

# Weekly Report

## Full-time workers want to work fewer hours, part-time workers want to work longer hours

*Since the reunification of Germany, average working times for men and women have followed different trends. There are various reasons for the difference. More and more women are gainfully employed; they engage in part-time and marginal employment, both of which are on the rise. The importance of full-time employment has declined. This accounts for most of the reduction in their average workweek, which decreased by 2.3 hours to 31.9 hours between 1993 and 2007. The full-time employment of men also declined, in both relative and absolute terms—unlike their average workweek, which, according to data provided by the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), totaled 43.3 hours per week in 2007. This is 0.8 hours more than in 1993.*

*Overall, the working time of male and female wage and salary earners in West Germany and of such earners in East Germany have converged, though not the number of working hours preferred by women in the two regions. These numbers remain considerably higher in East Germany than in West Germany. The differences are most pronounced among women who work part-time. In East Germany, the women who this applies to often find that this form of employment provides too low a level of work. Long workweeks exceeding 40 hours are not very popular in either part of Germany—not even among men, at least half of whom work that long, though only 17 percent of them do so by preference.*

This study examines trends in working hour preferences and realities among male and female wage and salary earners in East and West Germany between 1993 and 2007.<sup>1</sup> The German Federal Office of Statistics has tracked two “economic downturn” and two “economic upturn” phases for this period. In a departure from the familiar business cycle concept, the periods from 1993 to 1997 and from 2001 to 2005, which saw an increase in the number of persons who were unemployed, are described here as downturn phases, whereas the periods from 1998 to 2000 and from 2006 to 2007 are upturn phases owing to their falling unemployment figures. Persons from the hidden labor reserve became active in the job market during both phases.<sup>2</sup> Despite the long downturn phases, overall employment increased between 1993 and 2007.

<sup>1</sup> This report is a follow-up to earlier results reported by DIW Berlin on this topic; cf. Holst, E.: Arbeitszeitwünsche von Frauen und Männern liegen näher beieinander als tatsächliche Arbeitszeiten. Wochenbericht des DIW Berlin No. 14–15/2007.

<sup>2</sup> The hidden reserve includes those unemployed persons who are not included in the official statistics but who wish

**Elke Holst**  
eholst@diw.de

**JEL Classification:**  
J16, J21, J22

**Keywords:**  
Working time, Working time preferences,  
Gender gap, East / West Germany.

The number of gainfully employed women increased by at least two million during this period. The number of gainfully employed men, on the other hand, fell by approximately 600,000 (Table 1). During the first downturn phase, the employment rate for women increased by 0.3 percent to 55.2 percent. For men it decreased by 3.1 percent to 71.9 percent. The employment rate for women increased also in the second downturn phase in the labor market, by 0.7 percent to 59.5 percent, while the comparable figure for men once again declined, by 1.5 percent to 71.2 percent. It should be noted that these observations are based on purely per capita results.

When we consider the amount of paid work performed, it becomes clear that the rise in the female employment rate was accompanied by a considerable increase in gainful employment at reduced hours. The proportion of all part-time and marginally employed workers increased from 15 to 26.3 percent.<sup>3</sup> The part-time employment rate for women was 46.2 percent in 2007, more than five times the rate of that for men (Table 2). As compared to 1993, full-time employment declined in both relative and absolute terms, for men as well as for women.<sup>4</sup>

To what extent do the realities of such changes in working time match the preferences of the employed?

### Actual working hours of women have decreased

For women, the increase in part-time work and the decrease in full-time employment are reflected in a reduced average workweek (Figure 1). Overall, their contractual and actual working times declined by approximately two hours during the period of observation. At 30.1 hours, the former eventually came close to the preferred weekly level of 30.3 working hours. Actual working time for 2007 was calculated to be 31.9 hours on the basis of the SOEP.

