

WORKING TIME CHARTER

Working time in Europe has changed over the last twenty years. The changes have been brought about by extreme deregulation triggered by a shift towards a neoliberal policy. This process will only accelerate as a result of digitalisation. Flexibilisation and intensification of work will increase and therefore trade unions should enforce regulations to protect workers. Working time undoubtedly remains one of the most fundamental areas of conflict between labour and capital at company level (including multinational company level) and sectoral level, as well as in collective bargaining and in terms of legislation.

Trade unions need to be aware that the introduction of new technologies, and digitalisation in particular, can lead to different forms of work organisation - be it increases in precarious work or, conversely, improved working conditions. Furthermore, we should also consider who will benefit from the productivity increase generated by these new technologies: employers only or workers too?

The determination of working time is a key priority in collective bargaining. Working time is currently mainly regulated by collective agreements at national level. National sectoral social partners are best placed to deal with the current challenges. It is also necessary to establish common European standards to stop working time being used as a competitive edge between European countries. Trade unions must not accept a race to the bottom through the uncontrolled prolongation of working time.

IndustriAll Europe's member organisations work in different ways with working time policies. Nevertheless, the main goals are:

- Securing employment
- Improving health and safety at work
- Improving the quality of working life
- Ensuring a work-life balance

To achieve these goals, industriAll Europe and its members are committed to pursuing strategies using the tools they see most fitting to their needs and most compatible with the situation in their countries and sectors. IndustriAll Europe and its member organisations respect and acknowledge the various approaches in Europe to achieve the above-mentioned goals. Growth of labour productivity should also be beneficial to employees.

The demands of the European trade union movement contain a number of appropriate options:

- To limit the growing dissolution of boundaries of working time and prevent the rampant extension of working hours.
- To create less burdensome shift models.
- To defend adequate rest and leisure times.
- To reduce working time in all its different models and approaches (e.g. weekly/annual, collectively/individually etc.). Productivity progress driven by digitalisation may bring the aspect of the redistribution of work more into focus in the future.

Securing employment

Securing employment is still one of the greatest challenges to be dealt with by the economic and social policies of the European Union. In the wake of the economic and financial crisis, the unemployment⁴ rate increased throughout the EU, especially in southern European countries, particularly impacting the youth. Indeed, the youth unemployment rate is significantly higher than the average national rate in all EU countries. The austerity policies implemented to tackle the crisis have in fact completely failed and maintained this social disaster.

⁴ For figures see contemporary Annual Eucob@n Report

IndustriAll Europe notes that temporary working time reduction models have effectively secured jobs in a number of countries. The German steel industry is a good example of this, with part-compensation of wages achieved collectively by trade unions as part of the working time reduction model.

Furthermore, partial or early retirement models - a complete or progressive reduction of working time for older workers, especially for those with arduous jobs – can be used to facilitate access to employment for young people, ideally combined with knowledge transfer schemes. However, it should be a voluntary system. Hence, models of working time reduction can play an important role in managing demographic change.

Working time reduction can also be used to prevent negative impacts on workers' health and safety due to the intensification of work, arduous jobs, stressful workplaces, around-the-clock availability or the effects of repetitive tasks.

Nonetheless, we must ensure that these working time reduction models do not increase work intensification and flexibilisation.

Beside collectively agreed instruments to reduce unemployment and secure jobs, IndustriAll Europe demands a coherent industrial policy at EU level that underpins the re-industrialisation of the European economy and the creation of quality and sustainable jobs. It also calls for fair and inclusive labour market policies that promote the adoption of a base of minimum rights at EU level to improve working conditions, achieve equal treatment between all workers and combat social dumping. Finally, we need a growth-oriented economic policy and to put an end to the neoliberal agenda.

Health and safety

Highly flexible working time models, in combination with more stress caused by the implementation of new production systems and new technologies, are increasingly becoming a cause of illness. Long working hours without enough time for recreation, flexible shift work (especially night shifts) and longer working lives under arduous working conditions are making more and more workers physically and mentally ill and thus decreasing their life expectancy in good health.

Improve the quality of working life

The reality for many employees across Europe is increasing working time and growing work intensity. Employers demand more and more flexibility to the detriment of the workers, with working time patterns shifting constantly and little or no influence from the employees. A situation where employees suffer from burnout due to ever-increasing working hours and demands for flexibility is unacceptable. Moreover, workers in precarious jobs are often working too few hours to be able to earn a decent wage, whilst many more are being forced into unemployment. Atypical and stressful models of working time are currently on the rise across the board in Europe.

Work-life balance

The boundaries between working time and free time are becoming blurred, especially for people who work remotely using mobile devices, away from their traditional workplace. This current flexibility is all too often a flexibility which only serves the interests of the employers and not those of employees.

Against this background, industriAll Europe and its affiliates are determined to establish common standards for working time to the benefit of workers by:

- Ensuring that every hour worked is registered. This would be a first step towards re-regulating working time and ensuring that compensation is given as pay and/or time off in lieu. When working time banks exist, compensation in terms of time off should be preferable. Work-related travel time is working time.
- Ensuring that flexibilisation of working time is only introduced through collective agreements. Companies' interests must be balanced with workers' interests.
- Stopping the increase of individual working time and strengthening workers' control over their own working time. Rights and rules regarding workers' sovereignty over their working time must be properly implemented and strengthened where needed. Workers must be able to use their working time accounts as and when they choose.
- Regulating working times so as to guarantee work-life balance (family needs, care work in general, recreation, culture and all other aspects of quality of life). The trend towards longer and more flexible work can disturb the work-life balance of the workers. Flexibility of working time can be used by workers to improve their work-life balance.
- Limiting atypical and stressful working hours and providing better compensation possibilities for workers with arduous jobs.
- Limiting flexible work and promoting regular work patterns and rest time so as to prevent negative impacts on workers' health from shift work, night work and any forms of atypical work...).
- Calling on the right to disconnect to be put in place by law or by collective agreement. Digitalisation leads to a change in production and the organisation of industrial work, as well as affecting working time arrangements. The rapid and uncontrolled development of mobile work and telework have given rise to unforeseen consequences such as stress, psycho-social risks and burnout. The increased efficiency brought about by digitalisation has to be invested in decent work for all and not in unhealthy, hyperflexible and overly long work for some. New forms of flexible work via mobile devices could represent a positive development for workers but have to be regulated.
- Ensuring that vocational training takes place during normal working time. Skills and knowledge requirements increase with the introduction of new technological developments.

IndustriAll Europe is fully aware of the importance of these issues and will continuously evaluate the implementation of the Working Time Charter, especially the effects of minimum standards in working time.

The industriAll Europe affiliates will introduce the aims of this Working Time Charter into the social dialogue and in negotiations at national and European level in order to create a situation in which they are implemented on a transnational European level.

IndustriAll Europe will continue to closely monitor the implementation of the European Working Time Directive, with the objective of rejecting employers' attempts to erode minimum standards and of improving the European Working Time Directive.