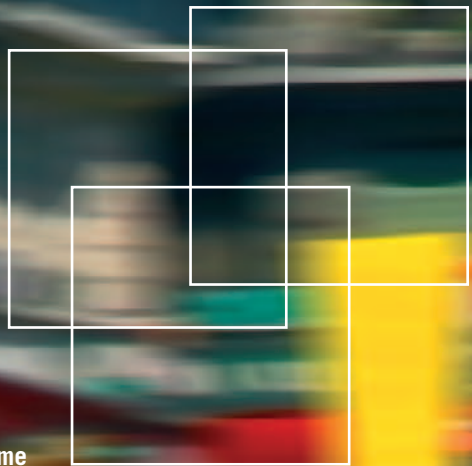




International
Labour
Office
Geneva

DECENT WORKING TIME

Balancing Workers' Needs
with Business Requirements



Conditions of Work and Employment Programme
(TRAVAIL)

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with Business Requirements**

International Labour Office Geneva

Conditions of Work and Employment Programme (TRAVAIL)

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Section 1

INTRODUCTION

New economic trends during recent decades have resulted in working hours that are increasingly diverse, decentralized and individualized. They have also led to a greater tension between workers' needs and preferences regarding working hours and enterprises' business requirements. These developments include an increased use of results-based employment relationships; the division of working time into smaller segments, in order to more closely tailor staffing needs to customer requirements; and the expansion of operating and shop opening hours towards a "24-7" economy. This new reality has also raised new issues, such as time-related social inequalities, particularly in relation to gender; workers' ability to balance their paid work with their personal lives; and even the relationship between working hours and social times.

The ILO has defined a concept of "decent work" that involves promoting opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity, in order to decrease the differences which exist between people's aspirations regarding their work and their current work situations (ILO, 1999). One of the important steps in the ILO's quest for decent work is the enhancement of working time. In order to improve working conditions around the globe, working time issues need to be tackled on multiple levels in order to close the different types of "gaps" between workers' actual and preferred hours of work, as well as to advance the competitiveness of enterprises (Messenger ed., 2004). These situations include those workers who are working "excessively" long hours on a regular basis; those workers who are working part-time and would prefer to work more hours to raise their earnings; and finally those workers whose primary concern is not the number of hours they are working, but rather the arrangement of those hours, such as those working at night, at weekends, and on irregular or rotating shift schedules. Taking steps to address these situations and thus promote decent work can benefit businesses in a number of different ways, such as through increased productivity; reduced rates of absenteeism and staff turnover; and improved employee attitudes and morale, which in turn can translate into a better "bottom line".

The enhancement of working time is an important step in the ILO's quest for decent work.

Working time was also the subject of the very first international labour standard, the Hours of work (Industry) Convention, 1919 (No. 1). Over the years, working time has continued to be central to the work of the ILO, which has adopted international standards on a variety of working time-related subjects, including not only standards establishing limits on working hours, but also those providing for minimum weekly rest periods, paid annual leave, protections for night workers, and equal treatment for part-time workers. Based upon both these international labour standards and recent research on working time trends and developments, the ILO's Conditions of Work and Employment Programme (TRAVAIL) has identified five significant dimensions of decent work in the area of working time, or "decent working time". These five dimensions are as follows: working time arrangements should promote health and safety; be "family-friendly"; promote gender equality; advance the productivity and competitiveness of enterprises; and facilitate worker choice and influence over their hours of work. Advancing each of these five dimensions requires a broad range of policies at the national, sectoral and/or enterprise level. The precise mix of policies that need to be pursued will vary substantially across countries (and perhaps even across states or regions within the same country), depending upon the socio-economic situation in each country.



This booklet serves to summarize these five dimensions of decent working time, and how these principles can be put into action. It identifies how each dimension can contribute to reaching the desired working time win-win situation by being mutually beneficial for workers and employers, as it improves work-life balance while simultaneously making enterprises more competitive.

