



Foundation Findings

Working time in the EU



WEEKLY TIMESHEET

	WED	THUR	FRI
START	9:00	9:00	8:30
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Policy background



Working time is a critical element in the working conditions of all workers and is one of the main points for negotiation in collective bargaining. The issue has far-reaching consequences for competitiveness, plays a role in shaping home life, and both reflects and influences gender equality and gender roles. For all these reasons, the issue of working time has received considerable attention in EU policymaking discussions over the last 20 years. These discussions have focused in particular on making working time more flexible and facilitating shorter working hours, both as a way of making jobs available to more citizens and to assist in balancing work and private life. Another key policy area implicated in working time is gender equality, stemming from the fact that men and women have very different working time patterns and that women tend to devote much more time to unpaid work in the home.

EU policy intervention

The EU has intervened through legislation to improve employment conditions and the health and safety of workers. The 1993 Working Time Directive, and its subsequent revisions, stipulates that working time policies should ensure a high level of protection of workers' health and safety in terms of working time, allow for greater flexibility for companies and Member States with regard to the management of working

time, ensure a better balance between work and private life, and avoid unreasonable constraints on companies, in particular on SMEs.

The directive lays down provisions for a 48-hour maximum working week (including overtime), as well as rest periods and breaks and a minimum of four weeks paid leave per year, in order to protect workers' health and safety. The regulations cover everyone except those who are genuinely self-employed. The most important exception is in respect of workers concerning what is called 'unmeasured' time. This applies to workers in managerial and professional roles that allow them to determine what hours they work and when. These workers are subject to the 48-hour working week limit but only in respect of time that they are contractually required to work. Any additional hours they may choose to work remain unmeasured and fall outside the regulations.

The directive also contains an opt-out clause, which permits Member States not to apply the maximum 48-hour weekly working limit if the individual worker voluntarily agrees to this.

In March 2010, the European Commission initiated a comprehensive review of the Working Time Directive. One of the objectives will be to improve the balance between work and private life, which puts part-time work once again at the centre of policy discussions. Among other

things the revision is trying to take account of the impact of more variation in working time schemes and working time organisation, for instance on-call working.

Meanwhile, part-time employment is covered by the Part-time Work Directive, implementing the Framework Agreement on part-time work, which was signed by the social partners in 1997. Its objectives are to eliminate discrimination against part-time workers, to improve the quality of part-time work, to facilitate voluntary part-time work and to contribute to the flexible organisation of working time, taking the needs of both employers and workers into account.

The duration of working time, and how it is organised, is also a key element for employers in ensuring that goods are produced and services delivered. The demands of business have become increasingly complex in a globalised world of business, where the employer is obliged to respond to customer demands both flexibly and with the most efficient use of human resources. To cater to this demand, companies may employ part-time workers to fill gaps in their service delivery. Shift work has been important in manufacturing for many years to ensure continuous production.

Europe 2020 targets

Reconciliation of work and private life is a key element in quality of work and employment. It is also mentioned in the Europe 2020 Strategy for Smart, Inclusive and Sustainable Growth. Indeed, it is a precondition for increasing the employment participation of both men and women and is an important element of gender equality. As such, it has the potential to make a significant impact on the goal of gender equality.

Explicit in the Europe 2020 targets is the aim of retaining older people in the workforce for longer. This becomes a more urgent priority as Europe's population ages and more pensioners need to be supported by a relatively smaller base of working adults. However, if people are to work for longer, there is a potential need for a more flexible, differentiated pattern of time use over the course of their working lives.

Moreover, if more older people are to remain in employment, then work itself must be more sustainable: that is, it must be possible to perform over the long term without suffering either physical harm or mental harm (through stress or burnout, for instance). Working time, its duration and how it is structured, is an important element in this.

All these factors clearly highlight the importance of working time, its duration and organisation. While this issue of 'Foundation Findings' explores the situation in Europe, the Europe 2020 Strategy points to the fact that the EU's competitors have longer working weeks and working years. The question is, will globalisation push back the trend towards reduced working time and give way to longer hours? Certainly, steps in this direction have been taken in France, noted for its landmark 35-hour working week. Changes are currently afoot which will undoubtedly have fundamental consequences for workers, the households they belong to, the companies that employ them and society as a whole.



Key findings

- The number of hours worked per week continues to drift downwards, on average – the result of more people working part time, fewer people working long hours, and a fall in the collectively agreed working hours in many countries.
- Standard working time arrangements – a five-day week of 40 hours, worked Monday to Friday – is still the norm for most Europeans.
- Almost one fifth of European workers are having difficulties achieving a satisfactory work–life balance, a slight decrease since 2000.
- The use of flexitime has increased in European companies since 2004. Both managers and employee representatives acknowledge the benefits arising from such schemes: higher levels of job satisfaction and a greater ability for the organisation to adapt to variations in the workload.
- Working time accounts, where hours can be banked to allow full days to be taken off, have the potential to further boost flexibility for both employers and employees. However, they are not widely available in all countries, and there is little protection for employees in the event of business failure.
- Part-time work is widely used across Europe, most notably in the Netherlands. On average, around three times as many women work part time as do men, mainly to facilitate their domestic responsibilities. When their unpaid work in the home is factored in, however, women working part time work nearly as many hours per week as do men working full time.
- Overtime, compensated for by monetary payments, is the most traditional company strategy for meeting temporary peaks in demand for products or services. Around half of the European workforce works some form of overtime.
- On average, around half of all self-employed workers work long hours – more than 48 per week. People who work more than 48 hours per week have more problems in terms of work–life balance and health. Besides they are also more likely to work intensely, and are more likely to work in their free time.
- Over the course of the recession, many Member State extended or introduced publicly financed short-time working and temporary layoff schemes in response to falling demand. Between 2008 and 2009, the number of workers on such schemes tripled to almost two million.
- A key element in working time is paid leave, and this varies greatly from country to country. Annual leave and public holiday provisions are substantially more generous in such countries as Germany and Denmark than in, say, Romania, where citizens work the equivalent of another two-and-a-half working weeks each year.



Exploring the issue



Evolution of length of working time

According to findings from Eurofound's fifth and latest European Working Conditions Survey, there has been an ongoing decline in the number of hours worked per week in Europe. In 1991, the average working week in the then 12 Member States (former EC12) was 40.5 hours long; in 2010, in the same 12 Member States, it had gone down to 36.4 hours. In the EU27 in 2010, it was 37.5 hours long.

Reasons for reduction in working time

The overall reduction in working time is largely due to four key developments:

- an increase in the proportion of people working part time (defined as 34 hours or fewer per week);
- a decrease in the number of people working long hours (in line with the EU Working Time Directive, defined as working more than 48 hours per week);

- a rise in the proportion of the workforce working shorter hours (fewer than 20 per week) over the past two decades;
- a reduction in collectively agreed working time in many countries and sectors.

