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## 2 WORKING HOURS IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

*Timo Anttila, Jenny-Anne Lie, Satu Ojala and Jouko Nätti<sup>1</sup>*

Work is moving beyond its traditional borders of time. The standard industrial model (eight-hour day, five-day week, daytime work, free evenings and weekends, annual holidays, and retirement with a pension) is increasingly changing toward a new 'post-industrial working time regime' (O'Carroll 2015). Under the pressures of technological change and globalization, this new regime is characterized by labour market deregulation, a de-standardization of both the duration and timing of working hours, increasing work intensity, and a blurring of the boundaries between family and working life. At best, the new regime may bring more flexibility and autonomy for the majority of employees and contribute to a more productive economy. At worst, it creates new risks for individuals and their families and reinforces societal inequalities (Warren 2015).

While the trend toward a post-industrial working time regime might exist in most industrialized countries, its intensity and outcomes are not necessarily the same everywhere. Countries have various regulatory working condition traditions, and institutional change is likely to be path dependent. The Nordic countries have a tradition of strong and inclusive labour market regulation concerning collective bargaining, working conditions, worker autonomy, and combining work with family life (Eurofound 2016a; Gallie 2007; Mustosmäki 2017). This makes these countries an interesting case for observing the changes in working hours in the last two decades.

In terms of working time arrangements, distinct 'Nordic regimes' have been identified in the literature as having at least three relevant dimensions: working time regulation through bargaining at a macro level, working time flexibility at the workplace, and high work participation of women. First, at the macro level, the Nordic countries are characterized by a 'negotiated' working time-setting regime (Berg, Bosch & Charest 2014, Eurofound 2016b). Collective bargaining agreements between employer and employee organizations, predominantly at the sectoral level, are the key instrument in establishing working time standards. This working time configuration is the

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<sup>1</sup> The other authors have revised this chapter from a draft written by late prof. Jouko Nätti (1954–2020).

result of a tradition of high trade union density and broad coverage of collective bargaining (Gallie 2007). According to Eurofound (2016b), countries belonging to the ‘negotiated’ working time-setting regime have the lowest regulated working hours and actual usual hours worked, due to the strong voice of employee organizations.

Second, working time regimes are not merely the result of formal agreements and legal norms at a macro level but also of voluntary and customary practices that influence working time practices at a micro level (Rubery et al. 1998). Chung and Tjeldens (2013) found that the Nordic countries are characterized by high employee- and employer-centred flexibility. This means that working time flexibility can benefit both employees, through arrangements such as training, parental and care leave; and employers, through overtime, unusual hours and shift work. Hybrid arrangements can benefit both sides and include phased retirement, part-time work, and flexible or reduced working hours.

Third, the Nordic working time regime is characterized by high overall participation in employment by both men and women, the overall employment rate being 4–9% higher than the EU28 average 73.1% (Eurostat 2020a). Gender gap in employment is small in the Nordic countries, ranging from 2.7% in Finland to 7.2% in Denmark, whereas the EU28 mean was 11.4% in 2019 (Eurostat 2020b). According to Eurostat (2020c), part-time employment rates in Norway, Denmark and Sweden in 2019 were over 20%, which is higher than the EU28 mean. However, Finland is an exception to this, with a part-time rate of 14%.

## 2.1 WOW scientific results

### 2.1.1 Changes in usual working hours and part-time work in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden in recent decades

WOW analysed whether convergence or divergence occurred between men and women in the countries in comparison to each other, and within the countries themselves (Riekhoff et al. 2019a). Moreover, it analysed whether structural differences and changes in the population have contributed to changes in working hours. We used annual data from the EU LFS to identify trends between 1996 and 2016 (N=730 133), while controlling for a set of structural factors. The duration of working hours was defined as the number of hours per week usually worked in one’s main job. Part-time work was defined as 1–34 hours per week. The findings suggest a degree of divergence between the countries: usual working hours and the incidence

of part-time work were relatively stable in Finland and Sweden, whereas working hours decreased in Denmark and Norway. The latter was partly driven by a decline among the 15–29-year age group. A gender gap in working hours was evident in all the countries: on average, men worked more hours in paid work. However, the gender gap decreased somewhat over time, due to a rise in part-time work among men and a decline among women in Norway and Sweden.

