

Population & Societies

Work-life balance: who faces the most difficulties?

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In France, many people in paid work also look after children or elderly relatives, and these combined roles may be difficult to reconcile. How do men and women in different family and employment situations perceive the balance between their work and private life? Drawing on new data from the Families and Employers survey (FamEmp, 2024), the authors examine the quality of respondents' work-life balance and examine its links to health and fertility.⁽¹⁾

The ongoing transformation of employment and family is raising new challenges for the work-life balance [1]. For example, the recent development of remote working has eased certain work-related constraints but may also blur the boundaries between work and private life; population ageing and later retirement are increasing the burden placed on workers who care for both dependent children and elderly relatives. The first wave of the longitudinal Families and Employers survey (FamEmp) conducted by INED in 2024⁽²⁾ (see Box 1) sheds light on various dimensions of the work-life balance over respondents' working lives.

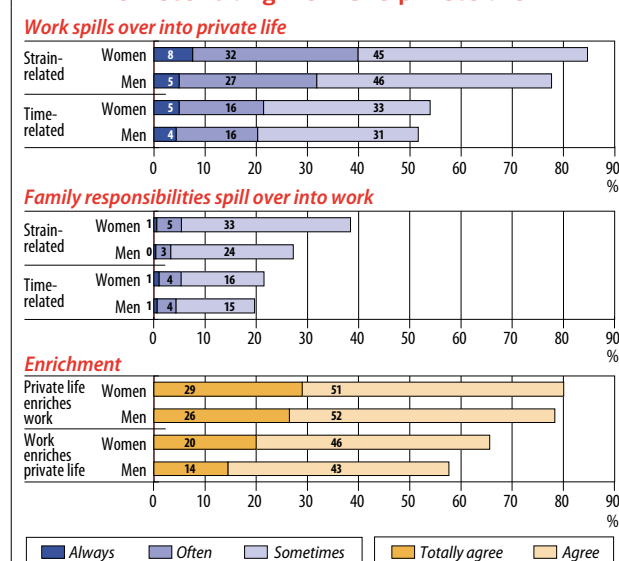
Paid work, a source of stress and satisfaction

Given that 74% of men and 68% of women in France are in employment, the majority of 20- to 65-year-olds confront the challenges of combining work and private life. Some remain out of the workforce or leave their jobs for family reasons [2]. For example, 0.4% of men and 6% of women report being 'homemakers' or on full-time parental leave. For mothers with

children under age 3, the share is slightly higher (9%) but remains low compared to other European countries.

For people in employment, it may be difficult to combine multiple roles [3]. Work-related stress or fatigue may spill over into private life (Figure 1): 78% of men and 85% of women

Figure 1. Challenges and pleasures of reconciling work and private life



R. Fontaine, A. Pailhé, D. Remillon, *Population & Societies*, 637, October 2025, INED.

Interpretation: Eight per cent (8%) of women report always being too tired after work to enjoy what they like doing at home (see Box 1).

Coverage: Working women and men aged 20–65 living in metropolitan France.

Source: INED, FamEmp survey (2024).

(1) Data for the tables and figures are available in Excel format in the 'Related documents' tab on the *Population & Societies* webpage.

(2) The FamEmp (<https://famemp.site.ined.fr/en>) survey received funding from the Agence nationale de la recherche (ANR) under the Investissements d'avenir programme (PIA) France 2030 (ANR-21-ESRE-0037) and the programme 'blanc' (ANR-24-CE41-7235-01), and from Paris city hall as part of its Émergence(s) programme. It was also financed by INED, CNSA (Caisse nationale de solidarité pour l'autonomie), DARES (Direction de l'Animation de la recherche, des études et des statistiques), DREES (Direction de la Recherche, des études, de l'évaluation et des statistiques), CNAF (Caisse nationale des allocations familiales), and France Stratégie.

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aged 20–65 report that their personal life is sometimes, often, or always affected by work-related strain. A smaller share (52% of men and 54% of women) report that time spent at work prevents them from spending as much time as they would like with their partner or child(ren).

Conversely, family demands may also disrupt working life, although such situations are less common: 27% of men and 38% of women report sometimes, often, or always finding it difficult to concentrate at work due to fatigue generated by family responsibilities, and 20% and 22%, respectively, report that family concerns prevent them from spending as much time at work as they should. Women report more strain-related issues than men, but not more difficulties linked to a lack of time. This may be due partly to the larger share of women in part-time work (23% of working women aged 20–65 vs. 5% of men), which has a certain protective effect, as we will see below.

