

OUR OWN TIME

European Work-Time Network Newsletter

June 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 **20th issue**. If you would like to see the previous issues, please use [this link](#).

The newsletter is produced by the Autonomy Institute, 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

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.

Austria

Collective Agreement for Private Health Resorts and Rehabilitation Facilities

Strong income increase achieved for employees, the details:

- Collective bargaining minimum wages and salaries as well as allowances will be increased by 8.3 percent on 01.05.2024.
- A collective bargaining minimum wage of 2,000 euros has been achieved.
- December 24 and December 31 are free of work with continued pay. For all employees who have to work on one of these days, there will be a time credit to the extent of the working hours worked, which shall be granted together.

Successful collective bargaining agreement 2024 for shipping workers

Shorter working hours and higher wages from 1 April 2024.

On 17 April 2024, the representatives of the GPA trade union and the representatives of the Association of Austrian Newspapers (VÖZ) agreed on a collective bargaining agreement for shipping workers, editorial and administrative assistants, deliverers and distributors, sorters and loaders, order pickers and base logisticians.

The normal weekly working hours will be reduced from 36 hours to 35 hours from 1 April 2024.

The collective bargaining weekly wages will be increased by 6 percent with effect from 1 April 2024, rounded up to the next full euro amount.

No termination of the collective agreement until 31 December 2027.

Find out more information [here](#).

Belgium

Belgian Socialist Party includes a four-day week in its manifesto

In February, the Belgian Socialist Party (PS) [included](#) a 32-hour week with no loss in pay in its General Election manifesto.

The elections were held on 9 June, and PS has entered the governing coalition alongside other centre-left and centre-right parties.

Belgian company Tryangle published a review of the four-day week debate in the Belgian private sector - available in English [here](#) and French [here](#).

France

Public discussion continues about working time reduction

Debates continue in France around working time reduction, compressed working hours and the existing 35-hour week.

Le Monde [published](#) an article promoting the compressed model last month.

Left-wing leader Mélenchon promoted a 32-hour week in his 2022 manifesto. The impact the General Election happening next week will have on the debate remains to be seen.

Germany

Margareta Steinrücke, Attac! Germany

More and more SMEs implement the 4-day-week.

Many small and medium-sized enterprises are shortening working hours with no loss of pay. The main motivation is to get qualified staff. In February 2024, a pilot started with 45 enterprises introducing the 4-day-week, initiated by the agency Intraprenör and evaluated by the University of Münster.

Trade union of railway workers, GDL, won a 35-hour week for shift workers.

Following strikes, the 35-hour week will be reached in 2029.

Ver.di, is beginning demands for working time reduction.

For the first time in 20+ years, the biggest service sector union will fight for working time reduction in public service collective bargaining processes, at the Federal and communal level from Spring 2025.

Ver.di carried out a huge inquiry among members and workers in the public services on the subject, where the majority is pleading for different forms of working time reduction.

Federations of employers calling for a longer working week

Against the positive climate for working time reduction, particularly among young people, the federations of the employers and their supporters (even the Green Minister for Economy who used to favour working time reduction) are

campaigning for longer working weeks e.g. 42 hours. They are attempting to throw out regulations of the Work Time Law of a maximum 10-hour working day and 11 hour minimum gap between 2 working days.

Reforms to German Work-Time Law to document every hour worked.

The Government must reform the German work-time law after the decision of the European High Court that every working hour must be documented by employers. This decision prescribes to every employer in the European Union to document every hour of work, not just overtime hours. This is a positive means to reduce overtime and unpaid work.

Italy

Private sector pilot to start in September

4 Day Week Global is launching a private sector 4-day week pilot in Italy in September.

Registrations to take part are [open](#) now.

Netherlands

Yvette Becker, FNC

Hospital staff massively in favour of a shorter working week: good for staff and care!

86% of hospital staff are in favour of a shorter full-time norm of 30 or 32 hours, according to a poll by FNV among 3,355 employees. Staff believe that a shorter working week would:

1) Attract and retain staff, creating a more attractive sector

- 82% of respondents believe it has a positive effect on attracting and retaining colleagues, which is essential in the tight healthcare labour market. 90% expect a positive effect on job satisfaction.

2) Not lead to inferior care

- 81% think the quality of care will improve or at least be maintained.

3) Make money

- We expect to make up 3.5 hours by working smarter, using technology, no longer doing unnecessary tasks and better communication between departments. The current full-time norm is 36 hours. Half an hour per employee costs €163.3 million. However, by reducing absenteeism to the national average (saving €186.5 million) and smarter working practices, this is a net positive balance of €23 million.

See this [link](#) for more information.

