Time use survey highlights changing working conditions

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The latest population time use survey indicates changes in the profile of time use in Latvia in 2003, compared with 1996. In 2003, all workers used a greater part of the total weekly time budget (168 hours) for personal care and sleep; however, men spent a greater part of the total time in paid work. Moreover, there was an increase in travel or commuting time. The survey also shows differences in time use between those in paid employment and others, according to sex and geographical location. Time use surveys are primarily a quality of life indicator, but they also contain useful data regarding working conditions.

Introduction

Time use surveys provide valuable data for the analysis of working conditions, which cannot be obtained from any other statistical source. Such surveys have been conducted and published in several European countries, including Latvia, since the 1970s. The survey interval – on average every five or 10 years – is due to a certain stability in population time use patterns, which means that changes are easier to observe over a longer time frame.

In 1972, the Institute of Economics in the Latvian Academy of Sciences (Latvijas Zinātņu akadēmijas Ekonomikas institūts, LZAEI) conducted the first time use survey in Latvia. It was based on previous experience in the research of time use among the population, and also on international time use surveying methods. In 1987, the same group of researchers repeated the investigation on time use of the population. In 1996, the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (Centrālā Statistikas Pārvalde, CSP) – in cooperation with the same researchers and corresponding institutes in other countries – conducted a pilot survey on time use using Eurostat methods.

In 2000, Eurostat issued Guidelines on harmonised European time use surveys (1.8Mb PDF) to conduct internationally comparable time use surveys. The following year, CSP began preparations for a further survey on population time use, using the improved Eurostat methods. The official results of this time use survey were finally published in 2005.

Survey methodology

The target population in this time use survey were people aged 10 years and over. The survey was carried out between February and August 2003 and October and November 2003, in order to cover all seasons. Time use was recorded in a workday diary and a weekend diary; the information was obtained from 3,804 respondents in 1,469 households. A total of 998 respondents were interviewed in the capital city, Riga, while 1,433 people were surveyed in other cities and towns of Latvia, and a further 1,373 respondents were living in rural areas. Of 7,596 time use diaries, 3,804 diaries reflected time use on workdays, 1,951 recorded the time spent on Saturdays and 1,841 on Sundays.

The individual diaries were coded according to the list of possible time use activities developed by Eurostat. The survey covers 168 activities from the EU level list and five country-specific activities. Time use activities are combined into the following 10 listed groups, in line with the Eurostat guidelines: personal care, paid employment, study, household and family care, voluntary work and meetings, leisure time, travel and unspecified time use.

Personal care involves time spent meeting physiological needs, such as sleep, confinement to bed in case of illness and eating. Leisure time includes socialising and entertainment, sports and outdoor activities, hobbies and games, and use of mass media. Travel is a special group of activities set out according to the Eurostat methodology. It involves time used in journeys connected with all kinds of activities such as travelling to or from work, trips in connection with household tasks and travel in relation to free time or leisure pursuits.
The published survey results consist of six parts: 1) time use of the population by area and sex, 2) time use of the population by sex, age and life cycle, 3) time use of people in employment, 4) time use of students, 5) time use of the population not engaged in paid employment and study, and 6) daily time rhythm of the population.

The statistical tables in the survey findings provide data covering the population in the respective group, those who are involved in the specified activity, and the percentage of those who are involved in the respective activity as a proportion of the overall population. All indicators are provided according to sex and geographical location, including the overall average for Latvia, as well as specific data for Riga, other cities and towns, and rural areas.

Compliance with the international methodological requirements ensures the comparability of the Latvian data with time use research results of other countries and future time use surveys, as well as with results of the surveys previously conducted.

Relevance of time use data

A time use survey of the population is a specific source of analysis of working conditions. Its usefulness is based on the unique circumstance that the amount of time in a defined period (time budget) is limited. The activities undertaken, such as personal care, paid employment, free time and domestic tasks, are interrelated values which will always constitute 168 hours in the total weekly time budget. Thus, an increment in time used for any activity can take place only at the expense of other activities.

In relation to working conditions, the analysis of time use data focuses mainly on time use of people in employment (Part 3 of the survey results) and time use in connection with paid employment for the entire population, such as job seeking. Nevertheless, interesting relevant characteristics may also be found in other parts of the survey.

Paid employment includes several activities: unspecified employment; the main job, including working time and coffee and other breaks; a second job, including working time and coffee and other breaks; and activities related to employment such as lunch breaks, job seeking and other unspecified and specified activities in this regard.

In this way, time use data can provide useful indications of the quality of life of employed people, as well as typical patterns in relation to the following: time spent at work and travelling to or from work; time spent travelling in connection for job-related reasons; time used for the main job and also a secondary job; prevalence of people taking a second job; and the ratio between time spent at work, on personal care and leisure time.

Geographical location and time in paid work

Across the entire population – working and non-working – the amount of time spent in paid employment and study, as well as the amount of leisure time, does not differ essentially in Riga and in other urban and rural areas but remains close to the average time use indicator throughout Latvia. In 2003, people on average spent 23.04 hours weekly in paid employment (Figure 1). It should be noted that times given in the text of this report refer to hours and minutes, meaning that the above time represents 23 hours and four minutes.

The average time used for paid employment by those who actually worked in such employment – which accounts for approximately 40% of the entire population – is of course significantly higher. The national average for this group is 56.29 hours a week, increasing to 58.05 hours in Riga, and 59.22 hours in other cities, but declining somewhat to 52.01 hours in rural areas.
Impact of gender

Across the entire population, the impact of gender on time use is considerably greater than that of location. Each week, women spend on average nine hours less than men do in paid employment; however, women spend on average an hour longer on personal care than men, and spend almost twice as much time on household chores and childcare (Figure 2). Men spend slightly more time on studies than women. The average amount of leisure time for women is about four hours less than for men. Women spend on average one hour less on travel; this difference is observed in both rural and urban areas.