Section 2

HEALTHY WORKING TIME

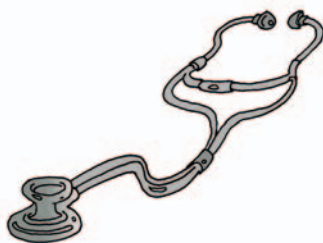
The first of the five dimensions of “decent working time” is healthy working time. The need for working time to be both healthy and safe is a traditional concern dating back to the very first international labour standard, the Hours of Work (Industry) Convention in 1919. Regular long working hours and “unsocial” working hours such as night work are neither preferred by workers nor healthy for them. Moreover, the effects of long and/or “unsocial” working hours are not limited to individual workers, but also affect their families and society at large (Spurgeon, 2003). Regular long working hours also cost enterprises substantial amounts of money, for example due to increased accidents in the workplace (European Commission, 2004).

The principle underlying this dimension of “decent working time” is that unhealthy working hours should not be a means of improving firms’ profitability, a principle which underlies the EU Directive on Working Time (93/104/EC). The protection of workers’ health through limitations on working hours also underlies the Hours of Work (Industry) Convention, 1919 (No. 1) and the Hours of Work (Commerce and Offices) Convention, 1930 (No. 30), which both stress the limits of the 8-hour work day and the 48-hour work week (with certain exceptions).

Regular long working hours not only negatively affect the health and safety of workers but also decrease the productivity of enterprises.

If the potential negative effects of regular long working hours on health and safety aren’t properly considered, determining working hours may easily result in the over-utilization of labour or “overwork.” Overwork can be defined as the point “when the length of work hours begins to adversely affect the health and safety of individuals, families, organizations and the public, even if workers themselves voluntarily work the excess hours” (Golden, 2004).

An increasing body of evidence underlines the adverse effects of regular long working hours on human health and workplace safety. Multiple studies regarding health agree that the negative effects of regular long working hours include both short- and long-term effects (NIOSH, 2004). Acute reactions involve physiological responses such as increased levels of stress, fatigue and sleeping disorders, as well as unhealthy lifestyle habits such as smoking, alcohol abuse, irregular diet, and lack of exercise. Long-term effects include an increased incidence of cardiovascular disease, gastrointestinal and reproductive disorders, musculoskeletal disorders, chronic infections, and mental illnesses (NIOSH, 2004, 2006; Spurgeon, 2003). In addition to these health implications, it is clear that work schedules which regularly involve extended hours decrease workplace safety, as the risk of occupational accidents and injuries rises with increasing length of the work schedule – a situation which obviously is also costly to enterprises (Johnson and Lipscomb, 2006).



Regarding safety, there is also substantial evidence linking regular long working hours with occupational accidents, which carry a high price tag: the European Union has estimated that the total cost of occupational accidents from all sources was € 55 billion a year in the EU-15 alone (European Commission, 2004). For example, a study analyzing survey data from more than 10,000 workers, conducted by the Center for Health Policy and Research at the University of Massachusetts (U.S.) Medical School, found dramatic evidence of that link. According to the study, jobs with regular overtime schedules are associated with a 61% higher injury hazard rate compared to those without overtime. The study also identified a positive correlation between excessively long working hours and increased injury hazard rates: working 12 hours or more per day increases the injury hazard rate by 37%, while working 60 hours or more per week increases it by 23% – leading to their conclusion that the worker injury rate increases in correspondence to the total number of hours worked per day or per week in a customary schedule (Dembe *et al*, 2005).

The report *Overtime and Extended Work Shifts: Recent Findings on Illnesses, Injuries and Health Behaviors* by the US National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) provides further support for these findings: according to 16 different studies focused on general health effects of working hours, overtime is associated with poorer perceived general health, increased injury rates, more illnesses, and even increased mortality. Furthermore, a pattern of deteriorating performance on psychophysiological tests and an increasing injury rate while working long hours (especially when combining 12-hour shifts with work weeks of 40 hours and more) was observed across multiple study findings (NIOSH, 2004).

