

DEMANDING DIGNITY BEHIND THE SCENES



ENDING
LONG HOURS
CULTURE IN
THE GLOBAL
FILM AND TV
INDUSTRY

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INTRODUCTION

**UNI MEDIA AND
ENTERTAINMENT GLOBAL
SURVEY ON WORKING TIME
IN FILM & TV PRODUCTION**

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OUR PEOPLE HAVE BASIC HUMAN NEEDS LIKE TIME FOR MEAL BREAKS, ADEQUATE SLEEP, AND A WEEKEND.¹

Matthew D. Loeb, UNI MEI President
IATSE (United States and Canada)

I was working 14-16 hour days minimum, not including travel time. I spent a lot of time quietly crying at my desk ...My friends and family all commented on how sad and tired I was on the weekend, if I was allowed a weekend.²

Anonymous respondent Bectu
(United Kingdom)

¹ UNI Global Union Statement “Excessive working hours plague film and TV industry worldwide, not just U.S.”

² Quoted in Eric Vespe, “The Possible IATSE Strike Explained, and Why Movie Fans Should Care,” Slashfilm, 01 Oct 2021, <https://www.slashfilm.com/621584/the-possible-iatse-strike-explained-and-why-movie-fans-should-care/>.

Behind-the-scenes labour in film and television production is not glamorous. It is often physically demanding, with workers enduring extreme hot or cold temperatures, 14- or even 16-hour shifts, and dangerous conditions. The long hours, short or non-existent breaks, and low pay have been norms for decades in this global industry—a situation known as “long hours culture.”

Abuses increased significantly in 2021 as companies tried to make up for time lost during the pandemic hiatus. Spencer MacDonald, national secretary of the London Production and Regional Production Divisions of the U.K.-based union, Bectu, explained the situation in the industry newspaper, *Variety*:

[Working conditions have] got massively worse since we’ve gone back after the lockdown just because there’s been a backlog in terms of productions that are all shooting at once now, and they’re all trying to get the best crew, and they’re all competing with each other.³

In order to gather critical data and contextualize the challenges workers face in the global film and TV industry, UNI Global Union’s media and entertainment sector (UNI MEI) launched a broad survey of its affiliated unions in July 2021. This report summarizes the results of that survey

UNI gathered data from 28 unions in 22 nations⁴ representing more than 150,000 behind-the-scenes crew members in feature film production, independent television production and streaming content production. The survey of union representatives focused primarily on working conditions as defined by law, within collective bargaining agreements and in practice. Some respondents also shared worker testimonials, which illustrate the key findings in the survey.

The UNI survey results demonstrate that the unrelenting workplace pressures endured by film and television industry workers are no longer sustainable. Workers across the industry are highly vulnerable to mental and physical harm caused by excessive daily hours, excessive weekly hours and a lack of time off between workdays and on weekends.

Recommendations at the conclusion of this report call on television and film producers in every nation to ensure that workers’ basic human needs—including adequate daily and weekly rest time, meal breaks, health care and the opportunity to connect with family and friends—are always met and that they enjoy the right to free association, non-discrimination and equal pay for equal work.

The dialogue between international employers’ associations and UNI should include working towards a level playing field in working conditions across national borders in this global industry. An important step on the path to changing the long hours culture is the promotion of good practices around safe working conditions and sustainable hours through a combination of collective bargaining and national laws.

³ K.J. Yossman, “As IATSE Threatens Strike Action in the U.S., Are U.K. Crews Ready to Do the Same?” *Variety*, 12 Oct 2021, <https://variety.com/2021/biz/news/iatse-strike-k-crews-international-1235086093/>

⁴ Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Israel, Lithuania, Malaysia, Peru, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States.

SURVEY RESULTS REVEAL GLOBAL LONG HOURS CULTURE

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SURVEY RESULTS REVEAL GLOBAL LONG HOURS CULTURE

RECURRENT OVERTIME AND INSUFFICIENT REST DURING AND BETWEEN WORKDAYS IS NOT THE EXCEPTION BUT THE RULE IN THE GLOBAL FILM AND TV INDUSTRY. THE EXISTING LONG HOURS CULTURE IS A GLOBAL PANDEMIC AND NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED.

Christy Hoffman, UNI Global Union General Secretary



The UNI MEI Global Survey on Working Time in Film & TV Production assessed:

- ▶ Where and how collective agreements regulate working hours and the reality of workers' daily and weekly schedules in practice.
- ▶ The pervasive culture of long hours—over 50 per week—in the industry.
- ▶ Lack of adequate turnaround time—time for rest between two working days.
- ▶ Lack of adequate weekend time.
- ▶ Urgent issues unions must address to improve working conditions in the industry.

