



MSU - DL9-Europe

Trade union strategies and working time from a gender perspective

Austria – Belgium – Denmark – France – Italy – The Netherlands

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Introduction

The demand for shorter working hours appeared as soon as trade unions came into being. All European unions have turned this measure into an important demand and bargaining topic in order to improve working conditions, develop the idea of the right to free time and combat unemployment. More recently, the issue of work-life balance – linked to the objective of gender equality - has also been promoted.

At its 1976 congress, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) advocated the reduction of working time to 35 hours per week. But, today, this objective has been achieved in few European countries – and only France has adopted a law on it. It would even appear in recent years that the process of the collective reduction of working time is being challenged, including in France. The development of policies of flexible working time is tending to diversify working hours and rhythms – atypical working hours, shift work, part-time work, annualisation and variation¹ of working hours... These are complex trends and result essentially from economic factors (increased competitiveness and improved productivity, etc.). Social and cultural changes also partly contribute to these developments – the large-scale participation of women in the labour market fosters a new configuration of working time and explains the increase in part-time work. Likewise, aspirations for more free time and a better balance between social times are becoming stronger. As John Monks, ETUC general secretary, recently recalled during negotiations on the revision of the European directive on working time²: *“Today workers are increasingly men and women who combine paid work with other activities in life”*.

But it is difficult to arbitrate between, on the one hand, economic policies concerning working time - which imply growing flexibility and diversified working hours – and, on the other, employees’ aspirations for working hours, which they choose and control. In the context of an approach that fosters equality, trade unions play a central role regarding working time: the need for flexibility is recognised by European unions, but the search for compensation for employees remains essential – whether in terms of pay, free time or the possibility of choosing the way in which one’s working time is organised.

If, on the one hand, the demand for a reduction in working time is no longer in the forefront, the question of balancing social times - namely working time, family and domestic time, social life time, leisure time and “personal” time – is becoming a major issue. It is central, both from the point of view of the way the labour market functions and economic efficiency, and from a social point of view in terms of promoting a fairer and more balanced society. It involves all the actors of economic and social life – the State and public services, as well as companies, which are increasingly sensitive to this dimension. Families – in all their various forms – are also obviously concerned. The increase of dual-earning families and single parent families (the “heads” of which are mainly women) leads to increasing tension, which is felt significantly more intensely by women, for whom work is not accompanied by any real

¹ The term “*modulation*” is used in French to describe variations in working time – the average being calculated over any period exceeding a week (often 3 months or 6 months), while annualisation is used for a period of one year.

² Directive N° 93/104/CE on working time, which was adopted in 1993, is in the process of being amended. This directive fixes maximum working time (48 hours per week, 13 hours per day and 4 weeks annual leave). Proposed amendments, which are criticised by the ETUC, concern notably the following points: introduction of an “opt-out”, which makes it possible for the employer to opt out of maximum working time, if the employee agrees; extension of the reference periods without collective bargaining...

reorganisation of the sharing of domestic chores. Given this context, trade unions are increasingly involved in this issue, which concerns much more than just the workplace.

In fact, the issue of work-life balance has become one of the major aspects of European policy through the adoption of important directives and recommendations, that are often preceded by agreements between the European social partners, such as: working time, part-time work, parental leave, childcare and, more recently, the June 2000 resolution on the balanced participation of men and women in working and family life and the European council's resolution, that introduced monitoring indicators on work-life balance in November 2000³. The various European action programmes fostering equal opportunities for men and women have also emphasised this issue. Finally, the European employment strategy (1997) and especially the employment guidelines (adopted in 1999), that are incorporated the National Action Plans for employment⁴, continue this approach. Since 2003, this process has gone even further by imposing quantitative objectives (increase women's employment rates to 60%; 1% reduction in long-term unemployment; a half-percent reduction in pay gaps by 2010; more childcare facilities, etc.).

The aim of this report is to present the results of national surveys of union strategies on time and equality. As part of the MSU programme (c.f. our website: www.iseres.org/msu), it involves observing how the issue of work-life balance has become a new area of implementation of gender mainstreaming. This report is based on various sources – existing European data and studies and also case studies that we have carried out in enterprises in the three sectors, which we previously chose, in all six countries (c.f. DL7 reports): metal industry, commerce and public services. These monographs are about experiences concerning working time - reductions in working time, annualisation and development of part-time work (c.f. appendix which presents the enterprises). The aim is to identify cases of “good practice” and also to observe negative experiences regarding equality.

³ These indicators were drawn up after the Beijing programme, during the French presidency of the European Union and led to an appraisal of all existing measures in this field: R. Silvera (2002), *Articuler vie familiale et vie professionnelle en Europe, un enjeu pour l'égalité*, Women's rights and equality service, la Documentation française.

⁴ NAP guideline N°19 : incorporate equal opportunities for women and men; guideline N°20: combat gender discrimination; guideline N° 21: reconcile working and family life; guideline N° 22: foster women's return to work.

I. Trends in working time in the countries covered by the project

I.1. Data on working time

In 2000, according to the European Industrial Relations Observatory (EIRO⁵), the average working week in Europe stabilised at about 38 hours. The data confirm the slowing down of the reduction of working time in recent years.

Average collectively agreed normal weekly hours, 2003

Austria	38,5
Belgium	38
Denmark	37
France	35
Italy	38
The Netherlands	37
EU + Norway average	38

Source: EIRO

Apart from in France, it can thus be observed in the countries covered by this study, that average weekly working time is 37-38 hours. It is calculated on the basis of legislation and collective agreements, depending on the country. But the length of stipulated working time is exceeded in practice – in fact, usual working time, based on Eurostat surveys, is generally two hours longer (the European average is 40 hours). In the six countries of our study, the gap between stipulated working time and usual working time is more than 2 hours in Denmark and France (the country where stipulated working time is shortest); however, the gap is only 0,5 hour in Italy.

Usual working time of full-time employees, 2002 (hours)

	Total	Men	Women	Gender gap
Austria	40	40.1	39.9	0.2
Belgium	39.3	39.7	38.3	1.4
Denmark	39.1	40.1	37.7	2.4
France	37.7	38.2	36.9	1.3
Italy	38.5	39.8	36.4	3.4
The Netherlands	38.9	39.1	38.1	1
EU average	40	40.8	38.6	2.2

Source: Eurostat as quoted by EIRO

Gendered data in the above table confirm that even full-time working women usually work shorter hours than men. This gap is especially high in Italy (more than 3 hours) and almost non-existent in Austria.

⁵ EIRO (2004), Working time developments, 2003, Eiroline

Rates of part-time employment, by gender in 1992 and 2002 (%)

	Total		Men		Women	
	1992	2002	1992	2002	1992	2002
Austria	12,6	18,9	3,6	5,1	24,5	35,7
Belgium	12,7	19,4	2,3	5,9	28,9	37,7
Denmark	23	20,6	10,7	11	37,1	31,4
France	13,1	16,2	3,8	5	25,2	29,7
Italy	5,5	8,6	2,5	3,7	11,2	16,7
The Netherlands	34,8	43,8	15,2	21,5	64,4	72,8
EU average	14,2	18,2	4,2	6,6	28,8	33,5

Source: Eurostat, as quoted by Coral, Isusi, 2003

In most European countries, part-time work has increased over the last decade. Though, this is not the case in Scandinavian countries, where, on the contrary, part-time work has declined, notably for women. Everywhere, part-time work is essentially a women's phenomenon – it represents, on average, a third of their jobs (this is the case for 4 of the countries covered by our study) and more than 70% of women's employment in the Netherlands, which is an exception. However, the situation is different in Italy, where, as we know, even though part-time work is increasing, this form of employment is still not very widespread (16% of women's employment).

