

Memo on methodology

January 16, 2012

As a supplement to Working Document:

Actual working time in France and in Europe

Working Document No. 29, January 2012

www.coe-rexecode.fr/public/Liens-en-tete/Coe-Rexecode-in-English/Actual-working-time-in-France-is-one-of-the-weakest-in-Europe

At the request of several readers, we would like to clarify in this memorandum the difference between the working time data currently available on the Eurostat site and the data from the study “Actual working time in France and in Europe” that Eurostat recalculated and provided to Coe-Rexecode.

1/ The Eurostat tables entitled “Average number of work hours actually worked per week in the principal activity by full-time salaried employees” are posted on Eurostat’s web site. These figures are, for 2011, 40.7 hours for Germany and 39.3 hours for France.

2/ The figures posted on the Eurostat site do not allow a determination of the actual annual working time of full-time salaried employees, and their multiplication by 52 (number of weeks) provides a figure that is not interpretable.

The multiplication by 52 of the “Average number of work hours actually worked per week in the principal activity by full-time salaried employees” resulted, thus, in 1,955 hours for 2009 in France, which is inconsistent with the results published by INSEE and Dares (from the Employment Survey) which were 1,640 hours for the same year, 2009 (Please recall that the Employment Survey was the French part of the Labor Forces Survey coordinated by Eurostat).

3/ It turns out that the actual average weekly working time published by Eurostat on its site eliminates the calculation of people who declared that they hadn’t worked during the week they were questioned about (because they were absent for one reason or another (annual leave, illness, etc.)).

The weekly averages which are posted on the site are, thus, not the actual working time averages because they are calculated only on a part of the full-time salaried employees surveyed. This practice is justified by Eurostat for the sake of finding “comparable” figures to those of habitual working times, also published on the Eurostat site, and this is indeed the case. It is, thus, to no avail to add them (or to multiply them by 52) in the hopes of obtaining an actual annual working time, and the gap between the weekly figures multiplied by 52 and the annual figures cannot be interpreted directly.

4/ It is, in fact, impossible to get actual annual working times from weekly data published on the Eurostat site. This calculation can only be done by directly processing individual data. This is exactly what Eurostat did at our request. To illustrate the question of statistical averages, we offer a pedagogical example in the annex.

The annual data transmitted by Eurostat and published by Coe-Rexecode in the study “Actual working time in France and in Europe” is the only comparable data of actual average annual working time between European countries.

Annex: a simple example

Let's consider a period (the year) limited to three sub-periods (the weeks). We could, of course, make this calculation based on 52 weeks. Let's consider 3 full-time employees who are absent during an entire period (one whole week).

In hours	Weeks			Years	Number of actual work hours of each employee for all three periods
	Period 1	Period 2	Period 3		
Mr. DURAND	37	39	0		76
Mrs. DUPONT	36	0	36		72
Mr. MARTIN	0	35	35		70
Total number of work hours of all these employees for the period	73	74	71		218
Calculation of the Averages				Actual average working time for the entire period	
Actual average working time of the employees	24.3	24.7	23.7	72.7	← Real figure of annual average working time
Actual average working time of the employees for each sub-period (excluding periods = 0 hours)	36.5	37.0	35.5	109.0	← Non-interpretable figure

As can be noted, the addition of the weekly averages of the 3 sub-periods calculated by excluding the employees who did not work gives a figure of 109 hours.

This figure is much higher than the actual average working time of the three employees (meaning the average of the actual annual working times of the full-time salaried employees) for the entire period (72.7 hours).

Coe-Rexecode, January 13, 2012