

# OUR OWN TIME

## European Work-Time Network Newsletter

December 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 **22nd 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.

If you would like to subscribe to receive this email, please sign up [here](#).



# In this issue

Network Updates	2
France	4
Germany	5
Iceland	7
Norway	9
Poland	11
Spain	12
United Kingdom	13
Europe	16
Beyond Europe	18

# Network Updates

## Conference 2024



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

We had **over 130 participants** join us over two days online and in person in Brussels to hear about how we achieve working time reduction in Europe.

We had 5 excellent panels, with speakers from trade unions, academia, political parties and civil society. You can watch the recordings from the conference on our website [here](#), of each panel:

1. Wage increases vs reduced working hours
2. Daily reduction of hours vs reduction of days
3. WTR and the intensification of work
4. Driving working time reduction: employees vs employers
5. Achieving working time reduction: office, industrial and service sector jobs

You can find out more and join the Network [here](#). We will share a summary of the country updates from our members in January.

We were generously supported by the Alex Ferry Foundation, European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), European Trade Union Institute (ETUI), and European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU).

[Return to contents](#)

## Webinars - 13th November & 11th December

Since our last newsletter, we have had two webinars.

On 13th November 2024, Mark Bergfeld from UNI Europa presented global research on **working time in the cleaning sector**. You can watch the recording [here](#).

On 11th December, campaigners from CCOO Catalonia presented a session on **digital organising for working time reduction within trade unions**. You can watch the recording [here](#).

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

## 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](mailto:workingtimenetwork.europe@gmail.com).

# France

## Few collective agreements with working time reduction signed in 2023

Pauline Grimaud at *Le Centre d'études de l'emploi et du travail* has [analysed](#) 17,000 collective agreements signed in 2023 in France that include working time organisation and duration. The national weekly working time in France is 35 hours.

Among the agreements analysed, 150 (0.8%) have implemented a four-day week. 89% (134) of those 150 have implemented a compressed work week into four days. Of the remaining 16 agreements, eight have implemented a four-day week with a duration greater than 35-hours per week, and eight a four-day week with a week shorter than 35 hours.

## Report published on the four-day week in the French public sector

A report was [published](#) earlier this year by Profil Public reviewing experiments in working time reduction and flexible working hours, and their application in the French public sector.

# Germany

*Margareta Steinrücke, Attac! Germany*

## Private sector four-day week pilot results announced

The results from the German four-day week pilot were [published](#) in October 2024.

The trial involved 45 firms/organisations. In 60% of these firms, all employees participated in shorter working hours, while in 40% only specific services and/or employees were involved. 46% reduced their working time by 10%, 20% by between 11 and 19%, 34% reduced their hours by 20%.

90% of employees reported an improvement of physical and mental health, more time for sleep, and less stress and burnout. Productivity remained the same or increased, profits were maintained as well as performance. Illness absence decreased by 11% on average. 73% of the firms will continue with shorter working hours.

## IG Metall negotiations expand free day allowance

In its latest collective bargaining round, Germany's biggest trade union IG Metall focused on wage increases as a result of recent inflation and cost of living pressures.

Working time reduction was included in the negotiations. Workers can change a tariff allowance into 8 additional free days for workers with caring obligations, part-time workers and shift workers. This was expanded from a two-year policy to a five-year one.

## Ver.di backs a reduction in working hours and other trade unions' progress

In 2025, Ver.di, the trade union for all services, will demand a reduction in working hours in the public service collective bargaining round for the first time in 30 years.

The union will call for 3 additional days off per year for all workers, and 4 for its own members. It will also call for the introduction of a time account called “Meine Zeit-Konto” for the flexible accumulation and use of free time.

## **Reduction in working hours to save jobs in large manufacturing companies**

Volkswagen, Germany's largest automobile company, announced the termination of 30,000 jobs and the employment protection agreement.

To save these jobs IG Metall is calling for a reduction in working hours instead of wage increases, as VW and IGM successfully agreed a similar policy in 1994 with the introduction of the 4-Day/28.8-Hours-Week.

Germany's largest steel company, Thyssen-Krupp, also announced the reduction of 11,000 jobs. To prevent this, the reduction in working hours that was agreed in 2023 (from 35 to 32 hours with partial wage compensation for companies in a crisis or transformation) may come into effect.



# Iceland

*Guðmundur Haraldsson, ALDA*

## **Icelandic Medical Association signs agreement for 36 hours per week**

The Icelandic Medical association, on behalf of physicians, has signed an agreement with the government stipulating a 36-hour working week for the profession.

In early November this year, the Icelandic Medical Association agreed on a widespread strike action within the health care sector. Negotiations with the state had been ongoing for months but had not led to an agreement. The key demand in the negotiations was a 36-hour workweek, as many other professions had negotiated earlier.

In the 2020 negotiations, physicians had not negotiated reduced hours, unlike many other health professions, as it was considered too complex to achieve this for physicians.