Furthermore, reductions in working hours in response to the current recession will have already resulted in the shortening of working hours in many countries (see section 'Impact of the recession' on p. 17).

Looking at the evolution over a 20-year period: in 1991, 8% of the workforce in the EC12 worked short hours; by 2010, this figure had nearly doubled, reaching 14%. (For the EU27 as a whole, there was just a slight rise over ten years, from 12% in 2000 to 13% in 2010.)

Meanwhile, the proportion of people working part time (fewer than 34 hours per week) has steadily increased, from 17% of the workforce in the EC12 in 1991, to 27% in the same 12 Member States in 2010. (In the EU27 in 2010, the figure was 25%).



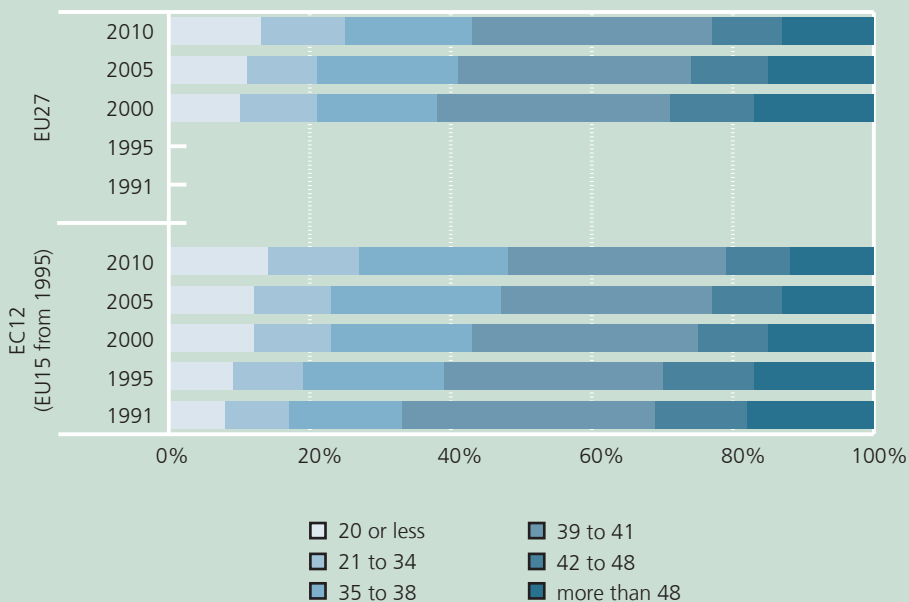
In 1991, around 18% of the workforce in the EC12 worked long hours; in the same countries, in 2010, this figure had fallen to 12%, and stood at 13% in the EU27.

Length of working week across the EU

The shortest average working week is in the Netherlands (33 hours), while the longest is in Greece (46 hours). Moreover, the length of the working week varies within countries, as Figure 2 illustrates.

In Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Malta, most people work the same hours per week (around 40). In the Netherlands, in contrast, there is huge variation in the length of the working week. Large variations are also visible in Austria, Belgium, Poland and the UK. This situation may be accounted for by the fact that in most of these countries a greater variety of working time patterns is available, mainly in the form of different part-time working arrangements.

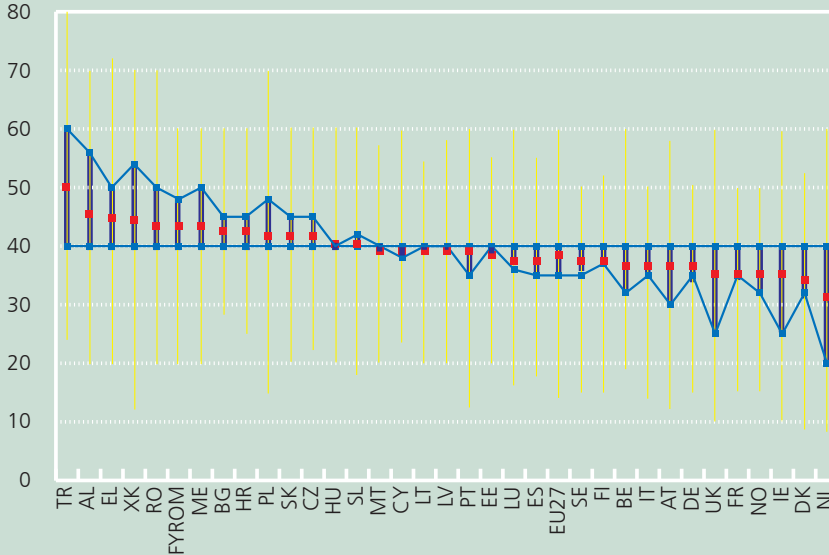
Figure 1: Evolution of working time, 1991–2010, hours per week



Note: Percentages are proportions of respondents who worked the hours indicated by colour bands.

Source: Eurofound, fifth European Working Conditions Survey, 2010

Figure 2: Variation in length of working week within countries (hours)



Notes: The red dot indicates the average length of the working week. The blue box marks the interquartile range; in other words, it 'contains' 50% of the workforce of the country. The vertical line represents the 5th and the 95th percentiles for each country: in the case of Hungary, for instance, this means that 90% of the population works between 20 and 60 hours per week.

Source: Eurofound, fifth European Working Conditions Survey, 2010

Flexible working time

According to findings from the European Company Survey 2009, more than half (57%) of all companies with 10 or more employees used some type of flexitime arrangement. This reflects a substantial increase from 2004, when the average was 48% of companies.¹ In some countries, such as Denmark, Finland, Sweden and the UK, the majority of companies (over 60%) use some form of flexitime.

These flexible time arrangements are, however, not necessarily open to the entire workforce, but are sometimes restricted to specific groups of

employees, such as clerical staff, employees in management positions or employees not working any shift scheme. In the companies offering these schemes, on average about two-thirds of the workforce is entitled to make use of them. In almost half (45%) of all companies practising such schemes, they are available to the entire workforce.

At one end of the spectrum, there are basic flexitime schemes that allow employees to vary the times they start and finish work. At the other, there are 'working time accounts', in which hours worked over the specified amount can be banked as 'credit' hours. In line with flexitime generally, these have also become more common². Not all countries make equal use of flexitime schemes. They are most commonly used in

¹ The figures for 2004 apply to the 21 countries that formed the sample group in Eurofound's European Establishment Survey of Working Time and Work-Life Balance 2004; the figures for 2009 use the larger sample group of 30 countries for the European Company Survey 2009.

² Data for this section are derived from the European Company Survey 2009, and its predecessor, the European Establishment Survey of Working Time and Work-Life Balance 2004.



Finland, where over 80% of companies offer their workers some type of scheme. They are also widespread in Denmark, Sweden and the UK. In contrast, only 30% of companies in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia do so and around 35% in Bulgaria and Greece. There is also a qualitative difference in the types of flexitime applied. In the Nordic countries, Austria and Germany, flexitime schemes are generally much more flexible, allowing employees to bank hours and take whole days off. In Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, the UK and most of southern Europe, this accumulation of hours is generally not possible.

