

Working time trends and developments in Europe¹

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The objective of this paper is to summarise what is known about key trends and developments in working time across Europe. The European Region analysed in this paper includes not only the 27 current member states of the European Union (EU), but extends even beyond its borders. This paper reviews trends and patterns in working hours in the broadest range of countries possible given data limitations (especially outside the EU), with a focus on: average weekly hours of work and the proportion of workers working ‘excessively long hours’ (defined as usual working hours of 48 or more per week); developments regarding one unique form of working time arrangement, part-time work, with a focus on the incidence of part-time work in each country, changes in this incidence over time, the female share of part-time employment and issues related to the quality of part-time jobs; and finally considers trends in the organisation of working time across Europe, with a focus on the incidence of non-standard work schedules (e.g. night work and weekend work) and shift work, as well as the extent to which various types of flexible working time arrangements are being deployed in individual enterprises. Finally, the paper presents some policy suggestions within a broad framework designed to advance the International Labour Organisation (ILO) concept of decent work in the area of working time.

Key words: Working time, Europe, Usual hours of work, Excessive hours, Part-time work

JEL classifications: J81

1. Introduction

Working time has been a central workforce issue, and a subject of intense debates, since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Working time has also been a central issue of labour policy since at least the adoption of the Factories Act of 1844 in the UK limiting the working hours of women and children and of course it was also the subject of the very first international labour standard, the Hours of Work (Industry) Convention, in 1919.

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¹ This analysis was completed in mid-2008 prior to the onset of the global economic crisis. Therefore, the working time trends and developments reviewed in this paper do not reflect major new developments in working time that have occurred in response to the crisis, such as substantially reduced working hours in many European countries (e.g., Germany) due to the widespread adoption (or expansion) of work sharing measures.

Although the paid working hours of many of the world's workers have declined dramatically since that time, particularly in the more developed ('industrialised') countries, working time remains a topic of intense and often emotional debate up to the present day. One need look no further than the recent example of the Aubry Laws in France, which ushered in the so-called '35-hour workweek' (in reality, it was more like the 1600-hour working year), to see that working time has lost none of its political and ideological potency.

Of all of the regions of the world, it seems quite safe to say that none of them has taken a greater interest in the subject of working time than Europe. Whereas interest in working time has languished in some parts of the world (Japan is one of the notable exceptions), it has remained a primary focus of attention across Europe. This is reflected in the vast body of literature not only on working hours *per se*, but also on a wide variety of related topics, including the effects of long working hours, part-time work, flexible working time arrangements and work-life balance. And only the European Region—or more specifically the member states of a major part of it, the European Union (EU)—has adopted a supranational regulation of working hours, the Working Time Directive (93/104/EC) in 1993, and amendments to this directive continue to be proposed and debated.

Given the vast body of literature that has been developed on working time and a range of related issues in Europe, it is simply impossible to do justice to that entire literature in one short paper. And the European Region is not limited only to the 27 current member states of the EU (the 15 older EU member states and the 12 'new' ones that have joined since 2004), but, at least from an International Labour Organisation (ILO) perspective, extends beyond the borders of the EU. Under these circumstances, it is essential to carefully select and analyse a few important components of working time and to focus attention on summarising what is known about key developments in those areas across the European Region. The main sources for this analysis include data from the European Union Labour Force Survey (EU LFS), drawn largely from EUROSTAT; the ILO Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM), 5th edition (2007); and the 19 country study reports commissioned by the ILO Regional Office for Europe as inputs into the thematic report for the 8th European Regional Meeting (ERM) in 2009 (see Appendix). These sources will be supplemented in some cases by data from the global report focused on working time in developing and transition countries, *Working Time Around the World* (Lee *et al.*, 2007).

Towards the objective of summarising what is known about key developments in working time across Europe, Section 2 of this article will review trends and patterns in working hours in the broadest range of European countries possible given data limitations, with a focus on average weekly hours of work and the proportion of workers working 'excessively long hours' (defined as usual working hours of more than 48 hours per week). Section 3 will analyse developments regarding one particularly unique form of working time arrangement, part-time work, with a focus on the incidence of part-time work in each country, changes in this incidence over time, the female share of part-time employment, and issues related to the quality of part-time jobs. In the following section, Section 4, we will consider the organisation of working time in Europe, with a focus on the incidence of non-standard work schedules (e.g. night work and weekend work) and shift work, as well as the extent to which various types of flexible working time arrangements (e.g. flexi-time schemes, annualised hours, working time accounts, etc.) are being deployed in individual enterprises across these countries. Finally, the last section of the paper, Section 5, will briefly summarise its main findings and then present some policy suggestions within a broad framework designed to advance decent work in the area of working time.

2. Trends and patterns in working hours

The focus of this section will be on broad trends in working hours across the European Region, divided into the following subcategories: the ‘old’ EU-15 member states; the ‘new’ EU-12 member states; and to the limited extent that data is available, other countries in Europe outside of the EU, including both the Western Balkans and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).² The discussion will focus first on average (usual) weekly hours of work and then on ‘excessive’ weekly hours of work—defined as usual weekly hours in excess of 48 per week (in line with the 48-hour weekly limit established in ILO Conventions, nos. 1 and 30).³

Looking first at average usual weekly hours of work,⁴ we can see that there is a broad trend towards a reduction in average weekly hours in most of the countries for which data is available. In Figure 1, which focuses on the old EU-15 member states, nearly all the countries follow this pattern over the 1995–2006 period, except for a small increase in Austria and an essentially flat line (no trend) in France. This overall trend towards reduced working hours is mirrored in the weekly hours of full-time workers, which also decline in most EU-15 countries over the same period. The notable exceptions to this trend are Austria—where the average weekly hours of full-timers jumped by 3 hours (from 41.3 to 44.3) over the period—and small increases in Germany and Italy. This trend holds even in the cases of Greece—which has the longest average weekly hours in the EU-15 at 44.1 hours for full-time workers (and 42.7 hours per week for all workers)—and the UK, which has often been singled out for having relatively long working hours among European countries (average weekly hours for full-timers in the UK decreased from 44.9 to 43.0 over the period). Thus, it is a decrease in average weekly hours among full-time workers, rather than the increase in the incidence of part-time work in most of these countries (discussed in Section 3 of this paper), which accounts for this overall decline in working hours amongst all workers.

This overall trend also generally holds true for both men and women, except for Austria, where a substantial increase in average hours for men (from 41.0 to 43.5 hours per week) was partially masked by a substantial decline in women’s average hours (from 35.9 to 33.9 hours per week), undoubtedly due to a substantial increase in the incidence of part-time employment, most of which is among Austrian women (see Figures 9 and 11) and, to a lesser extent, the UK, where women’s weekly hours ticked up slightly. It also should be noted that in some countries these reduced weekly hours across all workers reflected shorter hours for part-timers, rather than reductions in the hours of full-time workers; for example, in the case of Italy the weekly hours of full-time workers actually showed a modest increase over the period from 40.4 to 41.1 hours (see Figure 2). In fact, in many of the old EU-15 countries, the average weekly hours of part-time workers are actually increasing, such as Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden and especially Spain—where average hours of part-timers jumped from 18.2 to 23.3 hours per week (see Figure 3).

In Figures 4, 5 and 6, which cover the new EU-12 member states, we see a similar pattern, albeit from somewhat higher levels of weekly hours. In nine of the 12 new EU

² Data for countries outside of the EU-27 are only available for the analysis in this section of the article.

³ It was originally intended that this section would also review trends in annual hours of work across the Region, but it was decided not to include this analysis due to both space limitations and the limited coverage of the available data. In general, the most significant difference between weekly and annual hours is due to differences across countries in the duration of paid annual leave.