Reconciling work and family life is not only a source of stress. The two can be mutually enriching. For a large majority of women and men (80% and 78%, respectively), the pleasures of private life help them to work better. Likewise, 66% of women and 58% of men report that their work gives them fulfilment and helps them to ‘enjoy family life’. Overall, women express difficulties with the work-life balance slightly more frequently than men, but their work contributes more strongly to their appreciation of private life.

Having young children or caring for a relative make the work-life balance more difficult

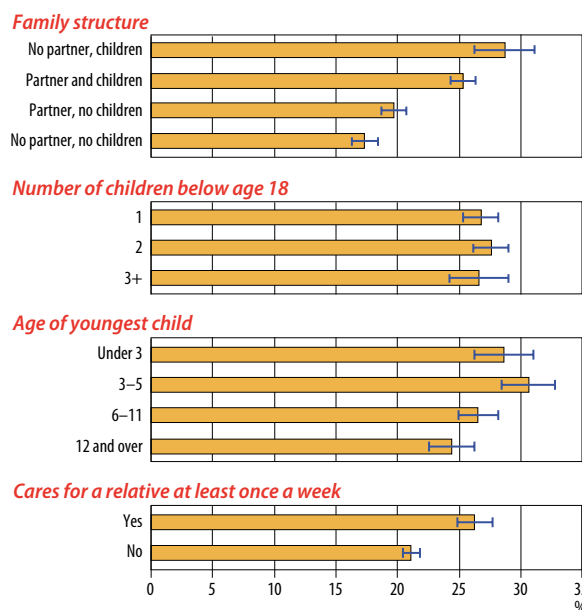
The quality of the work-life balance can be summarized by means of a composite indicator that measures the intensity of perceived difficulties (Box 1 and Online Appendix⁽³⁾). Women, people aged 30–49, and the most highly educated are slightly over-represented among the 20% of people who experience the greatest difficulties balancing work and private life. However, family structure and employment characteristics are the main contributing factors.

Reconciling work and private life is more difficult when children are present in the household (Figure 2). All other things being equal, childless individuals—whether single or in a couple—are much less likely than parents to report a poor work-life balance, and lone mothers experience more difficulties than mothers with a partner. Family responsibilities are greater for parents of young children, who demand increased energy and attention.

The survey also enabled us to measure the quality of the work-life balance among individuals who care for a disabled or elderly dependent relative. In our sample, 15% of the 20- to 65-year-olds in employment reported caring for a relative at least once a week. These caregivers more often reported a very poor work-life balance (probability of 26% vs. 21% for non-caregivers), women more so than men (29% and 24%).

(3) The Online Appendix is available at:
<https://doi.org/10.34847/nkl.1dfdhv97>

Figure 2. Probabilities of reporting a very poor work-life balance by family situation



R. Fontaine, A. Pailhé, D. Remillon, *Population & Societies*, 637, October 2025, INED.

Interpretation: For given sociodemographic, family, and employment characteristics, unpartnered individuals with cohabiting children have a 29% probability of reporting a very poor work-life balance.

Note: Predicted probabilities for comparable characteristics based on a probit model; 95% confidence intervals.

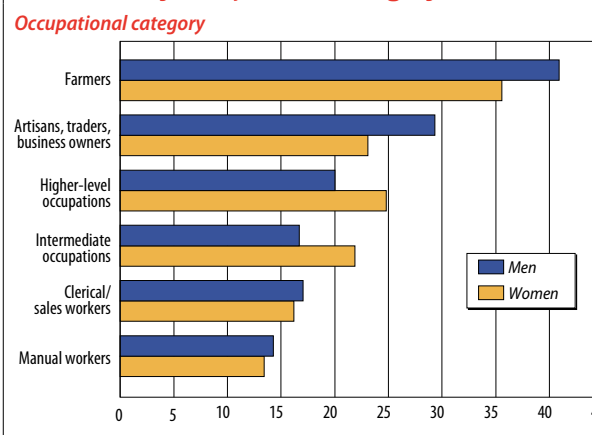
Coverage: Working women and men aged 20–65 living in metropolitan France, who are also parents for the variables of number and age of children.

Source: INED, FamEmp survey (2024).