Underlying the demand for a 36-hour working week is a high workload in the medical profession and a chronic shortage of doctors in Iceland, which often leads to burnout. Many Icelandic doctors, around 600, choose to work and live outside of Iceland - particularly in the other Nordic countries - due to lack of work-life balance and high workload.

The Icelandic Medical Association hopes that a reduced work week will attract doctors to the country, reducing the workload and alleviating the shortage. Included in the agreement is an initiative to reduce workload and change norms, especially around the various certificates doctors are asked to issue in the context of sickness and employment, and for government agencies, but also to rethink other time-consuming tasks.

The new agreement will now undergo a widespread consultation process and then voting by members of the Icelandic Medical Association.



## Updated research finds working time reduction has been a huge success in Iceland

[Research](#) by ALDA and the Autonomy Institute offers new insight into the programme of working time reduction that has taken place in Iceland, following successful public sector trials in the country.

The offer of shorter hours has been widespread. In the two years prior to being surveyed, more than half (59%) of workers were offered reduced working hours.

These changes have had significant worker inputs: in the vast majority (80%) of instances, workers say they were consulted on how reduced hours were implemented in their workplace.

A large majority of Icelandic workers (78%) are satisfied with their present working time.

97% of workers thought that shorter working hours had made it easier to balance work with their private life, or at least kept the balance the same as before (with more than half, 52%, thinking it had improved).

# Norway

*Johan Petter Andresen, Rødt*

## Kindergarten employees working 30 hours a week report better health

The experiment with reduced working hours may lead to lower sick leave in the long term, [a new report](#) shows.

Rambøll has visited kindergartens in Stavanger and Oslo twice to observe the effect of reduced working hours. In the recent interim report, the researchers write:

"As employees in the pilot's kindergartens experience less negative health impact than employees in the control kindergartens, it may mean that reduced working hours can help reduce sick leave."

This is good news in a sector struggling with increasingly higher rates of sick leave.

"If one feels better at work, and well-being and quality of life increase, one can hope that sick leave will decrease. But I cannot guarantee that it actually happens," said kindergarten director Ada Sexe-Lysvik.

She works at Lillo Gård kindergarten in the Sagene district of Oslo. They are one of two kindergartens participating in a two-year trial project with a 30-hour work week. For the past year, they have had six-hour workdays with full pay.

The researchers are also following Gullfaks kindergarten in Stavanger, which has a four-day work week. In addition, the researchers have conducted the same studies in two similar kindergartens that are not part of the experiment and thus have regular working hours. The most significant difference the researchers at Rambøll find is that employees in the kindergartens with reduced working hours experience lower negative health impact.

**Fact box: Experiment with 30-hour work week**

- Employees at Lillo Gård kindergarten in Sagene, Oslo (15 employees, 56 children) have six-hour workdays.
- Employees at Gullfaks kindergarten in Tasta, Stavanger (15 employees, 60 children) have four-day work weeks.

The work weeks in both kindergartens are 30 hours per week, compared to the previous 37.5 hours.

Rambøll Management Consulting has been commissioned to conduct follow-up research related to the pilot project on reduced working hours.

They recently published the second of a total of three reports, with preliminary results from the research.

The pilot projects were initiated by Oslo and Stavanger municipalities in the summer of 2023 and will conclude in the summer of 2025.

# Poland

## Tusk government promises to shorten working hours

The Polish government has [confirmed](#) that it will amend the Labour Code to reduce working hours – either by introducing a four-day week or a seven-hour day – before its mandate ends in 2027, Polish media reported at the end of August.

## Polish city introduces 35-hour working week for officials

A Polish city has [announced](#) that its officials will now only work a 35-hour week instead of the traditional 40 hours. Their pay will remain the same.

The new system, which began in September, was introduced by the mayor of Włocławek, Krzysztof Kukucki, in keeping with a policy that his party, The Left (Lewica), wants to implement across Poland.

Employees of the town hall in Włocławek – a city of around 100,000 in central Poland – will be able to choose how they want the change to affect their schedule. They can either work an hour less each day or opt for a four-day working week. Either way, their salaries will not change.

# Spain

## Trade unions hope that the 37.5-hour work week will be approved in the spring

- Social partners are still discussing an agreement with the government to deploy the legislation that will allow the country to move to a 37.5-hour working week in two years, as agreed by the progressive government conformed by the Socialist Party and Sumar.

CC OO and UGT will [focus](#) their negotiations with the Labour Department to encourage the working time reduction to be implemented early in 2025. They are also negotiating for a digital work-time record all companies must use, connected with the Ministry of Labour. It is hoped this would prevent companies from manipulating working time data from their employees.

# United Kingdom

*Joe Ryle, 4 Day Week Campaign*

## One thousand workers start new four-day week trial

One thousand workers in the UK will get extra time off with no loss of pay in the [first official pilot](#) by the four-day week campaign under the new Labour government.

The campaign will aim to present the findings from the latest pilot to the Labour government in the summer, as momentum builds for a shorter working week.