LONG HOURS—DAILY AND WEEKLY—COMMON THROUGHOUT THE INDUSTRY

Many production days last up to 20 hours...We have been proposing to the association of production companies for six years to limit the maximum working day to 16 hours without a constructive response from the employers.⁵

Guido Valerga, General Secretary, SICAAPMA (Argentina)

During the production of a publicity film for a large multinational client in a top production company, my father passed away. He lived in a nearby city and I wasn't allowed to →

stay with my mother that afternoon, so I barely had time to [go to] my father's funeral and had to go back to finish the mock-up. I stayed up all night to deliver it. Does advertising have a soul?⁶

Anonymous, Designer SINDCINE (Brazil)

The UNI survey found that workers in responding countries work, on average, at least 11 hours per day in practice, with, at minimum, an additional one to two hours for “prep and wrap” duties before and after filming. This is true for workers in both film and TV productions, resulting in an overall average of at least 12 to 13 hours per day in all countries.

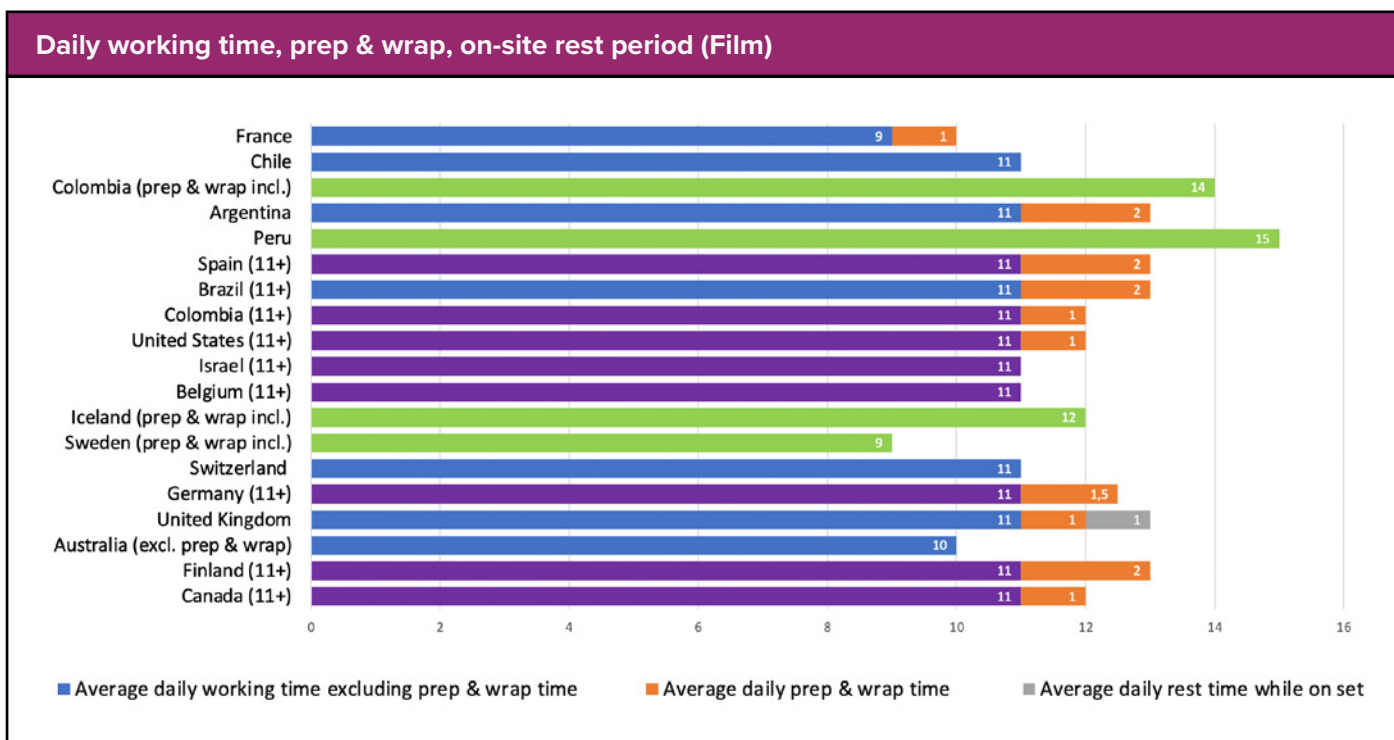
In measuring weekly total hours, the survey found that workers in most countries average 40 to 50 hours, with the number of hours worked in practice often exceeding nationally mandated limits. Work in excess of 50, and even 60, hours per week is common. For example, in the UK, workers average 50 hours per week, not including prep and wrap time. In some nations, including Iceland and Sweden, daily prep and wrap time is included in maximum hours standards.

