

Challenges and prospects in the EU

Working conditions and sustainable work: An analysis using the job quality framework



Case studies

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Work–life balance

National policies extending access to leave for fathers

Making paternity leave more similar to maternity leave: Spain

Under Royal Decree Law 6/2019 on urgent measures to guarantee equal treatment and opportunities for women and men in employment and occupation, paternity leave in Spain will progressively become more equal to maternity leave until it reaches 16 weeks for both mother and father in 2021. This leave will become an individual (non-transferable) right.

Extending paid paternity leave: Slovenia

In Slovenia, under the Parental Protection and Family Benefits Act, paid paternity leave was extended by 5 days in 2018 (from 25 to 30 days), while unpaid paternity leave was abandoned completely. For children born on or after 1 May 2018, at least 15 days of paternity leave may be taken until one month after the end of parental leave. Up to 15 days of leave may be taken until the child completes the first grade of primary school (at the age of six or seven).

Extending length and coverage of paternity leave: Estonia

In December 2017, the Estonian parliament approved the Family Benefits Act. According to this act, 30 days of paternity leave will be covered by parental benefit as of July 2020; this leave will be non-transferable. The entitlement applies to employees only. It can be used from 30 days prior to the birth until the child reaches three years of age. It can be taken simultaneously with the mother's maternity leave or parental leave and can be taken in several parts. It does not reduce the entitlement to parental leave and – like parental leave – is equivalent to 100% of the previous income (an average of 12 months preceding the pregnancy). Currently, fathers in employment are entitled to 10 days' leave, which they can take between two months before the due date and two months after the birth of the child. Parental leave remains fully transferable between parents.

Company practices

Raising awareness of work–life balance for fathers: Pilot project

In Slovenia, four organisations (the police force, RTV Slovenia, Support & Trade, and GoOpti) joined a six-month pilot project entitled 'Fathers and Employers in Action', funded by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism Programme 2009–2014. The project addressed work–life balance challenges faced by fathers. The aim was to foster more equal involvement of fathers in childcare with the cooperation of key actors, such as governmental bodies, employers, trade unions and working fathers themselves. The pilot project developed and tested new strategies and possibilities for enhancing work–life balance. In the four participating organisations, 41 fathers joined the pilot project. Together with their line managers and company management, they took part in designing 'father-friendly' measures at company level. Strategies were adapted to the requirements and work organisation of different businesses, which present a variety of challenges for fathers wanting to participate more actively in family life and childcare.

As a first step, the project sought to identify key factors preventing fathers from engaging more actively in childcare. Three key issues were identified:

- the long distance between workplace and home
- a lack of empathy shown by co-workers and superiors for fathers' obligations (even when the employer was obliged to provide legally guaranteed rights)
- stress at the workplace negatively affecting family life

Company-based father-friendly measures designed as a result mainly revolved around the organisation of work and working time. Companies selected measures such as:

- specifying one day a week when fathers are allowed to go home earlier
- organising meetings to begin early in the morning to prevent them from running into the late afternoon
- offering the option of working from home
- making it a priority for fathers to be able to take annual leave during school holidays

The pilot project helped to raise awareness of work–life balance conflict more generally and for fathers specifically. Discussions between fathers and line managers helped to reorganise work in a much more family-friendly manner.

- IT company Support & Trade reorganised services so that only one person (rather than three) was required to work late in the afternoon. It also adopted flexible working time and offered the option of working from home.
- Transportation company GoOpti adopted special measures for drivers (more free weekends for fathers) and office workers (meetings arranged no later than 14:00; the possibility to finish work earlier on certain days).
- Public broadcaster RTV Slovenia offered flexible working hours and the option of working from home as well as banning meetings from taking place in the late afternoon.
- The police force enabled participants to choose work shifts, provided two free weekends a month and made it a priority for fathers to be able to take annual leave during school holidays.

Fathers participating in the pilot project were able to use project funds to organise events for fathers and children. Three of the participating companies decided to continue organising family events in the future (without external supporting funds).

At the end of the pilot project, fathers and management agreed that the project had made it possible to implement useful changes in work organisation, although 10 fathers considered that they could not take full advantage of the measures due to the challenges of the work environment. It also made employers more aware of work–life balance conflict issues more generally.