⁴ Usual hours of work refers to the number of hours that workers reported working in their ‘usual’ (typical) working week. This can be contrasted with actual hours of work, which refer to the number of hours that workers worked in a particular reference week (which is commonly the week prior to the survey week).

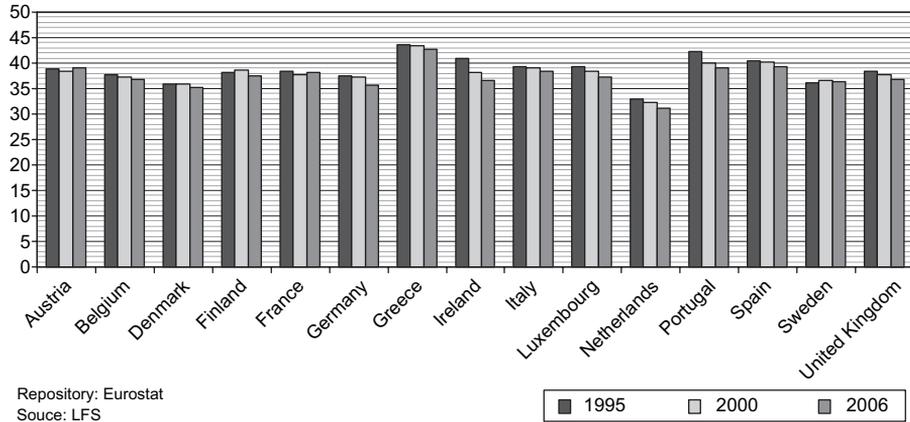


Fig. 1. Average usual weekly hours of work in main job, all workers, old EU-15.

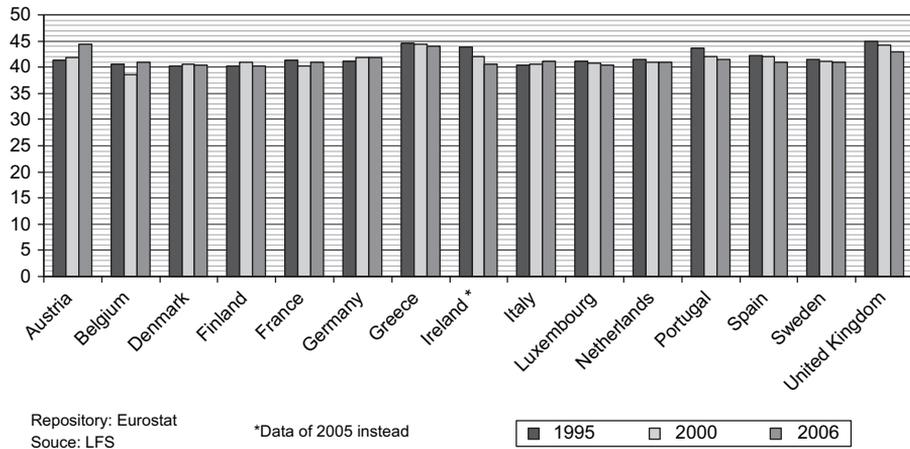


Fig. 2. Average usual weekly hours of work in main job, full-time workers, old EU-15.

member states, there is a gradual decreasing trend in average weekly hours over the period for which data for all of these countries was available (2000–2006), except for Bulgaria, where average weekly hours increased slightly (from 40.7 to 41.4 hours) and two other countries, Poland and Romania, where the working hours remained unchanged. The same phenomenon has already been noted in other studies using other datasets—such as the Fourth European Working Conditions Survey (2005), which found a considerable reduction in the number of workers in these countries working more than 41 hours per week since 2001. In terms of the average weekly hours of full-timers, they mirror the gradually declining trend in overall weekly hours—which is not surprising given the low, and generally stable, incidence of part-time work in most of these countries. Once again, from a gender perspective, we see women and men following similar patterns as those for the overall trends in each of the countries, resulting in a gradually decreasing trend in working hours for both sexes in most of this sub-region.

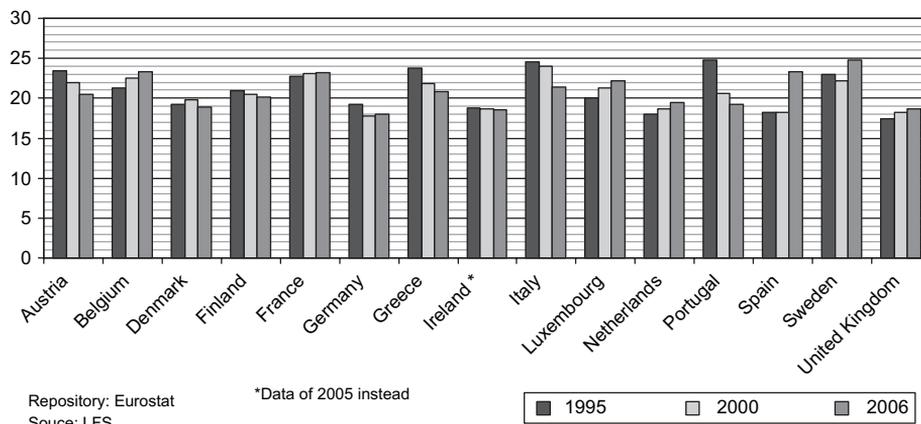


Fig. 3. Average usual weekly hours of work in main job, part-time workers, old EU-15.

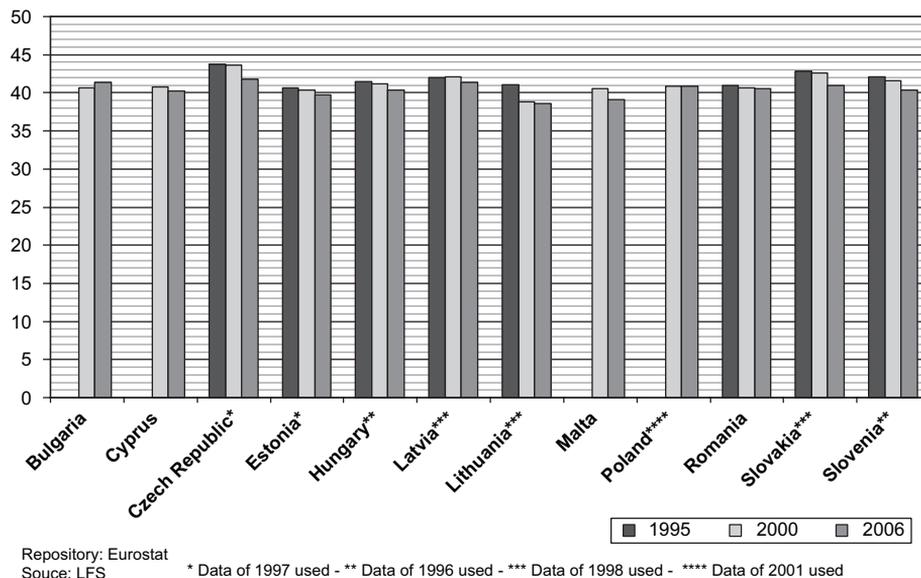


Fig. 4. Average usual weekly hours of work in main job, all workers, new EU-12.

More surprisingly, however, there is also a gradual declining trend in the average hours of part-time workers in nearly all of the new EU-12 member states, except for Hungary and Lithuania. In some cases, however, this decline may be mainly a legal artefact, such as a change in the method of calculating working hours in the Czech Republic (due to EU accession), which contributed to a decline in the hours of both part-timers and full-timers in that country (Soukup, 2007).⁵

⁵ A law that went into effect in 2001 removes the lunch break from the period that is calculated as working time (Soukup, 2007).

