



UNIVERSITÉ PARIS  
DAUPHINE

**IRIS**  
INSTITUT DE RECHERCHE INTERDISCIPLINAIRE  
EN SOCIO-ÉCONOMIE  
UNITÉ ASSOCIÉE C.N.R.S. FRE2140



# **FLEXIBLE WORKING HOURS AND THEIR IMPACT ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND WORKING CONDITIONS**

***Jean-Yves Boulin***  
***CNRS-IRISSO/Université Paris Dauphine***

*Expert meeting*  
*Organisation of working time : implications*  
*For working conditions*  
*Dublin June 3rd 2011*

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# Introduction



- Since the beginning of industrialisation there is a conflict between time structures and rhythms of individuals and those of the work sphere
  - atypical working hours submit individual to tensions:
    - \* regarding his physical and mental health
    - \* regarding his social and family environment
  - social utility of time spells differ considerably due to the social organisation of time. The intensity of tensions varies according to the social utility of these time spells (evening, week end...)

## **I.Trends in flexible organisation of time**



**Besides “classical” shift work, a large process of destandardisation of working hours has occurred during the last decades :**

- week end work,**
- staggered working hours (work hours early in the morning and working hours during evenings)**
- long working days**
- scattered working days (with breaks of more than 3 hours)**
- irregular working days and weeks**
- yearly variations (annualisation/modulation)**
- unpredictable working hours**

**Non standard forms of employment are conducive of atypical working hours (part time, short term, agency)**

**After a strong increase during the 90's, EWCS concludes to a stabilisation during the 2 000's (15 to 27 countries ; cross country differences but at EU level, standard working hours are still the norm-EWCS 2010).**

### **France :**

**- shift work is increasing (10% in 1998 to 11% in 2005), particularly for women (16% to 19%, mainly two shifts)**

**- night work is still increasing (15,2% in 2009) with an increasing share of women (29% of night workers were women in 2009, 20% in 1991)**

**- intensification of atypical hours : increasing share of those working regularly during nights (7% in 2005, 4% in 1998), on Saturdays (27% in 2005 vs 19% in 1998), on Sundays (13% vs 7%)**

# The shrinking of the standard working time regime

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A study (DARES, 2009) indicates that only **37%** of french employees work with normal/standard hours of work (regular from day to day and week to week, on a 8/9-17/18h basis, not during week ends).

Among others :

- 19% work **regularly** on **atypical hours** or have **irregular working weeks** (long hours regimes are frequent for this group)
- 10% have, only **occasionally**, the working hours characteristics of the previous group
- 6,7% have **irregular working rhythms over the year** (industries with seasonal rhythms ; developments of annualisation in number of industries linked with the implementation of the 35h)
- 10% have **long working hours, flexible** with low constraints (PMS who have more temporal autonomy)
- 17,5% work **part time**

## II. Impact on working conditions and work life balance.



Consequences of shift work and night work on **health** have been particularly scrutinized : digestive and sleeping dysfunctions, heart rhythms troubles generated by changes (regular or irregular, fast or slow...) of working time schedules etc.

Consequences on **working conditions** of shift and night workers are also well studied. DARES 2007 exhibits that **night workers** tend to cumulate atypical hours (saturdays, sundays...), their working hours are strictly determined and controlled, they have more often varied tasks without autonomy, they have more often rhythms constraints, are compelled to hurry, are more often exposed to tensions and physical attacks, have more tedious physical working conditions...



**Impact of other forms of atypical working hours are less studied but research work highlight that are also detrimental to health (restrictions on sleeping time, shifting time for meals etc.) and have more or less the same working conditions as shift and night workers (controlled working hours, need to hurry etc.)**

**Long working hours (>48h) have also negative impact on working conditions (EWCS, 2010) :**

- on health (37% vs 16% for those <48h)**
- on work intensity (54% vs 44%)**
- controlled work targets (29% vs 22%)**





## **Impact on work life balance**

**Less scrutinized in the past (indirect effects) but better studied since end of 90's/ 2 000 :**

- greater incidence of women participation to the labour market**

- greater incidence of dual earner households and mono parental families (in a context of unequal distribution of domestic and educational tasks)**

- context of individualisation of life styles and consumption behaviours**

- extension of service economy (24h ; 7/7)**

**In this context, impacts of atypical working hours on family life and social life, on accessibility to public and market services become of policy relevance :**

