured data on work–life conflicts by asking respondents how frequently in the past 12 months they had worried about work when they were not working, felt too tired after work to do some household tasks and found it difficult to concentrate on their job because of their family responsibilities. The first two questions relate to the impact of work on people's personal lives by trying to assess levels of physical and mental stress and exhaustion, whereas the third relates to how family or personal life affects working life.

People in the WB6, on average, report being significantly more worried about work when they are not working, across all occupational categories, than EU workers. On average, workers in the WB6 in various occupational groups such as managers (61 %), skilled agricultural workers (52 %), professionals (50 %) and technicians and associate professionals (49 %) report relatively more worrying about work outside working hours than their EU-27 counterparts (Figure 24).

Figure 24: Worrying often or always about work when not working, by occupation, WB6 and EU-27 (%)



Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Likewise, with the exception of managers, more workers in all occupations in the WB6 report being tired after work, and therefore unable to do household jobs, than their counterparts in the EU-27. The occupation with the highest share of respondents feeling tired after work is skilled agricultural workers (50 %), which is consistent with the nature of their work and the fact that the majority of this group (60 %) report working more than 48 hours per week.

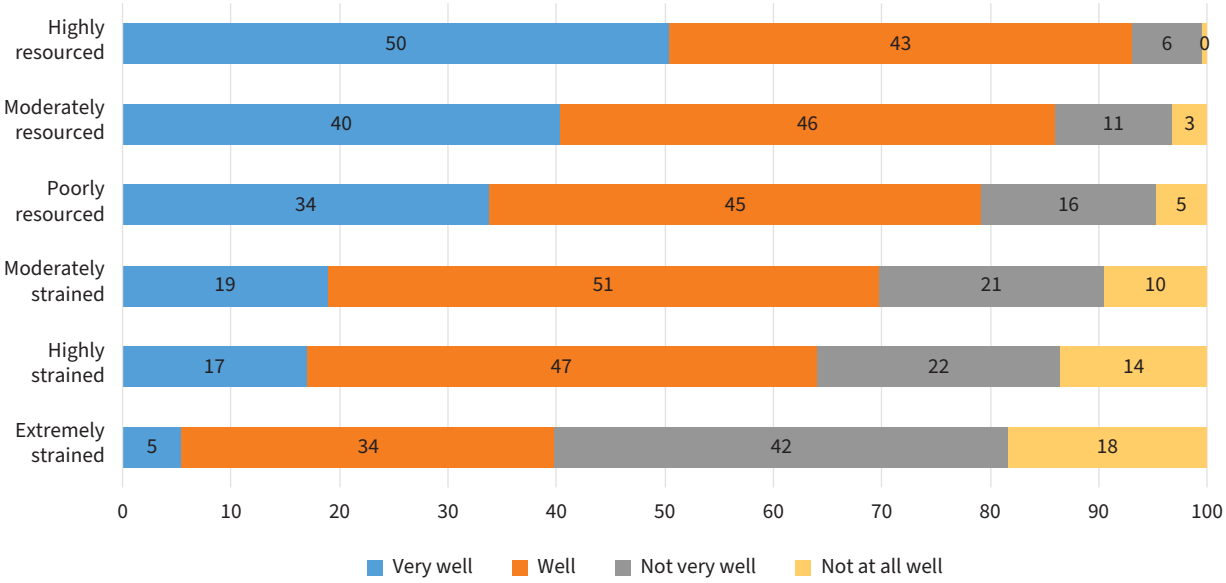
While the overall shares by occupation of workers who report difficulty concentrating on their work due to family responsibilities in the WB6 remain small (14 % and below), there is variation among occupations when we look at, for instance, the differences between elementary occupations, craft and related trades workers, clerical support workers, professionals and the armed forces. The share of workers in the WB6 reporting difficulty concentrating is smaller than in the EU-27 in certain occupations, while share differences are relatively modest.

The analysis of the share of workers worrying about work by sector shows that, apart from transport, where a higher share of workers report worrying about work in the WB6 than in the EU-27 (34 % versus 20 %), and education, where a higher share of workers report worrying about work in the EU-27 than in the WB6 (36 % versus 28 %), there are, on average, no significant differences between the EU-27 and the WB6.

On average, across all sectors except industry, a higher share of workers report being tired after work in the WB6 than in the EU-27. The highest share of work–life conflict in the WB6 is found again among workers in the agricultural sector. In addition, the agricultural and retail and hospitality sectors are the only ones in the WB6 where workers report a higher share of difficulty concentrating at work than their EU-27 peers.

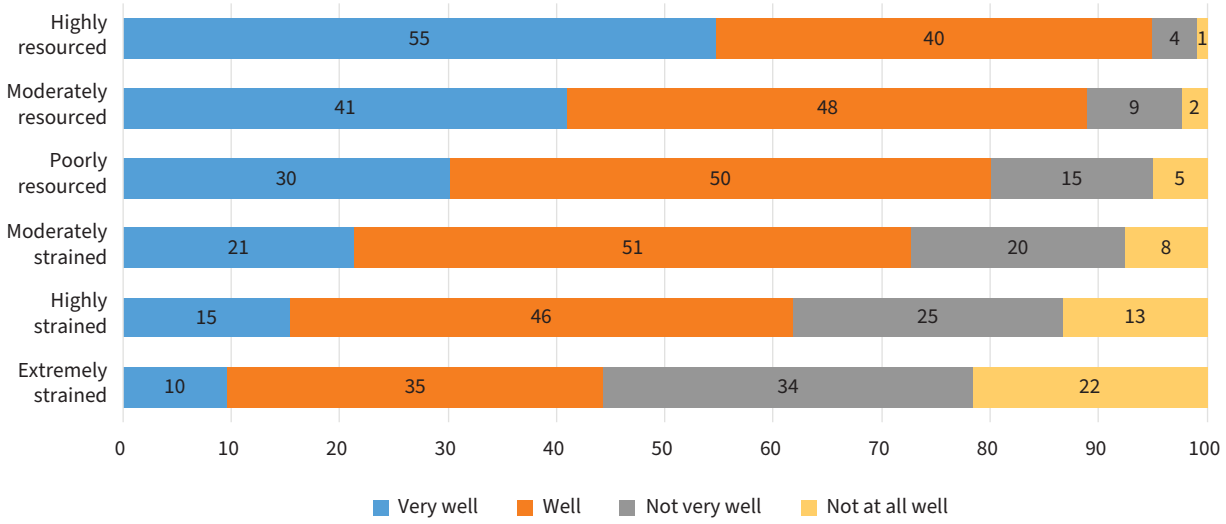
The analysis of job quality and work–life balance shows that, the more resourced and the less strained workers are in the WB6, the more they report a good work–life balance (Figure 25). Out of all workers, the share of those who are highly resourced and report a good work–life balance is lower in the WB6 than in the EU-27 (50 % versus 55 %) (Figure 25 and Figure 26).

Figure 25: Job quality index distribution and reported work–life balance levels, WB6 (%)



Source: 2021 EWCTS.

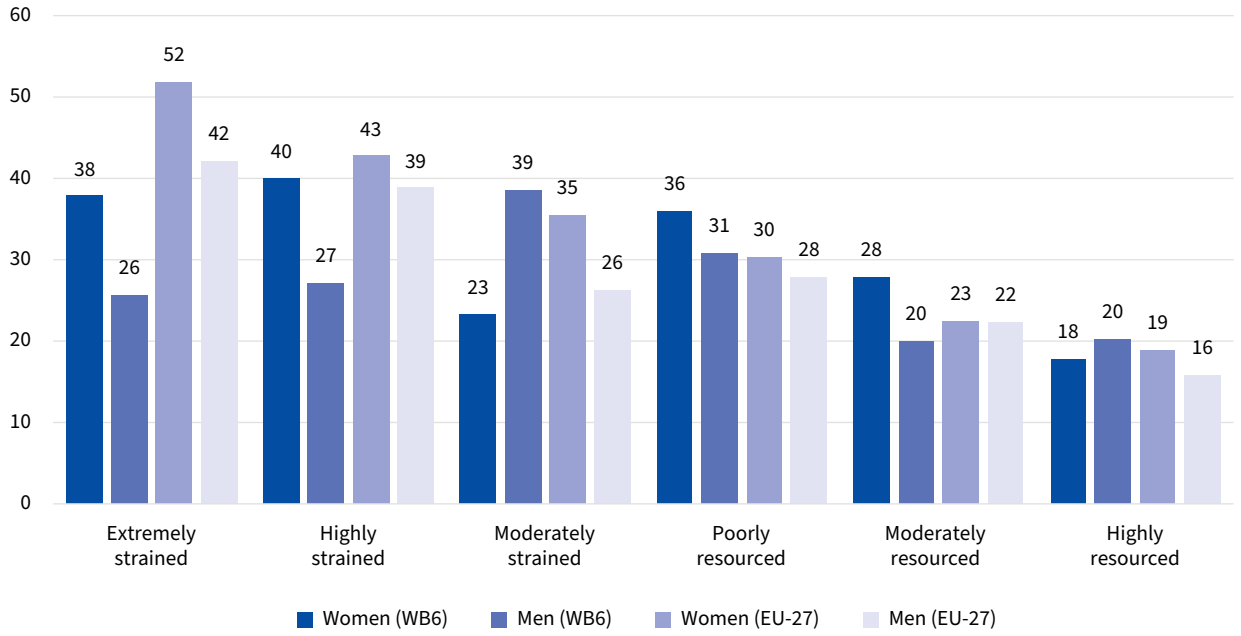
Figure 26: Job quality index distribution and reported work–life balance levels, EU-27 (%)



Source: 2021 EWCTS.

The analysis of both job quality and worrying about work shows that the more strenuous the workers' work circumstances, the more worried they are about work after working hours. Yet extremely or highly strained women and (especially) men in the WB6 are not worrying about work as much as extremely or highly strained women and men in the EU-27 (Figure 27). Previous research links job insecurity and precarity to poor life satisfaction, anxiety and uncertainty (e.g. Drishti et al., 2022; Ramhorst, 2021; Jusić et al., 2019). The high levels of job insecurity and precarity in the WB6 could explain why workers there tend to worry more about work outside working hours.

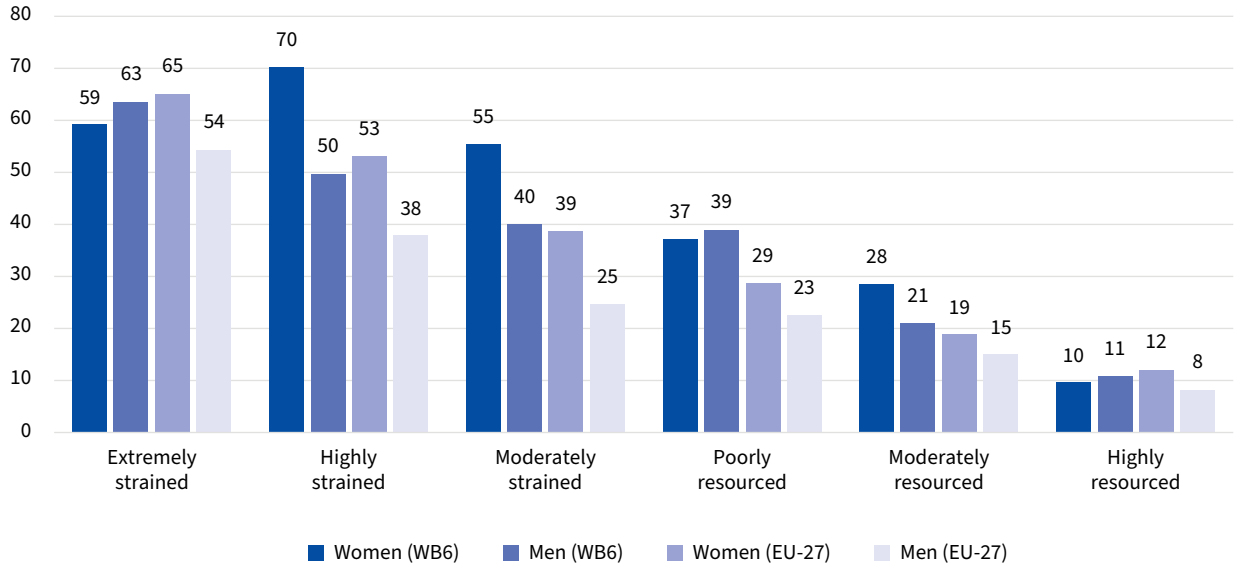
Figure 27: Worrying often or always about work, by job quality and gender, WB6 and EU-27 (%)



Source: 2021 EWCTS.