AFAS, software company, moves to four-day week due to AI benefits

A Dutch software company has moved to a four-day week because of the productivity benefits they have found from using AI. They received 125 new job applications in one day and lots of media attention.

See more information [here](#) and [here](#).

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Portugal

Pedro Gomes, University of Birkbeck

Final report of the Portuguese four-day week pilot released

The final report on the Portuguese Pilot came out on the 24th of June ([in Portuguese](#)). The English version will be published in a few weeks time.

Main conclusions

COMPANIES

- 41 companies tested a four-day workweek in Portugal in 2023. 20 coordinated the start of a trial in June.
- 56% of the initial contacts were made by female leaders.
- Consulting, Science, and Technology were the most represented sectors in the study, which also included a nursery.
- Companies adopted the four-day workweek in different formats and implemented various organisational changes.
- Operational and employee performance improvements.
- 80% of managers rated the test as financially neutral. Only one organisation had to hire more workers.
- Only four companies returned to a five-day workweek at the end of the test.

WORKERS

- Experimental Group - 332 workers in companies that participated in the Pilot | Control Group - 160 workers in companies in the Control Group
- 67% of the workers are female
- 55% are under 40 years old
- 79% have a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree
- Before the pilot project, they worked 41.6 hours; during the pilot, 36.5 hours
- Significant reduction in exhaustion and negative mental health symptoms, compared to a control group.
- Improvement in mental and physical health
- Better balance between work, family, and personal life
- Increased satisfaction with work and life in general
- Workers value this benefit at 28% of their salary. The value attributed to the four-day week is higher among women,

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workers with children, those with salaries below €1100, and those with lower qualifications.

- 93% of workers would like to continue

Left wing parties support a four-day week in general election manifestos

During the election for parliament in March 2023, several left wing parties (BE and Livre) included the 4 Day Week as a long-term goal in their manifesto, proposing measures towards it.

From BE's perspective, "the country already produces enough to reduce working hours," proposing the extension of the four-day workweek experiment and the creation of a "permanent mechanism to support companies in increasingly adopting this work model, which is desired by both companies and workers."

Livre proposed "the continuation of the four-day workweek experiment in the private sector and extend it to the public administration, promoting the inclusion of the four-day workweek in collective bargaining and company agreements, working towards a national-level experience of a four-day workweek period - similar to what the city of Valencia in Spain has done;"

A third party, PCP has put forward "an initiative that proposes reducing the weekly working hours to 35 hours, in both the public and private sectors, without any loss of salary."

Collectively, BE, Livre, and PCP garnered over 10% of the votes. The current Prime Minister, Luís Montenegro (of the centre-right coalition AD), stated in the debates that he does not oppose a four-day working week, provided it remains a choice of businesses and is not mandated by the state."

Youth president of the centre-right party defends a transition to a four-day week

On the 22nd of June the new president of JSD (the youth of PSD the main center-right party, now in power) defended a transition towards a four-day week.

"João Pedro Louro defends the "implementation of the four-day working week", explaining that his "generation doesn't just want to live to work, they want to work to live, and it's essential to integrate professional life more closely with personal life, in order to give people a better quality of life so that they can build their own happiness project".

Spain

Joan Sanchis, University of Valencia

Ongoing public pilots

Two public policies provide economic incentives for firms transitioning to a 32-hour workweek. The Regional Government of the Valencian Country has one such policy, while the Spanish Government, through its Ministry of Industry, has another, which specifically targets industrial firms and requires a 10% reduction in working time. Currently, 20 companies are participating in this program.

Other regions, including the Basque Country and Catalonia, are exploring the possibility of implementing pilot programs and economic incentives for work-time reduction.

Political support for a reduction to 37.5 hours at the national level

There has been a broad public debate recently about legally reducing the maximum working week. The progressive coalition government, formed by the Socialist Party and Sumar, has committed to enforcing a work-time reform to reduce the standard workweek to 37.5 hours within two years.

Possible economic and support measures to accompany this process are being debated.

Spain's largest trade unions support a 32-hour workweek.

The two largest unions, UGT and CCOO, are actively backing a 32-hour workweek and have made it a priority in their recent May 1st manifestos.

Valencian health sector transitioning to a 35-hour workweek.

There have been advances in work-time reduction in the public sector. For example, in the Valencian Country, the government has agreed with unions on a transition to a 35-hour workweek for the health sector.

Sweden

Hampus Andersson, Kommunal

Union Initiatives

Kommunal's Campaign

Since 2022, Kommunal (Swedish Municipal Workers' Union), one of Sweden's largest unions, has been actively advocating for a reduction in working hours, aiming for a 30-hour work week. Their efforts have included comprehensive advocacy and influence campaigns which have shown substantial success.