In 12 of the 22 countries surveyed, collective bargaining agreements cover daily and weekly maximum hours as well as overtime. The agreements often also cover night work, rest periods, travel to and from the set and measures designed to ensure good work/life balance.

Despite language in these collective agreements, respondents said workers face difficulties making sure the provisions are enforced, and not all companies respect the agreements in practice. Survey respondents from several nations reported their maximum

⁵ UNI MEI Global Survey on Working Time in Film & TV Production, July-August 2021.

⁶ UNI MEI Global Survey on Working Time in Film & TV Production, July-August 2021.



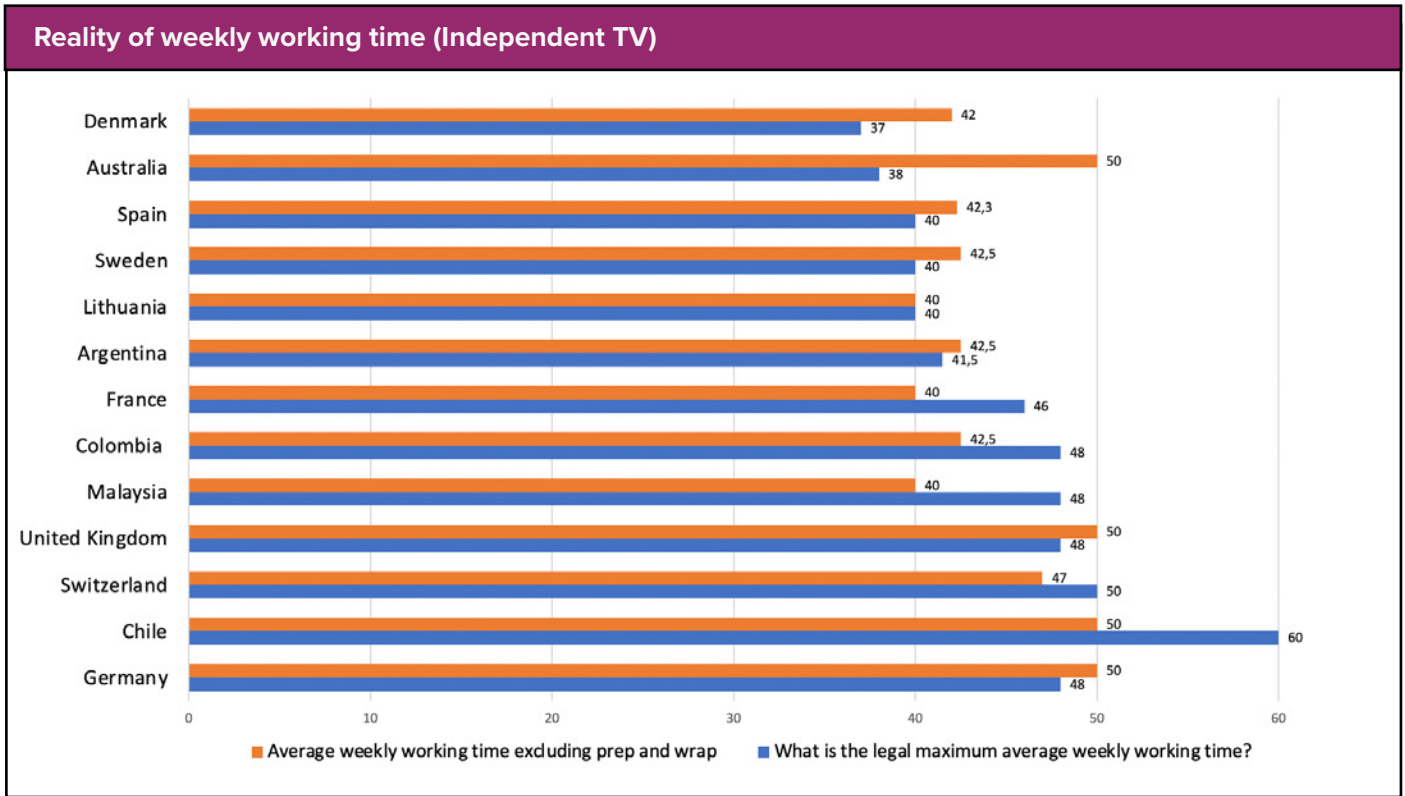
weekly hours in practice were in excess of mandates with shorter turnaround times than are required. In Argentina, for example, crew members work more than 50 hours per week and frequently work overtime on weekends despite the language in their collective agreement.

Companies not only defy collective agreements, but they also defy national labour laws related to maximum working hours. For example, a representative of the Australian crew members’ union, Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA), reports that several producers in that country do not respect working time provisions. MEAA members regularly work more than 50 hours per week on average in practice, despite the fact that the work week is limited by law to 38 hours.

