

3. Long working hours and the expectation of long working hours

While excessively short hours can be problematic, at the other extreme of the spectrum, long working hours (defined as more than 48 hours per week) negatively affect workers with impacts on their health, mental well-being and work-family balance. It affects in particular low-paid workers and those who have little influence over their jobs or work environment, such as domestic workers. On the other hand, longer working hours for some workers result in higher compensation, for example in the case of bankers and lawyers. National legislation on long working hours may not apply to certain groups of workers.

Men make up a higher share of the employees working long hours. As shown in a Eurofound report, men worked an average 2.1 hours more than women per week across the 27 European Union countries (Eurofound, 2010). Not only does the expectation of long working hours limit women's career progressions, it also puts pressure on men, who are expected to work longer hours. Consequently, gender stereotypes and cultural expectations about working hours help to perpetuate the existing division of labour (Lee et al., 2007). This is because the long working hour culture leads to a stigma against professionals who choose to take up flexible arrangements such as reduced hours and teleworking.

As Williams and co-authors explain (Williams et al., 2013), the flexibility stigma is a gender-dependent phenomenon. Women who take flexible work arrangements are viewed as doing what they are supposed to do by prioritizing their family over their work (Stone, 2013; Stone and Hernandez, 2013). By reducing their working hours, women perceive that both their status at work and quality of assignments fall drastically (Stone and Hernandez, 2013). For men, the cultural assumption of being a good father means being a good worker and breadwinner. As such, a man who decides to adopt flexible work is perceived to be "less of a man" (Williams et al., 2013; Berdahl and Moon, 2013; Rudman and Mescher, 2013; Vandello et al., 2013).

While the expectation to work long hours creates a barrier to women's access to high status and highly paid jobs, women in the lowest paid occupations are often also working long hours. Self-employed workers are de facto not covered by national legislation on working time. This is reflected in the findings set out in Part One, showing that more self-employed workers than wage and salaried workers work more than 48 hours per week.

Although men in wage and salaried employment work longer hours than women, domestic workers – or employees providing services for private households – work long hours. Domestic work provides 3.6 per cent of all wage employment. Women make up the vast majority of the world's domestic workers, ranging from 63 per cent in the Middle East to 92 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean. Globally, 57 per cent of all domestic workers or 29.7 million individuals have no limitations on their working hours. A small proportion – 3.6 per cent – of all domestic workers, or 1.9 million individuals do have such limitations but on less favourable terms than other workers. Domestic workers, on average, work longer hours than the national averages. In Nepal, domestic workers worked an average of 52 hours per week even though the national average was 39 hours. Similarly, domestic workers reported working long hours in Indonesia (51.6 hours), Malaysia (65.9 hours), the Philippines (52 hours), Qatar (60 hours), Thailand (58.3 hours), Namibia (62 hours), and the United Republic of Tanzania (63 hours).⁴³ In industrialized countries, the average weekly working hours for domestic workers are considerably shorter and, for example, in Europe they often have the reverse problem of not finding enough work (ILO, 2013f).⁴⁴

Long working hours and schedule inflexibility are also significant sources of work-family conflict and dissatisfaction for workers who have to balance work, family and other commitments (Fagan et al., 2012). For women in professional occupations, the culture of long hours becomes a barrier to advancing their careers, while the flexibility stigma discourages men from reducing their work hours to meet family responsibilities. For women and men in low-paid occupations, long working hours also limit their ability to balance work and family responsibilities (discussed further in Chapter III).

43. The following years were used for the data points: Indonesia (2008), Malaysia (2008), Namibia (2007), Philippines (2010), Qatar (2009), Thailand (2003), and the United Republic of Tanzania (2006).

44. Based on the ILO's (2013f) analysis of 17 industrialized countries, the working week for domestic workers ranges from 15.1 hours in Austria to 39.6 hours in Lithuania.