The decisive role of working conditions

The subjective perception of the work-life balance is even more strongly linked to employment conditions (Figures 3 and 4 and Online Appendix). The self-employed (men in particular),

Figure 3. People with a very poor work-life balance by occupational category (%)



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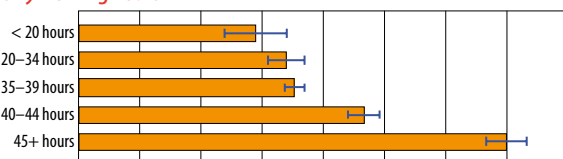
Interpretation: Among farmers, 41% of men reported a very poor work-life balance.

Coverage: Working women and men aged 20–65 living in metropolitan France.

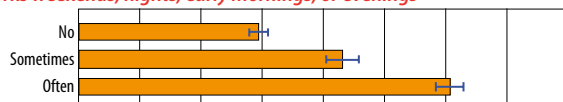
Source: INED, FamEmp survey (2024).

Figure 4. Probability of reporting poor work-life balance under different working conditions

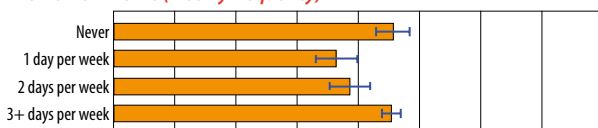
Weekly working hours



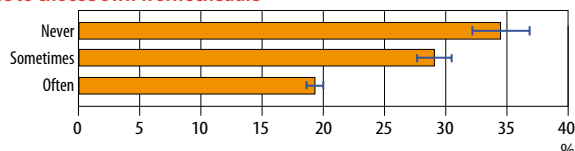
Works weekends, nights, early mornings, or evenings



Works from home (weekly frequency)



Able to choose own work schedule



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Interpretation: For given sociodemographic, family, and employment characteristics, people working 45 or more hours per week have a 35% probability of reporting a poor work-life balance.

Note: Predicted probabilities for comparable characteristics based on a probit model; 95% confidence intervals.

Coverage: Working women and men aged 20–65 living in metropolitan France.

Source: INED, FamEmp survey (2024).

farmers, and, to a lesser extent, artisans, traders, and business owners most often experience a very poor work-life balance. Among the most highly qualified employees (higher-level and intermediate occupations), difficulties are more frequent among women.

The gender differences are linked mainly to disparities in working conditions for men and women in comparable occupational categories. For example, working hours are a key factor affecting the perceived quality of the work-life balance. For given sociodemographic and characteristics and other working conditions, long working hours (40–44 hours or 45+ hours per week) or non-standard schedules (weekends, nights, early mornings, or evenings) make it more difficult to reconcile work and private life. Likewise, the work-life balance is poor when workloads are heavy, when work spills over into leisure time or when the journey to work takes 1 hour or more (see Online Appendix). Conversely, the balance is better for those who can choose their own work schedule, doubtless thanks to their greater freedom to deal with unplanned family or personal obligations. Likewise, working from home for 1 or 2 days per week improves the work-life balance, although its perceived quality tends to be poorer when the weekly share of remote working is greater.

Box 1. FamEmp survey

The new edition of the longitudinal Families and Employers survey (FamEmp) conducted by INED in 2024 analyses the interconnections between private and working life from both individuals' and employers' perspectives. The sample comprised 41,233 men and women aged 20–65 living in metropolitan France, alongside more than 9,000 workplaces with 10 or more employees (<https://famemp.site.ined.fr/en>).

Ten questions concerned respondents' experience of reconciling work and private life:

- Do you ever feel that your work prevents you from spending as much time as you would like with your partner or your children?
- Do you ever think that your family responsibilities prevent you from spending as much time as you should at work?
- Are you sometimes too tired after work to enjoy what you like doing at home?
- Do you ever find it difficult to concentrate at work because of your family responsibilities?
- Do your family or friends complain that your work keeps you away from them?
- Do you ever continue to think about your work outside your working hours?

The response categories were: *always*; *often*; *sometimes*; *never*.