INSUFFICIENT TURNAROUND, REST BETWEEN TWO WORKING DAYS

I’ve done overtime everyday with back-to-back weekends, Saturdays and Sundays, without being paid properly because “they can’t afford it.” Yet they want things produced to a high standard, which can only be done by working seven days a week. I’ve done 15-hour days and broken turnaround by being back five hours later. I know other people have done that as well.⁷

Anonymous, Specialty Costume Designer Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (Australia)



Across the industry, workers lack adequate “turnaround time”—a term referring to the period between shifts for rest and recuperation. This is considered one of the most brutal aspects of the industry because of its effect on mental and physical health.

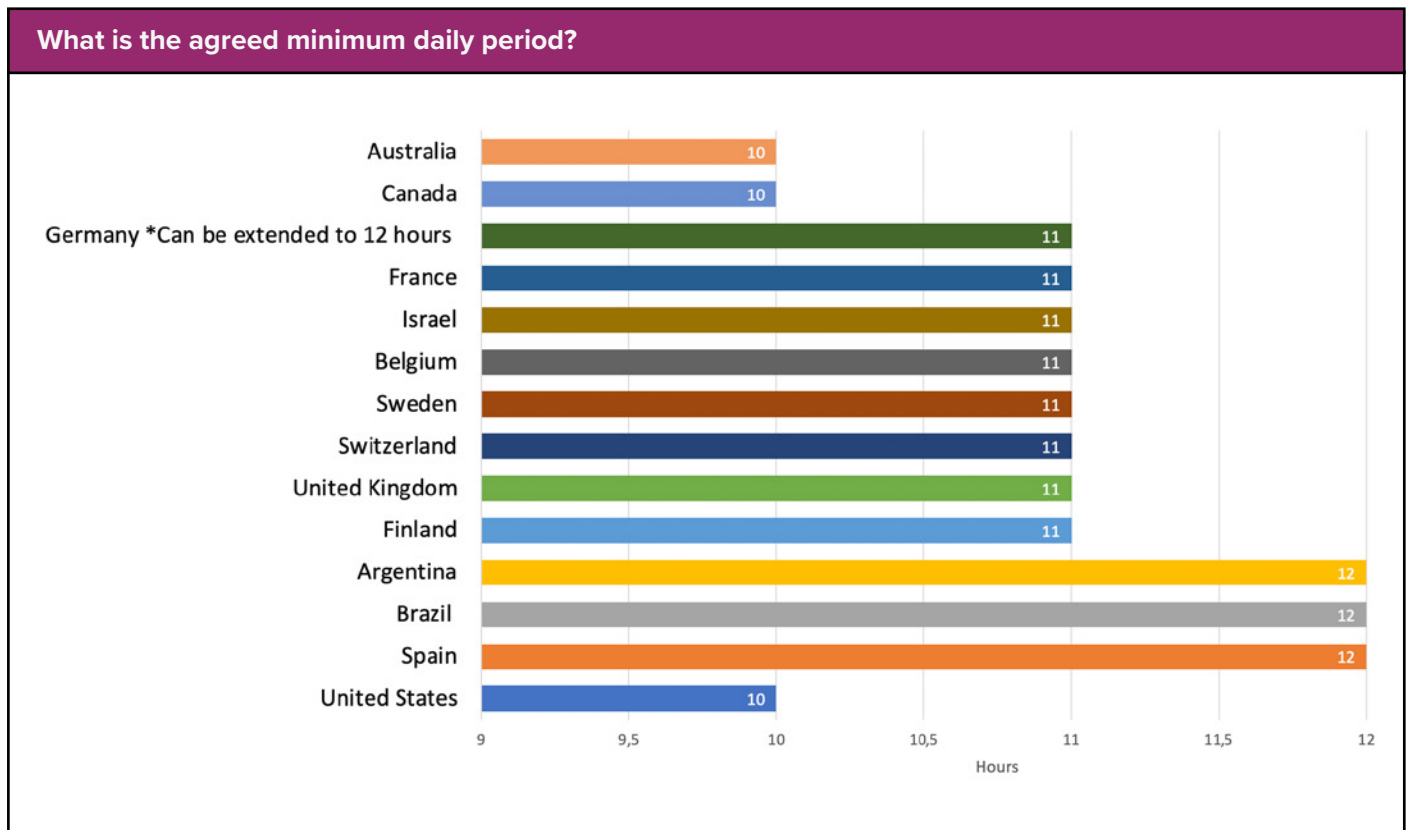
In Europe and South America, the state typically mandates at least 11 to 12 hours of rest per day. In Argentina, for example, the legally mandated maximum is 35 hours per week with a 12-hour break between workdays. Employers within the European Union must ensure that staff do not work more than 48 hours per week on average (including overtime) over a reference period of up to four months. Employees must be given at least 11 consecutive hours of daily rest and at least 24 hours of uninterrupted weekly rest every seven days, over a reference period of two weeks.⁸