to pursue gainful employment and would be able to accept paid work no later than during an economic boom. Regarding hidden reserves cf. Holst, E.: Die Stille Reserve am Arbeitsmarkt. Größe—Zusammensetzung—Verhalten. Berlin 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. German Federal Office of Statistics: Statistik des Mikrozensus. Wiesbaden 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Other analyses, such as those of the Arbeitsgruppe Alternative Wirtschaftspolitik (Working Group for Alternative Economic Policy), have quantified a reduction of approximately 900,000 persons in "normal" full-time employment (exclusive of subcontracted work) in the period from 2003 to 2008. According to their calculations, the number of persons in one-euro jobs increased during the same period by 300,000, while those in mini-jobs increased by 500,000, and another 1.2 million persons pursued other part-time work. Cf. Arbeitsgruppe Alternative Wirtschaftspolitik: Krise unterschätzt—Massives Konjunkturprogramm erforderlich. Special memorandum. Bremen 2008, [www.memo.uni-bremen.de/docs/sondermemorandum2008.pdf](http://www.memo.uni-bremen.de/docs/sondermemorandum2008.pdf).

Table 1

### Employed persons<sup>1</sup> and employment rates

	Employment rate			Employed persons		
	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Total
	in percent			in 1,000 persons		
1993	54.9	75.0	65.1	14,959	21,111	36,070
1994	55.0	74.0	64.6	14,970	20,796	35,765
1995	55.1	73.9	64.6	14,983	20,744	35,727
1996	55.4	72.7	64.2	15,145	20,490	35,634
1997	55.2	71.9	63.7	15,117	20,322	35,439
1998	55.5	71.8	63.8	15,220	20,278	35,498
1999	56.9	72.4	64.8	15,605	20,421	36,026
2000	57.7	72.8	65.4	15,793	20,439	36,232
2001	58.8	72.7	65.8	16,040	20,376	36,415
2002	58.8	71.9	65.4	16,045	20,073	36,118
2003	58.8	70.9	64.9	16,014	19,720	35,734
2004	58.4	70.1	64.3	15,812	19,397	35,209
2005	59.5	71.2	65.4	16,241	19,806	36,047
2006	61.4	72.7	67.1	16,661	20,141	36,801
2007	63.1	74.5	68.9	17,046	20,522	37,568

<sup>1</sup> Ages 15 to 64 years. Downturn phases in the job market have a gray background.

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt: Statistik des Mikrozensus.

DIW Berlin 2009

The number of working hours was significantly higher for men than for women. These figures changed but slightly between 1993 and 2007. For the most part, the figures for preferred and contractual working hours were very close to one another, though the number of hours actually worked was

Table 2

### Part-time employment rate<sup>1</sup> by sex

	Employment rate		Salary earners	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
	in percent		in 1.000 persons	
1993	32.2	2.3	13,852	18,870
1994	33.3	2.8	13,827	18,473
1995	33.9	3.1	13,835	18,395
1996	33.6	3.4	14,054	18,134
1997	35.4	3.9	14,016	17,900
1998	36.4	4.3	14,067	17,811
1999	37.8	4.6	14,517	17,980
2000	38.3	4.8	14,669	17,969
2001	39.6	5.2	14,834	17,910
2002	40.2	5.5	14,853	17,615
2003	41.4	6.0	14,818	17,225
2004	42.1	6.2	14,559	16,846
2005	44.3	7.4	14,885	17,181
2006	46.0	8.8	15,310	17,520
2007	46.2	8.9	15,680	17,927

<sup>1</sup> Ages 15 to 64 years. Downturn phases in the job market have a gray background.

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt: Statistik des Mikrozensus.

DIW Berlin 2009

much higher. For men, contractual working time amounted to approximately 38 hours per week for the entire observation period. The preferred number of working hours was 39.1 in 2007 (38.3 hours in 1993). Only the number of hours per week actually worked has increased somewhat more substantially in recent years, rising to 43.3 hours in 2007 (42.5 hours in 1993).

For men, the number of hours actually worked increased slightly only during the last upturn phase as the job market in Germany recovered. That a similar effect was not detectable for women may be attributed to the stronger increase in part-time employment.

Subtracting the average number of hours per week worked by women from those worked by men yields the “gender gap,” the disparity between the working time values observed for each sex (Figure 2).

The gender gap in working time increased during the observation period. The most substantial increases were in hours actually worked (+3.1 hours) and contractual working time (+2.6 hours), while the preferred number of hours increased the least (+0.5 hours). It appears that job market recovery phases have increased the gender gap in actual and contractual working time. It should be noted, however, that more women have accepted (part-time) employment during these phases.

