

BARTIME: The importance of bargaining working time arrangements

Key insights from the BARTIME project

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Most Collective Agreements (CBAs) fix pay levels based on a standard working week and typically include provisions for monetary rewards related to non-standard working hours. However, there is a lack of understanding of the specificities of these provisions across European countries. BARTIME examines the rewards for non-standard hours across 24 EU countries. BARTIME aims to contribute to the social dialogue in Europe by deepening the understanding of monetary rewards of non-standard working time arrangements and the related agreements in collective bargaining.

BARTIME is led by the WageIndicator Foundation and is joined in the project by University of Utrecht, Central European Labour Studies Institute (CELSI) and the University of Girona. The European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) is associate partner to the project.

WageIndicator Foundation

WageIndicator Foundation is a global, independent, non-profit organisation operating in 208 countries across the world that collects, analyses and shares information on Minimum Wages, Salaries, Living Wages, Living Income and Living Tariff, Labour Laws, Collective Agreements and Gig and Platform Work. It aims to improve labour market transparency for workers, employers and policy makers worldwide by providing accessible labour market information worldwide through 220 websites in 70+ national languages.

Utrecht University

University of Utrecht (UU), Department of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, in the Netherlands is one of the largest Dutch universities with over 35,000 students. The Department of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences has a staff of more than a hundred professors, assistant professors, and PhD and post doc researchers. Its research covers issues such as discrimination in the job market, reintegration at work, growing up in a multicultural neighbourhood, developing your individual identity, high-risk behaviour in young people, growing inequality and the accessibility of care.

Central European Labour Studies Institute (CELSI)

Central European Labour Studies Institute (CELSI) is a non-profit research institute based in Bratislava, Slovakia. It fosters multidisciplinary research about the functioning of labour markets and institutions, work and organizations, business and society, and ethnicity and migration in the economic, social, and political life of modern societies. CELSI strives to make a contribution to the cutting-edge international scientific discourse.

University of Girona

The University of Girona's Department of Economics is affiliated to the Faculty of Economics and Business Sciences and offers teaching in several bachelor's and master's degree studies. The department is very active in research and its interests range from statistics, applied economics and health to public economics, services and industry. Its research covers issues such as labor economics, monetary policy, basic income, transition economies, and the impact of education on the labor market.

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1. Introduction

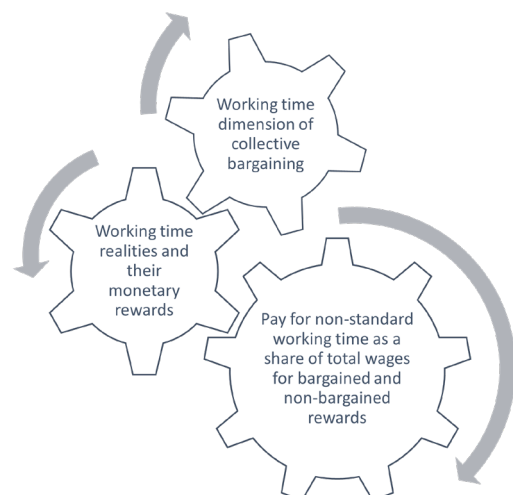
The BARTIME project examined the monetary rewards associated with different dimensions of working time by studying working-time related provisions in collective agreements (CBAs) and in the working population across 24 EU Member States. Co-funded by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (Project No. 101126498), the project analysed pay for work performed during regular daytime schedules on weekdays ("standard hours"), as well as remuneration for work carried out outside these periods ("non-standard hours").

The project sought to advance our understanding of the links between collectively bargained arrangements and the actual remuneration of hours worked in practice. First, BARTIME analysed the collective bargaining agenda on pay for working time, focusing on the length, scheduling and predictability of working hours. Second, it examined the extent to which non-standard hours are performed in the labour force, and the levels of pay employees receive for such hours. Third, the project assessed whether premium pay for non-standard working time—both as agreed in collective bargaining and as received in practice—constitutes a substantive share of European workers' total wage incomes.