The 2021 EWCTS results also show that, the more strained workers are, the more likely they are to report being tired after work. The comparison between workers in the WB6 and the EU-27 also shows the former having a higher share of workers who are tired after work, although there is some variation across the reported levels of job quality (Figure 28).

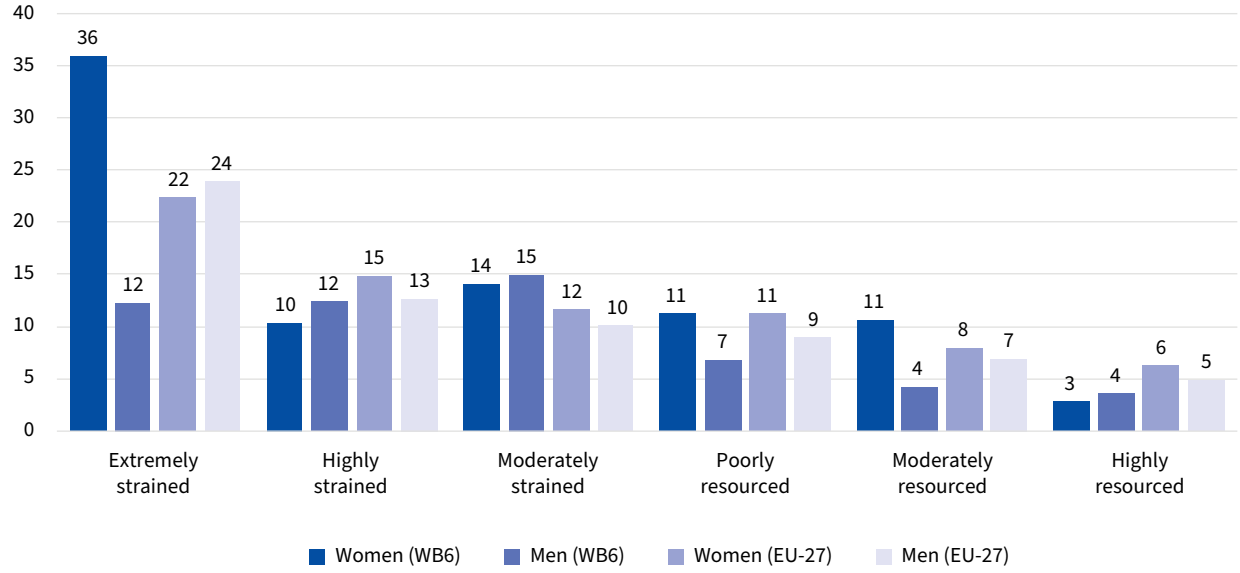
Figure 28: Often or always tired after work, by job quality and gender, WB6 and EU-27 (%)



Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Likewise, the more resources workers in the WB6 report having, the less difficulty they have in concentrating at work. The opposite also holds true (fewer resources are correlated with more difficulty concentrating). There is a significantly higher share of women than men in the WB6 who report difficulty concentrating and extremely strained working conditions (Figure 29).

Figure 29: Often or always having difficulty concentrating, by job quality and gender, WB6 and EU-27 (%)

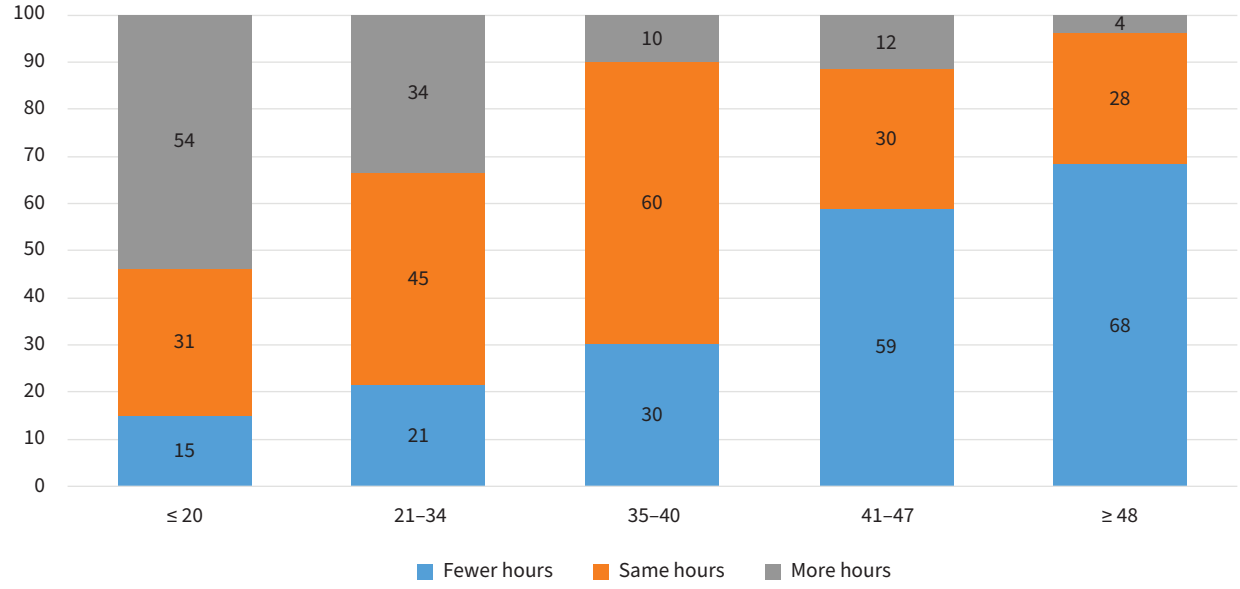


Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Working time preferences

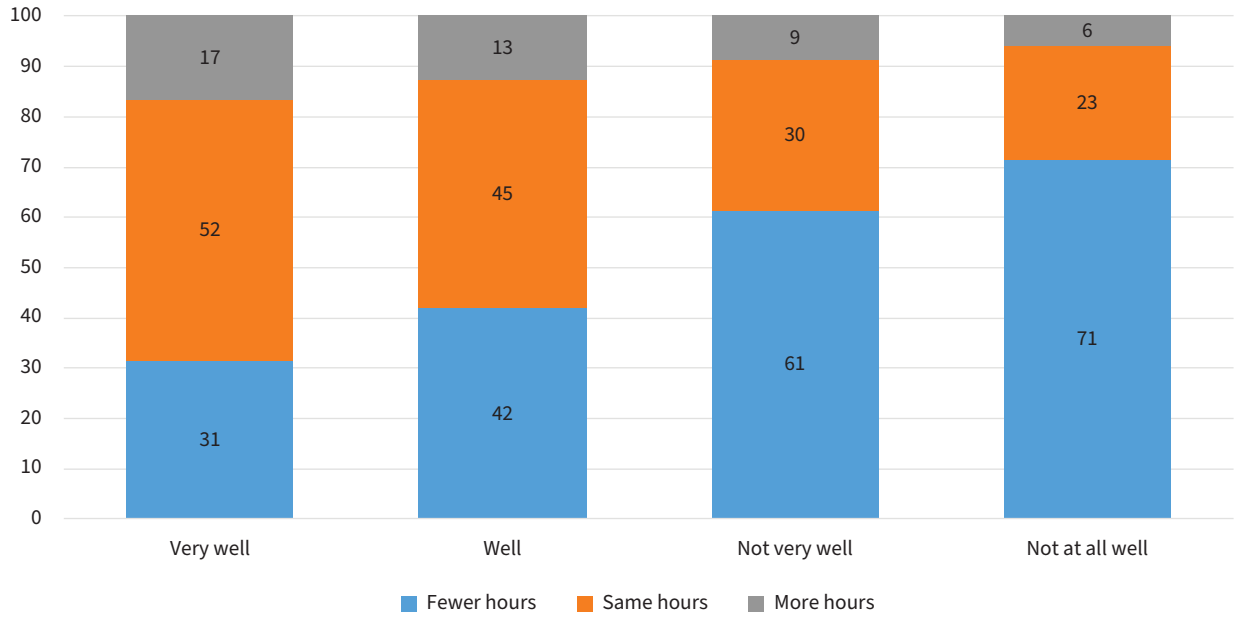
The 2021 EWCTS asked respondents to indicate their preferred number of working hours while considering the possible impact on earnings. Overall, 43 % of workers in the WB6 indicated a preference for the same number of hours as they currently work; the result was very similar in the EU-27 (Eurofound, 2022). However, a slightly higher share of workers in the WB6 (44 %) report that they would prefer to work fewer hours, while the remaining 13 % opt for more hours. A more detailed analysis of working time preferences in the WB6 by usual working hours shows that more than half of those who work up to 20 hours per week and more than a third of those who work 21–34 hours would prefer to work more hours, which suggests that part-time employment is frequently not by choice. Likewise, the high shares of those who work 41–47 hours (59 %) and those who work 48 or more hours (68 %) reporting that they would prefer to work fewer hours suggests that, for many, long working time is also not by choice (Figure 30).

Figure 30: Working time preferences by usual weekly working hours, WB6 (%)



Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Figure 31: Working time preferences by quality of work–life balance, WB6 (%)

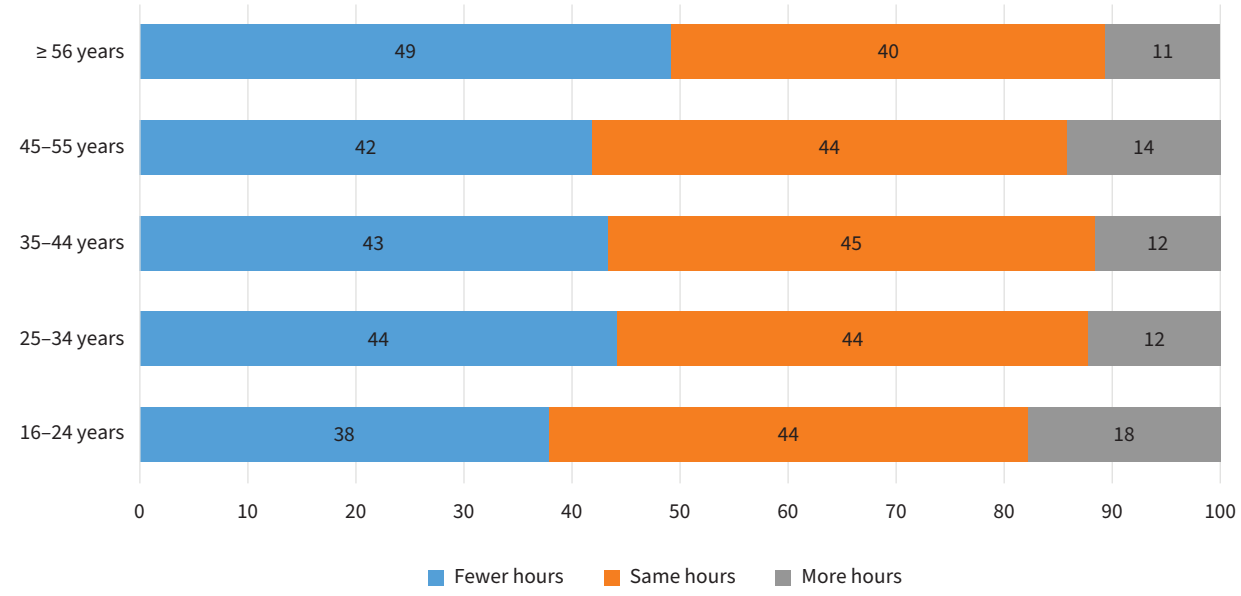


Source: 2021 EWCTS.