Regular long working hours not only adversely affect the health and safety of the work force but also affect the productivity of the individual workers and the enterprise as a whole (Shepard and Clifton, 2000). Workers working excessively long hours on a regular basis have shown reduced hourly productivity due to greater fatigue, and those with long hours and/or heavy workloads report decreasing job satisfaction and motivation (See Section 5, Productive Working Time) and higher rates of absenteeism and staff turnover. These factors eventually result in additional costs for employers. Reduced working hours can also be a key measure to attract and retain top-performing employees as well as to help reduce costly lawsuits from employees seeking compensation for occupational injuries and illnesses linked with long hours (Kossek and Lee, 2005).

International standards, such as the Hours of Work Conventions (Nos. 1 and 30), and national laws and regulations have traditionally provided a “countervailing force” to restrain excessively long hours. Further international standards promoting working time restrictions related to health and safety include the Weekly Rest Conventions (Nos. 14 and 106) and the Night Work Conventions (most recently No. 171). The need for such regulations holds not only in those cases in which long hours are involuntary, but even when long hours are worked “voluntarily,” in order to protect the safety and health of both the workers involved and the general public (e.g. regulations restricting the working hours of truck drivers and airline pilots). Voluntarily-worked long hours are especially common among white-collar (professional and managerial) workers in many developed countries, most likely due to the fact that they are often excluded from national working time regulations.

Besides protective measures for people working regular long hours, further protective approaches regarding night work are needed, such as those discussed in the Night Work Convention, 1990 (No. 171), in order to minimize its inherently adverse health and safety effects. Such protective measures include regular health assessments, suitable first aid facilities, appropriate compensation, alternative work schedules (e.g., for those workers certified as unfit for night work for health reasons), and employer-sponsored health promotion programmes, as well as individual coping and behavioral practices. A similar justification can be applied to protective measures concerning other forms of “unsocial” hours as well. Appropriate public policies to protect workers against excessively long and “unsocial” working hours are a necessary condition for achieving the goal of healthy working time.

Section 3

FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORKING TIME

The amount of working hours is one of the most important factors in determining whether one's work is compatible with family responsibilities and, more generally, with life outside work. For example, recent research in Europe has concluded that the key working conditions that reduce the work-family compatibility of jobs are long weekly hours and "unsocial" working hours in the evenings, at nights and at weekends (Fagan, 2004).

Both "inflexible" working hours and limited childcare tend to reinforce the traditional "male breadwinner – female homemaker" division of labor within households and create difficulties in combining paid work and family duties. Beyond that, "unsocial" working hours in the evenings, at nights and at weekends, as well as unpredictable variations in working hours, increase the likelihood that both women and men will report work-family conflicts (Fagan and Burchell, 2002). It is therefore necessary to seek measures that allow the adjustment of working hours according to workers' family needs, without negatively impacting on enterprises.



The possibility of using working time arrangements to facilitate the combination of work and family commitments may be achieved by multiple different but complementary means. These "family-friendly" working time measures include a variety of policy options, ranging from a collective reduction of working hours to part-time work to an individual right to reduce or adapt working time for family reasons.

In general, reduced working hour schedules, particularly in the form of part-time work (which may involve two part-time workers sharing a full-time job, i.e. job sharing), appear to be the number one strategy employed for balancing paid work with family duties. However, there are two main problems with part-time work as a strategy for work-family reconciliation. First of all, part-time jobs are often of lesser quality than comparable full-time jobs in terms of hourly wages, non-wage benefits, and career development opportunities, including limited options for returning to full-time work when family responsibilities change (see e.g., Polivka et al., 2000; Fagan and O'Reilly, 1998). Additionally, part-time work is heavily gender-segregated in nearly all of the countries in which it exists. In 2004, almost one third (31.4%) of women in the EU-25 worked part time, in contrast with just 7% of men, while the overall proportion of part-timers increased steadily from 16% in 1997 to 17.7% (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007). In industrialized countries, women now hold nearly three-quarters of all part-time positions (OECD, 2004), and part-time work is increasingly used in some developing countries as well, such as Brazil and Jamaica (see e.g., Lee, McCann and Messenger, 2007).