Among the total male population in 2003, 47.4% were involved in full-time paid employment and worked on average 58.52 hours a week. Of the total female population, only 35.3% were involved in full-time paid employment and worked on average 53.47 hours a week.
Influence of age and life cycle

The survey shows that age has a significant impact on time use. The breakdown of how people spend their time each week changes throughout the life course.

In the total population, persons in the 25–44 year age group devote most time to paid employment and have the least free time. Men in this age group spend 42.13 hours a week in paid employment and have 28.04 hours for leisure, while the corresponding times for women are 33.14 hours and 22.53 hours respectively.

The amount of time spent on household work and childcare increases with age for both men and women, while the difference in time spent on household work decreases between the sexes.

Clear differences emerge for particular life cycles where time use patterns differ from the average indicators. For example, when a person has a spouse and young children, as well as in the situation when children are raised by single parents, both men and women have the least free time at their disposal. The survey shows that the amount of free time for men declines mainly due to the increase in time used for paid employment, while for women the reduced free time is a consequence of more time spent on household work and childcare.
Main activity

Work, study or household tasks are considered ‘main activities’. The time use of the employed population, students and people not involved in paid employment or study differs not only in all main groups of activities, but also with regard to time used for sleep, leisure time and travel time (Figure 3). Study is the main activity of younger people, while work is the main activity for those aged between 25–60 years and household work is the main activity of retired persons.

Figure 3: Time use of population, by main occupation (weekly average per respondent), 2003

Time use among people in employment

Compared with 1996, the 2003 survey revealed an increase in time used for personal care (Figure 4). Furthermore, men spent more time in paid work, and an increase was also observed in travel or commuting time among the employed population. Time spent on household tasks and family care has declined, and the amount of free time has slightly increased.
Main job and second job

People in employment spend on average 42.51 hours a week in paid work (Figure 5). Some 41.15 hours are spent in the main job, 0.57 hours in a second job and 0.39 hours on activities related to employment. The average estimates for respondents who had worked on the actual day of the survey are higher, standing at 58.34 hours a week in paid work. A total of 57.09 hours are spent at the main job and 25.17 hours in a second job and activities related to employment. On average, some 3.5%–4% of employed people across Latvia work in a second job; this proportion is less in Riga (3%), but increases to more than 7% in rural areas.

Men spend on average seven hours more in paid employment than women do, at 46.13 and 39.21 hours a week respectively; annual holidays are included in the calculations. Again, the average estimates of working hours for men and women who had worked on the day of the survey are higher, at 60.59 hours and 55.54 hours a week respectively.
Time use on other activities

Workers spend on average 7–10 hours less time a week on personal care, compared with time spent on personal care in other population groups (Figure 6). Time use on personal care for men and women in employment does not differ significantly. Women living in Riga spend about two hours a week more on personal care compared with men, while in rural areas men spend an hour more than women do on personal care.

Employed women spend 12 hours more a week on household work and family care than men. The difference is smaller among residents of Riga and does not exceed 10 hours weekly.

There are gender differences in the amount of time devoted to leisure activities. Women spend on average 5–6 hours less on leisure time than men do. The difference is less pronounced in Riga, at 4.28 hours a week, while in rural areas it is more significant, at 6.45 hours a week.
Quality of life of employed people

The quality of life of the workforce is judged on the amount and use of leisure time of employed people. It is assumed that a satisfactory amount of leisure time as well as active leisure pursuits, sports, culture, education and optimal time on sleep provide a better quality of life among the workforce than passive forms of leisure time, overwork or sleeping.

About 80% of time used on personal care is spent sleeping, while the remainder is for eating and other activities, such as washing, dressing and medical care. As explained earlier, leisure time is used for socialising and entertainment, sports, hobbies, mass media and TV. The most popular use of leisure time is watching TV and videos, followed by reading, sports and social activities with friends (Figure 7). Less time is spent on socialising with family.

Study takes up more time among those living in Riga than in other cities and towns in Latvia. Employed women in Riga spend on average twice as much time studying than men do.
Figure 7: Amount and structure of leisure time and studies (weekly average per respondent), 2003

Note: The time use in Figure 7 is measured in minutes.
Source: CSP, 2005

Impact of age on daily work rhythms

The daily time rhythm is estimated as the population’s participation rate in time use activities in half hour intervals. The percentage of people performing an activity in an interval indicates those who have been carrying out the respective activity for at least 10 minutes.

Participation in paid work ranks at the highest rate between 9.00 and 12.00 on workdays and again between 14.00 and 16.00. Women participate in paid work on average 6% less than men; women’s activity in paid work falls sharply after 17.00.

Participation in paid work is highest in the 25–44 and 45–64 year age groups. Fewer people are involved in paid work in the 15–24 year age group, but more people in this group spend time studying. Less than 10% of people aged over 65 years – that is, of retirement age – and less than 2% of those aged 10–14 years participate in paid work.
Commentary

This report presents some aspects of working conditions that are based on the time use survey data. More information can be found by undertaking more analysis of differences in time use of employed people and geographical location.

The overall conclusion is that people in Latvia work long hours and have insufficient time for leisure. The survey shows gender and regional differences in time use, and characterises the lifestyle of the working and non-working population. It highlights the volume of actual working time more clearly than any other quantitative measure. The findings for 2003 reveal both positive and negative trends in comparison with the results of previous investigations.

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