The analysis of working time preferences in the region by quality of work–life balance shows that as the satisfaction with work–life balance declines, the preference for fewer hours increases. Those dissatisfied with their work–life balance prefer fewer hours – 71 % of those responding 'not at all well' and 61 % of those responding 'not very well' want to reduce their working hours. Conversely, individuals satisfied with their work–life balance prefer to retain the same hours, with 52 % of those responding 'very well' and 45 % of those responding 'well' opting for no change. Few people want to work more, even among satisfied workers (17 %). The data suggest that work–life balance strongly influences working time preferences, with most people favouring fewer or unchanged hours over increased work hours (Figure 31).

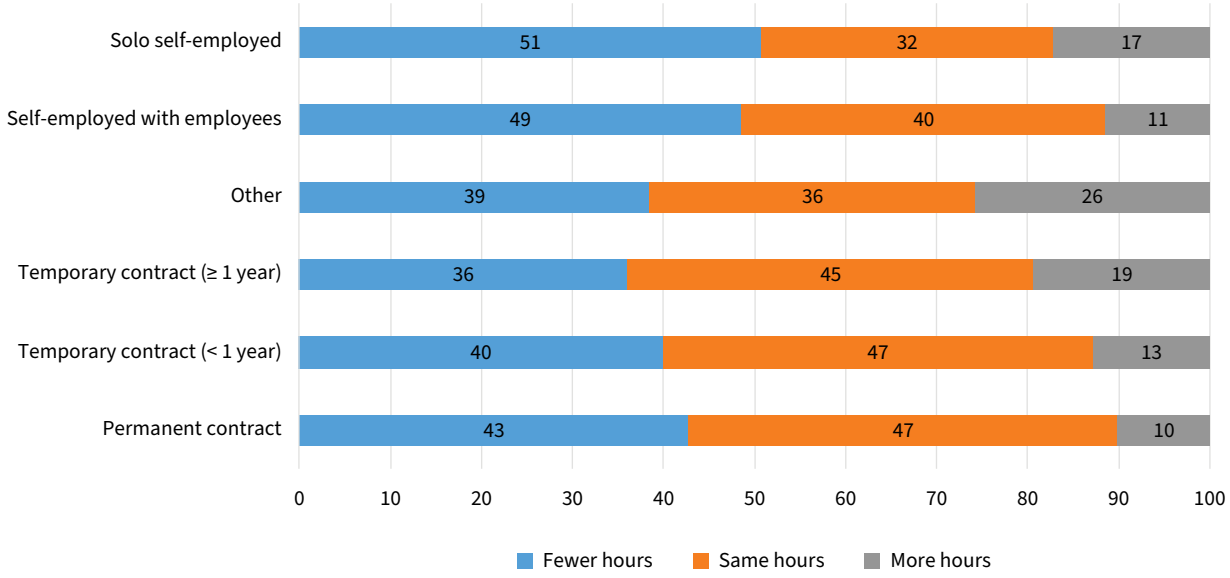
The desire to work fewer hours increases with age (Figure 32), since older workers (56 years and over) show the strongest preference for fewer hours (49 %), while younger workers (16–24 years) have the lowest (38 %). The preference for the same hours remains stable across age groups (40–45 %). Younger employees (16–24 years) tend to be more motivated to gain experience and increase their earnings. They have the highest interest in working more hours (18 %), while older groups show less enthusiasm (11–14 %).

Figure 32: Working time preferences by age group, WB6 (%)



Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Figure 33: Working time preferences by employment status, WB6 (%)

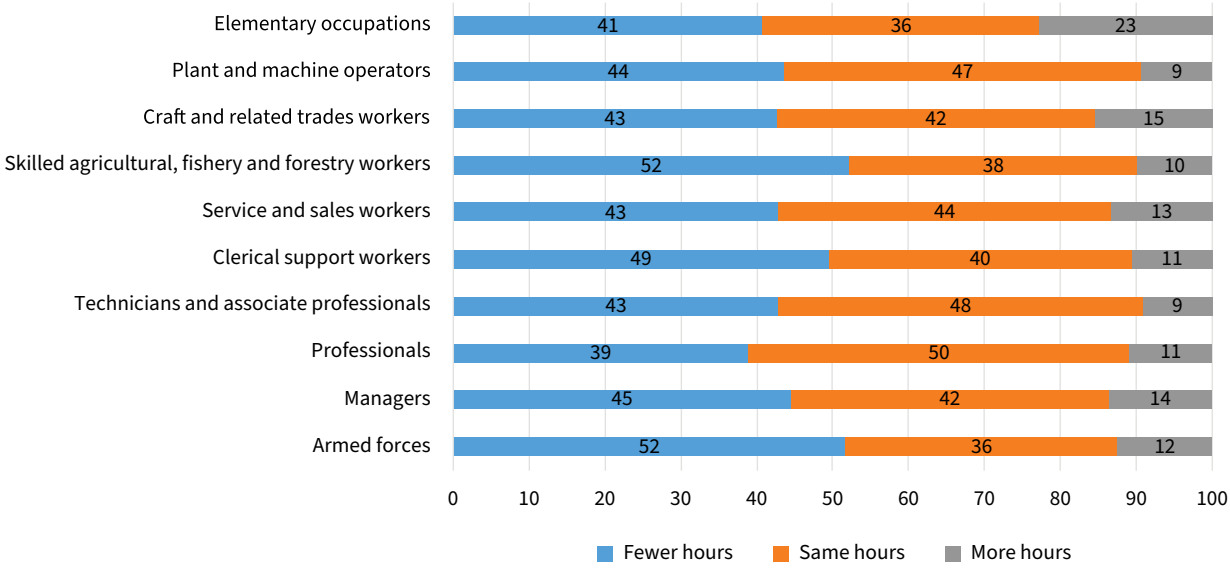


Source: 2021 EWCTS.

The analysis of working time preferences by employment status shows that the self-employed, both solo self-employed people (51 %) and self-employed people with employees (49 %), have the strongest preference for fewer hours, probably due to the demanding nature of running a business. Workers on temporary contracts (of both over and under one year) and permanent contracts, on the other hand, have a higher preference for maintaining their current working hours (45–47 %), suggesting a desire for stability. In addition, fewer temporary workers (36–40 %) wish to reduce their hours compared with self-employed individuals (Figure 33).

Meanwhile, the analysis by occupation shows that 39–52 % of workers across all occupations would prefer to work fewer hours. Professionals are the most likely to prefer to maintain the same working time (50 %), followed by technicians and associate professionals (48 %) and plant and machine operators (47 %). Significant shares of the other occupations would also like to have the same number of hours (36–44 %). The workers most likely to prefer working more hours are those in elementary occupations (23 %), while significantly lower shares of the other occupations would prefer the same (Figure 34).

Figure 34: Working time preferences by occupation, WB6 (%)

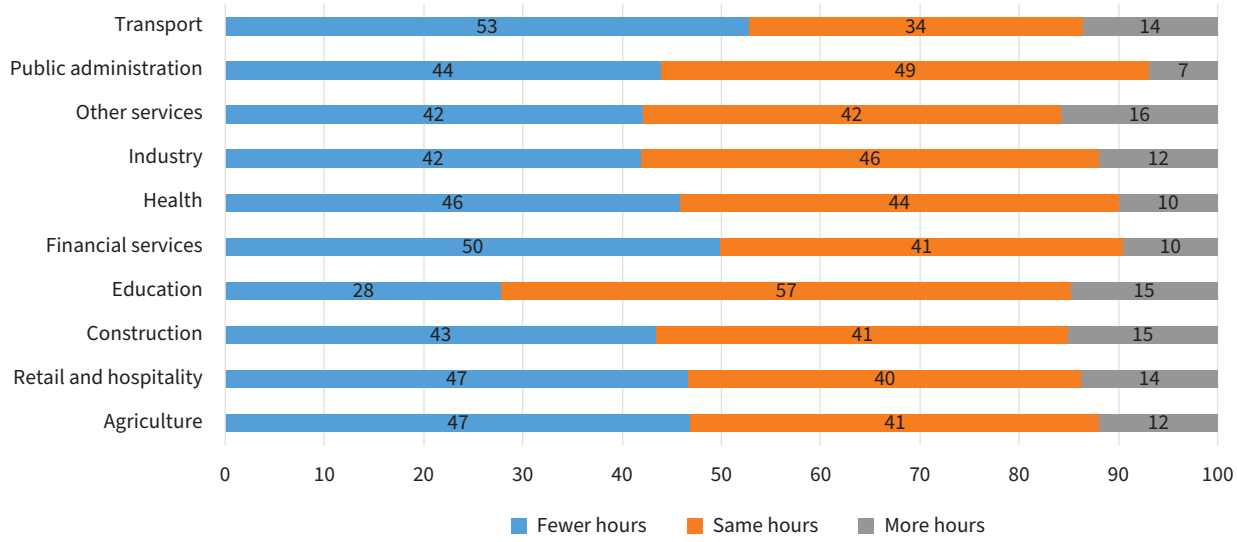


Source: 2021 EWCTS.

An analysis by sector (Figure 35) also shows that most workers across all sectors would prefer to either keep working the same hours or work fewer hours. Workers in the transport sector are the most likely to prefer working fewer hours (53 %). Education is the sector where the highest share of workers would prefer to keep the same

hours (57 %) and the lowest share would prefer to work fewer hours (28 %).

Figure 35: Working time preferences by sector, WB6 (%)



Source: 2021 EWCTS.

4 Gender equality snapshot

Since the 2000s, all governments in the WB6 have prioritised EU accession. This has resulted in gender equality becoming a more visible and public priority as the EU commenced policy discussions specifically focused on it. When the state of gender equality is analysed as part of the political standard for EU accession, common challenges in achieving it are detected across the WB6: from having a solid legal and policy framework for gender equality but weak institutional capacity for implementation to having predominant gender roles and stereotypes that hinder the implementation of equal rights and the realisation of gender equality objectives.

The EU as a transformative force: gender equality in labour legislation

Given their commitment to EU accession, the WB6 strive to harmonise their labour and social legislation with the EU gender equality *acquis*. In line with Directive 2006/54/EC, all of the WB6 have prohibited direct and indirect discrimination (Article 2.1(a) and (b)), harassment (Article 2.1(c)) and sexual harassment (Article 2.1(d)) in the workplace. Most of the countries have introduced prohibitions on gender discrimination to the relevant labour laws (i.e. Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia), while some have implemented them through specific gender equality laws (i.e. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo). In line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and Directive 2006/54/EC, the Labour Code of Albania prohibits gender discrimination in employment relations. It also sets out the option of introducing special temporary measures to achieve equal treatment. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Law on Gender Equality regulates the issues of employment, work and access to all forms of resources. It specifically addresses the areas of equal pay, equal access to and conditions for education, differentiated treatment related to pregnancy, and maternity leave and benefits, among other issues. In Kosovo, the Law on Gender Equality regulates equal protection and treatment based on gender affiliation in the employment relationship and focuses on the prohibition of discrimination (direct and indirect) in relation to access to employment, vocational training and requalification, and working conditions. In Montenegro, the Labour Law regulates the prohibition of discrimination, both direct and indirect, towards people seeking employment and towards employees, including on the grounds of sex and sexual orientation. In North Macedonia, the Labour Law prohibits direct and/or indirect discrimination on the aforementioned grounds. It also defines and prohibits harassment and sexual harassment as forms of discrimination. In Serbia, the Labour Law prohibits direct and indirect discrimination at work. Sexual harassment is prohibited, an employed woman is entitled to special protection in the case of pregnancy and childbirth, and any employee is entitled to special protection for the purpose of tending to a child.

In all of the WB6, full alignment with the EU requirement for prohibition of pay discrimination based on sex (Directive 2006/54/EC, Article 4; Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Article 157.1) is also observed. The labour legislation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia adapted the ILO Equal Remuneration Convention's definition of equal pay for work of equal value, understanding it as equal pay for equal work. Affirmative action (Directive 2006/54/EC, Article 3) to achieve gender equality in the workplace is usually provided for within specific gender equality legislation, regulating special and temporary measures to be enacted in the public and private sectors to achieve gender equality. The most advanced legislation in the region in this respect is the new legal framework in Serbia, which explicitly obligates companies with more than 50 employees to include a section on achieving and improving gender equality in their annual plans and to inform the ministry in charge.