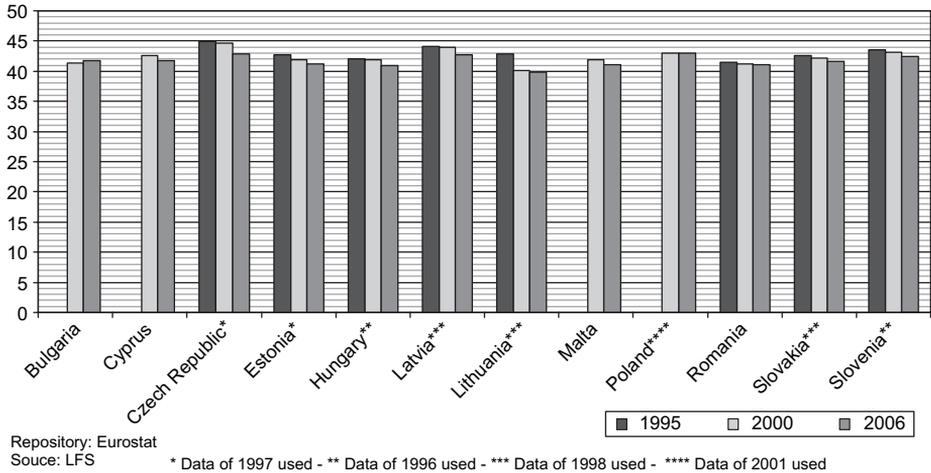


Fig. 5. Average usual weekly hours of work in main job, full-time workers, new EU-12.

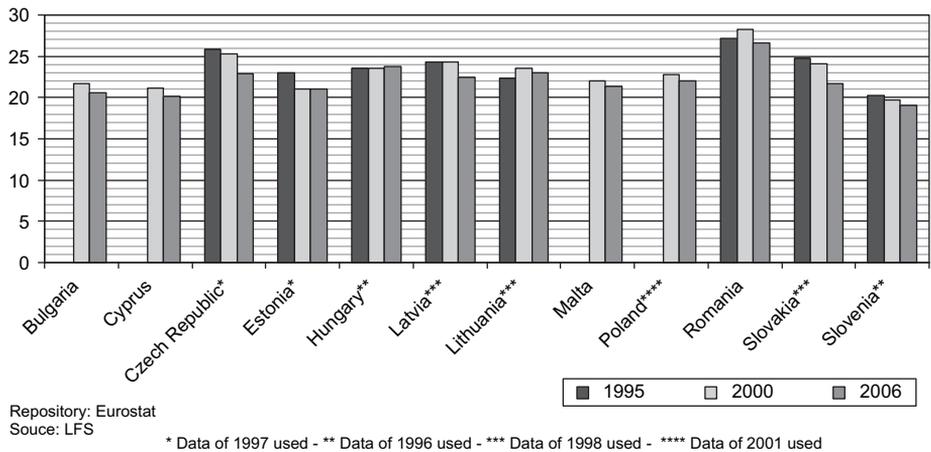


Fig. 6. Average usual weekly hours of work in main job, part-time workers, new EU-12.

Outside of the EU member states, comparable data on hours of work is extremely limited. In many of these countries, primarily those located in the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, such working time statistics do not exist at all, making any analysis of working time trends and developments impossible for most of these countries. The very limited data that is available indicates the following developments: a slight downward trend in average actual weekly hours in Croatia; a modest upward trend in actual weekly hours in Moldova from a very low baseline; no change in actual hours in Kyrgyzstan over the period; and, although no longitudinal data is available, average actual weekly hours in Turkey remain very long (an average of 51.3 hours in 2006). We can supplement this data with information from the ERM country reports where available. For example, based on the country reports Croatia follows the general downward trend of the

EU member states in average *usual* weekly hours, decreasing from 41.5 hours in 1998/1999 to 40.4 hours in 2005—most likely due to a reduction in the legal workweek from 42 to 40 hours in 2001 (Franičević, 2008, p. 56). In the Russian Federation, for example, *usual* weekly hours remained essentially unchanged over the 1995–2004 period (Vasilioouk, 2008, Annex 3.3.1, p. 67). In Ukraine, average *annual* working hours *increased* substantially over a similar period (1997–2006), but this increase actually represented a recovery in the level of working hours following a substantial drop in hours at the beginning of the economic transition during the first half of the 1990s (Libanova, 2008, p. 29).⁶

The second component of our review of overall trends in working hours across the European Region is ‘excessive’ weekly hours of work. Long working hours are neither generally 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 (see, e.g., 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; Dembe *et al.*, 2005).

As is discussed in the ILO’s recent report on *Working Time Around the World*, there are several different ways in which excessively long working hours might be defined. However, for the purposes of the present discussion, excessive hours will be defined as usual weekly hours in excess of 48 hours per week for two reasons. First, this threshold is in line with the 48-hour weekly limit established in Convention nos. 1 and 30, which was originally intended to be the maximum weekly hours that workers would be required to work under normal circumstances, i.e., except for certain temporary and permanent exceptions such as *force majeure* (see the ILO General Survey Report on Convention nos. 1 and 30, 2005); 48 hours is also the maximum limit for working hours established in the EU Working Time Directive, including both normal hours of work and overtime.⁷ Second, many studies have investigated the relationship between long working hours and safety and health: an increasing body of evidence from these studies underlines the adverse effects of regular long working hours on human health and workplace safety, and also suggests that these negative effects begin to manifest themselves when regular working hours exceed 50 hours per week (see Spurgeon, 2003, for a summary of the literature).⁸ It also should be noted that other studies indicate that there are negative impacts of excessively long hours on work–life balance as well:

[T]he greatest effect of long working hours is on work–life balance: three times as many workers working long hours compared to other workers feel that their working hours do not fit in with their social and family commitments (Parent-Thirion *et al.*, 2007, p. 19; see also Fagan, 2004).

⁶ Unfortunately, the working hours data available for this country are not comparable with the other figures presented here because the figures for Ukraine are for *annual* hours. However, this upward trend over the period is also confirmed by ILO/LABORSTA data on average hours actually worked per month.

⁷ Under normal circumstances, 48 hours is the limit on average weekly hours of work over the agreed reference period, assuming that the so-called ‘opt-out’ provision of the Directive is not used.

⁸ Multiple studies regarding health agree that negative impacts include both short-term and long-term effects (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 2004). Acute reactions involve physiological responses such as increased levels of stress, fatigue and sleeping disorders as well as unhealthy behavioural responses 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 (MSDs), chronic infections and mental illnesses (Caruso *et al.*, 2004, 2006). In addition to these health implications, it is clear that work schedules that regularly involve extended hours decrease workplace safety, as the risk of occupational accidents and injuries rises with increasing length of the work schedule—which obviously is also costly to enterprises (Dembe *et al.*, 2005; Johnson and Lipscomb, 2006).

Turning now to the available data on excessively long working hours,⁹ we see that the proportion of workers usually working excessive hours is relatively low in most countries in the European Region and, further, that the proportion of workers working such long hours is declining in most countries for which time series data is available.

In Figure 7, which focuses on the old EU-15, we see that such long hours are common in only a handful of these countries—most notably Greece (32.5% of workers) and the UK (17.7% of workers). There is also a broad trend towards a reduction in usual long hours of work in most of these countries, with a few interesting exceptions, in particular Austria—where excessive hours nearly doubled between 1995 and 2006 (from 9.7% to 17.7% of workers)—and, most surprisingly, France. In the case of France, the recent increase in reported long hours might potentially be attributed to the numerous working time laws (Robien, Aubrey I, Aubrey II), which may have made individual employees more aware of the number of hours they work each week. Once again, as was the case with average working hours, this trend holds even in the cases of Greece and particularly the UK, which recorded a five percentage point decline in the proportion of workers working excessively long hours over the period. In addition, it should be noted that (as is already well-established in the literature), excessively long hours of *paid work* are highly gendered, and tend to disproportionately affect men. This is the case not only in Europe (see, e.g., Parent-Thirion *et al.*, 2007), but across the world as well (see Lee *et al.*, 2007).

