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IRREGULAR WORKING HOURS IN CALL CENTRES IN BELGIUM, THE NETHERLANDS AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

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In the WageIndicator web surveys in The Netherlands, Belgium and The United Kingdom questions have been asked to call centre operators and team leaders about their working hours. We compare the patterns regarding working Saturdays, Sundays and in the evening.

According to official statistics, in the Netherlands more than 4 out of 10 employees report to be working in the evening 'sometimes', more than 4 out of 10 employees 'sometimes' on Saturdays and almost 3 out of 10 'sometimes' on Sundays. The survey question in the *WageIndicator* was somewhat more limited, asking if one worked regularly on irregular hours. In 2005-2007 more than 4 out of 10 worked regularly in the evening, more than 3 out of 10 regularly on Saturdays and more than 2 out of 10 on Sundays.

When comparing the working hours of the Dutch call centre employees with those of the labour force at large, both appear to be working equally on Saturdays, but the call centre employees far less on Sundays and, on the other hand, much more often during the evenings. This seems to be obvious, but the figures for Belgium and the United Kingdom reveal totally different pictures. In the Netherlands the labour force is more often working on Saturdays, compared to the Belgian and the British labour force, but for the call centre employees this works out the other way around. In Belgium 5 out of 10 operators work on Saturdays, in the UK even 5 out of 10, while in the Netherlands this is 4 out of 10.

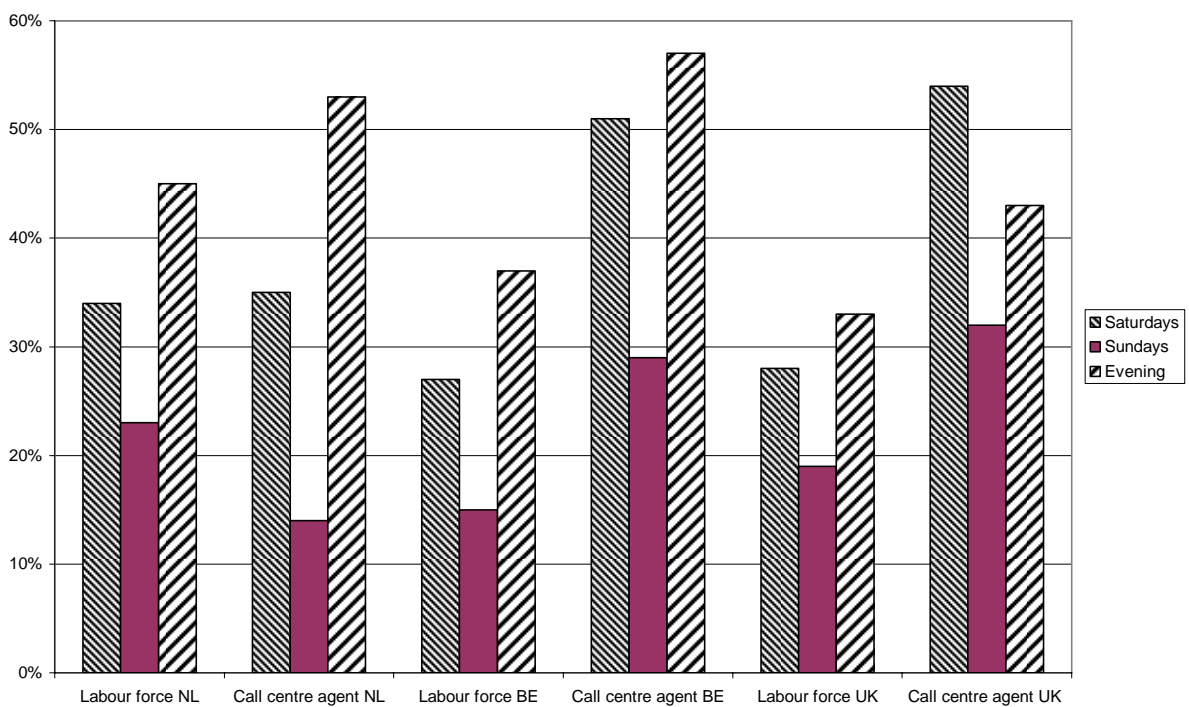
The pattern of working on Sundays varies substantially across countries. In the Netherlands working on Sundays is much more common than it is in the UK, and even more than in Belgium. In contrast, Dutch call centre employees are working hardly on Sundays, while call centre employees in Belgium and particularly in the UK are working more often on Sundays than the labour force at large.

Compared to the Belgian and the UK labour forces, the incidence of evening work in general is much higher in the Netherlands. Yet, this pattern is different for the call centre employees. In Belgium they work more often during evenings, followed by their colleagues in the Netherlands and next those in the UK. Thus, the working hours in call centres do not resemble the general working hours' patterns in each country. At the same time, in call centres these patterns vary across countries. In the Netherlands

operators and team leaders are particularly working during evenings but hardly on Sundays, whereas in Belgium they work particularly during evenings and on Saturdays, In the UK, they do work on Saturdays and to a lesser extent on Sundays, but not during evenings.

It turns out that irregular working hours hardly correlate with age: compared to older workers, young workers hardly work more irregular hours. This pattern can be seen in all three countries, and in this respect call centre employees do not differ from the labour force at large. Yet, the incidence of irregular working hours does correlate with education. Low educated work more often on Saturdays and Sundays. The incidence of working during evenings is about equal for low, middle and high educated. This general pattern is the same for the three countries, but again among call centre employees the picture is very different. In the Netherlands and Belgium low educated call centre employees work relatively often on Saturdays, but they do not in the UK, while middle and highly educated call centre employees in all three countries work more often during evenings.

Graph: Percentages working Saturdays, Sundays and evenings in the Netherlands, Belgium and the United Kingdom. Unweighted data *WageIndicator*, selection employees, Sep-2004-Mar-2007.



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