More information:

The Peace Institute: [Fathers and employers in action – ODA](#)

Equalising leave entitlements between mothers and fathers: Diageo

In May 2019, global beverage company Diageo announced that it would offer 26 weeks of paid paternity leave to match the 26 weeks of paid maternity leave offered to its workforce in Ireland, where it employs around 1,500 workers. At present, Ireland offers 26 weeks of statutory maternity benefit of €245 per week and two weeks of paternity benefit at the same rate. As a result, Diageo's policy offers a significant enhancement of existing national statutory provisions. It also means that this paternity leave is more expensive to the employer than maternity leave, as Diageo tops up the statutory maternity benefit payable for 26 weeks, whereas statutory paternity benefit is paid by the state for only two weeks, meaning that the cost of offering full pay for fathers on paternity leave is significantly higher. The extended paternity leave offered by Diageo is non-transferable in order to encourage fathers to take the full benefit. The stated goal of the policy is to create a more inclusive and diverse workforce at Diageo. Diageo also committed to provide equal amounts of maternity and paternity leave on full pay to its workforce in the UK. In other countries, such as Italy, the Netherlands and Spain, as well as North America and Australia (among others), the company will offer at least 26 weeks of fully paid maternity leave and 4 weeks of fully paid paternity leave.

Supporting childcare arrangements: Bitė Lietuva

This Lithuanian telecommunications company employs a high proportion of workers with young children, so it decided to establish kindergartens with professional childcare staff in its Vilnius and Ukmergė offices. The kindergartens are free of charge and open to all company employees' children aged 3 to 12. The kindergartens are open from 08:00 until 17:00 and are used by 70% of workers with children in this age group. Children can stay in the kindergarten for several hours or full time.

The kindergarten does not organise daytime napping or meals for children, but it provides a cosy space with a professional pre-school educator who selects children's activities according to their age and ensures quality time and safety for children. Bitė Lietuva has also equipped a children's room (without childcare staff) in its Šiauliai office, which can be used by older children to play or do their homework near their parents' workplace. Where necessary, the company also offers flexible work schedules and teleworking, and parents can take a day or half a day off without using their annual leave days.

More information:

CV-Online Karjeristai: [Trečius metus iš eilės TOP darbdaviai – Bitė Lietuva, UAB](#)

Supporting childcare arrangements: Edding

German company Edding, a wholesaler of markers and pens and communication devices, provides childcare facilities, as well as a broad range of other family-friendly working arrangements. These include:

- flexitime
- telework or home working on request
- 10 days' childcare leave per year
- 10 days' paid eldercare leave
- part-time work on request
- childcare facilities
- external emergency care service for several hours if required (for example, emergency childcare or eldercare needs)

Edding is one of the founding members of a regional employers' alliance supporting family-friendly workplaces (Beruf und Familie im Hanse Belt), set up in 2012.

More information:

Edding corporate responsibility report (in German): [Edding corporate culture](#)

Beruf und Familie im HanseBelt: [Home page](#)

Reducing working time: MAKAvA delighted GmbH

A small wholesale beverage company based in Austria, MAKAvA delighted has 12 employees. The company introduced a six-hour working day and a 30-hour working week with flexitime for its employees and CEOs in 2015 with full compensation. The company has daily core working hours from 10:30 to 14:30 (called 'community time'), during which employees need to be reachable. Work takes place at the office or elsewhere, and daily working hours are flexible. Meetings are organised during these core hours. Technical applications and online tools are also used in order to support daily communication.

This working time model was jointly agreed by management and employees (not via an employee representative body due to the small size of the company) and is used by all employees, including the two CEOs. It has contributed to high levels of motivation and satisfaction within the company. MAKAvA delighted was awarded the national Trigo award in 2016 for 'holistic CSR management in small companies' for its innovative company culture 'based on equality and flat hierarchies'.