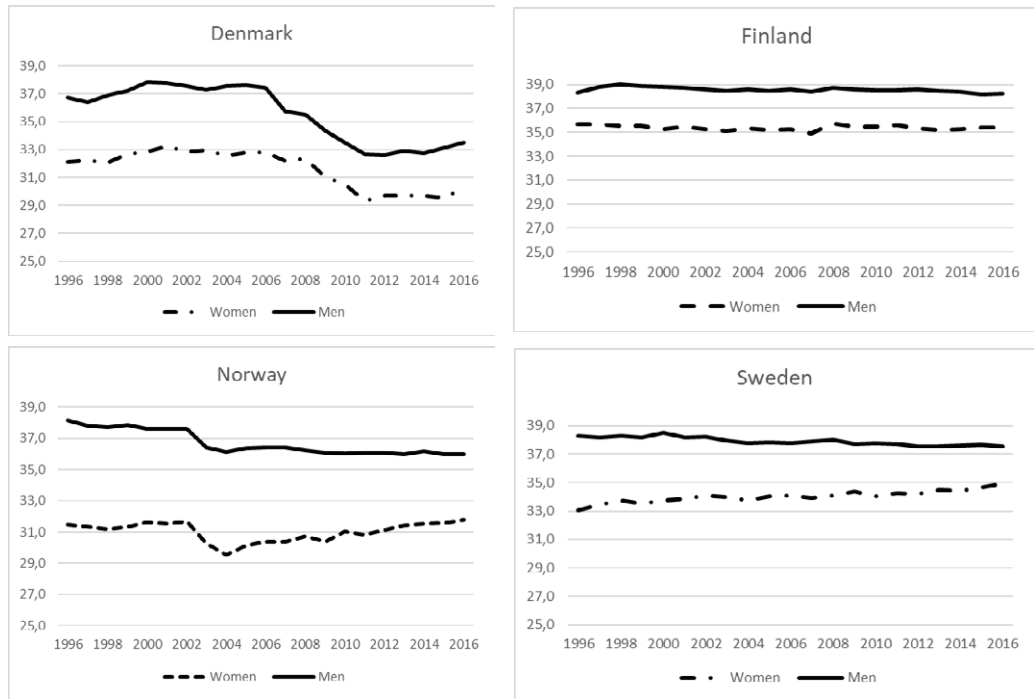


Figure 1. Trends of usual working hours (hrs/week) in Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Norway, 1996–2016.

### 2.1.2 Individual- and country-level factors that contribute to the risk of working unsocial hours in 30 European countries

Using the EU LFS data, we investigated the influence of labour market dualization, product- and labour market regulation, and collective bargaining on the individual risk of working unsocial hours (Riekhoff et al. 2019b). In the EU LFS data, the ‘usually’ response to work during evenings and nights means at least half of the days worked during a reference period of the preceding four weeks, whereas ‘sometimes’ means less than half of the days worked but at least one hour during the same period. For work during weekends, ‘usually’ means at least two of the Saturdays/Sundays during

a reference period of the preceding four weeks, whereas ‘sometimes’ is defined as work on only one Saturday/Sunday during the period, including at least one hour during the same reference period. The results show that there is no overall 24/7 economy or society in Europe if the incidence of working unsocial working hours (i.e. evenings, nights or weekends) is used as an indicator. The study showed large variations between countries. However, on average, more than one out of three of the employees in this study typically worked unsocial hours. The risks of working unsocial hours were strongly dualized between low and high skilled workers. In all the countries, lower skilled workers were most exposed to unsocial hours, but the size of the risk gap between low-skilled and high-skilled workers varied. In the countries in which collective bargaining plays a greater role in regulating working hours (e.g., the Nordic countries) the gap between low- and high-skilled workers was smaller.

### **2.1.3 Comparison of Nordic countries with other European countries in terms of working time and place dimensions and their associations with employees’ work-life balance**

A European comparison of the flexibility of working time and place found various types of flexibility regimes in Europe (Anttila et al. 2015). Nordic countries were characterized by shorter usual working hours, less unsocial (other than daytime) working hours, higher intensity, hastiness of work (work tempo), and more control over working hours. In addition, employees in northern Europe were the most satisfied with how their working hours fit in with their family or social commitments. Furthermore, working times were associated with perceived work-life balance. The more autonomy the employees had in terms of their working hours, the more often they felt that their working hours fit in well with their family or other social commitments. In contrast, the more working hours and the more frequent unsocial working hours or work in multiple locations that the employees had, and the higher working time intensity they felt, the less often they deemed their working hours a good fit with their family and social commitments.

### **2.1.4 Comparability of working hour variables in four national working condition surveys**

We studied the comparability of the working hour variables of the different national working conditions surveys for a potential meta-analysis of the working hour trends in Scandinavia. The four national surveys were the *Working Environment and Health Study in Denmark (WEHD2012–WEHD2014)*, the *Finnish Working Conditions Survey*



*Employees in telework may face challenges in work-life balance.*

(FWCS, 1977, 1984, 1990, 1997, 2003, 2008, 2013), the *Survey of living conditions - Working environment* (LKU, Statistics Norway, 2006, 2009, 2013), and the *Swedish Longitudinal Occupational Survey of Health (SLOSH, 2006–2014)* (Lie & Nätti 2018). These four surveys showed large discrepancies in their definitions of both demographics and working hour variables. We recommend closer co-operation between the countries in the future, to facilitate new joint studies and improve between-country comparisons.

## 2.2 Other scientific evidence and conclusions

### 2.2.1 Usual working hours

Other studies looking at the European trends in working time have shown some convergence in recent years between old and new EU Member States and between working time-setting regimes (Eurofound 2016b). However, this convergence appears to be mainly due to countries with relatively long usual working hours experiencing a downward trend. Furthermore, earlier studies indicate that overall working hours

in the Nordic countries have been relatively stable (Eurofound 2016b). We analysed in more detail whether convergence or divergence occurred between the Nordic countries and genders when a set of structural factors were controlled for. Our results indicated a degree of divergence between the countries: usual working hours and the incidence of part-time work were relatively stable in Finland and Sweden, but working hours decreased in Denmark and Norway (Riekhoff et al. 2019a).

