OUR OWN TIME
European Work-Time Network Newsletter

September 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 **21st 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.

The European Work-Time Network

Autonomy

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Network Updates

Next webinar - 13th November

Our next webinar will be on 13th November 2024, with Mark Bergfeld from UNI Europa presenting global research on working time in the cleaning sector.

Sign up here



You can watch the recordings of our previous webinars on our website here.

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Conference 2024



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

Register to attend here.

View our agenda and speaker list here.

In person registrations are full, but you can join a waiting list in case of cancellations. Online attendance is available.

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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Germany

Margareta Steinrücke, Attac! Germany

Work-time reduction manifesto launched

A network of organisations concerned with work-time reduction, including attac-AG ArbeitFairTeilen, initiated by the ISM (Institut Solidarische Moderne) launched a manifesto on work-time reduction as a crucial project of a socio-ecological transformation.

40th anniversary of union action for a 35-hour week

2024 is the 40th anniversary of the successful fight for the 35-hours week among certain trade unions. In 1984, IG Metall striked for 6.5 weeks and the IG Druck&Papier (Printers Union) striked for 13 weeks for a 35 hour week. This progressed in three steps: 38.5 hours, 37 hours and 35 hours in 1995. There will be anniversary celebrations titled “40 Jahre Kampf um die 35-Stundenwoche - ein Blick zurück nach vorn", including on 24th October 2024 in the trade union house in Bremen at 24.10.24.

Employers’ associations push for longer working hours

Given the shortage of skilled workers, employers’ associations and some conservative and liberal politicians are waging an angry campaign against Generation Z and their alleged laziness. They are advocating for the abolition of the 8-hour day and the reduction of the minimum rest period from 11 to 9 hours. They’re trying to influence the Ministry for Labour to change the working hours act towards total flexibility of working hours.

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Amendments to the Working Hours Act

The Ministry of Labour is in the process of changing the Working Hours Act. This includes the national implementation of the ECJ ruling on recording working time, to make overtime better paid and make the employment of older people more attractive.

GDL win a 35-hour week for shift workers

The railway workers' trade union, GDL, fought successfully via several strikes for a 35 hour-week that will be implemented in full in 2029 for all shift workers.

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. After a large survey of its members, the preparation of the demands is now underway.

The focus of IG Metall's ongoing collective bargaining round is on wage increases. Regarding work-time reduction, there are only plans to convert bonuses into days off for those with care obligations and in shift work.

The trade union of chemical workers, IG BCE, agreed in the last collective bargaining round one extra day off per year for trade union members.

Automotive industry challenges raises possibility of 28-hour week

The crisis in the German automotive industry, especially VW's announcement that it will cut up to 30,000 jobs, is leading to the reconsideration of the four-day/28-hours week, which already saved 30,000 jobs at VW in 1994.

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Working time society symposium

On 10th and 11th October 2024, there will be a symposium of the working time society (Arbeitszeitgesellschaft) in Berlin on the issue "Innovative Arbeitszeitmodelle" and the BAUA (Bundesanstalt für Arbeitsschutz und Arbeitsmedizin/the official Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health) will present its bi-annual working hours report.

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Hungary

Benedikt Lehmann, Eötvös Loránd University

Two major trials finished in 2024

Examples of the four-day workweek, or working time reduction more generally, remain rare in Hungary. In terms of public awareness, only two major trials—by Telekom and the bookstore chain Libri—have garnered significant attention.

Both trials reported mixed results. Telekom's trial was discontinued in February 2024 because they were unable to uniformly apply a four-day schedule to all employees. In addition, running parallel four- and five-day schedules was considered a long-term business risk.

Libri's trial, which began in October 2022 with 137 office workers for a six-month period, was restarted in June 2023, this time involving 120 employees from the central office. These workers were required to work 8.5 hours per day over four days each week. However, obstacles remained, such as the need for IT departments to support stores that continued operating seven days a week.

Additionally, workloads during peak seasons forced employees to return to five-day weeks.

This smaller trial ended in June, and the results were expected to be analysed over the summer months, though no updates have been reported yet. It will be interesting to see what, if anything, is published in the coming months and whether the company envisions a future for shorter working hours.

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Iceland

Guðmundur Haraldsson, ALDA

Renewed labour contracts have mostly been finalised. See newsletter #19 for private sector updates.

Public sector agreements signed

Agreements in the public sector have been signed. For municipal workers, the base working week going forward will be 36 hours for workers in regular full-time work. Minimum number of paid holidays per year will be 30. The terms are similar for government workers.

Increase in labour productivity since work-time reduction implemented

According to Committee on Labour Market Statistics publication this spring, labour productivity in Iceland has increased by 1.5% a year on average the last five years, the highest of the Nordics. This is noteworthy as critics of the reduced hours initiative repeatedly claimed productivity would not increase in relation to reduced hours.

Research forthcoming updating on work-time reduction impact

In October, ALDA and the Autonomy Institute will publish research to update the study released in 2021 analysing the impact of work-time reduction on the Icelandic public sector involved in shorter working week trials.

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Italy

Italy comes 27th out of 30 in Work Life Balance index

CGIL responds to Italy being one of the lowest scoring countries in the European Life-Work Balance Index by human capital platform Remote.

The ‘average working hours’ score includes part-time hours.

Poste Italiane paves way for four-day week and endometriosis leave

Poste Italiane, Italy's postal service provider and the country's largest employer with 120,000 staff, renewed its collective agreement at the end of July. The agreement makes it possible to trial a four-day week in certain departments and makes steps forward on work-life balance. It also introduces leave for women suffering from severe endometriosis. The agreement is due to be approved by the workers' assemblies in September.