More information:

MAKAvA delighted: [Wie die 30 Stunden-Woche bei Makava funktioniert](#)

Von Michael Wihan (founder) and Jan Karlsson (managing director): [Die 30-Stunden-Woche ist bei uns bereits Standard](#)

Reducing working time: Femma

In Belgium, the non-governmental organisation Femma introduced a 30-hour working week on full pay in 2019. This ran as a trial for all 80 employees and is the culmination of a four-year action research project aimed at enhancing work-life balance for workers within the organisation. The details of the research project were agreed as part of the collective agreement negotiated at organisational level. The aim of the project was to look at the practicalities – the organisational, technical and financial aspects – involved in the introduction of a 30-hour working week. The whole project was monitored by a research team, which will assess both the time spent by employees at work and outside of work to assess any changes in the quality of work and private time.

At the interim stage of the experiment, results indicate that the work-life balance for most employees has improved considerably, with employees more likely to indicate that their private lives are not negatively affected by their work. A decision was taken to invest in recruiting additional staff to replace 80% of the working time lost (for the period of the trial). Each team was free to decide for themselves whether and how replacement staff were deployed, based on their specific needs. An important part of the assessment was to determine how much of the work delivered during the previous 38-hour working week could be accomplished in 30 hours, what could be done more efficiently, and where replacement staff would ultimately be required to achieve the same work output. Part of this monitoring process was an assessment of which work processes could be performed more effectively and efficiently – which might ultimately allow for working hours to be reduced on a more permanent basis. The aim was to conclude a new collective agreement with a 36-hour working week in 2020, following the conclusion of the experiment.

As an organisation focused on enhancing gender equality, Femma was particularly keen to assess whether such a reduction in working time was feasible in female-dominated sectors, which tend to be less driven by (technical) production process schedules, where it can be easier to build in greater efficiencies and where 'productivity' itself can be more challenging to measure.

More information:

DeWereldMorgen: [Femma tekent cao voor 30 uren werkweek](#)

Minerva: [Kortere werkweek bij Femma verdient navolging](#)

Femma: [Beleidsplan 2016-2020 - 'Meer tijd & geluk' – Samenvatting](#)

Reducing working time: Sherpas

This digital strategy agency with 25 employees, based in Czechia, introduced a 'three-day weekend' in January 2019. The company sees it as a priority that its employees are provided with the 'ideal conditions for reconciling personal and professional life. We believe that work should be performed [only] at work, and our task is to enable our employees to pursue their hobbies and be with their families during the time that is theirs' (Luboš Plotěný, CEO of Sherpas). Workers are given autonomy to perform their specific tasks efficiently. The ability to make use of the 'free Friday' is predicated on the following conditions, thus somewhat restricting its availability in practice.

- The client must not notice any difference in service levels. The company does not insist that its customers respect the new arrangement (although they are made aware of it). If clients are only able to meet or require the delivery of services on a Friday, employees are required to work.
- Employees must be available. Free Friday does not mean that employees turn off their phones and do not respond to calls. It is always possible that the client will need something. Employees must therefore also be online.
- The aim is that no meetings are arranged for Fridays. If the client wants to meet, employees must respect this; however, no internal meetings are arranged.

The introduction of the three-day weekend was planned well in advance. Business operations were adapted, and activities were planned to accommodate this arrangement. A year in advance of the introduction of the measure, a detailed analysis was conducted on whether the agency could afford to reduce working time for employees on full pay. According to management representatives, initial assessments are encouraging. The majority of Sherpas' employees make use of the arrangement for additional family activities and value it as an important benefit of their employment with the company. This is also beneficial for the company as it assists in the recruitment of new staff and in the retention of existing staff (in a tight labour market). One side-effect has been enhanced team building, as many employees use the additional leisure time to also organise activities with their colleagues.

More information:

LMC: [Benefit jako 4denní pracovní týden. Proč se firmám vyplatí?](#)

Hospodářské noviny: [Od ledna pracují zaměstnanci agentury Sherpas jen čtyři dny v týdnu. Lidé jsou čerstvější, říká ředitel](#)

Reducing working time: Donar

In Slovenia, furniture manufacturer Donar decided to start a six-month trial period of a six-hour working day with full pay for its 25 employees. The six-hour work schedule covers all employees in development and in production where workers work in two shifts. The company saw this experiment as part of its business model, which is built on strong environmental and social awareness. The company measured performance throughout the trial period and as a result decided to continue with the six-hour working day when the trial period expired. It was found that employees were less tired and tense because they were able spend more time with their families. Workers in development found that they were more creative, whereas in production, concerns around health issues, including wrist strain, diminished. The company was better able to retain skilled workers. The analysis carried out during the trial period confirmed that workers work productively for no more than six hours a day. Matej Feguš, owner and design manager at Donar, said that the experiment fulfilled the goal of 'increasing productivity not by intensifying the work but by increasing the quality of work' (Regional Obala, 2019).