The trial will involve 17 businesses, who will mostly implement the four-day week, although some have opted to test a shorter working week or a nine-day fortnight, in which workers get an extra day off every two weeks. Four more businesses will join the trial later. This time, the trial will incorporate flexibility, with employers being encouraged to experiment with alternatives and elaborations to the 100-80-100 model.

## New Four-Day Week Councils Pilot Programme launched for 2025

The 4 Day Week Campaign and the Autonomy Institute are partnering to [launch](#) a new four-day week Pilot Programme for local councils in 2025, building on the success of South Cambridgeshire District Council's trial and the government's [new approach](#) of giving councils more autonomy over workforce management.

The pilot programme will kick off in March 2025 with training and workshops led by experts and consultants that have supported hundreds of companies in the public, private and third sector to successfully adopt a four-day working week, with no loss in pay.

## **Tube drivers in London close to winning a reduced hours four-day week through trade union negotiations**

Tube drivers have been [offered](#) a “ground-breaking” deal including a four-day week and paid meal breaks in return for calling off their strikes, it can be revealed.

Aslef, the union that represents the majority of Tube drivers, says the changes mean that drivers will be at work for 2.5 hours a week less than at present.

They will also receive an extra week’s paid paternity leave.

## **Labour rejects civil servants’ demand to run first Government departments four-day week trial**

Civil servants who are members of the PCS union have been [campaigning](#) for a four-day working week and on Wednesday released research they said could save the government £21.4m a year in one department.

However, the Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s official spokesman said it is “not government policy to support a four-day working week”.

“The civil service is working to deliver for working people day in, day out,” he added.

## **Director of the 4 Day Week Campaign gives keynote speech at the London School of Economics**

You can watch Joe Ryle’s speech on working time reduction [here](#).



## Update from the Public and Commercial Services Union Scotland

*Ruby Gibson, PCS*

In 2022 and 2023, PCS members working in employers that come under the Scottish Government's Pay policy won landmark pay deals that included a move to a 35-hour week with no loss of pay or terms and conditions. Since then, workers in the Scottish civil service and the justice, culture, enterprise, skills and tourism sectors have reduced their working time to 35 hours.

One of the biggest wins is in the National Galleries of Scotland where PCS members working as security shift staff won a new roster. This roster, created by the workers doing the job, has achieved an 'out of the box' way to meaningfully reduce working time for operational staff. Their weekly hours have reduced from 42 to 33.75 with no loss of pay or terms and conditions. To achieve an annualised 35-hour week, they are required to work 6 floating shifts a year to help provide operational cover.

These wins are testament to the industrial action that PCS members took in the face of the cost-of-living crisis in 2022.

In addition to this, PCS members in two employers, South of Scotland Enterprise and Accountant in Bankruptcy, are involved in the ongoing Scottish public sector pilot of a 4-day, 32-hour week with no loss of pay. PCS members in SOSE have not only benefited from the reduction in working time with regard to well-being and work life balance, but have proven that the operational requirements of their roles can be fulfilled within 4 days, 32 hours. When the pilot results are published in 2025, PCS union members will be looking to advance and win their campaign for a 4-day week.

# Europe

## **Eurofound literature review on working time reduction with a focus on the four-day week**

See [Eurofound's literature review](#), written by Jean Yves Boulin, on working time reduction with a focus on the four-day week. The review looks at academic and third sector research on the subject, and encourages further evaluation work, building on the critics on methods by which previous evaluations have been carried out.

## **European Commission Joint Research Centre publication on working time reduction**

The JRC have [published](#) a report titled: 'The Working Times They Are A-Changing: Trends in Six EU countries (1992-2022)', by Sergio Torrejón Pérez, Enrique Fernández-Macías and Ignacio González-Vázquez.

"The results indicate:

- 1) that reductions in working time are primarily attributable to an increased prevalence of non-standard forms of work, mainly part-time work;
- 2) that part-time work has expanded mainly due to the feminization of employment and tertiarisation; 3) that full-time workers continue to work more or less the same hours as in the 1980s, given that there are countervailing effects pushing up and down the time they devote to work; and
- 4) that the self-employed work less because part-time self-employment has become more prevalent, although the self-employed continue doing the longest workweeks."

You can read a [summary](#) of the paper on Social Europe.

## **New ETUI publication: Negotiating working time reduction**

A new [paper](#) by A. Piasna, A. Cetrulo and A. Moro investigates the process and outcomes of collectively bargained working time reduction, based on case studies in two large manufacturing firms in Italy.

# Beyond Europe

## Final report published from trials in Brazil

Currently only available in [Portuguese](#), the final report has been published from the working time reduction trials in Brazil. Main results (as translated by the Work-Time Reduction Research Network):

- 56% improvement in project execution;
- 52% improvement in meeting deadlines;
- 60% improvement in engagement;
- 87% report more energy for task completion;
- 44% experience a better work life balance.