



Making work arrangements more family-friendly

Working hours and place are probably the most important factors in determining whether one's work is compatible with family responsibilities and, more generally, with life outside work.¹ This Information Sheet considers measures that can make working time more "family-friendly", as well as the new possibilities arising from teleworking at home.

Measures related to duration of work

Reducing emphasis on time at work

Long working hours that are well beyond standard working hours clearly leave less time for family life and cut into evenings and weekends. Recent research in Europe has concluded that "the key working conditions that reduce the 'work-family' compatibility of jobs are long weekly and unsociable hours (long days, evenings, nights, weekends) for both women and men".² Long working hours may not be family-friendly, but for workers who receive payment for overtime, this may be an important

way of increasing earnings for the family and reduced hours may not be wanted.

For managers and professionals, although overtime is not usually paid, working long hours may be a way of showing one's commitment and progressing in the organization. Some companies in sectors with many professional workers have tried to move away from the "long-hours culture", as can be seen below.

From long-hours culture to quality of output

Pricewaterhouse Coopers in the United Kingdom identified the "macho long-hours culture" as a problem in this business services firm. Two of the principles that underpinned the company's response to this problem were:

- *supporting managers in helping their team to work more flexibly given the habit of long working hours; and*
- *emphasizing quality of output as more important than the number of hours worked.*

As a result, the company noted "an increasing acceptance of flexible working in its broadest sense, for example home working, flexitime, etc., which promotes a greater sense of trust between managers and staff and a greater sense of personal control among individuals".

Source: Employers for Work-Life Balance, case study found at http://www.employersforwork-lifebalance.org.uk/business/case_studies.htm on 22 November 2003.

Notice for overtime

When overtime is required, advance notice is important to all workers, particularly to those with family responsibilities, so that they can make arrangements for, *inter alia*, childcare. In developing countries, where it may be difficult for workers to contact their families from the workplace, advance notice is particularly critical. Recognizing the importance of this issue, some national legislation and collective agreements require that a worker be notified in advance of overtime work.

Part-time work

Working less than standard hours or part-time is one way of reconciling work with family responsibilities. Since women continue to have the major responsibility for care of dependents, part-time work has mainly been taken by women. In 2002, it constituted about 30 per cent of women's employment in the European Union compared to 6.1 per cent of men's.³

Although part-time work seems to be a solution for some women with caring responsibilities, there is considerable debate about the implications for gender equality. Part-time work tends to reinforce the male breadwinner model,

with women taking a secondary role in the labour market because of their caring responsibilities at home. Also, the types of part-time jobs which are available and the conditions of work of part-time workers are of concern. On the other hand, part-time work may provide employment opportunities for women who otherwise would have to withdraw from the labour market.

For employers, part-time work provides a way of coping with extra workloads and is a frequent solution for extending opening hours in the retail trade. Also, it may be a means of attracting workers who cannot work full time.

Job-sharing

Job-sharing is a form of part-time employment in which one job is filled with two or more part-time employees, with responsibilities and working time shared and the full-time salary divided between them.

Reducing working hours

Employees who want to work part-time usually want to do so for a specific period of their life, such as when their children are young. The provision that workers can reduce their working hours and move between full time and part time is increasingly being incorporated in national legislation. A number of countries allow reductions in working time for carers. For example, in the United Kingdom, parents with a child under 6 years have the right to request flexible working, which could be reduced hours. The Netherlands

is an exceptional case: legislation provides all workers with a more general right to change working hours, and there is no requirement to have caring responsibilities.

Even without legislation, a number of enterprises have policies that may be part of collective bargaining agreements (or informal practices) to allow workers to reduce their working hours, mainly in order to retain personnel and avoid turnover costs.

Reduced working year arrangements

In Australia, the 48-for-52 scheme is a popular way to reduce the working year, particularly among parents who need leave during school holidays. Rather than working 48 weeks a year (four weeks' annual leave), employees work for 44 weeks, thus taking an additional four weeks without pay. The income for the 48 weeks is averaged and paid over 52 weeks. This arrangement provides a steady, if reduced, monthly income.