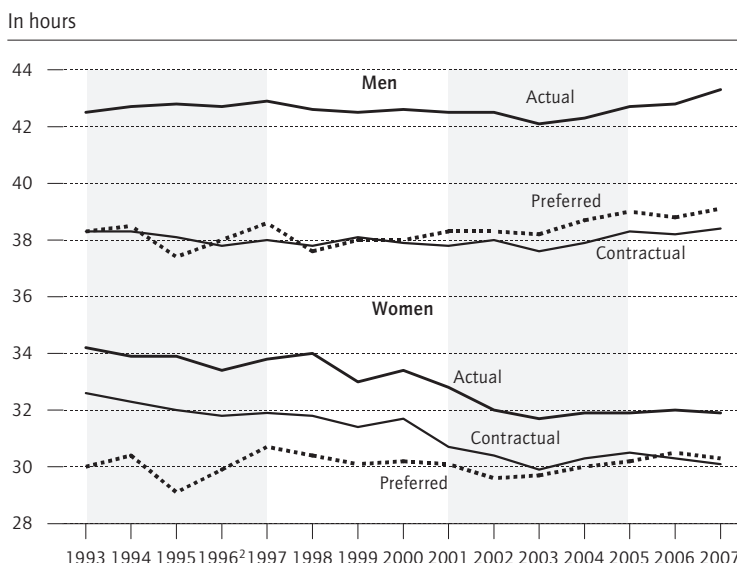
**The number of working hours preferred by women who are employed full-time has increased in the East and in the West**

The greatest differences between East and West Germany with regard to workweeks and preferred numbers of working hours are those observed among women. Though similar developments were evident during the observation period among those employed full-time, in East Germany they occurred at a higher level in terms of hours (Figure 3).

By the end of the observation period, contractual and preferred weekly work hours were converging in the two parts of Germany. In West Germany, the average number of contractual working hours for women who were employed full-time increased by 0.4 hours to 38.9 hours per week between 1993 and 2007; in East Germany this number fell by 0.6 hours to 39.3 hours per week. What is interesting is that women who are employed full-time in West Germany now wish to work a considerably greater number of hours per week than they wished to work even as late as 1993. In 2007, they stated that they

Figure 1

**Contractual, actual and preferred workweek<sup>1</sup> for women and men**



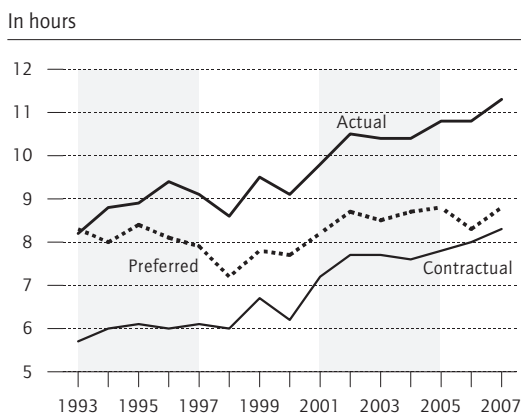
1 Salary earners only.  
2 Interpolated data.

Source: SOEP; all data has been calculated by DIW Berlin.

DIW Berlin 2009

Figure 2

**“Gender gap” for contractual, actual and preferred workweeks<sup>1</sup>**



1 Salary earners only.  
2 1996 interpolated data.

Source: SOEP; all data has been calculated by DIW Berlin.

DIW Berlin 2009

wished to work 36.8 hours per week (an increase of 2.4 hours). Women in East Germany wished to work 37.4 hours per week in 2007 (an increase of 1.2 hours). At the same time, the hours actually worked by women who were employed full-time increased during the observation period. This was seen to a greater extent in West Germany (+1.4 hours

to 42 hours) than in East Germany (+0.9 hours to 43.3 hours).

