Statistics in focus

POPULATION AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

THEME 3 – 9/2002

Women and men reconciling work and family life

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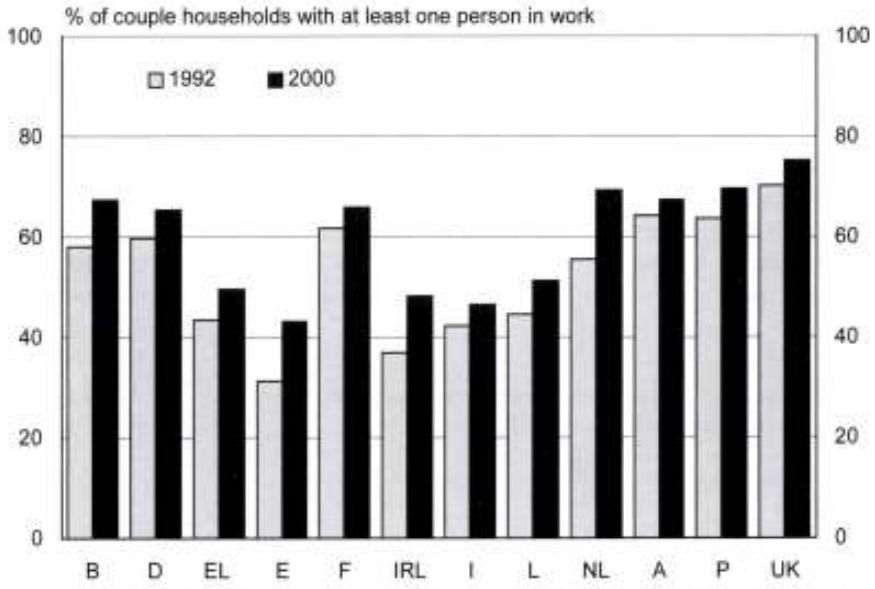
The increase of women in employment has been one of the most dominant and persistent trends in European labour markets over recent decades. The counterpart has been a decline in the traditional household form, of a single male breadwinner and a growth of 'dual participant' households, or those where both partners are in work. This has now become the dominant form in most EU Member States, at least among households with two people of working age – here taken to be 20 to 59. The concern here is to examine the pattern of employment of men and women in such households, focusing on those in which at least one of the people concerned is in work (ie 'workless' households, which number around 7% of all such 'couple' households, are excluded for this purpose).

Contents

Fig. 1 Dual participation households, 1992 and 2000



IRL: 1992 and 1997; A: 1995 and 2000; L: 1992 and 1999; DK, FIN, S: no data available

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Dual participant households

For the 10 Member States for which data are available from the latest Labour Force Survey, households with both partners in the labour force were almost twice as numerous in 2000 as those with only one, averaging around 62% of the total. A marked divide is evident between the northern Member States, together with Portugal, where two-thirds or more of households were dual participant ones and Spain, Greece, Ireland and Italy (though see below) where the proportion was under 50% (Fig. 1).

In both groups of countries, however, there was an increase in the importance of dual participant households over the 1990s. The growth was particularly pronounced in the Netherlands (up by 14 percentage points) and Belgium and in Spain (up by 12 percentage points from only 31% in 1992). It was even more pronounced in Ireland, for which there are no data after 1997, but where the increase over the 5 years before then was over 11 percentage points. Given the continued rapid rise in the employment of women since then, it is now almost certainly well above 50% .

Dual participation rising most among couples with children

These large increases in the importance of dual participant households are unlikely to have been achieved without a change in the behaviour of parents of children. Indeed, in most Member States, the relative number of dual participant households increased more in respect of couple households with at least one child under 15 between 1992 and 2000 than for those without (Fig. 2). The rise for couples with children was especially marked in the Netherlands, where it was almost three time larger than for those without, while in the UK, it was over twice as large. Only in Belgium (where the overall rise was, nevertheless, significant), Germany and Italy, was the increase perceptibly less for couples with children than without.