“Family-friendly” working time benefits workers and their families as well as the society as a whole.

Apart from part-time work, certain types of “flexible” working time arrangements can also contribute to work-family reconciliation, especially flexi-time programmes and “time-banking” schemes (also called working time accounts) that permit workers to vary their hours of work based on their individual family situations. Furthermore, offering workers the possibility of “telecommuting” to their jobs from their homes can also help them to blend work and family responsibilities on a daily basis. Moreover, a number of other measures such as maternity protection as well as access to affordable, high-quality childcare services are also crucial for helping workers to reconcile their work and family responsibilities.

Thus, the second important dimension of “decent working time” is providing workers with the time and the flexibility they need to handle their family responsibilities, in line with the principle established in the ILO’s Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156). In particular, “family-friendly” working time measures need to be designed

to help meet the needs of parents – both women and men – to have sufficient time to care for their families on a daily basis. By allowing individuals to flexibly adjust their work schedules to meet these essential domestic obligations, “family-friendly” working time benefits workers and their families as well as the society as a whole.

This dimension is also directly related to the objective of improving the quality of available part-time positions as a means of achieving “family-friendly” working time. This in turn suggests the need to “normalize” part-time work compared to the baseline for full-time work that exists in each country. Equal treatment regulations in employment, non-wage benefits and social protection systems, a principle established in the ILO’s Part-Time Work Convention, 1994 (No. 175), can help to improve the conditions of part-time work, and at the same time make a substantial contribution towards promoting gender equality (McCann, 2004), a subject covered in the next section.

Section 4

GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH WORKING TIME

Equality of opportunity and treatment between women and men in the world of work is a principle established in several international labour standards, most notably the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111). This ILO Convention sets the elimination of discrimination regarding employment and occupation as a fundamental principle – one that remains at the core of the ILO Decent Work Agenda today (ILO, 2000). The overall objective of advancing gender equality therefore also needs to be applied in the area of working time – and integrated into the full range of working time policies – in order to ensure that policies designed to advance other “decent work” objectives do not inadvertently have a negative impact on gender equality.



Despite the growing presence of women in the workforce, gender segregation in the labour market as well as a gendered division of labour in society is a persistent feature of nearly all countries (Fagan, 2004; Rubery et al, 1999). In industrialized as well as in developing countries women still do most of the domestic and care work, while few men significantly reduce their paid working hours to take on these responsibilities (see e.g., European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007; Sorj, 2004). This situation often presses women into working hour schedules – such as part-time work or even weekend and evening schedules – that fit their domestic commitments (Fagan, 2004).

The third dimension of “decent working time” therefore involves using working time as a tool for promoting gender equality. An important principle in this respect is the distinction between working time measures that are only “family-friendly” and those that are “family-friendly” while simultaneously promoting gender equality. For example, measures such as part-time work or family leave provide parents with the opportunity to spend more time taking care of their children or elderly relatives. However, if mothers are the only ones who make use of such leave, then, while these policies may indeed help promote work-family reconciliation, they may reinforce gender inequality by relegating women to marginal forms of labour market participation instead of paving the way for true equality in paid employment. Beyond that, particular working time arrangements such as long hours or unpredictable schedules are likely to further fuel gender segregation in employment by creating barriers to labour market entry and career advancement for those with care responsibilities (Fagan, 2004). To promote gender equality, working time policies must therefore do their part to enable women to be on an equal footing with men in employment (e.g., position levels, career advancement, etc.), and allow both partners to combine paid work, family responsibilities, and lifelong learning (Bosch, 2006).

