

More women than men living in workless households

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Statistics in focus

POPULATION AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

THEME 3 – 15/2002

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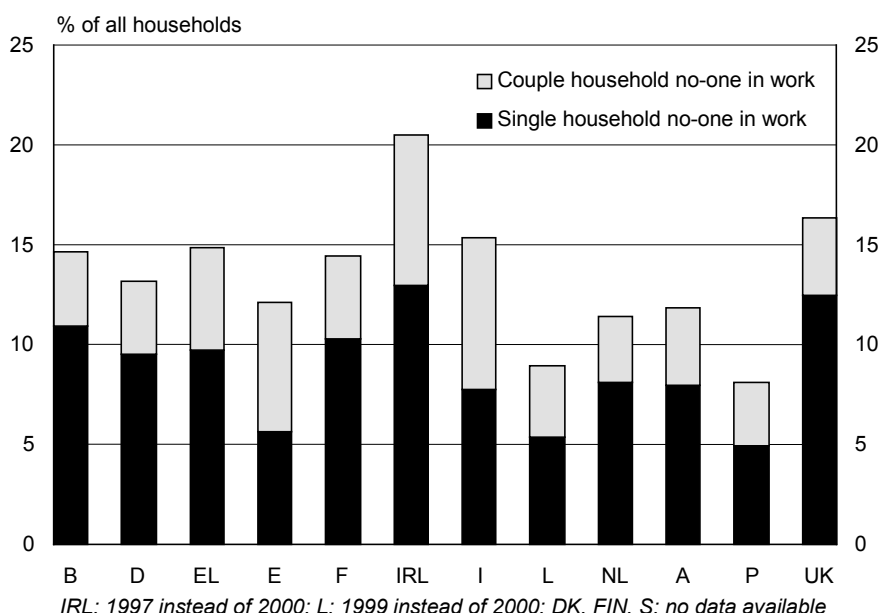
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Being in paid employment, or more precisely, having access to earned income, is generally regarded as being essential to avoiding social exclusion and poverty. A corollary of the equal opportunity dimension of the European Employment Strategy is that women should be no more likely than men to live in households where no one is in work. In a number of EU Member States, spouses or partners of someone who becomes unemployed or, in some cases, who becomes economically inactive, may face fiscal barriers to them entering or remaining in the labour market because of the features of the tax and benefit system. In most cases, those affected are women, who may also face social and other obstacles to employment, rather than men. Equally, women are more likely than men to be living on their own with young children and so more vulnerable to exclusion because of caring responsibilities.

Fig. 1 Households with no-one in work as a share of all households, 2000



Households with no-one in work – more jobless women than men live alone

In 2000, according to the latest data available, the number of households in which neither the reference person in the household nor their spouse, or partner, were in work ranged from under 10% of the total in Luxembourg and Portugal to 17% in the UK (Fig. 1; data relate only to those aged 20 to 59; see Methodological notes for an explanation of the data used; no data are available at the household level for Denmark, Finland and Sweden). In Ireland, the figure was even higher, at over 20%, according to the latest data, but these relate to 1997 when unemployment was significantly higher than in 2000 (10% as against 4%).

These figures reflect only to a limited extent the variation in the unemployment rate, which in the UK (5.5%) was only slightly higher than in Portugal (4.2%) and considerably lower than in Spain (14.1%), where the household rate was 12%. (It should be borne in mind that those out of work include the economically inactive as well as those who are unemployed on the internationally standard definition used in the Labour Force Survey.) In Belgium, Germany, France, the Netherlands and the UK, most workless households, as defined here were single ones (over 70% in each case), whereas in Spain and Italy, there were as many couple households as single ones (see Methodological notes for a definition of the terminology used).

Whereas the relative number of couple households with no-one in work declined during the 1990s in most Member States, as unemployment came down, Italy being the main exception, this was accompanied by a widespread increase in the number of workless single households. Indeed, only in Luxembourg and the Netherlands, did these decline significantly in relation to total households. As a consequence, the proportion of households with no-one in work increased over the 1990s in 5 of the 12 Member States for which data are available.

The proportion of women living in households in which neither they nor their partner was in work exceeds that of men throughout the EU (Fig. 2). The difference was particularly marked (over 3 percentage points) in 2000 in Greece, Ireland and the UK (1997 in Ireland), which in the UK might be slightly unexpected given that the unemployment rate among women (5%) was lower than among men (6%), the only country included in the analysis here where this was the case (in Ireland, the rate was the same for the two in 1997).

