

FACT SHEET

TRENDS IN WORKING TIME



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OVERALL TRENDS IN WORKING TIME

A trend to reduced working hours

- » The overall trend in the last decade has been towards reduced working hours. . In 2010, the average collectively agreed weekly working time in the EU27 stood at 37.5 hours, a reduction from an average of 40.5 hours in 1991 (for the EU12).
- » Workers in the former EU15 countries and Norway continue to work 1.1 hours a week less than workers in the new Member States.
- » Permanent working time reductions without loss of pay has not featured significantly in bargaining in any country in the last three years, continuing the trend of recent years and also as a result of the current economic recession in Europe.
- » The economic crisis has led to an increase in part-time work and a significant fall in the average number of weekly working hours.
- » Up to 2008 there had been a slight increase in entitlements to annual paid leave; however, this trend is now being reversed.

- » While most countries have set in legislation a 48 hours maximum working week in line with the EU Working Time Directive, some have a lower limit of 40 hours, or in the case of Belgium a limit of 38 hours. In practice, working hours tend to be shorter because of collectively agreed reductions in working hours.
- » There is an increasing diversity of working time arrangements across Europe, resulting from an increase in part-time work and flexible working schedules.

A reduction in long working hours and an increase in shorter working hours

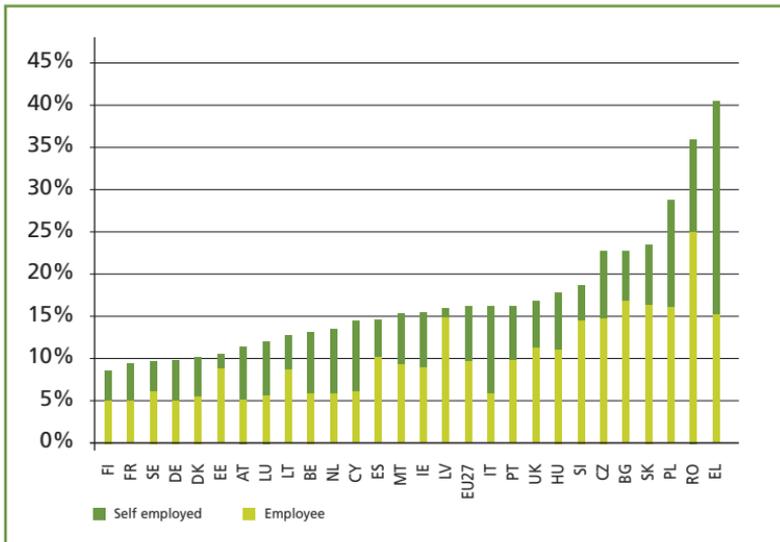
- » There has been a corresponding reduction in long working hours, of over 48 hours a week and an increase of shorter working hours (fewer than 20 hours per week) In 2005 15% of the workforce was working long working hours (of over 48 hours a week) and this declined to 12% in 2010. The trend to shorter working hours has resulted in a near doubling of shorter working hours, with 8% of the workforce in the EU12 working short hours, which rose to 14% of the EU12 in 2010, and to 13% for the EU27.

- » Long working hours are more likely to be experienced by men in the workforce; 18% of men and 8% of women worked long hours in 2010. Long working hours are more likely to be found in the manufacturing than in the service sector (with 20% of workers in manufacturing working longer than 48 hours in 2010, compared to 10% of workers in services). 42% of self-employed people report working more than 48 hours a week in the EU27.

- » Table 1 shows the variation in the extent of long working hours across the Member States. Finland has the lowest number of self-employed and employed people working long hours, while the largest number can be found in Poland, Romania and Greece.

- » People working more than 48 hours or more a week reported more significant problems with work-life balance (38%, compared to 16% of those working less than 48 hours a week). Similarly 37% of those working 48 hours or more reported that work had a negative impact on their health, compared to 23% working less than 48 hours a week. Work intensity was also higher for people working longer hours.

