

Working Conditions around the World



1. Warm-up: ask and answer the following questions with a partner. You may need to research some of the answers.

- What do you think working conditions are like in your country?
- What is the minimum wage in your country? Do you think it's reasonable?
- How much sick leave do workers in your country get?
- How much parental leave do workers in your country get?
- Is maternity leave longer than paternity leave in your country?
- Do you think unions are powerful or weak in your country?
- Is there anything you would change about working conditions in your country?



2. Pairwork: read the statements below and guess if they are true or false before reading the article.

- Sick leave in Germany can last for more than 1 year. *T / F*
- Sick leave in Australia is longer than sick leave in China. *T / F*
- The minimum wage in China changes from province to province. *T / F*
- The cost of living in Germany is higher than in the USA. *T / F*
- Parental leave in Australia is unpaid. *T / F*
- Annual leave in the USA is longer than annual leave in Mexico. *T / F*
- The minimum wage in Mexico is higher than the minimum wage in China. *T / F*



3. Read the descriptions of working conditions in different countries.

Germany

The minimum wage in Germany is 14 USD, and the average cost of living is \$915 (without rent). Workers who take sick leave must be paid 100% of their salary for the first 6 weeks of sickness (per year). After this period a worker will still receive 70% of their salary from mandatory insurance. This period can last up to 18 months. Parental leave is 12 months at 65% of the parent's income and an optional extra 24 months with a small salary paid by the government. Annual leave is 20 days.

China

The Chinese minimum wage varies in different provinces, but the minimum wage in Beijing is 3.6 USD per hour, while the cost of living is \$630 per month. Chinese workers are entitled to 3 months of sick leave per year paid at 60-100% of their salary, depending on how long they have worked for the company. New mothers are entitled to 100 days maternity leave. Annual leave is 5 days.

Australia

The Australian minimum wage is \$22, and the average cost of living is approximately \$1000 per month. Australian workers are entitled to 10 days sick leave a year with 100% pay. Parents in Australia get 2 periods of parental leave, one continuous period of 3 months which is paid at the national minimum wage, and 12 months optional unpaid leave. Annual leave is 20 days.

USA

The minimum wage in the USA is \$7.25 per hour, and the cost of living is \$930. Full-time workers in the USA can take between 3 and 7 days off with paid sick leave. Some workers in the USA can take up to 12 weeks off for parental leave, but the time is unpaid. Annual leave is 10 days.

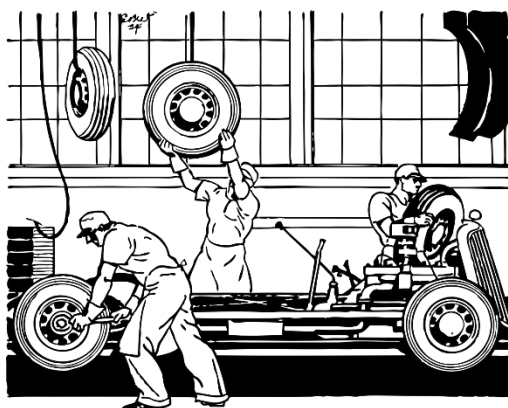
Mexico

The minimum wage in Mexico is \$7.10 per day, and the cost of living is \$374. Full time workers are entitled to unlimited sick leave paid at 60% of their salary. Parental leave is 3 months at full pay and, if necessary, an extra 3 months at half pay. Annual leave is 6 days.



4. Pairwork: ask and answer these questions.

- What did you find most surprising about the information above?
- How many questions from exercise 2 did you get right?
- From an employer's perspective, which country would you prefer to open a business in and why?
- From an employee's perspective, which country would you prefer to live in and why?





5. You are going to roleplay a situation in which you negotiate the working conditions in your country or company. First use the negotiating phrases in the box below to complete the conversation.

have in mind	how about	out of the question
reasonable	on the condition that	meet in the middle

George: Minimum wage of 17 euros an hour? That's *out of the question*, most businesses would go bankrupt within a year.

Helena: Ok, what did you *have in mind*?

George: We think 12 euros an hour is *reasonable*. At that rate employees could live comfortably, and businesses would still have a chance.

Helena: I'm sorry but that is simply too low. Couldn't we *meet in the middle* at 15 euros an hour?

George: That's not the middle and you know it Helena. Look, we could agree to 15 euros an hour *on the condition that* we reduce sick leave from 15 days to 10 days a year.

Helena: I'm afraid I can't agree to that.... But *how about* if we keep the sick leave at 15 days but reduced the pay to 80% of the employee's salary?

George: That might work actually...



6. Negotiation: Student A will represent the unions (workers), student B will represent the lobbyists (companies). Read the cards below.

*Note: Feel free to offer creative solutions. Eg. "We can agree to 25 days of annual leave on the condition that the employee has worked at the company for at least a year."

Student A: Negotiate the best possible working conditions for the workers. In the boxes below write down what your target is for each figure, and what your lowest possible number is (eg. lowest minimum wage \$8, target minimum wage \$15).

	Lowest possible number	Target
Minimum wage:		
Annual leave		
Sick leave		
Parental leave		

Student B: Negotiate the best possible conditions for businesses in your country. In the boxes below write down what your target is for each figure, and what your highest possible number is (e.g. highest minimum wage \$13, target minimum wage \$6).

	Highest possible number	Target
Minimum wage:		
Annual leave		
Sick leave		
Parental leave		



7. Optional task/homework: Choose a country that interests you. Research the working conditions in that country and then present what you found to the class. Your presentation should include the minimum wage, annual leave, sick leave, and parental leave.