Usual working hours of part-time employees, 2002

	Total	Men	Women	Gender gap
Austria	21,8 hours	21,8 hours	22	-0,2 hours
Belgium	22,7	22,8	22,7	-0,1
Denmark	18,5	13,6	20,4	+6,8
France	23	22,7	23,1	+0,4
Italy	23,8	28	22,6	-5,4
The Netherlands	19,2	19,2	19,2	0
EU average	19,7	19	19,9	+ 0,9

Source: Eurostat, as quoted by EIRO

In Europe, usual part-time work is about 20 hours (half-time). Unlike full-time employment, France and Italy have longest weekly part-time hours (more than 23). In gender terms, the differences are very small, in relation to full-time employment and, above all, vary in both directions – at the European level, part-time working hours are longer for women. This gap is biggest in Denmark, where men's part-time working hours are very short (13.6 hours), because they correspond to men's jobs, which are transitional either in terms of entering or leaving the labour market (young men and older men). However, in Italy, women have much shorter part-time hours, but, as we have already observed, there is much less part-time work in Italy than generally in Europe, regardless of gender.

1.2. General debates in European countries on the issues of reduction in working time and work-life balance

In the 1980s and 1990s, some European countries made the reduction of working time one of the aspects of employment policy and the battle against unemployment. This was notably the case in France (laws on 35 hour week) and partly in Belgium (38 hours), Italy and the Netherlands. However, in Denmark, the issue of the length of working time was linked rather to improving living conditions and gender equality (passage to 37 hours). In Austria, these discussions did not figure much on the political agenda, but are now back on the trade union agenda, as, in 2002, GPA called for a 35 hour week and gradual transition to a 30 hour week.

Although in all these countries, the unions participated in introducing the reduction of working time, the measures have actually been implemented with the support of governments (in France, Belgium and the Netherlands). As we have emphasised in previous reports, the relationship between legislation and collective bargaining on working time depends on the national context of industrial relations and predominant social models. Thus, in France, the laws on the 35 hour week envisage and encourage sector- and company-level collective bargaining. Elsewhere, legislation only provides a framework and follows collective bargaining on working time.

Ongoing changes

Collective bargaining on working time is developing and various trends can be identified:

- Gradually, the objective of sharing work and improving living conditions is being pushed into the background and leaving the way open to flexibility. As an ETUC study⁶ emphasises: “*Since the mid-eighties, productive flexibility (which is essentially approached on the basis of constraints of production with the aim of optimising productive efficiency) has imposed itself on all European countries (...) – the initiative is now in the hands of employers, reorganisation of working time is predominating over reduction of working time and processes of implementation are being decentralised*”.
- Another trend, that is common to the various countries, is that debates are gradually leaving the single area of weekly working time and are now examining annual working time – with the introduction of variations of working time. This change is related to companies’ search for greater flexibility. Thus, most European countries have adopted measures with a view to accounting for time on an annual or monthly basis, while respecting a weekly average. In all cases, legislation envisages a collective agreement at sector level and sometimes at enterprise level.

⁶ ETUI (1995), *Le temps de travail en Europe, organisation et réduction*, directed by R. Hoffmann and J. Lapeyre, Syros

Legislative framework on variations / annualisation of working time

	Legislation	Reference period	Maximum weekly hours	Conditions
Austria	1997 law on working time and specific decrees for public services	Up to 12 months	48 hours	Collective agreement (CA) necessary and enterprise agreement if required by the CA. System of extended bandwidth over 13 to 52 weeks
Belgium	16 March 1971 law, 10 August 2001 law, 17 March 1987 law + 1987 CA	Between 3 and 12 months	45 hours (flexible week schemes); 50 or 56 hours for specific reasons	Normally, sector-level CA. Specific reasons (work overload, technical problems, etc.) with agreement of sector-level committee.
Denmark	2002 law – implementation of Directive on part time work But working-time is decided through collective agreements and not legislation	Up to 6 months and 12 months, if agreement	48 hours	Sector-level agreements in public and private sector. The flexibility is due to local agreements
France	1996 Robien law, 1998 and 2002 Aubry laws	Up to 12 months	48 hours	Compulsory sector- or enterprise-level agreements
Italy	1997 law, 2000 circular, 2003 decree	Up to 4 months and 12 months, if agreement		CA to exceed 4 months reference period. All sector-level agreements include “multi-period” working hours; some include “time banks” (commerce, metal industry...). Only chemical industries provide for complete annualisation
The Netherlands	1995 law on working time	13 weeks	45 hours or 50 hours if CA	CA or agreement with works council for prolonging normal working hours

Source: EIRO, 2003

Some data on the number of employees concerned by variations / annualisation of working time

Austria	Not much information available: OeGB estimates that 10% to 20% of employees, who are covered by CAs, are concerned by the “extended bandwidth” system
Belgium	According to the 2004 National Action Plan for Employment, 68.2% of all employees are concerned by variations (82.3% of women and 50.2% of men).
Denmark	According to the employers’ organisation’s (DA) statistics, 67% of the 650,000 employees covered by DA are concerned.
France	According to an official study on the 35 hour week, 35% of employees, who benefit from the 35 hour week, are concerned.
Italy	No overall data. In the chemicals industry, 75% of employees are concerned.
The Netherlands	No data

Source: EIRO, 2003

The EIRO study lists the advantages and disadvantages of annualisation from the social partners’ point of view. It shows that advantages are greater for employers, who are most often behind the introduction of such measures. It makes it possible to organise working hours most effectively, reduce costs (notably in terms of overtime pay) and absences... From the union point of view, the results are more mixed – it depends on the balance of forces, the collective bargaining context and the economic situation. When unemployment is high, pressure on employees is such that they accept non-standard working hours more easily and negotiate fewer compensations. Thus annualisation is not always compensated by higher pay or more free time. Likewise, “*it is becoming difficult for employees to demand and win working time arrangements, which are in line with their preferences both in terms of pay and free time. The introduction of flexible working time used to be often accompanied by shorter working hours, now in most EU countries, the reduction of working time is tending to stagnate*” (EIRO, 2003). From a gender perspective, the situation is rather negative – problems of knowing one’s working hours ahead and increased atypical working hours are great constraints, especially for working mothers. Work-life balance is sometimes better taken into account in some agreements on annualisation, but this is not always the case.