### Men employed full-time in the East and in the West wish to work fewer hours

Not long after the reunification, the disparity between East and West Germany was greater with regard to the actual number of hours worked per week by men who were employed full-time than had been the case since the end of the 1990s (Figure 4). In 2007, there was another adjustment that brought the number of working hours in West Germany closer to the higher level that existed in East Germany. Since 1993, the number of hours actually worked by men who were employed full-time increased by 2.6 hours in the West. In East Germany, this value returned to its 1993 base level of 45.5 hours per week. For men, contractual and preferred numbers of working hours converged sharply. Even for them, however, the number of hours actually worked was considerably higher.

Among full-time male and female employees combined there was little change in the values for working time associated with the economic up- and downturns—with the exception of the weekly number of hours actually worked in 2006 and 2007.

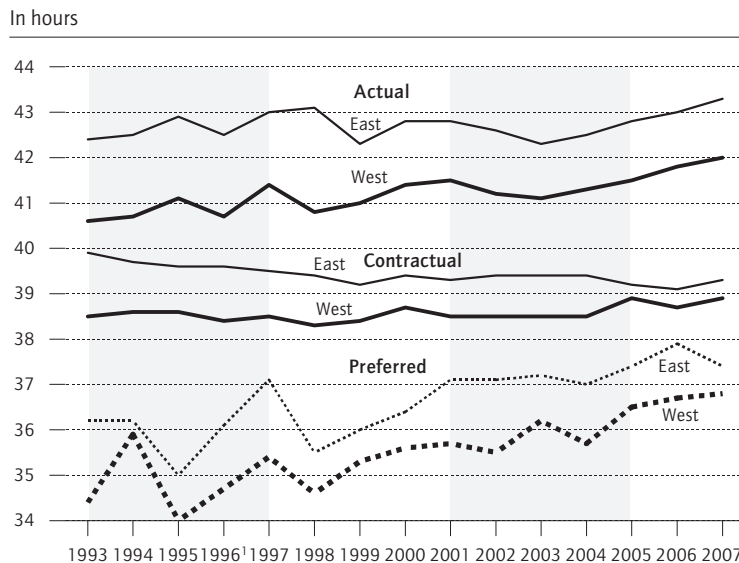
In contrast to all employed persons, among those who were employed full-time, the gender gap was small for preferred and actual working time (Figure 5). In West Germany, the gap widened slightly for the number of hours actually worked, which is primarily due to the increase in weekly hours for men during the last economic upturn. While the gender gap ultimately narrowed in terms of the number of hours actually worked, it widened for the preferred number of working hours.

### Nothing new on the eastern front: women employed part-time would like to work substantially longer

In contrast to men, women are more often engaged in reduced forms of gainful employment. In both parts of Germany, however, considerable differences remain with regard to the occupational motivation of women who are employed part-time (Figure 6). This is clearly reflected in the higher average hour level for all three of the examined working time values. The difference is particularly large in the case of desired working time. For women in East Germany, the large gap between wish and reality has been clearly evident during the last ten years—this

Figure 3

### Contractual, actual and preferred workweeks for women who are employed full-time



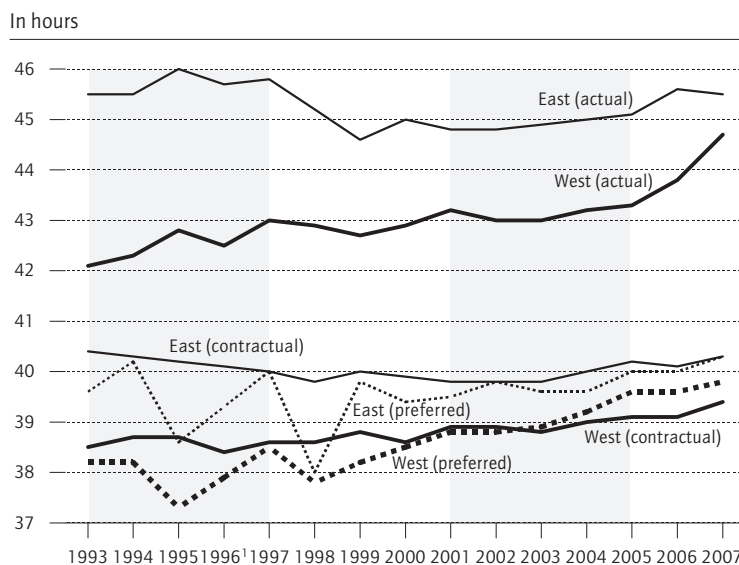
1 Interpolated data.