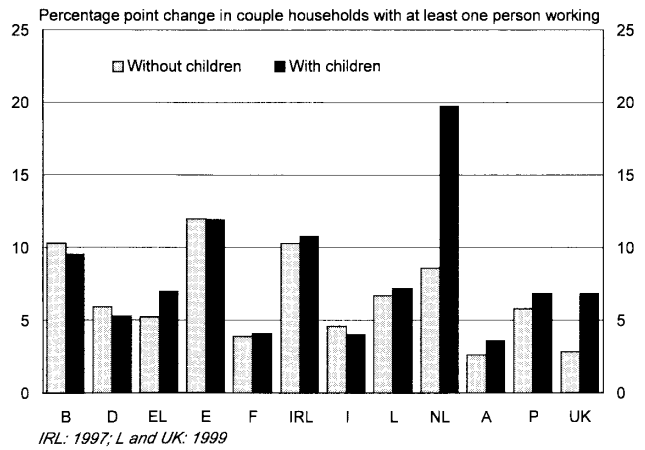
Indeed, in Belgium, the proportion of dual participant households among those with children was already higher than among those without, the only country in the north of the Union where this was the case. In Greece, Spain and Portugal, dual participation was more prevalent in 2000 among households with children than among those without and in, Italy, there was little difference between the two. In the other Member States, however, although the proportion was lower among households with children, the difference was small in most cases (Fig. 3). Only in Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg and the UK, was the share of dual participation households among those with children significantly less than for those without. Nevertheless, in over 60% of both types of household, both partners were in the work force.

The variation in the pattern of employment between Member States, therefore, seems to be more pronounced than the variation between households with children than without. Where large differences exist between the latter two types, they might reflect the absence of childcare support facilities available. They might equally reflect, however, social norms and/or distinctive patterns of labour market participation on the part of young couples before they have children or older couples after their children have grown up, both of whom are included in households without children in the above comparison.

Working time patterns

Any assessment of the effect of children on labour force participation needs also to take account of working time and, in particular, the extent of part-time working. In practice, there are very few dual participant households where both partners work part-time or where the man works part-time and the women full-time (here defining full-time to be usual hours of 30 or more a week and part-time fewer hours than this rather than, as normally,

Fig. 2 Change in share of dual participant households with and without children, 1992-2000



IRL: 1997; L and UK: 1999

Fig. 3 Dual participation within households with and without children, 2000

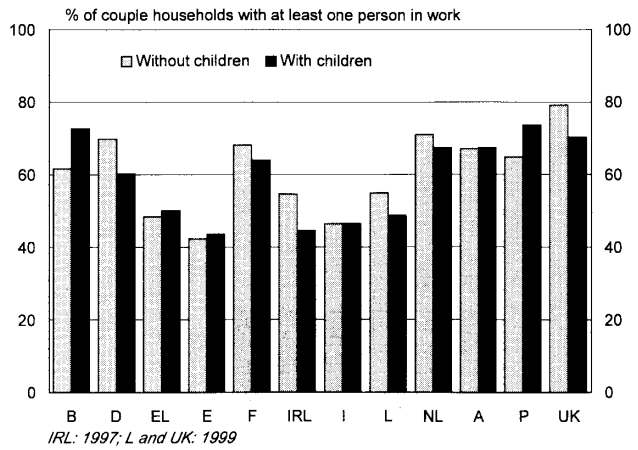


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Table 1: Combinations of dual participant households by working time arrangements, 2000

% of couple households with both partners in work

	Male part-time + female part-time	Male part-time + female full-time	Male full-time + female part-time	Male full-time + female full-time
B	3.0	3.0	35.9	58.1
D	1.1	1.4	40.2	57.2
EL	1.4	1.5	8.3	88.8
E	0.5	0.9	16.1	82.6
F	1.7	2.0	22.6	73.6
IRL	(2.5)	(2.5)	29.1	65.7
I	2.9	2.4	24.2	70.6
L	:	:	37.1	62.9
NL	3.2	2.1	58.2	36.4
A	0.5	1.1	31.4	67.0
P	:	(1.2)	10.6	87.6
UK	1.3	1.5	40.4	56.8

IRL: 1997
":" no reliable data available
Figures in parenthesis are published with a warning concerning reliability

in terms of self assessment). The two together in 2000 amounted to a maximum of only 5-6% of total dual participant households in Belgium, the Netherlands, Ireland and Italy (Table 1).

The most common form of dual participant households in all countries except the Netherlands is one where both participants work full-time. In Spain, Greece and Portugal, these accounted for over 80% of dual participant households and in Italy as well as France, over 70%. In the Netherlands, however, they represented only 36½% of the total. Here the main form is one of the man working full-time and the woman part-time, which accounted for 58% of the total, much higher than in any other Member State. At the same time, the proportion was also relatively high in the UK and Germany, at over 40%, and in Belgium and Luxembourg, at 36-37%. Nevertheless, such '1½ worker' households still represented only around 30% of all couple households (ie including those with only one partner in work), just over a quarter in Germany and less than this in Belgium and Luxembourg (under 20% in the latter).