This research was motivated by evidence pointing to the widespread incidence of non-standard working hours in European workplaces (Anttila & Oinas, 2018; Leschke, 2015), alongside growing concerns about their implications for workers' health and well-being (Bernstrøm et al., 2019; Hu et al., 2016). It questions the effectiveness of paying premium rates for non-standard working hours, which were originally intended to discourage employers from excessive reliance on long and anti-social working hours (Hart & Ma, 2010; Yu & Kuo, 2022). Against this background, the BARTIME project placed particular emphasis on evaluating the role and effectiveness of collective bargaining in regulating and compensating non-standard working time.

This report, which constitutes Deliverable 4.1 of the BARTIME project, brings together findings from two years of research conducted by the WageIndicator Foundation, Utrecht University, the University of Girona, and the Central and Eastern European Labour Studies Institute. It aims to present the project's key insights in an accessible way, summarising conclusions drawn from detailed econometric analyses and qualitative interview studies.

The report is structured around the three core research questions of the BARTIME project. Accordingly, it presents key findings and policy-relevant conclusions on: (1) provisions on remuneration for standard and non-standard working time in European collective agreements; (2) the prevalence of non-standard working hours and associated premium pay in the European workforce; and (3) the contribution of premium pay for non-standard hours to workers' total earned wages.



2. Remuneration of standard and non-standard working time in collective bargaining

The first research question addressed by the BARTIME project asked which standard and non-standard working time arrangements are agreed in collective bargaining agreements, and which monetary rewards are attached to these arrangements (for an extensive discussion on these issues, see BARTIME reports 1, 2 and 7). This question is highly relevant for policy makers, as collective bargaining remains a key mechanism through which working time norms and compensation practices are defined across Europe. The analysis shows that bargaining over the remuneration of working time generally revolves around two broad issues: first, the pay associated with performing a standard full-time job as understood by the collective agreement; and second, the pay linked to working hours or schedules that fall outside the scope of the standard working hours expected from a full-time employee (Besamusca 2025a, 2025b).

Key insight 1 is that there is growing ambiguity in how the “standard” working week is defined in collective agreements. Rather than formulating a uniform benchmark, collective agreements increasingly allow firms, or even employees within firms, the discretion to determine standard weekly hours. They do so either through provisions in sector-level agreements that derogate these decisions to the firm level, through the absence of explicit working-time definitions in collective agreements, or through the growing predominance of firm-level bargaining (Baccaro & Howell, 2017; Boumans, 2024; Doellgast & Berg, 2018; Ilsøe, 2010). In addition, many agreements introduce individual choice options, enabling employees to opt for longer or shorter standard working weeks with corresponding consequences for pay or annual leave entitlements (Boumans, 2022; Ibsen & Keune, 2018; Leede et al., 2007; Schulten, 2019). The right to request part-time work also appears in some agreements, further reflecting shifts towards flexibility in working time arrangements (Brega et al., 2024).

