



# Global Highlights

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## Demography and Labor Markets

### Time spent at work, productivity and work-life balance

- One of the most striking phenomena of recent times is that women have increased their share of the labour force. In the 1980s and 1990s, labour force growth was substantially higher for women than for men for every region of the world except Africa. The "[Global Gender Gap Index 2007](#)" survey, just published, states that Nordic countries are the closest to achieving equality among men and women in terms of labour-force participation rates and salaries, in contrast to Middle East and African countries. Inevitably, changes in the structure of the families and the role of men<sup>1</sup> and women have followed.
- Recently, we have seen how big firms and multinationals are adopting a set of measures to balance work and family and improve productivity. Among others<sup>2</sup>, [Iberdrola](#) has concentrated the hours worked -except for chief executives-, offers paid reductions for mothers during the first year and flexible schedule. Those measures will avoid wasting time and will increase productivity in 500.000 hours per year. Randstad, Sanitas and Repsol YPF do not allow to work further than 6 p.m; while others, like Nestlé, Sony or Endesa promote flexi-hours.
- **Time spent at work and productivity**<sup>3</sup>: According to a study carried by [Microsoft](#), American workers spend 45 hours a week at work, but describe 16 of those hours as unproductive. Similarly, [America Online](#) and Salary.com determined that workers actually work a total of three days a week, wasting the other two. *The longer you work, the less efficient you are*, claims the founder of Fusion Factor, a productivity and time-management consulting company.
- But experts disagree on how all this time is wasted. Microsoft says that unclear objectives, lack of team communication and ineffective meetings are among the top time wasters that workers around the world say make them feel unproductive. People spend about 5.6 hours each week in meetings; and 69 percent feel meetings are not productive. Likewise, 60 percent said they do not have work-life balance, and being unproductive contributes to this feeling. Workers said they receive an average of 42 e-mails per day. The AOL survey says that time is lost surfing the Internet and searching through clutter. Time-management firms and [professionals](#) claim that unclear priorities and procrastination are at the core of the [lack of productivity](#)<sup>4</sup>.
- **Time spent at work and work-life balance**: The [OECD Babies and Bosses](#) series analyzes two goals that are important both to individuals and societies: the ability to participate fully in the labor market, generating income, and the ability to provide the best for one's own children. The report claims that all too often, parents cannot achieve their preferred balance of work and care commitments and may either adjust their family behavior or withdraw from the labor market. More and better *family-friendly* social policies -which help reconcile work and family life- may facilitate parental work / child-care choice and may promote gender equality in employment opportunities at the same time that it reduces stress and "key-children"<sup>5</sup> related problems such as obesity, short attention span, etc.
- Also, **the size of the cities** matters: The geographical concentration of jobs in urban areas makes further reforms necessary. For instance, the Spanish two-hour lunch break is losing its sense, almost none can go home but makes you stop and stay at the workplace even longer. [OHL](#) has already changed this practice.

<sup>1</sup> See "Hombres jóvenes y la paternidad", I. Alberdi. Ed. Fundación BBVA.

<sup>2</sup> See "Guía de buenas prácticas de la empresa flexible" [www.empresaconciliación.com](http://www.empresaconciliación.com)

<sup>3</sup> See the NY Times, Life's work Section.

<sup>4</sup> Open the link, and try it! You can calculate your personal efficiency ratio.

<sup>5</sup> "Key-children" refers to those children that arrive home sooner than their parents.