

FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

Flexible working arrangements are one group of measures that allow parents to balance work and family life (Lohmann et al. 2009). They give employees the flexibility to adjust their work to their childcare responsibilities. Flexible working-time arrangements consist of part-time work, flexitime, telework and banking hours. Apart from the proportion of employees who work part-time, another important facet of part-time work is the notion of reversibility. Authors often estimate whether firms provide the possibility of reversing a temporary part-time job to a full-time job. Other forms of flexible working-time arrangements that should be assessed include the option to vary the start and end of daily work, to accumulate hours, to use accumulated hours for full days off and to use accumulated hours for longer periods of leave.

Part-time work is the most common flexible working-time arrangement. The rationale for introducing

part-time work in a firm shows whether part-time work is introduced in a company for economic or organisational reasons, or in response to employees' requests. The Table shows that employees switch to part-time work mainly on the basis of employee wishes (on average 37.9 percent). This is for instance the case for firms in Scandinavian countries, i.e., 50 percent in Denmark. The reason "mainly needs of establishment" is high in Cyprus (60 percent) and in Poland (65 percent). This rationale averages 34.3 percent among the members of the EU-21. Firms that reported establishment needs and employee wishes being of equal importance in switches to part-time work make up 20.8 percent of all firms in Europe.

It is particularly difficult for companies to provide employees the option to switch at will from part-time to full-time work. This reversibility of part-time employment is a major issue for the quality of part-time work. It describes the proportion of establishments offering full reversibility between part-time and full-time work. The majority of firms with part-timers prefer to switch employees from full-time to part-time work, and often do so quickly, whereas

Table

Flexible working arrangements (proportion of firms in percent)

	Rationale for introducing part-time work				Reversibility of part-time work	Forms of flexible working time arrangements			
	Proportion of firms with part-time work					Proportion of firms			
	Mainly needs of establishment	Mainly wishes of employees	Both of equal importance	Other reasons		Possibility to vary start/end of daily work but no accumulation of hours	Possibility to accumulate hours but no compensation with full days off	Possibility to use accumulated hours for full days off	Possibility to use accumulated hours for longer period of leave
Austria	27	40	27	6	16	8	2	14	28
Belgium	15	57	23	5	13	14	6	8	10
Cyprus	60	15	20	5	4	10	4	2	2
Czech Republic	38	34	18	10	14	10	15	19	11
Denmark	19	50	30	1	13	10	3	13	25
Finland	36	44	16	4	5	5	12	23	22
France	28	46	18	8	16	15	8	13	12
Germany	39	33	24	4	5	6	7	17	21
Greece	71	14	13	2	2	17	8	2	1
Hungary	39	27	26	8	6	14	6	11	5
Ireland	28	47	23	2	9	25	5	15	10
Italy	16	62	20	2	9	21	7	7	5
Latvia	45	30	13	12	8	26	12	15	13
Luxembourg	21	51	18	10	6	11	7	13	15
Netherlands	12	63	22	3	10	16	5	9	14
Poland	65	20	10	5	5	18	6	19	12
Portugal	34	24	40	2	2	12	4	4	3
Slovenia	23	30	12	35	3	10	6	14	8
Spain	45	28	15	12	9	23	10	5	6
Sweden	25	51	19	5	17	11	9	19	27
United Kingdom	35	30	30	5	16	28	7	11	10
EU	34.3	37.9	20.8	7	9	14.8	7.1	12.0	12.4

Source: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.

they have difficulties with the reverse process. On average 9 percent of firms that allow their employees to switch from full-time to part-time also provide the possibility to switch back to full-time employment. The highest proportion of firms providing reversibility can be found in Sweden (17 percent), in Austria (16 percent), in France (16 percent) and in the UK (16 percent).

Part-time work is not the only form of flexible working time; hence flexible working-time arrangements, such as possibilities to vary the start and end of the working day, to accumulate hours, to use accumulated hours for a day off and to use accumulated hours for longer leaves, should be assessed as well. Regarding these different possibilities, the following patterns can be noted for Europe. The possibility to vary the start and end of the working day is widely used among the members of the EU-21, followed by the possibility to use accumulated hours for longer leave periods. The former possibility is provided on average by 14.8 percent of firms in Europe, and the latter by 12.4 percent. The variation in the start and end of the working day is used mostly in Ireland (25 percent of firms) and Spain (23 percent of firms), whereas Scandinavian firms prefer to offer their employees the option to accumulate hours for longer leaves, i.e., Denmark (25 percent) and Sweden (27 percent). The possibility to use accumulated hours for full days off is provided by an average of 12.0 percent of firms. The option least-used by European firms is the possibility to accumulate hours but not in order to take full days off; here, on average, only 7.1 percent of firms offer this option as a flexible working time arrangement.

W.O.

Reference

Lohmann, H., F. P. Peter, T. Rostgaard and C. K. Spiess (2009), "Towards a Framework for Assessing Family Policies in the EU", *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Paper* no. 88.