A comparison of working time patterns between couples with children and without again shows that variations between Member States in the main form of working arrangement tend to be more important than differences between the two types of couple, though there are exceptions. In most countries, the proportion of households in which both partners work full-time is lower among those with children than for those without, but in Greece, Spain, Italy and Belgium, the difference was small in 2000, and in Portugal, the proportion was higher for those with children, perhaps reflecting the greater pressure to maximise household earnings (Table 2).

In Austria, Ireland and Luxembourg, the proportion of households with both partners working full-time was over 13 percentage points lower for those with children than for those without, in Germany, over 20 percentage points lower and in the UK and the Netherlands, over 25 points lower. The counterpart is a much higher proportion of households with children where the man works full-time and the woman part-time. This form of working arrangement is more important for couples with children than those without in all Member States apart from Portugal, but the difference is particularly large in the Netherlands, where it accounted for 53% of all households with children in 2000, in the UK, where it accounted for 40% in 1999 (there are no data for 2000), in Germany, where the figure was almost a third, and in Austria and Belgium, where it was over a quarter.

Table 2: Combinations of parent and non-parent couple households by working time arrangements, 2000

% of couple households with at least one partner in work

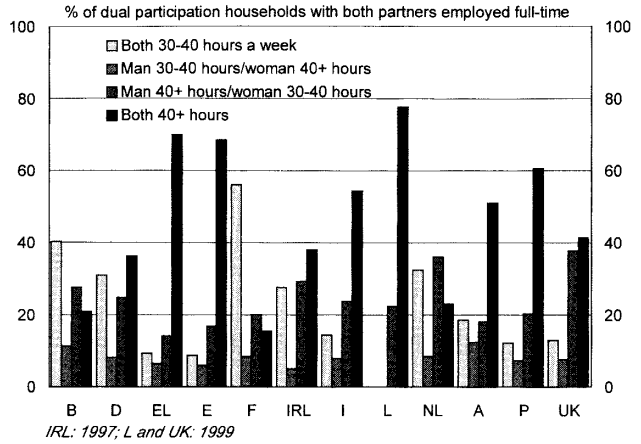
	One earner, couple	Male PT + female PT	Male PT + female FT	Male FT + female PT	Male FT + female FT
Non-parent					
B	38.2	2.1	2.5	19.8	37.4
D	30.1	0.8	1.2	20.4	47.5
EL	51.4	0.4	0.6	3.4	44.2
E	57.8	0.2	0.4	6.3	35.4
F	31.8	1.1	1.6	13.2	52.3
IRL	45.3	:	:	11.2	43.5
I	53.5	1.3	1.3	9.0	34.9
L	45.2	:	:	13.7	41.2
NL	29.0	2.2	1.6	29.3	37.9
A	32.9	:	0.6	14.5	52.0
P	35.3	:	:	8.2	56.6
UK	20.9	1.1	1.6	21.2	55.2
Parent					
B	27.3	1.9	1.7	28.3	40.8
D	39.7	0.6	0.7	32.9	26.1
EL	49.7	0.9	0.9	4.7	43.7
E	56.3	0.2	0.4	7.5	35.6
F	36.0	1.2	1.1	16.3	45.4
IRL	55.5	1.1	:	16.2	27.1
I	53.6	1.3	0.9	13.0	31.2
L	51.2	:	:	23.2	25.7
NL	32.7	2.3	1.3	52.9	10.8
A	32.6	:	0.9	27.7	38.8
P	26.5	:	:	7.0	66.5
UK	29.8	0.7	0.9	40.0	28.6

IRL: 1997; L, UK: 1999
":" no reliable data available

Children affect working time relatively little in most countries, with notable exceptions

