



Weekend work

What is weekend work?

Weekend work is any work occurring during normal days of rest. While in Western countries the weekend commonly refers to rest days on Saturday and/or Sunday, this is not the case in all countries because of different religions, traditions and customs. For example, in most Arab countries, the traditional weekly rest day is on Friday. As far as weekend work is allowed, it is generally compensated with extra or 'premium' payments in addition to the normal wage. This is the case in many industrialized countries, where shop-opening hours and operating time of equipment have been extended into the weekend.

The extension of shop-opening hours during the weekend has

been a controversial issue in many countries. Some employers contend that weekend work in services could enhance economic benefits, whereas some governments expect the creation of more employment. Others maintain that weekend work would prejudice the social life of workers and would particularly be a deterioration of family life. Depending on the country, weekend work may be introduced through a collective agreement (e.g. Belgium, Denmark, France, Norway), only after approval from the works council, a firm-level labour-management committee (e.g. Germany), or simply by an employer's decision (e.g. United States).

How is work during the weekend regulated?

ILO Weekly Rest Conventions No. 14 (1921) and No. 106 (1957) require that each worker have at least 24 hours of uninterrupted rest every seven days. Whenever possible, the rest day(s) should be simultaneous for all employees of an undertaking and correspond with the traditions and customs of the country. As noted above, Arab countries often choose the Friday, instead of the Sunday, as the rest day for the week. In China and Hungary, two days off are laid down in

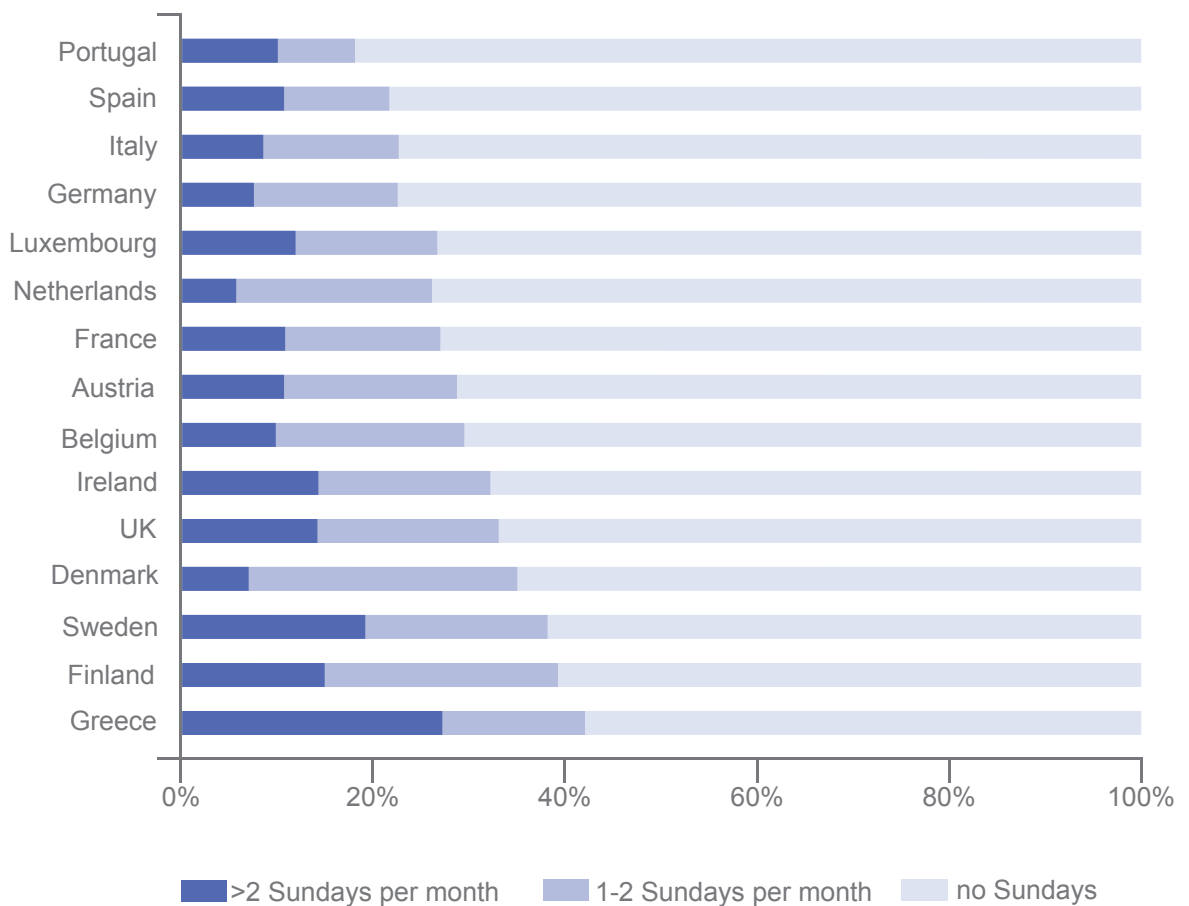
national laws. In European Union (EU) member States, the EU Working Time Directive (93/104) entitles workers to a minimum of 24 hours of rest per week, principally on Sunday, in addition to 11 hours of rest each working day (between shifts). In most countries, although only one day off per week is prescribed in national legislation, collective agreements or commonly-accepted norms set the standard of a five-day week.

