OUR OWN TIME
European Work-Time Network Newsletter

January 2025

Bonus issue!
Member updates

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 bonus issue of our newsletter includes country updates on working time reduction from our members, which were shared at our conference in October 2024.

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 see the previous issues, please use this link. 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

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 can 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. You can read the country updates from our members below.

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).

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Belgium

Mario Bucci, CNE

At the end of 2023 the Belgian government launched a pilot of the 4-day week with compressed hours (38 hours, four 9.5-hour days). As an incentive, participating companies would benefit from a reduction of their contributions to social security for the test period (12 months). The pilot is supported by the Federal Bureau du Plan and Gent University who provide assistance to companies and monitoring of the process. After a lengthy promotional phase only five organisations have joined the pilot. All of these organisations are from the non-profit/charity/NGO sector.

The Belgian Employers Federation has publicly manifested its firm opposition to any form of working time reduction. Influential Belgian employers are confronted with the problem of labour shortages, and they believe working time reduction would only aggravate that problem.

In order to deal with labour shortages, recently the federal government has introduced incentives to encourage individual workers to either postpone their retirement or to continue work after their retirement. This is in addition to general measures that raise the retirement age for all workers, similar to other European countries.

While preserving the freedom of individual companies to negotiate different forms of working time reduction, the broader tendency in Belgium seems to be to promote a work time increase (over the course of a professional career).

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France

Adrien Tusseau, Reseau Roosevelt

In October 2024, a four-day week private sector pilot was launched by 4-Day Week Global and a university business school. The pilot targeted 50 companies to transition to working time reduction.

The Metropole of Lyon launched a four-day week experiment, but some experiments are compressed hours, not genuine working time reduction.

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Germany

Margareta Steinrücke, Attac! Germany; Katrin Mohr, IG Metall; Philipp Frey, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology; Beate Zimpelmann, Hochschule Bremen

In 2024, VW announced laying off workers and closing down factories due to underutilisation of labour - not selling enough cars. The company terminated a collective bargaining agreement which protected employment. IG Metall was fighting this, with precedent: in the mid-1990s they negotiated a 28.8-hour work week to save 30,000 jobs, widely regarded as a success.

There are just over 40 companies in the four-day week private sector pilot in Germany. The majority went for a 36-hour four-day week, compressed to 9-hour days. 20% of participating organisations decided to not continue. You can read the results here.

Ver.di is demanding working time reduction in the public sector, starting negotiations in January 2025. They are calling for 8% wage increases, 3 days additional 'free' time that is not annual leave, & 1 extra day for union members. IG Metall is also making demands.

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Greece

Maria Jaidopulu, Nicos Poulantzas Institute

Only bad news from Greece - 6-day week legislation has passed, and staff can now work up to two jobs, with up to 12-hours in total per day. Compressed working hours are available.

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Iceland

Guðmundur Haraldsson, ALDA

A baseline working week of 36 hours in the public sector has been negotiated, which is formalising what people are doing already. Number of holidays has also increased annually for government and municipal workers.

The private sector is not willing to negotiate much - there was a strike in an airport about working conditions (including patterns) involving 150 people. Employers organised a work-ban across the union (tens of thousands of workers), called off strike and negotiated but didn't win.

Labour productivity in Iceland has increased 1.5% per year, the highest number from the Nordic countries. Iceland has historically lagged behind but the increase is happening post COVID and following a reduction in working hours.

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Italy

Giorgio Maran, CGIL

At the company level, there are some instances of a 30-hour, four-day week being negotiated.

For sectoral progress, mechanical workers have negotiated a reduction from 40 hours to 32 hours.

National contracts have seen a weekly reduction in hours over recent years, including to 36 hours per week in the public sector and 37 hours per week in the credit/banking sector. On 18th October there was a national strike where union Mechanica in the automotive sector (metal workers/mechanics) called for a 32-hour week.

A bill was tabled in the national government – 3 bills for WTR from 3 parties, arrived at an agreement on one – but it was blocked by the majority in government. The bill had its limitations, including giving money to companies to reduce working hours.

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Netherlands

Yvette Becker, FNV

We have seen momentum build for the four-day working week in some promising places. This should be focused initially where the usefulness and need for working time reduction is clear, where there is broad support among our members and where this is exemplary for other sectors. This means that we do not have to start working on the four-day working week everywhere at once, but that we can look purposefully for opportunities to get this issue and people moving. So it will have to be assessed per (sub-)sector and/or collective agreement route whether it is promising to commit to the four-day working week. We will continue to lead the debate in the coming period based on our knowledge and experience and relevant collective agreement processes that are working on this.