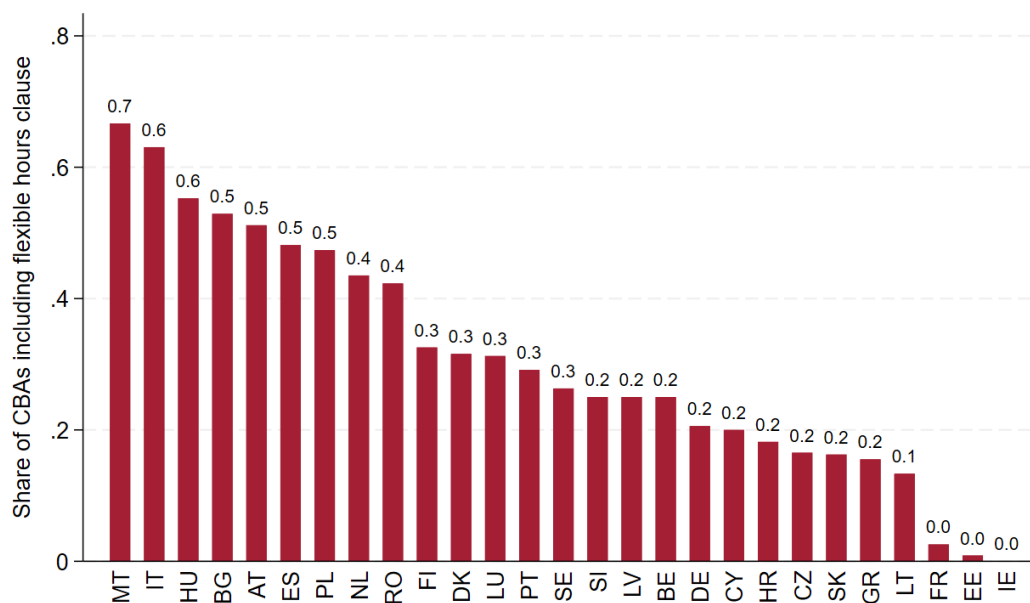


Figure 2 - Share of collective agreements with flexible working time provisions, by country. Source: BARTIME report 2, Besamusca 2025b

Evidence from the WageIndicator collective agreement database (Medas et al., 2024) illustrates the uneven spread of these provisions across EU member states. The share of collective agreements including clauses on flexible working hours ranges from around 10% in Lithuania to about 60% in Italy. Provisions granting employees the right to request a change in the number of weekly working hours—most commonly used to move between full-time and part-time employment or vice versa—are absent from collective agreements in 14 member states, included in 10% to 20% of agreements in 11 member states, and present in about half of all Italian and Bulgarian collective agreements. As noted in the BARTIME report on collectively bargained provisions (Besamusca, 2025b), the inclusion of these topics on the bargaining agenda should be interpreted with caution, as legal provisions may already fulfil a similar role outside collective bargaining.

The second BARTIME report (Besamusca, 2025b) further demonstrates that collective bargaining agreements define standard working hours in a wide variety of ways. Just over half of the agreements in the sample specify either weekly working hours or a combination of weekly and daily working hours. By contrast, around one quarter of the 2001 European collective agreements included in the WageIndicator CBA Database do not define standard working hours at all (Besamusca, 2025b). This absence of explicit definitions suggests a deliberate degree of flexibility in how working time is organised at the workplace level. In addition, approximately 18% of collective agreements include provisions defining the number of hours that constitute full-time employment on an annual basis, further highlighting the shift towards more flexible and aggregated approaches to regulating working time.

Insights from qualitative studies help to contextualise these findings. Experts involved in the BARTIME project—including trade union representatives, academic specialists participating in expert meetings, and coders of the CBA database—note that when standard working hours are specified in collective agreements, they are often framed as “average” working weeks, pointing to the widespread use of working time accounts. Pre-doctoral BARTIME researchers Lindma, Palikidis and Rhône (2025) show that such discretion is common in Estonia, Greece and Spain and leads to what they call ‘temporal precarity’ for workers. Studying CBA texts and interviewing social partners, they argue that employer discretion regarding working hours is introduced through ever increasing derogations (Spain), generous exceptions to normal working time regulations (Greece) and post-hoc adjustments to contracts (Estonia).

Key insight 2 points to a significant transformation in the wage–effort bargain, i.e., the work an employee is expected to perform in exchange for a full-time wage or salary (Rubery et al., 2005). Boundaries between standard and non-standard working time are becoming increasingly blurred as different hours are progressively folded into what counts as “standard” work through the use of ‘annualised hours’ and ‘time accounts’. As highlighted during the BARTIME final conference, these developments make the definition of standard working time more contested. By compensating longer weeks with shorter ones (and vice versa) within a given reference period, employers can avoid classifying additional hours as overtime, thereby reducing entitlement to overtime pay (Arrowsmith, 2007; Boumans, 2024; Grimshaw et al., 2017; Haipeter & Lehdorff, 2005; Ilsøe, 2010, 2012; Piso, 2022; Rubery et al., 2005). These practices are reinforced by the

extension of standard operating hours and, in some cases, by collective agreements that include mandatory or contractual quotas for weekend, evening, or overtime work (Besamusca, 2025b; Ilsøe, 2012; Piasna et al., 2024).