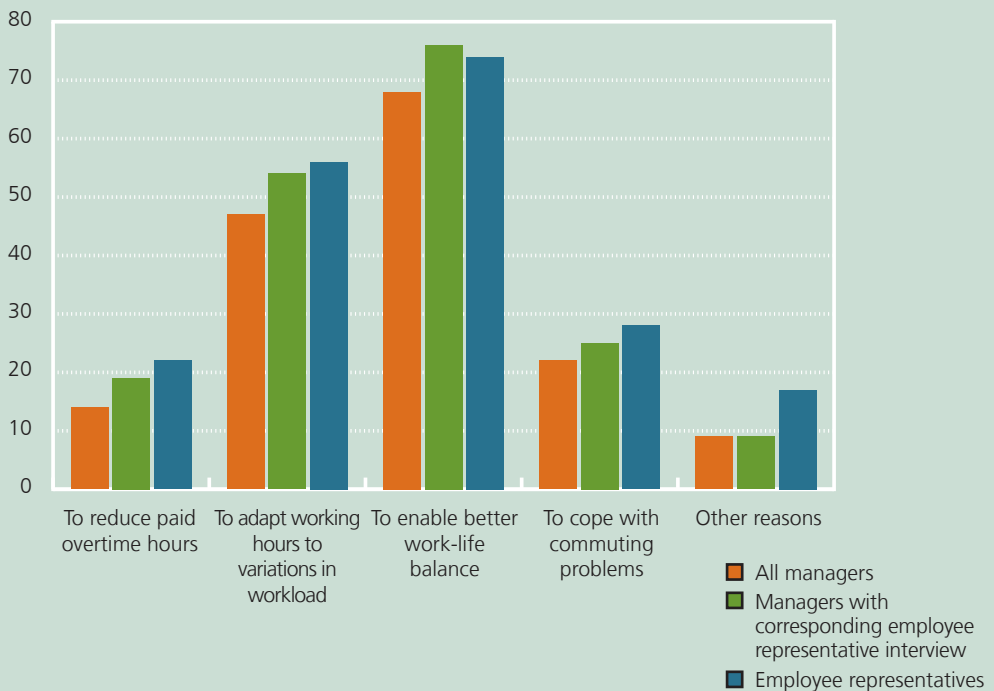
found in construction and education. While flexible working is most common in large companies, substantial numbers of smaller companies have also implemented flexitime schemes, including the more complex forms that involve the banking of hours (though not long-term working time accounts). Given that considerable effort is involved in setting up and administering these schemes, and that the overheads are proportionately greater in small companies, it would appear that employers clearly feel that the benefits of introducing such schemes outweigh the costs.

Companies in all sectors have introduced flexible working schemes, even in such sectors like hotels and restaurants, where it is important that staff are available for clients at non-standard working times. However, it is most widespread in such sectors as real estate and financial services, and least likely to be

Reasons for introducing flexitime

When asked, managers gave a number of reasons why flexitime systems were introduced in their organisations. Interestingly, the chief reason, cited by around 68% of managers, was to benefit workers – to enable employees to better combine work and family or personal life. Creating a system of working hours that is more

Figure 3: Reasons for introducing flexitime schemes (%)



Source: Eurofound, European Establishment Survey on Working Time and Work-Life Balance 2004

readily adapted to variations in the workload – albeit coming in at second place – was cited by just 47% of managers.

Both managers and employee representatives reported that flexitime brought concrete benefits to their organisations. For instance, over 60% of managers and over 70% of employee representatives felt that it resulted in greater job satisfaction; and around 50% of managers and over 65% of representatives believed it enabled the organisation to better adapt to variations in the workload.³ Both parties were less enthusiastic about the other benefits. Less than one third of both groups felt that implementing flexitime in their company had resulted in lower rates of absenteeism.

The findings show that the greater the leeway of the flexitime system applied in a company, the higher was the level of satisfaction on both sides.

Working time accounts

Flexitime schemes with the possibility to bank hours – so-called ‘working time accounts’ – are frequently considered to be a form of flexibility that can meet the interests of both employers and employees. For employers, the instrument opens up a broad range of flexibility in the management of all types of workload variations, enabling them to react quickly to changing market conditions. For employees, the benefits consist mainly of an increase in their time sovereignty and the possibility to improve their work-life balance.

However, working time accounts are generally still not commonly used. In the EU27, only 6% of companies offer such long-term time accounts.⁴ However, in Denmark, around 30% of all companies provide them for at least some of their workers. They are also more common in Sweden (with 18% of companies providing them), Finland (13%), Germany (12%) and

Austria (11%). In southern Europe and in most of the new Member States that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, on the other hand, long-term time accounts are seldom available.

However, even when a company’s flexitime scheme is open to all or most employees, this does not automatically mean that long-term accounts are also open to everybody. Moreover, while they offer the promise of great flexibility, there are potential risks for employees in the implementation of long-term working time accounts. Crucially, not all working time accounts are sufficiently secured against the risk of business failure. Should the company go out of business, employees lose both their job and the time credits accumulated through long periods of overtime hours, without any compensation. Even in countries where laws and rules have been drawn up for securing working time accounts, these are often not implemented.

Long-term working time accounts – especially those that operate over a number of years – are often designed to facilitate future arrangements such as longer periods of further training, leave in order to care for dependents, or early retirement. In economically difficult times, however, employees may be urged to use up the accumulated time credits, thereby rendering long-term life plans void.

And even where companies are not at risk, there is little possibility for workers who have built up time credits to transfer these credits to another company should they change their job.

Overtime

The most traditional company strategy for coping with temporary peaks in the workload has been the use of overtime, compensated for either by payment or by time off in lieu – in which case it might be viewed as a special case of flexible working time (the difference being that overtime is implemented at the request of the employer).

³ European Establishment Survey on Working Time and Work-Life Balance 2004.

⁴ European Company Survey 2009; only companies with 10 or more employees were included in the survey.



A little over two-thirds of companies in the EU27 use overtime, with around half of the workforce being involved in overtime work.⁵

However, this average conceals large differences between individual companies. In 26% of companies, 80% or more of the workforce is involved in overtime; conversely, in another 29% of companies, less than 20% of the workforce works overtime.

Overtime is most commonly used in France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, the Nordic countries and the UK. It tends to be less commonly used in southern Europe and in the central and eastern European NMS.

Overtime work is relatively evenly spread across the different sectors of the economy. Larger enterprises are slightly more likely to use overtime than smaller companies.

Payment for overtime

The single most common way of compensating for overtime work is by payment: just over one third (35%) of companies generally pay for overtime. Almost a quarter (23%) normally compensate for overtime with time off in lieu. However, more commonly, both time off and payment may be used, with 37% of companies using both mechanisms. This does not necessarily mean that employees can choose: usually, internal organisational rules dictate who is compensated for their overtime work by which method.