Working time policies need to both promote gender equality in employment through gender-neutral measures, as well as ensure that policies advancing other dimensions of decent working time do not negatively impact gender equality. It is therefore vital to have a coordinated combination of policies promoting gender equality because the efficacy of one particular instrument usually depends upon other supporting measures (Messenger, ed., 2004). First, policies are needed to close the “gender gap” in the number of working hours for men compared with those hours worked by women. This objective can be pursued by limiting excessively long hours among full-time workers and encouraging longer hours for part-timers, the vast majority of whom are women. Second, it is essential that the quality of part-time work is improved if it is to be made compatible with the objective of promoting gender equality (Fagan, 2004; OECD, 2001; Fagan and O’Reilly, 1998). Promoting the equal treatment of part-time and full-time workers is a principle established in the ILO’s Part-Time Work Convention, 1994 (No. 175), which has been extended to the laws of a number of countries, as well as to the European Union through the 1997 EU Part-time Work Directive (97/81/EC) (McCann, 2004). One particularly important mechanism for improving

the quality of part-time work is the use of equal treatment regulations in employment, non-wage benefits and social protection systems (as mentioned in the previous section).

Working time policies must enable women to be on an equal footing with men in employment and allow both partners to combine paid work, family responsibilities, and lifelong learning.

Beyond the question of part-time work, promoting gender equality involves overcoming the “no-win” dilemma of work–family reconciliation measures: that is, policies designed to facilitate women’s integration into the labour market may simultaneously reinforce gender inequality in the domestic division of labour and thus undermine gender equality in employment (Moss and Deven, 1999). To help overcome men’s resistance to using reconciliation measures, a broad range of policies is needed to promote the involvement of fathers in domestic tasks and care activities. One possible approach would be to provide fathers with the right to take extended leave for family reasons or reduce their working hours when they have young children. In addition, enterprise-level policies designed to reduce organizational resistance to men adapting their working hours based on family needs would also have positive effects for female colleagues by combating the “long hours culture” that exists in some companies and also “normalizing” a broad range of working time arrangements for all employees. Finally, extending government support for child care and elder care services can serve as a key tool in achieving work-family reconciliation, while also advancing gender equality (Fagan, 2004).

Section 5

PRODUCTIVE WORKING TIME

“Decent working time” is also productive working time, as more and more enterprises are recognizing that promoting a healthy “work–life balance” for their employees isn’t just the “right thing” to do, but that such an approach can also serve as an effective competitiveness strategy. Enterprise policies and practices that seek to promote “decent working time” can benefit businesses in a number of different ways, such as through increased productivity; reduced rates of absenteeism and staff turnover; and improved employee attitudes and morale, which can in turn translate into a better “bottom line”.

There is longstanding evidence that links reductions in working hours to increased productivity (output per hour worked). Such productivity gains result not only from physiological factors such as reduced fatigue, but also from an improvement in employee attitudes and morale (White, 1987). Improving working time arrangements can have productivity-enhancing effects, which are similar to the effects of higher wages. With such changes, workers can improve their mental and physical health and thus be more rested and alert during working hours, thereby improving labour productivity. For example, it is known that the physiological effects of long working hours include a reduction of the pace of work or work intensity. Thus, the extension of working hours may not yield the expected increases in total output, but instead lead to a reduction of total output in the long-run, while the reduction of working hours can increase labour productivity without causing physically harmful consequences for workers. There is substantial empirical evidence that reductions in “excessively” long hours of work – typically linked with changes in work organization, methods of production and similar factors – have resulted in substantial productivity gains over the years (Bosch and Lehndorff, 2001). As long hours of work are also positively related to absenteeism, reducing such long hours can also provide firms with benefits in terms of reduced rates of absenteeism (Barmby et al., 2002).

There is longstanding evidence that links reductions in working hours to increased productivity.

