

# Combining work, study and care in the future

Key points

# 1

## More and more of us are combining work, care and study

Working people increasingly have to balance their jobs with care tasks and studying. The combination can be enjoyable and rewarding, but also stressful. At the Dutch Government's request, the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (SER) has examined work, care and learning in different life phases. In its advisory report, it presents its analyses, draws conclusions and makes recommendations.



### Combining tasks has become more common

It has become very common for people to combine a paying job with child care, informal care or studying. In the past, men were the breadwinners and women took care of the home and the family. Today, however, both men and women combine paid work and care duties. On top of this, lifelong learning is a growing necessity. According to the Netherlands Institute for Social Research, more and more people are combining work, care and learning. The trend is expected to continue over the next few years, in part owing to demographic changes. For example, the number of elderly and chronically ill persons is set to increase in the years ahead, leading to a rising demand for care. In its policy measures, the Government is encouraging people to do more to arrange care for themselves and their loved ones. Working people will therefore have to take on more care duties. At the same time, the importance of lifelong learning is growing. The rapid rise of new technologies means that knowledge and skills quickly become obsolete. Employees need to spend more time retraining and updating their skills in order to compete in the labour market. In other words: we can expect work, learning and care

to compete even more for priority in the future. That can cause stress as people juggle tasks, put them under time pressure, and even result in burnout.

### Work and private life are changing

The more people combine work, care and study, aided by technological advances such as digitisation, the more the boundary between work and private life becomes blurred. But changes are also afoot *within* the two life domains.

Working life is growing increasingly dynamic and diverse, something that international institutions such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the International Labour Organization and the World Economic Forum have noted in separate reports on the future of work and jobs. At the root of these changes lie advances such as robotisation and technologisation. Work will more often take the form of temporary 'jobs'. Careers and employment relationships will become more varied as a result.

The private domain is also becoming more diverse. Blended families and single-person households are growing more common, and people now change family structures more often over the course of a lifetime.

### About this report

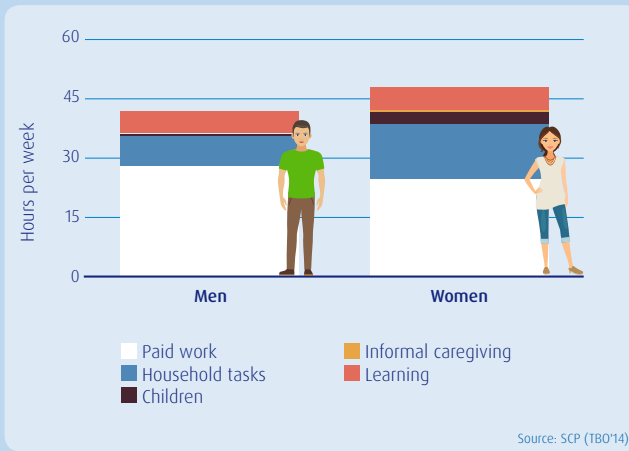
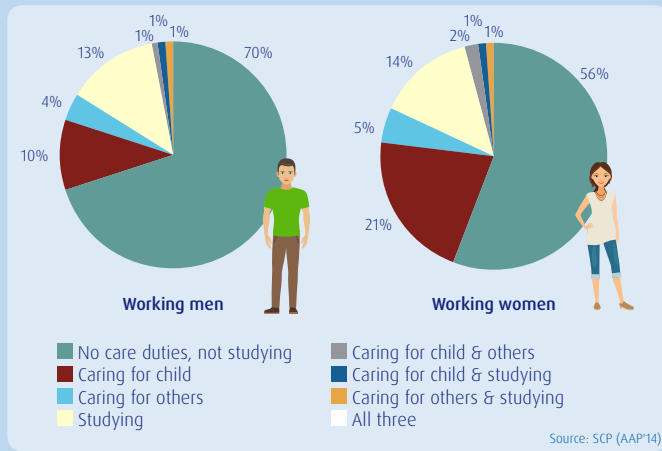
The SER advisory report **Een werkende combinatie** (A working combination) incorporates recent data furnished by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research and Statistics Netherlands. Their figures concern not only the combination of work, study and care in various life phases, but also how social groups differ in that respect. In its advisory report, the SER identifies six themes that are important to a forward-looking policy on work, study and care (see Section 5). The report is closely related to earlier SER advisory reports, i.e. ⇒ **Gelijk goed van start** (2016, on provisions for young children) and ⇒ **Tijden van de samenleving** (2011, on the work/life balance).