- **desynchronisation of time schedules of different members of the household : a shift worker spend 22% less time with his child (under 11 years old) than a worker in a standard working time schedule (Gadbois, 2004)**

- **time spent separately by each parent with children has increased strongly during the last decades, particularly the time spent by fathers (+ 170% between 1985 and 1999) (Lesnard, 2009)**

- **increased difficulties to have access to daily services (care facilities for children, public services such as transport facilities due to atypical working hours, leisure services etc.)**

**Nowadays, desynchronisation is not a choice but the result of individual inequalities in the field of working time : detrimental to family and social links**



**Moreover, these work/life balance effects have detrimental impacts on health and working conditions of employees, and negative impacts on firms' productivity/efficiency**

- stress incurred by these work/life imbalances has a negative impact on work productivity**
- necessity to hurry in order to resynchronise daily life time schedules**

**Women are particularly exposed to these bad daily life conditions due to the still prevalent unequal distribution of domestic tasks**

**Firms which implement such atypical working hours have difficulties to find skilled employees and to retain them**



### **III. Are there flexible organisations of time which are employees oriented ?**

**The development of atypical working hours (and atypical forms of employment) and in a lesser extent of part time employment (depending of cultures : FR vs NL) expresses the search by firms of more flexible work organisation (attuned with production cycles and demand rhythms in services activities). But, generally speaking, these evolutions do not fit with employees needs (productive flexibility)**

## **Scope and limits of some employees' oriented schemes**

**What about :**

**- flexitime?**

- \* not extensive**
- \* strictly controlled**

**- working time accounts ?**

- \* not extensive (instead in Germany : )**
- \* mainly used as a tool to synchronise labour demand with market cycles (controversial, Jürgens vs Seifert)**

**- “confident time” ?**

- \* time is no more the measure of task, but task becomes the measure of time**

# The myth of flexicurity



**In theory, working time is a key issue for combining business requirements and employees needs. Flexicurity is understood as providing flexibility for firms and security for employees. Both are supposed to be complementary (more strength for firms in the global competition and securisation of professional life courses of employees through a better management of transitions)**

**Actually, the empirical research in the field of working time organisation shows that productive flexibility is detrimental to employee security :**

- atypical and/or long working hours, flexible working time arrangements are detrimental to the health, family and social life of employees**

- breaks during the professional life and part time employment (both are female features) induce path dependencies with negative effects for latter development in biographies (career developments, level of pensions...)**

## IV. Some perspectives



⇒ A balanced approach in social times aiming at solving time and spatial shortcomings for individuals needs :

⇒ time sovereignty for individuals

⇒ at the society level a social organisation of time allowing better access to services and access equity

Firms need flexibility but also security in the sense that they need to be confident in their employees competencies - permanent up dating - and availability. For that they need to implement good working conditions and to provide a large palette of working time options



*As social scientist we identify three ways (to be implemented jointly) in order to improve both individual/households' time sovereignty and their working conditions*

⇒ **The negotiated flexibility/balanced flexibility at the work places** : does the design of working time regimes takes in consideration the everyday life of employees ? ***Crucial role of social dialogue at work place*** in order to implement flexible working time regimes which take in account the social, family situation of workers



## **Governmental social policies/welfare policies (with a supportive role of EU institutions) :**



- policies which favour work/life balance (parental leaves, childcare facilities...), life course patterns (lifelong training/education), gender mainstreaming and diversity in the labour market policies...

For instance the revision of the working time directive should encompass :

- a limitation of long working hours (adverse to work/life balance, gender equality and detrimental to working conditions)

- promote working time options in a life course perspective (long working time accounts, drawing rights irrespective of the time accumulated through implementation of funds at the industry level)

- promoting rules concerning unsocial hours/atypical working hours : e.g limited span of time under these schemes

***Tripartite social dialogue both at european and national levels***

## **Time in the cities or local time policies :**

**Policies which favour the development of services activities and their accessibility with the aim of the improvement of the quality of life of citizens (cf. Resolution and recommandation of the Congress of Local and Regional authorities, Council of Europe, oct 2010)**

***Societal dialogue at the local level (quadrangulaires tables of co-projection involving local authorities, social partners and inhabitants)***