Source: New South Wales, Department of Industrial Relations: *Family friendly ideas for small business*, at www.dir.nsw.gov.au.

Measures related to scheduling of work

Flexible work schedules that provide workers with more control over the organization of their working hours are becoming increasingly common: this section discusses shift swapping, flexitime and time banking.

Flexible hours preferred to more money

In the United Kingdom, job seekers would rather work flexible hours than get extra money, according to an on-line survey of 4,000 people looking for a job. One in three of those questioned said flexibility was more important to them than an extra £1,000 a year.

Source: Department of Trade and Industry (UK): *More people want flexible hours than cash, company car or gym*, press release of 30 December 2002, at www.dti.gov.uk.

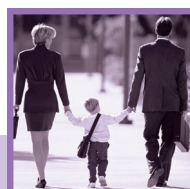
Predictability and swapping of shifts

As with overtime, predictability of shifts and knowledge of the schedule well in advance help shiftworkers to cope with their family responsibilities. When working hours fluctuate and are unpredictable, organizing daily or weekly routines is very difficult and stressful. Unsociable working hours are easier to cope with when they are known well in advance. One way that shifts can be organized which helps workers with family responsibilities is to allow workers to exchange shifts or “shift swap”.

Shift swapping in a collective bargaining agreement

In the agreement between Teamsters Local 445 and St. Luke's Hospital in Newburgh, New York, the union negotiated with the hospital to allow employees to switch working days with other employees, provided that employer approval is obtained.

Source: AFL-CIO Working Women's Department: *Bargaining fact sheet: Control over working hours and alternative work schedules* (Washington, DC, 2001).



Flexitime

Flexitime requires employees to be present at their place of work for certain specified periods (called “core time”), and allows them to vary their starting and finishing times. In some systems, the number of hours to be worked each day is fixed, and employees must select their hours and adhere to them on a daily basis. Lunchtime can also be part of variable, rather than core, hours. Sometimes the arrangement is more informal, allowing some flexibility on daily hours, such as taking a short lunch break and leaving early, or allowing a half-hour flexibility

to arrive early and leave early.

Flexitime arrangements present obvious advantages for workers with family responsibilities who can adapt their starting and finishing times to school hours, for example, as well as for other workers who may just want to avoid traffic jams. For employers who are service providers, flexitime may make it possible to extend operating hours. Not all jobs are suitable for flexitime schedules, such as assembly lines, shift work and other situations requiring the simultaneous presence of all workers.

Time banking

Timebanking (or the interchangeable term “working time accounts”) involves keeping track of hours worked in “accounts” for individual workers and, in some cases, is combined with flexitime. Workers can accumulate leave time, often by working overtime during peak periods, which can be used for unexpected family events or for other personal reasons.

A major advantage of these flexible schedules is that they are normally available to all workers in a given category, whatever their family responsibilities, and thus do not lead to jealousies. For employers, any additional administrative cost may be far outweighed by the benefits from the satisfaction of workers and improved accountability for time.

Teleworking

In telework, the worker works away from the workplace for a period of time. Some teleworkers work only from home, whereas others alternate between workplace and home on a regular or emergency basis.

Telework has grown in recent years based on the rapid development of information technology: for example, in 1997 in the United States, 11.6 million employees worked from home at least one day per month. This figure had reached 23.5 million by 2003.⁴

Telework eliminates travel time and costs, and allows the worker to work at convenient times while dealing with family responsibilities. For organizations, telework can reduce costs for office space. However, for workers, teleworking on a continuous basis can lead to isolation and difficulties in switching away from work. For workers who are equipped to work from home, teleworking is a way of coping with an emergency, such as a sick child, while still being able to work.

¹ For more information on various working time arrangements — such as overtime, part-time work, shift work and other types of working schedules (flexitime and “time banking”, annualized hours, staggered hours, compressed workweeks and job-sharing) — readers should consult the Information Sheets specifically on these topics.

² C. Fagan and B. Burchell: *Gender, jobs and working conditions in the European Union* (Dublin, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2002), p. 79.

³ OECD: *Employment Outlook 2003*, Table E.

⁴ International Telework Association and Council: Press release of 4 September 2003, at www.workingfromanywhere.org.