Source: SOEP; all data has been calculated by DIW Berlin.

DIW Berlin 2009

Figure 4

### Contractual, actual and preferred workweeks for men who are employed full-time



1 Interpolated data.

Source: SOEP; all data has been calculated by DIW Berlin.

DIW Berlin 2009

is an indication of the persistent dissatisfaction of East German women with the amount of work their part-time positions offer them. The desire for longer working hours among women who are employed part-time has increased in West Germany as well.

This quantity is not as markedly in excess of the number of hours per week actually worked, so that we may assume in this case that there is greater satisfaction with the amount of paid work.<sup>5</sup>

### The 40-hour week is the most popular among East German women

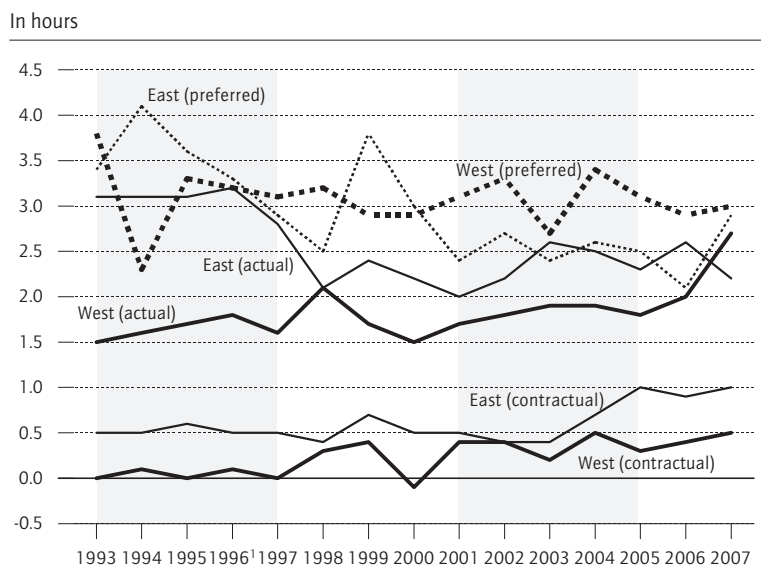
Close examination of actual and desired working hours per week also reveals strikingly large differences between women in West and East Germany. It becomes clear that, on the whole, female wage and salary earners in East Germany wish to be employed full-time or nearly full-time (Figure 7). However, women in West Germany prefer to have a comparatively wide range of working times (including the part-time category). Thirty-five percent of women in East Germany would prefer 40 hours per week of paid work, though only 19 percent have been able to satisfy this wish. In West Germany, on the other hand, 16 percent desire a 40-hour workweek, and a similar proportion (14 percent) works one. A workweek of 30 to 34 hours is the second most frequent preference indicated by East German women (25 percent). This quantity of paid work is also very popular in West Germany (17 percent), and is as popular as a 20- to 24-hour workweek (18 percent). Only nine percent actually work the 30- to 34-hour workweek (while 14 percent actually work a 20- to 24-hour week). Among women in the West, the difference between wish and reality is most pronounced in this range of weekly working hours. Common to women in both parts of Germany is a lack of desire for a workweek longer than 40 hours. However, more women work such a week in the East than in the West.

For men, there is considerably more similarity between actual and desired workweeks (Figure 8). The 40-hour workweek is preferred by 39 percent of West German men and 56 percent of East German men. In reality, however, substantially fewer men work to this extent (22 percent in the West, 26 percent in the East). Longer workweeks are also desired by fewer men than those who actually work them. For example, just 15 percent of West German men and just 13 percent of East German men work 45 hours per week, while only six percent and five percent respectively would like to do so. Even more conspicuous are the differences (more than ten percentage points) between each group's desired and actual hours per workweek for very long workweeks of 49 or more hours, which are worked

<sup>5</sup> For the correlation between life satisfaction, work satisfaction and health satisfaction and differences in preferred and actual working time with see e.g. Grözinger, G., Matiaske, W., Tobsch, V.: Arbeitszeitwünsche, Arbeitslosigkeit und Arbeitszeitpolitik. SOEPpapers No. 103. 2008.