The prohibition of direct and indirect discrimination on the grounds of sex in access to employment and vocational training, working conditions, and membership/involvement in workers' organisations (Directive 2006/54/EC, Article 14.1), including harassment, sexual harassment, instruction to discriminate, or any less favourable treatment of a woman related to pregnancy or maternity leave (Directive 2006/54/EC, Article 2.2), is regulated in labour legislation or gender equality legislation throughout the region.

The EU principle of entitlement to a minimum of 14 weeks' maternity leave, including a compulsory period of at least two weeks (Directive 92/85/EEC, Article 8), is upheld in all the WB6 except for Kosovo, where labour legislation only specifies a maximum duration of non-compulsory leave from work due to pregnancy and childbirth of 12 months. In Serbia, maternity leave and leave for nursing a child are limited to a total duration of one year. In North Macedonia, the total duration for parental leave is nine months, and the father of the child may take leave, but only if the mother has abandoned the child, has died or is otherwise prevented from taking leave. Parental leave in Kosovo is regulated using a more restrictive model than in the rest of the WB6 in terms of duration and payment. A mother (and in exceptional circumstances a father) is entitled to 12 months of leave, of which six months are compensated at 70 % of the basic salary, three months are compensated at 50 % and three months are unpaid. Maternity leave is a cornerstone of women's labour rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but although all three levels of government provide for up to 12 months' maternity leave, certain rights differ. At the country level, the total duration may be shortened to 42 days after the mother gives birth, while in Republika Srpska such truncation is not allowed. In both

cases, the law discriminates against men, as it does not provide for equal parental leave; the father can take leave only if the mother dies or cannot take care of the child (Law on Labour of Republika Srpska, Article 75). However, in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, maternity leave has some elements of the dual-earner/dual-carer model. In Montenegro, the Labour Law provides for both maternity and parental leave. Following a compulsory 98 days of maternity leave for mothers, both parents share a parental leave period of up to one year. Both parents are entitled to use parental leave equally; however, 30 days are non-transferable ([8]). In Albania, the provisions are generous, prohibiting a pregnant woman from working 35 days before and 63 days after childbirth. Albania also introduced paternity leave, entitling the father to parental leave after the first 63 days after childbirth. At least one month of parental leave is in principle non-transferable between parents, but the leave is unpaid (Kosovo Women's Network, 2022). Overall, regulations in the WB6 assume that the burden of care for children is primarily taken on by the mother and not the father. This is even more pronounced in practice, with a minuscule percentage of fathers exercising their right to parental leave even where it exists.

Finally, a very important aspect of EU anti-discrimination law is the prohibition of 'victimisation', which involves measures to protect employees against dismissal or other adverse treatment by employers in reaction to a complaint or legal proceedings aimed at enforcing compliance with the principle of equal treatment. The labour legislation in Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia is aligned with this.

Aspects of gender inequality at work

As the foregoing brief legal and policy analysis shows, the WB6 have undergone progressive legislative improvements, but certain structural problems remain (Regional Cooperation Council, 2023), and gender inequality at work is an everyday reality. The biggest challenges remain in the areas of access to the labour market and equal opportunities.

Participation of women in the labour market

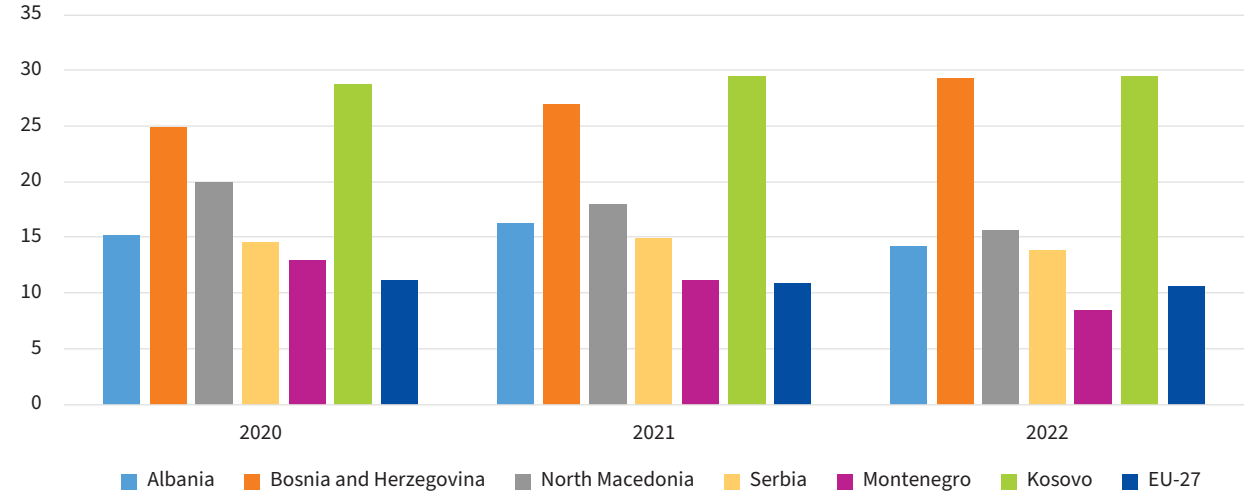
The WB6 have the lowest rates of female labour force participation and employment and the highest rates of female unemployment (especially for youth) in Europe (Regional Cooperation Council, 2022; Bellaqa et al., 2021; Atoyan et al., 2017; Golubović et al., 2015). The participation rate of women aged 20–64 years in the labour force in the WB6 is well below the EU average (70 % in 2022). In 2022, this rate was 67 % in Serbia, 63 % in Albania, 62 % in Montenegro, 52 % in North Macedonia and 50 % in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Employment gap

A primary goal in making progress towards gender equality is closing the gender employment gap. The gender employment gap is defined as the difference between the employment rates of men and women aged 20–64 years. The gender employment gap in the WB6 is higher than in the EU-27, ranging in 2022 from 8.4 pp in Montenegro to 29.3 pp in Bosnia and Herzegovina and 29.4 pp in Kosovo, compared with 10.6 pp in the EU-27 (Regional Cooperation Council, 2022). All of the WB6 except Montenegro have a much higher gender employment gap than the EU-27 average (Figure 36).

There is a pronounced gender imbalance in employment across the Western Balkans region. The rate of employment for women ranges from 20 % in Kosovo to 39.1 % in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 48.8 % in Montenegro, 49 % in North Macedonia, 58.3 % in Albania and 58.9 % in Serbia, all far from the EU average of 67.7 % in 2021 (Eurostat, 2023). The gender gaps are substantially larger for older women with low educational attainment (Regional Cooperation Council, 2022).

Figure 36: Gender employment gap, WB6 and EU-27, 2020–2022 (pp)



Source: Eurostat.

8 One month being non-transferable is compatible with the Parental Leave Directive (Directive 2010/18/EU), which is the predecessor to the Work–Life Balance Directive (Directive (EU) 2019/1158).

Unemployment gap

The unemployment rate among women in the WB6 is typically slightly higher than that among men. Compared with the gender employment gap, the gender unemployment gap in the WB6 is relatively small. In 2022, North Macedonia was the only country with higher unemployment among men than among women, with a difference of 0.8 pp. Meanwhile, the largest gender gap was in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the unemployment rate was 7.4 pp higher among women than among men. It should be borne in mind that the main reason for the relative gender equality in unemployment rates is the much lower activity rates of women – that is, many more women withdraw from, or do not join, the labour force in the WB6 compared with the EU-27.

Gender pay gap

The gender pay gap (GPG) is calculated as the difference between the average (or median) wages for men and women as a percentage of the wage for men. Many statistical offices in the WB6 do not publish data on wages by gender, which enables only the calculation of an unadjusted ([9]) GPG. Albania publishes the unadjusted GPG and the GPG disaggregated by economic activity sector and occupation. The unadjusted GPG in Albania amounted to 10.1 % in 2019 and decreased to 6.2 % in 2023 ([10]). In North Macedonia, the unadjusted GPG decreased from 25 % in 2018 to 17 % in 2023 ([11]). In Serbia, it increased from 12 % in 2019 to 17 % in 2023 ([12]).

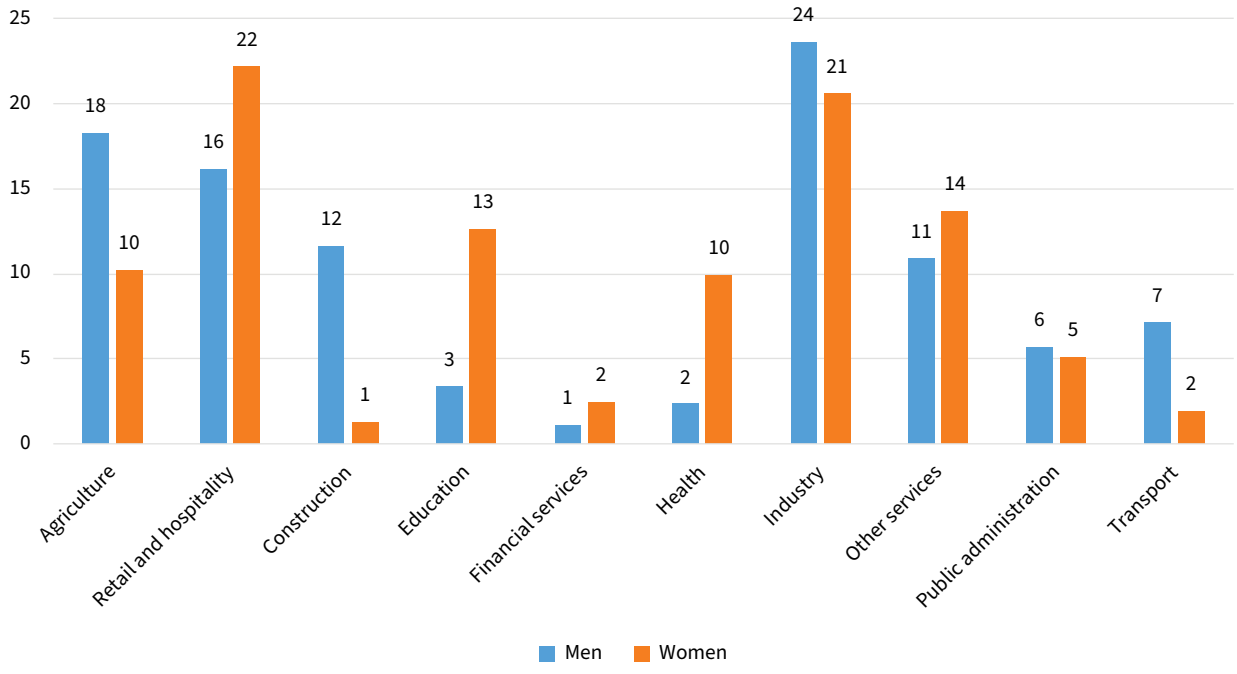
Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Montenegro do not report data on wages by gender. Unofficial estimates put the unadjusted GPG in Montenegro at 21 % in 2023 (UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2024). Bosnia and Herzegovina has the largest GPG in the region, amounting to 37.8 % (Ilić, 2022). Only in Kosovo does there appear to be an unadjusted wage premium for women, although it becomes a wage penalty for women of 6.2 % once the GPG is adjusted for the personal characteristics of men and women (Gashi et al., 2020).

Gender segregation in the labour market

Gender segregation in the labour market means that men and women tend to segregate themselves into different sectors and occupations, so that there exist typical female and male sectors and occupations. This is a long-standing feature of labour markets in the WB6.

The differences in the distribution of women and men across jobs in different economic sectors are highly visible in the EWCTS results for the WB6. Women are almost five times more engaged in health sector jobs, four times more in education sector jobs and almost two times more in retail and hospitality jobs (Figure 37). On the other hand, men represent a vast majority in transport (almost four times more than women) and construction (10 times more than women).