Thinking and measures regarding the life cycle are in the process of developing. As a result of the pressure of union demands to improve employees’ individual and family comfort – and also as a result of economic concerns regarding flexibility – this issue now goes beyond the framework of the working day. Measures have been introduced to foster career breaks, time credits, long leave and early retirement, etc.⁷

In all countries of the study, legislation or collective agreements on women’s night work have been modified. In line with European legislation on equal treatment of women and men, most countries have removed restrictions on women’s night work, notably in industry (Austria,

⁷ For an analysis of working time during the life cycle, c.f. J.Y. Boulin, R. Hoffmann (2000), *Les nouvelles pistes du temps de travail*, Editions Liaisons

France). In both **Denmark** and the **Netherlands**, for many years already, there have been no restrictions on women working at night or in shifts.

II The place of working time in union strategies

Working time is becoming an increasingly complex issue, as reference to a “normal” working day is becoming decreasingly relevant. Such diversification renders trade union actions much more complex. We have decided to choose certain modalities, which unions have referred to during our surveys and which have important repercussions in terms of gender, namely reductions in working time, annualisation and part-time work.

II.1. Union positions on reduction of working time and annualisation

In all six countries covered by the study, working time is a central union issue, even if in recent years, the demand for a reduction in working time has been put to one side. France is an important example in this area.

The 35 hour week and gender in France

In France, the issue of the reduction of working time has been one of the main bargaining topics since the 1990s. The 1998 and 2000 Aubry laws made the transition to the 35 hour week compulsory in enterprises with more than 20 employees. Unions have not always welcomed this measure. Paradoxically, FO was against the law, but has signed local agreements, whereas CGT nationally was in favour of collective bargaining on working time, but agreements have not always been signed by the CGT locally. CFDT and CFTC adopted a more consistent position in favour of the law.

Available data show that 117 sector-level agreements (covering more than 9 million employees) and about 42,800 enterprise agreements (covering 4.6 million employees) have been signed. The reduction of working time is, thus, an issue around which employees mobilise – especially women – but it has also, in fact, revealed tensions and contradictions.

According to certain unions (notably CGT), the reduction of working time has sometimes been accompanied by **negative consequences for employees**, because of resulting increased flexibility and imposed variation of working hours. The development of atypical working hours now concerns almost half of all employees (asocial working hours, staggered hours and night work, etc.). These new time constraints increasingly contaminate all life times, including for employees who work short hours or who benefit from a reduction in working time. According to a DARES survey (Estrade et al., 2001), 28% of interviewed employees consider that their working conditions have worsened since the reduction of working time. This is the case for all men, regardless of grade, whereas 35.4% of unskilled women consider that their conditions have worsened, while only 18.4% of women executives do so. Some agreements have led to removal of breaks and less time for informing the next shift of developments – both of which are signs of intensified work, which is reflected in the repeated phrase “*they ask us to do the same work in less time*”. Moreover, there is greater tension around notice of changes in working hours – many enterprises do not respect notice stipulated in the agreement, using the excuse of flexibility requirements and putting more or less informal pressure on employees to accept unexpected changes, sometimes even from one day to the next. Clearly, family organisational needs, which weigh mainly on women, are heavily penalised by such practices.

However, studies on the consequences of the Aubry laws, do show up certain **positive points for employees**. The primary effect of the 35 hour week concerns changes in employees' life rhythms. Without actually seeking new leisure, cultural and community activities, employees – especially women – mainly show the need to relax. This reaction is greater amongst those employees who have difficult working conditions – and, in their view, the reduction in working time is accompanied by more intensive work. This is even more so for working mothers, for whom domestic chores are “reserved”.

Although women are generally less unionised than men, they participated more in collective bargaining on working time and there were proportionately more women amongst “mandated” negotiators, i.e., non union members, who are mandated by a representative union to negotiate and sign an agreement on its behalf when it does not have members in a particular company. This shows that the issue of reduction of working time mobilises women more than other bargaining topics, most certainly because it concerns organisation of life at work and also outside work (Defalgard et al., 2004). In certain agreements, many women thus refused to allow the 35 hour week to be introduced in the form of four working days (i.e. four 9-hour days), which would not coincide with the school day; in other cases (e.g., supermarkets) the reduction in working time made it possible to increase hours of part-time employees. In other words, employees are more satisfied when their collective agreement made it possible to negotiate the way in which the reduction in working time was implemented in their workplace.

Surveys of employees' perceptions of the reduction of working time emphasise greater satisfaction amongst women, who appreciate the extra free time. In a study on working time and employees' living patterns (Anxo, Boulin, Lallement, Lefevre, Silvera, 1998), some men employees were reticent about proposals for collective reduction of working time at the beginning, because they interpreted it as less involvement in work. They saw reducing working time as a transition to part-time work and challenging the unchangeable principle that “*skills rhyme with presence and availability at work*”. More women than men said that they “do not have enough time” before working time was reduced, even when comparing men and women in the same grades (Estrade et al., 2001). Women say that with a reduction in working time, they are able to organise domestic chores better and “*free up time on weekends*”. This contributes to loosening time constraints, which is especially appreciated by women, who continue to assume most of this kind of work.

The results of this measure are thus mixed, notably from a gender perspective.

Reduction of working time in other countries: a union issue that has been abandoned for flexibility?

In **Denmark**, working time has been gradually reduced by collective bargaining. By the beginning of the 1990s, the working week in most important collective agreements was 37 hours. The general reduction of weekly hours is not an important issue on the current bargaining agenda. However, both the social partners and the government are interested in developing more flexibility – it is as much a matter of improving working and living conditions of employees with young children, as of using equipment and labour more effectively with a view to company competitiveness. Thus, on the one hand, extra days off have been offered to parents of young children (“care days”), while there is also a greater use

of annualisation of working hours via company agreements. In 2000, the reference period for varying working time increased from 6 months to 12 months (with an average of 37 hours).

In **Italy**, during the 1980s, collective bargaining on working time was incorporated in general collective bargaining without success – not only because of employers’ opposition. Hours were reduced by only 5-6% in the form of extra days of leave and compensated in industry by the use of overtime. In the 1990s, the government launched the idea of introducing a law on the 35 hour week, as in France – under pressure from the most radical political forces. A law was not adopted in the end, because of union opposition to the form rather than content – they consider that the reduction of working time should result from collective bargaining and not legislation. In recent years, individual solutions have been developed (a major increase in part-time work) and also flexibility regarding the organisation of working time, which was fostered by the framework law N° 53/2000⁸ (on increased possibilities of reorganising working time, notably via flexibility of the working day and the possibility of having additional leave). Negotiations for these flexible solutions take place, above all, at the second level of collective bargaining, during which it is easier to experiment alternative working schedules with respect to standard ones, at the same time taking into consideration the requirements of users and consumers, the organisation of work and technological level, as well as the needs of both men and women workers. However, these are but drops in the ocean. Ever since it was enforced, the effects of law N°53 have mostly been limited to the first part of the text relating to maternity and paternity leave, whereas the second part of the law, which is the most innovative, has remained largely unimplemented. There are very few firms, which responsibly consider the personal requirements of their employees - more often than not, workers, and, above all, women workers, are left with no option but to accept the working hours imposed by the enterprise. On the other hand, trade unions still consider these measures as residual or, at best, supplementary with respect to the other topics, which are tackled during collective bargaining. This mainly occurs in defensive phases such as the current one. In fact, over the past few months, collective bargaining in Italy, even at corporate level, has aimed at contrasting the effects of job insecurity and of working hours, which have been unilaterally rendered more flexible by the law.