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Netherlands

Yvette Becker, FNV

4-day week a priority for FNV in 2025

FNV has put the 4-day work week as a priority in the terms of our employment agenda ('arbeidsvoorwaardenagenda'). This means it will be one of the focus subjects in the upcoming year.

FNV is the largest union in the Netherlands representing 22 sectors from Transport to Metal to the health sector.

We believe the 4DWW will lead to:

1. More labour supply

   Absenteeism falls, employees are less likely to retire early, part-timers will work a few more hours

2. Productivity and satisfaction increases. Workload does not increase.

This sounds impossible, but by adopting smarter working practices and taking a critical look at whether the time we spend really adds value, and deploying technology intelligently, we expect to be able to largely finance the four-day working week already.

3. Attracting and retaining more staff

Because of how work is currently organised, many workers in NL of every generation struggle to sustain work until retirement. We have the longest length of working life in the whole EU. We are getting older and many women are working. Our way of life has changed. Work is getting faster and more complex. And yet work remains largely organised, as it was in the 19th century. Is it because there is no other way, or because we cannot imagine it any other way?

Let's test how it can be done differently. Not based on feelings, but based on evidence. We also have a landing page with more information and a link to our report: [4-daagse werkweek - FNV]

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CNV backs a 30-hour workweek

The Christian National Trade Union Federation is advocating for a 30-hour work week to support work-life balance, increased productivity, educed absenteeism and reduced burnout.

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Norway

Johan Petter Andresen, Rødt

Successful strike by aeroplane cabin personnel

A strike by cabin personnel on airplanes in August was successful.

The main result for working time were 12 extra free weekends per year. The agreement also includes better conditions for meals during duty and a good increase in basic wages.

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Portugal

Pedro Gomes, University of Birkbeck

Final report of the Portuguese four-day week pilot translated

The final report on the Portuguese Pilot came out on the 24th of June (in Portuguese). The English version has been published here.

You can access a summary version with infographics in multiple languages at the links below:

- English
- French
- Italian
- Spanish
- German
- Portuguese

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Spain

Joan Sanchis, University of Valencia

National legislation on work-time reduction in discussions

Social partners are still discussing an agreement with the government to deploy the legislation that will allow the country to move to a 37,5h/week in two years, as agreed by the progressive government conformed by the Socialist Party and Sumar.

There has been a recent offer by the government to social partners to put in place a support program for small and medium companies, that would include subsidies for new hires and training resources for those who apply for it.

Social partners are still discussing all the details and they should be able to come to an agreement in the coming months.

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Sweden

Hampus Andersson, Kommunal

Opportunities for national legislation

In Sweden, the debate on working time reduction remains highly topical. A working group within the Social Democrats, the leading opposition party, have proposed reducing the standard working week from 40 to 35 hours by 2035. This proposal will be discussed at the party congress in spring 2025.

The major question is whether such changes should be legislated or negotiated through collective agreements and at which level. Employers are strongly against legislation, preferring to address the issue through union negotiations. Within the unions, opinions are split between those supporting legislation and those favouring collective agreements. Strategies for the 2025 bargaining round are expected to be finalised by October/November 2024.

Increasing work-time reduction agreements at the local level

Locally, Sweden has seen an increase in agreements for working time reductions, especially in shift work. Nearly all municipalities in the public sector have adopted solutions for continuous weekend work, leading to weekly hours between 26 and 32. These arrangements are typically introduced by employers to address staffing challenges without union concessions.

Successful healthcare union strike for shorter working hours

Recently, the Vårdförbundet union, representing healthcare professionals such as nurses, went on strike to push for shorter working hours and reduced overtime. The strike led to a new agreement that includes reduced hours for those working unsocial hours and measures to manage excessive overtime.

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United Kingdom

Aliyah Davies, 4-Day Week Campaign

UK Autumn Pilot

The 4 Day Week Campaign and flexible working consultancy Timewise have partnered to launch a second four-day week pilot in the UK this Autumn, with research support from University of Cambridge, Boston College and the Autonomy Institute. The six-month pilot is scheduled to begin on November 4 with training and workshops starting in mid-September.

Employment bill for flexible working arrangements

The UK Labour Government is bringing forward an Employment Bill which will increase workers rights to flexible working arrangements from day one of employment, including the right to work a four-day week using a compressed hours model. It is suggested that this new legislation will make it harder for employers to refuse flexible working requests.

Rail union negotiates for 35-hour week

Transport Salaried Staffs' Association has included demands for a 35-hour work week and 38 days' holiday for its members in its latest negotiating round.

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Europe

New EPSU country case studies

See EPSU's case studies of working time reduction for Poland, Czechia, Slovakia and Hungary. This is the 6th in their series on the subject.

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!

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Beyond Europe

UNI study on cleaners' work schedules

UNI, the global union, has published research titled "Working Against the Clock: A global survey on how cleaners' work schedules impact their health, safety and well-being.". The study involved over 2500 professional cleaners from 32 countries, across 3 continents.

The survey focused on the effects of working schedules on their health, wellbeing and lives.

You can access the report here. Mark Bergfeld from UNI Europa will be presenting this research at the Network's November webinar.

UAW President supports 32-hour workweek bill

Shawn Fain, the president of the United Auto Workers in the US, testified during a Senate Health, Education, Labour and Pensions hearing earlier this year.

He spoke in support of Bernie Sanders' new 32-hour workweek bill.

Autonomy report on AI automation and working time reduction in Canada

The Autonomy Institute has published a report on how the latest AI technology can lead to a nation of shorter hours in Canada, without reductions in livelihoods or productivity. This follows similar publications on the US and Canada.

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