Countries differ in how their companies compensate for overtime work. In Germany, time off in lieu is the most common form of compensation, with nearly half of all companies offering only time off (46%). Time off is also commonly used in Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg and Romania. In most Mediterranean countries, time off is the least common form of compensation, only 3% of companies in Malta, 4% in Italy and 7% in Greece and Cyprus offering it as a general rule. In these countries, compensation solely in the

form of payment prevails. This is also the case in most central and eastern European Member States as well as in the UK.

Unpaid overtime

However, in a very small minority of companies (4%), overtime work is not compensated for at all. This occurs most commonly in the sectors of real estate and business activities (8% of companies do not compensate for overtime) and in education (7%). This is clearly the least favourable option from the perspective of the employee. However, for well-paid employees in higher positions, a certain amount of overtime is often taken for granted and covered in the basic salary. And, indeed, overtime hours are not compensated for in 9% of companies where 80% or more of the positions are high skilled. Companies not compensating for overtime hours were most frequently reported in the Netherlands (14% of companies) and Lithuania (11%).

In the services sector, compensation with time off is much more frequent than in manufacturing: 27% of companies offer time off in the services sector, but only 14% do so in manufacturing. Conversely, 46% of companies in manufacturing pay for overtime hours, while only 30% of services-sector companies do so.

Companies that offer working time accounts are – perhaps not surprisingly – much less likely to pay for overtime hours. Less than a quarter (22%) of all companies with time banking options pay for overtime; however, nearly half of those without such options (49%) do so. nonetheless, even in such companies, some combination of payment and time off is still the most frequent approach to compensating for overtime.

Part-time work

Part-time work is one of the most widely used forms of non-standard working in Europe. It is also a diverse form of work. While some workers may opt to work part time to assist in gaining a better work–life balance, for others it may

⁵ European Company Survey 2009.

be the result of a decision by their employer who needs to juggle staff costs and company revenue. A decision by either party, moreover, will affect the other. Furthermore, whether part-time working really does facilitate a better work-life balance depends to a large extent on the basis on which a part-time job is offered and how such work is structured in an organisation.

The extent of part-time working varies considerably between countries. Just over 50% of the Dutch workforce work part time (with more than 80% of female workers on part-time schedules).⁶ Part-time working is also more common in Belgium, Denmark, Ireland and the UK, where around 30% of the workforce work part time, with between 45% and 55% of women working part time. While nearly 27% of Europeans work part time, it is a predominantly female phenomenon: around 30% of women work part time compared with only 13% of men. Men are more likely to work part time in the Netherlands (25%) and Denmark (21%) than in other countries. However, across Europe, this is more likely to be the case only at the beginning of a man's career.

Most part-time work is carried out mainly in the sectors of education, health and social services, other services and retail and wholesale. On average, in these sectors taken together, more than 38% of the workforce work part time. Part-time work is also more likely to be carried out in particular occupations: by unskilled workers, service and sales workers, professionals and clerical workers.

Flexible part-time work

Part-time work normally takes the form of shorter days in a standard five-day working week: 78% of companies use this form.⁷ However, nearly half of all companies that employ part-time workers allow them to work according to another arrangement – for example, working some full days and taking other days off. While these forms of part-time work can be readily adapted

to the needs of employees, one common form of part-time work (used by 35% of companies) is flexible working hours that are fixed only a few days, or in some cases a few hours, in advance according to the company's needs. This is the least employee-friendly set-up, as it makes planning family and personal responsibilities difficult. Moreover, this part-time work form makes it very difficult to combine different part-time work arrangements with each other, an aspect which is especially important if a person works part time involuntarily due to not finding a full-time job and seeks to combine different part-time jobs in order to have a sufficient income. From the point of view of the employer, nonetheless, this form of part-time work offers the widest range of flexibility, since it allows the company to adapt the workforce at very short notice to the current workload.

Such flexible part-time work on demand is most frequently found in Malta (in 56% of companies with part-time workers), Ireland (53%), Latvia and the UK (both 48%) and Germany (47%). Such flexible hours are most likely to be demanded in the hotels and restaurants sector, where the workload is often determined by unforeseeable circumstances.

Some people work on a very part-time basis – fewer than 15 hours a week. These 'marginal' part-time jobs tend to be very poorly paid and require greater flexibility on the part of employees. In a number of countries – Germany, Ireland, Malta, the Netherlands and the UK – some or all part-time staff are employed on such a basis in more than 40% of companies (mostly in the education sector, in hotels and restaurants and in other services, such as personal services).

Impact on job security and career

As mentioned earlier, part-time work is often undertaken, particularly by women, to facilitate domestic arrangements and obtain a better work-life balance. And the findings show that part-time workers do feel that they have a better work-life balance. Between 91% and 93% of those working part time feel that they have a good or very good work-life balance, as against

⁶ Fifth European Working Conditions Survey 2010.

⁷ European Company Survey 2009.



80% of those who work more than 34 hours per week.⁸ Part-time workers are also in a better position to take an hour or so off work should an emergency arise in their private lives.

Currently, the bulk of unpaid domestic care is done by women, who have adapted their working practices to accommodate their domestic responsibilities – not least, by working part time in many instances in order to facilitate home life; women are also more likely to work predictable hours to allow them to attend to routine domestic duties. In contrast, men are more likely to work overtime and generally make themselves more available for the employer.

However, there are disadvantages associated with part-time work. Part-time workers are more likely than full-time workers to feel that their jobs are not secure. On average, 16% of workers in 2009–2010 strongly agreed with the statement ‘I might lose my job in the next six months’. However, 29% of those working fewer than 20 hours per week agreed with the statement.

Nor do part-time workers rate their career prospects highly. Around 35% of those who work more than 40 hours a week feel that their career prospects are good. By contrast, only 23% of those who work fewer than 20 hours per week feel the same. It should be noted that women, regardless of their full-time or part-time status, always rate their career prospects less highly than do men.

These feelings of poorer career prospects among part-time workers would appear to be supported by an earlier Eurofound survey of company practices. When asked if part-time and full-time workers enjoyed the same career prospects, a high proportion of respondents (27% of managers and 40% of employee representatives on average) reported ‘slightly worse’, and even ‘significantly worse’, promotion prospects for part-time workers in all countries.⁹ The survey also found it could be difficult for part-time

workers to transfer to a full-time job: nearly 50% of managers and employee representatives surveyed said that such a transition would be possible ‘only exceptionally’, or that there would be ‘almost no chance’ of it.

Level of qualifications

Other Eurofound research has found that companies generally do not employ part-time workers in highly qualified positions or in supervisory roles. Three-quarters of companies in Europe have no part-time workers in positions that demand high levels of qualifications or managerial experience. However, in the Netherlands, over half of Dutch companies have part-time workers in such roles, the highest rate in the EU.¹⁰

Part-time workers in highly qualified or supervisory positions are most likely to be working in the sectors of health and social work, other community, social and personal services, and education. All three sectors are characterised by predominantly female workforces and have a substantial proportion of highly skilled employees in the workforce; therefore, the result is not that surprising.