In the **Netherlands**, the issue of working time has been one of the major union demands for many years – in order to fight against unemployment and promote access to the labour market for young people, women and foreigners. The aim was to reduce working time, not only on a weekly basis (although this was an important aspect, as many enterprises reduced weekly hours from 40 to 38 and sometimes to 36). Reduction of working time was also seen as creating more possibilities for women to enter the labour market. However, now – in a period of recession after an economic boom - employers, still concerned about increasing participation in the labour market, are not focussed on reducing working time, but rather on increasing the number of hours for everyone, for instance by increasing the weekly number of working hours again to 40. The trade unions are strongly opposed, even though in some sectors labour market shortages are acknowledged to be a problem, which has to be tackled. Trade unions in the Netherlands are not striving any more for overall reduction of working time, but try to create more worker-friendly flexibility and greater say for employees concerning their working schedules.

⁸ Law N° 53 of 2000, which defines the *"Provisions aimed at sustaining maternity and paternity, health and occupational training, and the maximisation of time in cities "*, unifies regulations governing maternity, paternity, care, occupational training and time devoted to social initiatives. Article 9 of the law sets out measures to sustain flexibility of working hours, so as to encourage and stimulate working schedules that can reconcile working and personal life.

In **Belgium**, there has not been such a big debate on the reduction of working time as in France, even though the government tried to launch it. The process has been gradual since the 10 August 2001 law on reconciling employment and quality of life with the transition to 38 hours per week. This reduction could not lead to loss of pay and implied a collective agreement or labour regulation. Maximum limits on working hours can be reduced by collective agreements, while the law makes it possible to exceed 38 hours per week in certain cases. Collective bargaining has concentrated, above all, on the life cycle - in January 2002, “time credits” were introduced. They involve full- or part-time career breaks of up to a year and the possibility for the over-50s to work part-time. The aim is to enable employees – both men and women – to suspend their contract, while benefiting from an allowance and maintaining their labour rights with a view to promoting work-life balance. Unions recognise that, up to now, the majority of those who take time credits are women...

Austria is unlike the other countries covered by the study, in that the reduction of working time is not an issue of debate and plays a secondary role in union strategies, except in the commerce sector. The national trade union confederation, OeGB, does advocate a general reduction of working time to 35 hours per week and then a gradual reduction to 30 hours, as well as a more widespread reduction throughout one’s life, in order to improve the quality of life. However, over the last 7 years, the reduction of working time has been pushed to the background by the debate on the flexibility of working time. During preparations for the 1997 law on working and leisure time, OeGB won the right for employee representatives to be consulted about all changes to working hours linked to production needs. But this law does also make it possible to work up to 12 hours per day and 60 hours per week in certain circumstances, notably if there is a sector-level collective agreement and an enterprise contract. OeGB tries to limit the negative effects of flexibility and increase the power of works councils, but the centre-right wing government is pushing for deregulation of working time. By limiting rights and protection to collective agreements and promoting enterprise-level agreements, employers’ campaigns to increase working time are helped. Over the past ten years, use of overtime has increased by 100%. Half of Austrian employees work overtime, which is often not compensated. The same goes for the development of weekend and holiday shift work. In some low-paid sectors, employees are forced to work longer hours during periods of peak activity without any bonuses in compensation. This situation is incompatible with work-life balance, because working hours are increasingly unpredictable.

II.2. Part-time work – a controversial topic

The issue of part-time work divides people in different European countries and also within countries – some consider that it provides real choice for employees and corresponds especially to working mothers’ needs, while others denounce it as a new source of job insecurity for both men and women employees.

In the **Netherlands**, until recently, unions have long been reticent about the development of flexibility and part-time work, because of two factors – firstly, part-time work and flexible contracts concerned mainly women (and young men during education) and were not considered a very important union objective. Moreover, casual and part-time workers were considered as competitors of full-time employees and a danger to full-time employment. Unions found that if they defended the rights of such employees, they would be accepting the principle and would, therefore, encourage the growth of this kind of employment. Gradually, opinions changed – not only because of the influence of women in unions, who were

demanding improvements in the situation of part-time workers, but also because more men (both young men and those affected by the economic recession) ended up with flexible and part-time jobs. Now, unions consider that it is better to incorporate policy on part-time work and flexible employment, strengthening their rights and legal position, in order to reduce gaps with standard employment regarding pay. This also puts unions into a position of being able to negotiate on these issues. When it comes to part-time work, two important laws justify this position. One of them concerns the equal treatment of part-time employees (granting them equal pay, equal access to social security, training and career possibilities, thus limiting the previous advantages of part-time work for employers, but also encouraging not only women to take up skilled part-time employment. The other law on adapting working time gives every employee with at least a year's length of service the right to request a transfer from a full-time contract to a part-time one or vice versa with 4 months' notice. This can only be refused if there is a valid reason and it is possible for employees to contest decisions. This law aims at promoting part-time work in sectors where men predominate and where employers were reticent about allowing women (and men) to work part-time, for example, to cope with family responsibilities – and also to enable women part-timers to move to jobs where part-time work did not exist. This law also hopes to enable women who have short part-time contracts to increase their hours and even access full-time positions. In short, the labour market policy regarding part-time work in the Netherlands is aimed at creating more possibilities for employees to differentiate their working time according to their personal situation during each period in their working life.

These debates exist in all the countries, covered by our study, but unions are not so involved in them elsewhere. In **Austria**, OeGB puts alongside the general demand for a 35 hour week, the issue of part-time work: the right to part-time work during specific periods of working life, with the right to return to full-time employment of the same quality; full strategy for transition between full- and part-time employment; maintenance of the right to training and career development for part-timers. In **Belgium**, unions were also reticent about part-time work at first and then, gradually, this form of employment has been accepted, provided that social protection is identical as that of full-timers. In **Denmark**, part-time work is seen as an individual solution - not as a measure for solving labour market problems. Part-time work is, therefore, not a subject of debate as such and is not part of the collective bargaining agenda.

In **France**, however, the recent increase in “imposed” part-time employment means that unions are still reticent about this kind of employment. However, one cannot say that there is radical opposition to it. This certainly reflects the place of equality issues in all union strategies and the difficulty of adopting a position on an issue that is related partly to individual choice. In some sectors, especially commerce (see below), the battle against job insecurity and imposed part-time employment is a priority.

For a long time, in **Italy**, unions were also hostile to the development of part-time work, because most of the jobs concerned were marginal ones or offered limited career prospects. However, more recently, this attitude has changed, above all because historical analysis of the low rate of women's participation in the labour market – compared with other European countries – can be explained by the fact that there is little part-time employment. The traditionally low spread of part-time work can partly be explained by the specific nature of the public sector where « reduced full-time » has made the part-time option less attractive and necessary. What needs to be assessed is whether the low incidence of part-time work in Italy, compared to other European countries, is somehow linked to the type of manufacturing specialisation existing in the country and, therefore, to the relatively lower presence of sectors

having a “part-time vocation”, including a public sector that is hardly service-oriented. The domination of small enterprises within the Italian manufacturing system is another factor that does not encourage the spread of part-time work. In this kind of environment there is a natural flexibility that curtails the reliance on a formal flexibility, that is set down and regulated by laws and work contracts. It is also probable that the development of part-time work has been hindered by the reticence of the labour demand. The introduction of a significant percentage of part-time work in a company implies organisational changes which Italian companies are not always prepared to make, especially as they can be costly in the initial phase. There are many other factors, which have a natural inclination towards part-time work as, for example, the commerce and service sector, where women employees are often obliged to work part-time or shifts, even if they would prefer a full time position. In fact, Italy has the highest rates of imposed part-time work compared with the other European countries. However part-time work is often concentrated in marginal employment areas, which offer poor career prospects, thus reducing the women workers’ propensity to choose such jobs.

