

OUR OWN TIME

*The Newsletter of the European Network
for the Fair Sharing of Working Time*

Welcome

December 2023

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

The European Work-Time Network 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 **18th issue**. If you would like to see the previous issues, please use [this link](#).

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

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Call for submissions

The newsletter is dependent on contributions from the Network's members. All members need to provide is a link to the relevant update and a one/two-line explanation in English.

If you would like to become a Lead Contact, or have any information you think should be included in the next newsletter, please contact the Network Coordinator, India, at:

workingtimenetwork.europe@gmail.com

Network Updates

Annual Members' Event

The Network's Annual Members event was held on Monday 23rd October in London.

We discussed country updates on working time reduction, the Network's 2023 activities, future plans for the Network and the 2024 conference.

Please contact our Coordinator, India, if you are interested in receiving the minutes, at: workingtimenetwork.europe@gmail.com.

European Work-Time Network: Rebranding

The European Network for the Fair Sharing of Working Time has rebranded, and is now named the 'European Work-Time Network'.

We are in the process of launching a new website, and formalising as an Association in France. Updates will be shared via email.

Webinar series

The European Work-Time Network's webinar series on working time reduction was held between April and November 2023. Speakers from trade unions, campaigns, academia and business provided updates and insight on progress towards shorter working weeks around Europe.

The final webinar was held on **Wednesday 29th November, on AI & the Algorithmic Management of Work**. Agnieszka Piasna and James Muldoon presented.

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

The webinar series will continue in 2024. If you are interested in speaking on a panel in one of these webinars, please contact our Coordinator, India, at workingtimenetwork.europe@gmail.com.

Austria

General Updates

The new chairman of the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) called for a 32-hour week in his election campaign, but the chance of the party winning a general election soon seems unlikely.

The Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB) and the union GPA have both published in support of working time reduction ([here](#) and [here](#)), however the ÖGB was unable to come to a common demand in the autumn.

The ÖGB [surveyed](#) its members on the '90 for 80' model, whereby if four employees voluntarily reduce their working hours to 80 percent and a fifth person is taken on, the salary is reduced to only 90 percent. The difference is borne by the AMS. 64% are in favour.

The two unions in the public health sector called for a reduction in working hours in the summer, but the issue did not make it into the official letter to start negotiations.

In the metal and steel industries, shift workers receive a '[solidarity bonus](#)', but it is rarely used. There is a 38.5 hours per week which operates in shifts (with the solidarity bonus model 32). In the chemical industry workers work 36 hours per week in shifts.

Belgium

Low uptake of four-day week compressed hours policy

[According](#) to a survey conducted by the HR service company Acerta, only 0.8% of Belgian employees have transitioned to the full-time four-day work week since the 2022 Labour Deal. This equates to one in 130 full-time workers.

Employees work either 9.5 hours a day for a 38-hour workweek, or 10 hours a day for a 40-hour workweek.

France

France24 video feature

Their video [looks at](#) companies opting for a four-day week across France:

“What if we worked a four-day week? In France, the idea is gaining ground. Some business owners have already made the switch. From company attractiveness to employees’ wellbeing, the formula seems to be working. We take a closer look at this new working schedule and explore which sectors are implementing it.”

Germany

IG Metall launched calls for a 32-hour four-day week in the steel industry

The union is calling for working time reduction for four reasons:

1. Employment security for the steel workers against the risk of job losses accompanying the transition from coking coal to hydrogen.
2. Contribution to the fight against the climate crisis through decarbonisation.
3. Better compatibility of family and work through a shorter full time week.
4. More gender equality by the pro-rata increase of the wages for the part-time workers (who are disproportionately women) by a shortening of full time jobs with full wage-compensation.

Railway workers' union GDL calling for a 35-hour week for shift workers

In their ongoing collective bargaining agreements, GDL - the railway workers' trade union - is demanding a 35-hour work week for shift workers (who make up the majority of their workforce).

Ver.di (services trade union) updates

Anke Thorein, Union Secretary

Ver.di has [won](#) a 35-hour work week for members at the Eisenberger hospital in East Germany. Access a flyer on this [here](#).