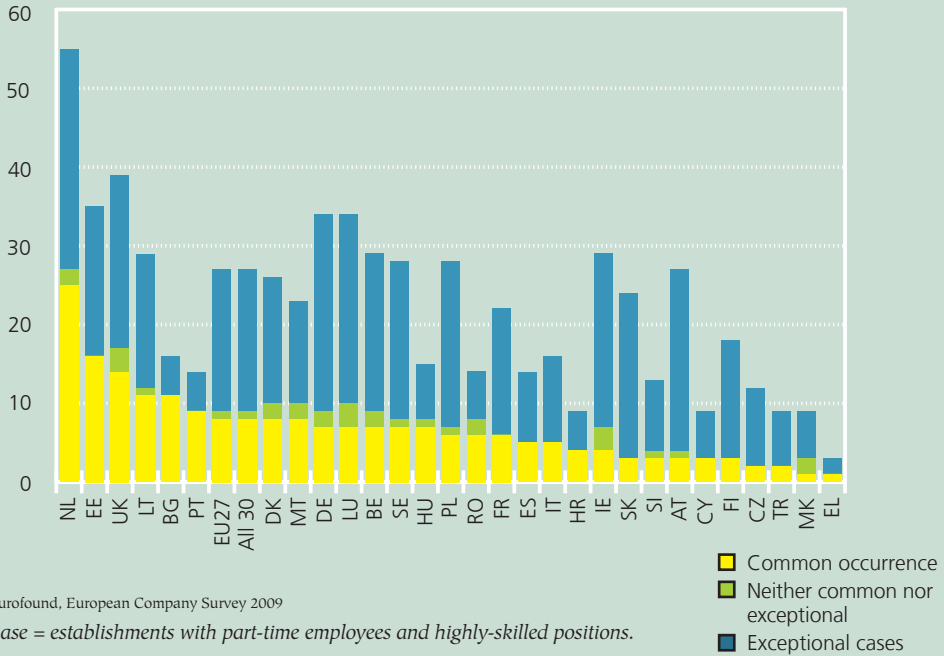
Figure 4 (on p.14) reveals the pronounced differences between countries. In the Netherlands, part-time workers in highly qualified positions are much more frequently found than in all other countries, with 54% of the Dutch companies with part-time workers and highly skilled jobs commonly employing such workers in highly qualified positions or in a supervisory role.

⁸ Fifth European Working Conditions Survey 2010.

⁹ Eurofound’s European Survey on Working Time and Work-Life Balance 2004.

¹⁰ See European Company Survey 2009 – Overview.

Figure 4: Prevalence of part-time workers in highly qualified positions, by country (%)



Source: Eurofound, European Company Survey 2009

Note: Base = establishments with part-time employees and highly-skilled positions.

Long working hours

While its prevalence has decreased steadily since 2000, working long hours is still quite common across Europe. On average, 43% of self-employed workers (without any employees under them) work more than 48 hours a week.¹¹ For those who have employees reporting to them, the proportion is even higher: 54%. By contrast, only 11% of European employees – on average – work long hours each week. Across Europe, there is a huge variation between countries. In Turkey, where agricultural work is still an important element of the economy, more than 60% of agricultural workers work over 48 hours per week and 36% in Romania. In contrast, the corresponding figure for Finland is 9%.

Interestingly, despite the debate that has taken place in the UK regarding the opt-out from the working time directive’s provisions on long working hours, workers in the UK do not work the longest hours.

More men than women work long hours: while on average, more than 20% of workers work long hours in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Greece and Slovakia, this figure rises to 30% in the case of men. The disparity is even more evident when the EU is looked at as a whole: in the EU27, 18% of men work long hours, compared with 8% of women.

While working long hours is more common among men, in some countries women are subject to them too. In Greece and Romania, more than 30% of women work more than 48 hours a week.

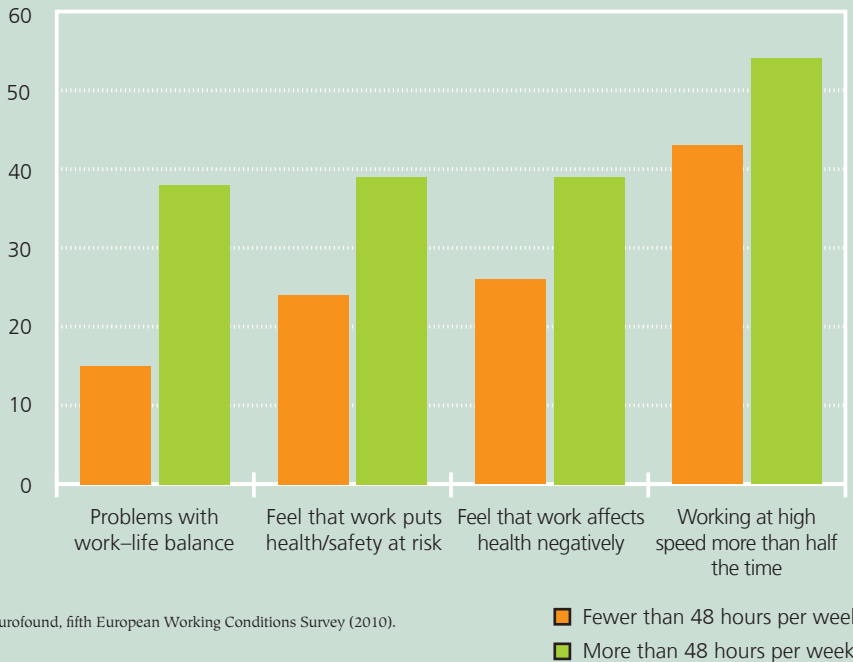
Long hours are more commonly worked in manufacturing than in services. In 2010, in the EU27, 20% of the manufacturing workforce worked more than 48 hours a week. The figure for the services sectors was 15%. The findings show that people who work long hours have more problems in terms of work–life balance and health (Figure 5).

For instance, while only 15% of those who do not work long hours have problems with their work–life balance, 38% of those who work long hours do. And,

¹¹ Fifth European Working Conditions Survey 2010.



Figure 5: Perceived impact of long working hours (%)



Source: Eurofound, fifth European Working Conditions Survey (2010).

Interestingly, working long hours does not seem to solve the problem of work intensity: those who work long hours also work at high speed more frequently than those who do not work such long hours.

Nor does working long hours seem to address the issue of people working outside working hours in order to meet work demands. Over the last 20 years, this has become more common – not least because of the increased use of information technology. And it is those workers who work long hours who are more likely to do this: nearly 40% of those who work 48 hours or more per week work nearly every day of their free time. By contrast, only 11% of those whose working week is less than 48 hours do so. For some workers, work essentially has no boundaries.