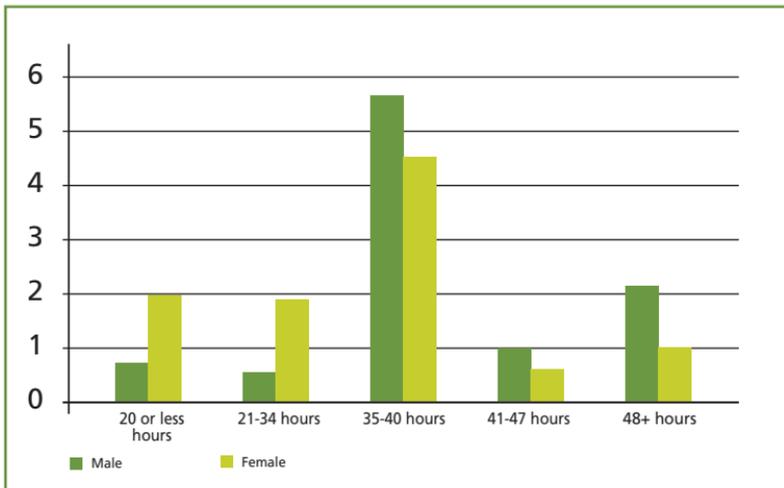
Table 1: Percentage of self-employed and employees working more than 48 hours a week (European Working Conditions Survey, 2010)



- » In 1991 8% of the workforce worked fewer than 20 hours; by 2010 this had risen to 14%. Much of this trend to shorter working hours is explained by increased employment rates of women, many of whom work part-time.
- » 20% of women in employment, compared to 7% of men, worked part-time in 2010.

» Table 2 shows the hours worked by women and men. Overall men work an average of seven hours a week more than women. There are significant variations between Member States with regards to levels of part-time work, and particularly the extent to which part-time work is voluntary or not.

Table 2: Working hours - percentage of women and men (European Working Conditions Survey, 2010)



- » In the last two years there has been an increase in shorter working hours as a direct result of the current recession, with agrowth of company and/or state sponsored short working time schemes (see below).

- » Despite an increase in flexible and 'non-standard' working hours, the majority of workers in the EU27 continue to work standard hours. 67% of workers work the same number of hours a week and 58% worked the same number of hours a day; 77% of workers work the same days and week, while 61% start and finish at the same time every day. These proportions have remained relatively unchanged since 2000.

- » However, there is a significant number of workers who work non-standard hours, with 16% working long days at least five times a month; 17% working shift work; 20% work on-call; and 53% work at the weekend at least once a month. While there has been an overall small reduction in the number of workers working shift work and night work, there has been a small increase in the numbers working at least one Sunday per month.

Work-life balance

- » Workers today are more concerned about their work-life balance, reflecting a trend of dual-earning households. Overall, 18% of workers in the EU27 are not satisfied with their work-life balance. Women are more likely to adapt their working hours, for instance, by working part-time to balance work and family responsibilities. However, this is less evident for men.
- » Working time is a key issue facing an ageing workforce and will continue to do so as retirement ages are extended. Fewer workers today take early retirement. In addition around 60% of workers in the EU27 believe that would not be able to carry out their current job when they reach the age of 60. Many older workers express a preference to work shorter hours.

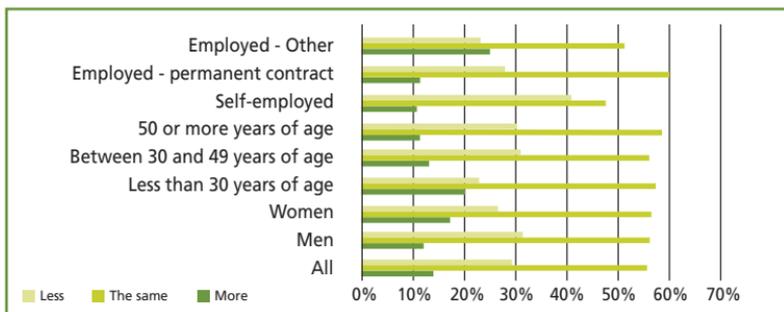
Work intensity

- » More workers today are experiencing more intensive and stressful working conditions, which have a negative impact on their health and well-being. However, there is a decline in the numbers of workers who feel that their working environment poses risks for their health and safety.

Working time preferences

- » The 2010 EWCS found that workers are generally satisfied with their current working time.
- » However, as Table 3 shows there are a not insignificant number of workers who would like to work fewer hours and a smaller number who would like to work longer hours. Combined together this does suggest that many workers work hours that are not their preference, with slightly more women than men wanting to work more hours and more men than women wanting to work fewer hours.

