

The length of weekly working hours

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For affiliations and more information please see:

<https://www.ttl.fi/en/research-and-development-projects/wow/>

The length of working hours is regulated by the European Working Time Directive. Working hours are defined as: normal 32-40 hours/week, long: ≥ 48 hours/week and very long: > 55 hours/week. Part-time work, including reduced working hours, is defined as less than the normal hours. In the Nordic countries 14-27 % have part-time work (19-41% among women), whereas few work very long working hours.

Recommendations

- ✓ The limitation of the weekly working hours to the maximum of 48 hours, as set by the EU Working Time Directive, is still well justified.
- ✓ Interventions on reduced work hours (e.g. 6-hour workday) with retained salary have shown beneficial effects of subjective health and well-being in Finland and Sweden. Due to the economical aspect a cost-benefit analysis is recommended.

The length of working hours, health and well-being

Large international studies have found very long weekly working hours (> 55 hours/week) associated with increased risk of heart diseases, depression and type-2 diabetes. However, the increased risk of heart disease was not replicated in a large Danish study as a part of WOW. Yet, both Nordic and international studies find higher risks of heart disease in groups with low socio-economic status.

Part-time work can increase work participation, improve return to work after long-term sick leave, and extend work career for older employees. In a Swedish study, reduced working hours with retained salary has been associated with fewer subjective health symptoms, better sleep and recovery, less pain experience and better well-being. Involuntary part-time work is often associated with job insecurity (temporary positions) and financial strain, which may have adverse health consequences.