Respondents were also asked whether they *totally disagreed*, *disagreed*, *neither agreed nor disagreed*, *agreed* or *totally agreed* with the three following statements:

- Your work gives you fulfilment and helps you to enjoy private life
- Your private life makes you happy, and this helps you to work better
- There is often a clash between your work and your family or private life

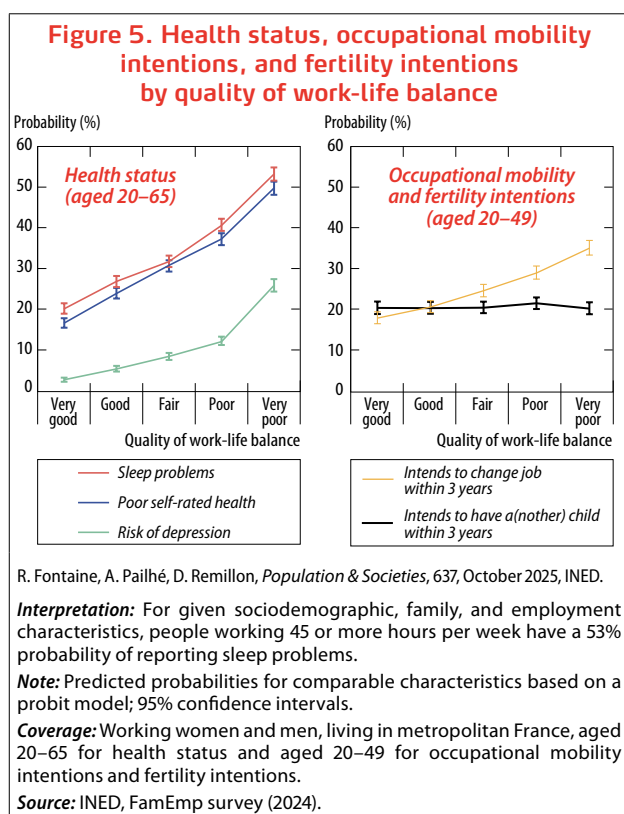
Last, respondents were asked the following question: On a scale of 1 to 10, are you satisfied with your current main job in terms of your work-life balance?

A total of 23,991 respondents answered all the questions.

We used the answers to these ten questions to calculate a composite score of perceived quality of the work-life balance based on the position on the first axis of a multiple correspondence analysis. Five groups of equal size were created according to perceived quality of the work-life balance. We then used a probit regression to model the probability of belonging to the 20% of workers with the poorest work-life balance. Figures 2 and 4 show the mean predicted probabilities for given sociodemographic, family, and occupational characteristics. We used an identical probit method to estimate the association between quality of the work-life balance and various indicators of health status, occupational mobility intentions, and fertility intentions (Figure 5). The question wording, the list of sociodemographic, family, and occupational variables used in the models, and the complete model results for all working people and for each sex are available in the Online Appendix. The family structures are defined in terms of partners and children (or stepchildren) living at least half of the time in the household. The discussed effects are statistically significant at the 5% level.

Poor work-life balance is associated with poor health

Difficulties in reconciling work and family life are associated with poorer health [4]. For given sociodemographic, family, and occupational characteristics, people with a very poor work-life balance are 3 times more likely to report poor or very poor general health than people with a good balance (50% vs. 17%; Figure 5). They are also more likely to have sleep problems and to be at risk of depression. This association may work in two directions: while a poor work-life balance may have a negative impact on health, poor health may also make a good work-life balance more difficult to achieve.



With poor work-life balance, a desire for occupational mobility but no questioning of fertility intentions

People reporting a poor work-life balance more frequently plan to look for a new job (new position, new company, or new occupation) within 3 years than those with no work-life balance problems (Figure 5). However, among people aged under 50, men and women alike, and whatever the number of children, for given sociodemographic, family, and employment characteristics, there is no clear link between the quality of the

work-life balance and intentions to have a child within 3 years. It would thus appear that people with a poor balance tend to look for better working conditions as a means to improve the situation rather than forgoing their childbearing plans, over the short term at least. The second survey wave, scheduled for 2027, will enable us to compare these intentions with realizations and to see how people who reported a poor work-life balance have responded to these problems, be it by leaving the labour force, finding a new job, or obtaining new working conditions.

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Abstract

Drawing on a range of indicators, the Family and Employers survey (FamEmp) shows that for a large share of working individuals, work is a source of fatigue and stress that affects their private life but is also a source of personal fulfilment. Difficulties in reconciling work and private life vary by family structure. They are greatest for parents of children under age 6 and for people providing support to a disabled or elderly dependent relative. The quality of the work-life balance varies even more widely according to working conditions. A poor work-life balance is associated with poor health and increases the desire to find a different job, but it does not affect fertility intentions.

Keywords

Work-life balance, working conditions, family structure, well-being