Table 3: Working time preferences of different groups of workers (European Working Conditions Survey, 2010)



WORKING TIME TRENDS AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The goal of reduced working time has been a core trade union demand. Trade unions believe that reduced working time not only improves the health, safety and well-being of workers, but it can act as a lever for employment creation, and for the improved work-life balance and time sovereignty of workers.

Collective bargaining on working time is affected by national legislation and the structure of collective bargaining, which exists at several different levels - inter-sectoral, sectoral or company levels. While collective bargaining remains the main method for determining working hours, this is less the case in the newer Member States. Overall collective bargaining on working time addresses three main issues. First, is the length of the working week or year; second is the introduction of working time flexibility; and third is the length of working life established through retirement ages and early retirement regulations.

Trade unions are approaching working time in different ways. For example, the fight for a 35-hour week was a core union goal in France and Germany. Working time reductions were negotiated as an integral part of employment policy in France and Germany in the last decade. However, the extension of both the working week and of the retirement age have become core policy objectives of both governments. In contrast unions in countries like Sweden have explicitly sought to improve the reconciliation

of work and family/private life, while in the UK work-life balance and flexible working hours have predominated.

In the last few years there have been a number of notable developments in collective bargaining resulting from the economic downturn, which have impacted on working time. Some of these concern statutory provisions and/or collective agreements on short time work (STW), as well as enforced reductions in working hours or short-term leave policies.

WORKING TIME AS A TOOL FOR EMPLOYMENT SECURITY: SHORT TIME WORK

Five million fewer people were in employment in the first quarter of 2010, compared to mid-2008 when the economic crisis began to hit Europe. Significant job losses have taken place in construction, manufacturing, transport, retail, health and education.

Since the onset of the economic downturn in Europe there has been a significant increase in short-time work (STW), either through statutory schemes and/or social partner agreements which have the effect of compensating employees for some of their loss of earnings that arise from reduced working time. Trade unions have played a key role in avoiding a significant increase in unemployment arising from the recession, by negotiating for short-term working and agreements on employment security. Several Member States using working time flexibility, for example, through working time accounts, reducing overtime and increasing income support for work-sharing as a method to maintain employment levels.

Kurzarbeit, or short time work in Germany has been introduced through collective agreements to avoid job losses by reducing the working hours of all or most of their employees, while the government makes up some of the employees' lost income. In some cases employees can undergo training programmes during their extra time off. The short-term working allowance scheme has been extended in order to reduce unemployment

as a result of the current economic crisis. The scheme is now of a longer duration, includes new groups of workers, and has a stronger training component. The short time working schemes follow on from successful examples of work-sharing introduced in Germany in the 1990s; for example, in VW a reduction in working time saved over 30,000 jobs. In 2009, the budget for these schemes amounted to €5.1 billion, which replaced the lost income of over 1.4 million workers, and saving nearly 500,000 jobs during the recession.

Examples of short time working arrangements

Austria, Belgium, France and Sweden have strengthened their short-time working schemes to avoid temporary lay-offs, while Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovenia have recently introduced new schemes for this purpose. In Austria, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands these provisions have been implemented through sectoral and local collective agreements. In Austria, for example, the schemes are organised through collective bargaining that cover the terms of the staff, the maximum period of its application, the conditions for any lay-offs, and professional training or re-training courses.

In some countries where collective bargaining takes place at enterprise level, short-time working has been implemented through collective agreements. For

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example, in Bulgaria, Hungary and Poland collective agreements on short-time work have been agreed in large and multinational companies.

In Slovenia, the provision of wage subsidies for cuts in full-time working requires a collective agreement at company level.

In Italy, the use of resources from the so-called 'Wage Guarantee Funds', which provide for the reduction of working time or the temporary total suspension of activity by compensating workers for losses in income resulting from cuts in working hours, presupposes a collective agreement at the company or plant level. In some sectors – such as the financial sector – agreements on the reduction of working time and other employment-related issues (such as early retirement and training) have been re-negotiated in order to address the employment effects of the crisis.

In Sweden, agreements on temporary lay-offs concluded for blue-collar workers in the manufacturing sectors and a similar agreement

From: ETUI policy brief, Collective Bargaining Responses to the Economic Crisis, 2010.

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