Figure 5

### "Gender gap" for contractual, actual and preferred workweeks for persons who are employed full-time



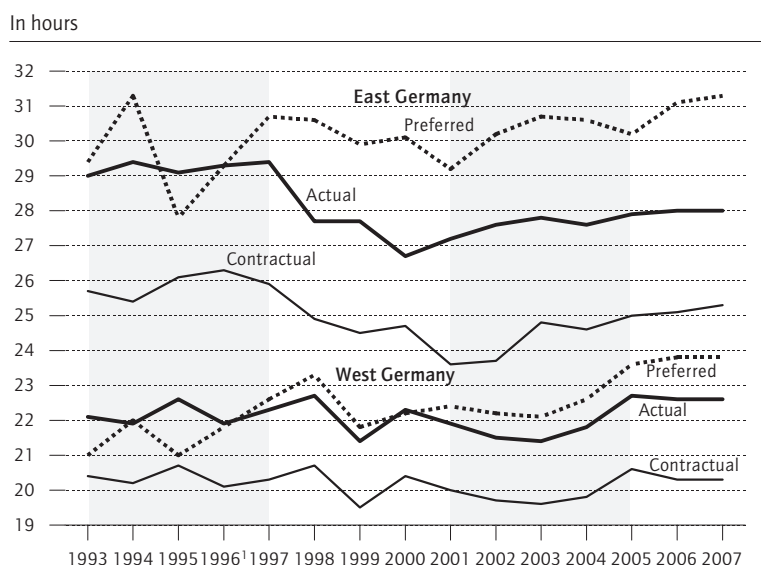
1 Interpolated data.

Source: SOEP; all data has been calculated by DIW Berlin.

DIW Berlin 2009

Figure 6

### Contractual, actual and preferred workweeks for women who are employed part-time



1 Interpolated data.

Source: SOEP; all data has been calculated by DIW Berlin.

DIW Berlin 2009

by 23 percent of employed men in West Germany and 29 percent of employed men in East Germany. Thirty-five hours of paid work per week are desired by twelve percent of West German men and nine percent of East German men, but are worked by



negligible percentage—two percent on the West German side and one percent on the East German side. Few men in either part of the country (eight percent) work fewer than 35 hours per week, a fact that is also largely consistent with their workweek preferences (eleven percent in the West, nine percent in the East).

If one is on the lookout for “redistribution potential”, this analysis shows that it would be realized primarily by cutting back long workweeks, particularly for men, but for women as well. The potential in this case is purely mathematical, however, and has not been adjusted for qualifications or regional details. It can be shown, however, that further investigations would be in order if we wish to bring about a better balance between wish and reality among the employed, and a better integration of the unemployed into the labor market.

In contrast to earlier studies, it can be stated here that there has been no significant change since 2005 in the distribution of actual and desired working time in terms of hours per week.<sup>6</sup> The trend, among men in particular, is for working times between 35 and 38 hours to be somewhat more often in demand than those of about 40 hours. Very long workweeks of 49 or more hours are, moreover, less usual and less in demand.

**Conclusion**

In the German labor market, cyclical effects on working hours were most evident during years of strong economic growth, particularly 2007, when actual working hours increased for men. Gainful employment of women increased sharply in West Germany from 1993 to 2007.<sup>7</sup> Mothers in particular pursued part-time or marginal employment with ever greater frequency as a means of balancing family and occupational responsibilities.<sup>8</sup> The reduction of the average workweek for women is explained primarily by the increase in reduced working times. Full-time employment has decreased in both relative and absolute terms—and this has also contributed to a reduction in the average number of hours women work. Although full-time employment declined in

<sup>6</sup> Holst, E.: Arbeitszeitwünsche ..., loc. cit.

