



May 18, 2011

## Executive Summary

**Flexible Workplace Solutions for Low-Wage Hourly Workers: A Framework for a National Conversation** provides a thorough examination of the challenging schedules faced by many of today's workers and provides a set of practical solutions for employers and policymakers looking to improve these challenging schedules.

The following is a snapshot of some of the key findings from this report:

1. Half of low-wage hourly workers work standard schedules, while the other half work nonstandard schedules.
2. One in two part-time workers in a job requiring standard hours and almost one in four part-time workers in a job requiring nonstandard hours would prefer to be working full-time.
3. There are three key scheduling challenges — rigidity, unpredictability, and instability — affecting low-wage hourly workers in jobs requiring both standard and nonstandard and part-time and full-time hours.
4. Flexible workplace solutions — opportunities for meaningful input into work schedules, more predictable work schedules, and more stable work schedules — can be implemented to address each of these three challenges.

The report adds to the literature in this area by providing:

- A description and categorization of the different types of scheduling faced by low-wage hourly workers in jobs requiring standard and nonstandard schedules and part-time and full-time work;
- A Flexible Workplace Solutions framework for conceptualizing and developing new strategies for addressing scheduling challenges — including employer practices and policy solutions; and
- A clear connection between the scheduling challenges facing low-wage hourly workers to the broader national dialogue on workplace flexibility policy and practice.

Offering flexibility to workers in low-wage hourly jobs requires businesses to implement strategies that address the full range of scheduling challenges facing these workers by reducing the use of rigid scheduling practices and increasing the use of predictable and stable scheduling practices. Using the Flexible Workplace Solutions Framework, WF2010 and iwin have identified concrete employer strategies for making improvements in each of these areas.

Critically, the Flexible Workplace Solutions Framework identifies three key solutions to scheduling challenges faced by low-wage hourly workers:

- Providing opportunities for meaningful input into work schedules
- Providing advance notice of scheduling
- Providing schedule stability

Workplace flexibility is necessary to ensure the economic health of American businesses, and the health and well-being of today's workers and their families. The Flexible Workplace Solutions Framework lays the foundation for employers, employees, and the government to make flexibility a regular feature of low-wage hourly jobs.



## **Flexible Workplace Solutions for Low-Wage Hourly Workers in More Detail:**

Meeting the demands of everyday life while holding down a job has been a kitchen table issue for decades. For low-wage workers, who are the focus of this report, the daily struggle is often a whole lot harder. These workers are least likely to have flexibility at work, and least likely to be able to pay someone to take care of their obligations outside of work.

There is a growing recognition among businesses, employees, and government that the overall demographics and needs of the workforce have changed, with significant implications for employers, families, and communities. While in 1970 two-thirds of married couples had one spouse at home, women are now breadwinners or co-breadwinners in over two-thirds of households and represent nearly half of all American workers. In today's working families, 18% of working parents are single parents. Our aging population is living and working longer. Roughly 40% of employed people in the United States report that within the past five years, they have provided "special attention or care for a relative or in-law 65 years old or older." Advances in medicine and technology have allowed a greater number of people with disabilities to maintain employment. Health problems, aging, disability, and caregiving can all give rise to the need for greater flexibility at work.

Yet most workplaces have not caught up with the realities of the modern workforce. Experts have found that this mismatch has a negative impact on workers' psychological and mental health, child well-being, marriages, and employment outcomes. In response to this conflict, some employers have taken new approaches to work, implementing flexible work arrangements (FWAs) that make it easier for their employees to be good workers and succeed in the rest of their lives. But we have not yet seen a large-scale normative shift in the way work is organized. Less than half of employers provide all, or even most, of their employees with FWAs. Low-wage workers are even less likely than other workers to have access to most forms of flexibility.

This report brings new insight to a dynamic field of study, advocacy, and business practice that places low-wage workers squarely in the national conversation on workplace flexibility. This report adds to the scholarship in this area by drilling down to examine low-wage hourly workers' flexibility needs through the lenses of standard (Monday through Friday daytime schedules) and nonstandard work schedules (anything other than a Monday through Friday daytime schedule) and part-time and full-time work. Examining the scheduling challenges facing these workers at close range, we find tremendous variation within a workforce often considered to be homogeneous.

Through new data analysis, we identified three different types of scheduling challenges — rigidity, unpredictability, and instability — that often play out differently for workers on standard and nonstandard, part-time and full-time schedules. We hope that our findings will both broaden and refine the conversation on flexible work arrangements for low-wage hourly workers.

In this report, we focus on flexible work arrangements that can improve scheduling for low-wage hourly workers in each of these areas. Examples of flexible work arrangements include shift-swapping, team scheduling, self-scheduling, honoring worker preferences to work certain shifts or certain days, and seeking volunteers first for overtime.

Public-sector and private-sector efforts could have far-reaching implications for low-wage workers and their families, not only for those in the workforce now, but also for those who are currently out of the workforce and might have an easier time reentering if flexibility were a more common feature of low-wage jobs. All of this activity presents an unparalleled opportunity for advocates for low-wage hourly workers and for the businesses that employ them to ensure that their needs are included in the current policy conversation on flexibility.

To view the full report, visit [www.workplaceflexibility2010.org](http://www.workplaceflexibility2010.org) and [www.iwin.uky.edu](http://www.iwin.uky.edu).