III. Relationship between working time issues and equality in local experiences

III.I. Examples of “good and not so good practices” regarding time and equality

The case studies - some of which are presented here – concern three sectors: metal industry, commerce and public services. The tables presented in the appendices provide additional information about the various enterprises. The objective, which was fixed for all the partners, was to carry out one or two monographs per sector, each being chosen because they have interesting experience concerning working time. They are not ‘best practices’, but experiences which give an insight into the way in which the issue of working time effects the position of women in the various organisations. We wish to point out that in most countries, it has been difficult to do these monographs either because there are few such experiences in some sectors (such as the metal industry) or because it is difficult to access certain workplaces (commerce and public services). Without it being possible to transpose or generalise these experiences, they are, however, significant as to the way in which equality is – or is not – incorporated into working time issues.

Metal industry

“Expanded bandwidth” variable working hours in “*Electronic Company*” (Austria)

In “*Electronic Company*”, an agreement provides for an “extended bandwidth” variation model with a system of overtime payments for those working 3 shifts. The problem is to cope with high turnover. But management recognises that the personal needs of employees should also be taken into account via a system of “time accounts”. According to the collective agreement, this should make it possible, in the long-term, to increase the responsibility of each member of the group of employees. It implies a balance between individual responsibility, team work and the needs of the enterprise. In practice, it means that each employee has a time account ranging between +40 and -20 hours. In this framework, the enterprise can vary working hours and introduce longer shifts on Saturdays and during holiday periods. When there is overtime due to Saturday work, compensation takes the form of additional time off (not overtime pay). Bonuses appear only when more than 8 extra hours per month are worked. The way in which credited time is used is decided upon jointly by the employee and management.

Time credit and part-time work in *Méta 1* and *Méta 2* (Belgium)

In these enterprises, working hours are shorter than the legal 38 hours (36.5 hours in *Méta 1* and 35 hours in *Méta 2*). In *Méta 1*, women are favourably treated – part-time work is generalised, at the request of the women in the enterprise (80% of women work part-time), unlike in *Méta 2* and generally in industry. As there are financial advantages, men increasingly choose to work four-fifths time. But, according to a trade unionist, part-time employment is used by women, in order to look after children, while men use it to work elsewhere.

Night work is reserved for men. Flexible working hours are possible for those who work during the day, but not for night work, so this is considered to be an “advantage” for women. In *Méta 2*, on the contrary, women have asked to transfer to part-time work, but management has categorically refused.

Segregation through working time arrangements in “Metal products” (Netherlands)

In production at ‘*Metal products*’, women have always worked largely in one unit, in which the specific work (painting of the products) was traditionally seen as especially fit for women. In the other units, where physical strength is more important to fulfil the work, less women work, although gradually more women are also involved in this work. Part-time work is common in the unit, where the majority of the employees are women, although some of the women work full-time. Here, to a certain extent, mutual changes of shifts can be agreed upon, and requests to change the weekly number of working hours in the contract are honoured when possible. Working time arrangements in the other units are more fitting to a ‘man’s life’: full-time, with few possibilities of adapting working hours to personal life. According to trade union activists, this not only contributes to the fact that hardly any women enter these units (and that more of them disappear after some time), but also that no women are found in middle management, where working time coincides with the demands of a (more than) full-time position.

35 hour week in Zip (France)

The 226 employees of this zip factory are all now on a 35 hour week with the possibility of varying between 28 and 44 hours, depending on work fluctuations. The agreement (1999 Aubry 1 law) envisaged the creation of 10% of jobs, which occurred, but were offset afterwards by a drop in production. Out of 150 employees, who work on the shop floor, under a third work days (8.30. to 5.15.). They are mainly women employees with long length of service. The great majority work shifts (6 – 2 or 2 - 10). There is a small group (only 6 or 8 men), who work nights.

CGT, which is the majority union in the enterprise, did not sign the agreement, because it involves flexibility and variations in working time: “*Before, women worked mainly days. At the beginning, management wanted 28 hour weeks, but the women were against that, because they would have also had to accept 44 hour weeks. Since then, there have been attempts to make them do 44 hour weeks and Saturday work, but the women refused*”.

Management wants employees to be able to react quickly. Even if it is only for short periods (approximately 3 weeks per annum), employees must accept versatility and variations. The agreement stipulates 8 days’ notice (if working hours are changed). Sometimes, notice is not respected and employees change shifts, but this happens rarely. “*Employees can refuse, without being subjected to penalties, but we know that if we accept, it is possible to make arrangements*”.

In practice, employees appreciate the agreement, while variations in working time continue to be rarely implemented. The agreement was signed at a time when production needs could justify longer working hours (Saturday and night work). However, since then, the situation has deteriorated and management does not use these margins of manoeuvre. *“In fact, things are alright. They do not impose a 44 hour week on us, nor Saturday work. In general, we have kept our working hours... we can have Wednesday or Friday off... At the beginning of the year, a calendar is drawn up and we can take our time off when we want – in half-days or whole days added on to leave, etc... Provided work organisation is respected, we try to make arrangements amongst colleagues... The threat of flexibility still exists, but it is true that management has not used all the possibilities that annualisation provides. However, that is because current demand does not require them. If they need us to work 44 hours, they could make us do so...”* (CGT, **Zip**).

Commerce

Experience of “checkout pool projects” – *Hyper 1* and *Hyper 2* (Italy)

In the context of law N° 53, an initiative has been developed for checkouts, which enables cashiers to organise their working hours themselves. This example shows how the same flexibility tool can have different repercussions, depending on the role given to employees and their representatives. In both hypermarkets, the project dates back to the year 2000.

In *Hyper 1*, the project was negotiated and implemented with the participation of *RSU* (works council) and *CGIL Filcams* and involves the organisational and personal qualities of the women employees concerned. A series of rules have been created, which the cashiers have been informed about and are monitored by *RSU*, in order to avoid employees losing control of their working hours. Credited hours are put in a kind of time bank and are called “stocked hours” and must return to zero each month. So, at the end of each month, extra hours worked are considered to be overtime, while if one has worked fewer hours, the difference is deducted from leave. In order to avoid having to recuperate too many hours, the system stipulates that one cannot accumulate a whole week without working. There is a ceiling of 8 hours per day and 35 hours per week. The period of work must not exceed 12 hours from the time of first entry and last exit. There is rotation of Sunday working, closing shifts and rest days. In this kind of work, where shift work is compulsory, part-time work rarely chosen and weekly working hours very short, this experience of “checkout pools” is positive for regaining control of time, provided both parties have the same objectives. However, if objectives are not shared, work organisation will continue to follow the usual model, namely management decides and employees have to accept their decisions. Union participation is essential during negotiations on work organisation, in order to monitor the effectiveness of the system and avoid losing control of stocked hours.