Furthermore, better working time arrangements can have motivational effects by obtaining the willingness of workers to use their energy in more efficient ways. These effects can only be expected, however, if there is a positive relationship between managers and workers, which increases synergies between better working time arrangements and higher labour productivity. Flexible working time arrangements such as “flexi-time” and compressed work weeks have shown positive effects on employee attitudes and morale (see, e.g., Hogarth et al., 2001; Boston College Center for Work and Family, 2000; Gottlieb et al., 1998). These improvements in employee attitudes and morale can also translate into a better “bottom line” for enterprises – as demonstrated by a study that shows a positive relationship between workers’ emotions regarding their work and firms’ financial performance (Towers Perrin and Gang & Gang, 2003). A review of the literature on the effects of flexible working time arrangements (Avery and Zabel, 2001) also found benefits to firms from such arrangements due to decreased tardiness and absenteeism, as well as improved recruitment and retention of employees. Finally, some studies indicate that perhaps the most important factor is not the working time arrangement itself, but rather the workers’ ability to choose their arrangement that shows the strongest impact on employees’ job performance, and hence on firms’ productivity (Gottlieb et al., 1998). Thus there appears to be substantial evidence regarding the potential benefits of “decent working time” practices for enhancing enterprise competitiveness.



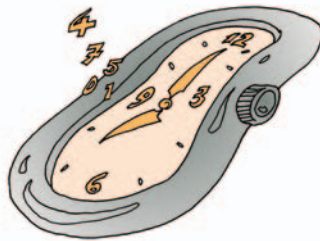
As there are substantial business benefits that can be reaped from “decent working time” policies and practices, working time arrangements need to be adapted accordingly. First, as productivity is linked to the length of the work schedule, a reduction of regular long working hours of more than 48 hours per week – in line with the Hours of Work

(Industry) Convention, 1919 (No. 1) , the Hours of Work (Commerce and Offices) Convention, 1930 (No. 30), and the Reduction of Hours of Work Recommendation (R116) – is necessary. Second, realizing the described benefits requires firms to implement innovative arrangements that consciously seek ways of combining business efficiency with increased worker influence over their working hours. Such innovative forms of working time arrangements may include flexi-time and various forms of “working time accounts”, such as “time banking” schemes that allow workers to accumulate “credits” in working hours for later use. Those flexi-time arrangements that actively seek to balance the interests of workers with business requirements have been particularly successful (Haipeter, 2006). Ultimately, however, the combination of business efficiency and increased time sovereignty for workers is a question of work organization (Bosch, 2006). In order to make this synthesis work in practice, enterprises need to make a conscious attempt to align their objectives and strategies with workers’ needs and preferences in ways that are mutually reinforcing.

Section 6

CHOICE AND INFLUENCE REGARDING WORKING TIME

Increasing work demands during all hours of the day and all days of the week are an emerging reality of the move towards a “24-7” economy. Such requirements for extensive availability (e.g., on all days of the week, at very short notice, for irregular work periods, etc.) are among the most unfavorable of modern working conditions because of the substantial disruptions they can create in individuals’ lives (Gadrey et al, 2006). While these are perhaps extreme examples, they nonetheless serve to highlight the importance of workers’ ability to choose, or at least influence, their working hours in order to achieve decent working time. Increasing workers’ choice and influence regarding their working hours is a matter of considering workers’ subjective needs and preferences, rather than making the assumption that current working time arrangements somehow accurately reflect workers’ preferences regarding their hours of work.



Flexible working time arrangements can be considered advantageous for both workers and employers. Workers often appreciate flexibility in handling their daily and weekly working hours, and consider it as an important means to improve their work–life balance. For employers, on the other hand, flexible working hours can be a measure to cope with workload fluctuations, reduce absenteeism and staff turnover (see previous section), as well as to minimize overtime payments. As expectations on both sides do not always coincide, the degree of flexibility depends largely on the actual implementation of flexible working hours schemes at enterprise level (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2006).

The positive effects of introducing flexible working time arrangements have been confirmed by the findings of the recent European Establishment Survey on Working Time and Work–Life Balance (ESWT), which was conducted in over 21,000 establishments covering both private and public sectors in 21 EU member states. According to the survey, the effect that is most frequently reported as a positive outcome of the introduction of flexible working time regulations is a higher degree of job satisfaction: 61% of all managers and 73% of all employee representatives named this aspect as the top effect of the introduction of flexible working hours. A better adaptation of working hours to the workload (54% of managers and 67% of employee representatives) was the second most mentioned result. Among other positive effects stated by enterprise managers and worker representatives were a reduction of paid overtime hours and a lower absenteeism rate, while negative consequences of flexible working time arrangements were reported only in a minority of interviews (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2006).