This experiment has already had knock-on effects in Slovenia, as its positive outcome persuaded another company to adopt the six-hour working day. Plastika Skaza produces plastic products for the home. The company employs 300 workers on open-ended contracts and 100 workers on temporary contracts. The company launched the new working time schedule in October 2019 with the aim of 'providing a better work-life balance to workers for higher labour efficiency' (Regional Obala, 2019).

More information:

Večer: [Matej Feguš iz podjetja Donar, kjer delajo šest ur na teden: Zanimivo bi bilo slišati argumente politikov proti 6-urnemu delovniku](#)

Regional Obala: [Šesturni delovnih? Uveljavljajo ga tudi slovenska podjetja, nekateri mu nasprotujejo](#)

Siol.net: [Podjetje, ki je uvedlo šesturni delovnik](#)

STA: [The pros & cons of 6-hour workday in Slovenia](#)

Enabling highly flexible working time and location arrangements: Swiss Re

‘Own the Way You Work’ is a flexible working time concept implemented by the insurance company Swiss Re to enable employees to manage their working and personal time effectively. The company does not specify exactly when employees should be at work or when they can leave. If they want to go out to exercise during lunch or pick up a child from nursery, they can. If they work better in the morning, they can start work at 06:00. Alternatively, staff can start in the middle of the day if that suits them better or work in the evening, after 18:00. In addition, employees can work from home or other suitable locations other than their office. The emphasis is on delivering specific tasks rather than when and where they are performed. The concept of ‘Own the Way You Work’ is an integral part of the company’s culture and a mutual commitment – between the company and the individual, and between team leaders and team members.

This approach was adopted by the employer at an international level and is seen to contribute to higher productivity and retention in the company.

More information:

Swiss Re: [2018 Corporate responsibility report](#)

Swiss Re: [Working at Swiss Re Slovakia](#)

Enabling highly flexible working time and location arrangements: Draugiem Group

This Latvian company has introduced several measures to enhance work–life balance. These include a flexible working time regime allowing employees to start work at any time up to 11:00 in the morning. Flexibility of location is also supported. The company has several offices in Riga, one in Cesis (a smaller town in Latvia) and several offices in other EU countries. Employees can choose the office they wish to work from. Some employees chose to work at the Cesis office on Fridays, thus being closer to relatives living in the region and allowing for more time to be spent with them.

Enabling highly flexible working time arrangements: Marbles

In 2016, the Belgian marketing company Marbles extended flexible working hours to include leave planning. This allows for more self-management within the organisation by giving team members the opportunity to organise the work among themselves and to take on a shared responsibility for it. Within this framework, staff are offered the opportunity to take as much paid leave as they want, just like self-employed entrepreneurs, but always with the clear proviso that the work has to be done and that backup is provided. Teams monitor their own workload and delivery on a daily basis with the aim of working smarter. After three years of operating the scheme, the average number of leave days has increased from 20 to 30 days and the number of sick leave days has reduced.

More information:

Marbles: [Onbeperkt verlof, drie jaar later](#)

Enabling highly flexible working time arrangements: ING

‘Unlimited holidays’, as they are referred to, have also been implemented in a collective agreement in the Dutch bank ING. The 2017 collective agreement also includes provisions detailing the latitude employees have to organise their own work schedule and to telework. In addition, the agreement provides employees with the opportunity to take up to a month of paternity/parental leave. The agreement also provides for ‘unlimited holidays’, which employees can use to manage their time and workload more sustainably.