### 2.2.2 Unsocial working hours

Earlier studies indicate that working non-standard hours appears to be a widespread phenomenon in the US (Presser 2003) and Europe. In European countries, based on the 2005 labour force survey data, between 15% and 30% of wage earners usually work at night, in the evenings or in shifts, whereas between 20% and 35% of respondents usually work on Saturdays and Sundays (Presser et al. 2008). Using the 2010 EWCS data, Anttila and Oinas (2018) found that in most European countries, more than 50% of the workers worked during weekends at least once a month, between 40% and 60% worked in the evening, and less than 25% worked at night. However, there is only little evidence that these figures are part of an increasing trend of unsocial working hours across the working population and across countries (Hamermesh 1999). One Eurofound (2015) study indicated that Saturday work remained almost unchanged for over a decade, while Sunday work increased slightly from 13.5% to 14.6% between 2004 and 2014. The same report showed that overall in Europe, the incidence of shift work changed very little over time. In addition, little change was observed in evening and night work, in which the proportion of those who *usually* worked evening and night hours declined, and there was only a slight increase among those who *sometimes* worked these hours (Eurofound, 2015). Country studies in Belgium (Glorieux et al. 2008) and Finland (Anttila & Oinas 2018, Ojala & Pyöriä, 2015), which used detailed time-use survey data over longer periods of time, demonstrated substantial differences between the countries, but found no trend toward a 24/7 society in any of these countries.

### 2.2.3 Working time dimensions and work-life balance

Earlier studies on the linkages between working time dimensions and work-life balance have shown that a long working week (Grzywacz & Marks 2000, Crompton & Lyonette 2006), unsocial working hours (Gallie & Russell, 2009), and a high working time tempo (Grzywacz & Marks 2000, McGinnity & Calvert, 2009) usually have negative effects, and working time autonomy has positive effects on employees'

perception of the balance between work and other life spheres (Fagan et al. 2012). Based on meta-analytic research, Byron (2005) concludes that individual schedule flexibility is negatively related to work-family conflict. Another meta-analytical study by Michel and colleagues (2011) found that schedule flexibility benefited those who were married or parents. Hughes and Parkes (2007) found that high individual work-time control buffered the negative effect of longer hours on work-family relations. According to a comparative analysis of the European countries (Anttila et al. 2015), the Nordic countries appear to be a group of countries in which employees have a high level of autonomy regarding their working hours and the opportunity to work outside company premises, but also suffer from considerable time pressure at work. This northern group differed from all other country groups in its higher incidence of good work-life balance.

## 2.3 Recommendations

### 2.3.1 Usual and part-time working hours

Important factors that reinforce differences between countries and genders but that are not directly measurable using labour force survey data, are policy reforms and societal norms. The convergence in working hours between men and women in Norway and Sweden might be due to more gender-oriented work-life balance policies (Björnberg 2016, Haataja 2009). Differences in the norms regarding full-time work might explain why part-time work is still so much more uncommon in Finland than in its neighbouring countries. Nevertheless, norms are not static and can change, bringing along changes in practices. Mósesdóttir and Ellingsæter (2017), for example, have shown how in Norway, the norm of women working part-time is under pressure, and is slowly altering (see also Nätti & Nergaard 2019).

### 2.3.2 Unsocial hours

Given their wide occurrence and far-reaching negative effects, the regulation of non-standard work schedules has been a logical approach to limiting negative effects. At the EU level, the European Directive of Working Hours forces national legislation in the European Union, unlike in most other countries outside Europe. In addition, any effective strategy for addressing this issue must involve effective employee organizations, as well as the active engagement and commitment of employers. Collective agreements are made between employee and employer organizations. Thus, both have the right to modify the appliance of working time regulations by



law in the EU. This allows interaction between top-level (directive) and national and local level regulation, with a great deal of flexibility and interactions. Another issue is whether the regulations associated with well-being of the rather strict Directive are always sufficiently followed.

In addition, as unsocial working hours are unlikely to be completely eradicated, solutions should also be sought in occupational health and family policies. For example, the contribution of workplaces to occupational safety activities can help lower the risks of accidents and adverse health effects, and flexible access to childcare facilities might offer opportunities to reduce tensions between work and family life. Finally, a job with unsocial working hours may suit someone during a certain phase of life (e.g., a young person with no children) or might serve as a stepping stone to a job with more standard working hours. To avoid dead ends in one's working life, policies should aim to enable skill-upgrading, occupational mobility and sustainable working times over the life course.

### **2.3.3 Work-life Balance**

Paid working hour arrangements are a central issue in European social policy. One of the main aims of the European Social Policy Agenda (see European Commission, 2019) has been to increase the employment rate, especially that of women. It is expected that a good balance between paid work and other life spheres will help achieve this goal. Analyses of the WOW project studies have shown that working hours are closely related to perceived work-life balance. Both the duration and timing of working hours predict perceived work-life balance.