# 2

## Combining work, care and study in different life phases

People maintain different combinations of work, care and study in differing life phases. Those phases can be divided roughly into age categories, but they are defined mainly by such turning points as starting work and having children. Below we analyse the four phases.

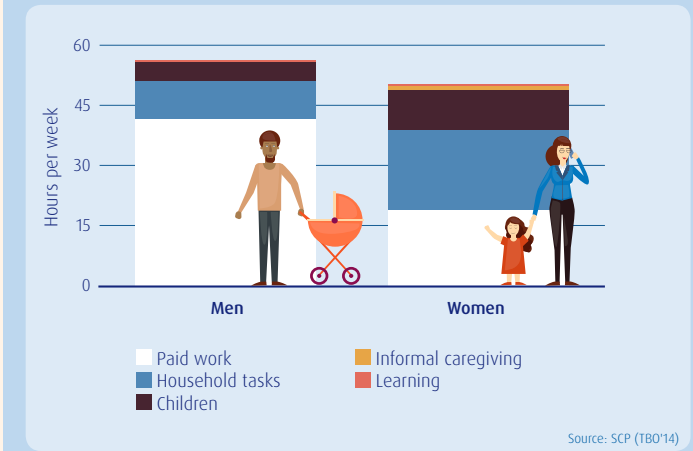
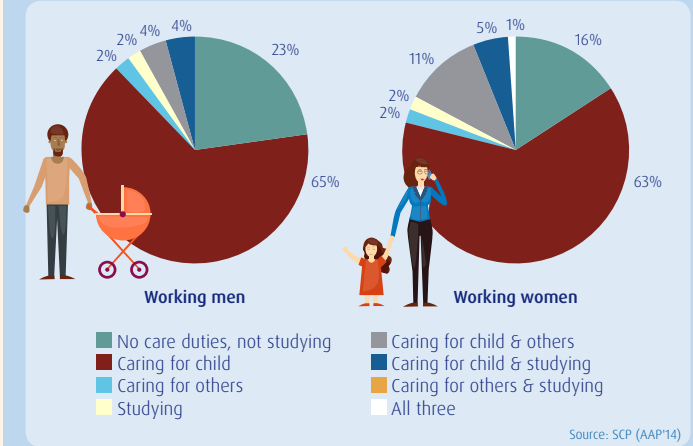
TIME USE **YOUNG ADULTHOOD (AGE 20-30)**



Young working adults do little combining, relatively speaking. More than half of young adult females and almost three quarters of young adult males do not study or take care of a child or other person beyond their work. More young women than men combine different tasks, in other words. For example almost one out of five women combines

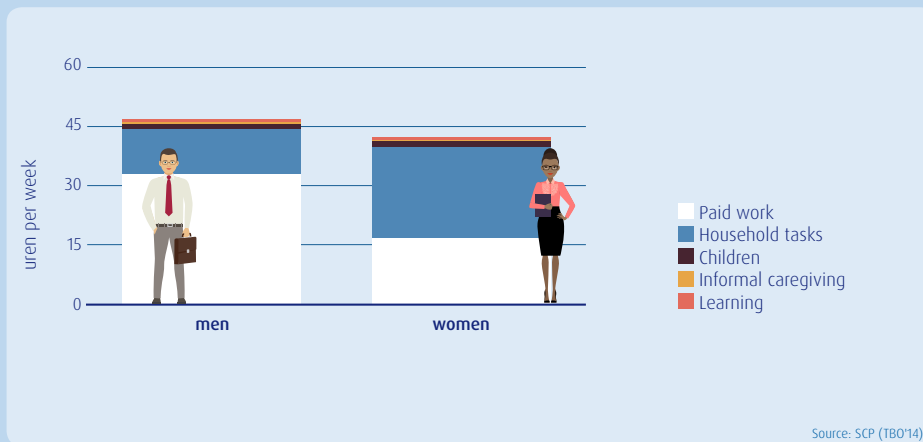
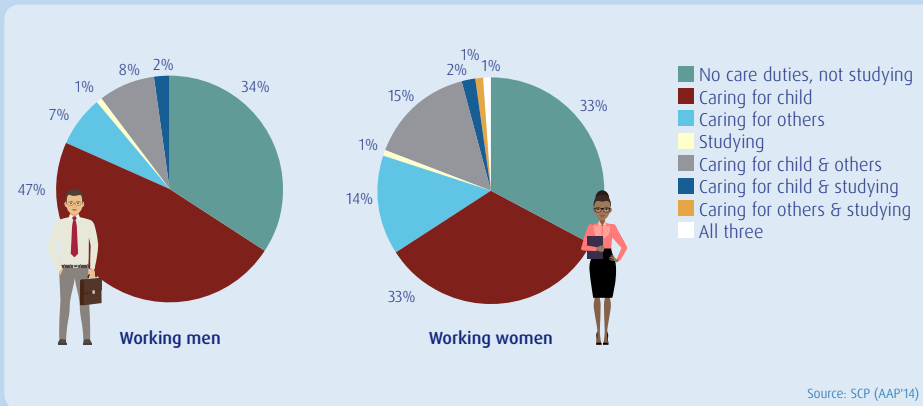
paid work with child care, as opposed to one in ten men. It is relatively common to combine work and study in this life phase. Young adults spend somewhat fewer hours combining work, study and care than people in the following two life phases: men 42 and women 48 hours a week.