Regular and irregular working hours

Most workers work a standard working week: five days a week, approximately seven to eight hours per day. Among European workers, 58% work the same number of hours per day, while 67% work the same number of hours per week – figures essentially

unchanged since 2000.¹² Not surprisingly, it is easier for those who are employed by others to keep regular hours: 63% of employees do so, as against only around 30% of self-employed workers.

However, a considerable proportion of people work outside the ‘normal’ schedule of nine to five, Monday to Friday – on so-called ‘atypical’ schedules. For instance, half the European workforce works at least one Saturday per month, with 23% working at least three Saturdays a month. About 18% work at least one night per week. Around 17% of (mainly younger) workers do shift work, while 21% work on call. On-call work is carried out mainly in the transport sector (affecting 30% of such workers), in construction (27%), public administration and defence (24%), health (25%) and agriculture (23%).¹³

There is considerable variation across countries in terms of work outside regular hours. Working at night, for instance, is most common in the Czech

¹² Fifth European Working Conditions Survey 2010.

¹³ Fifth European Working Conditions Survey 2010.

Republic, where 26% of the workforce work at least one night a month, and least common in Cyprus, where just 10% do so.

Greater regularity in working life can suit workers who seek to balance the demands of home, family and workplace: 84% of those who work regular hours say that their hours fit in well with their family and social commitments (as against 71% of those who work irregular hours). Interestingly, while 30% of those who work irregular hours feel that work is having an adverse effect on their health, only 24% of those with regular hours think so. Shift workers on rotating shifts are particularly likely to feel that work is impacting on their health. Women, who tend to play a greater role in running the household, are more likely to have fixed finishing and starting times than men (68% of women start and end work at the same time each day, as against 58% of men). They are also more likely to work the same number of hours per day, and the same number of days per week.

Predictability of one's schedule is another key element in a satisfactory work–life balance. While a majority of workers (65%) have no changes in their work schedule, a small minority of workers (less than 10%) discover that their schedule has changed only the day before. Of these workers, 30% report problems with their work–life balance. In contrast, only 21% of workers who find out about changes to their schedule several weeks in advance have work–life balance problems.

Clearly, the area of work that one is engaged in has a huge impact on whether working at unusual hours is required.¹⁴ Weekend work and night work are very common in the hotels and restaurants sector, and in health and social work; shift work is also more common in these sectors than in any other. In these sectors, the nature of the work often requires that a service be provided around the clock, not just to boost competitiveness or

¹⁴ This discussion of the prevalence of unusual working hours from a sectoral perspective comes from Eurofound's European Company Survey 2009. Rather than asking workers whether they engaged in night work, this survey asked company management and employee representatives whether staff in their establishment worked at night.

cope with workload peaks, but in large part to maintain essential services such as healthcare or the provision of hotel services on a 24-hour basis.

Unpaid work and composite working time

Normally, working time is seen as being the time spent in one's main paid job. However, for many or most people, that is only part of the story. For instance, a small proportion of the workforce has a second job, which greatly increases the proportion of the hours that they spend working. Many people have to commute to get to their place of work – on average around 40 minutes per day, in itself a chore. And, most importantly, a huge amount of unpaid work is done in the private sphere, which adds to a person's workload. Taking care of children, the house, and other relatives all take time. And it is predominantly women who spend more time doing unpaid work, as Figure 6 indicates. What is striking about the figures is that even women who work full time still do more unpaid work than men who work part time. Part-time work is often presented as a family-friendly measure to help workers balance their domestic and professional lives. However, as the figure indicates, women who work part time do much more unpaid work than their male equivalents; clearly there are differences in how men and women spend the time they save when they work part time. Moreover, women working part time work nearly as many hours in total, all things considered, as men who work full time. The average woman working part time works 55 hours per week – the average man, 56. And women who work full time have a total working week that is 66 hours in length, on average.

Work–life balance

Work–life balance continues to be a key element of the European debate, with the European employment strategy highlighting, for instance, its importance in facilitating individuals' entering and remaining in the workforce and its potential for achieving greater gender equality.¹⁵ A rise in the number of households in which both partners work

¹⁵ The data on this discussion of work–life balance is taken from the fifth European Working Conditions Survey.



has shifted work–life balance higher up the agenda, this being reflected also in the organisation of the workplace. Overall, 18% of workers in the EU27 are not satisfied with their work–life balance, a marginal decrease since 2000. Men are most likely to experience problems with their work–life balance in the middle of their careers (between the ages of 30 and 49). Women, while less likely to experience dissatisfaction overall, do so on a constant, ongoing basis over the course of their careers. Given that women still do most household and caring work, it may seem somewhat surprising that their sense of an adequate work–life balance is better than that of men. However, many more women than men tailor their working lives to adapt to these domestic demands – by working part time or working regular hours for instance – and so may reduce the conflict they experience from two opposing sets of demands. Not surprisingly, having children or other relatives in the household makes achieving a satisfactory work-life balance more difficult.

Working time preferences

More than half of all European workers are happy to continue working the same hours they currently do.¹⁶ However, nearly one third would like to work fewer hours; only a small minority (14%) would like to work more. However, this perspective changes

¹⁶ Fifth European Working Conditions Survey 2010

dramatically among those who work long hours: 65% of those who work more than 48 hours per week would like to work less.

The findings show that there are striking differences between countries. Turkey has some of the longest working hours of all countries; it is also the country in which most workers would like to reduce their working hours, around 60% expressing this desire. However, Sweden, with much shorter working hours, comes second in terms of countries where people would like to work less.

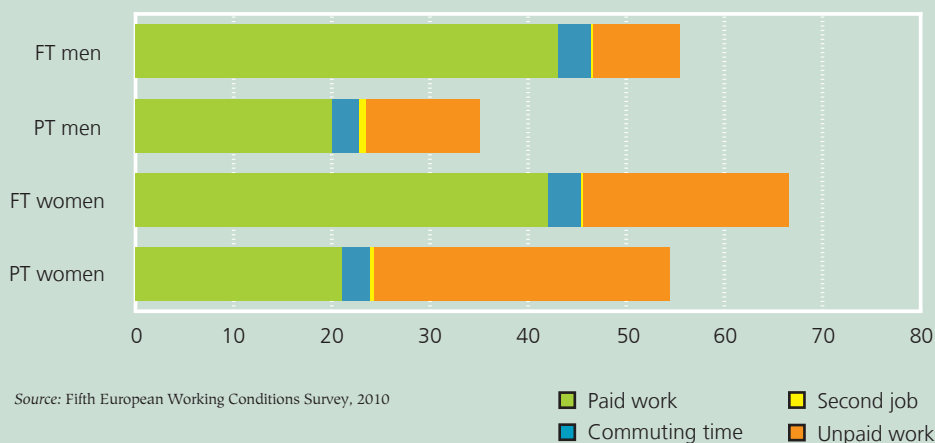
Latvia, Lithuania and Ireland are among the leading countries in which people express the desire to work more; interestingly, they are also the countries in which most workers saw their working hours cut in response to the recession (See section below).

