

working hours

a practical guide for suppliers
how to understand, manage and reduce excessive overtime

2026

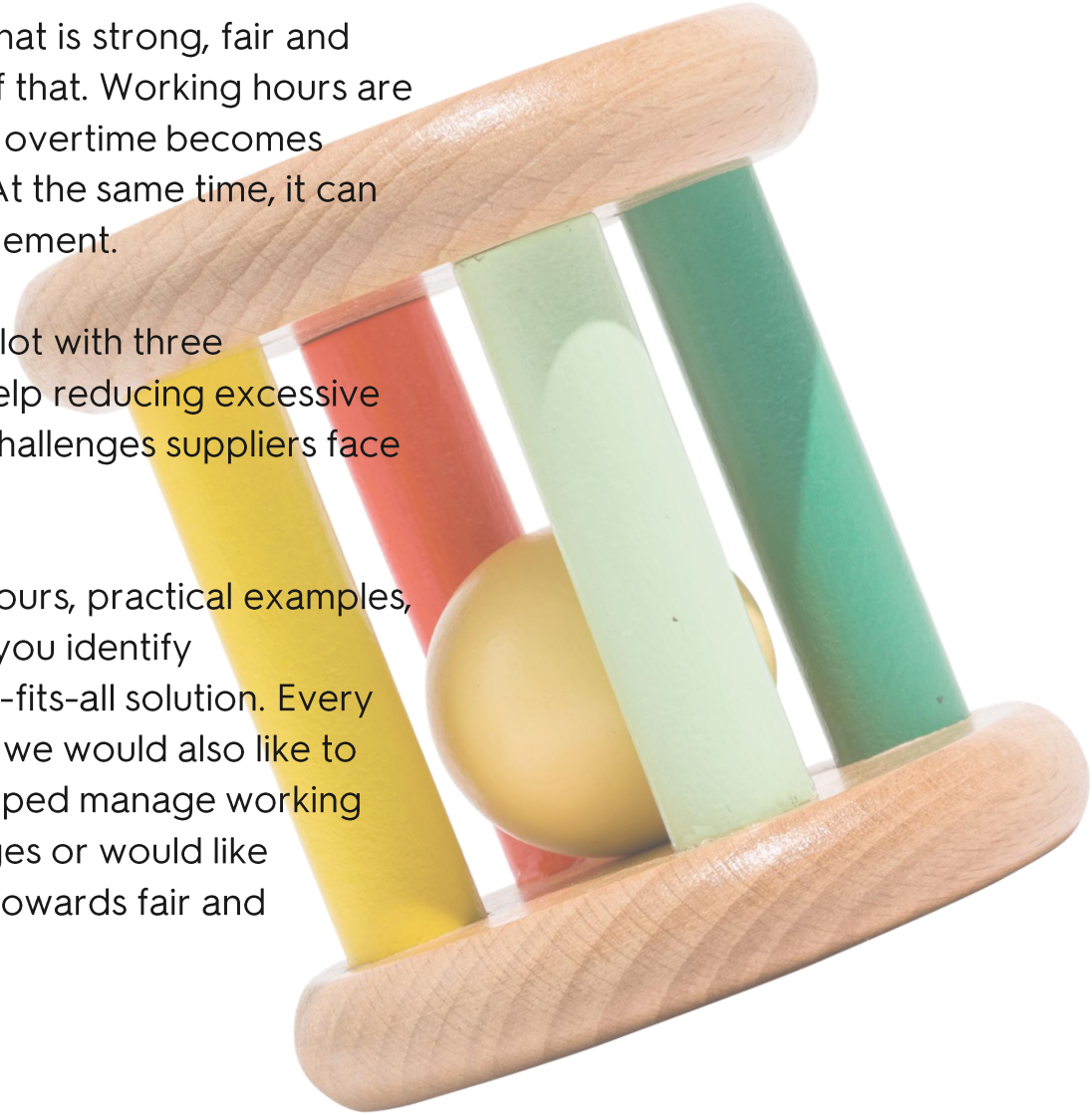
dear supplier to HEMA

We are proud of our partnership. Together we work on a supply chain that is strong, fair and ready for the future. The people making our products are at the heart of that. Working hours are an important part of creating healthy and sustainable workplaces. When overtime becomes excessive, it can affect workers' well-being, safety and job satisfaction. At the same time, it can be a sign of wider challenges in planning, production or capacity management.

In 2025, we shared HEMA's standards on working hours and started a pilot with three production sites to better understand the root causes and what could help reducing excessive overtime in practice. The pilot provided valuable insights into both the challenges suppliers face and the actions that can make a difference.