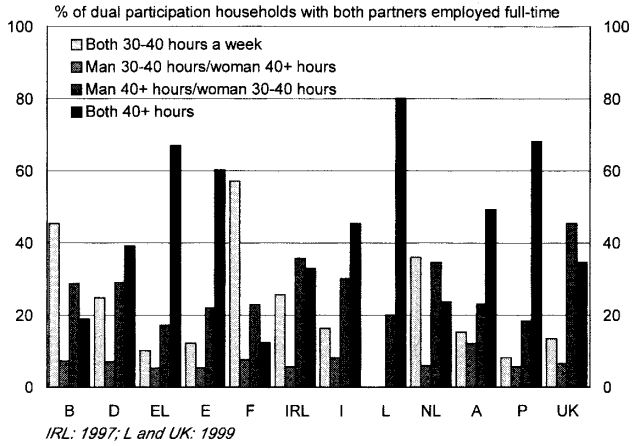
There are very few households in the Union in which women work significantly longer hours than their male partner. In all Member States in 2000, Austria apart, there were under 10% of households with both partners in full-time jobs in which women worked 40 hours or more a week (here termed 'long full-time hours') and men worked less than 40 (termed 'medium full-time hours'). In Greece, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Luxembourg and Austria, the most prevalent pattern is for both partners to work long full-time hours, in both households with children and those without (Figs. 4a and 4b).

Fig. 4a Patterns of usual hours worked per week in dual full-time participant households without dependent children, 2000



IRL: 1997; L and UK: 1999

Fig. 4b Patterns of usual hours worked per week in dual full-time participant households with dependent children, 2000

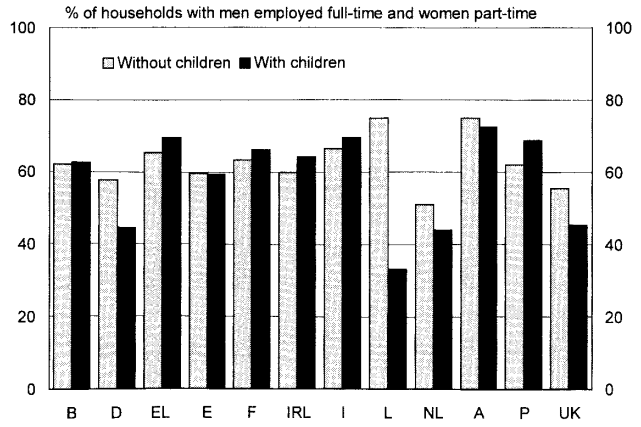


IRL: 1997; L and UK: 1999

This is also the main form in Germany, but not to the same extent. In Belgium and France – in the latter, reflecting the influence of working time regulations, in this case the 35-hour week – it is for both to work under 40 hours a week, again irrespective of whether there are children in the household. There were also around a third of 'full-time' households in the Netherlands, where both partners worked under 40 hours a week, though a similar proportion where the man worked longer hours.

The latter was the most prevalent pattern for couples with children in the UK and Ireland, though not for those without, where in around 40% of cases, both partners worked long hours. Except for these two countries, however, children seem to have a relatively small effect on the pattern of full-time working and again variations between countries appear to be more important than variations between types of households within them.

Fig. 5 Dual participation households where the female partner works long part-time hours, 2000



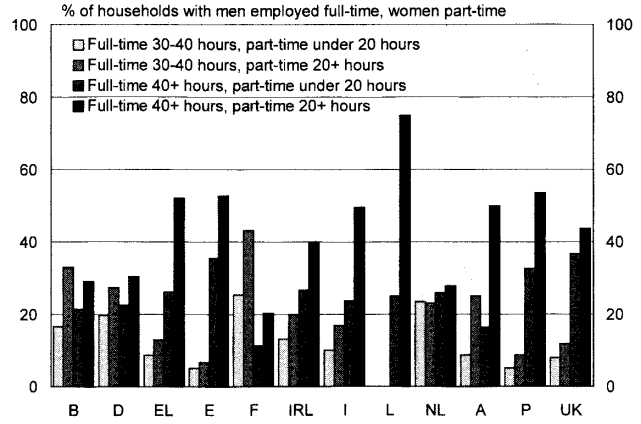
IRL: 1997; L and UK: 1999

Children affect part-time hours worked in some countries

In most Member States, women in part-time jobs and living in dual participant households where their male partner is employed full-time tend to work 20 hours or more a week, whether they have children or not (Fig. 5). For those without children, this was the case in 2000 in around 60% or more of the households except in Germany and the Netherlands, where the figure was still over 50%, though only slightly so in the latter case. In both of these two countries, however, along with Luxembourg and the UK, the proportion of those with children working 20 or more hours a week was under half and in Luxembourg, only around a third. By contrast, in Greece, France, Ireland, Italy and Portugal, the proportion of women working 20 or more hours a week was higher for those with children than for those without.