Key insight 3 shows that non-standard working time has become increasingly linked to concerns about health and well-being, rather than being framed solely in terms of wage compensation. This shift is often captured by the concept of working-time “intensification”, whereby more variable and anti-social schedules are combined with tighter control over idle time through efficient scheduling and time-account systems that respond closely to peaks and troughs in demand (Lehndorff, 2007; Rubery et al., 2005). Together, these developments increase the pace and intensity of work beyond what was originally envisaged in the wage-effort bargain. These concerns are also reflected in debates around the four-day working week, where pilot schemes are frequently introduced in highly demanding jobs—either as a response to long-hours cultures or as compensation for anti-social schedules in production and care environments (Coote & Franklin, 2013; Piasna et al., 2024;).

Evidence from the BARTIME expert meetings illustrates how these issues are beginning to influence collective bargaining practice. Trade union representatives described negotiating shorter working weeks for hospital staff who regularly perform night shifts, arguing nurses deserve compensation because night shifts require more recuperation time. In one example from the Czech manufacturing sector, initiatives for working time reduction were explicitly linked to sustainable employability through bargained provisions that enable older workers in manual occupations to work four days in the years leading up to their retirement.

However, analyses of collective agreement texts suggest that most CBAs still lag behind these debates and continue to focus on monetary compensation over recuperation through time off (Besamusca, 2025b). Most provisions continue to focus primarily on financial compensation for non-standard hours: over half of the agreements in the sample regulate overtime through premium pay, while more than a quarter (670 agreements) contain no overtime premiums at all. The remaining agreements compensate overtime either through time off in other weeks or through a combination of additional pay and time off.

3. Remuneration of non-standard working time in the European labour market

The second objective of the BARTIME project was to identify which groups of workers are most likely to perform non-standard working hours, examining differences across countries, sectors, gender, age groups, and positions in the wage distribution. This objective responds directly to policy concerns about the unequal distribution of non-standard working time (Beckers et al., 2007; Yu & Kuo, 2022) and its implications for job quality, income security, and health outcomes across the European workforce (Bernstrøm et al., 2019; Hu et al., 2016).

Key insight 4 highlights substantial differences in the estimated incidence of non-standard hours depending on the source of reporting: employers or employees. These discrepancies are particularly pronounced for overtime work and reveal a significant gap between the *paid* overtime

hours reported by employers in the European Structure of Earnings Survey and the total volume of *paid and unpaid* overtime hours reported by employees in the European Labour Force Survey. Evidence from the fourth BARTIME report shows that, on average, unpaid overtime accounts for less than half of all overtime hours reported by employees (Elias Moreno & Besamusca, 2025b). However, this average masks considerable sectoral variation: in some sectors, unpaid overtime represents as much as 70% to 90% of all overtime hours worked, according to employees (Elias Moreno & Besamusca, 2025c). These findings point to systematic under-recording of overtime in employer-based data sources and underline the importance of triangulating employer data with employee-reported information for policy analysis.

Patterns of non-standard working time across economic sectors largely reflect differences in production processes and service delivery models. Evening and night work, for example, are most common in sectors where continuous service provision is intrinsic to the job, such as hospitality and healthcare (Bernstrøm et al., 2019; Elias Moreno & Besamusca, 2025c; Peetz et al., 2019; Piso, 2022; de Tavernier et al., 2023; Weaver et al., 2023). However, **Key insight 5** shows that the relationship between non-standard working hours and individual worker characteristics is more complex (Elias Moreno & Besamusca, 2025a, 2025c). According to employees' self-reports, some forms of non-standard hours—including both paid and unpaid overtime, as well as evening work—are most frequently performed by high-paid workers. The concentration of unpaid overtime among higher earners aligns with existing research on long-hours cultures, in which employees signal commitment to their employer and career by working well beyond their contractual obligations (Wharton & Blair-Loy, 2016; Williams et al., 2013). By contrast, the prevalence of paid overtime among middle- and high-paid workers is more unexpected, given that formal overtime has traditionally been associated with waged rather than salaried occupations (Yu & Kuo, 2022). This pattern may reflect the growing use of advanced working-time arrangements, such as annualised hours and time accounts, as identified in the analysis of collectively bargained provisions (Arrowsmith, 2007; Besamusca, 2025b).