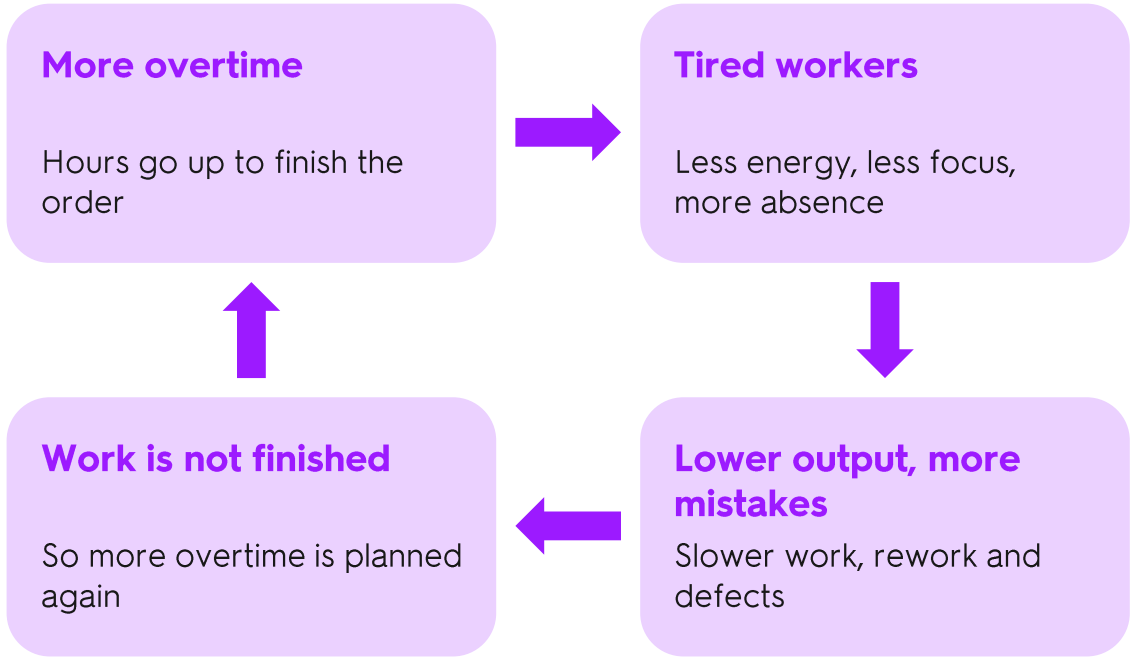
In this brochure, you will find HEMA's expectations regarding working hours, practical examples, and key lessons learned from the pilot. We hope these insights will help you identify opportunities within your own operations. We know there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Every factory is different, and meaningful improvements take time. That is why we would also like to learn from you. If you have ideas, experiences or initiatives that have helped manage working hours, we would love to hear about them. And if you are facing challenges or would like support, please reach out. Together, we can continue making progress towards fair and sustainable working conditions.

Thank you for your partnership.



why reducing overtime matters

Extra hours look like extra output. In practice, they often cost more than they bring.



Better for your people

- Less fatigue, fewer accidents and fewer sick days
- Time to rest, and time with family
- More reason to stay, so you retain your people and their skills

Better for your business

- Lower rates of injury and less medical costs
- Fewer mistakes, less rework and less waste
- Lower overall production costs (less overtime premiums and lower hiring costs)

Better for our partnership

- You meet the HEMA supplier code of conduct
- Fewer findings in audits, less time spent on corrections
- A stronger base for long-term partnership

HEMA’s overtime standards and expectations

Working hours must comply with national laws, collective agreements, or the HEMA supplier code of conduct (based on internatonal standards), whichever affords the greater protection for workers.

The maximum permitted number of working hours is in accordance with national laws but will not exceed the ILO standards of a 48-hour workweek. We support suppliers in reducing excessive overtime, as more than 12 hours per week conflicts with our HEMA supplier code of conduct.

Our overtime standard follows the ILO guidelines of a 48-hour normal working week.

0 – 12 hours overtime per week	More than 12 hours	More than 20 hours
within the HEMA standard	excessive overtime	priority

Normal working hours are generally between 40 and 48 hours per week. Overtime should be the exception, not the norm. Total working hours, including overtime, should not exceed 60 hours per week, and workers should have at least one full rest day every week.

Overtime is voluntary

Workers should always have the freedom to decide whether to work overtime. Overtime must never be forced or expected as a condition of employment.

Sufficient rest

Workers should receive sufficient breaks during the day and at least one continuous 24-hour rest period every seven days. Also in peak season.

Fair compensation

Any overtime worked should be compensated at the prescribed rate. Make sure contracts specify regular hours, rest days, overtime hours and overtime pay.