Moving now to Figure 8, which focuses on the new EU-12 plus Croatia and Turkey (based on the availability of comparable data), we see a somewhat more mixed pattern: substantial declines in excessive hours in most of these countries, but increases in some others. The most notable decreasing trends in usual long working hours were in the Czech

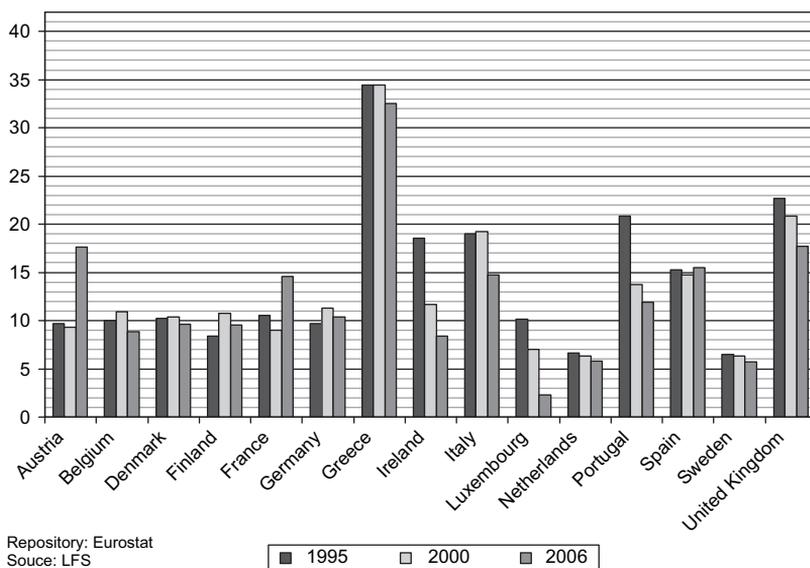


Fig. 7. Percentage of all workers with usual weekly hours of 48 or more, old EU-15.

⁹ Given limitations in the categories of EU LFS data compiled for the 2009 ERM, we have used usual working hours of 48 or more per week in Figures 7 and 8, instead of usual hours more than 48 per week.

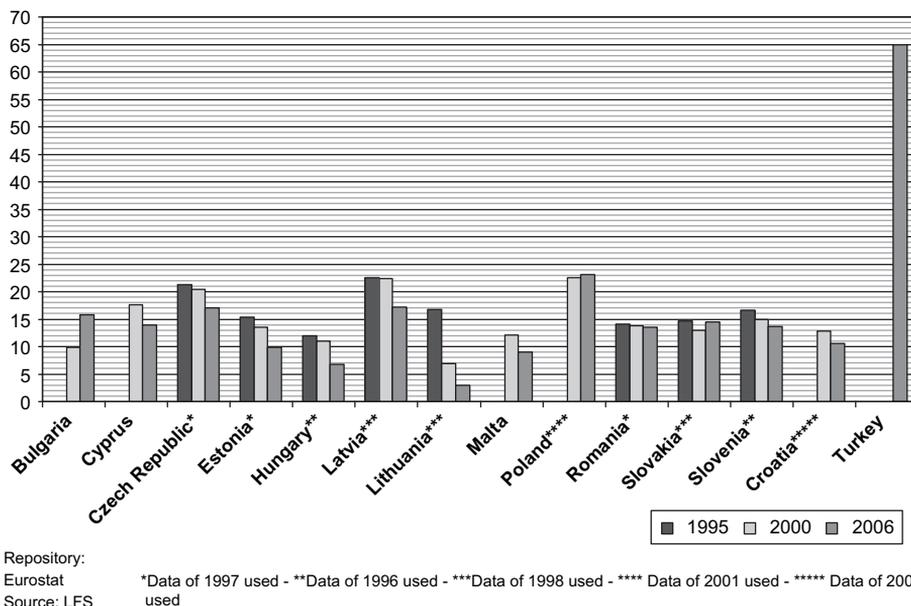
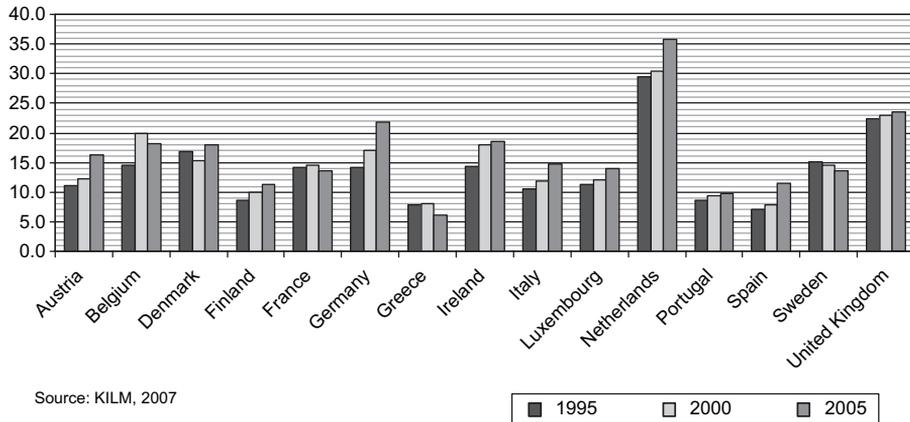


Fig. 8. Percentage of all workers with usual weekly hours of 48 or more, new EU-12 plus Croatia and Turkey.

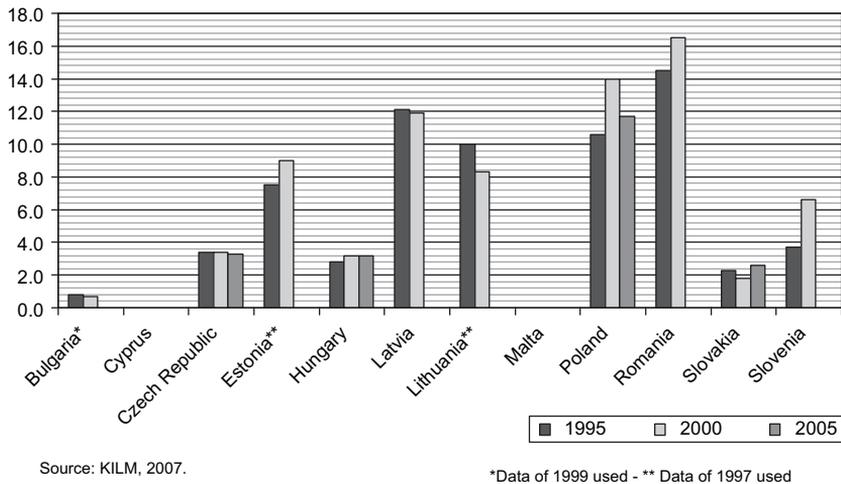
Republic, Slovenia and the Baltic states—especially Lithuania, which registered a dramatic decrease in excessive hours over the period (from 16.7% in 1998 to 2.9% in 2006). On the other hand, Poland and especially Bulgaria (from 9.8% to 15.8% of all workers) registered increases in excessively long hours between 2000 and 2006. For the EU-27 as a whole, the sectors with the highest proportion of workers working long hours are agriculture, hotels and restaurants and construction (Parent-Thirion *et al.*, 2007). In terms of occupational groups, senior officials, managers, professionals and skilled agricultural workers are the occupations that are most likely to work excessively long hours (Hogarth and Vileikis, 2007). And beyond the borders of the EU separate data indicates that excessive hours in the main job hardly exist in the Russian Federation, where the proportion of those workers working 51 hours a week or more remained below 2% between 1995 and 2004 (Vasiliouk, 2008, appendices).

