

## **Question in Project:**

European Working Conditions Survey 2024

---

## **Question Topic:**

Job and career/ Job situation & professional activity

## **Construct:**

Work hours

## **General Information:**

**\*Note: The item was tested in English, German and Polish.\***

## **Introduction:**

The next questions are about your working time.

## **Question Text:**

English versions:

Version 1: How many hours do you usually work per week in your main paid job?

Version 2: How many hours do you usually work per week in your paid job?

Filter: How many hours do you work usually per month in your main paid job? How many hours do you work usually per month in your paid job?

German versions:

Version 1: Wie viele Stunden pro Woche arbeiten Sie normalerweise in Ihrem Hauptberuf?

Version 2: Wie viele Stunden pro Woche arbeiten Sie normalerweise in Ihrem Beruf?

Filter: Wie viele Stunden pro Monat arbeiten Sie normalerweise in Ihrem Hauptberuf? Wie viele Stunden pro Monat arbeiten Sie normalerweise in Ihrem Beruf?

## **Instruction:**

English version:

ToolTip text [usually]:

- If your working hours vary from week to week, please provide an estimated average.
- If you work on call, please provide an estimation of the number of hours you actually

work, not the hours being on call.

Please exclude meal times and time spent travelling to and from work.

German version:

ToolTip text [normalerweise]:

- Wenn Ihre Arbeitszeit von Woche zu Woche schwankt, geben Sie bitte einen geschätzten Durchschnitt an.
- Wenn Sie Bereitschaftsdienste leisten, geben Sie bitte die geschätzte Anzahl der tatsächlich geleisteten Arbeitsstunden an, nicht die Stunden des Bereitschaftsdienstes.

Bitte schließen Sie Mittagspausen und Fahrzeiten von und zur Arbeit aus.

## **Answer Categories:**

English version:

Number of hours per week

I prefer to answer about the number of hours per month

Filter:

Number of hours per month

German version:

Anzahl der Stunden pro Woche

Ich möchte die Arbeitsstunden lieber pro Monat angeben

Filter:

Anzahl der Stunden pro Monat

## **Cognitive Techniques:**

Web probing: Recall Probing, Comprehension Probing

Cognitive interviews: Recall Probing, Difficulty Probing, Comprehension Probing, Specific Probing

## **Findings for Question:**

### **Findings Web Probing:**

The vast majority (93%,  $n = 734$ ) of respondents reported their working hours in hours per week. Respondents in Poland were significantly more likely to report their working hours per month than respondents in Germany or the UK ( $\chi^2(2,792) = 15.888$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Also, Polish respondents reported a significantly higher number of weekly working

hours than the UK or German respondents ( $F(2,731) = 7.213, p = .001$ ). The same pattern held true for the reported monthly hours, though the difference was not significant. In particular, the majority of Polish respondents (60%,  $n = 138$ ) responded that their usual weekly working hours were exactly 40 hours, while this share was at only 21% and 24% in the UK and Germany, respectively.

*How did respondents arrive at their answer?*

Approximately three quarters of respondents (77%,  $n = 609$ ) gave a substantive answer to the probing question asking how they arrived at their answer (P1\_Q24). A response was coded as non-substantive if the respondent inserted no answer or random characters ( $n = 75$ ), simply repeated their survey answer (i.e., the number of hours) or gave an otherwise off-topic, non-codable answer ( $n = 108$ ). Non-substantive responses may be a sign of satisficing, that is respondents being unwilling to respond to the probing question but may also indicate that respondents have difficulty answering the survey and/or probing question. Supporting this second notion, respondents with (presumably) irregular working hours were more likely to give non-substantive answers. For instance, respondents in atypical working situations were significantly more likely to give non-substantive answers (30%,  $n = 85$ ) than self-employed (20%,  $n = 46$ ) or employed (19%,  $n = 52$ ) ( $\chi^2(2,792) = 11.478, p = .003$ ). Also, respondents who reported their monthly working hours (50%,  $n = 29$ ) rather than their weekly hours (21%,  $n = 154$ ) were significantly more likely to give non-substantive answers ( $\chi^2(1,792) = 25.477, p < .001$ ).

Among the substantive responses, respondents described how they arrived at their answers. Around two fifths of the respondents (43%,  $n = 263$ ) described their calculation to arrive at their working hours. Many of those respondents averaged their working hours over certain time periods, such as a week or a month. Some respondents counted or summed up the hours and others estimated their working hours. In five cases, respondents reported that they had guessed their working hours. Other responses indicated that respondents thought of their contracted hours or their working scheme (16%,  $n = 97$ ). A similar share of the respondents did not elaborate further on their answer, pointing out "that's what I work" (13%,  $n = 78$ ). A few respondents set their own working hours, which therefore varied.

Three respondents criticized the survey question. Two of these respondents said they would have preferred to insert a number with a decimal. The third respondent wanted to indicate "*that the hours or days I work are different all the time*" but could only put down numbers. Furthermore, some respondents (6%,  $n = 38$ ) reported their breaks despite the instructions asking them not to, because their breaks are paid working time as per their contract.