Figure 37: Gender segregation in the labour market by economic sector, WB6 (%)



Source: 2021 EWCTS.

9 An unadjusted (crude) GPG means not controlling for systematic personal and job-related differences between men and women, for example in levels of education and work experience.

10 Calculation by the Albanian Institute of Statistics.

11 Calculation based on data from the North Macedonian State Statistical Office.

12 Calculation based on data from the Serbian Statistical Office.

Generally, the employment of women in the WB6 is concentrated in retail, food services and accommodation, followed by public administration, health, education and social work services (Regional Cooperation Council, 2022). In the North Macedonian labour market, in 2022, the top three sectors for women's employment were trade (31.4 %), public administration (29.4 %) and manufacturing (23.9 %) (Ilostat, n.d.). In the same year in Serbia, the top three sectors for women were public administration (34.2 %), trade (33.5 %) and manufacturing (16.3 %). Furthermore, according to Ilostat (n.d.) estimates for Bosnia and Herzegovina, 32.9 % of employed women worked in trade, 29.7 % in public administration and 20.5 % in agriculture. Albania is somewhat of an outlier, as 41.6 % of all employed women in 2022 worked in agriculture, 21.6 % in trade and 20.7 % in public administration. In Montenegro in 2022, the top three sectors for women's employment were trade (49.6 %), public administration (35.9 %) and agriculture (6.6 %).

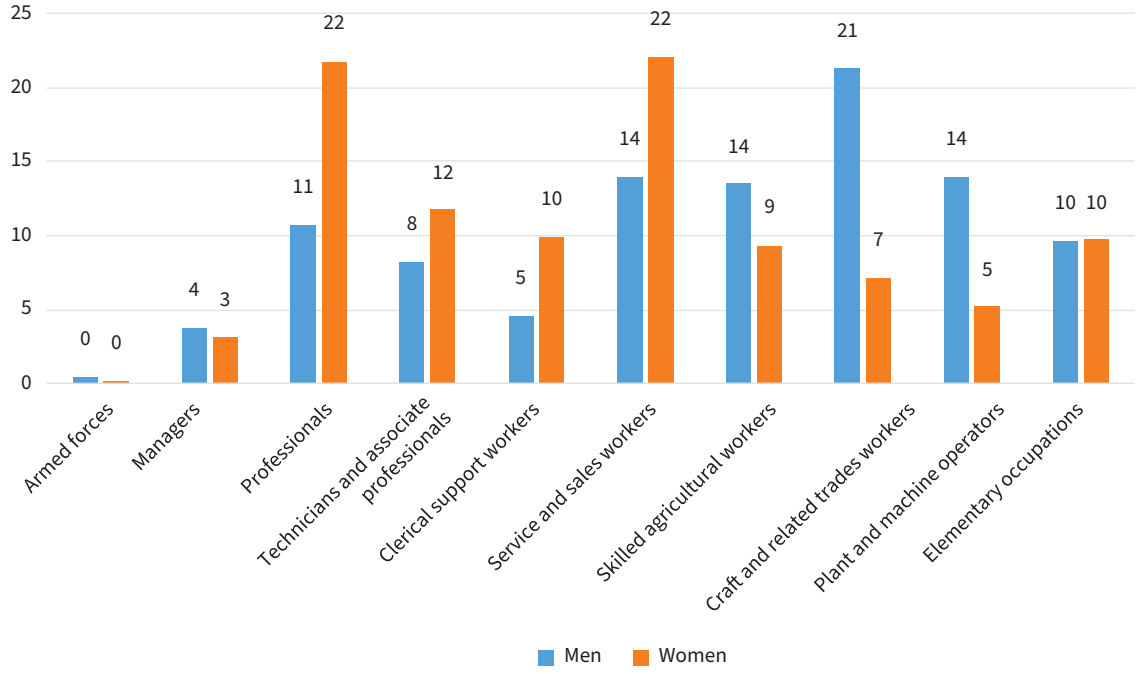
Sectoral differences are relatively highly correlated with differences by occupational group (Figure 38).

The EWCTS data show a sharp difference between women and men when it comes to shares of occupations in total employment. For example, women are two times more represented among professional and clerical support workers, while men are three times more represented in occupational groups such as plant and machine operators and craft and related trades workers.

It is interesting that there is not much difference between genders regarding employment in the manager occupation. However, this is the least common occupation for women except for armed forces positions, while the highest shares of women are employed as professionals and service and sales workers. The high percentage of women working as professionals reflects the fact that more women than men have higher education in the WB6.

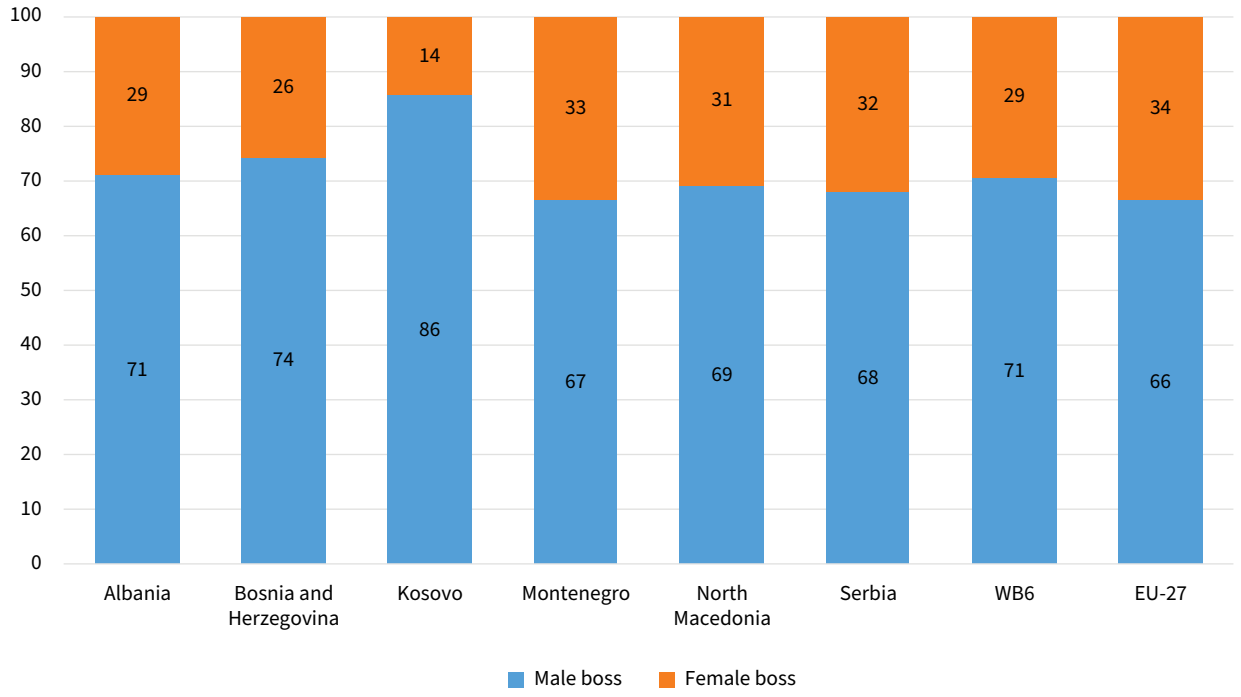
The gender divide among managers is more apparent when we examine the gender of bosses in the workplace (Figure 39). Montenegro, Serbia and North Macedonia show results similar to the EU-27 average, but the difference in gender rates is most pronounced in Kosovo, where only one in seven managers is a woman.

Figure 38: Shares of occupations in total employment by gender, WB6 (%)



Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Figure 39: Shares of management positions by gender, WB6 and EU-27 (%)

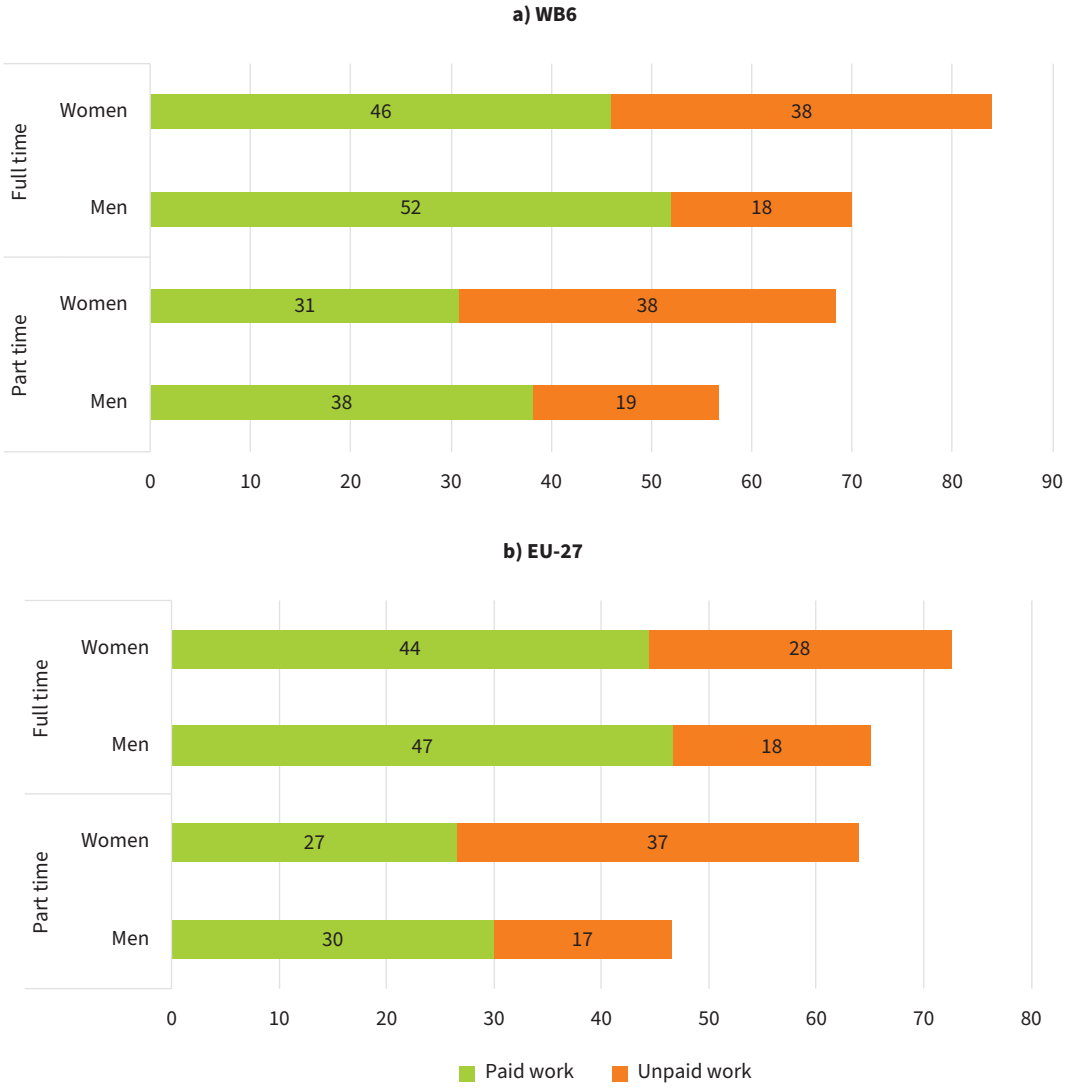


Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Paid and unpaid work

Regardless of whether they work full time or not, women take on the bulk of the burden of unpaid work (Golubović et al., 2015), while men spend more time on paid work. The EWCTS confirms this and identifies similarities between the WB6 and the EU-27 in this respect. The findings show that (i) men in the WB6 and the EU-27 spend the same amount of time on unpaid work regardless of whether they have a full-time or a part-time job; and (ii) men in the WB6 and the EU-27 who work part-time spend less time on unpaid than paid work (Figure 40). However, important differences are observed between women in the WB6 and their counterparts in the EU-27. While women with a part time job in the WB6 spend almost the same amount of time on paid and unpaid work, women in the EU-27 with a part-time job spend more time on unpaid than paid work. Women in the WB6 with a full-time job spend less time on unpaid work than on paid work. However, the amount of unpaid work that women in the WB6 do is the same no matter whether they are employed part time or full time. This is not the case in the EU-27, where women with a full-time job spend less time on unpaid work than women with a part-time job.

