

# Working hours

The regulation of working hours is one of the most long-standing concerns of labour legislation. The very first ILO convention, adopted in 1919 ([Hours of Work \[Industry\] Convention, 1919 \[No. 1\]](#)), limited hours of work and provided for adequate rest periods for workers. The concept of limited working hours as a human right is also addressed in both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art. 24) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Art. 7). The right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work also ensures rest and leisure.

The ILO standard on working hours (see Art. 2, [Hours of Work \[Industry\] Convention, 1919 \[No. 1\]](#)) sets a maximum of 8 hours per day and 48 hours per week, with a few exceptions under special circumstances.



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Such exceptions include, for example, when all the employees of a company are members of the same family; when persons hold supervisory or management positions; when there is agreement between employers' and workers' organisations; and when one or more days of the working week are less than eight hours then a remaining day/days of the week can be of up to nine hours. Another exception to the standard is when persons are employed in shifts. The number of hours worked in a week may then exceed 48 hours, but the average cannot be over 48 hours per week across a period of three weeks.

A company may impact workers' rights as they relate to working hours by failing to record working hours in general while creating an environment of long working hours, or by simply requiring employees to work excessive hours without sufficient daily and weekly rest periods. Moreover, companies may have an indirect effect on excessive working hours through their supply chains, for example when they exert pressure on suppliers to deliver to tight deadlines and make last-minute changes to orders.

Even though the standard is a maximum of 48 hours/week many company codes of conduct wrongfully cite 60 hours/week including overtime as their referenced standard, even though 60 hours of work over a week's time should only be accepted under exceptional circumstances. Other companies sometimes wrongly refer to a requirement to merely follow national legislation, which might accept excessive working hours and not be aligned with ILO standards.

In situations where national laws fall short of international standards (e.g. local legislation on working hours) companies should aim to adhere to the higher standard. Companies should, as mentioned, ensure that the working week is limited to 48 hours, that overtime is infrequent and limited; and [that workers are given reasonable breaks and rest periods](#) in order not to restrict the workers' right to rest and leisure.

In relation to that, companies must also grant all employees paid annual holiday leave of at least three weeks per year (or longer if the national government in the location of operation specifies a longer time period), and workers should be allowed to take at least two uninterrupted weeks at a time (see [Holidays with Pay Convention \[Revised\], 1970 \[No. 132\]](#)). Holiday pay must be compensated at a rate that is equivalent to the worker's normal or average remuneration. The calculation of holiday pay must comply with the manner determined by the competent authority and include the cash equivalent of any remuneration normally paid in kind.

National laws usually define the amount of time required for the weekly rest period, but as a minimum, [employees must be allowed no less than 24 consecutive hours of rest in every seven-day period](#). If national law provides for more hours of weekly rest, the company must apply the national standard. National governments are also responsible for determining exceptions to weekly rest periods for special cases or instances of force majeure, but only after consultation with workers' organisations.

One related way to address concerns regarding working hours is to strengthen freedom of association and collective bargaining in the supply chain (see more under [Freedom of association and collective bargaining](#)).

#### ▼ Links to SDGs and targets

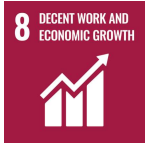




The SDGs relate to international labour standards around working hours through the goals on decent work and economic growth (SDG 8) and reduced inequalities (SDG 10).


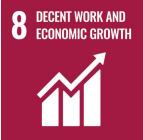
Businesses can contribute to these goals by e.g. creating a company culture where employees take their full paid annual leave and facilitate a change of culture through, for example, strict and progressive family leave policies (8.5 and 8.8). Another way in which companies can respect labour rights related to working hours while they contribute to the SDGs, is by consistently adhering to international standards on overtime hours when local laws do not afford workers the same level of protection (8.7). Also, companies can limit excessive working hours in their supply chains when they ensure supply chain workers are paid a living wage, thereby not indirectly forcing employees to work long hours in order to financially support themselves and their families (10.1).