In *Hyper 2*, on the contrary, management was behind the initiative and has maintained power relations between managers and employees, because the autonomy of the cashiers in the choice of their working hours varies a lot, as soon as the hypermarket’s needs change. In this context, the principle of “checkout islands” is very advantageous for management, because it avoids the presence of too many or too few staff. Nevertheless, it has improved the life of those women employees involved: *“Before, I never had Saturday off, but now I manage to have every third Saturday off and I no longer have to ask my boss”*. However, unions are reserved about it, because the project has been managed in a unilateral way right from the beginning and without the agreement of the parties concerned. Even the choice of cashiers, who tested the system was discretionary and considered to be privilege that was given to certain employees, namely those whom management think are most “suitable”... Two years

after the system was introduced, cashiers no longer manage their time, but, on the contrary, are even more dependent on management than the others. In fact, certain cashiers work less than others and have to catch up their hours whenever management decides. There have even been cases of cashiers, who have had to work 8 non-consecutive hours in the same day – and even during their holidays, at Christmas or on Sunday. Some employees are terrified, because they have to recuperate 80 hours in a few months! This happens because management of checkouts has remained in the hands of management and unions are kept out and cannot intervene.

Part-time work as an element of labour market policy in “Food retail” (Netherlands)

More than half of the employees in food retailing work part-time, in a variety of part-time jobs (longer and shorter ones). Many of them are women, but also young men, working in short part-time jobs in order to earn some money to pay for their education. A major problem concerning working time is the predictability of working schedules, especially for those with family responsibilities. According to a trade union study of many supermarkets, time arrangements are used to demotivate older women from staying in the job, thus creating possibilities for recruiting more younger people and reducing costs. ‘*Food retail*’ allows employees to be involved in making working time arrangements on the shopfloor. In each establishment, mutual exchanges can be agreed upon, and also working time schedules are published in good time. As a larger variation in working time schedules (for instance long part-time jobs) is also possible in middle management, more women are working in these positions than elsewhere in food retailing.

The dual trap of part-time work (France)

Where there is a high proportion of women, part-time work can either be imposed (in commerce and local authorities in the form of non full-time work) or “chosen”. In the former case, it is accompanied by difficult working and living conditions, but in the latter, it does not necessarily mean there is no discrimination.

*“Constrained”/imposed part-time work. In **Magasins**, as in the commerce sector in general, there is much part-time work – it actually represents 46% of all employment and 57% of women employees. Agreements on reduction of working time have, in general, provided for longer part-time jobs (e.g., minimum of 22-23 hours per week). But, according to CGT, “It is easier to transfer from full-time to part-time employment than for part-timers to become full-timers. Since the reduction of working time, we have not managed to get anyone transferred from a part-time contract to a full-time one, whereas that is in fact the aim! The law provides for part-time contracts not being short – if this wasn’t the case, employers would use them more. They use temporary contracts for weekend work”. In other words, need for flexibility, notably on weekends, requires short contract hours, according to management, who thus often offer such contracts to students, thereby getting round the 22-23 hour lower limit.*

In *Grande Distrib.*, the agreement provides for lengthening part-time work to 26-28 hours per week. However, their longer working days are accompanied by variations in their working hours and greater job diversity... i.e.; in order to obtain a few extra hours of work, employees have to accept more frequent changes in their working hours, systematic Saturday work and even work on Sundays and public holidays. Unions also denounce the fact that employees are put into competition with each other on the basis of their length of service and working hours – younger employees accept constraints more easily and are more malleable; they consider that those with longer service are privileged, because they have less difficult working hours (daytime) and full pay (which is, at best, the minimum wage!).

In local authorities, the problem of very short working hours is one of the forms of women's job insecurity. In the hope of being later able to become local authority civil servants (with protected employment and longer hours), women, who are often single mothers, accept working only a few hours as ancillary staff in schools, etc.

"It is sometimes rather dishonest of local authorities to recruit ancillary staff, because all of those who do this work hope later to be turned into civil servants, because they, thus, remain in an insecure situation, without looking for other work. They are mainly women working in schools, crèches and old people's homes". (CFDT, Ville 2). The great majority of ancillary staff are women – the main reason for this is the kind of work they do and some say that *"it's because they are women that these poor conditions are possible"*. (CGT, Ville 2).

Part-time work requested by employees. Those who ask to work part-time also sometimes have working conditions that penalise them. At **Auto**, the few women, who do work part-time, are penalised: *"You hear that those who work 80% of full-time hours do not get bonuses!"* A CGT member said: *"There is a woman, who has worked here for more than 30 years, but she is still on grade 180, as she works half-time – that's not normal. Her boss says her job is not good enough for her to get a higher grade, but men on the same job do so! Moreover, Auto recently encouraged people to take half-time jobs!"*.

Another factor has led to a reduction in the spread of part-time work and that is the timing of the special buses that take employees from the town (30 kms away) to work. They leave according to shifts and do not take into account working hours that are not "classical" shifts.

The bonus system in **Ville 1** is such that part-timers have little chance of having bonuses. *"In theory, those on non full-time hours and part-timers are not excluded from the bonus system. However, as the system is related to supervisory functions and co-ordination, etc., the issue is whether part-time work is compatible with this kind of job"*. (Human resources director).

In **Ville 1**, "chosen" part-time work is not possible in supervisory and management positions. According to the human resources director, *"Currently, it is true that a part-time woman, who is less available, is penalised vis-à-vis a man for getting a high-level position. I don't think the local authority could function properly with part-time managers – it wouldn't be able to cope."*

Likewise, in **Ville 2**, although they are less extreme in the way they speak, a woman executive, who changed from full- to part-time work, was transferred – in consultation with her – to a different (non-supervisory) position and had to commit herself to *"showing that she could be flexible"* if necessary (i.e., come to work on Wednesdays⁹ if necessary).

Part-time work and reorganising services in Hospital (Italy)

In Hospital, the introduction of part-time work involved great efforts of reorganisation, not only concerning nurses' and health staff's working hours, but also actual work done. The agreement between unions and management led to continuous collective bargaining between social partners.

The results of the experience are positive for employees (both men and women) and unions, because it has made part-time work possible, without discrimination regarding careers and

⁹ Her day off – there is no nursery and primary school on Wednesdays in France.

pay (those who change to part-time work are transferred to the outpatients' department, where work is less skilled, but with fixed hours and shifts). Employees are pleased with this agreement, but management is not at all pleased, because they consider that the only people to gain from the agreement are the employees. Management considers that this agreement was imposed on them, as, in their view, too many employees are concerned (25%) and it means that they are no longer subjected to the same flexibility proposals as the others. Some employees ask for part-time work, in order no longer have to work shifts and this has negative repercussions on full-timers.