⁸ Europa.eu, “Working Hours,” downloaded, 25 Oct 2021, https://europa.eu/youreurope/business/human-resources/working-hours-holiday-leave/working-hours/index_en.htm ; Ignacio Funes de Rioja and Eduardo Viñales, “Employment and Employee Benefits in Argentina: An Overview,” Westlaw/Practical Law, 01 Nov 2013, <https://content.next.westlaw.com/6-502-9887>

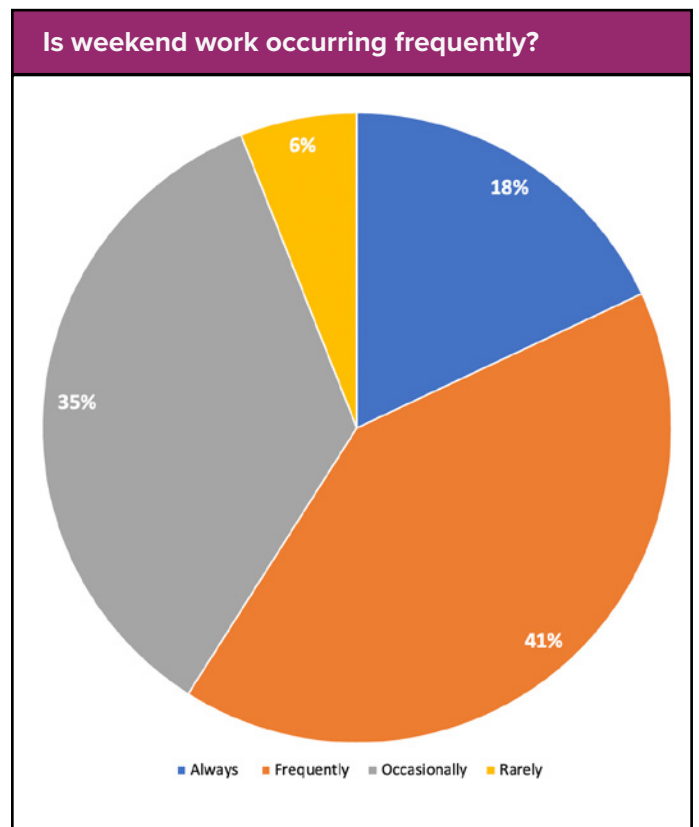
FRATURDAY ELIMINATES WEEKENDS, ESSENTIAL TIME FOR HEALTH, FAMILY AND REST

Overtime work during the week and on weekends is common in most of the nations surveyed. For example, 41 per cent of all respondents said that overtime is a frequent occurrence during the week and a shocking 35 per cent said it is always required. More troubling, 25 per cent of respondents said that overtime work is *not* remunerated at a premium rate.