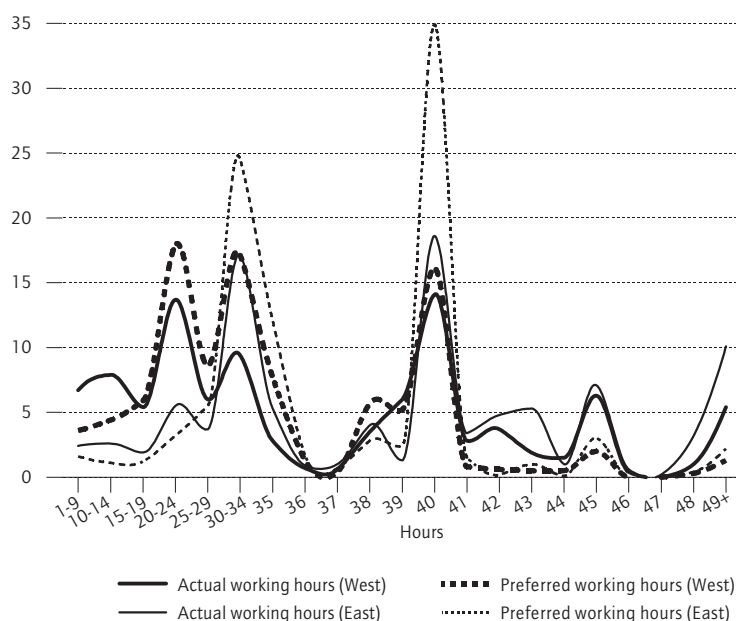
<sup>7</sup> Neither for women in West Germany nor for those in East Germany is unemployment an option nowadays. Cf. Holst, E., Schupp, J.: Situation und Erwartungen auf dem Arbeitsmarkt. In: Statistisches Bundesamt: Gesellschaft Sozialwissenschaftlicher Infrastruktureinrichtungen (GESIS), Zentrum für Sozialindikatorenforschung, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB) (pub.): Datenreport 2008. Bonn 2008, 122–128.

<sup>8</sup> Despite increased participation by women in the labor force, women continue to bear responsibility for family duties and housework. Housework generally has lasting negative effects on the labor market—for men as well as for women. Cf. Anger, S., Kottwitz, A.: Mehr Hausarbeit, weniger Verdienst. Wochenbericht des DIW Berlin Nr. 6/2009.

Figure 7

**Actual and preferred workweeks<sup>1</sup> for women in hours**

In percentage terms



<sup>1</sup> Salary earners only.

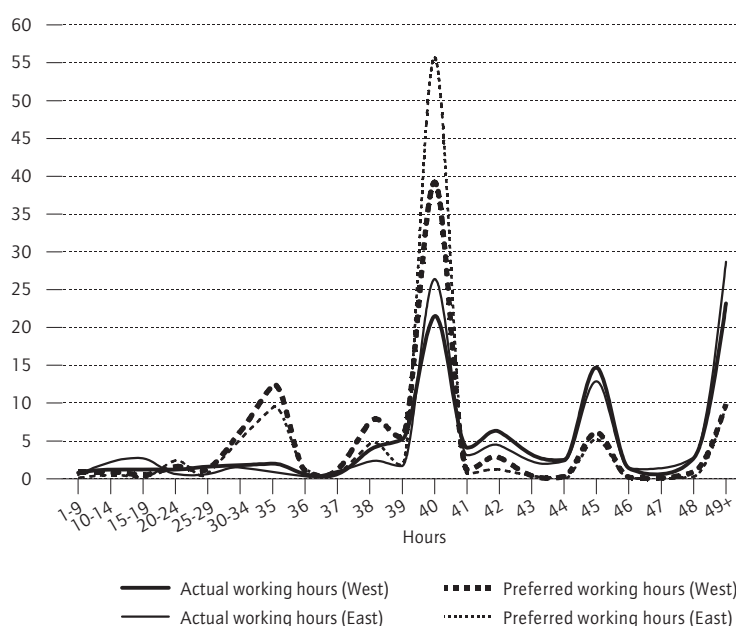
Source: SOEP; all data has been calculated by DIW Berlin.

DIW Berlin 2009

Figure 8

**Actual and preferred workweeks<sup>1</sup> for men in hours**

In percentage terms



<sup>1</sup> Salary earners only.

Source: SOEP; all data has been calculated by DIW Berlin.