The four-day working week is, for us, a significant work time reduction of 10-20% which we want to finance by working smarter at both company and employee level.

Since the launch of our agenda, there has been a lot of enthusiasm and activity around this commitment at various levels: there are questions from sectors/companies; requests to feed societal debate & input is needed for political commitment.

We developed a landing page, research report, infosheet, presentations and research, business cases, action plans, collective bargaining texts, questionnaires and research has been done in Day Care, Hospitals and ING.

We see options for pilots (and have serious discussions with employers) at an insurance company (8,000 people), ING (15,000 NL people), hospital sector, municipalities, metal sector, public transport and construction sector.

Because of all the publicity the Dutch ministry was asked by the right wing party to answer questions about this. And at the same time members and non-members have contacted us, because they are enthusiastic about working time reduction. We have three different campaign teams and a social media team starting on this subject.

We are very busy educating union leaders. If someone wants to share best practices it would be nice! The next step is to

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develop innovative shift schemes for 2, 3, 4 and 5 shift workers.

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Spain

Joan Sanchis, University of Valencia

At the regional level, in Valencia, a four-day week programme started 2 years ago by the former progressive government. The second round of the programme is now. There's a subsidy for companies to reduce their hours to 32 per week, with 20 companies in the current round - which has decreased since the first round of the programme.

At the state level - Ministry of Industry for industrial firms has a four-day week programme with more money. There are subsidies and resources to finance technology, consultancy & training for participating organisations. Companies must reduce the working week by at least 10%. 20 industrial companies across Spain are participating, and this is due to be evaluated by a state body. The government recently commissioned a significant report, for €100,000, on the four-day week.

There's a national debate to reduce the working week by law to 37.5 hours within 2 years - there's commitment from the government, coordinated by socialist party and the alternative left party. Currently negotiating with social partners, the commission is managing this. SMEs are against it, but big companies are less opposed. There would be provision to help companies adapt. 37.5 is the average working time currently, but this would be a big change for tourism, the service sector, etc.

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Sweden

Hampus Andersson, Kommunal

A report came out in Spring 2024 from Kommunal on working time reduction.

There's a working group in the Social Democratic Party - the biggest party in Swedish politics but in opposition - on policy proposals for the future (Hampus is a part of it), proposing advocating for working time reduction and a national reduction to 35 hours by 2035 via a gradual reduction. Allowing the publication of this & discussing it at national government level is a major shift.

There was a unanimous decision at trade union confederation level for pushing for WTR in Spring 2024, and accepted motions to push towards working time reduction. If the trade unions don't push for it politically, next year's Social Democratic Party congress won't accept the policy proposal. Public sector unions think it needs to be a national issue; other industries are less in favour, most things regulated by collective agreements.

There is a need for political and union support to get this through - and a risk that the trade union congress doesn't push for it centrally and it falls through.

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Switzerland

Mirjam Brunner, UNIA

UNIA organised a conference on working time reduction in October 2024, discussing the topic with members and identifying demands by sector. There was a better-than-expected turnout, which is encouraging.

UNIA has supported a manifesto for shorter working time - in German, French, Italian - to sign to show that the demand is supported by many stakeholders in Switzerland.

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United Kingdom

Aliyah Davies, 4 Day Week Campaign; Ruby Gibson, PCS Scotland; Grace King Western, Autonomy Institute

England

There is a PCS campaign for a four-day, 32-hour week in the government Department for Environment. UNISON, the UK's largest union, passed a motion demanding legislative action encouraging employers to adopt a four-day week.

There was the first local council trial of a four-day week in South Cambridgeshire – and the Council Cabinet voted to make it permanent. The Council needs to pursue a consultation process to finalise, and the final decision will be made at the end of 2025. A report analysing results showed overwhelmingly positive outcomes.

An Academy Trust introduced a 9-day fortnight for teachers, an early example of working in an education setting.

The 4 Day Week Campaign launched a smaller Autumn pilot, with the first trials starting early November. An evaluation report will be published summer next year and presented to the UK Labour Government.

Angela Rayner, Deputy Prime Minister, has proposed a law that people can request their employer offer them compressed hours, which the government has attempted to sell as a 'four-day week' policy. There is a concern about it undermining actual four-day efforts.

Wales

Working hours of public sector staff is devolved to the Welsh Government. The government set up a committee to look at working time reduction, which earlier in 2024 released a report recommending the government establish a public sector trial in collaboration with unions, employers etc. The Minister currently responsible for this is a big advocate for the 4DW.

Scotland

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

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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.

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