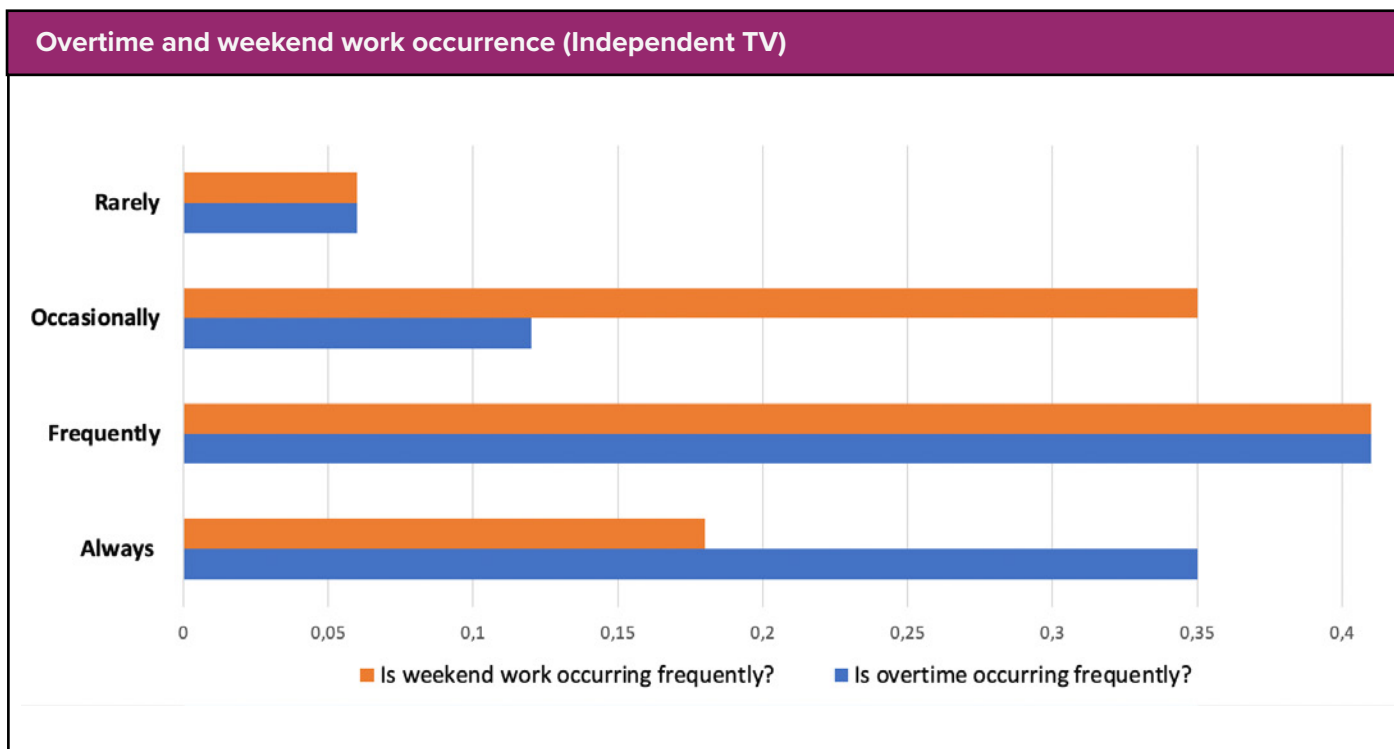
Weekend work, which eliminates essential time for family, health and rest, is a common problem according to 41 per cent of respondents, while 18 per cent said it is *always* required. One particular type of weekend work, which is becoming more common, has earned its own nickname, “Fratursday.” Fratursday refers to shooting schedules that require late hours on Fridays extending overnight and into Saturday. These difficult schedules eliminate full weekends off for many workers.



An assistant camera operator and IATSE member in the United States, interviewed in an industry newsletter, explained that his schedule on one production shifted constantly into nights, “with 14 straight Fraturdays,” creating miserable conditions for the crew.⁹



⁹ Andy K-D, “My Crew and I Walked Off a Set,” TWC Newsletter, 19 Oct 2021, <https://news.te-chworkerscoalition.org/2021/10/19/issue-21/>



DEVASTATING EFFECTS OF LONG HOURS CULTURE

Long hours and lack of rest rank highest in the list of issues respondents want collective bargaining to address. About 62 per cent of those surveyed by UNI said the intensity of their work schedules “negatively impacted their mental wellbeing.” And 28 per cent of respondents in independent television production said grave accidents have resulted from extreme fatigue. “More than 9 in 10 shooting crew members who responded to a Bectu survey reported that they sometimes felt unsafe at work or travelling to and from work because they were tired.”¹⁰

The effects of long hours of work are devastating for the short-term and long-term health and safety of workers in any industry. Fatigue, as a result of brutal schedules and chronic lack of sleep, leads to accidents and emotional and physical challenges, including anxiety, memory loss, obesity, heart disease and diabetes.

People who regularly work long hours suffer problems related to a poor work-life balance. Their quality of life is wrecked. The issue is widely acknowledged for police and the emergency and medical services, but is not yet taken seriously in the film and TV industry.¹¹

¹⁰ Paul Evans and Jonathan Green, “Eyes Half Shut: A Report on Long Hours and Productivity in the UK Film and TV Industry,” Oct 2017, p. 7.

¹¹ Paul Evans and Jonathan Green, “Eyes Half Shut: A Report on Long Hours and Productivity in the UK Film and TV Industry,” Oct 2017, p. 6.



A member of the British crew member union Bectu reported:

I fell asleep whilst driving at the end of a seven day week on a high budget feature. Thankfully, I didn't injure anyone else, but I suffered minor injuries myself. My car was a write-off. This could have been a far more horrific story.¹²

Researchers have found that working 55 hours or more per week is associated with a 35 per cent higher risk of stroke and a 17 per cent higher risk of dying from heart disease when compared to working 35 to 40 hours per week. The study, conducted with the International Labour Organization (ILO), also revealed that almost three-quarters of those who died as a result of working long hours were middle-aged or older men.¹³

Fatigue also frequently impacts workers' family life as they struggle to see their children during long work weeks and miss family holidays. Separation or divorce from partners is not uncommon. Nearly 90 per cent of respondents to a UK Bectu survey said that working long hours had a negative effect on their family lives, with those over 40 years-old affected the most.

