

Balancing working and personal life: *new challenges*

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In France, **64% of employees do not work a standard five-day working week**: atypical working hours, part-time work, on-call duty, etc. There are many different situations. In the face of changes in the way people relate to work and in their living conditions, the search for a balance between working and personal life is at the heart of employees' new expectations.

Three sets of factors are now shaping this work/life balance:

- **changes in the workplace**, whether in the private, voluntary or public sectors, with the integration of the requirements of the ecological transition, new ways of organising work and in particular working from home, new technologies, adapting to an ageing population, etc.;
- **changes in living conditions** that complicate the way people organise their time, by affecting rest time and working time, in particular the difficulty of finding accommodation close to work, and long commuting times;
- **Certain life situations** (single-parent families, carers, people with disabilities).

In the light of these observations, the ESEC has chosen to talk about the “balance of life times”: personal and working lives are interlinked because they cannot be lived independently of each other.

How can we encourage a better balance between personal life and working life?



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THE ESEC'S 4 KEY AREAS FOR A BETTER BALANCE OF LIFE TIMES

→ Free up and make the most of free time

1. By legally establishing the definition of free time at the heart of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (EU), to clarify the concepts of working time on the one hand and free time on the other. Free time is understood to be time that is separate from working time and free of any work-related constraints.

The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights states that "*every worker has the right to limitation of maximum working hours (...)*". It acts as a compass for the policies pursued in each country.

Free time is not defined as such. By clearly defining free time, it will be given the same legal value as working time, which will enable it to be protected more effectively. Including it in the European set of social rights could help to clarify it and ensure that its definition is enshrined in the national law of European countries.

2. By supporting free time in order to act on the constraints that weigh on it.

Life conditions and situations have an impact on free time and need to be supported to ensure better coordination with working time: single-parent families, carers, disability, and so on. There are numerous examples of this. The ESEC recommends, for example, that measures be taken to ensure that women and men can take parental leave on an equal basis.

→ Take action on the organisation of working time

3. By listening to the growing demand for freedom and autonomy among the working population by engaging in social dialogue and negotiations at all levels, in both private and public employment.

Social dialogue at cross-industry level (several sectors of activity), at branch level (in a single sector of activity) and at company level will ensure:

- that the needs of employees at different stages of their lives and personal situations are taken into account,
- that the right to disconnect is implemented effectively, but also that this right is adjusted to take account of the new aspirations of employees and their situation.

4. By considering the intensification of work and the urgent need to slow down thanks to a managerial revolution

The ESEC recommends that the issue of balancing different life times be included in the discussions of the Social and Economic Committee (SEC) on strategic orientations, and that the tools available to managers for assessing employees' workloads be specified.