Collective bargaining for around 25,000 film professionals began on October 12 between the United Services Union (ver.di), the actors' union BFFS and the employers' association Produzentenallianz. Together, the unions are demanding a new working time model with a four-day week, shorter daily working hours and weekends off. The list of demands also includes a binding industry-wide company pension scheme and curbing the use of generative AI, i.e. the replacement of human creativity and expression with machine processes, similar to the negotiations of the US film unions.

In the coming collective bargaining there are plans for more federal and municipal marginings.

Ver.di will organise an opinion poll on working time reduction and other issues for its members in 2024.

German four-day week pilot due to launch in February 2024

[Organised](#) by business consultancy company, Intraprenör, and 4 Day Week Global, from September 21, 2023 companies in Germany can sign up to take part in the trial, which will last from February to December 2024. The trial will be similar to that which took place in the UK in 2022.

Hungary

Quarterly update

Benedikt Lehmann, Eötvös Loránd University

In response to trade union initiatives, several employers in Hungary have decided to reduce working hours by closing their businesses over the Christmas period. The Lidl chain was the first among the country's present commercial chains to announce the closure for Christmas Eve. The drugstore chain, Rossmann, followed Penny Market in also reporting that their employees would have the day off to celebrate with their families instead of working.

In addition to these announcements, there is a recent proposal from the minority party in the governing coalition to modify the leave entitlement for employees with children. The motivation behind this proposal is similar to the introduction of Christmas closing, aiming to improve the balance between career and family. The suggestion involves granting additional leave and parental leave at the employee's requested time, provided that they notify the employer at least 15 days before the scheduled leave.

Finally, the research group, MTA-ELTE Lendület New Vision, which investigates the desirability and feasibility of working time reduction in Hungary, was recently interviewed for an article in the magazine, Qubit. The article discusses the possibility that reduced working hours can contribute to a more environmentally friendly transformation of society, while also highlighting shortcomings that employees face with employer-led working time reduction schemes in Hungary.

Italy

Lamborghini introduces four-day week for production workers

Lamborghini has [reached](#) a deal with unions to introduce a four-day week for its production workers, following an agreement between management and the FIOM and FIM-CISL unions.

Production workers on a rotating two-shift schedule will alternate a five-day week with a four-day week, cutting 22 days of work each year overall, the unions said.

Those on a three-shift rota, which includes night shifts too, will have a five-day week alternated with two four-day weeks, cutting their yearly working days by 31.

Eyewear maker EssilorLuxottica agrees four-day week trial with trade union

EssilorLuxottica has [signed](#) an agreement with its unions to introduce the four-day working week on an experimental basis for twenty weeks a year. The agreement currently concerns only some departments of six Italian factories.

The experiment is included in a union contract for 2024-2026 signed between EssilorLuxottica and the Filctem Cgil, Femca Cisl and Uiltec Uil unions.

Portugal

Private sector pilot finished at the end of November

The intermediate report on the Portuguese 4-day week pilot was [released](#) last week.

The report studies 41 companies.

In 58.5% of companies, workers had one day off per week, while 41.5% of companies opted for a nine-day fortnight. After four months, the organizations rated the overall trial an average of 7.7/10.

As for the workers' experience, within three months, the frequency of negative mental health symptoms decreased significantly, with anxiety falling by 21%, fatigue dropping by 23%, and insomnia or sleep problems reducing by 19%.

The percentage of workers who struggled with balancing work and family responsibilities fell from 46% to a remarkable 8%, while almost two thirds (65%) of workers spent more time with their families after the reduction in working hours.

Spain

Month-long four-day week pilot in Valencia boosts workers' health

The pilot programme that [took place](#) across Valencia in April and May 2023, and saw 360,000 workers experience a month of four-day weeks, lowered stress, reduced fuel emissions and benefited children.

Sweden

Swedish Social Democrats preparing proposals on working time reduction

The opposition party of Sweden are [reportedly](#) preparing working time reduction policies, linked to possible benefits related to workers' health.

The next Swedish general elections are scheduled for 2026.