How many employees work during the weekend?

In 2000, 47% of male employees in EU member States (EU-15) worked on Saturdays (females: 41%), and 26.5% on Sundays (female: 22.5%) (EU Labour Force Survey). According to the *Third European Survey on Working Conditions*, work on Sundays in the EU-15 was most widespread in

Greece, Finland and Sweden (see the chart below). Overall, the EU-15 have witnessed a moderate decline in both Saturday and Sunday work over the period from 1995 to 2000. However, a sizeable increase was reported for service and sales workers over the same period.

Percentage of employees working on Sundays, 2000



Source: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions: *Third European Survey on Working Conditions* (Dublin, 2000).

Advantages and disadvantages

The potential advantages of weekend work include:

Advantages for employers

- Continuous use of facilities and equipment, particularly in capital-intensive industries.
- Increased responsiveness to customers' delivery times and needs.
- Improved match between shop-opening hours and fluctuations in customer demand.

Advantages for employees

- Weekend work can enable some workers to combine work during the week and other private interests and obligations (e.g. family, further training).
- Higher total earnings if premium payments are provided for weekend work, in particular for low-skilled and blue-collar workers.

The potential disadvantages of weekend work include:

Disadvantages for employers

- Higher operating costs, particularly personnel costs: inconvenient social times (called 'unsocial' hours) and particularly work on the weekly rest day are often coupled with extra payments and premiums.

Disadvantages for employees

- Working hours occur at inconvenient times (weekends), which may cause conflicts with social obligations.
- Potential problems for workers with family responsibilities, especially for those workers with children and other family-care obligations.

Weekend work can no longer be avoided in many economic sectors. For this reason, it is all the more important to think about a 'worker-friendly' approach to such working hours. In organizing working hours during the weekend, the following aspects need to be considered:

- Use technical and organizational work design principles for structuring weekend shifts.
- Consider workers' needs and preferences regarding the days that they would like to work on the weekend. Workers who have

high levels of family obligations, in particular, should have the right not to work on their weekly rest day (Friday, Sunday, etc.).

- Keep the length and frequency of inconvenient hours for individual workers relatively short.
- Time off should be granted to and taken by workers following periods of weekend work, i.e. their weekly rest day(s).
- Grant additional time off as compensation for weekend work.



Case example

Machine Construction Company (MCC) is a business unit in a large firm in the metalworking industry. It develops, builds, sells and maintains machines for the food-processing industry. This global corporation has two establishments in the Netherlands. The largest establishment has 400 employees and the smaller one employs 50 people. In addition, 20% to 25% of its total staff is temporary. MCC's reorganization into self-managing teams of 10 to 15 employees, called 'Complete Task Groups' (CTGs), caused changes in its working time structures. These changes relate to employees' participation and their increased responsibility regarding aspects such as overtime, a temporary switch to more shifts, and the hiring of agency temporary workers. The production CTGs work according to a two-shift system. If there is an increase in orders, the team can decide to work three shifts. The team can also decide whether working at nights or at weekends is necessary, and then make a schedule and divide the tasks. At weekends, the CTGs try to use only those machines that require few actions and little attention, in order to employ a minimum number of team members. This also reduces the difficulties with the higher costs of working on weekends. The CTGs do need extra people to run the three-shift system, and so work schedules have to be planned a month in advance.

The temporary staff works together with the more experienced, permanent employees. The introduction of self-managing teams and the related change in the working time structure have led to a stronger team spirit, higher motivation and commitment, and higher internal flexibility. Furthermore, processing time has been reduced from nine to four weeks and stocks have decreased. The work processes have also become more controllable. The rate of work/overhead has decreased by 30% and delivery times have become more reliable. In general, employees are satisfied with their new responsibilities, the opportunity for self-management and the increased diversity of their jobs. The rate of absenteeism has decreased to 4%, and some employees have even received higher salaries. However, the introduction of CGTs has also had a few negative effects. The pressure and stress at work have increased over the past few years, especially for team 'coaches' (team leaders). In addition, the new self-management tasks take up extra time. Yet, the most important goal of the change process (greater flexibility) has been achieved.

Source: Lange (de) et al.: *Work redesign and the organization of working time: Some best practices in the Netherlands*, Working paper (Tilburg, 1998), pp. 19-24.