Figure 40: Average hours spent on paid and unpaid work by full-/part-time employment and gender

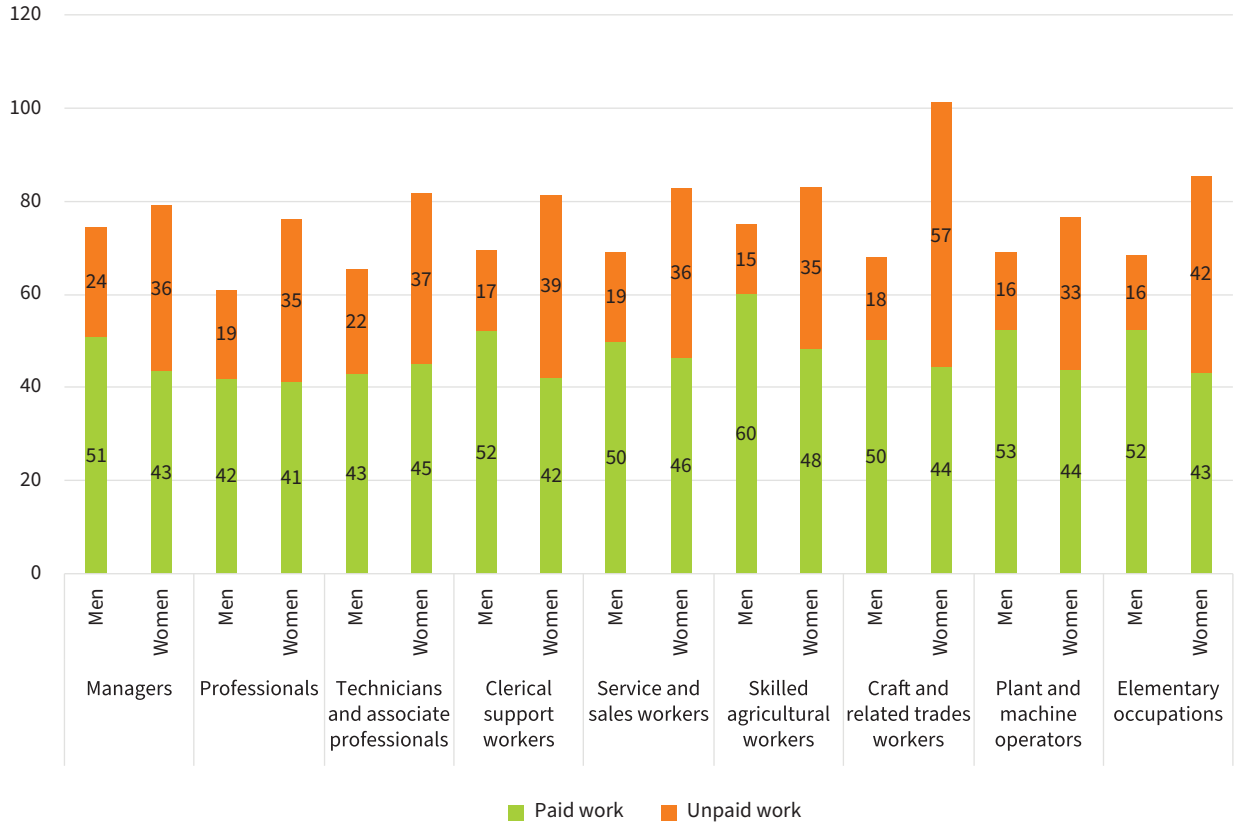


Source: 2021 EWCTS.

The EWCTS also shows that, with regard to occupation, managers and technicians spend the most time on unpaid work among men, while among women, craft and trades workers do, followed by elementary occupations, clerical support workers and technicians (Figure 41). This reveals two trends in the WB6: (i) women are expected to work more in the household if they are working lower-paid jobs; and (ii) the more educated and better paid men are, the more evenly they distribute unpaid work with women.

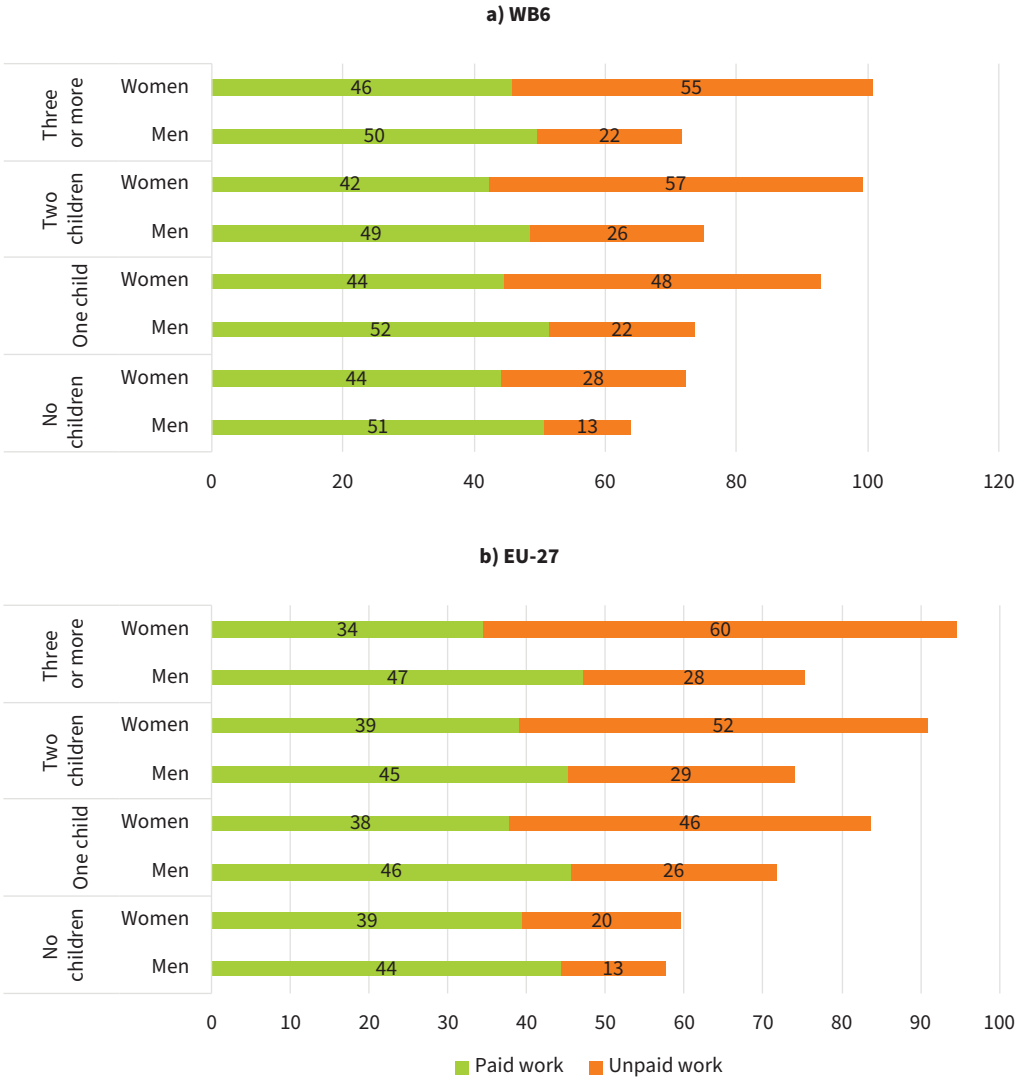
Generally, women spend twice as much time on unpaid work as men. But the average time spent on unpaid work increases with the presence and number of children, and it does so considerably more for women than for men (Regional Cooperation Council, 2022; Figure 42).

Figure 41: Average hours spent on paid and unpaid work by gender and occupation, WB6



Source: 2021 EWCTS.

Figure 42: Average hours spent on paid and unpaid work by number of children



Source: 2021 EWCTS.

The distribution of paid and unpaid work in the WB6 reflects traditional gender roles in the division of work. It can be explained partly by persistent behaviours, barriers and constraints imposed by tradition, culture, legislation, a lack of family-friendly policies, social and childcare infrastructure and gender-based comparative advantages in unpaid work (Alonso et al., 2019). The uneven distribution of unpaid work has multiple negative impacts on women. When women are expected to take on most of the unpaid work, they often have less time to devote to paid work or education and have considerably less free time. Unpaid work and the care economy are still not acknowledged by legislators in the WB6 as an essential component of the nation's prosperity.

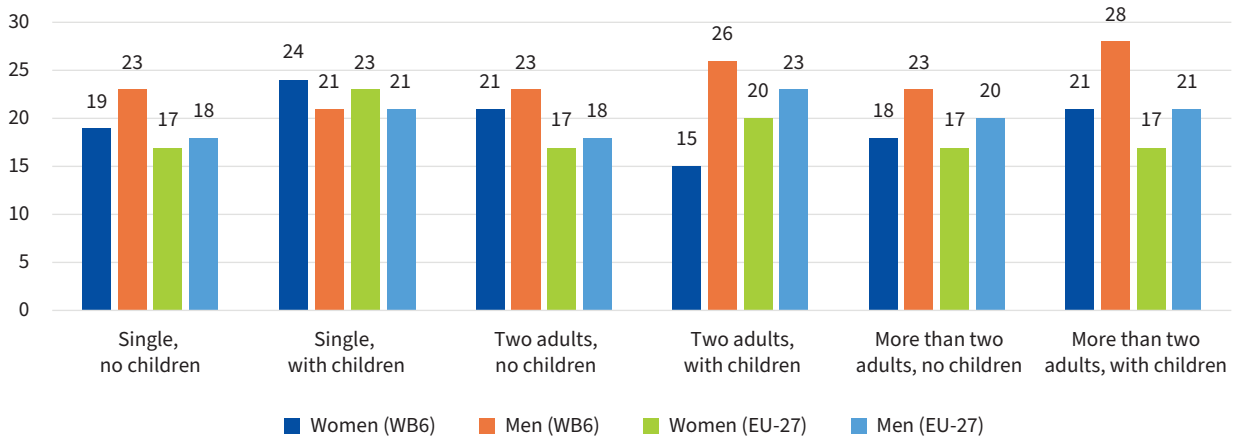
Gender aspects of work–life balance

Considering that the lower employment and activity rates among women in the WB6 can to a significant extent be attributed to their role as primary caregivers for children and elderly people, looking at gender aspects of work–life balance is one avenue to better understand factors that can improve the labour market situation and working conditions of women.

The European Institute for Gender Equality's Gender Equality Index indicates substantial gender gaps between the WB6 and the EU-27 average, especially in the domain of money, followed by those of time and work. By dismantling barriers and advancing parity, a more inclusive and dynamic workforce can be cultivated (World Economic Forum, 2023).

The EWCTS results show that work–life balance rates in the WB6 align closely with EU-27 averages (Figure 43). Among individual countries, however, Montenegro and Serbia perform well below the EU-27 and WB6 averages in terms of work–life balance.

Figure 43: Rates of poor work–life balance by household type, WB6 and EU-27 (%)



Notes: Data cover the survey responses 'not very well' and 'not at all well' with regard to their work hours fitting with their personal life.
Source: 2021 EWCTS.