*These are merely examples of ways in which actions to ensure decent work through addressing working hours can contribute to certain SDGs and is not an exhaustive list of such links.*

## Cases on Working hours



Case brief	Goals	Targets	Due diligence
<p><b>Global sourcing principles extend to supply chain</b></p> <p>Marks &amp; Spencer requires its suppliers to comply with its <a href="#">Global Sourcing Principles</a>. The Global Sourcing Principles align with national and local laws and state obligations around forced labour, discrimination, workplace harassment, temporary workers' rights, wages, working hours and health and safety, among other things.</p> <p>To increase transparency for responsible sourcing, Marks &amp; Spencer publishes an <a href="#">interactive map</a> that distinguishes the location, name, type of manufacturer and number of workers across its clothing, food, homeware and beauty suppliers. The company recently published and made publicly available a <a href="#">Modern Slavery Toolkit for Suppliers and Partners (2017)</a> and a Forced Labour Toolkit for International Suppliers and Partners (2018).</p>		<div>8.5</div> <div>8.7</div> <div>8.8</div>	<div>Corporate commitment</div> <div>Integrating and acting upon findings</div> <div>Tracking and monitoring</div> <div>Communicating and reporting</div>
<p><b>Employer eliminates excessive overtime and promotes work–life balance</b></p> <p>In 2016 Nikon enacted policies in order to promote paid leave and to prevent excessive overtime work by its employees around the world. Through these policies, Nikon aimed to support the work–life balance of its employees, and to provide more flexible working hour options to those employees who need such accommodations. For example, Nikon commits to allowing staff to take up to two years of childcare leave with staggered working hours, reduced working hours, and leave on an hourly basis. Their "cooling system" programme is meant to prevent individuals from working excessive overtime; a flexitime programme was instituted to allow workers to take their annual paid leave more easily; a "work time" campaign promotes taking annual paid leave by focusing on those employees who have the lowest rates of taking personal leave. Nikon's <a href="#">“target for the year ending March 31, 2019 is to reduce the number of employees working excessive overtime of 60 hours on a monthly average basis to 0”</a>.</p> <p>The Nikon 2018 sustainability report indicates the following statistics for the previous year:</p> <p>1 man and 19 women used staggered work hours, and 9 men and 96 women took reduced working hours.</p>	 	<div>8.5</div> <div>8.7</div> <div>8.8</div> <div>10.1</div>	<div>Corporate commitment</div> <div>Integrating and acting upon findings</div> <div>Tracking and monitoring</div>
<p><b>Hospitality firm gets rid of zero-hour contracts</b></p> <p>The hospitality and housekeeping firm WGC banned the use of <a href="#">zero-hour contracts</a> in 2017 in the United Kingdom. This decision set out to help more than <a href="#">5,000 workers</a> move to guaranteed minimum hour contracts with more protected workers' rights and also ensures them educational opportunities in the form of English language courses for migrant workers. This move by WGC also</p>	 	<div>8.5</div> <div>8.7</div> <div>8.8</div> <div>10.1</div>	<div>Corporate commitment</div> <div>Assessing impacts</div> <div>Integrating and acting upon findings</div>

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<p>sought to provide its workers with more defined and established working hours and to eliminate the negative repercussions of temporary work contracts. Zero-hour contracts can lead to excessive working hours due to the lack of security and stability a non-permanent contract entails.</p>			
<p><b>Social Media Company Employs Flexible Arrangements in Response to Covid-19</b></p> <p>In order to accommodate employees whose schedules were disrupted by Covid-19 – in particular working mothers –Facebook has made <a href="#">a number of flexible arrangements</a> such as suspending its normal performance rating system and instead providing employees with bonuses as if they exceeded expectations for the first half of the year and allowing managers to reorganize priorities on a case by case basis.</p>	 	<div>8.5</div> <div>5.1</div>	Corporate commitment

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