Key insight 6 indicates that other types of non-standard working hours are most prevalent among workers in the middle of the wage distribution. Shift work, for example, is reported by around 20% of workers in the fourth to seventh wage deciles, compared with approximately 10% among those in the highest wage decile. Night work is most common in the upper half of the wage distribution, peaking at 17% among workers in the eighth decile. In contrast, weekend work is concentrated in the lower half of the wage distribution, with the highest prevalence among workers in the second to fourth wage deciles. Together, these findings underline that different forms of non-standard working time are unevenly distributed across the labour market, with important implications for targeted policy responses.

Table 1 – The relative prevalence of non-standard working hours across countries, sectors, and employee characteristics

	Most common among	Least common among
Paid overtime	Workers in the top wage decile, where around 20% report receiving paid overtime.	Workers in the lowest wage decile, where fewer than 3% receive paid overtime.

Unpaid overtime	Professionals in information, professional activities, finance, real estate, education, and public administration, where 60–80% report unpaid overtime; particularly common in Greece, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, and Lithuania.	Workers in hospitality, mining, transport, construction, and wholesale and retail, with much lower incidence; especially in Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands.
Shift work	Workers in wage deciles 4–7, with around 20% engaged in shift work, particularly in manufacturing, transport, health, retail, and hospitality.	Workers in the highest wage decile, where only about 10% perform shift work.
Evening work	Workers in hospitality, transport, and wholesale and retail, where 50–70% work evenings; particularly prevalent in Italy, Greece, Portugal, and Slovenia. Evening work is also common among the highest wage decile (around 40%).	Workers in public administration, education, finance, and professional activities, where fewer than 20% work evenings; especially in Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Austria.
Night work	Workers in transport, hospitality, wholesale and retail, and construction, where 30–50% work nights; especially in Italy, Greece, Slovenia, and Malta.	Workers in public administration, education, finance, real estate, and professional services, where less than 5% work nights; particularly in Austria, Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands. Night work is least common among the lowest wage decile (around 7%).
Saturday work	Workers in hospitality, transport, wholesale and retail, construction, arts, and health, where more than 50% work Saturdays; especially in Italy, Greece, Slovenia, and Malta. Common among wage deciles 2–4, with over 40% working Saturdays.	Workers in public administration, education, professional services, and finance, where fewer than 10% work Saturdays; especially in Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands. Less common among the highest wage decile (around 30%).
Sunday work	Workers in hospitality, transport, wholesale and retail, and construction, with 40–60% working Sundays; particularly in Italy, Greece, Portugal, and Slovenia.	Workers in public administration, education, finance, professional services, and information, where fewer than 10% work Sundays; especially in Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Norway.

4. The importance of non-standard hours for wages and wage adequacy

The third objective of the BARTIME project was to assess the importance of remuneration for non-standard working hours in shaping workers' overall incomes. This objective speaks directly to the

European policy agenda on adequate wages, which has gained renewed prominence in response to rising inequality and persistent in-work poverty across the European Union agenda (European Union Institutions, 2017; von der Leyen, 2019). Understanding whether premium pay for non-standard hours meaningfully improves workers' earnings is therefore central to evaluating the effectiveness of existing wage-setting and working-time arrangements.

Due to data limitations in the European Labour Force Survey—most notably the lack of detailed wage information and a breakdown of wage components—this part of the analysis relied primarily on employer-reported data from the European Structure of Earnings Survey (ESES). The ESES provides information on wages paid for regular working hours, as well as supplements for shift work and overtime, allowing for an assessment of the contribution of these elements to total earnings.