TIME USE **FAMILY PHASE (AGE 30-45)**



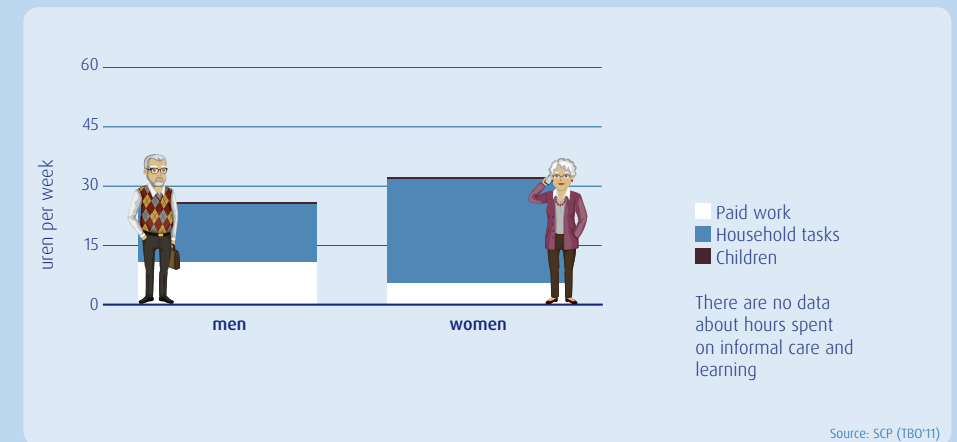
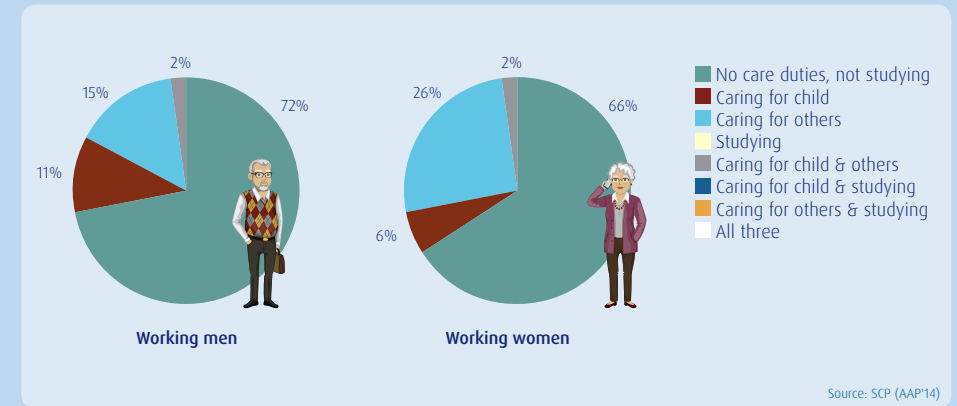
In the family life phase, many employees combine their job with child care. Women also regularly function as informal caregivers. There is clearly less time spent studying than in the previous phase. Of all the life phases, work, care and study combined take up the most number of hours. The difference with the previous phase is starkest for men. They spend 56 hours a week on work, care and study; women spend 50, and devote a relatively large number of hours to household tasks.

## TIME USE MID-CAREER (AGE 45-60)



At mid-career, people start spending more time on informal care. One out of three women and one out of seven men provide informal care during this life phase. Working people still devote a considerable amount of time to their children, and caring for children, grandchildren, parents, in-laws or partners may overlap. There is even less time for study than before. The combined tasks take up less time than in the previous phase.