Research and Reports

Kommunal conducted extensive research on the impacts of working time reduction. The findings were compiled into a comprehensive report authored by Hampus Andersson, a researcher at Kommunal and a member of the European Work-Time Network. This report was [published](#) on 28 May 2024, and gained significant attention in major Swedish newspapers, national TV news, and podcasts, highlighting the high public interest in this issue.

Additionally, several other reports and studies were published during spring 2024, accompanied by numerous seminars, debates, and themed programmes on national TV. Collectively, these activities have transformed the issue from being largely ignored to one of the hottest topics in Sweden.

Vårdförbundet's Strike

Currently ongoing, Vårdförbundet (the Swedish Association of Health Professionals) launched a large strike in June 2024. They are demanding a reduction of the workweek to 35 hours, with an initial step from 38.25 hours (for those working shifts during days, evenings, and weekends) to 37 hours per week.

So far, public employers have refused these demands, likely fearing that a concession would further energise the movement for working time reduction among other professional groups.

National Trade Union Federation's Decision

LO's Commitment

In May 2024, LO (the Swedish Trade Union Confederation) decided to prioritise the demand for shorter working hours at the national level. This decision was made unanimously, reflecting broad consensus among Swedish workers from various sectors, including healthcare, retail, manufacturing, and electrical work.

LO aims to push for changes in the Working Time Act through central negotiations and political collaboration.

Political Party Developments

Social Democrats' Reform Work

The Social Democrats, Sweden's largest political party (currently in opposition), have initiated a major reform effort to update and improve their policies.

A dedicated working group, focusing on labour market issues and including Hampus Andersson, has prioritised the topic of reduced working hours. Annika Strandhäll, the former Minister of Social Affairs and leader of the working group, publicly announced that the group will propose a working time reduction.

If adopted at the party's congress in 2025, this could become a key issue in the 2026 election, marking the most significant focus on working time reduction in over two decades.

These developments indicate a strong and growing movement towards working time reduction in Sweden, involving key stakeholders from unions, political parties, and the public sector.

Switzerland

Mirjam Brunner, UNIA

Manifesto “More time to live”

The trade union Unia has launched a manifesto for a reduction in working time without a reduction in pay and with full wage compensation.

With an average of 41.7 working hours per week, full-time employees in Switzerland work the longest hours in Europe.

With the manifesto, Unia is calling for a shorter full-time standard for four reasons: To protect health from excessive strain; as a basis for a fairer distribution of paid and unpaid work between the sexes; for the redistribution of productivity gains from capital to labor; for a fair Twin Transformation.

You can sign the manifesto [here](#).

Reduction in working hours as a “hopeful prospect” at the Reclaim Democracy congress

On September 13, 2024, a panel on the reduction of working hours as a point of convergence of different struggles will take place at the [Reclaim Democracy congress](#).

United Kingdom

Aliyah Davies, 4-Day Week Campaign

Largest UK trade union backs a four-day week

The UK's largest union, Unison, (with over 1.3 million members) [passed](#) a motion demanding legislative action to encourage employers to adopt a four-day working week.

Green Party four-day week manifesto commitment

The Green Party of England and Wales have [committed](#) to a four-day week in their 2024 General Election manifesto.

200 British Red Cross staff trial a four-day week

Around 5% of the British Red Cross's workforce will [begin](#) trialling a four-day week next month.

Starting on 1 July, the four-day week pilot will last for six months and apply to around 200 members of staff.

A mixture of frontline and supporting teams will be affected, including the entire technology function.

The pilot was organised following consultation with the charity's staff and diversity networks.

TUC Webinar attended by over 500 Trade Unionists

In June, more than 500 Trade Union members and reps [joined](#) a campaigning webinar with the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and the 4 Day Week Campaign to hear more about workplace four-day week campaigns including recent successes.

Welsh Government Four-Day Week Report

In 2023, the Welsh Government commissioned a Working Group under the WPC to explore the feasibility of a four-day week with no loss of pay in the public sector.

The Working Group has now [published](#) its report with a key recommendation for devolved public sector employers, trade unions and the Welsh Government to collaborate through the WPC to have a four-day week trial.

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.

Europe

UNI Europa Fair Working Time research

At the request of UNI Europa - the European trade union federation for service workers, a research study on working time reduction in Europe is now being carried out within the EU-funded project 'FATIMA - Fair working time matters'.

ETUC research: collective bargaining agreements

The ETUC is working alongside the Autonomy Institute to assess working time reduction within collective bargaining agreements in Europe.

They have launched a call for evidence for examples of relevant collective bargaining agreements. Please complete [this form](#) if you know of any case studies!