In today's fast-paced society, there are many competing demands on workers' time. Working time arrangements should therefore take account of individual needs in order to attract people into the workforce and help them remain active. The availability of flexible working time arrangements has a positive impact on the work–life balance of employees while simultaneously benefiting enterprises, helping them to match working hours with the workflow and leading to greater job satisfaction, and ultimately better business results (Johnson et al., 2005). Thus, it is no surprise that the introduction or extension of flexible working time arrangements such as flexi-time or working time accounts is at the top of the "wish list" of workers' representatives for future working time policies: 26% of all employee representatives interviewed cited this as the only or most important measure for a further improvement of work–life balance (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2006).

Expanding workers' choice and influence regarding their working time means expanding the range of opportunities for workers to structure their work and personal activities such that their working hours can more closely approximate their individual situations. This objective can be advanced in two ways. First, the number of working time options available to employees can be increased, such that workers can choose from a "menu" of alternatives. Second, workers can be permitted to exercise a direct influence over the length and arrangement of their

working hours. This latter approach recognizes that “decent working time” should help to promote the outcomes that individual workers prefer (Lee and McCann, 2006).

It is important to stress that providing workers with greater choice and influence over their hours of work does not mean a complete individualization of decisions regarding working hours, or that such choice can be realised entirely at the individual level. A strong degree of social support is essential in increasing workers’ “working time capability” — that is, the range of realistic working time options from which they can choose (Lee and McCann, 2006). Such collective support can be provided by Workers’ Organizations and through methods including laws that strengthen trade unions, such as those on independence, recognition and the right to strike.

Workers appreciate flexibility in handling their working hours, and consider it as an important means to improve work-life balance.

Policy measures taking into account both workers’ and employers’ preferences regarding working hours, as suggested in the Reduction of Hours of Work Recommendation (R116), can be adopted at the national, sectoral and enterprise level. For example, national legislation has been introduced in a number of European countries that can enhance worker influence by allowing collective agreements to implement or modify working time standards. Laws have also been enacted in a few countries, such as the Netherlands, Germany and the United Kingdom, which provide individual workers with a right to request changes in their working hours. Such “right to request” legislation has the potential to advance workers’ ability to influence their working hours, as well as to address the existing differences between full-time and part-time work (McCann, 2004; Anxo *et al*, 2006). At the enterprise level, flexi-time schemes and “time banking” accounts that allow workers to build up time “credits” for later use are tools that have the potential to offer workers a substantial amount of influence over their working hours. As noted earlier, such schemes can combine business efficiency with increased worker influence over their working hours.

ACTION STEPS: HOW CAN WE ADVANCE THESE DIMENSIONS?

The five dimensions of decent working time – healthy working time, “family-friendly” working time, gender equality through working time, productive working time and choice and influence regarding working time – create a framework for policies and practices which can advance the goal of decent work in the area of working time. These five dimensions provide a set of guiding principles that point towards decent working time. As principles, the five dimensions of decent working time will of course vary substantially in their implementation from one country to another, according to variations in national, regional and perhaps even local circumstances.

Decent working time can be mutually beneficial for workers and employers as it creates win-win situations. This happens because it not only allows workers to balance their personal lives with paid work, but also increases enterprise competitiveness. Given the breadth of the topic, the five dimensions for decent working time policies and practices can begin to be put into action with the following steps: the reduction of regular long working hours; the equal treatment of part-time workers; and the adoption of flexible working time arrangements.



