



Right to influence working time

What is the right to influence working time?

Workers are increasingly able to influence the schedule of their working hours. Meanwhile, working time organization in many firms is becoming more and more task-oriented. New working time arrangements, including flexitime, time banking and staggered

hours schemes, allow for a wide range of working time distribution possibilities and can be designed to allow workers a high degree of influence over the beginning and end of their working days, as well as the length of their weekly and monthly working hours.

Worker influence: The legal frameworks

Bargaining over working time issues at the firm level (see Information Sheet No. WT-7 on negotiating working time) can enhance the opportunities available to individuals to influence their working time patterns. It can be used to introduce working time schemes that allow employees to set their own working times according to their individual preferences, including flexitime and time banking schemes (see Information Sheet No. WT-3) and staggered hours

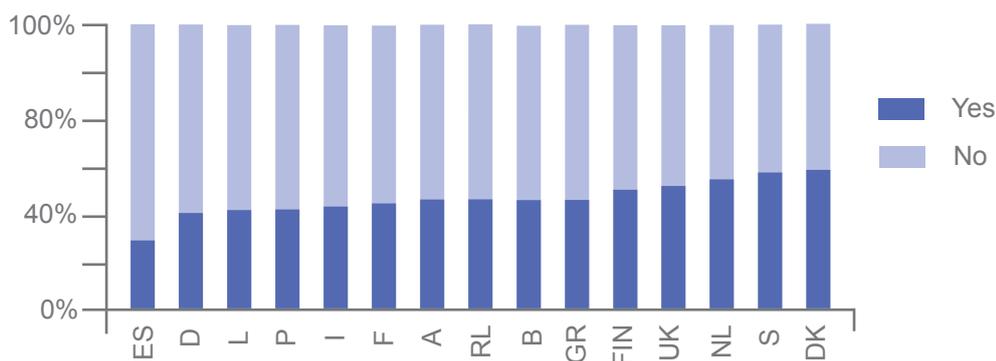
schemes (see Information Sheet No. WT-9). In addition, in Germany and the Netherlands, legislation extends a right to full-time employees to shift to a part-time job, and vice-versa. In the Netherlands, for example, the Act on the Adaptation of Working Time 2000 — the first national law to grant workers a right to change their working time — was introduced with the primary goal of promoting a redistribution of paid and household labour between women and men.

To what extent can employees influence their working hours?

As part of the Third European Survey on Working Conditions, employees in the European Union and Norway were asked whether they can influence their working times. Almost half of the interviewed workers (44 per cent) stated that they can exercise this kind of

influence. The chart below reveals that the highest proportion of workers who have an influence over their working hours are found in Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Workers' answers to the question "Can you influence your working hours?"



Source: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions: *Third European Survey on Working Conditions* (Dublin, 2002).

Advantages and disadvantages

The introduction of an individual right to influence working time can be, for employers, a guarantee of good relations with their employees. They can also make the organization of working time more task-oriented, allowing unproductive times to be avoided. Moreover, worker influence over working hours can lead to higher productivity: the more influence workers have over their working hours, the better they will feel at their workplace and the better they will be able to respond to their companies' needs.

The advantage for workers of being able to influence their working hours is that they have more control over their work. They can therefore be more motivated and less stressed. Workers are also facilitated in balancing their paid work with their non-work responsibilities, including their family and domestic obligations.

Nevertheless, increased influence over working time can also present some drawbacks. From the employees' perspective, there is a risk of work intensification; from the employer's perspective, a loss of supervision or control over working hours may ultimately require more administrative work and incur additional costs.

Case example

Henriette Swellengrebel is a residential home for the elderly in the Netherlands. All its employees, both nurses and support staff, can choose the working time arrangements they want. Together, the employees, who are mainly women, are responsible for the working time schedule of their team. There are three shifts: a day shift, an evening shift and a night shift. Each shift is worked by several teams, which ensures that sufficient staff are available to work night shifts. Under this working time structure, hours of work can vary from a six-hour week, or three night shifts a month, to a full-time contract for a 36-hour week. Employees can change their working-time arrangements at any time, for example when they move to a different stage of life and have different needs and responsibilities. Nearly everybody works part time. Although the employees work a regular number of shifts each month, the team itself decides (after mutual consultation) who will work at what time or on which day. Work assignment and consultation with colleagues are very important. Since these arrangements were introduced, the rate of absenteeism has decreased and employee turnover has been very low.

Source: W. de Lange et al.: *Work redesign and the organisation of working time: Some best practice in the Netherlands*, paper presented at the 7th International Symposium on Working Time, 18-20 February 1999, Institut Arbeit und Technik, Gelsenkirchen.

This factsheet was written by Akima Hamandia-Güldenber