## TIME USE SENIORS (AGE 61-67)



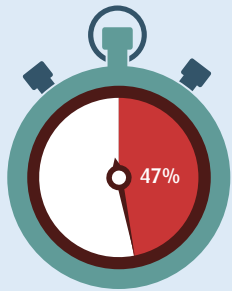
Working people at the end of their careers lead relatively quiet lives. Work, study and care take up less time than in previous phases. They spend very little time on study. Informal care, on the other hand, is even more important than it was in the previous phase. 34 Percent of working women provide informal care (with or without combining care for children of learning); this is 28 percent of working men.

# 3

## The challenges of combining

There is pressure in every life phase, although the combination of tasks differs from one phase to the next. That pressure has noticeable challenges in every phase: people feel rushed or think they are falling short at work or at home.

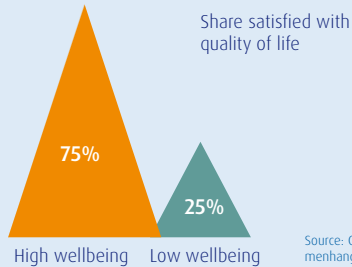
### CONSEQUENCES AND PERCEPTIONS YOUNG ADULTHOOD (AGE 20-30)



Source: SCP (TBO'11)



Source: CBS/TNO (NEA'14)



Source: CBS (SSB/Sociale samenhang en Welzijn '12/'13)



32% feel they sometimes fall short at work



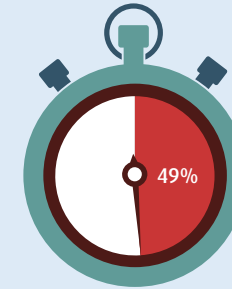
30% feel they sometimes fall short at home

Source: SCP (TBO'11)

The experience of young adults is varied. Almost half regularly feel rushed off their feet, almost one out of three feels that they sometimes fall short at home and/or at work, and no less than 14

percent have burnout symptoms. At the same time, three out of four are very satisfied with their quality of life.

### CONSEQUENCES AND PERCEPTIONS FAMILY PHASE (AGE 30-45)



Source: SCP (TBO'11)



Source: CBS/TNO (NEA'14)

Of mothers of young children who combine a job and family:



33% find the combination **rewarding**



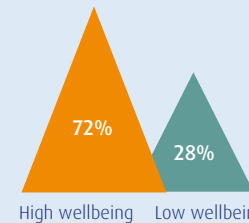
50% find the combination **difficult**



and 25% are unhappy with their **work/life balance**

Source: SCP (KIK'13)

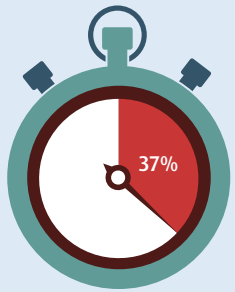
Share satisfied with quality of life



Source: CBS (SSB/Sociale samenhang en Welzijn '12/'13)

While many working mothers find it rewarding to combine a job and family, an even larger number consider it 'difficult'. Both men and women in this phase are more likely to feel rushed and suffer symptoms of burnout than young adults. Nevertheless, this group is also generally satisfied with their quality of life; their sense of wellbeing is considerable.

## CONSEQUENCES AND PERCEPTIONS MID-CAREER (AGE 45-60)



37% feel rushed at least 1 day a week

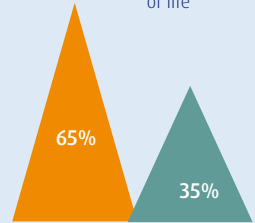
Source: SCP (TBO'11)



16% experience burnout symptoms

Source: CBS/TNO (NEA'14)

Share satisfied with quality of life



High wellbeing Low wellbeing

Source: CBS (SSB/Sociale samenhang en Welzijn '12/'13)



32% feel they sometimes fall short at work



36% feel they sometimes fall short at home

Source: SCP (TBO'11)

Older people feel less rushed off their feet. There is no decline in the number of people with burnout symptoms, however, or in the number who feel they sometimes fall short at home and/or at work. People in this life phase are less pleased with their quality of life, probably because they have more health issues.