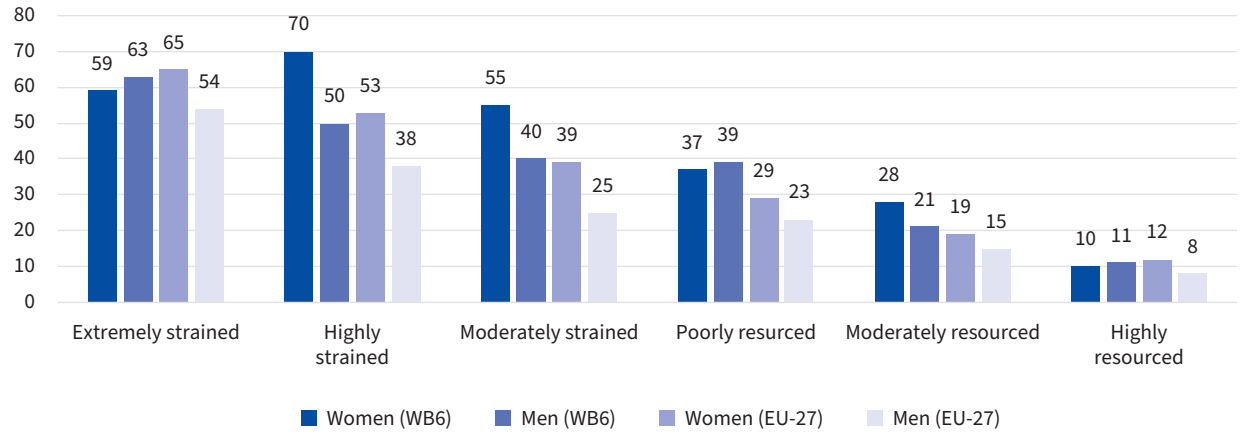
As a rule, having children is a contributing factor to poor work–life balance for women, especially in Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia, while Kosovo reports the lowest levels of poor work–life balance for women across most household types. This may be the result of the more traditional family structure commonly found in Kosovo, which enables the reallocation of unpaid care work to inactive family members from those active in the labour market. Overall, the EWCTS data highlight Montenegro as having the poorest work–life balance for women in the WB6, particularly among those with very young children.

The poor work–life balance experienced by men in the WB6 can be understood as a result of the patriarchal family system, which puts men in the role of primary breadwinner, in combination with labour policy frameworks that do not provide for paternity leave or endorse the dual-earner/dual-carer system. In contrast, women tend to adapt to and internalise their dual role, centred around both work and home (Hakim, 2000).

Considering that women in the WB6 must do a second shift at home and spend almost as many hours doing unpaid work as they have spent on paid work, another relevant indicator of work–life balance is the level of tiredness workers feel after work. The EWCTS shows that the rate of tiredness in the WB6 increases with age, particularly for women, who report significantly higher fatigue levels than men, especially among the older age groups. In contrast, the EU-27 data show a more even distribution of tiredness, although men still typically report less fatigue than women across most age groups. In the WB6, women generally report more tiredness after work than men, especially in households without children. The most significant gender gap is observed in single-parent households. Men tend to report higher levels of tiredness in households with older children (aged 12–15), whereas women report more tiredness in households with younger children (aged 6–11). This is explained by the gendered division of responsibilities related to children. In comparison, the EU-27 shows less variation in tiredness between genders across different age groups of children.

Job strain is a major factor influencing tiredness after work, with higher levels of fatigue associated with more strained jobs. Women in the WB6 consistently report more tiredness than men in roles with moderate strain, while the gender gap is more balanced or reversed in highly resourced jobs (Figure 44). In the EU-27, women also tend to report more fatigue than men in strained jobs, though the gaps between genders are generally narrower. The EWCTS data suggest that job strain and resources have a notable impact on concentration difficulties, particularly in the WB6. Women tend to report more difficulty concentrating in extremely strained and poorly resourced jobs, whereas men in the EU-27 report more challenges in extremely strained roles. However, the differences between genders become less significant in jobs with moderate or high resources.

Figure 44: Rates of feeling often or always tired after work, by gender and job quality (%)



Source: 2021 EWCTS.

The most vulnerable groups in the WB6 are single mothers and women with children in any household type, considering that they experience notably higher levels of work-related worry than their EU-27 counterparts. Generally, men in the WB6 tend to show lower levels of work-related worry. However, larger households, particularly those with children, also seem to be associated with increased worry, especially for men in the WB6 when the youngest child is aged 12–15 years.

Conclusions and policy pointers

Conclusions

This report is the first of its kind to provide a **comparative analysis of the working lives of workers in the WB6** – comprising Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia – with a special focus on **working conditions and job quality**, including from a **gender perspective**. It is largely based on data collected by the EWCTS, a probability survey conducted in 2021 in 36 European countries and the first such Eurofound survey to cover all of the WB6. The report's key findings largely reflect long-standing features of the working conditions in the region, while acknowledging the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Complementary analysis was also conducted based on data from the EU-LFS, national censuses and other statistical sources.

The region has shown good progress in **convergence with the EU-27 on key labour market indicators**, although the progress has been uneven over time and among countries. The report starts by taking stock of population and labour market trends. The analysis shows that the population of the region is shrinking, due to both natural decline and outmigration. Yet the region has shown good progress on certain key labour force indicators by reducing its gaps with the EU-27 in activity, employment and unemployment rates and wages. From 2014 to 2023, the WB6 experienced an average growth in their activity rate of 3.3 pp, in their employment rate of 8.6 pp and in their unemployment rate of 11.4 pp. This has brought about convergence (understood technically as a reduction in the negative difference between rates) with the EU-27 of 1.9 pp in the activity rate, 3.7 pp in the employment rate and 6.6 pp in the unemployment rate. Despite some wage convergence, the average wages in the WB6 are still far behind the EU-27. Furthermore, gaps in women's labour force participation, employment rates and pay remain significant. Since the WB6 constitute the European region with the highest average number of working hours per week, in terms of average hours worked per adult, the region lags somewhat less behind the EU-27 than in terms of employment rate. However, because of long hours and working time arrangements often demanding significant flexibility and extra effort from workers, job quality and work–life balance are at an elevated risk in the region.

More attention needs to be paid to the **improvement of working conditions and job quality** in the region. The encouraging trend of more jobs and higher wages has already been well documented. The new phenomena of labour shortages and labour immigration are gradually but steadily taking ground, alongside the existing issues of unemployment and outmigration. These quantitative gains create room for a greater focus on working conditions and job quality as timely topics in the WB6. This report strives to explain the theoretical foundations, multidisciplinary analytical framework and empirical methodology used by Eurofound to analyse working conditions and job quality.

The empirical analysis of survey data reveals a **complex and varied picture** across the WB6 and along the various dimensions of job quality. Most notably, the average working conditions and levels of job quality in the WB6 are not found to be worse than those in the EU-27.

While the **physical environment** in the WB6 is **more strained** than that in the EU-27, the **social environment** in the WB6 appears to be **more resource-heavy** than that in the EU-27. Physical demands and risks are typical attributes of many jobs in the WB6. Across various aspects such as exposure to chemicals, noise and infectious materials, the physical environment in most economic sectors in the WB6 is overall less safe than in the EU-27. However, the disparities are neither uniform nor typically significant. On the other hand, the social environment appears to be more resource-heavy in the WB6, with workers enjoying more support from their managers and co-workers than their peers in the EU-27 do. Such results are consistent with some earlier research in the field of organisational culture, which claimed that cooperation and solidarity as 'collectivist' values are preferred among employees in the Western Balkans region over the values of competition and individual growth.

With respect to job tasks, while **fewer workers in the WB6 are exposed to the job demands** of working at high speed or under tight deadlines, they have **less autonomy to choose or change their methods of work** or the order of their tasks than their peers in the EU-27. In this dimension, there is a different kind of trade-off from that in the dimension of job environment – workers in the WB6 face less job strain, but it comes at the price of fewer job resources in terms of task autonomy. Here, an explanation based on the sectoral and occupational structure of the workforce appears to be more convincing than alternative ones based on cultural idiosyncrasies.

While workers in the WB6 are **much more likely to work long hours** and work at night, at short notice and in their free time than their peers in the EU-27, they have some compensation in the form of being able to **more easily arrange an hour or two of free time**. The WB6 have the highest average number of working hours per week in Europe, which means that job quality and work–life balance are at an elevated risk due to long and often unsocial working time arrangements. Here again it can be assumed that structural factors play a significant role, since, in comparison with the EU-27, the WB6 have a higher percentage of solo self-employed people and self-employed people with employees, who tend to work longer hours.

With regard to the job prospects dimension, workers in the WB6 are **more strained** and have **fewer resources** than their peers in the EU-27. Workers in the WB6 are more likely than their counterparts in the EU-27 to fear they might lose their job in the next six months; they are also more pessimistic regarding the possibility of their workplace situation deteriorating, especially in sectors

like agriculture and construction. Workers in the WB6 also report fewer training and learning opportunities but see somewhat more prospects for career advancement.

When it comes to intrinsic job features, like their peers in the EU-27, the vast majority of workers in the WB6 (more than 9 out of 10) think that their work is **well done and useful**. Furthermore, more workers in the WB6 than in the EU-27 believe that they have enough opportunities to use their knowledge in the workplace. Two out of three workers in the WB6 feel that they receive a high level of recognition for their work, a rate somewhat lower than in the EU-27, but in Kosovo and North Macedonia, more than three quarters of workers consider their work highly recognised, which is well above the EU-27 average.

A comparison between the WB6 and the EU-27 across all dimensions measured indicates that, on average, **job quality in the WB6 is consistently lower than in the EU-27**. The job quality index, calculated by comparing job demand levels with job resource levels, suggests that around one third of workers in the WB6 are in strained jobs, where the demands outweigh the resources. In the EU, the corresponding share is somewhat lower, with 3 out of 10 workers engaged in strained jobs. This result is expected, as it is driven by the differences in the levels of economic development in the EU-27 and the WB6, which are reflected in the different sectoral and occupational structures in each region.

However, the **relationship between the gross domestic product level and scores on the job quality index** is far from deterministic. Looking beyond the regional averages, there is significant diversity between countries and in the levels of strain and resources. Strikingly, it turns out that job quality in Kosovo is superior to that in the EU-27 (and also to that in the rest of the WB6) across the entire job quality distribution. In three countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo), the share of extremely strained jobs is lower than in the EU-27. In Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, there are fewer strained jobs (in all three degrees of strain) than in the EU-27. These are encouraging findings, suggesting that many jobs in the WB6 are resource-heavy despite the limitations associated with the level of economic development. Furthermore, in the WB6, the correlation between key quantitative labour market or economic indicators – such as the employment rate, the average wage and the national income per capita – and the job quality index score appears to be non-existent or weakly negative.

Job quality in the WB6 is influenced by **cultural, institutional and other factors**. As frequently mentioned throughout the analysis, the influence of culture and formal and informal institutions certainly plays some role. Nevertheless, there are significant differences in individual dimensions or in overall job quality scores between pairs of culturally very similar countries, such as Montenegro and Serbia or Albania and Kosovo. Varying levels of stringency in their COVID-19-related regulations at the time of the survey may have played a role, but this role appears to be far from straightforward. On balance, the net impact on working conditions and job quality of all factors other than those related to the level of economic development has apparently been positive, albeit unevenly distributed, throughout the WB6. In any case, further research is needed to get a more precise insight into the effects of cultural, organisational, institutional and other factors on job quality in the WB6.

Balancing work and private life is particularly challenging in the WB6, due among other things to **long working hours and a long working week**. While in the EU-27 the norm for the working week in 2021 continued to be five days for the vast majority (70 %) of men and women, in the WB6 slightly less than half of all workers (48 %) report a five-day working week, while nearly as many (45 %) report working six to seven days per week. Furthermore, on average, workers in the WB6 work more hours per week (43.4) than workers in the EU-27 (38.9).

Working hours **interfere more with the family and social commitments** of workers in the WB6 than of their peers in the EU-27. Fewer EWCTS respondents in the WB6 report that their working hours fit with their family and social commitments outside work ‘very well’ or ‘well’ (32 % and 46 %, respectively) than in the EU-27 (34 % and 47 %, respectively). However, it seems that despite long working hours, almost four fifths of workers in the WB6 still manage to balance their private life and their work reasonably well. In the WB6, balancing work and private life is particularly challenging in occupations demanding higher skills (which is not the case in the EU-27), and in certain sectors such as transport. When it comes to working time preferences, workers in the WB6 would more frequently opt for fewer working hours if given the opportunity than their EU-27 peers.

