



# A new organisation of time over working life

## info sheet

*'The European Commission has ... invited a rethinking of the way in which periods of work, leisure, learning and caring are distributed over the life cycle.'*

*European Commission, October 2001.*



## WHAT is the context?

Changes to traditional gender roles and the division of work are forcing a rethink of conventional work-life patterns. Individuals are increasingly calling for a better quality of life, while employers require greater flexibility in the workplace. The 2000 Lisbon European Council highlighted the need for time arrangements which support 'active ageing', improve lifelong learning and employability and guarantee a sustainable pension system. As a result, European political and social agendas are increasingly focused on improving labour supply and flexibility for companies, enhancing employability through better lifelong learning, meeting society's care requirements, securing sustainable pensions and increasing the employment rate of older and female workers.

## WHY this report?

Much work has already been carried out by the Foundation on time issues, looking in particular at time management as a tool in tackling some of today's most pressing problems. The concept of 'life-course' time organisation, which is back on the agenda, is one possible response. This project looks at how to address these changing needs by reorganising the use of time over the entire life course, specifically focusing on the individual's working years.

## WHAT are the findings?

### Working time preferences

- Half of all employees want to reduce the working week by an average of about 10%.
- Over 20% of employees say they would opt for a three-month sabbatical without pay.
- 14% of full-time workers have made efforts to move into part-time work.
- 40% of older working women are considering retiring to care for elderly family members.
- About 10-15% of the workforce indicate a desire to reduce lifelong working hours.

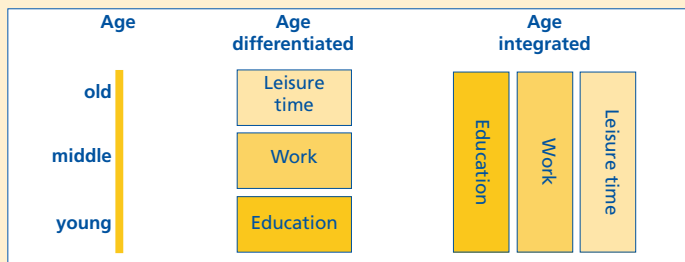
### Trends in work-life balance

- The 'education-work-retirement' pattern remains the norm but is changing due to more flexible working time and employment practices.
- Flexible working time arrangements in Europe increased from 25% in 1988 to 29% in 1998.
- Flexible arrangements apply more to younger than to older people.
- Duration of working life has fallen significantly due to extended education and early retirement trends.

## Gender gap

- Continuous full-time employment for women increased between 1984 and 1999 but the percentage varies widely in different Member States.
- Significant increase of women in sectors previously occupied by men in continuous full-time employment.
- Increasing variety of employment patterns among couples with small children, with full-time and part-time mix.
- Uneven income distribution remains, e.g. the average life course income of women in Germany is 43% compared to the male equivalent.
- A growing number of men now have a typically 'female' work pattern, i.e. truncated periods of work activity.

### Two models of life-course structure



Source: Riley and Riley, 1994

## Related issues

- Redistribution of income over the life course.
- Access to paid time for care responsibilities and life-long learning.
- Prolongation of working life.
- Use of pension savings to finance other activities during the life course.
- Employee rights of part-time workers.
- Measures to reconcile employee and company needs.

## Policy perspective

- Increasing policy support for combination scenarios: providing more accessible part-time and flexible work arrangements.
- Improved access to long-term leave arrangements, notably parental and educational leave, career breaks and sabbaticals in most Member States.
- Most Member States are implementing 'active ageing' policies in an effort to reverse the early retirement trend.

## WHAT now?

Concluding that the overall objective is to improve quality of life for employees, the report suggests that the policy challenge must be to structure life-course patterns accordingly. This would give individuals more options and freedom of choice while at the same time ensuring income or social security arrangements are in place.

It proposes that policymakers should improve or create new time and income options to help redistribute working time over the life course to allow for improved conditions of work, enhanced private life, and better access to training or volunteering. Specifically, the report suggests that as the retirement age is raised, thus prolonging working life, policymakers should ensure that, in exchange, more paid leave is accessible during the 'stress' phases of life. It also underlines that new social security structures are essential for the individual to be able to exploit a new organisation of time over working life.

### Full text:

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/EF0336.htm>

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### Foundation work on related issues:

*Active strategies for an ageing population*

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/living/ageing.htm>

*Employment options of the future*

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/working/options.htm>

*Third European working conditions survey*

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/working/surveys.htm>

*Family care of the elderly*

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/living/family.htm>

*Reconciliation of work and family life and collective bargaining*

[http://www.eurofound.eu.int/Other\\_Reports/work\\_family\\_life.pdf](http://www.eurofound.eu.int/Other_Reports/work_family_life.pdf)

*Time constraints at work and health risks in Europe*

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/EF0307.htm>

*Gender, employment and working time preferences in Europe*

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/EF0145.htm>

(summary also available:

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/EF0149.htm>)

*Time and work: work intensity*

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/EF0248.htm>

*Time and work: duration of work*

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/EF0211.htm>

*Times in the city and quality of life*

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/EF9940.htm>

(summary also available

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/EF9957.htm>)

*Flexibility in working conditions*

[http://www.eurofound.eu.int/working/flex\\_wip.htm](http://www.eurofound.eu.int/working/flex_wip.htm)

*Monitoring quality of life in Europe*

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/living/monitor.htm>