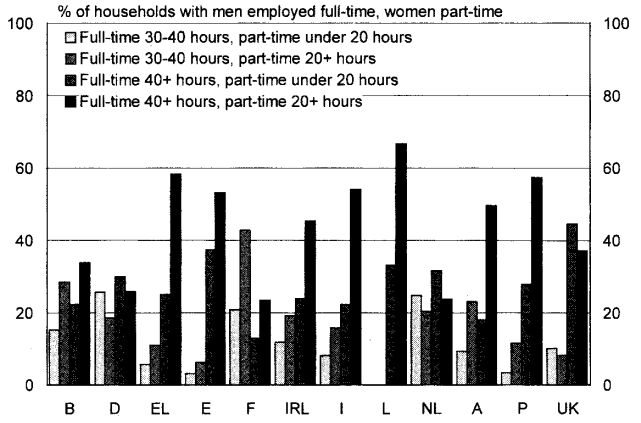
Comparing the hours worked by women in part-time jobs with those worked by their full-time male partners,

Fig. 6a Patterns of usual hours worked per week in male full-time/female part-time households without children, 2000



IRL: 1997; L and UK: 1999

Fig. 6b Patterns of usual hours worked per week in male full-time/female part-time households with children, 2000



IRL: 1997; L and UK: 1999

the most common pattern across the Union is for men to work long full-time hours – 40 hours a week or more – and women to work long part-time hours (20 hours a week or more). This applies to both those with children and those without (Figs. 6a and 6b). The exceptions for those without children are Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and most especially, France. In the former two countries, there is a relatively even split between the different patterns of working time, while in Belgium, in around a third of households, men worked under 40 hours a week and women 20 hours or more, and in France, the proportion was as high as 43%.

In France, this was also the case for households with children, the proportion being twice as high as for any other Member State apart from Belgium (29%). In the UK, by contrast, the most prevalent pattern in households with children and with women working part-time, was the most polarised one, for men to work long hours and women to work short hours (under 20 a week). This was also the main pattern in Germany and the Netherlands for such households, where in both cases over 55% of the women employed in part-jobs worked under 20 hours a week.

Overall, there is little evidence of household working time arrangements emerging that are compatible with a more equal sharing of paid and unpaid work, which would be expected to manifest itself in both partners being engaged in some combination of medium full-time work or long part-time work. Such combinations – which might be regarded as 'balanced' working hours in the sense of balance both between men and women and between too long and too short hours – account for more than half of all dual participant households only in France, though for almost 40% in Belgium. In Spain, Greece, Portugal and the UK, they account for only just over 10%.

Education levels have a large effect on working patterns

The education attainment level of women seems to have a significant effect on whether they as well as their partners work and whether they have part-time or full-time jobs. In all Member States in 2000, the number of dual participation households as a proportion of all 'couple' households with at least one partner in work was over 20 percentage points higher for those where women had university or equivalent education than for those where they had not progressed beyond compulsory schooling. This was the case for both those with children and those without (Table 3). In Spain and Italy for both types of household and in Greece for those with children, the proportion was around 40 percentage points higher.

Moreover, in all Member States, except Portugal for both those with children and those without and Italy for those without children, the share of dual participant households in which both partners were in full-time work was higher for those in which the woman had a high

Table 3: Share of dual participant households by education level of female partner, 2000

% of couple households with at least one partner in work

	Non parents			Parents		
	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
B	44.6	61.3	74.5	51.0	74.6	86.2
D	49.5	64.7	73.4	43.4	62.0	73.2
E	28.4	52.3	68.2	31.2	50.2	68.9
F	52.3	67.0	73.7	48.6	66.3	77.6
EL	40.4	46.1	64.5	39.4	45.8	78.3
I	29.5	58.1	70.2	29.6	58.2	79.8
L	38.5	60.0	75.0	43.8	47.4	66.7
NL	49.8	74.2	79.7	54.5	70.0	80.9
A	51.1	65.6	78.9	54.3	69.4	78.8
P	56.5	73.1	78.1	70.0	83.2	94.4
UK	60.7	79.4	82.3	52.8	70.4	80.0

UK: 1999

level of education than for those where she had a lower level (Figs. 7a and 7b). Again, apart from Portugal and Italy, this was true of both households with children and those without.