Despite working many more hours of unpaid work, **working women in the WB6 do not report more difficulties in achieving work–life balance** than working men. The gender-balanced results of reported work–life satisfaction rates – found also in the EU-27 – have already been explained in the literature on working conditions as a result of women’s adaptive preferences, reflecting what is known as the higher elasticity of the female labour supply. This trend of adaptability holds in working families with children, but the level of satisfaction with work–life balance decreases for both men and women.

Workers in the WB6, on average, report being significantly **more worried about work and being more tired after work** than their peers in the EU-27. However, there is no significant difference between workers in the WB6 and the EU-27 regarding their difficulty **concentrating on the job** due to family responsibilities.

Gender equality at work in the WB6 remains a distant ideal despite the existence of enforceable legislation. Women’s labour activity and employment gaps are much larger in the WB6 than in the EU-27. In 2022, the labour force participation rate for women was 67 % in Serbia, 63 % in Albania, 62 % in Montenegro, 52 % in North Macedonia and 50 % in Bosnia and Herzegovina, compared with 70 % in the EU-27. Similarly, the gender employment gap in the WB6 is higher than in the EU-27. There is a pronounced gender imbalance in employment across the WB6. Women’s employment rate ranges from 20 % in Kosovo to 39.1 % in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 48.8 % in Montenegro, 49 % in North Macedonia, 58.3 % in Albania

and 58.9 % in Serbia, all far below the EU average of 67.7 % in 2021 (Eurostat, 2023). The gender gaps are substantially larger for older women with low educational attainment. The data on gender pay gaps are difficult to compare and interpret, but the same pattern of above-average gaps can be found throughout the region, except in Albania and Kosovo.

There exist **clear patterns of gender segregation** by sector and occupation. Women are almost five times more likely to work in health, four times more in education and almost two times more in retail and hospitality than men. On the other hand, men represent the vast majority in transport (almost four times more than women) and construction (10 times more than women). Furthermore, there are sharp disparities in the shares of women and men in types of occupation. For example, women are two times more represented among professional and clerical support workers, while men are three times more represented among plant and machine operators and craft and related trades workers.

Policy pointers

While continuing to work hard to secure further convergence with the EU-27 on key labour indicators, policymakers in the WB6 should pay equal attention to designing **measures and actions aimed at improving working conditions and job quality in the region**. This design process is driven by both external and internal forces. Externally, the adoption of the EU *acquis* in areas of relevance such as health and safety at work, labour laws, social dialogue and gender equality becomes more comprehensive and binding as EU integration advances. Internally, as the labour market situation improves, non-financial aspects of working conditions and issues of job quality are becoming more important for workers and employers in the region. This is especially the case for young workers, who are already, unlike their peers in the EU-27, able to secure jobs of above-average quality in comparison with older workers. Supporting the creation of more resourced and less strained jobs for young people in the region should bring additional benefits in ameliorating the effects of demographic trends such as population ageing and outmigration.

The role of **social partners** in helping to improve job quality, working conditions, work–life balance and gender equality at work is essential. Socioeconomic councils and other tripartite bodies should initiate, support and engage in activities aimed at the improvement of working conditions and job quality beyond the standard health and safety programmes. In particular, they should support the inclusion of a broader range of working conditions in collective bargaining and collective agreements at all levels and monitor how they are addressed.

The **academic community** should be invited, incentivised and supported to engage in **understanding the methods behind research on working conditions** and in **explaining and disseminating the results of the EWCTS**. The theoretical approach based on job characteristics that is behind Eurofound's research needs to be introduced and popularised in the region. While the EWCS framework is relatively novel in the region, researchers in related fields, such as organisational science, occupational psychology, the sociology of work, behavioural science, industrial relations and labour economics, should be involved in the creation of a wider expert community in the region by contributing approaches and knowledge from their respective disciplines.

Statistical offices should strive to enrich the empirical data on working conditions and related themes by introducing specific modules in standard surveys (e.g. the LFS), such as modules on work skills, working time and forms of informal and atypical employment.

The **European Commission** should start **monitoring working conditions and job quality in the WB6** in its annual progress reports, based on the EWCTS and other sources. This should encourage the WB6 to work systematically on the improvement of work standards and working conditions, in line with Articles 151 and 153 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

Policymakers and social partners should work jointly towards the **improvement of gender equality at work**. Women's labour activity, employment and pay gaps in the WB6 are much larger than in the EU-27 as a result of a variety of structural factors, which need to be properly identified and addressed by well-designed policy measures.

A broad set of actions is needed to **improve working time and work–life balance in the region**, especially for women, and **reduce gender segregation**. Such actions include but are not limited to the stricter regulation of working time and more limitations on overtime, shift work, night work and other unsocial working hours; changes in the regulation of parental leave to secure adequate childcare periods for both parents; and affordable and more accessible childcare facilities for employed and job-seeking parents, especially in smaller settlements. Actions aimed at reducing gender segregation at work should strive to reduce it at the sectoral, occupational and workplace levels.

References

All Eurofound publications are available at www.eurofound.europa.eu

Alonso, C., Brussevich, M., Dabla-Norris, E., Kinoshita, Y. and Kochhar, K. (2019), 'Reducing and redistributing unpaid work: Stronger policies to support gender equality', *IMF Working Papers*, No 1019/225, International Monetary Fund, Washington, DC.

Atoyan, R. V. and Rahman, J. (2017), 'Western Balkans: Increasing women's role in the economy', *IMF Working Papers*, No 2017/194, International Monetary Fund, Washinton, DC.

Bajrami, L. (2024), *Generation Z's perspective on work–life balance: Case of Kosovo*, thesis, Rochester Institute of Technology Kosovo, Pristina, https://repository.rit.edu/theses/11838.

Bakker, A. B., Demerouti, E. and Sanz-Vergel, A. (2023), 'Job demands–resources theory: Ten years later', *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 10, pp. 25–53.

Bellaqa, B., Tmava, Q. and Krasniqi, A. (2021), 'Comparison of the labour market between the countries of the Western Balkans', *Corporate Governance and Organizational Behavior Review*, Vol. 5, No 2, pp. 135–144.

Borjas, G. J. (2023), *Labor economics*, 9th edition, McGraw Hill, New York.

Dobrotić, I. (2022), 'Challenges to the Europeanisation of work–care policies in the Western Balkans', *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy*, Vol. 38, No 2, pp. 165–179.

Drishti, E. and Carmichael, F. (2022), 'Life satisfaction and job insecurity – Evidence from Albania', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 55, No 3, pp. 91–118.

Eurofound (2018), *Upward convergence in the EU: Concepts, measurements and indicators*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Eurofound (2022), 'Working conditions in the time of COVID-19: Implications for the future', *European Working Conditions Telephone Survey 2021*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Eurofound (2024), *Young people in the Western Balkans*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Eurofound and Ipsos (2022), *European Working Conditions Telephone Survey 2021: Technical report*, Eurofound, Dublin.

European Commission: Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs (2023), 'Progress towards meeting the economic criteria for EU accession: The EU Commission's 2023 assessments', *European Economy Institutional Papers*, No 260, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Eurostat (2023), *Labour market statistics on candidate countries and potential candidates – Factsheets – 2023 edition*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Gashi, A. and Adnett, N. (2020), 'Are women really paid more than men in Kosovo? Unpicking the evidence', *South East European Journal of Economics and Business*, Vol. 15, No 2, pp. 83–95.

Golubović, N. and Golubović, S. (2015), 'Comparative analysis of work–life balance in FYR Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia', *Facta Universitatis – Series: Economics and Organisation*, Vol. 12, No 3, pp. 183–198.

Hakim, C. (2000), *Work–lifestyle choices in the 21st century: Preference theory*, Oxford University Press, New York.

Hofstede, G. (2011), 'Dimensionalizing cultures: The Hofstede model in context', *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, Vol. 2, Issue 1.

Ilić, N. (2022), 'Gender pay gap in the Western Balkans: Why do women earn less than men?', in: Davinić, M. and Kostić, S. (eds), *Gender competent public law and policies*, Springer International, Cham.

Ilostat (n.d.), 'Indicators and data tools', Ilostat website, https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/.

Janićijević, N. (1998), 'Cultural determinants of employees' needs and job satisfaction', paper presented at the First International Conference on Performance Measurement, 'Performance measurement – Theory and practice', 15–17 July, Cambridge.

Janićijević, N., Bogićević-Milikić, B. and Aleksić-Mirić, A. (2024), 'Generation Z: Understanding work-related values of the newcomers on the job market', *Economic Themes*, Vol. 62, Issue 2, pp. 219–240.

Jusić, M. and Obradović, N. (2019), *Enlargement policy and social change in the Western Balkans*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Dialogue Southeast Europe, Sarajevo.

Kosovo Women's Network (2022), *Gender-based discrimination and labour in the Western Balkans – Second edition*, Pristina.

Loretto, W. and Vickerstaff, S. (2015), 'Gender, age and flexible working in later life', *Work, Employment and Society*, Vol. 29, No 2, pp. 233–249.

Muñoz de Bustillo, R., Fernández-Macías, E., Antón, J.-I. and Esteve, F. (2011), *Measuring more than money: The social economics of job quality*, Edward Elgar, Northampton, MA.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2017), *OECD guidelines on measuring the quality of the working environment*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

Ramhorst, A. (2021), *Study on youth employment in the Western Balkans*, Regional Cooperation Council, Sarajevo.

Regional Cooperation Council (2022), *Performance of Western Balkan economies regarding the European Pillar of Social Rights*, Sarajevo.

Regional Cooperation Council (2023), *Regional overview of Western Balkan economies regarding the European Pillar of Social Rights*, Sarajevo.

Sen, A. (1997), 'Maximization and the act of choice', *Econometrica*, Vol. 65, No 4, pp. 745–779.

Stiglitz, J. E., Sen, A. and Fitoussi, J.-P. (2009), *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress*, Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress.

UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2024), 'Concluding observations on the third periodic report of Montenegro', 6 June, CEDAW/C/MNE/CO/3.

Vendramin, P. and Parent-Thirion, A. (2019), 'Redefining working conditions in Europe', *International Development Policy*, Vol. 11, pp. 1–19.

World Economic Forum (2023), *Global gender gap report 2023*, Geneva.

Getting in touch with the EU

In person

All over the European Union there are hundreds of Europe Direct information centres.
You can find the address of the centre nearest you online (european-union.europa.eu/contact-eu/meet-us_en).

On the phone or in writing

Europe Direct is a service that answers your questions about the European Union.
You can contact this service:
– by freephone: 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (certain operators may charge for these calls),
– at the following standard number: +32 22999696,
– via the following form: european-union.europa.eu/contact-eu/write-us_en.

Finding information about the EU

Online

Information about the European Union in all the official languages of the EU is available on the Europa website at: (europa.eu).

EU publications

You can view or order EU publications at op.europa.eu/en/publications. Multiple copies of free publications can be obtained by contacting Europe Direct or your local information centre (european-union.europa.eu/contact-eu/meet-us_en).

EU law and related documents

For access to legal information from the EU, including all EU law since 1951 in all the official language versions, go to EUR-Lex (eur-lex.europa.eu).

Open data from the EU

The EU portal data.europa.eu provides access to open datasets from the EU institutions, bodies and agencies. These can be downloaded and reused for free, for both commercial and non-commercial purposes. The portal also provides access to a wealth of datasets from European countries.

This report documents working conditions and job quality in the Western Balkans based on the European Working Conditions Telephone Survey data collected in 2021. It brings new regional insights to the analysis of European working conditions and strives to raise awareness of the topic and broaden the perspectives of policymakers, social partners, researchers and the wider public in the region. While the region still lags behind the European Union in most labour market indicators, and notably in gender equality at work, this report paints a complex and diverse picture of job quality across various dimensions and countries. Region-specific combinations of job demands and job resources found in several dimensions of job quality highlight some common aspects of the region's work culture, while in other cases differences are pronounced, even between jobs and workers in the culturally closest countries. Nevertheless, many jobs in the Western Balkans demonstrate a remarkably high level of resources, and, with the right policies, many more could become more resourceful.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite European Union Agency established in 1975. Its role is to provide knowledge in the area of social, employment and work-related policies according to Regulation (EU) 2019/127.

Publications Office
of the European Union