

Uneven Shift Scheduling

The Czech Labor Code (*Zákoník práce*) defines two basic forms of work time scheduling: even and uneven. This article will focus on the uneven distribution of working hours.

Definition

Uneven distribution of working hours means that the working hours are unevenly spread over individual weeks. Therefore, in some weeks, employees work longer than in other weeks. The average weekly working hours for a certain balancing period (*vyrovnávací období*) chosen by the employer must not exceed the established weekly working hours within legal limits.

Difference Between Even and Uneven Distribution of Working Hours

Even scheduling of working hours is predominantly applied in single-shift work regimes. A typical example is a five-day workweek schedule – Monday to Friday, where an employee works eight-hour shifts each day. However, this is not the only possible way of even shift scheduling.

Uneven scheduling of working hours is mainly applied in continuous and multi-shift operations or seasonal work. An example of uneven scheduling is the so-called "short and long week" (*krátký a dlouhý týden*). Employers schedule a varying number of hours each week (while respecting legally established conditions), with the average weekly working hours not exceeding the established weekly work time over the balancing period.

Basic Principles of Uneven Working Hours Scheduling

- ❖ **Length of Shift**
 - The length of the shift must not exceed 12 hours.
- ❖ **Balancing Period**
 - The employer establishes a so-called **balancing period**, which can be a maximum of 26 weeks (or 52 weeks if agreed upon in a collective agreement).
 - The stated maximum length of the balancing period should be understood as a limit within which any duration can be chosen, depending on the operational and organizational needs of the employer, e.g., 3 months.
- ❖ **Work Time Schedule – Shift Schedule**



- Employers are obliged to create a written schedule of weekly working hours for the entire balancing period and to inform their employees about it or its changes no later than 2 weeks before the start of the respective period unless a different notification time is agreed upon with the employees.
- When scheduling shifts, overtime work must not be scheduled. However, in practice, positive or negative deviations from the established weekly working hours often occur. In the case of a positive difference, overtime work arises, and in the case of a negative difference, it is considered an obstacle at work on the employer's side.

Example

An employee works in a single-shift operation with unevenly distributed weekly working hours. The balancing period was set by the employer for 26 weeks. The shift length is 12 hours.

Within the balancing period, the employer must schedule 1,040 hours (40 hours per week x 26 weeks = 1,040 hours), i.e., 86.67 shifts. Since a new balancing period cannot start during the last shift, the employer must plan 87 shifts (1,044 hours), and there will be 4 overtime hours. If the employer planned only 86 shifts (1,032 hours), they would be obliged to provide wage compensation for 8 hours due to obstacles at work on the employer's side.

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