Fig. 7a Dual full-time participation in households without children by education attainment level of the woman, 2000

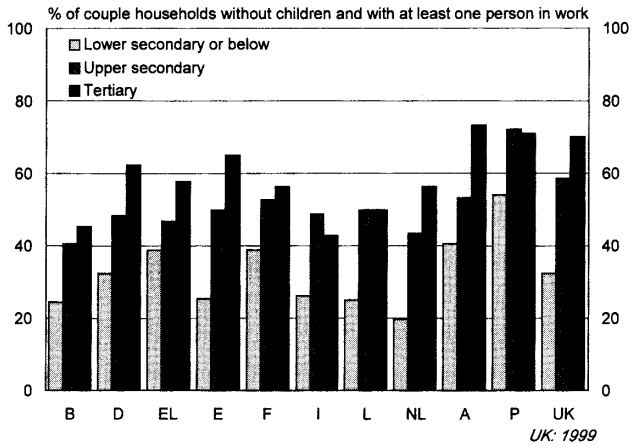
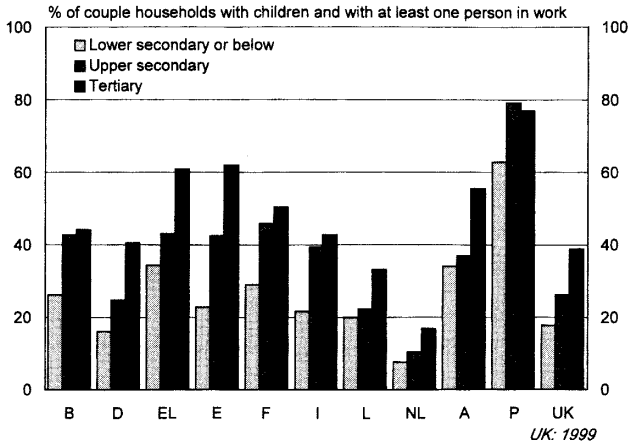


Fig. 7b Dual full-time participation in households with children by education attainment level of the woman, 2000



➢ ESSENTIAL INFORMATION – METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

Abbreviations: : not available . not applicable 0 negligible – nil () uncertain reliability

Data sources, classification and definitions

Data are from the EU Labour Force Survey, which compiles statistics on a household basis for all Member States except Denmark, Finland and Sweden, where so far data are not available in this form. No data are available for Ireland after 1997 or for Luxembourg after 1999. Since UK data disaggregated by parenthood were not available for 2000, the UK data in the sections dealing with parenthood relate to 1999. The earliest year for which data for Austria are available is 1995.

The data used in the analysis relate to 'reference persons' (ie the person in each household who is used in the LFS as the reference point for identifying relationships between the different household members and, therefore, to categorise households) and their spouses or partners. The reference person is not necessarily the head of the household (the concept used in the LFS before 1992), though they may usually be. The analysis is confined to reference persons and their spouses or partners who are aged 20 to 59 so as to exclude households where one of the partners is likely to be retired. Other people in the household, other than children under 15 who are children of the reference person or their spouse or partner, are not taken into account in the analysis.

Households are categorised as couple households where the reference person is aged 20 to 59 and is living with a spouse or partner who is also aged 20 to 59. Parenthood is defined as the presence of at least one child, of the reference person or their spouse or partner, aged under 15. There may also be other people living in the household apart from children under 15 but these are not considered in the analysis.

Single participation households are, therefore, defined as those in which only the reference person or their spouse or partner is in work, ignoring whether or not any other members of the households are working. Dual participation households are defined as those in which both the reference person and their spouse or partner is in work, again ignoring the employment status of other members of the household, if any.

Employment, unemployment and economic inactivity are all defined in terms of the international standard conventions. Anyone who worked for one hour or more during the reference week, or had a job or business from which they were temporarily absent, is counted as being employed.

Data on education attainment levels are defined in terms of the International Standard Classification of Education 1997 (ISCED 97) and relate to the highest level of education achieved. 'Low' education refers to ISCED 1 and 2 (lower secondary level education or below), 'medium' education refers to ISCED 3 and 4 (upper secondary education) and 'high' education refers to ISCED 5 and 6 (tertiary education or university level). In the case of the UK, those classified to ISCED 3c (two-year courses not designed to lead to ISCED 5 education) are included in the 'low' education category in order to improve comparability between Member States.

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