The most dramatic figure in Figure 8, however, is the one for Turkey in 2006 (no time series data was available for this country): 65% of Turkish workers are working 48 hours a week or more, and these long paid hours affect a large proportion of women (45.9%) as well as a majority of men (71.7%). This situation likely reflects both the longer standard (legal) workweek in Turkey (45 hours) than in most countries in the European Region, as well as the classic issue of the link between low wages and long working hours, which continues to be an important reason for long hours in developing countries (Toksoz, 2008; see also Lee *et al.*, 2007, for a discussion of the link between long hours and low wages in developing countries). Contrary to what has been reported in some studies, however, these excessively long hours are not primarily driven by agriculture, but appear to be spread across the Turkish economy, particularly in the wholesale and retail trade, construction and manufacturing sectors (Toksoz, 2008).



Source: KILM, 2007

Fig. 9. The incidence of workers in part-time employment, old EU-15.



Source: KILM, 2007.

*Data of 1999 used - ** Data of 1997 used

Fig. 10. The incidence of workers in part-time employment, new EU-12.

3. Developments in part-time work

In the previous section, we looked at broad trends in working hours across the Europe. In this section, we now turn our focus to one particular form of working time arrangement—part-time work—and some of the key issues associated with this unique arrangement. Part-time work refers simply to those positions in which the hours of work are shorter than the ‘normal’ or standard hours of work established in a particular country. The definition of part-time work varies from country to country, but is most commonly less than 30 hours per week.¹⁰ Part-time work can be organised in a variety of different ways, but the most

¹⁰ The definition of part-time work in most countries is based on the number of hours worked, although in some survey instruments (notably the EU LFS), participants are asked directly if they work part-time. The threshold for part-time work varies across countries, but typically refers to work of less than 30 hours per week.

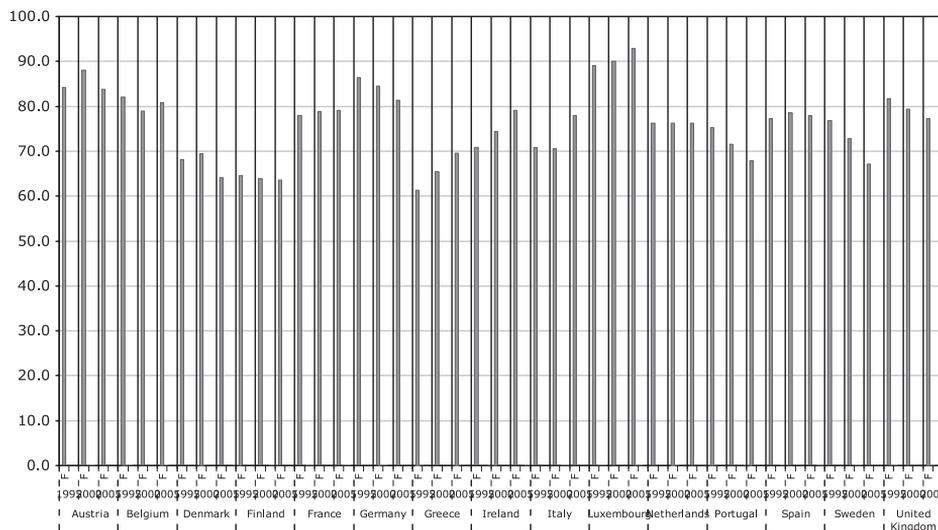


Fig. 11. Female share of part-time employment, old EU-15 (source: ILO, 2007).

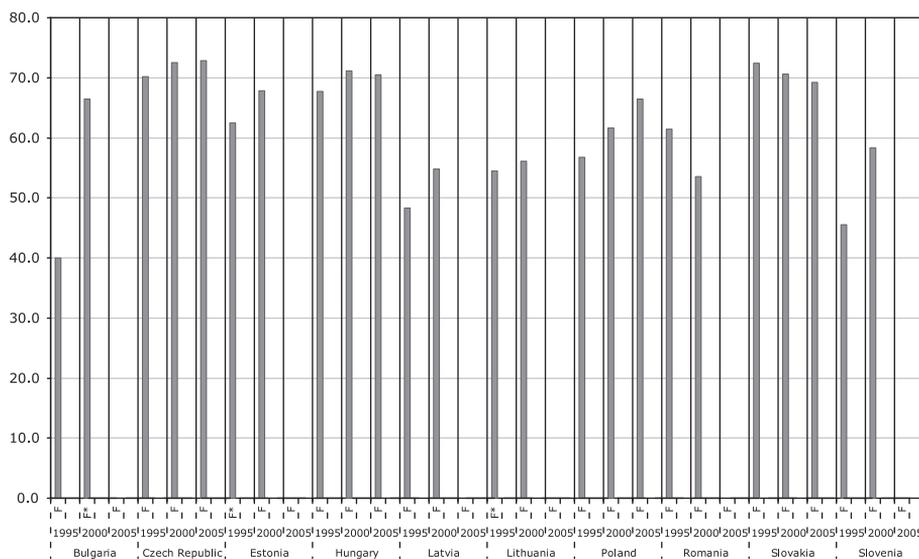


Fig. 12. Female share of part-time employment, new EU-12 (source: ILO, 2007).

common ‘model’, at least in Europe, is the one which establishes some fixed hours of work for each working day: 69% of all establishments surveyed across 21 European countries organise part-time work schedules in this way (Riedmann *et al.*, 2006; Anxo *et al.*, 2007).

There are several aspects of part-time work that are broadly similar across countries—not only in Europe but in the world as a whole. First and foremost, part-time work is heavily gendered in nearly all 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% in 2005 (Parent-Thirion *et al.*, 2007). In industrialised countries women hold approximately three-quarters of all part-time positions (see, e.g., OECD, 2004).

Second, there is the issue of job quality. Part-time jobs are frequently of lesser quality than similar full-time jobs in their terms and conditions of employment: hourly wages, non-wage benefits, social protection coverage and even training and career development opportunities (see, e.g., Fagan and O'Reilly, 1998; Polivka *et al.*, 2000). A related concern is the question of the 'reversibility' of part-time status—that is, the often limited options for returning from part-time to full-time status when family responsibilities change. In addition, there is the issue of the extent to which part-time work reflects a voluntary choice on the part of workers—that is they prefer to work part-time—or whether it is instead an involuntary situation resulting from an inability to find a suitable full-time job (which in ILO terminology is called 'time-related underemployment'); this perspective also raises concerns regarding the quality of part-time jobs, as there is evidence of substantial involuntary part-time work in many European countries (see, e.g., Messenger, 2004). Finally, an increasing body of evidence has documented the wage penalties incurred by part-time workers, particularly those individuals (usually women) who continue to work part-time over an extended period (see, e.g., Francesconi and Gosling, 2005).

Despite these broad similarities, however, part-time work is shaped by many different factors that affect the specific form that it takes and, by extension, its effects on both workers and enterprises. The national context obviously matters and many European governments (particularly in the old EU-15) have actively promoted part-time work, such as France, Germany and the Netherlands, while other countries have been more passive or even resistant (Anxo *et al.*, 2007). The specific national policy orientations have been quite different, and with very different results for both the overall incidence of part-time employment and also the quality of part-time jobs (see, e.g., Visser and Yerkes, 2006).

Looking first at broad trends in part-time employment across Europe, we can see both substantial differences in the incidence of part-time work in different countries, as well as a generally increasing trend in many countries. This increasing trend is most notable in the industrialised countries of the old EU-15, although from very different baseline levels (higher levels in Northern Europe; much lower levels in the Mediterranean countries). In Figure 8, which focuses on the EU-15, nearly all the countries followed this pattern over the 1995–2006 period—even the Netherlands, which already had the highest proportion of part-time workers—with the exceptions of Belgium, France and Greece (where the part-time rate was already very low), all of which recorded modest declines since 2000.

