

OUR OWN TIME

European Work-Time Network Newsletter

March 2024

Welcome

The debate on working time is one of the most salient topics on work and politics across Europe today, and there is a growing movement that is pushing for a more just distribution of labour and leisure time.

The European Network for the Fair Sharing of Working Time coordinates organisations, be they trade unions, political parties or civil society organisations, around the subject of working time reduction and adaptation.

This newsletter collates and shares the latest information on working time reduction from across Europe. The newsletter is released quarterly, and this is the **19th issue**. If you would like to see the previous issues, please use [this link](#).

The newsletter is produced by Autonomy, and is supported by ATTAC (Germany – Group ArbeitFAIRTeilen), the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung's Brussels Office and funded by the German Federal Foreign Office.

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Network Updates

Webinar series - tomorrow

Our next webinar is tomorrow Wednesday 27th March, at 1pm Brussels time:

Working Time Reduction: Union Perspectives

Dr Torsten Müller is a senior researcher in the field of collective bargaining, wages and trade unions in Europe. He holds a PhD in Industrial and Business Studies from the University of Warwick in the UK.

Register to attend [here](#).

You can watch the recordings of our previous webinars on our website [here](#).

Conference 2024



The European Work-Time Network's 2024 Conference will be held at Mundo Madou in Brussels on 17th & 18th October 2024.

[Register your interest to attend here](#)

More details to follow soon!

Call for submissions

The newsletter is dependent on contributions from the Network's members and our dedicated Country Leads.

If you would like to become a Country Lead, or have any information you think should be included in the next newsletter, please contact the Network Coordinator, India, at: workingtimenetwork.europe@gmail.com.

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Austria

‘Family working time’ proposal

The Austrian Chamber of Workers and Trade Union Confederation have [called](#) for a care-friendly working time culture, including a shorter working week.

This model for ‘family working time’ [proposes](#) that parents have the same amount of time available for childcare and paid work. This would involve each parent working 28-32 hours per week for four months after the birth of their child.

New leader of the SPÖ calls for shorter working hours

The new leader of the SPÖ (Austrian social democratic party) Andreas Babler is demanding, in their new programme, a shortening of working hours with full wage compensation and more paid holidays.

France

France's Prime Minister proposes compressed 4-day week models

For public sector employees and employees who are divorced parents, France's Prime Minister has [proposed](#) a compressed 4-day week. Staff would continue to work full time hours but over four days. Gabriel Attal has [encouraged](#) experiments with compressed working hours across government, and is suggesting new working arrangements for divorced parents.

There is a government seminar on work happening on 27th March where these proposals will be discussed.

Germany

Private sector pilot begins

In February, a private sector four-day week pilot involving 46 companies [began](#) in Germany. Organised by 4-Day Week Global and the Agency Interprenör, the pilot will be evaluated by the University of Münster. The trial will last 6 months.

Working a 4-day week in small and medium-sized enterprises is already used to attract certain types of skilled workers across Germany.

Die Linke launch 4-day week proposal

Die Linke, Germany's Left Party, has [outlined](#) a plan for German workers, including a 32-hour work week with no loss in pay. They propose the Government lead the way in reduced working hours, to help create new labour market standards.

Train drivers union fighting for a 35-hour work week

The trade union of the train-drivers GDL is fighting for the 35-hour week for all workers in shift work. Strikes have taken place, a mediation proposal was refused and the decision is now pending Deutsche Bahn's agreement to the demand of GDL (as some smaller railway companies already have).

Trade union for public services is on strike for better working time

Ver.di is striking for better working time - longer breaks, more holidays and shorter working hours - in public transportation. The transportation workers are supported by FridaysForFuture and other social movements like ATTAC Germany.

Ongoing public debate for working time reduction

There is an ongoing debate for and against working time reduction in Germany. Trade unions and many younger people, especially young parents, are demanding shorter working hours that allow a better work life balance. On the other hand, confederations of employers, conservative parties (even the German Minister of Economy from the Green Party who, in the past, has voted for working time reduction) are concerned about damage to the German work ethic and potential labour shortages, and are now demanding longer working hours and older retirement ages.

Work Less, Live More: New Book

In March, a new book on working time reduction was published: "Weniger Arbeiten, mehr Leben!" (Work less, live more), edited by Margareta Steinrücke and Beate Zimpelmann. It was presented at the Leipzig Book Fair on the 23rd March 2024.

40th Anniversary of the Fight for 35 Hours

2024 will be the 40th anniversary of the fight for the 35 hour week in Germany. In 1984, the trade unions of the metal and printing industries, IG Metall and IG Druck&Papier, reached an agreement on the 35-hour week after 6.5 and 13 weeks of strikes (respectively). There will be some events for this jubilee by IG Metall, Ver.di, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and ATTAC.

Hungary

Quarterly update

Benedikt Lehmann, Eötvös Loránd University

Working time reduction trials in companies do not always succeed in Hungary due to mixed results regarding the productivity of workers and sometimes distrust from employees that working reduced hours will eventually harm them.

Nonetheless, discussions amongst researchers, journalists, politicians, and some unions continue.

Most recently, the ecological economist, Miklós Antal, was interviewed by the social democratic newspaper Népszava (in English, 'Word of the People') to discuss working time reduction from the perspective of environmental sustainability. He criticised the current economic system for promoting excessive consumption alongside demanding workplaces, leading to dissatisfaction among workers and advocated for reducing working hours. However, he also outlined several challenges such as current social norms regarding consumption and specific expertise of workers that may be difficult to replace.