In the face of grueling hours and unsafe environments, workers behind the scenes are often expected to maintain a stoic, uncomplaining attitude, but this only perpetuates the risks to workers' health and well-being. In order to change the culture of the film and television industry and improve workers' lives, unions must lead the way.

¹² Bectu Survey, 2017.

¹³ World Health Organization, "Long Working Hours Increasing Death From Heart Disease and Stroke," 17 May 2021, <https://www.who.int/news/item/17-05-2021-long-working-hours-increasing-deaths-from-heart-disease-and-stroke-who-ilo>

SAFE WORKING HOURS TOP UNION BARGAINING AGENDAS

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THE MEMBERS HAVE SPOKEN LOUD AND CLEAR. THIS VOTE IS ABOUT THE QUALITY OF LIFE AS WELL AS THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF THOSE WHO WORK IN THE FILM AND TELEVISION INDUSTRY.¹⁴

Michael Loeb, International President IATSE (United States and Canada)



14 IATSE, "By a Nearly Unanimous Margin, IATSE Members in TV and Film Production Vote to Authorize a Nationwide Strike," 4 Oct 2021, <https://iatse.net/by-a-nearly-unanimous-margin-iatse-members-in-tv-and-film-production-vote-to-authorize-a-nationwide-strike/>

The fight for safe and healthy working conditions, with an emphasis on reasonable hours for work and rest, is a global one. In some countries, including the United States, Germany and Sweden, unions have recently negotiated improvements in agreements that put good working conditions first. In other countries, the fight continues.

IMPROVEMENTS PART OF NEW BASIC AGREEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

In September 2021, bargaining talks between the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) and the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) broke down, culminating in an early October vote authorizing a strike.¹⁵ Nearly 90 per cent of the 60,000 eligible members voted, and an unprecedented 98.7 per cent voted in favour of strike authorization. The tentative agreement reached between IATSE and AMPTP in mid-October averted a strike at the last moment. The new basic agreement that was ratified by IATSE members in November includes some significant wage increases for hourly workers, boosts revenues from streaming and addresses quality-of-life issues such as rest and meal breaks. The provisions bring about a major shift away from the “Fratursdays” culture to improved weekend rest, and include 54 hours of rest for those working five consecutive days per week, and 32 hours of rest for those working six days.¹⁶

Enforced time off during the pandemic gave tens of thousands of workers in the film and TV industry an extended period for reflection — often for the first time in their careers.

15 Members of IATSE are the backbone, muscle and lifeblood of the film and television industry in the United States and Canada and include most of the people behind the scenes of any production, from caterers, cinematographers and carpenters to make-up artists and props specialists. Vehicle operators, actors, directors, screenwriters and producers have their own unions or guilds and are not members of IATSE. The AMPTP is a powerful association of television and film producers in the United States and Canada, which regularly negotiates with all industry-wide unions.

Recognizing the toll their work was taking on their physical and mental health, they took action, demanding to be treated like humans rather than line items in a budget. The unprecedented mobilization, resolve and solidarity among IATSE members resulted in a strong strike authorization and gave negotiators the means to obtain significant improvements .

UNI affiliated unions around the world have been closely watching closely the IATSE-AMPTP negotiations and provisions of the new basic agreement. IATSE is the world’s largest entertainment union, and Hollywood is home to the oldest and most profitable film and TV industry. The entertainment producers who make up the AMPTP are among the largest multinational media corporations in the world, including companies such as Warner Brothers, Sony Pictures, Walt Disney Studios and Universal Studios. What happens in Hollywood is setting a pattern for working conditions globally.



MORE UNIONS STAND UP AGAINST EXCESSIVE HOURS

Collective agreements, good legislation, proactive cooperation with production companies and a high level of membership have led to good working conditions by international standards. And we are producing more films than ever.¹⁷

Niclas Peyron, Line Producer
Member of Scen & Film (Sweden)

“IN THE LAST ROUND OF COLLECTIVE BARGAINING WITH EMPLOYERS, OUR UNION SUCCESSFULLY NEGOTIATED LONGER REST PERIODS, LIGHTER WORKLOADS AND PREMIUM PAY RATES TO PROTECT THE WEEKEND FOR MORE THAN 25,000 GERMAN FILM WORKERS.”¹⁸

Matthias von Fintel ver.di (Germany)

The collective bargaining experience in countries such as Sweden and Germany demonstrates that improving working conditions, including work schedules

¹⁷ UNI MEI Global Survey on Working Time in Film & TV Production, July-August 2021.

and rest periods, is not standing in the way of the success and growth of the industry. Unions in those two countries have negotiated improvements, including progressive standards for work in the film and television industry that prioritize daily and weekly hours and rest time.