However, in Figure 10, which covers the new EU-12 member states,¹¹ we see a very different picture. First, the incidence of part-time employment is extremely low in most of these countries, with the exceptions of Latvia, Poland and Romania—most likely due to part-time work in the large agricultural sectors in these countries (Golinowska, 2008).¹² Moreover, unlike the EU-15, there does not appear to be any increasing trend in the incidence of part-time employment in these countries, with the exceptions of Slovenia and possibly Estonia. In most cases, this situation is probably a legacy of the Communist era, with its focus on full-time employment for both men and women and the legal and regulatory frameworks designed to promote this objective. This would imply that much of

¹¹ No data for this indicator was available for Cyprus and Malta (source: ILO, 2007).

¹² According to Golinowska (2008), 40% of all workers in the agricultural sector in Poland work part-time.

the part-time work in these countries is probably involuntary in nature, which is confirmed by several of the country studies undertaken for the 8th ERM in 2009 (see, e.g., Eamets, 2008; Golinowska, 2008).

In addition to the national institutional context, there is also the issue of the ‘dual logic’ of part-time work—in other words, the very different logics of workers and employers in promoting the adoption and expansion of part-time work. From the perspective of workers, reduced working hour schedules, particularly in the form of part-time employment, appear to be the number one strategy employed by workers for reconciling paid work with their personal responsibilities; it is predominantly used by women with family responsibilities and, to a lesser extent, by youth to combine paid work and education. In nearly all countries women still do most domestic and care work, while few men significantly reduce their paid working hours to take on these responsibilities (see, e.g., Parent-Thirion *et al.*, 2007; see also Lee *et al.*, 2007, ch. 4). This reality means that family duties often press women into working time arrangements—such as part-time work or even weekend and evening schedules—that fit with their domestic commitments (see, e.g., Fagan, 2004). It is interesting to note that, unlike female part-time workers, male part-timers in Europe do not ‘spend’ the time ‘saved’ by working part-time jobs in handling family responsibilities or other unpaid domestic tasks (Parent-Thirion *et al.*, 2007).

We can see the workers’ side of this part-time logic played out in Figures 11 and 12, which present the female share of part-time employment in the EU-15 and the new EU-12, respectively. Looking first at the EU-15, in Figure 11 we see that the female share of part-time employment represents the dominant proportion of part-time work (at least 60% and often 70% or more) in every single country in this table, with little change over time, reflecting women’s use of part-time work as a work–family reconciliation strategy, albeit in different forms based on national laws (e.g., provisions regarding the right to work part-time during or following periods of parental leave).¹³

Turning to the new EU-12, in Figure 12 we also see a dominant and increasing female share of part-time employment in most of these countries, with especially large increases in the female share in Bulgaria and Slovenia. However, there are a few exceptions to this rule—most notably Latvia, Lithuania and Romania, where men’s share of part-time employment represents nearly half of the total.

For enterprises, however, part-time work is based on a different logic—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say multiple different ‘logics’ depending upon the enterprise. On the one hand, part-time work represents one form of flexible staffing arrangement that facilitates the adaptation of staffing levels in the enterprise to business demands, such as covering peak periods; on the other hand, enterprises may offer part-time work as a means to accommodate workers’ preferences for work–family reconciliation, often as part of a broader strategy to promote the recruitment and retention of women. The Establishment Survey on Working Time (ESWT) provides clear evidence of the different rationales for the introduction of part-time work in European establishments: 34% of the managers surveyed stated that they introduced part-time work primarily in response to the needs of the enterprise; 39% of the managers said that they adopted part-time work primarily in response to their employees’ preferences; 21% reported that both factors were equally important. (Anxo *et al.*, 2007, p. 32). The ways in which employers deploy part-time work reflects these differences, as well as important sectoral differences in business requirements

¹³ This is not to suggest that women necessarily *prefer* to work on a part-time basis, but rather that they often end up using this option as a result of limited alternatives for work–family reconciliation.

and also differences in national laws and policy orientations. For example, while part-time work with some fixed hours on every working day is the most common form of part-time work across the EU (it is used by two-thirds of all establishments), certain industries are more likely to use other forms of part-time work as well: 'other fixed cycles' (typically full-time hours on fewer days) is common in both financial administration and health and social work, while part-time work with flexible schedules based on enterprise needs is common in hotels and restaurants (Anxo *et al.*, 2007, p. 41).

In discussing part-time work across the European Region, it is interesting to briefly consider the realities that exist beyond the borders of the EU. Despite the lack of comparable data on part-time work in these countries, several country studies shed light on a phenomenon that can best be described as reduced working hours—effectively part-time work based on other fixed cycles—determined by the needs of enterprises. Unlike part-time work based on enterprises' needs in the EU member states, however, which is often designed to respond to short-term fluctuations in market demands, these reduced working hours typically take the form of extended periods of administrative leave that are compulsory in nature, and are designed to respond to longer-term declines in labour demand due to reduced production and/or financial difficulties facing individual firms. This type of administrative leave appears to operate in a manner similar to work sharing (short-time working), where workers hours and pay are sharply reduced (sometimes to zero) but they are not laid off and may continue to receive various company-specific benefits (e.g., subsidised housing). This phenomenon was widespread in former State-owned companies in a number of Eastern European countries such as Kazakhstan, Ukraine and the Russian Federation, particularly during the initial period of economic transition in the 1990s (Tatibekov, 2007; Libanova, 2008; Vasiliouk, 2008). In Ukraine, for example, long-term administrative leaves affected nearly 20% of the workforce in 1999, and although they have declined dramatically since that time, such leaves still affect substantial portions of workers in certain industries, such as transport and communications, construction and manufacturing (Libanova, 2008).

4. The organisation of working time

In any discussion of working time, it is essential to consider not only how many hours workers actually work over a given time period, but also how those working hours are organised. In fact, the same number of working hours can be organised in very different ways—with very different impacts on both workers and enterprises. In this section, we will briefly consider a few key aspects regarding how working time is organised across the European Region: the incidence and frequency of non-standard work schedules (i.e., night work and weekend work), the incidence of shift work and the use of various forms of working time flexibility. In particular, this section will draw heavily on research and analysis from the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, based on data from the ESWT 2004–2005¹⁴ and the Fourth European Working Conditions Survey 2005.

Looking first at non-standard work schedules, night work is relatively rare across the European Region. Data is available primarily for the EU member states, where an average of only around 10% of establishments requires at least 20% of their employees to regularly perform night work (Kümmerling and Lehndorff, 2007, p. 11). Regular night work is most

¹⁴ This establishment survey covers a representative sample of establishments in the 'old' EU-15 plus six of the new EU-12—the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Hungary, Latvia, Poland and Slovenia.

common in the UK (13.2% of all establishments), the Czech Republic (12.0%) and Sweden (10.9%), as well as in the utilities sector—electricity, gas and water supply (28.5%), health and social work (27.5%) and hotels and restaurants (26.2%) (Kümmerling and Lehndorff, 2007, p. 13). In general, employed men are more likely than employed women to work non-day hours, with a few exceptions in the Nordic countries (i.e. Finland, Norway and Sweden) (Presser *et al.*, 2008).