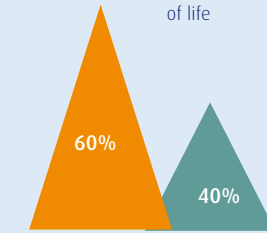
## CONSEQUENCES AND PERCEPTIONS ACTIVE SENIORS (AGE 61-67)



29% feel rushed at least 1 day a week

Source: SCP (TBO'11)

Share satisfied with quality of life



High wellbeing Low wellbeing

Source: CBS (SSB/Sociale samenhang en Welzijn '12/'13)



13% experience burnout symptoms

Source: CBS/TNO (NEA'14)



14% feel they sometimes fall short at work



20% feel they sometimes fall short at home

Source: SCP (TBO'11)

People in this life phase clearly feel under less pressure to combine tasks. Feelings of being rushed or falling short decline and, to a lesser extent, so do burnout symptoms. A growing number say their sense of wellbeing has declined as well, once again likely owing to increasing health issues.

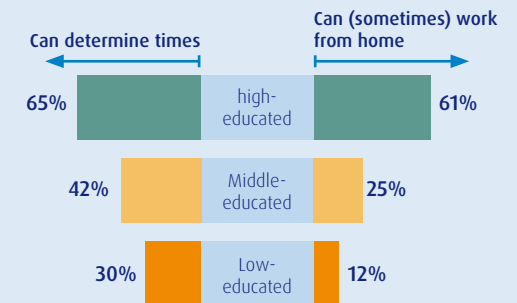
## Notable outcomes

A number of notable conclusions can be drawn from some of the study data:

- Both women and men have to work hard to combine work and care. That is particularly the case for high-educated men.
- Employees are taking on care tasks in a growing number of life phases.
- Approximately 15 percent of employees experience burnout symptoms in all life phases.

- Study becomes an increasingly smaller factor during the course of the working life, despite all the efforts to encourage 'lifelong learning'.
- The fact that schools, child-care centres and public facilities have limited opening hours increases the pressure on those combining work and care or study.
- The quality of someone's time off may play a role in how much time pressure they feel; women, in particular, spend much of their free time doing unpaid work at home and 'volunteering' at school.

## FLEXIBILITY IN TIME AND WORKSPACE DIFFERS FROM SOCIAL GROUPS



Source: CBS/TNO (NEA'14)



## Differences between social groups

- People in every social group combine work and care tasks. How they experience that combination and how they perceive their quality of life differ considerably from one group to the next:
- High-educated individuals spend more time working, studying and taking care of others than low-educated ones.
- High-educated individuals feel more rushed, but they have more tools and opportunities to combine tasks, for example by working from home.
- High-educated individuals rate their quality of life considerably higher than low-educated ones.
- Studies show that single persons are at greater risk of burning out, and that own-account workers feel under more pressure from combining tasks than people in employment.

# 4

## Opportunities and risks

The trend of combining work, care and study is here to stay. The SER sees opportunities to guide that trend in the right direction. It also sees risk factors.



### Opportunities

Advances in digital and other technology are making it easier to combine tasks. Technologicalisation is improving productivity and facilitating communication in the working world. At home, workers can reap the benefits of new techniques in the form of robot vacuum cleaners or alert systems that support informal caregivers.

The rise of digital platforms and the sharing economy can also lighten the load, although this is a fairly new development. For example, digital platforms can stimulate the market for personal and household services, creating employment at the same time. In the SER's view, however, the work created by outsourcing such services - for example odd jobs in and around the house - must be 'decent work', i.e. offering good terms and conditions of employment.

Technologicalisation will cause the boundary between work and private life to blur even more. We cannot say whether that flexibility will lead to a better work/life/care balance, or to an even bigger risk of burnout.

### Risks

Women often take part-time positions so that they can continue caring for their home and families and take on other duties above and beyond their work. Because we will only be combining tasks more in the future, there is a risk that women will continue taking part-time jobs, some for only a few hours a week, even though they are ready and willing to work more.

The Netherlands has a relatively large population of low-educated women who are not in paid work, and those who do have jobs work few hours compared with women in other European countries.

Part-time employment is embedded in Dutch culture; it is also the starting point for many government schemes and regulations. The SER has noted the difficulty of resolving this 'predicament'. And yet, it is important to encourage women to go into work or to work more

hours. That is why we need to make it appealing to combine work, care and study.

Besides the general risk of the 'part-time predicament', each life phase has its own specific risk factors. People in the family phase, for example, tend to feel very rushed, and young adults are relatively prone to burnout. That is why we must make it easier to combine tasks. Three combinations merit special attention: work and caring for young children, work and informal caregiving, and work and study. Caring for young children or other loved ones leads to 'combination pressure', while continuing professional development is often the first thing to fall by the wayside when employees are burdened with too many work/life tasks. Groups of particular concern are low-educated or low-income people, single persons, and own-account workers.