People who work long hours would like to work less: 65% of those who work 48 hours a week or more would like to work less, as against only 7 % of those who work 20 hours or fewer per week. And of these short part-time workers, 43% would like to work more.

Impact of the recession

The recession has had a substantial impact upon working time. While some workers have been laid off, others have experienced an increase in their working hours, in part due to their being required

Figure 6: Composite working hours for men and women, by full/part-time status (%)



Source: Fifth European Working Conditions Survey, 2010

to cover for their colleagues who were made redundant. Other workers had their working hours cut in so-called 'short-time' working schemes.

In most countries, a high proportion of workers who held on to their jobs saw their working week get longer. However, the reverse was the case in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Ireland – countries that have been deeply affected by the recession – where between 17% and 24% of workers had their working hours reduced.

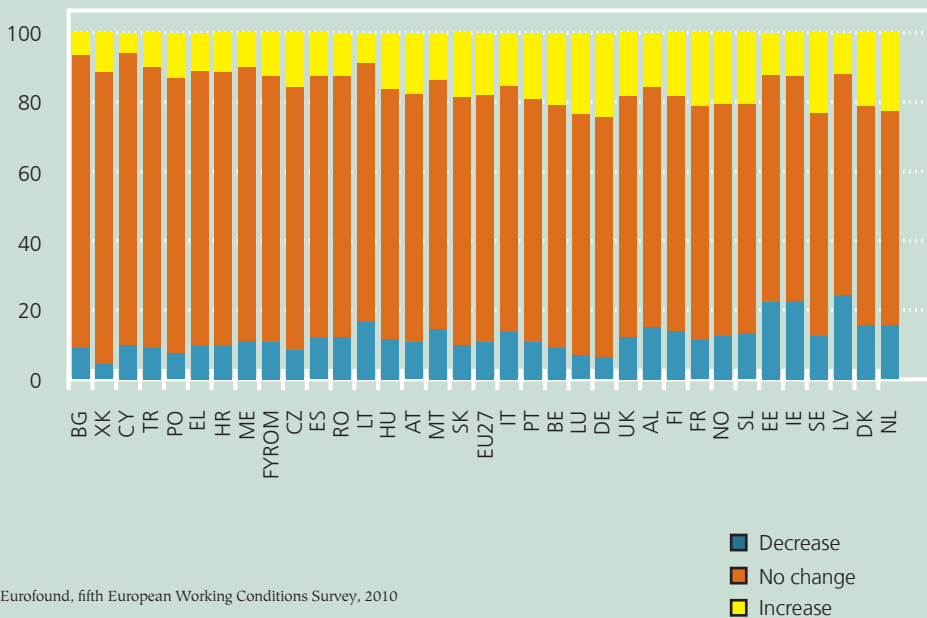
EU employment targets have been dented in the last three years, as recession has resulted in mass job loss. However, in some cases jobs have been retained – at least in the medium term – by adopting or extending short-time working schemes and making use of working time accounts. In the current economic crisis, many companies are using the accumulated hours in the working time accounts as a buffer for coping with – often substantially – reduced order volumes.

Short-time working schemes seek to compensate workers for reduced income due to lower working hours, thereby providing the employers with greater flexibility (not having to pay workers their full wage, while retaining access to skilled labour) and giving workers security both in terms of their income and their job. Such schemes have been widely seen as successful in mitigating the worst effects of the recession.

It is important to emphasise that there are many other means by which working time can be reduced. Other approaches that have been used include production stops, obligations to take annual leave, shorter working weeks or days, enhanced use of working time accounts, leave rotation and sabbaticals.

Various forms of working time reduction were implemented in particular in Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Sweden and the UK. Between 2008 and 2009, the number of workers on short-time

Figure 7: Changes in length of working week, January 2009–June 2010, by country (%)



Source: Eurofound, fifth European Working Conditions Survey, 2010



schemes (not necessarily publicly subsidised) tripled to almost two million – 55% of these were in Germany and Italy. Such workers are generally men working in blue-collar occupations in manufacturing, who have lower levels of education.

Short-time working schemes vary greatly: they may cut working time by between 10% and 100%, and compensate for between 55% and 80% of the foregone pay. The degree to which training is provided during newly available free time also varies considerably, as does the extent to which social security contributions are maintained.

Regulation of working time

Collective agreements set the duration of the working week and the conditions pertaining to it for around three quarters of the European workforce. In some of the new Member States that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, it does so to a lesser (and sometimes negligible) extent.¹⁷ Bargaining may take place at different levels (intersectoral, sectoral, company, etc.) and bargaining coverage can vary considerably between countries. Bargaining is also more important in some sectors and for some groups of workers than others. And the relative influence and relationship between bargaining and working time legislation vary considerably between countries.

In most countries, the average collectively agreed normal weekly hours in 2010 were identical to those in 2009: Slovakia was the only country where a shorter working week was agreed (a reduction of just 0.1 hours).¹⁸ In Spain, Sweden and the UK, the agreed weekly hours rose, but by just 0.1 hours per week in Sweden and 0.2 hours per week in Spain and the UK. France remains the country with the shortest average collectively agreed working week – 35.6 hours – as a result of the 2000 Aubry Law, which put in place a statutory working week of 35 hours. The Nordic countries, together with Netherlands and the UK with agreed working weeks of 37.5 hours, have also agreed working weeks shorter than the EU15 average of 37.6 hours.

¹⁷ Data in this section is taken from Working time developments – 2010.

¹⁸ This refers to the collectively agreed weekly hours for single-shift work in Slovakia.

Other factors play a role in determining the amount of time people spend in work in any given country. There are also statutory limits on weekly and daily working time, and the annual leave entitlement, determined by both collective agreements and legislation. Moreover, the actual hours worked on average may differ from what has been set down in agreements.¹⁹ For instance, the actual working week of full-time employees was longer than the average normal collectively agreed working week in almost all EU Member States in 2010. This effectively reverses the trend, evident since 2006, of a narrowing gap between actual and collectively agreed working hours. In the EU27 as a whole, the actual working week was 39.7 hours in 2010, 1.7 hours longer than the agreed working week. The longest actual working week for full-time employees in their main jobs in 2010 was in Romania (41.3 hours); the shortest was in Finland (37.8 hours). This was 3.5 hours less than in Romania, giving Romanians a working week that was 9.24% longer. And in 2010, the actual weekly hours of male employees working full time in their main jobs continued to exceed those of their female counterparts in all countries considered.

An important factor in the overall duration of working time is the amount of paid annual leave to which workers are entitled. Agreed annual leave entitlement varies from 30 days in Denmark and Germany to 20 days in Estonia. The amount of time off available to workers also depends on the number of public holidays in a country. A better idea of the de facto leave entitlement can be had by calculating the sum of a country's leave entitlement and its public holidays. The combined total of agreed annual leave and public holidays varied across the EU in 2010 from 40 days in Germany and Denmark to 27 days in Romania – a difference that equates to around two-and-a-half working weeks.