Much of the difference between women and men is attributable to the larger proportion of women than men without work living alone. This was especially so in the three countries listed above. In both Greece and the UK, the proportion of women without work and living alone was over 4 percentage points higher than that of men and in Ireland, almost as much. Indeed, only in Germany and France – and in the latter only marginally – was the difference in the two proportions less than 2 percentage points. (Note that the shares of women and men in households without work in Fig. 2 are both lower than the share of households without work in Fig. 1, because the calculation excludes households with more than one person which are wholly female or male.)

In all countries in the Union, with the sole exception of the UK, households with at least one child under 15 are less likely to have no-one in paid work than those without, in most cases substantially so. Indeed, only in Ireland and the Netherlands did the proportion of workless households without a child exceed those with a child by much less than 2 to 1 in 2000 (Fig. 3). In the UK, on the other hand, households with no-one in work represented a larger proportion of households with children than without children.

The difference in workless rates between parent and non-parent households arises predominantly from the

Fig. 2 Share of women and men living in households with no-one in work, 2000

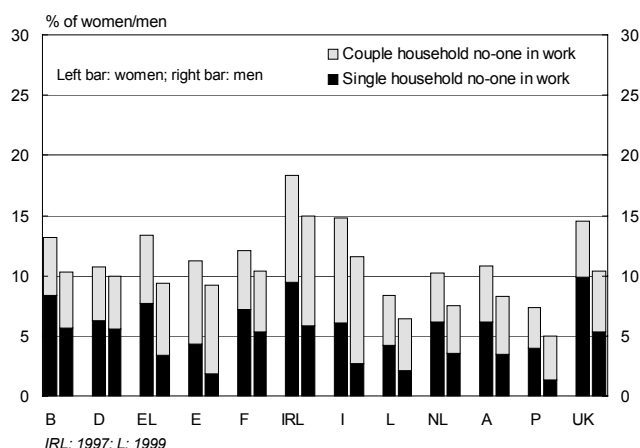
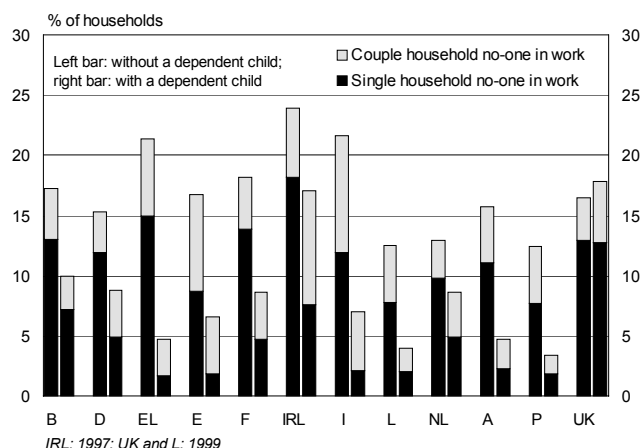


Fig. 3 Share of households with no-one in work among households with and without a dependent child, 2000



former group of households containing a much smaller share of single households with no one in work than the latter group. This was particularly the case in Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Austria and Portugal, where lone parents out of work represented under a third of workless households with dependent children and where, more generally, there were relatively few lone parents in or out of work. In the UK, in stark contrast to elsewhere, there were proportionately more households out of work with children than without, reflecting the much larger number of single parents not working than in other countries.

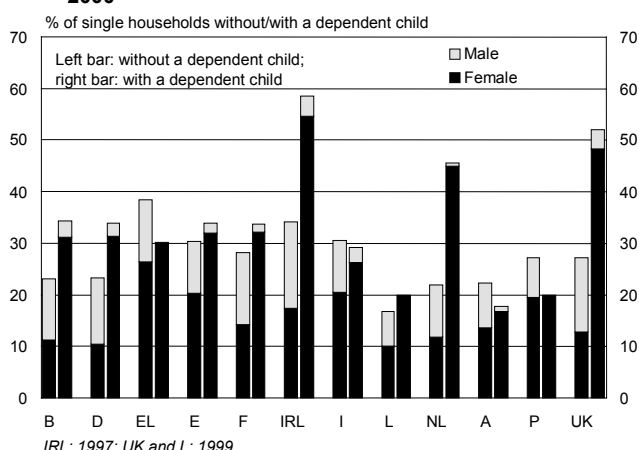
Single households more likely to have no-one in work

In all Member States single households are more likely to be households with no-one in work than couple households. In 2000, only around 10% or less of couple households had no-one in work in most parts of the Union, whereas this was the case for between 20 and 30% of all single households without children in all countries apart from Luxembourg (where the figure was only just below 20%). Moreover, in 8 of the 12 Member States, over 30% of lone parents were out of work, the great majority of them women.