More information:

ING: [Cao 2019 – 2020: Ons Werkgeluk](#)

Newsroom ING Nederland: [Cao ING: focus op vakmanschap en vernieuwing](#)

Sustainable work

Company practices

Implementing holistic age management: City of Kankaanpää

In 2010, due to the increasing average age of its staff, the City of Kankaanpää in Finland (515 employees) started to implement a programme that aims to improve age management in the organisation. The goal was to increase the average retirement age and improve organisational learning between the younger and older staff members. The programme focuses on three areas: individuals, age management and working conditions. While some aspects of the programme cover the entire organisation, irrespective of the age of those involved, the focus lies on providing sustainable working conditions for older staff members.

Measures generally available to all staff members include programmes to encourage exercise and provide free access to a range of municipal sports facilities. Employees can also apply for a programme that provides them with personalised help for healthy living.

Older employees have access to personal career guidance and support for job transitions within the municipality. The employer has a responsibility to try to look for a suitable, often less physically demanding position for older employees. Staff members over the age of 55 years are now encouraged to attend preventive health check-ups every three years instead of every five years, which is standard for younger staff members. Workers over the age of 60 are also entitled to an additional two paid days off every year, which is highly appreciated by the staff.

As a result of the programme, special attention has been paid to workplace ergonomics. For instance, some employees have been given height-adjustable tables. The employer also encourages flexible working hours where possible. The municipality has established a system that makes it easier for its employees to track their working hours and take days off when they have accumulated enough overtime hours.

The most recent available data (2014) show that the average retirement age among the employees was 63.8, which is a year later than in comparable municipalities. The amount of sick leave taken was also below the average: 11.4 days compared to 16.9 days per year. According to the mayor of the City of Kankaanpää, employees have embraced the age programme, especially those who have worked for the municipality for many years, and helps to make them feel more valued in the workplace.

Promoting health at work: MAVIR Zrt

Hungarian energy company MAVIR Zrt has introduced measures to respond to the ageing profile of its 620-strong workforce. According to the most recent data (2019), 60% of the company's employees working in substations and 39% of those working on transmission lines are aged over 50. In 2006, MAVIR introduced company-wide measures to improve the long-term health and well-being of all employees. The company continuously improves working conditions (over and above the legal requirements), for example using mobile balloon lamps, microphones built into helmets, satnav-based personal protection systems, ultra-high frequency radios, automatic defibrillators with trained staff, and personal emergency response systems.

The company also has a contract with a medical centre that gives employees free access to a range of medical treatments 24 hours a day. Employees also undergo routine medical checks on a regular basis. MAVIR contributes monthly to a voluntary pension scheme, a mutual savings bank and a voluntary health insurance programme. The company offers the option of redeployment to substations for employees with health issues. It advocates a healthy lifestyle and promotes employee recreation, provides subsidised holidays, and runs a Health Day and a Crisis Academy (a training programme for managers and leaders to handle risks like stress and workplace conflict).

Sick leave in the company fell from around 2,000 days in 2006 to around 500 days in 2015 (most recent data available). The number of days of sick leave caused by accidents was almost zero in 2015. Employee uptake of medical screening has increased: on the company's Health Day in 2016, around 225 employees used the free medical screening provided by the company, compared with around 100 employees in 2010. The number of days of subsidised holidays used by employees has almost doubled over the past decade, from around 600 in 2006 to around 1,200 in 2016.

More information:

OSHA: [Healthy workplaces for all ages](#)

Promoting health at work: Océ

Along similar lines, the Dutch electronics company Océ has made various tools available to its 2,200 employees, covering issues from posture to physical strain and allowing them to assess their working conditions. Océ uses a checklist prepared by a research organisation specialising in delivering health and safety strategies. Moreover, working groups were set up to identify key risks in production, as well as solutions to address these risks. The task of addressing identified risks has since been taken up by a team of industrial engineers trained in ergonomics, who constantly monitor whether individual workplaces allow for sustainable employability.

Alongside these initiatives, Océ has also put a greater emphasis on broader well-being initiatives, with the company actively communicating about the benefits of a healthier lifestyle, while providing employees with the means to enable such a lifestyle, such as voluntary health check-ups.

