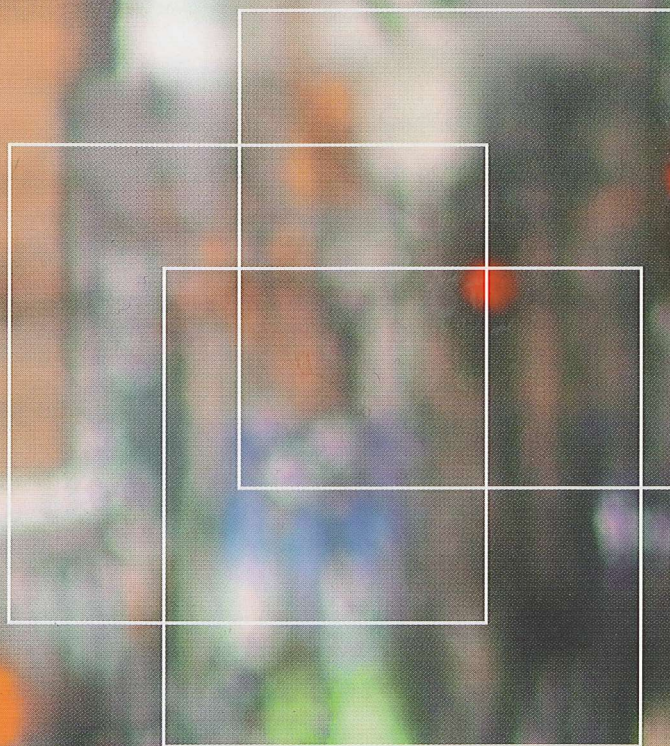




International
Labour
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Geneva

DECENT WORKING TIME

New trends, new issues



Edited by Jean-Yves Boulin, Michel Lallement,
Jon C. Messenger and François Michon

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ABOUT THE EDITORS

Jean-Yves Boulin, Sociologue au Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS); chercheur à l'Institut de Recherche Interdisciplinaire en Socio-économie (IRIS) à l'Université de Paris–Dauphine.

Michel Lallement, Professeur de sociologie, Laboratoire Interdisciplinaire pour la Sociologie Économique (LISE), Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) and Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers (CNAM), Paris.

Jon C. Messenger, Senior Research Officer, International Labour Office (ILO), Conditions of Work and Employment Programme, Geneva, with the lead responsibility for its sub-programme on working time and work organization.

François Michon, Économiste, Directeur de recherches au Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS)–MATISSE and Université de Paris I Panthéon–Sorbonne; chercheur associé à l'Institut de Recherches Économiques et Sociales (IRES).

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FOREWORD

Working time has been a central workforce issue since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, and a central issue of labour policy since at least the adoption of the Factories Act of 1844 in the United Kingdom limiting the working hours of women and children. Working time was also the subject of the very first international labour standard, the Hours of Work (Industry) Convention, 1919 (No. 1). Over the years, working time has continued to be central to the work of the International Labour Organization (ILO), which has adopted international standards on a variety of working time related subjects, including not only standards establishing limits on working hours, but also those providing for minimum weekly rest periods, paid annual leave, protections for night workers and equal treatment for part-time workers.

The ILO has defined a concept of “decent work” that involves “promot[ing] opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity” (ILO, 1999, p. 6). This vision of decent work animates all the ILO’s efforts across four broad strategic objectives: advancing fundamental principles and rights at work; promoting employment; strengthening social protection; and expanding social dialogue. During the past few years, different programmes within the ILO have worked to apply the broad concept of decent work to their specific fields of inquiry. Based upon both the existing international labour standards on working time and recent research on working time trends and developments focusing on industrialized countries, five significant dimensions of “decent working time” have recently been proposed: working time arrangements should be healthy; “family-friendly”; promote gender equality; advance enterprise

productivity; and facilitate worker choice and influence over their hours of work (Messenger (ed.), 2004).¹ These five dimensions of “decent working time” provide a broad policy framework – grounded in long-standing ILO principles such as equality of opportunity and treatment between women and men in the world of work² – that establishes a basis from which to consider how the goal of decent work can be advanced in the area of working time.

In its programme of work on working time and work organization, the ILO is seeking to advance “decent working time” by two related means of action:

- building its knowledge base via information collection and research on a range of issues, including national laws on working time, actual hours of work, various types of “flexible” working time arrangements (e.g., part-time work, flexi-time), rest periods and paid annual leave, etc.; and
- applying this expanded knowledge base to provide practical tools and technical advisory services to assist ILO constituents (governments and employers’ and workers’ organizations) to develop and implement appropriate policies and practices regarding working time and work organization – both at the national level and in the workplace.

In addition, the ILO is in the process of considering the implications of the recent *General Survey* report on two of the most important international labour standards on working time, the Hours of Work (Industry) Convention, 1919 (No. 1) and the Hours of Work (Commerce and Offices) Convention, 1930 (No. 30) (ILO, 2005).³ This report, based on survey questionnaires submitted by ILO member States regarding their working time laws and practices, concluded that, while “it remains important and relevant to provide for minimum standards of working hours . . . the changes that have taken place since these two instruments were adopted warrant their revision” (ibid., p. 105). While at the present time there is no consensus for such a revision, having access to the best available information regarding working time trends and developments will help to inform the decision of the ILO’s Governing Body regarding the appropriate course of action to take with respect to these two standards. It will also inform any potential future discussion of working time, such as at a Tripartite Meeting of

¹ Each of these five dimensions of “decent working time” is discussed at length in the concluding chapter of this volume.

² This principle is enshrined in a number of international labour Conventions, most notably the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111).

³ This report was prepared by the ILO’s Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations.

Experts⁴ or at the International Labour Conference – the body that ultimately makes the decisions on the adoption and revision of international labour standards.

As the premier network of international researchers in the field of working time, the International Symposium on Working Time – ISWT (Le Séminaire International sur le Temps de Travail – SITT) represents an important source of knowledge regarding working time trends and developments, as well as an essential forum for the exchange of ideas. As such, the ISWT/SITT network offers an important resource for assisting the ILO with building its knowledge base regarding working time and informing any future discussions and debates on this subject. The Symposium itself, which is held every few years, brings together scholars in the field of working time to address new trends and new issues in working hours and the organization of working time from across the industrialized world.

The Ninth International Symposium on Working Time, convened in Paris on 26–28 February 2004 and co-sponsored by the ILO, focused on the profound changes that have been occurring in the nature of working time, and indeed in the nature of the employment relationship itself. The new trends that have emerged over the past decade or two – such as the increasing use of results-based employment relationships for managers and professionals; an increasing fragmentation of time to more closely tailor staffing needs to customer requirements (e.g., short-hours part-time work); and the dramatic expansion of operating/opening hours with the move towards a 24-hour and 7-day economy – have resulted in a growing diversification, decentralization and individualization of working hours, as well as an increasing tension between enterprises' business requirements and workers' needs and preferences regarding their hours. This new reality has raised some new issues as well, such as those regarding increasing employment insecurity and instability; time-related social inequalities, particularly in relation to gender; workers' ability to balance their paid work with their personal lives; and even the synchronization of working hours with social times, such as community activities.

The results of the Ninth International Symposium on Working Time provide a better understanding of current developments in working time across the industrialized world; how those developments vary across different countries and under different sets of socio-economic circumstances; and the

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