United Kingdom

Autonomy report on AI automation and working time reduction

Autonomy has [published](#) a report on how the latest AI technology can lead to a nation of shorter hours, without reductions in livelihoods or productivity.

It finds that:

- A four-day week (32-hours as full-time equivalent) could be achieved within a decade for 8.8 million workers (28% of the workforce in Great Britain)
- 88% of the labour market in Great Britain (27.9 million workers) could have working hours reduced by at least 10%, should Large Language Models be introduced into workplaces and used as the basis for increased free time.

PCS trade union at the Department for Farming and Rural Affairs are calling for a four-day week

Civil servants working at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs have [submitted a petition](#) calling for bosses to trial a four-day week for staff.

The bid is backed by the PCS union and the 4 Day Week Campaign and seeks a pilot scheme that would run across the entire department to test benefits to productivity and staff welfare in what would be a first for the UK civil service.

PCS, which is the civil service's biggest union, said its proposal would involve a 20% reduction in working hours for staff with no loss of wages.

South Cambridgeshire Council four-day week trial continues to defy central government calls to stop

Since the council [started](#) its four-day week trial, staff turnover has reduced by 36% and sickness by 33% at a council which introduced a four day week, according to a report. Projected net cost of agency staff covering vacancies has reduced by £776,000.

South Cambridgeshire District Council began the trial in January and has ignored government calls for it to end.

Four-Day Week Campaign UK's crowdfunder launched!

We've [proved](#) that a 4-day week works. Now we need your help to make it a reality for everyone.

This Christmas, become a 4-Day Week Champion and [donate](#) 1 hours wage a month to the campaign.

TEDX talk from Joe Ryle, Director of the UK's Four-Day Week Campaign

Watch Joe's TEDX talk at the University of Leeds [here](#)!

Europe

ETUI Report on Working Time in the Manufacturing Sector

Torsten Müller at the ETUI has published a report on working time in the manufacturing sector.

The report reviews working time arrangements across Europe, and illustrates the importance of collective union agreements in ensuring shorter weekly and annual working hours.

Read the report [here](#).

Call for Papers - SASE Conference 27-29 June 2024

At the next SASE conference, taking place in Limerick, Ireland, 27-29 June 2024, we will be hosting a series of panels on working time reduction.

To submit a paper, go to [this link](#) and click on the first mini-conference MC01: Working Time Reduction: Towards a more balanced, just and sustainable economic life . Deadline for submissions is 19 Jan 2024.

This mini-conference will provide an opportunity to set out what we already know on WTR, how new evidence is affecting scholars' understanding of work, and what future research agendas should explore.

Beyond Europe

Autonomy report on AI automation and working time reduction - US edition

Autonomy has [published](#) a US-edition of our UK report on how the latest AI technology can lead to a nation of shorter hours, without reductions in livelihoods or productivity.

It finds that:

- A four-day week (32-hours as full-time equivalent) could be achieved within a decade for 35 million workers (28% of the US workforce)
- 71% of the US labour market (128 million workers) could have working hours reduced by at least 10%, should Large Language Models be introduced into workplaces and used as the basis for increased free time.

South Africa's four-day week trial deemed a success

South Africa's six-month four-day week pilot, [involving](#) 28 companies, ended in September, and was the first in Africa.

The results indicate a success in terms of employer and employee satisfaction, workplace productivity and overall well-being, with 92% of participating companies planning to retain the new schedule.

Organisations rated the overall trial a 7.7/10, reporting great satisfaction with business productivity, performance, and ability to attract employees. They also observed an 11% average reduction in resignations and a 9% reduction in absenteeism over the course of the pilot, with revenue increasing by a weighted average of 10.5%.

Former US President, Barack Obama, speaks in support of a four-day week.

Given automation and industrial shifts, Obama [discussed](#) the merits of a universal basic income and shorter working weeks in a recent speech.

UAW strike, calling for 40% pay rise and a four-day week ends with pay deal

UAW workers, who were on strike for six weeks starting in September, have [ended](#) their strike and reached an agreement with General Motors, Ford and Stellantis.

Workers will receive a 25% pay rise of four years, including improvements for pensions and the right to protest the closure of plants.

It appears the four-day week was dropped from negotiations.