Working time in line with family obligations (Denmark)

The conflict between long opening hours in retail and family obligations, as well as between long opening hours and ageing staff, etc. have resulted in different models of planning working hours in Denmark. In Ikea, employees have the opportunity of negotiating the planning of their working hours (opening hours of the stores are from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.). Employees with children under the age of 6 can choose to work between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. (the opening hours of childcare facilities). Both in Ikea and Butikken, human resources policies include the possibility of planning working hours in line with one's life-phase, i.e., as a person with child-related responsibilities or with other family responsibilities or in relation to age.

In Coloplast, team-working makes great flexibility of working hours possible – it is up to the team to meet their responsibilities regarding production. Thus, in line with the agreement and in practice, working time is flexible and allows other responsibilities to be met. In general, employees work full-time, but company policies are very strong in their intention to keep older employees and those, who for other reasons (psychical or psychological) need reduced working hours to stay in the workforce. These arrangements can be permanent or for shorter periods of time. Coloplast has shifts and has introduced 3x12 hours working time, which means that one works 3 long days and then has 4 days off.

III.2. Appraisal of favourable and unfavourable factors regarding equality and time

On the basis of the various experiences that we have presented, we can draw a few conclusions:

- Firstly, there is no one single general measure, which fosters equality in the area of organising time. The examples we have show that part-time work can be favourable or not, depending on the context of the enterprise, the state of industrial and social relations, as well as the specific modalities that are proposed. Besides the classical opposition between constrained/imposed and chosen part-time work, we have seen that some imposed part-time work can actually lead to forms of autonomous organisation for employees (*Hyper 1* in **Italy**); whereas, requesting part-time work can sometimes penalise employees in terms of pay and career (*Ville 1* in **France**).
- Most successful experiences are based on similar factors: the presence of women in collective bargaining and, more generally, the impact of employee representatives (*Hyper 1* in **Italy**); the existence of measures that provide advantages for both employees and employers (*Electric Company* in **Austria**; opposition between *Hyper 1* and *2* in **Italy**; *Ikea* and *Butikken* in **Denmark**).
- The main issue for employees is not so much the length of working time, but the way in which it is distributed and organised: employees – especially women – want to

know exactly when they are going to work as early as possible and be sure that their hours will not change and, even better, be able to organise them according to their own needs.

However, we have identified some important limits that hinder such approaches:

- From a union point of view, another aspect emerges from our analysis – in most countries (with the exception maybe of Denmark and the Netherlands, where work-life balance is a serious issue, incorporated in trade union policies) - few trade unions have brought the issue of occupational equality directly to the bargaining table, nor the demand to take family constraints into account when negotiating working time. However, in France, for example, the law on the 35 hour week provided for this link between working time and equality (in terms of employment, careers, availability criteria and improved work-life balance). The main argument, that was put forward, is the difficulty of dealing with these issues in companies, given the large number of bargaining topics and battles involved in implementing the agreements on reduction of working time (employment, maintaining pay at the same level, limiting flexibility and annualisation, etc.). All these bargaining topics are considered to be priorities. While in **Belgium**, in *Méta 1*, there are ambiguous feelings concerning the organisation of childcare. There is a preference for collective facilities, which are subsidised by the community, rather than by employers. *“If the employer provides childcare, we will be obliged to hold our child in one hand and our meal in the other. In fact, we do not discuss this issue - it is considered to be an issue that concerns society in general. Unions do not envisage any action regarding who looks after our children, ourselves and our families”*. (*Méta 1, FGTB*). A lot still has to be done in order for such issues to be taken on board by unions.
- In some cases – of which there are very few – the issue of “reconciling” working and family time has appeared in enterprises. But, according to a French study, this is especially the case when women are mandated to negotiate or when men take this issue to collective bargaining not for everyone, but on behalf of women and mothers: *“Generally speaking, men have negotiated reduction in working time for women (...) and they speak of time that is freed up for women – half days, Wednesdays and school holidays”* (Defalvard, 2004). Men negotiators have sometimes taken up the idea that reconciling times is a women’s affair without in anyway questioning themselves. For men, careers are primordial and their free time does not seem to coincide with family organisation. Another example is the collective agreement at **Auto (France)**, which offers up to 20 hours per employee for taking children to the doctor. They are awarded to all mothers, but only to single fathers... Unions recognise that this measure is discriminatory, but they have never denounced it and attempted to have it extended to all parents – perhaps because they fear it will be jeopardised? This issue was also raised in commerce in **Belgium**, where the theme of reconciling private life and working life is still considered to be a women’s issue. Union leaderships are mainly dominated by men (while the majority of union members are women) and still often have a traditional approach to this issue and are reluctant to take it on board. But if such measures are aimed at women in priority, then gender divisions at work and in the family will only be reinforced.

Behind the issue of work-life balance is – more or less explicitly - that of gender equality both at work and in private. We are thus using a very broad definition of equality by linking the issues of the world of work and those of society in general. If we do not link these spheres

(both occupational and domestic – and even societal), real equality cannot emerge. Public measures adopted on work-life balance, in fact, correspond with policy in the area of equality. Such measures are far from neutral – the creation of collective childcare structures, which are sometimes funded partially by companies or works councils, (as in France, where some works councils participate in financing workplace crèches), more effectively foster full occupational activity of mothers, whereas (parental) leave and even part-time work have negative repercussions for women’s careers, which increase with the length of such interruptions. Even when guarantees are offered to employees (e.g., the possibility of returning from part-time work to full-time work, as in the Netherlands, and maintenance of sufficient pay during leave periods in the Nordic countries), these measures are still mainly used by women and less used by highest grade employees (even though more and more high-grade women use them). It seems that is still incompatible today to have a real career and also benefit from these various measures. Thus, paradoxically, these measures, on the one hand, allow more women than previously to enter and stay in the labour market, but on the other hand actually tend to reinforce discrimination against women – at work, mothers’ assumed lesser availability contributes to maintaining occupational segregation (access to positions with less responsibility, which are considered more “compatible” with family life) and at home, by maintaining the gendered division of domestic labour.

Conclusion

The overall appraisal of the link between work-life balance and equality from a union perspective is mixed. There has been some progress, but observation shows that unions in most countries are still little concerned by this dual issue – the urgency and complexity of collective bargaining on working time has limited their involvement in equality issues; they feel they have to intervene above all on jobs, pay and work organisation, while work-life balance and equality remain, in most cases, once again in the background. However, as we have seen, the possibility of adopting a gender mainstreaming approach sometimes exists, as is the case in union agendas in Austria or in legislation in France. Denmark and the Netherlands provide examples of active union involvement and the integration of work-life balance in trade union policies, although one can see that, also there, attention is not yet guaranteed automatically.

We can also observe that sometimes union strategies on equality are of an indirect nature – for instance, the issue of job insecurity in terms of working hours (especially in commerce) is an important union demand. There, it concerns women, above all, whose employment conditions are very poor. Although most collective bargaining and demands still concern sectors where employment is full-time (e.g., technical services in local authorities in France), now efforts are also devoted to those who have been “left out” of collective bargaining on working time (i.e., part-timers and those with non full-time contracts). Even though the majority of collective agreements in these countries cover all employees (both full-time and part-time), social guarantees are not systematically extended to those with insecure and short part-time jobs, except, of course, in the Netherlands, where great efforts have been made in this area.

