

DEVCOBA

Developing Collective Bargaining in the Care Sector

WP5 Policy Recommendation

DENMARK

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Policy recommendation

1. Title of the recommendation

Continue the attempts to increase working time in an inclusive and employee-friendly way

2. Problems/needs addressed

Labour and skill shortages in LTC and ECEC are fluctuating, but severe, and forecasts show that they will continue to be a challenge in the short and mid-term future, especially in LTC. One of several ways to meet this challenge is to increase working hours among the care workers, of which the majority is working part-time. As most of the part-time workers are working long part-time, the workload in the two subsectors is high. Moreover, employers value the flexibility of having employees that they can convince to take extra hours when needed. These factors imply that it is difficult to overcome the ‘part-time culture’ and convince both employers and employees to agree on more full-time/longer working hours. The Danish WP3 case ‘A future with Fulltime’ shows that – when the actions are designed in the right way – it is possible to increase working time in a worker-inclusive and employee-friendly way with positive side-effects (See below).

As employers’ organisations and trade unions are the prime responsible actors for addressing working time related issues in Denmark, they should take the lead in such actions – as they have also done.

3. Recommendation

Our recommendation is, that the social partners should continue their attempts to increase working time in an inclusive and employee-friendly way – either by continuing the ‘fulltime project’ or by using the experiences they have obtained from it in other initiatives.

Put shortly, the project is coordinated by a joint employer organization/trade union project team. The initial process involves the recruitment of municipalities for participation in the project. This initial process is followed by the core of the project, which comprises four workshops facilitated by the joint project team. Various tools are presented at the first workshop. At this stage, it is important to win over those who are not completely convinced about the project - on the workers’ side, this has been done e.g. by emphasizing higher wages and pensions. This stage also includes finding specific workplaces for participation. At the second workshop, discussions start about the tools that could potentially be useful at the selected workplaces. At the third workshop, the tools are finally selected and implemented as pilots in the selected workplaces. The fourth and final workshop usually takes place four to five months later. At this workshop each individual workplace presents the pilot results. The project team writes detailed minutes about the experiences. Three months later, the municipalities are asked to send updated statistics, which are also used in the presentation of the project and its results, to be uploaded on the project webpage.

At the time of writing (mid-December 2025), ‘A future with Fulltime’ has been running for five years - in the first period financed by the social partners themselves, in the second by the

government. An evaluation will be published this month, but has not been seen by the Danish Devcoba-team. A decision will be taken about if the project should continue. No matter what the outcome of this decision will be, the ‘A future with full-time’ project has provided important experience about barriers to - and opportunities for - improving working time in a worker-involving and employee-friendly way that potentially could be continued in other initiatives. Increasing working-time is just one of several initiatives to counteract labour shortages, whereas others include improving job quality (also one of the mechanisms) used in the ‘full-time’ project

4. Target Actors (tick relevant boxes)

☒ Trade unions

☒ Employer organisations/care providers

☒ Bipartite bodies (the ‘fulltime project’ included a bipartite steering group)

☐ Tripartite institutions

☐ Other (specify): _____

5. Rationale and supporting evidence

The WP2 Danish report clearly illustrate that labour supply is an important challenge.

Table 4.1 Unsuccessful recruitment attempts in LTC and ECEC occupations

<i>Job</i>	<i>June 2021</i>	<i>June 2022</i>	<i>June 2023</i>	<i>June 2024</i>
Nurse	33 %	46 %	18 %	19 %
SOSU assistant	40 %	42 %	20 %	20 %
SOSU helper	32 %	44 %	25 %	17 %
Pedagogue	27 %	26 %	31 %	28 %
Pedagogical helper	6 %	33 %	16 %	7 %

Source: Styrelsen for Arbejdsmarked og Rekruttering, 2021-24. Note: The survey is based on job ads published from approximately half a year prior to the month noted until the month noted.

Table 4.1 shows, that LTC and ECEC includes five of the forty jobs with the most severe recruitment problems in recent years. The table indicates a peak in the recruitment problems around 2022, but the WP”- interviewees found the problems to be lasting.

6. Expected impact

Increasing the effective average working hours just one or two extra hours per week would represent an important contribution to meet the labour shortages in these sub-sectors.

The mid-term evaluation of the ‘full-time project’ shows that depending on how such initiatives are designed, this can be done with neutral or positive effects on job satisfaction/job-quality, working time flexibility and service quality.

The project’s mid-term statistical evaluation focusing on the LTC and ECEC areas, show increases in long part-time, but in addition to this, increases in the share of full-time employees (especially in LTC) and a decrease in the share of part-time employees. The fact that more changes are seen in the direction intended by the project in these areas than in the total municipality statistics could indicate that the project has made a difference. However, the increase in hourly waged employees is also found in the LTC and ECEC areas, although some pilots aimed to reduce the budget for these and transfer economic resources to part-time and full-time so-called ‘monthly waged’ employees.

Among the mid-term evaluation’s qualitative conclusions are: Increasing working hours have led to a decrease in workload and improvement of the work environment and improved service quality, as users more often meet the same employees; the pilots (including ‘dream schemes’ and better structure of the work tasks) are among the reasons for the increase in long part-time; most employees want to sustain their working hours when they have tried this in a pilot. Another source summarizes the most important experiences as follows: Longer shifts - by making use of longer shifts, employees have been able to increase their working time without more (weekend) shifts, which is often a barrier. Influence on the shift schedule: The employees are given the opportunity to hand in their own desired shift plan, after which the planners try to match their wishes. This has led to a situation where more employees want to work more hours or even full-time. Tasks and staffing: mapping which tasks are carried out during the 24 hours and then trying to obtain a more even workload distribution. This has resulted in more employees wanting to increase their working hours.