By contrast, weekend work, and Saturday work in particular, is far more common. The most commonly used type of non-standard work schedule across the European Region is Saturday work. Regular Saturday work affects employees in approximately 25% of all establishments in the EU member states; it is particularly common in the UK, Cyprus, France and Ireland, where one-third or more of all establishments require it, and is least typical in Spain and Portugal, where only about 10% of all establishments require regular Saturday work (Kümmerling and Lehndorff, 2007, pp. 5–6). Sunday work is less common than Saturday work and regular Sunday working affects workers in about 15% of all establishments in the EU member states (Kümmerling and Lehndorff, 2007, p. 8). Regular Sunday work, like Saturday work, is most common in establishments in the UK, but is also common in Sweden, Finland and Latvia as well; it is least typical in the Mediterranean countries such as Portugal, Spain and Greece, where regular Sunday work is required of employees in less than 10% of establishments (Kümmerling and Lehndorff, 2007). Both Saturday and Sunday work are also common in Croatia and Turkey, although Sunday work has become a major labour issue in the former country (Franičević, 2008). The highest proportions of establishments requiring *both* regular Saturday work *and* regular Sunday work are in the same sectors: hotels and restaurants, health and social work and other community and personal services (Kümmerling and Lehndorff, 2007, pp. 7–9). In general employed women are more likely than employed men to perform weekend work, although in manufacturing employed men are more likely to work weekends in almost all of these countries, with the exception of France where the percentages of the two sexes are equal (Presser *et al.*, 2008).

Shift work is a traditional method of organising working time that allows companies to extend their operating hours beyond the working time of any individual workers, as well as to better accommodate peak periods of demand (e.g., the ‘stacking’ of multiple part-time work shifts in the retail trade). The specific incidence of shift work is closely linked to the sectoral composition of national economies and is particularly prevalent in health and social work, hotels and restaurants, manufacturing, transport, storage and communications (Parent-Thirion *et al.*, 2007, p. 22). The use of shift work arrangements is common in most European countries: according to the Fourth European Working Conditions Survey, 16% of employees in the old EU-15 and 23% of employees in the new EU member states are shift workers. Beyond the borders of the EU, shift work is even more widespread in both Croatia (33.5% of employees) and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (34.8% of employees) (Franičević, 2008; Mojsoska-Blazevski, 2008). It is also interesting to note that shift workers are more likely to have ‘normal’ working hours than other workers—they are only half as likely as other workers to have either very long or short hours; however, they are also more likely than other workers to report negative health outcomes, as well as difficulties in balancing their paid work with their other personal commitments (European Foundation, 2007).

In addition to these traditional forms of organising working time, enterprises are relying more and more on various types of working time arrangements that permit greater flexibility in varying working hours over a day, week, month or even an entire year. Such

'flexibility' in the organisation of working time has traditionally been limited mainly to overtime work, non-standard work schedules (night work and weekend work) and shift work in its various forms. In the last few decades, however, there has been a marked trend away from the traditional 'standard workweek' and towards a more diverse array of options for arranging any given number of working hours including most prominently: flexi-time arrangements, which typically involve flexible daily starting and finishing times; working time accounts (also called 'time banking' or 'time savings' accounts), which allow workers to accumulate paid time off in the form of hours, days or even longer periods (e.g., for sabbaticals or early retirement); compressed workweeks, in which a set number of working hours is worked in fewer days (e.g. 40 hours in four days instead of five); and the averaging of working hours over extended periods of time, from multiple weeks up to a year (in the latter case, such hours-averaging or working time 'modulation' schemes are called 'annualised hours') or even longer periods. Although this trend is a gradual one, it is nonetheless quite real: in 1995, 65% of workers in the EU had fixed work schedules, but by 2005 this figure had decreased to 61% (Parent-Thirion *et al.*, 2007, p. 22).

Regarding working time flexibility, the key question that needs to be addressed is 'whose working time flexibility?'—that is, *temporal* flexibility that is oriented towards workers' needs versus *temporal* flexibility focused on meeting the needs of enterprises.¹⁵ That is not to say that working time arrangements cannot provide flexibility for both workers and employers—it is only to say that both the *type* of working time arrangement and the *structure* of that arrangement affect the extent to which the arrangement will meet the needs of workers, the needs of enterprises, or both. For example, overtime work is a type of working time flexibility that mainly meets the operational needs of enterprises (although it can also provide financial benefits to workers when overtime premiums are paid); on the other hand, flexi-time schemes have typically been designed primarily to provide workers with some degree of control over their daily starting and finishing times.

While it is simply not possible in this short article to provide a comprehensive analysis of all of the various factors that affect whether a particular working time flexibility scheme will be worker-oriented, employer-oriented or some combination of both, it is worth briefly reviewing the results of a relatively recent study on *Working Time Flexibility in European Companies* (Chung *et al.*, 2007). This study, based on data from the first Europe-wide establishment survey, the ESWT 2004–2005 in 21 EU countries,¹⁶ contains perhaps the most ambitious analysis of working time flexibility in Europe that has been attempted to date.¹⁷ The resulting typology of working time flexibility (Chung *et al.*, 2007, pp. 28–31) includes the following categories:¹⁸

¹⁵ There is considerable confusion regarding the concept of working time or *temporal* flexibility, particularly in the context of the ongoing EU debate on 'flexicurity'. Here we focus solely on *temporal* flexibility, which is defined as flexibility in the ways in which working hours are arranged over a specified period of reference. This type of flexibility assumes a *fixed number of workers with variable working hours* and should not be confused with 'numerical' or 'contractual' flexibility, which, by definition, focuses on obtaining flexibility through a *variable number of workers*.

¹⁶ The 15 'old' EU member states, plus six of the new EU member states—the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Hungary, Latvia, Poland and Slovenia.

¹⁷ This typology of working time flexibility was derived from an advanced statistical modelling technique called 'latent class analysis'. This statistical technique is designed to identify groups of establishments that are very similar in terms of the working time arrangements that they use. The particular groupings or clusters are not identified in advance but, rather, emerge from the data based upon how well the resulting groupings/clusters fit the data using a statistical 'goodness of fit' criterion.

¹⁸ It is interesting to note that in this typology part-time work can be placed in several different categories, including *both* worker-oriented high flexibility and company-oriented high flexibility.

- Worker-oriented high flexibility—this type of working time flexibility puts more emphasis on the needs and preferences of employees, such as providing them with some control over their work schedules (14% of EU establishments).
- Company-oriented high flexibility—this type of working time flexibility emphasises practices that focus on the enterprise's operational needs and/or the preferences of its customers, such as overtime and non-standard work schedules (22% of establishments).
- Intermediate flexibility based on the life course—this type of flexibility primarily involves providing workers with various types of leave at different points in their life course (e.g., leave for family illness or care work), including part-time work and early retirement (18% of establishments).
- Intermediate day-to-day flexibility—this type of working time flexibility is designed to accommodate variations in workload within the working day, such as irregular working hours, part-time work and flexible working hours (7% of establishments).
- Intermediate flexibility based on overtime—this type of working time flexibility is based primarily on the use of overtime with low use of other arrangements (18% of establishments).
- Low flexibility—enterprises in this category use low levels of all of the various types of working time flexibility practices (21% of establishments; a low level of working time flexibility is most typical in southern European countries).

As can be seen from this typology, working time flexibility can exist in varying amounts and take a variety of different forms. While some forms of working time flexibility more clearly benefit employers and others are focused to a greater extent on workers' needs, there are a range of potential benefits for both workers and enterprises resulting from the adoption of working time flexibility—depending critically on the specific type of arrangement chosen and the way in which it is implemented. For example, flexible working time arrangements such as flexi-time arrangements and compressed workweeks, which allow workers to adjust their work schedules in response to their personal needs, have been shown to have positive effects on employee attitudes and morale (see, e.g., Gottlieb *et al.*, 1998; Hogarth *et al.*, 2001). And the first European establishment survey, the ESWT, found that both managers and employee representatives in the establishments surveyed most frequently reported two outcomes as a result of the adoption of flexible working time arrangements:¹⁹ higher job satisfaction for workers and a better adaptation of working hours to the enterprise's workload (Reidmann *et al.*, 2006). Perhaps not surprisingly, the first findings of the second European establishment survey, which is called the European Company Survey (ECS) and covers all 27 current EU member states, show that more than half (56%) of establishments with 10 or more employees now use some type of flexi-time arrangement, and nearly four in 10 establishments use some type of working time account (also known as 'time banking'), which permits the accumulation of credit hours that can later be taken as paid time off (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2009).