Although the majority of those living alone without a child were men, except in Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal (Table 1), around 90% of those with a child were women, apart from Italy and Luxembourg (80%) and Belgium (just over 70%). In all Member States, over 90% of lone parents who were not in work were women, while people living alone without children and who were out of work were fairly evenly divided between men and women in most Member States. The exceptions are the four southern countries plus Luxembourg and Austria, where 60% or more of these were women (Fig. 4).

In all of these 6 countries, a large proportion of women living alone and not working were in their 50s – over

Fig. 4 Share of households with no-one in work among single households with and without a dependent child, 2000



40% in each case and around 60% in Spain and Portugal (Fig. 5). Many of these might be widowed or divorced and a large number of them could well have relatively little work experience.

Table 1: Single households with and without a dependent child, 2000

	% of single households with/without a dependent child			
	With		Without	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
B	71.6	28.4	41.3	58.7
D	89.2	10.8	43.6	56.4
EL	88.4	11.6	55.6	44.4
E	90.1	9.9	58.5	41.5
F	89.7	10.3	48.6	51.4
IRL	90.6	9.4	47.1	52.9
I	78.5	21.5	50.2	49.8
L	80.0	(20.0)	46.7	53.3
NL	88.6	11.4	44.3	55.7
A	93.1	6.9	48.1	51.9
P	92.2	(7.8)	64.8	35.2
UK	90.5	9.5	45.7	54.3

Note: IRL: 1997; UK and L: 1999

Couple households – in most cases where no-one is in work both partners are retired

It is also the case that a relatively high proportion of couple households with no-one in work included women of 50 or over (Fig. 5). In Spain, Portugal, Italy, Austria, Belgium and Luxembourg, the figure was over 50%, in the last four of these, partly reflecting high rates of early retirement among both men and women in their 50s. Indeed, in most countries, in the majority of couple households with no-one in work, both partners were economically inactive (Table 2).

In the other couple households, the most common situation was one in which the male partner was

Fig. 5 Women aged 50-59 as a share of women in single and couple households with no-one in work and in all households covered, 2000

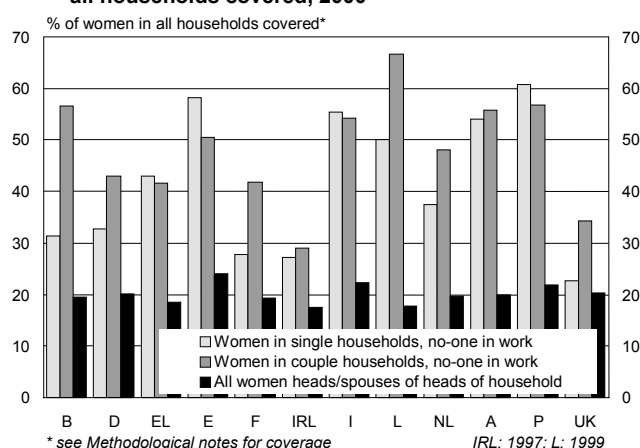


Table 2: Employment status of male and female partners in couple households with no-one in work, 2000

	% of non-employed households											
	B	D	GR	E	F	IRL	I	L	NL	A	P	UK
Female unemployed	(3.8)	20.4	10.1	15.5	13.7	8.1	7.1	-	0	4.8	0	4.9
Male unemployed												
Female unemployed	(3.8)	6.6	4.6	5.9	9.1	0	3.0	-	0	4.8	0	2.1
Male inactive												
Female inactive	17.0	25.5	16.5	25.2	24.9	37.1	16.5	-	8.1	21.4	13.6	22.7
Male unemployed												
Female inactive	75.5	47.5	68.8	53.4	52.3	51.6	73.4	100.0	89.4	69.0	78.8	70.4
Male inactive												

Note: IRL: 1997

unemployed and the female partner inactive. This was particularly so in Ireland, reflecting the fact that the rules governing entitlement to social benefit allow only one partner to register as unemployed.

greater in cases where their male partner was also outside the labour force – mostly because they had taken early retirement – than where they were inside (Fig. 10).