The BARTIME studies into these premium pay rates for non-standard working hours show earnings from shift work constitute only a small share of wages in most sectors. The evidence indicates that shift work premiums are higher in sectors where shift work is more widespread, including mining, energy, manufacturing, transport, hospitality, and healthcare (Elias Moreno & Besamusca, 2025a). This suggests that, in general, shift premiums are applied where shift work is actually performed and are largely absent elsewhere (**Key insight 7**). Premiums for shift work were relatively high in countries such as Malta, Lithuania, France, and Spain, while they were particularly low—or even negligible—in Germany, Austria, and several Nordic countries. Explaining these cross-country differences lies beyond the scope of the BARTIME project, but they may reflect either a lower incidence of shift work or, conversely, a greater normalisation of shift-based schedules in the latter group of countries.

Key insight 8 indicates that paid overtime is generally compensated at levels broadly in line with collectively bargained premium rates, yet its overall impact on workers' earnings remains limited. According to employer-reported data analysed in the third BARTIME Report, an additional hour of paid overtime in 2018 was rewarded with an average pay increase of around 19% compared to the hourly wage for standard working time (Elias Moreno & Besamusca, 2025a). Overtime premiums varied substantially across countries and sectors, ranging from about 5% on average in Germany to around 50% in Finland and Sweden, and from approximately 12% in public administration to over 25% in the arts and real estate sectors. The analysis further shows that overtime premium levels increased in most sectors between 2014 and 2018, with particularly strong rises in the arts, mining, and real estate sectors, and the notable exception of public administration.

Despite these premiums, the contribution of paid overtime to total earnings was modest. Findings from BARTIME Report 4 show that, on average, overtime compensation increases total earnings by only about 2.4%, and that just 3% of workers experienced an income increase of more than 10% as a result of overtime pay (Elias Moreno & Besamusca, 2025b). Simulation exercises using employee-reported data further suggest that, if unpaid overtime were compensated at the same premium rate as paid overtime, average earnings would increase by an additional 3.63%.

Key insight 9 highlights that paid overtime premiums have little effect on wage adequacy in Europe. The BARTIME researchers found that only a very small share of workers were lifted above commonly used adequacy thresholds when overtime pay is included in earnings: on average, 0.46% of workers move above 60% of the median wage, and 0.40% exceed 50% of the mean wage (Elias Moreno & Besamusca, 2025b). Two main factors explain this limited impact. First, overtime premiums are not concentrated among low-paid workers, but are most commonly received by employees around the median wage, whose basic wages already exceed adequate wage levels.

Secondly, the level and incidence of overtime premiums are insufficient to generate substantial income gains for those at the bottom of the wage distribution. On average, overtime premiums of around 20% are too low, and too infrequent, to lift low wages to adequate levels. In most countries and sectors, overtime accounts for less than 3% of total paid hours, rising to around 5% only in specific contexts. Evidence from the BARTIME literature review (Besamusca, 2025a) and the analysis of collective bargaining agreements (Besamusca, 2025b) suggests that this reflects a combination of unpaid overtime among higher earners, the use of time accounts in firms employing low-paid workers, and the prevalence of part-time work among low-wage work.

Key insight 10 points to a conditional role for collective bargaining in shaping overtime compensation. The BARTIME studies indicate that collective bargaining is associated with higher overtime premiums, but only where overtime is formally recorded (Elias Moreno & Besamusca, 2025b). BARTIME Report 4 shows that overtime premiums are more likely to be included in collective agreements in countries and sectors where paid overtime is common, but not where unpaid overtime predominates (Elias Moreno & Besamusca, 2025b). This suggests that collective bargaining tends to focus on regulating and compensating overtime where it is visible and formally registered. At the same time, the absence of a relationship between bargained overtime provisions and the prevalence of unpaid overtime indicates that collective bargaining has limited capacity to address overtime practices as long as they remain informal and detached from effective working-time recording systems.

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