More information:

Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment: [Participeren in preventie bij Océ](#)

Promoting health at work and reintegration after illness: HABAU

Between 2008 and 2013, the Austrian construction company HABAU Group participated as one of 20 companies in a workplace health promotion pilot programme on maintaining employees' capacity to work. The programme was sponsored by the General Accidents Insurance Corporation (AUVA) and the Pensions Office (PV). Within this programme, known as HABAUfit, HABAU considerably enhanced its promotion of workplace health for its 4,200 workers. The group focused on three different areas:

- an ergonomics programme (information on how to lead a healthy life, workshops on the ergonomically correct execution of work activities, consultations on how to ergonomically adapt workplaces for employees: all of this was targeted at preventing muscular and skeletal problems)
- a nutrition/food programme (a correct and balanced diet especially for employees working on construction sites, ensuring that they receive sufficient hydration)
- a leadership development programme that addressed occupational safety and health protection (promoting workplace health in relation to stress, work-life balance, prevention of burnout and psychosomatic diseases)

The overall aim of the programme was to reduce the number of sick leave days within the whole company.

In 2012, towards the end of the programme, a working group on the implementation of occupational integration management was set up. Members of the working group were HR managers, occupational health experts and works council representatives. The working group was also supported externally by the regional Chamber of Labour (AK) and the company service division of the Federal Social Office (Sozialministeriumservice).

After the conclusion of the HABAUfit programme, individual measures covered by the health promotion programme were continued, expanded and became part of occupational health management. By 2013, the focus had shifted to occupational integration management (following a German model). In order to integrate older workers, in particular, after longer periods of illness-related absence, new employment opportunities within the company are actively explored in cases where requirements for job tasks and work environment have altered due to changes in work ability. The processes for occupational integration management are transparent; while participation is voluntary, every employee at every level of the hierarchy can make use of it. The employees affected are actively involved in developing and designing their return to work plan and can receive support from the works council (or other people they wish to involve). If a case cannot be solved bilaterally, it is forwarded to a steering group (if the employee concerned agrees). The steering group's goal is to ensure the return to the previous job position in as far as this is feasible; if this is not possible, the steering group provides alternative solutions, in cooperation with the employee and the works council. If no in-company solutions can be found, the employee concerned is supported with a socially acceptable change of employment or exit from work.

The HABAUfit programme was aimed at all employees, so take-up of the measures was very high. Within the programme, work equipment, tools and workplaces were designed ergonomically in order to prevent postural defects and musculoskeletal problems. Workshops and training on ergonomic and health promotion behaviour were held at construction sites. Furthermore, surveys relating to the work ability index (measuring employees' subjective capacity to work) were organised in order to evaluate the programme (the results were positive). As a consequence of the HABAUfit programme and the discussion on work ability, a workplace health management plan was established within the company.

The company was awarded the seal of quality for workplace health promotion (Gütesiegel BGF), by the Austrian Network of Workplace Health Promotion (ÖNBGF) and received the health prize in Upper Austria in 2010 (awarded by the Austrian Economic Alliance, the conservative faction of the Federal Economic Chamber (WKO)).

More information:

Arbeit und alter: [HABAU Group](#)

HABAU: [Nachhaltigkeit](#)

Industriellen Vereinigung: [Perspektive 50+ Best Practice-Beispiele aus der österreichischen Industrie](#)

Sichere Arbeit: [Betriebliche Gesundheitsförderung in der Praxis](#)

Emphasising employability and knowledge transfer: ATM

Following a survey of its almost 9,800 employees and a number of further qualitative analyses carried out in 2015, ATM (Azienda Trasporti Milanese), Milan's public transport company, developed a positive action strategy to support, preserve and recover the work ability of all employees and thereby ensure the capacity of each worker to work better and in healthy conditions, regardless of age and seniority. The three main areas of intervention are: work organisation, health and safety at work, and skills and motivation.

The actions are designed and implemented by a specific team made up of HR staff, occupational doctors and health professionals, and health and safety personnel (including employee representatives). The actions include: posture courses, stress management, advice on active life and healthy eating, targeted health check-ups, skill and competence and mid-career assessment, digital skills course and knowledge transfer projects to retain the tacit knowledge of older workers.

More information:

ATM: [Welfare aziendale](#)

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