The employment status of one partner is closely related to that of the other

The possible effect of the employment status of one person in a couple household – whether they are working, unemployed or inactive – on the employment status of the other can be investigated further by more detailed examination of these situations. This reveals a clear relationship between the two in all Member States, especially as regards women (Table 3).

The same kind of influence is also evident the other way round, in the sense that the employment status of men in two-person households tends to reflect that of their female partners, though the effect is in most cases quantitatively smaller. In all Member States, therefore, with the exception of Luxembourg (where the sample size is relatively small), the proportion of men who were in employment in 2000 where their partner was also in work was higher than that where their partner was unemployed or inactive (Fig. 7). In 6 of the 12 Member States, the difference was more than 10 percentage points.

Women are, therefore, more likely to be in employment if their male partner is employed than if he is unemployed or inactive. In 2000, in all Member States without exception, a much higher proportion of women living in households where their male partner was employed were themselves in work than was the case for women living with male partners who were unemployed or inactive (Fig. 6). Indeed, in 7 of the 11 Member States for which data are available, the employment rate of women with partners in work was some 20 percentage points or more higher than that of women whose partners were unemployed. Only in the Netherlands and Portugal were much more than half of the women in the latter situation in work, and in Belgium, Ireland and Italy, the figure was under a third.

In sharp contrast to women, however, the employment rate of men in this age group was over 70% throughout the EU, irrespective of the employment status of their partner, and in most countries – the main exceptions being Germany, Ireland and the UK – it was 80% or more in all cases.

Correspondingly, women living with a partner who is unemployed are themselves disproportionately likely also to be unemployed (Fig. 8). In all Member States, except the Netherlands, the proportion of women who were unemployed in such households was over twice as high as in households where their male partner was employed or economically inactive, and in most cases over three times as high.

More markedly, in all Member States, again apart from the Netherlands, men were substantially more likely to be unemployed when their partner was in the same situation than when they are employed or inactive (Fig. 9). An analogous tendency is equally evident for men whose partners are inactive, this time in all countries including the Netherlands (Fig. 11). Men, therefore, seem more likely to take early retirement (ie before they reach 60) if they partners are inactive – or perhaps if they have also opted for early retirement – than if they are in work or looking for work.

Similarly, as noted above, the relative number of women who were economically inactive was significantly