# 5

## Possible solutions

The SER believes it is possible to help employees combine their jobs with their other roles and tasks. To take advantage of opportunities and limit risks, the Council proposes a broad spectrum of different solution categories, broken down into six themes.



### 1 Smarter operating hours

Operating hours have become ‘smarter’ in a number of respects in recent years. Shops, libraries, health care facilities and even municipal government offices now have extended opening hours. Digital services, for example electronic tax-filing systems, have also made a huge difference. And government has also updated regulations pertaining to flexible working. Other points still need improving. For example, before-school and after-school care for school-age children is far from ideal (‘extended day programmes’; see also theme 2). More needs to be invested in dismantling the part-time model, and employees should be given more say over their working hours, for example by permitting self-scheduling. The solutions that government develops must allow for the differing needs of various social groups.

### 2 Extended day programmes for school-age children

The SER considers it high time to develop viable day programmes for school-age children (age 4-12). This can be achieved by early and closer cooperation between schools and child-care facilities, more regularity in school hours, clustering schools and child-care facilities at the same location, and encouraging decent employment contracts in the child-care sector. Consistency and better quality child care before, between and after school hours will be beneficial for both children and their parents.

### 3 Optimising leave after the birth of a child

In the first year after the birth of a child, parents would benefit by having more options for combining work and care. That first year is crucial, not only in terms of the child’s development but also for its parents’ job and career prospects. They often make work and care decisions then that set a pattern for the rest of their careers.

The SER believes that government policy should focus on providing good quality, affordable child care – outsourced care – and on helping parents to care for their child themselves. Proper leave arrangements also allow young parents to stay in work, but too few employees make full use of such arrangements after having a child.

The SER would like to see more research on leave arrangements. It should be possible to take up more leave and concentrate it in blocks in the child’s first year of life. The SER advocates studying partial income compensation in the event of unpaid leave, for example by means of tax-friendly savings plans. Government should be cautious when amending leave arrangements, however; extending such arrangements could make young employees less attractive to small and medium-sized enterprises.



#### 4 Better combination of work and informal care

More than four million Dutch people, most of them women, are informal caregivers. In the workforce, most of these are age 45 to 67, but there is also quite a large group of young informal caregivers. Altogether, one out of 20 employees provides informal care.

There are many different types of informal caregivers, informal care recipients and informal care. A broad range of different and tailor-made approaches is required.

To help people combine work and informal caregiving, both employer and employee need to be flexible. It helps employees to give them a say in their work schedule and offer them an understanding work environment. Informal caregivers also need information and advice on existing schemes and regulations, with which they are often unfamiliar. The SER would also like to see more research on different financing arrangements. Specifically, this would include credit facilities and (tax-friendly) savings plans in which employees save time and/or money.

#### 5 Promoting lifelong learning

To remain attractive to employers and active until the end of their careers, employees must choose the path of 'lifelong learning'. When learning must be combined with other tasks and roles, however, study often falls by the wayside. That is especially the case for low-educated, older, and flexible workers. On the other hand, training courses and programmes do not make sufficient allowance for people who are already in employment.

The SER believes that the existing training infrastructure can be made more favourable to adult participants. It addresses this issue in more detail in one of its current advisory projects, *Leren in de toekomst* [Learning in the future].

#### 6 Market for personal and household services

At the moment, people are able to combine different tasks by leveraging time and/or money. The market for personal and household services can also play an important role. It is an emerging market that is expected to grow further in the years ahead.

The SER would like to see more research on this phenomenon. Personal services offer important opportunities to lighten the burden for working people and create jobs. But there are also risks involved, mainly with regard to the quality of employment. For example, good employment terms are not guaranteed. That is why the issue of decent work merits specific attention in this emerging market.

The SER plans to study the market for personal services, including in the international context, in the period ahead.

#### Would you like more information?

Read the complete ⇒ [advisory report](#) and the ⇒ [Government's response](#) (both in Dutch).

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PUBLISHER Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands, The Hague, November 2016  
DESIGN AND LAYOUT Sheila Kok, graphic designer TEXT Berber Bijma PHOTOGRAPHS Dirk Hol,  
Shutterstock, Hollandse Hoogte TRANSLATION Balance