These and other insights regarding the promises and difficulties of working time reduction are partly drawn from a recent publication covering ten case studies in Hungary titled 'Working time reduction: Employers' perspectives and eco-social implications', but also from an earlier article titled 'Six Clusters with Radically Different Outlooks for Working Time Reduction: Insights from a Survey and Implications for Post-Growth Thinking'.

Iceland

Quarterly update

Guðmundur D. Haraldsson, ALDA

Unions in the private sector have signed contracts with employers after three months of negotiations.

Working hours were not high on the agenda in this negotiation, though some unions did emphasise it.

The main emphasis on behalf of unions was protecting pay and raising the pay of those who are in the greatest need, especially after a lengthy period of high inflation (up to 10% yearly). Employers were seeking price stability on all fronts.

VR union, representing workers in commerce, services and offices, called for a strike amongst staff in bag handling and check-in at Keflavík International Airport. The strike aimed at changing patterns of work, where instead of the working day being split into two four hour chunks with a four hour gap between them, staff would work shifts or the whole day continuously without gaps.

Employers decided to call for voting on their own strike, banning all members of VR to work. The former strike would have impacted around 150 persons, while the latter would have impacted tens of thousands. Both were called off after new contracts were signed, but the pattern of work remains unchanged for now.

Rafiðnaðarsamband Íslands, representing workers in industry and technology, negotiated a 36 hour work week during the negotiations.

All the unions negotiated longer summer holidays. Minimum number of paid holidays will be 25 (instead of 24) and will increase with tenure. At VR and Rafiðnaðarsambandið, the maximum number of paid holidays will be 30 days.

At Efling and SGS confederation (representing mostly manual labourers) the maximum becomes 28 (rather than 25).

With the new contracts, pay is increased by a fixed number across unions and industries. The government

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has promised to help with building of housing, various benefits and actions aiming at price stability.

Unions in the public sector and unions of university educated staff are now negotiating.

A bill has been put forward in Alþingi, the Icelandic Parliament, making 24th of December and the 25th bank holidays in whole (rather than from 13:00 onwards). Also the bill stipulates that any bank holidays that end up on weekends are automatically transferred to the next working day in such cases.

Norway

Quarterly Update

Johan Petter Andresen, Rødt

There are currently two "pilot projects" in [kindergartens](#) in Norway, covering Oslo and Stavanger.

One [municipal kindergarten](#) in Oslo Lillo gård Sagene:

"Between August 2023 - July 2025, the kindergarten is trialling the pilot project "6 hour working day"! This means that all employees have reduced working hours during the project period, and we have added an additional 4 employees to the basic staff. Our staff consists of kindergarten employees, child- and youth workers, specialist pedagogues with a special education background and educational leaders. Rambøll is responsible for the follow-up research and must, among other things, look at the employees' working situation and service quality."

The other [municipal kindergarten](#) is in Stavanger. In this pilot, staff [work](#) 4-day weeks.

The work-time reduction from 7.5 hours to 6 hours is with full wage compensation and an increase in the amount of employees. For example, at Lillo gård Sagene they increased the number of employees from 12 to 16.

The political composition of both of these cities has changed. Now both cities have conservative majorities. As the pilot-projects are agreements with the trade unions, they will not be discontinued, and will last their period until the 31st July 2025.

But their continuation is uncertain, because of this political change.

There is also an increased interest for four day weeks in creative businesses.

United Kingdom

One Year on from the 4-Day Week Pilot

Autonomy published a [report](#) on companies' experience of the shorter working week one year on from the 2022 4-day week pilot results release.

Of the 61 organisations that took part in the 2022 UK four-day week pilot, at least 54 have confirmed that they are still operating the policy one year later (89%). In addition, at least 31 have made the four-day week permanent – 51% of all participating companies.

100% of managers and CEOs who were consulted said that the four-day week had a 'positive' or 'very positive' impact on their organisation. When asked what the shorter working week had changed, 82% of surveyed companies reported positive impacts on staff well-being. 50% saw positive effects on reducing staff turnover and 32% said the policy had noticeably improved their recruitment.

You can also watch the recording of our webinar summarising the findings and hearing from participating companies [here](#).

Scottish Government launch public sector 4-day week pilot

The Scottish Government has [launched](#) a public sector 4-day week pilot currently involving 140 staff. Staff are working a 32-hour week, 3 hours less per week.

4DW local council agree to continue trial

South Cambridgeshire District Council cabinet [agreed](#) to continue its four-day week trial while it awaits to hear about potential penalties from central government.

Progress in union discussions on a 4-day week at DEFRA

Trade union staff from the civil service trade union, PCS, are in [conversations](#) about a four-day week at DEFRA (the UK's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs).

The Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union has agreed to provide evidence of the benefits – including value for money for taxpayers – of a four-day week as part of ongoing discussions about the feasibility of such a scheme.

Major supermarket trials 4-Day Week

ASDA, a UK supermarket, has [confirmed](#) it's been experimenting with various flexible working initiatives. This included a small 20-store trial of a "four-day working week for the same pay and benefits".

Launch of '4ugust'

4ugust is a new initiative that has been [launched](#) by the 4 Day Week Campaign and think tank Autonomy. The idea is that companies give their staff a four-day week, while keeping salaries the same, for the month of August. Alongside the bank holiday in the final week, this amounts to just additional days off: a mini trial.

4-Day Week Handbook published

Joe Ryle, Director of the 4-Day Week Campaign has [published](#) a book: 'The 4 Day Week Handbook: Your Guide to Happy Staff, Smarter Working and a Productivity Miracle'.

Europe

ETUI book: The why and how of working time reduction

[Published](#) a few years ago, the ETUI's book on working time reduction maps the discussion on working time reduction by examining the recent trends, the different reasons for implementing such a reduction, and the ways in which it can be organised.