Fig. 6 Women employed by activity status of male partner, 2000

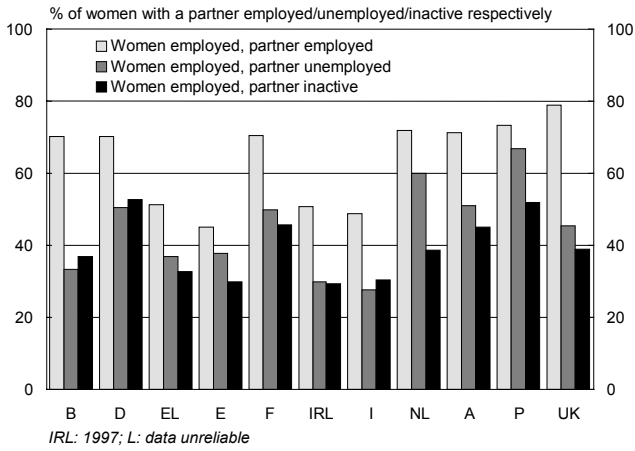


Fig. 7 Men employed by activity status of female partner, 2000

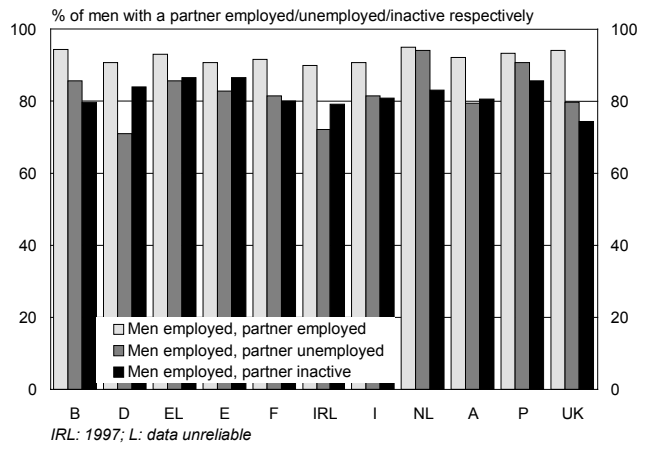


Fig. 8 Women unemployed by activity status of male partner, 2000

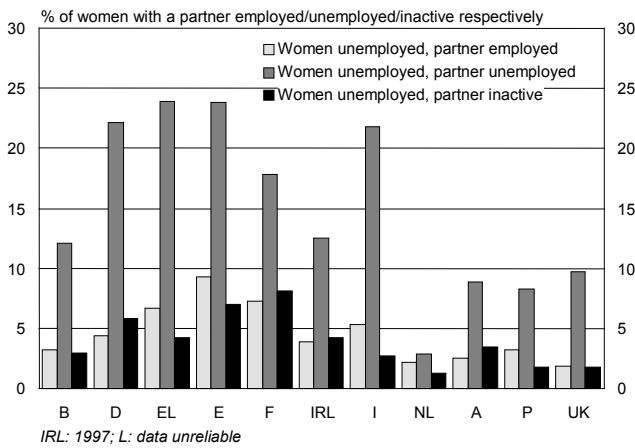


Fig. 9 Men unemployed by activity status of female partner, 2000

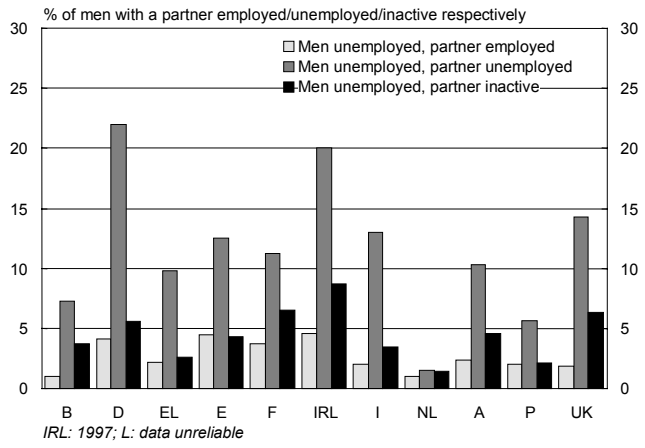


Fig. 10 Women inactive by activity status of male partner, 2000

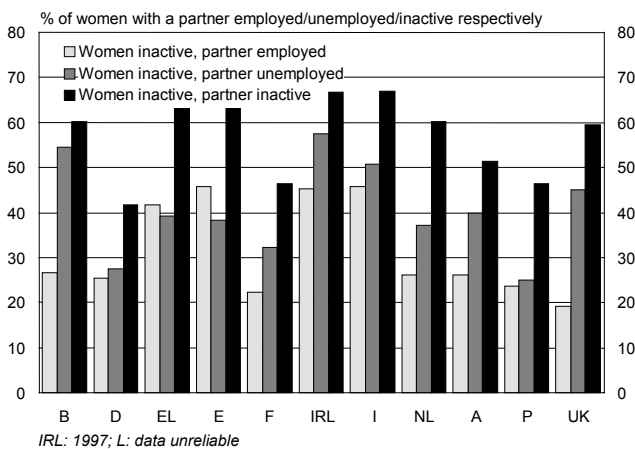
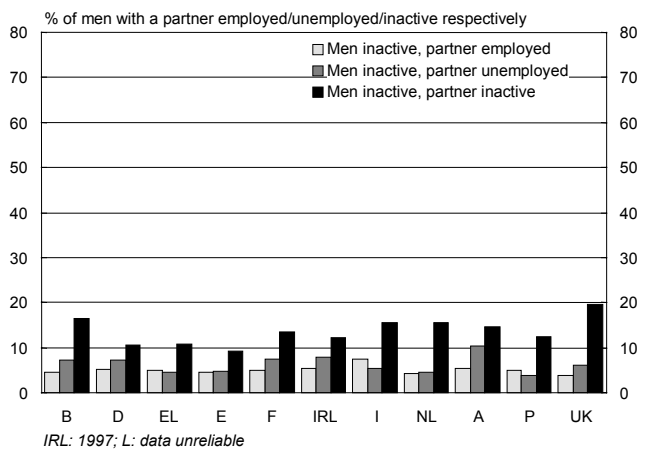


Fig. 11 Men inactive by activity status of female partner, 2000



Note: The percentages shown in the graphs relate in each case to the share of women or men, grouped by the employment status of their partner, who are employed (Figs. 6 and 7), unemployed (Figs. 8 and 9) or inactive (Figs. 10 and 11). Each set of the three bars in Figs. 6, 8 and 10, therefore, adds to 100% (ie the left, middle and right hand bars from each graph taken together), as do those in Figs. 7, 9 and 11.

