

BAuA-Working Time Survey: Working Time Preferences of Employees in Germany – Results at a Glance



baua: Report brief

Working hours tailored to personal needs can help reconcile work and private life or avoid overload. However, working time preferences and reality often do not match. These are results of a BAuA research report based on the first two waves¹ of the BAuA-Working Time Survey. Here is an overview of the central findings regarding employees' actual working hours and preferences.

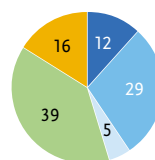
Weekly working hours

Asked about their preferred number of weekly working hours, given that earnings were adjusted accordingly, almost half of employees (49%) would like to reduce their working hours – by an average of 9 hours per week. Many (39%) would like to maintain their current weekly hours. Only a minority (12%) would like to extend their working hours – by an average of 8 hours per week. The wish to reduce working hours is more common among full-time employees (58%) than among part-time employees (21%). On the other hand, part-time employees more often wish to extend their working hours (31%) than full-time employees (6%). Despite some life-stage-specific differences, men and women of all ages, with and without children, and with and without caregiving tasks work more hours per week on average than they would if they had the choice.

A comparison between the years 2015 and 2017 shows that 42% of those who wanted to work fewer hours were in fact able to reduce their working hours, but often not to the preferred extent. Almost two-thirds (65%) of employees who wanted to extend their working hours worked longer in 2017 than they did two years earlier. However, often the contractual working hours did not increase to the same extent as the actual working hours.

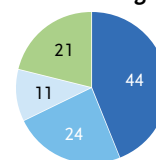
What prevents workers from realizing their working time preferences? Most often, it is financial reasons, such as pension rights, or a workload that could not be accomplished otherwise, that keep employees from reducing their working hours (see Fig. 1). In case of employees who wish to work longer hours, in many cases their employer or contract do not allow this.

Preference for shorter hours



- supervisor or employer do not allow this
- work could not be done
- do not want to jeopardize professional future
- financial reasons, e.g., pension rights
- other reasons

Preference for longer hours



- contract or employer do not allow this
- family or other private reasons
- not financially worthwhile
- other reasons, e.g., health

Fig. 1 Impediments to realizing shorter and longer working hours

Working time autonomy

Analyses with regard to working time autonomy show that a large share of employees rate control over the beginning and end of workdays as important (66%). In reality, however, only 39% of employees have much control over the beginning and end of workdays. Moreover, 64% of employees would like to have a lot of flexibility over when they can take a few hours off. Both aspects are particularly important to women. Whereas only about half of the workforce considers control over the timing of breaks to be important (51%), the vast majority (84%) would like to have autonomy over when they can take holidays or a few days off. In reality, only 58% of employees enjoy this kind of autonomy.

¹ cross-sectional 2017: approx. 8700 persons, longitudinal 2015 / 2017: approx. 5600 persons

Segmentation of work and private life

Modern information and communication technologies increasingly blur the boundaries between work and private life. Asked about their preferences, however, more than three out of four (78%) employees in Germany state that keeping work and private life separate is important to them. A similar share of employees (76%) has a job that allows for such a segmentation. However, for 14% of employees, separating work and private life is not possible, although they would prefer it that way. This is more common among full-time employees (15%) than among part-time employees (11%).

Working time preferences and well-being

A mismatch of working time preferences and realities can also be related to impairments of well-being. Employees who wish to retain their weekly working hours more often rate their health as good or very good (74%) compared to those who prefer longer (69%) or shorter working hours (66%). In addition, they are less likely to report health problems and more likely to be satisfied with their work-life balance and their work in general.

Furthermore, if employees have less working time autonomy than they prefer, this can be problematic. For example, employees who have less control over their

working hours than they prefer report worse health and less job satisfaction. In addition, they often experience problems in reconciling work and private life.

Lack of opportunities to separate work and private life is also associated with poorer subjective health and more health complaints, such as back pain and low back pain or general tiredness, faintness, and fatigue. Moreover, employees who prefer a separation of both life domains but whose job does not allow this are less satisfied with their work-life balance (see Fig. 2).

Conclusion

Overall, the analyses based on the BAuA-Working Time Survey show that employees' working time preferences and reality sometimes diverge widely and that a prompt adjustment is often not possible. In case of large discrepancies, health impairments and a lower work-life balance can be observed. In-depth analyses focusing on different life stages and economic characteristics, as well as branches and occupations can be found in the detailed report „BAuA-Arbeitszeitbefragung: Arbeitszeitwünsche von Beschäftigten in Deutschland“ (only available in German).

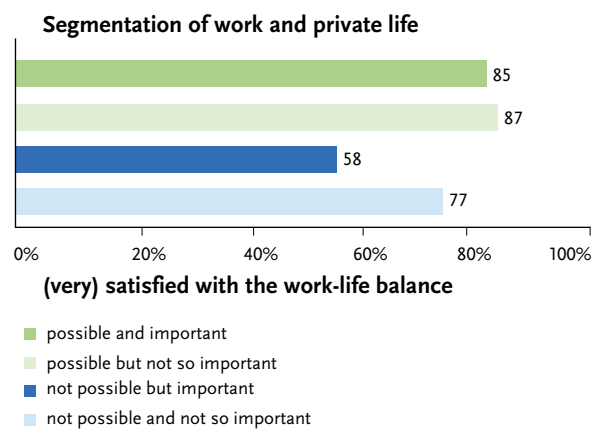


Fig. 2 Work-life balance according to preferred and actual segmentation of work and private life

Further Reading (in German)

- 1 C. Brauner, A. M. Wöhrmann, A. Michel. BAuA-Arbeitszeitbefragung: Arbeitszeitwünsche von Beschäftigten in Deutschland. 1. Auflage. Dortmund: Bundesanstalt für Arbeitsschutz und Arbeitsmedizin 2018. DOI: 10.21934/baua:bericht20181005. available at www.baua.de/dok/8755282
- 2 S. Brenscheidt, A. Siefer, H. Hinnenkamp, L. Hünefeld: Arbeitswelt im Wandel: Zahlen - Daten - Fakten (2019). Ausgabe 2019. Dortmund: Bundesanstalt für Arbeitsschutz und Arbeitsmedizin 2019. DOI: 10.21934/baua:praxis20190131. available at: www.baua.de/dok/8813594