*What do respondents understand by the term "usually"?*

Three quarters of the respondents (75%,  $n = 592$ ) gave substantive responses regard-

ding their understanding of the term "usually" (P2\_Q24). The remaining respondents either refused to answer the probe ( $n = 103$ ) or simply repeated their answer to the survey question or answered off-topic ( $n = 96$ ). Again, respondents in atypical working situation were significantly more likely to give non-substantive responses (30%,  $n = 86$ ) than respondents who were employed (22%,  $n = 61$ ) or self-employed (23%,  $n = 52$ ) ( $\chi^2(2,792) = 6.093, p = .048$ ).

Among respondents who gave a substantive, codable answer, 4% ( $n = 35$ ) responded that the question didn't apply to them because they had no usual working hours. For instance, one respondent wrote *"There is no such thing, every day is different"*, another *"I do not have fixed working hours"*, and a third explained *"[My working hours] vary greatly because they are order-related. The term 'usually' misses the mark here."* The majority of these respondents (60%,  $n = 21$ ) were self-employed. Similarly, another 9% ( $n = 56$ ) of respondents stated that their working hours depended on their workload and thus varied, for instance depending on the season or their current projects.

Despite these cases in which respondents refused to or could not define what the term "usually" meant to them in this question, the majority gave a clear explanation. In about one third of the substantive responses, respondents explained the term "usually" with synonymous phrases, such as their "typical", "standard" or "regular" work schedule (29%,  $n = 174$ ). Another common strategy was for respondents to calculate their "average" amount of hours (17%,  $n = 98$ ). In total, 13% of respondents indicated that their working hours contained no variation, for instance because they were defined by the contract. Other respondents explained that "usually" referred to their "most common" hours (9%,  $n = 52$ ) or their working hours when business goes "as planned" and there are no "unusual circumstances" (3%,  $n = 17$ ). Some respondents explicitly excluded overtime hours, holidays, or sick leave.

### **Findings Cognitive Interviews:**

The cognitive interviews aimed to gain a deeper insight into the retrieval process of the respondents with a specific focus on people whose working hours varied a lot. In addition, the understanding of the term "usually" was analyzed.

In Germany, twelve respondents answered this question in hours per week, three respondents answered in hours per month and one (DE04) respondent did not answer this question. In Poland fourteen respondents answered this question in hours per week, one (PL09) respondent answered in hours per month and one (PL15) respondent answered the question with a range of working hours per week.

A common retrieval process of the respondents was to refer to their work contract:

- *"This number is written in my employment contract. I also considered the time for teaching hours, time I need to prepare for them, and meetings. That's about as*

*much as it takes.*" (40 hours per week)

- *"It says 'normally' here. This week, for example, I had to work one extra hour. But I don't normally work like that. I just know the number of hours, it's also in my employment contract. [...] I didn't include travelling time and so on."* (35 hours per week)

Some respondents could not refer to their work contract since they are self-employed, or their work hours deviate from it. These respondents estimated an average of their work hours:

- *"There are weeks when I have had 27 hours, some 32 and some even 40. Strong fluctuations."* (30 hours per week)
- *"I can only estimate that. It's always imprecise and it fluctuates and changes. As a self-employed person, you don't have fixed working hours."* (35 hours per week)
- *"I took the lowest number of hours I spend per week and the highest I spend per week, and made an average number."* (40 hours per week)

The respondent (DE04) who did not answer this question explained that it *"is actually not possible for me to answer this question, as the number of hours alone varies so drastically between months or weeks that it is simply not possible to give an average"* (DE04, don't know). In addition, the respondent (PL15) who answered with a period of working hours in a week stated: *"I have irregular working hours. I am unable to determine this time, especially as it is written here to exclude lunch breaks and commuting. I am not able to calculate this"* (PL15, 40 – 60 hours per week).

Especially respondents who were self-employed or whose working hours varied a lot found it difficult to answer this question:

- *"I can't describe it as anything other than highly variable. The main reason is that there is no attendance clock in this profession and even the working time on a single day is sometimes difficult to estimate."* (DE04, don't know)
- *"I think what is meant by that is that we self-employed should align ourselves as much as possible with employees, and I try to do that, but it is almost impossible. In my opinion, this is a question that only employees can answer."* (DE12, 35 hours per week)
- *"Very difficult. In my job we do not have fixed working hours."* (PL04, 40 hours per week)

Regarding the understanding of the term "usually", the respondents either explained that these are the hours defined by the working contract or that they had to estimate an average:

- *"The regular fixed working hours according to the contract. Of course, there are also times when you have to substitute for a colleague. Then it's overtime."* (DE13, 18 hours per week)
- *"An average, so normally, does not exist for me."* (DE15, 40 hours per week)

### **Summary:**

- Most respondents preferred to report their weekly and not their monthly working hours.
- Some respondents asked for the option to insert a decimal, for instance because they work 19.5 hours per week as per their contract.
- Based on the results from web probing and cognitive interviews, respondents with irregular working hours had more difficulty responding to the question.
- The term "usually" was well understood by all respondents; however, respondents with working hours that vary strongly felt the need to explain this, which was not possible using the current closed question.

### **Recommendations:**

We recommend either giving respondents the option to insert a decimal number (i.e., 19.5 hours) or asking them to enter a whole number in the instruction.

Respondents with strongly varying working hours have difficulty answering this question, and are therefore most likely to leave it unanswered. We therefore recommend inserting a prompt for respondents who leave the question unanswered: "Even if your working hours vary strongly, please try to calculate a weekly [monthly] average."