DIW Berlin 2009

## Data basis and definitions

The data basis for these investigations is the Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP)<sup>1</sup> compiled in Germany by DIW Berlin in collaboration with Infratest Sozialforschung. The representative follow-up survey of private households in Germany has been providing copious information about objective living conditions and subjective attitudes for West Germany since 1984 and East Germany since 1990.

The results for the various working time values are based on the following questions in the SOEP:

- *Contractual workweek*: "How many hours are there in your contractual workweek, not counting overtime?"
- *Actual working time*: "And how many hours on average do you actually work per week, including any overtime?"
- *Preferred working time*: If you could choose the number of hours you work yourself, taking into account that your earnings would change accordingly, how many hours per week would you prefer to work?

Because the situation of women in the labor market is different from that of men, a separate analysis was conducted for each sex. Whether the employed persons lived in East or West Germany was also taken into account to expose any regional differences in occupational motivation. Also examined were differences within the group of women employed full-time and within the group of women employed part-time. The values given for working times are average values. Persons employed full-time are defined as those whose contractual workweek is at least 35 hours, while those employed part-time are defined as those with a contractual workweek of up to 34 hours. The study included wage and salary earners, i.e., white-collar workers [*Angestellte*], male blue-collar workers [*Arbeiter*], female blue-collar workers, male civil servants [*Beamte*] and female civil servants (trainees or apprentices were not included).

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Wagner, G.G. et al.: Das Sozio-oekonomische Panel (SOEP): Multidisziplinäres Haushaltspanel und Kohortenstudie für Deutschland—Eine Einführung (für neue Datennutzer) mit einem Ausblick (für erfahrene Anwender). In: AStA Wirtschafts- und Sozialstatistisches Archiv, Jahrgang 2, No. 4, 2008, 301–328.

relative and absolute terms among men as well, the average number of hours they worked per week did not. It appears, therefore, that among men, the decline in the number of full-time jobs less frequently resulted in them having reduced forms of employment than having no gainful employment at all. The gender gap widened for actual and contractual working times. For desired working times, on the other hand, the gender gap remained, with some fluctuation, virtually at the base level of 1993.

Wish and reality with regard to working hours per week were closest to one another for women in West Germany and furthest from one another for women in East Germany. In East Germany, women continue to entertain an (unfulfilled) wish to pursue employment with a workweek at a full-time or very high part-time level.

Irrespective of sex and region, comparatively few persons wish to work overlong workweeks. With this in mind, the popularity of the 40-hour workweek becomes all the more understandable. It is preferred twice as often as it is actually worked. Women in West Germany constitute an exception: for them wish and reality are largely the same.

The gender gap for the various working time values is narrowest among those employed full-time. In principle, men and women would differ less markedly in their workweeks if actual and contractual weekly working times were to match.

Overall, the working time values for both parts of Germany have converged. The adjustment occurred as a result of an increase in the workweek (and in the number of gainfully employed women) in the West, and a reduction of the workweek in the East. While scarcely any differences remain for men, women in East Germany still show substantially higher occupational motivation nearly two decades after the German reunification.

Inequalities exist particularly with regard to very long working hours. For example, 51 percent of men worked more than 40 hours per week in 2007, while only 17 percent wished to do so. For women the differences were less significant but likewise present. In purely mathematical terms, this provides the potential for redistribution to the benefit of part-time employees and/or persons without gainful employment. This would require overcoming regional and qualification-related differences in supply and demand. If the existing potential were to be real-

ized, wish and reality could be brought closer together with regard to the number of hours worked by the gainfully employed, and even the unemployed might have a better chance of being integrated into the labor market. These may be important points to consider, particularly now during a time when future downturn phases in the labor market loom on the horizon.

*(First published as "Vollzeitbeschäftigte wollen kürzere, Teilzeitbeschäftigte längere Arbeitszeiten", in: Wochenbericht des DIW Berlin Nr. 25/2009)*

DIW Berlin  
Mohrenstraße 58  
10117 Berlin

Tel. +49-30-897 89-0  
Fax +49-30-897 89-200

ISSN 1860-3343  
Price: Euro 10.–  
[www.diw.de/english/produkte/publikationen/weeklyreport](http://www.diw.de/english/produkte/publikationen/weeklyreport)  
Translated from the German.  
All articles are protected  
by copyright.