The results of reduction of working time itself regarding equality are mixed:

- Negative aspects include intensified working rhythms, removal of breaks, systematic development of flexibility, variations/annualisation and lack of warning regarding changes in work schedules. Women in low-skilled jobs are very much affected by

these results in all our case studies, also because of their family responsibilities. We have also seen that working time can be vehicle of occupational segregation: in the metal industry, access to certain jobs - which are more highly valued and skilled - require long working hours in rolling shifts and are mainly occupied by men.

- More positive aspects concern the satisfaction of some groups of women employees, notably when they have gained a certain degree of control over their working time and time outside work. If one earns sufficient income, reduction of working time can be a way of increasing free time and fostering work-life balance. This has been the case when flexibility has not been imposed and compensations have been negotiated for employees (choice of the way in which working time is reduced and control over managing one's time, etc.) – and when job creation has made it possible to limit pressure on workloads.

The latter situation is not a general phenomenon, because of the weak nature of the balance of forces (for employees and their representatives) during collective bargaining. Moreover, we have observed, at the European level, that the issue of reduction of working time has been pushed to the background by flexibility. The idea of “flexi-security”, which implies linking flexibility to security for employees – in order to conserve job conditions and quality, while at the same time providing more flexibility in working hours (for enterprises and employees) – opens up new collective bargaining prospects, where win-win situations can be created for employees, improving work-life balance, provided unions are really involved.

Moreover, we have emphasised that there are significant national differences regarding the issue of part-time work with a gender perspective from a union point of view: unions in some countries continue to resist (France, Belgium and Italy), while the Netherlands has adopted the opposite policy. Part-time work - and more broadly adapting working time to individual needs - is in the latter's view, an opportunity that fosters equality. In fact, we know that part-time work takes very different forms depending on the situation and is sometimes linked to job insecurity and not individual choice concerning working time arrangements. Provided certain conditions are respected (guarantees concerning the possibility of returning to full-time work, as well as guarantees regarding pay and careers; gender balance of jobs; possibility to vary ones working hours, etc.), this could be an area of future debate and research.

Finally, the low level of women's representation in unions has never facilitated the introduction of such issues. It remains an inevitable pre-condition for incorporating equality in all areas of collective bargaining.

**Some data presenting the case studies
Austria**

Name of enterprise or establishment	Type of activity	Jobs and (proportion of women)	Proportion of women amongst supervisory staffs/executives	Length of working time (proportion of women with part-time or non full-time work)
<i>Electronic Company</i> (metal industry)	Digital light equipment	617 (33,4 %) (blue and white collar workers)	8,1 %	38,5
<i>Vehicle company</i> (metal industry)	Vehicle production	1.800 (2,7 %) (blue collar workers only)	0,0%	38,5
<i>Retail Company 1</i> (commerce)	Supermarket (chain)	branch of the chain store 68 (80,9%)	In the branch 50%	38,5 hours (63%)
<i>Retail Company</i> (commerce)	Supermarket (chain)	1.140 (84,9%)	75 %	38,5 hours (59%)

Belgium

Name of enterprise or establishment	Type of activity	Jobs and (proportion of women)	Proportion of women amongst supervisory staffs/executives	Length of working time (proportion of women with part-time or non full-time work)
<i>Meta 1</i> (metal industry)	Battery production	697 (15.5%)		36.5 hours (80%)
<i>Meta 2</i> (metal industry)		108		35 hours
<i>Maga 1</i> (commerce)	Hypermarket	12,400 (33.3% of employees)	Very few (none?)	35 hours (25%)
<i>Maga 2</i> (commerce)	Hypermarket	12,000 (60%)	2 shops out of 120 managed by a woman	Majority of women work part-time
<i>Federal employment service</i> (public services)	Employment administration	1,516 (54.3%)	"glass ceiling"	38 hours
<i>National employment office</i> (public services)	Management of unemployment	3,888 (67.3%)	39%	

Denmark

Name of enterprise or establishment	Type of activity	Jobs and (proportion of women)	Proportion of women amongst supervisory staffs/executives	Length of working time (proportion of women with part-time or non full-time work)
<i>Coloplast A/S</i> (metal industry)	Develop, produce and market Medical equipment and services	Worldwide: 6120 Danish production site: production: 400 (230) warehouse: 38 men skilled metal workers: 80 men others: mainly men	Supervisors: 20 % Executives. 0%	Mainly full-time for all, but also flexible working hours related to family status and life-phase. Alternative working arrangements, e.g. 3 days of 12 hours a week, week-end work, etc.
<i>Ikea A/S</i> (commerce)	Design, produce and sell low-price furniture	Worldwide: 76,000 in 43 countries Denmark - 4 warehouses 800 Study - 1 warehouse: 250 (50% except warehouse)	Supervisors: 50%	Mainly full-time, but in fact one can decide upon one's working hours and schedule. Employees with children under 6 can work between 8am-4pm; working time can be adapted to life-phase.
<i>Butikken</i> (commerce)	Danish retail	Nation-wide: (70 %) Store study: 80 (83%)		In general, full-time, but more women under 30 hours. Working time and schedule can be adapted to family status and life-phase = company policy.

France

Name of enterprise or establishment	Type of activity	Jobs and (proportion of women)	Proportion of women amongst supervisory staffs/executives	Length of working time (proportion of women with part-time or non full-time work)
<i>Auto</i> (metal industry)	Car production	11,648 (13.2%)	6%	36.75 hours (13.7%)
<i>Zip</i> (metal industry)	Manufacture of zips	292 (50%)	6%	35 hours
<i>Magasins</i> (commerce)	Small town centre general supermarket	18,103 (72%)	24% (senior executives)	36.75 hours (57%)
<i>Grande Distrib.</i> (commerce)	Food hypermarket	36,891 (65%)	6%	36.18 hours (62%)
<i>Ville 1</i> (public services)	Local authority	2,046 (54%)	44% (grade A)	35 hours (12% imposed part-time) (14% chosen part-time)
<i>Ville 2</i> (public services)	Local authority	4,668 (58%)	45% (grade A)	35 hours (5% imposed part-time) (14% chosen part-time)

Italy

Name of enterprise or establishment	Type of activity	Jobs and (proportion of women)	Proportion of women amongst supervisory staffs/executives	Length of working time (proportion of women with part-time or non full-time work)
<i>Factory 1</i> (metal industry)	Electrical home appliances	803 (25%)	1 / 12	40 hours
<i>Factory 2</i> (metal industry)	Tin manufacturers	1,346 (10%)	No women	40
<i>Hypermarket 1</i> (commerce)	Cooperative	417 (87%)	Many women	36
<i>Hypermarket 2</i> (commerce)	Grande distribution	130 (90%)	No women	36
<i>Hospital</i> (public services)	Health	4,202	Women are under-represented	36/38
<i>Research Institute</i> (public services)	Research	1,813 (22%)	Few women in management bodies and examination board	36

The Netherlands

Name of enterprise or establishment	Type of activity	Jobs and (proportion of women)	Proportion of women amongst supervisory staffs/executives	Length of working time (proportion of women with part-time or non full-time work)
? (metal industry)				
? (commerce)				
? (public services)				

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