Reduction of regular long working hours

The reduction of excessively long hours of work in order to improve workers’ health, workplace safety, and enterprise competitiveness is a long-standing concern – one which goes back all the way to the Hours of

Work (Industry) Convention (No. 1) in 1919. It remains substantial in developing countries, especially those in Asia, and is also present to a lesser extent in developed countries. Beyond the Hours of Work Conventions (Nos. 1 and 30), which set limits of a 48-hour workweek and an 8-hour working day, the call for a reduction of working hours is furthermore based on the Forty-Hour Week Convention, 1935 (No. 47), and the Reduction of Hours of Work Recommendation (R116), as well as the steady movement towards the 40-hour workweek in national legislation around the world over the last 40 years (Lee, McCann and Messenger, 2007).

An increasing body of evidence underlines that the effects of a reduction of regular long working hours include positive impacts on workers' physical and mental health, improved workplace safety, and increased labour productivity due to reduced fatigue and stress; higher levels of employee job satisfaction and motivation; and lower rates of absenteeism. Appropriate government policies to protect workers against excessively long working hours, and also to provide protections for those workers working "unsocial hours" such as night work, are therefore a necessary condition for achieving the goal of decent working time. Obviously, reductions in long hours can also be advanced via the efforts of Workers' and Employers' Organizations and through collective bargaining at all levels.

Equal treatment of part-time workers

The second main conclusion regarding decent working time is the need for equal treatment of part-time workers, a concern which is grounded in the Part-Time Work Convention, 1994 (No.175). This principle has already been put into force in the European Union via the 1997 EU Part-time Work Directive (97/81/EC), although considerable inequalities in employment conditions between part-time and full-time workers still continue to exist in many EU member states. The road towards equality for part-time workers involves a process of normalization of part-time work, which includes granting part-time workers similar rights and benefits (e.g., pro-rata earnings, non-wage benefits, etc.) as full-time workers in similar positions. As part-time work is more widespread in industrialized than in developing countries, the issue of improving working conditions for part-time workers is especially important in those countries where part-time work has been rising substantially in recent years, such as Europe and Japan.

The issue of part-time work is very closely linked with gender equality issues because three-quarters of part-time workers are women, and also with family-friendly working time, as it has proven to be a key individual strategy for balancing family responsibilities with paid work. Equal treatment of part-time workers can help to reduce some of the inequalities related to part-time work such as differences in hourly wages, non-wage benefits, and access to training and career advancement opportunities. Beyond that, part-time work also offers economic and organizational advantages as it can help enterprises in coping with workload peaks or help fill positions with insufficient workloads for a full-time employee, making it potentially beneficial for both sides.

Adoption of flexible working time arrangements

Not only the duration of working hours, but also the way in which working hours are arranged at the workplace (i.e., work schedules), can have a significant impact on both the quality of working life and enterprise competitiveness. The need for flexible working time arrangements seems to apply in both industrialized and developing countries, although there is a great variance in the extent to which workers have the capability of realizing such customized work schedules. Therefore, a final suggestion regarding how to put decent working time into action is the adoption of possibilities to arrange work schedules in ways that can accommodate the needs of individual workers, including their family responsibilities, while simultaneously meeting enterprises' business requirements. This "win-win" approach takes into account both workers' and employers' preferences, as suggested in the Reduction of Hours of Work Recommendation (R 116).

If properly structured, flexible work schedules can be mutually advantageous for both workers and employers, as they increase employees' job satisfaction while simultaneously allowing employers to cope better with workload fluctuations and reducing overtime costs. Flexible working time arrangements can also provide additional business benefits, such as decreased absenteeism, increased retention of existing staff, and improved recruitment of new employees. These flexible arrangements are also known to improve employee morale and attitudes, which in turn improve productivity, quality, and ultimately the company's financial performance.

Decent working time helps workers to achieve a better work-life balance, while simultaneously advancing the competitiveness of enterprises.

Decent working time holds the promise of helping workers to achieve a better work-life balance, while simultaneously advancing the competitiveness of enterprises. However, a proactive approach is required: employers and workers must actively seek an appropriate mix of policies and practices, aided by a supportive national framework. Only then will the promise of decent working time be realised.

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