¹⁹ A further point to note is that reliable comparisons of working time in different countries can be problematic. For instance, comparable data are not collected in all countries; in some countries, working time is calculated on annual, rather than a weekly, basis; working time has been reduced in some countries through days off or cuts in annual hours, leaving the normal working week relatively unchanged; and weekly hours may vary considerably, with an average being maintained over a reference period.

➔ Policy pointers



Gender equality

➔ The fact that so many women work part time has substantial implications for their current income and future material prosperity: a lower income translates into lower social security contributions and a lower eventual pension pay-out. A better balance between working time and private life might benefit both men and women. The bulk of domestic work is still done by women, which in part encourages many women to take part-time employment. An improved infrastructure (in the form of childcare facilities and afterschool care, for instance) could help facilitate the entry of more women into full-time employment, if so desired, and where available. Given the growth in part-time employment, encouraging more men into part-time work could be a practical option, particularly where it takes the form of a four-day week of full working days; this may promote the image of part-time work as a viable career option. Other practices could include also flexible working, emergency leave and such social security measures as the Belgian example of funded childcare for a sick child after the second day of illness. In addition, for both men and women, working time accounts could help balance

time needs over the life course, granting more free time during the childrearing years, for instance, and an extended period of employment later in the working life.

Part-time work

➔ As indicated above, there is a strong gender dimension to part-time work. However, the quality of part-time work is still a matter of concern. Survey findings such as the high proportion of companies with marginal part-time work and the low incidence of companies having part-time workers working in highly skilled positions or supervisory roles, for example, suggest that the quality of part-time work is not always equal to that of full-time work. Moreover, the negative perceptions regarding the career impacts of part-time work are worrying given the widespread nature of part-time work and the government policies in many countries to encourage it. Policymakers should aim to reduce the highlighted differences in working conditions between part-time workers and full-time workers, and examine ways in which companies have successfully recruited part-time staff to highly qualified positions. Crucially, disparities in access to training should be reduced.



Overtime

- From both a flexibility and work–life balance perspective, overtime hours compensated for by time off differ substantially from overtime hours compensated for by payment. Employees who are compensated by time off do not, in the long run, work more hours, whereas those who are paid do. For the employer, the practice of compensating overtime hours with time off has clear advantages: if the time off is taken in periods of low workloads during which otherwise ‘idle’ hours would have to be paid for, the overtime hours do not lead to any additional costs. In terms of work–life balance, furthermore, this form of overtime tends to be more favourable than paid overtime. However, the possibilities for employees to decide on when to work overtime and when to take time off are likely to be much more limited than in working time account systems with established rules. In addition, for some groups of workers – especially those whose basic salaries are very low – overtime payments might be an essential part of their income and thus be their preferred form of compensation.

Short-time working schemes

- The wider use of short-time working schemes across Europe during the recession has helped preserve jobs in the face of dampened demand, and also encouraged training. However, Eurofound research argues that such schemes can be something more, not least in terms of addressing some of the structural problems facing the European Union. Publicly subsidised short-time working schemes are a good example of how the costs of labour market adjustment can be more widely shared between business, the state and workers. Real consensus on these schemes has been achieved among many social partners in Europe; this consensus could be harnessed to develop these schemes further towards a more active policy orientation, so that they become an extension of the flexicurity concept and be used to generate new skills to boost employment and further the goals of the European 2020 Strategy.

Flexible working practices

- Given the consensus that seems to exist at company level in Europe on the part of both management and employee representatives, it would seem that encouraging wider use of such practices in countries and sectors where they are used less is desirable, as well promoting a greater extent of flexibility in existing schemes. As noted earlier, the greater the leeway of the scheme offered, the greater is the satisfaction on both management and employee representative sides. Working time accounts have the potential to offer huge flexibility to both employers and employees. However, the risks attached to such schemes need to be addressed if their benefits are to be made more widely available.

Working time and work–life balance

- While working time flexibility appears to be viewed favourably by many parties, there is less consensus in terms of the duration of working time and its regularity and predictability. The debates over the issue of working long hours in the Working Time Directive highlight the difficulties inherent in reaching a compromise on this topic, despite the evidence that emerges regarding its undesirable effects on work–life balance and perceived health impacts. The difficulty is also apparent when the role of non-standard working time in the European economy is examined: shift work, night and weekend work are all essential in many sectors; also unavoidable is the need for employers to require changes of schedule at short notice. Again, however, the unfavourable opinion of European workers regarding such irregular hours is clear.

Related Eurofound publications

Changes over time – First findings from the fifth European Working Conditions Survey: Résumé
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1074.htm>

European Company Survey 2009 – Overview
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2010/05/en/1/EF1005EN.pdf>

European Establishment Survey on Working Time and Work–Life Balance 2004
Overview: Working time and work–life balance in European companies
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef0627.htm>

Fifteen years of working conditions in the EU: charting the trends
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2006/85/en/1/ef0685en.pdf>

Fourth European Working Conditions Survey 2005
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef0698.htm>

Working time developments – 2010 (European Industrial Relations Observatory)
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/studies/tn1106010s/tn1106010s.htm>

All Eurofound publications are available on the Eurofound website: www.eurofound.europa.eu



Country codes and groups

Country codes	EC12 (1991)	EU15 (1995–2004)	NMS (2004–2007)	Country codes
FR	France	France	Bulgaria	BG
DE	Germany	Germany	Cyprus	CY
UK	United Kingdom	United Kingdom	Czech Republic	CZ
NL	Netherlands	Netherlands	Estonia	EE
IE	Ireland	Ireland	Hungary	HU
IT	Italy	Italy	Latvia	LV
BE	Belgium	Belgium	Lithuania	LT
LU	Luxembourg	Luxembourg	Malta	MT
DK	Denmark	Denmark	Poland	PL
EL	Greece	Greece	Romania	RO
PT	Portugal	Portugal	Slovakia	SK
ES	Spain	Spain	Slovenia	SI
AT		Austria		
FI		Finland		
SE		Sweden		

Candidate countries	
ME	Montenegro
HR	Croatia
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic Of Macedonia
TR	Turkey
Other	
AL	Albania
XK	Kosovo
NO	Norway
CH	Switzerland

'A revised Working Time Directive will be instrumental for improving working conditions and providing businesses and employees with the necessary flexibility for implementing innovative and balanced solutions at the workplace. Further legislative action is necessary in order to shape the EU rules to changing working time patterns while respecting their objective of protecting workers' health and safety, and to clarify critical issues of interpretation.'

**European Commission: Communication COM (2010) 801:
'Reviewing the Working Time Directive (second-phase
consultation) of the social partners at European level',
21 December 2010**

Foundation Findings provide pertinent background information and policy pointers for all actors and interested parties engaged in the current European debate on the future of social policy. The contents are based on Foundation research and reflect its autonomous and tripartite structure.



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