

Meeting: Future of Work (Employment)
Committee: Work Life Balance
Country: South Africa

South Africans may be some of the hardest workers in the world—they're three times more likely to work 60 hours a week than Americans. On average, South African employees work 43.3 hours per week, the fifth hardest working country in a sample of countries by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Nearly 12% of the South African workforce spent more than 60 hours per week on the job. This is despite the fact that South Africa's labor laws prohibit more than 45 hours per week and no more than 10 hours in overtime.

Statistics provided by the South African Revenue Service and National Treasury indicate that 2744 taxpayers worked overtime in 2013, compared with 656 in 2016. The income from overtime dropped from a combined Rand33 million to R14m during the same time. There is no underlying information to these statistics, and the decrease may be due to businesses reducing their spending on overtime. On one hand, the biggest changes to show up this year surround the Labour Laws Amendment Bill, the National Minimum Wage Bill, and the proposed amendments to the Basic Conditions of Employment Act. The Labour Laws Amendment Bill is a new piece of legislation which seeks to introduce parental leave for not only the birth of a child, but also for parents who choose to adopt or commission the services of a surrogate. The bill removes the provision for Family Responsibility Leave for the birth of a child, which usually applies to the father or in the case of a same-sex relationship, the non-child bearing parent, and provides ten consecutive days leave for parental leave when an employee's child is born or adopted. Under the amendment, an employee who is an adoptive parent of a child younger than two years or who is a commissioning parent in a surrogacy agreement, will be entitled to ten consecutive weeks leave.

Cathie Webb, director of the South African Payroll Association, says people talk about work-life balance as if one can interchange the one with the other without any issue, but that is not necessarily the case. Many South Africans, particularly if they depend on public transport, have to commute long distances between their home and workplace. Increased traffic and deteriorating roads mean that an eight-to-five job may take many more hours out of one's day than the time spent at work. People who tend to have a more balanced work and private life generally work in isolation and do not have to keep regular office hours. Even if a company allows for more flexibility – where people can start earlier and finish earlier, or the other way around – there is an added level of complexity as soon as the job is “customer facing” or the employee is part of a team.

In conclusion, this shows that South Africa has been taking measures to ensure that its citizens are entitled to have a better work-life balance, such as increasing the minimum wage and providing work leaves. Although South Africa has always been a country that has long working hours, the situation could potentially improve from now on.