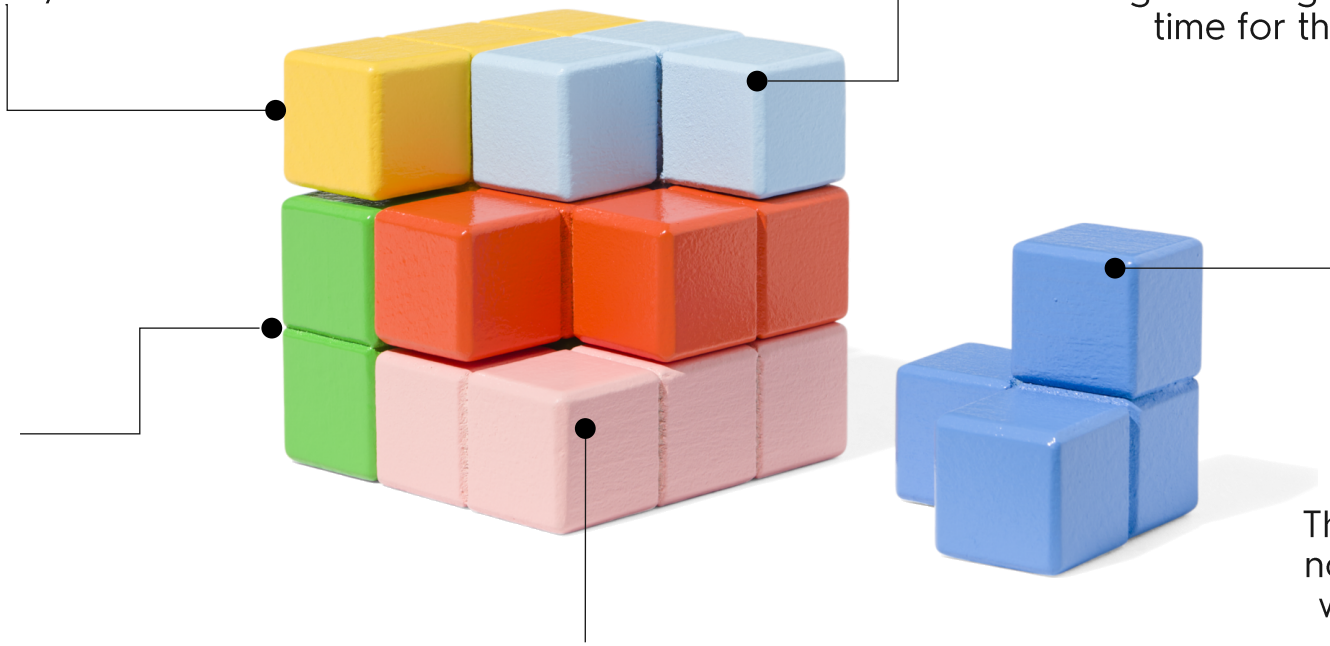
Hours are recorded accurately

Accurate records of hours worked for each worker are available for review.

understanding root causes

Orders and planning
When every line makes its own plan, no one sees the total workload of the factory. Orders are accepted without checking the real capacity.

Influence from outside of the factory
Short lead times, late approvals, sudden order changes and tight delivery deadlines leave less time for the same amount of work.



Workers depend on overtime income
When the normal working week does not give the income people need, they ask for extra hours themselves.

This is especially a risk where minimum wage is far below living wage for that country/region.

People and skills
There is not enough capacity or not enough skilled people. New workers often start on the line before they are trained.

Machines and process
Repetitive work is often done by hand or machines are not maintained well. A breakdown of a machine can delay the output.

reducing overtime & managing working hours effectively

1 Commit

Set a realistic target for the year

2 Measure

Track real hours per worker, per workshop, every week

3 Analyse

Look for the root causes behind the overtime

4 Act

Make a plan, formulate actions

5 Review

Review hours, output, wages, adjust and repeat

Involve your workers

- Raise awareness about the impact of excessive overtime on health and safety
- Set up a worker committee, or hold regular meetings, to engage your workers and track progress on reducing overtime together
- Reducing overtime can affect take-home pay. Check that base wages reflect a living wage, and consider a bonus to reward and retain skilled workers.
- Tracking hours over time shows trends and where action is needed
- Some factories use agency workers to manage peaks. The agency is usually responsible for paying wages and overtime, but the factory still needs to monitor their working hours. This should involve assessing whether the fees paid to the agency are sufficient to allow for overtime premium payments, and raising this with the agency when limits are exceeded.

Planning & prioritisation

- Create one production planning that covers all units / lines / workshops and check capacity before confirming an order
- Base planning on a normal working week, in line with local law, but not exceeding the ILO standards of 48 hours per week.
- Onboard and train extra workers before peak season starts
- Plan regular trainings to improve skills and productivity
- Plan maintenance of machines in time so a breakdown in peak season can be prevented
- Hours can increase in peak season or as a result of sudden order changes. Measure weekly, and set a signal so HR is alerted before a worker reaches the limit.
- Implement overtime approval by management. Is overtime really necessary or can the workstill be done during regular working hours?

start today!

Where to find more information?

- **HEMA supplier guidelines** – our policies on social compliance
- **amfori BSCI training** – fair remuneration and decent working hours (PA 5 & 6)
- **ILO infographic** on working hours and rest periods
- **ETI Base Code Guidance:** working hours

Let's talk!

Tell us what you are working on, what results you see and where you get stuck. We are happy to think along, share what other suppliers tried, and set targets that are ambitious and realistic. Please feel free to reach out to your HEMA contact person or sustainability@hema.nl.