5. Main findings and policy suggestions

5.1 Summary of findings

Based upon this limited review of working time trends and developments across the European Region, a number of key findings emerge. First, average usual weekly hours of

¹⁹ The specific arrangements varied substantially, from basic flexi-time schemes that allow employees only to vary the daily starting and finishing time all the way to long-term working time accounts that permit accumulated hours to be used for longer periods of leave, e.g., sabbaticals.

work are relatively modest and are also on a declining trend in most of Europe. In addition, regular excessively long hours of paid work are not very common in European Region, with the exceptions of Greece and (to a lesser extent) the UK, but where these exist they primarily affect men. A notable exception is Turkey, which follows the typical pattern in developing countries of long hours linked with low wages. Across the region regular long working hours are less of a general concern and more of an issue for specific sectors such as agriculture, hotels and restaurants and construction, and for specific occupations, such as managers, professionals and skilled agricultural workers.

Regarding part-time work, there are substantial differences in the incidence of part-time work in different countries in Europe, with substantially lower levels of part-time work in many Mediterranean countries and new EU member states. There is also a generally increasing trend in many countries, particularly in the industrialised countries of the old EU-15, although from very different baseline levels. The quality of part-time work remains a major issue, especially with such high proportions of part-time work—particularly among women. This issue involves not only concerns about the terms and conditions of part-time jobs (wages, benefits, social insurance coverage, training and career advancement) but also workers' ability to return to full-time status as well as involuntary part-time work including compulsory reduced hours in several Eastern European countries. In the latter case, however, the issue is not really working hours *per se*, but rather ensuring sufficient demand for enterprises' products and services for them to be able to extend working hours (and salaries) to full-time levels.

Finally, with respect to the organisation of working time, we see generally low levels of night work across the European region, but much higher levels of weekend work, and particularly Saturday work. The use of shift work arrangements is common in most of the countries in the Europe, but is typically higher in the new EU member states. In terms of working time flexibility, there is a gradual movement away from fixed work schedules, and towards various forms of more flexible work schedules. However, there is a wide variety in the type and structure of working time flexibility schemes that exist, and considerable variability in both the amount and types of working time flexibility schemes deployed in different countries and different sectors.

5.2 Policy suggestions

One important step in the quest for decent work is the enhancement of working time. Working time was 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 (i) promote health and safety, (ii) be 'family-friendly', (iii) promote gender equality, (iv) advance enterprise productivity and competitiveness and (v) facilitate worker choice and influence over their hours of work. Advancing these five dimensions requires a broad range of policies at national, sectoral and/or enterprise levels.

While the precise mix of policies that needs to be pursued will vary substantially across countries, key issues that need to be addressed include: ‘excessively’ long hours that are worked on a regular basis; the generally poorer quality of part-time work; and the question of how to achieve working time flexibility that balances the needs of workers and those of enterprises. Taking steps to address these issues and thus promote decent working time can benefit not only workers but also enterprises in several different ways such as through increased productivity, reduced absenteeism and staff turnover and improved employee attitudes and morale, which can translate into a better ‘bottom line’.

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 ILO Hours of Work (Industry) Convention (No. 1) in 1919.²⁰ 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 limit excessively long working hours are an important (see footnote 8) feature of any legal framework on working time and these also exist in most European countries at both the country level and at the supranational level in the form of the EU Working Time Directive. However, in the European context, where the proportion of workers working excessively long hours is relatively low by global standards, in order to be effective these policies will likely need to be better targeted at those specific sectors and occupational groups in which excessive hours are concentrated.

Another policy suggestion for advancing decent working time is the need for equal treatment of part-time workers, a concern which is grounded in the ILO Part-Time Work Convention, 1994 (No. 175). This principle has already been put into force at the EU level via the 1997 EU Part-time Work Directive (97/81/EC) but, nonetheless, considerable inequalities in employment conditions between part-time and full-time workers continue to exist in many EU member states. It is essential that the quality of part-time work be improved if it is to be made compatible with the objective of promoting gender equality (Fagan and O’Reilly, 1998; OECD, 2001; Fagan, 2004). The road towards equality for part-time workers involves a process of the ‘normalisation’ of part-time work—which includes actually granting part-time workers similar rights and benefits (e.g. pro-rata earnings, non-wage benefits, etc.) as full-time workers in similar positions. Thus, an important mechanism for improving the quality of part-time work is the use of equal treatment regulations in employment, non-wage benefits and social security systems, as well as extending part-time work into a broader range of occupations and positions.

However, to effectively promote gender equality in working time, policies need to go beyond just addressing part-time work. It is 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, 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, promoting gender equality in working time involves

²⁰ It should be noted that the various positive impacts associated with a reduction in regular long working hours do not necessarily apply, or apply only to a lesser extent, to reductions in shorter durations of working hours.

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 (see, e.g., Moss and Deven, 1999). To help overcome men's resistance to using such measures, a broad range of policies is needed to promote the involvement of fathers in domestic tasks and care activities.

Not only the duration of working hours, but also the way in which working hours are organised at the workplace (i.e. work schedules), can have a significant impact on both the quality of working life and enterprise competitiveness. Therefore, a final suggestion regarding how to put decent working time into action in Europe is the adoption of work schedules that offer possibilities to both accommodate the needs of individual workers, including their family responsibilities, and simultaneously meet the business requirements of enterprises. This 'win–win' approach requires taking into account both workers' and employers' preferences, as suggested in the ILO Reduction of Hours of Work Recommendation (R 116), 1962. If properly structured, flexible working time arrangements can be mutually advantageous for both workers and employers, as they increase employees' job satisfaction and improve their work–life balance, while simultaneously allowing employers to cope better with workload fluctuations and often reducing overtime costs as well. In particular, incentives should be offered to enterprises to adopt flexible working time arrangements such as flexi-time and working time accounts, which are known to improve employee morale and attitudes, and can in turn improve enterprise productivity, quality and, ultimately, the firm's performance.

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Appendix. Data sources used in this analysis

The European Union (EU) Labour Force Survey (LFS)

This is a quarterly sample survey covering the population in private households in the EU, EFTA (except Liechtenstein) and candidate countries. It provides annual and quarterly results on labour participation of people aged 15 and over and persons outside of the labour force. Data on both the average usual weekly hours and the percentage of workers with usual weekly hours of 48 or more are drawn from this source (see footnote 4 for definitions of usual and actual hours of work). Some important breaks in the EU LFS data series arise due to census revisions and the implementation of new concepts in various countries. However, the most significant break is due to the transition from a survey conducted only in spring (quarter 1 or 2 depending on the country) to a continuous quarterly survey in which the reference weeks are spread throughout the year. This transition, which began in 1998 and was completed in 2005, resulted in series breaks in the following EU member States: Austria (2004), Belgium (1999), Finland (2000), France (2003), Germany (2005), Italy (2004), Latvia (2002), Lithuania (2003), Poland (2002), and Sweden (2001).

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM)

This is a multi-functional research tool of the ILO, which includes data on 20 different labour market indicators for countries around the world. Data on both the incidence of part-time employment and the female share of part-time employment are drawn from this source. Because there is no agreed international definition as to the minimum number of hours that constitutes full-time work, the dividing line between part-time and full-time employment is determined either on a country-by-country basis or through the use of special estimations.

Country study reports commissioned for the ILO's 8th European Regional Meeting (ERM), Lisbon, February 2009

These country reports covered a broad range of labour issues in 19 countries in the ILO's EUROPE Region, which includes the entire European continent plus Central Asia. The specific country studies that were used in this analysis are cited in the bibliography to this article.