

Title	Flexible working time arrangements and gender equality
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Brief Introduction	<div data-bbox="427 421 1074 539" data-label="Section-Header"> <h1>1 INTRODUCTION</h1> </div> <p data-bbox="443 734 1070 1832"> Increasing the flexibility of working time is an important element of the European employment strategy (Employment Guideline 'Promote flexibility with employment security and reduce labour market segmentation'). Enterprises should become more flexible in order to respond to sudden changes in demand, adapt to new technologies and be in a position to innovate constantly in order to remain competitive. Flexibility, however, is not only an important ingredient in the quest for competitiveness by employers. Employees also express a growing need for more flexibility in the time allocation over the life course in order to respond to changing needs and/or responsibilities in regard to care, learning and leisure (Messenger 2004). At a more empirical level, these trends are visible in the growth of part-time working hours, career break systems, the 'annualisation' of working hours and, in general, more diverse working time arrangements. However, employer-friendly and employee-friendly flexibility do not always converge, which can create new tensions between employers and employees and between men and women. As stated in the Commission's current policy framework for gender equality, <i>A roadmap for equality between women and men 2006–2010</i>: 'Flexible working arrangements boost productivity, enhance employee satisfaction and employers' reputations. However, the fact that far more women than men make use of such arrangements creates a gender imbalance which has a negative impact on women's position in the workplace and their economic independence' (CEC 2006: 5). </p>

It is important to balance the various interests. Working time policy, which places emphasis on the importance of labour market flexibility, may be a vital element in businesses' competitive strategies. Working time flexibility may also complement the growing diversity in lifestyles and the rise of dual-earner families. Increasingly more employees seem interested in tailor-made hours matching their personal needs for flexibility. The importance to create a win-win situation and find mutually beneficial solutions is underlined by the Commission's 2007 communication 'Towards common principles of flexicurity'. This policy communication emphasises that modern work organisation should promote work satisfaction and, at the same time, make enterprises more competitive (CEC 2007). Similarly, the European social partners' progress report on reconciliation of professional, private and family life underlines that social partners have a common

interest to explore and promote forms of working time arrangements that benefit both employers and workers (ETUC/CES et al. 2008).

The aim of this study is to provide an analysis of flexible working time arrangements in the 27 EU Member States and in the three EEA-EFTA countries. As such the report contributes to a better understanding of how working time flexibility may contribute to solving important economic and social challenges both from an employer and employee perspective. A life course perspective adds an extra dimension to the analysis. Therefore developments from the perspective of young people, prime age workers/working parents and older workers are discussed. An important issue in this respect is the extent of gender differences. Are they most pronounced in the parental phase or already emerging in the working time patterns of young people? And do older workers continue along the patterns developed during the period in which care responsibilities were most intense, or does this phase indicate new patterns and perhaps new inequalities between men and women?

The term flexibility may refer to different concepts, such as contracts and working hours, but also to employability issues. From an analytical point of view, it is useful to make a distinction between external and internal flexibility on the one hand, and quantitative (or numerical) and qualitative (or functional) flexibility on the other (Atkinson and Meager 1986). External flexibility is flexibility between firms, whereas internal flexibility refers to flexibility within the firm. External quantitative flexibility includes using non-open-ended employment contracts such as fixed-term contracts, temporary work agencies, on-call work etc. External functional flexibility implies the use of external knowledge and includes, for example, posting of employees and freelance work. Internal quantitative flexibility refers to flexibility in working time arrangements, such as overtime, part-time work and working irregular hours. Finally, internal qualitative flexibility refers to the adoption of work organisation methods that enhance the adaptability to change, such as job rotation and multitasking (see also EC 2007: 125–126). This report focuses on internal quantitative flexibility. The reason is twofold. Firstly, gender differences seem most pronounced in this area. Secondly, flexibility in working time arrangements affects the total workforce and is therefore an important issue.

Although the trend towards diversification and individualisation of working time is visible in most European Member States, there are still large differences in the extent and actual shape of working time flexibility. This is illustrated in Chapter 2, which provides a preliminary overview of working time flexibility in the 30 European countries. The differences between European Member States and the actual options and trends within European Member States can be traced back by the different legislative and regulatory measures, which make specific options more or less attractive and/or provide restrictions on others.

Chapter 3 summarises these regulatory frameworks. Chapter 4 documents the prevalence of less standard and flexible working time patterns by focusing on part-time work, overtime and long hours of work. Chapter 5 concentrates on the flexible organisation of work and provides details on flexible working time schedules, homeworking and working atypical hours. Chapter 6 tries to categorise the European Member States in terms of working time flexibility and gender equality in employment. In Chapter 7 the focus is on recent policy developments. Finally, Chapter 8 provides a summary of the main findings.