Table 3: The employment status of women and men by the employment status of their partner, 2000

% of women/men with partner employed/unemployed/inactive

	Man employed	Man unemployed	Man inactive	Woman employed	Woman unemployed	Woman inactive
Woman employed			Man employed			
B	70.2	33.3	36.8	94.5	85.5	79.8
D	70.1	50.4	52.6	90.7	70.9	83.9
EL	51.4	37.0	32.8	92.9	85.7	86.5
E	45.0	37.8	29.8	90.8	82.7	86.5
F	70.3	49.9	45.6	91.5	81.4	79.9
IRL	50.8	30.0	29.2	90.0	72.0	79.2
I	48.8	27.6	30.3	90.6	81.5	80.9
L	54.3	:	50.0	92.0	(100.0)	91.0
NL	71.7	60.0	38.7	94.9	94.0	83.0
A	71.4	51.1	45.1	92.2	79.5	80.7
P	73.1	66.7	51.8	93.1	90.6	85.5
UK	78.9	45.3	38.9	94.1	79.7	74.3
Woman unemployed			Man unemployed			
B	3.2	(12.1)	(3.0)	1.0	(7.3)	3.7
D	4.4	22.1	5.8	4.1	22.0	5.6
EL	6.7	23.9	4.2	2.2	9.8	2.6
E	9.3	23.8	7.0	4.5	12.5	4.3
F	7.3	17.8	8.1	3.7	11.2	6.5
IRL	3.9	12.5	:	4.6	20.0	8.7
I	5.3	21.8	2.7	2.0	13.0	3.5
L	(1.4)	:	:	:	:	:
NL	2.2	:	:	1.0	:	1.4
A	2.5	8.9	3.5	2.4	10.3	4.6
P	3.2	8.3	1.8	2.0	:	(2.1)
UK	1.9	9.7	1.8	1.9	14.3	6.3
Woman inactive			Man inactive			
B	26.5	54.5	60.2	4.5	(7.3)	16.5
D	25.5	27.6	41.6	5.2	7.1	10.5
EL	41.8	39.1	63.0	4.9	4.5	10.9
E	45.7	38.4	63.2	4.6	4.8	9.2
F	22.4	32.3	46.4	4.9	7.4	13.6
IRL	45.3	57.5	66.7	5.4	:	12.1
I	45.8	50.6	67.0	7.4	5.4	15.6
L	44.3	:	50.0	7.0	:	8.0
NL	26.1	37.1	60.1	4.2	:	15.6
A	26.1	40.0	51.3	5.4	10.3	14.7
P	23.7	25.0	46.4	4.9	:	12.4
UK	19.2	45.0	59.4	3.9	6.1	19.5

Note: IRL 1997; L 1999

➤ 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 data for Austria are available is 1995.

The data used in the analysis relate to persons of reference (ie the person in the 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 partners who are aged 20 to 59 so as to exclude households where one of the partners is likely to be retired (though those in the age group who may have taken early retirement are included). Other people in the household, other than children under 15 who are children of the reference person or their partner, are not taken into account in the analysis.

Households are categorised as either single or couple households, defined as follows:

single households - households where the reference person is aged 20 to 59 and is not living with a spouse or cohabiting with a partner

couple households - 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.

In both cases, there may be a child under 15 living in the household. There may also be other people living in the household apart from children under 15. These are not counted at all in the household members. In Fig 5, therefore, the term 'women in all households covered' relates to women who are persons of reference or the spouses or partners of reference persons and who are aged 20 to 59 and does not include women in this age group who may also live in the household as other members.

It should also be noted that the other household members not included may or may not be in work but in neither case do they affect the division of households in the analysis between those where someone is in work and those where no-one is in work (termed 'workless' households in the analysis). In most Member States, there are comparatively few households where there are other members, though there are more in Greece, Spain, Italy, Portugal and Ireland than elsewhere, reflecting the larger average household size in these countries. Nevertheless, their exclusion means that 'workless households' might possibly include some in which one or more of these other members are in work.

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, while to be classified as unemployed requires that the person concerned is out of work, actively seeking a job and immediately available to take it up. Everyone else is recorded as being economically inactive.

Further information:

➤ Databases

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