In Sweden, for example, each employee must have at least 11 hours of continuous time off during each 24-hour period. Temporary deviations are permitted by local agreement, but in the case of a deviation, the employee must be given compensatory time off. Sweden’s collective agreements also ensure that workers have no less than 36 hours of continuous time off in each seven-day period, thus reinstating weekend breaks many workers in the industry had lost.

In Germany, ver.di FilmUnion, which represents crew members in the film and TV industry, negotiated with the German Producers’ Alliance in Spring 2021, after surveying crew members in Fall 2020.

Union members and non-members alike said there was an urgent need “to make progress towards a better reconciliation of professional and private life in the film industry. More and more reliable rest periods were of greater importance to them than the increase in collectively agreed minimum wages.”¹⁹

The German workers’ new collective agreement stipulates that two consecutive days of rest must be granted at least twice per month during shooting periods, and three consecutive days of rest must be granted from the second month onwards for longer productions with more than 40 days of shooting. After a night shoot into the weekend, a rest period of 48 hours and a further 11 hours must follow at least twice per month after the end of the shooting day. For work on weekends, a general surcharge of 25 per cent

¹⁸ UNI Europa, “Sector Agreement: Film Workers in Germany Win Improved Working Hours,” 06 May 2021, <https://www.uni-europa.org/news/sector-agreement-film-workers-in-germany-win-improved-working-hours/> will apply from September. The existing

¹⁹ Ibid.



Sunday supplement will be increased from 50 per cent to 75 per cent.²⁰

This new collective agreement between producers and workers in one of Europe's biggest film and TV producing countries demonstrates that ensuring the dignity of all work is essential to the sustainability of the industry as a whole.

PERSISTENT PROBLEMS THE INDUSTRY MUST ADDRESS

In a growing number of countries, a troubling trend is emerging: many employers are ignoring both collective agreements and legal restrictions on working hours or simply overusing the flexibility inherent in the language of agreements and laws to make longer hours the rule, rather than the exception.

In Argentina, for example, the collective agreement for workers in the film and TV industry sets a standard workday at eight hours, 45 minutes. Overtime is allowed, but

must always be compensated. Sindicato de la Industria Cinematográfica Argentina (SICA), Argentina's film workers union, has recently increased visits to sets to monitor the demands on workers. SICA has escalated pressure on companies to stay within maximum working hours and to ensure that overtime is fully paid.

In France, maximum working hours have generally been respected, but requirements for overtime and work on weekends are increasing. This becomes a problem for all workers when the provisions of collective bargaining agreements are not followed and when producers ask crews to work the maximum hours allowed more often than the standard workday.

In Colombia, workers face an especially difficult situation as there is no collective bargaining agreement in the film and TV industry. Without such an agreement, employers have been free to exploit workers, disrespecting labour laws and forcing crews to work beyond 60 hours per week on a regular basis without compensation.

UNI member unions stand together to

RECOMMENDATIONS

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build global union action addressing quality of work-life balance and working conditions. UNI Global Union seeks fair, equal, safe and sustainable working conditions for all workers in the film and television industry as a matter of human rights, public health and the sustainability of the industry. All workers deserve time away from

work and a chance to achieve a more holistic balance between work and their personal lives. With that goal in mind, UNI Global Union recommends the following standards for film and television production companies in every nation:



FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

The right of workers to freedom of association and collective bargaining must be recognized and respected without discrimination.

CONTRACTS, REMUNERATION AND EQUAL PAY

Individual contracts must always respect provisions of collective bargaining. Wages and benefits paid for a standard working week must meet, at a minimum, collective bargaining agreements—or in their absence, national legal standards. All productions must provide equal pay and eliminate discrimination based on sex.

WORKING HOURS

Working hours must comply with collective agreements and national laws. Production companies must respect rest periods and breaks in collective agreements and national laws.

Overtime must be voluntary, not required on a regular basis, and must always be compensated at a premium rate.

Work-life balance policies must be implemented to promote better reconciliation of work and private life and include measures such as flexible working and job-sharing.

NON-DISCRIMINATION, GENDER EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Employers must ensure that no person is subject to discrimination of any kind in employment. Productions must implement policies that include measures to improve gender equality and monitor progress. Diversity policies must aim to raise representation of under-represented groups on and off screen.

A SAFE WORK ENVIRONMENT AND PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Employers must provide a safe and healthy work environment by carrying out a risk assessment and applying best practices to prevent accidents and injury. All facilities must be clean and safe and meet workers' basic needs.

Employers must adopt and implement, in consultation with workers and their representatives, a workplace policy on violence and harassment.

GREEN FILM AND TV PRODUCTION

Production companies must maximise efficient energy use and minimize harmful emissions. They must take effective measures to recycle and minimize waste, as well as conserving scarce resources, including water, flora and fauna.

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