OUR OWN TIME
European Work-Time Network Newsletter

September 2025

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 **25th 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.

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Network Updates

Join us!

The European Work-Time Network is open to new members!

We are working for a Europe where the normal full-time working week is shortened, such as a 4-day working week, without reduction of pay. The Network consists of individual and organisational members.

The conditions of membership are as follows:

- Relevant professional or extracurricular interest and/or engagement with working time reduction.
- Subscription to the quarterly newsletter and mailing list (with an annual renewal).
- Contribution (sending updates on national debates, campaigns, trials etc.) to the quarterly newsletter where relevant.
- Attendance at Network events when possible, including monthly webinars and our annual members' event.

The Network's activities consist of:

- Quarterly newsletters
- Monthly webinars
- Biannual conferences
- Annual members' meetings
- Membership coordination

You can find out more and join the Network here.

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EWTN Monthly Webinars

In October, for the next webinar, we'll be discussing 'How a Job Guarantee Can Achieve Working Time Reduction', with Charles Stevenson (Autonomous University of Barcelona). This will take place on **29th October at 13:00 CET.** Sign-up here.

November's webinar will be "What Could Work-Time Reduction Mean for the Rest of the World?" with Suryadeepto Nag, a graduate researcher at the University of Lausanne. It will take place November 1pm CET, Wednesday 26th November. Sign up here.

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

These include:

- **March**: Ruby Alden Gibson presented how the PCS union in Scotland won a 35-hour week in the Scottish Government. Watch the recording here.
- **April**: Maria del Carmen Barrera Chamorro presented the EESC's Opinion on Working time, the efficiency of the economy and the well-being of workers. Watch the recording here.
- **June**: Maritza López Novella, Damaris Castro and Brent Bleys to discuss the drivers and challenges of implementing collective working time reduction in Belgium. Watch the recording here.
- **September**: India Burgess and Ana B. Muñoz Ruiz presented research findings from their work in a recent ETUCLEX study exploring working time reduction through collective agreements around Europe. Watch the recording here (passcode: 9CG%h0gU)

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Events

Shortening the Working Week: Stories from Pioneering Entrepreneurs

Pedro Gomes of Birkbeck, University of London, will be hosting a shorter working week event featuring two entrepreneurs talking about their stories shortening the working week at their organisations. The event will take place on the **4th of November at 18.00** in London at Birkbeck Central and online.

You can find out more about the event here, including the registration.

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, Grace, at: workingtimenetwork.europe@gmail.com.

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Germany

Margareta Steinrücke, Attac! Germany

Dr. Angelika Kümmerling, Institut Arbeit und Qualifikation

Debate continues about ‘flexibilising’ working time in Germany

In Germany, a broad debate is ongoing about the extension and complete flexibilisation of working time, promoted by the conservative Chancellor Merz and his Minister for Economic Affairs Reiche. Backed by employers’ associations they accuse Germans, specially Generation Z, of working too little – and demand the abolition of the daily maximum working time of 8 hours in favour of a only weekly maximum working time of 48 hours (as provided for in the EU Working Time Directive).

The Christian Democrat and Social Democrat government has therefore initiated a process to revise the German Working Hours Act in this direction. The social partner dialogue on this is underway.

The reaction of the normal working people has been outrage, particularly given that Germans work 1.2 billion overtime hours, three-fifths of which are unpaid, and occupational physicians warn of the dangerous consequences of extended daily working hours.

The German Trade Unions Confederation DGB has started a campaign against the conservative attempts to abolish the 8-hour day, "Mit Macht für die 8!" ("With Power for the 8!") and the chairman of the chemical worker's union threatened the government with legal action in German and European courts.

Many companies continue to implement the 4-day week or other forms of reduced working hours in order to attract qualified personnel and the trend toward part-time continues. Over 50 % of the teachers already work part-time.

A major driver for reducing working hours to secure employment is the crisis in the automotive and steel industry. The largest automotive supplier ZF has just agreed to a

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32.5-hour week (instead of 35 hours) to secure thousands of jobs.

Hans Böckler Foundation responds to German Chancellor’s proposal for a weekly, not daily, cap on working hours

Responding to recent discussion around changes to working hours limits in Germany, Prof. Dr. Bettina Kohlrausch, Scientific Director of the Economic and Social Science Institute of the Hans Böckler Foundation, sets out issues with the Chancellor’s argument.

> Chancellor Friedrich Merz is convinced that the path to economic strength leads through overtime. The transition from a daily to a weekly maximum working time is intended to enable more flexible working hours and, above all, give women the flexibility to increase their working hours. This raises the simple empirical question: Would a move away from the eight-hour day actually have the potential to increase women's employment volume? Spoiler alert: probably not.
>
> First of all, women work on average around 1.5 hours more per day than men per week. However, they are paid for a smaller proportion of the work. This "extra" is primarily the result of the gender care gap. Working women do an average of eight hours more unpaid care work per week than working men. While improved state support for childcare could help here, it would not solve the problem. The gender care gap does not arise exclusively or predominantly from responsibility for small children, but from activities such as cleaning, cooking, washing and shopping.
>
> Childcare is therefore an important, but by no means sufficient, prerequisite for women to increase their working hours. A fair distribution of unpaid care work is at least as important. In fact, what is needed is a twofold redistribution of time: paid working hours would have to be distributed from men to women, and time for care work would have to be distributed from women to men. Abolishing the maximum daily working time does not create additional time reserves; it merely weakens occupational safety and health.

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Furthermore, the question arises as to how productive people are who work ten hours a day. Research shows that people tend to work more effectively when working fewer hours. This is also supported by numerous studies that show that reducing working hours within a four-day week does not decrease productivity. Longer working hours, on the other hand, lead to more errors and people taking longer to complete certain tasks – thus decreasing productivity. This also applies to knowledge-based activities and office work.

If you want to maximize women's employment potential, there are smarter approaches. Access to continuing education, support for household services, for example, through service vouchers, and reliable childcare. Above all, however, I would like to see a cultural change, as well as institutional and company incentives, so that men finally take on half of the care work.

New research on working time reduction and employee health

Meanwhile, Dr. Angelika Kümmerling has also recently published research papers (in German) on the long-term impacts of working time reduction on employees' health and wellbeing. You can read these through the links here and here.

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Netherlands

How the Dutch do as much in a four-day week as many nations do in five

A recent article from *The Times* discussed how the Netherlands is setting the standard for a shorter working week: more than half of Dutch women and nearly one in five men work fewer than 30 hours a week, while being among the most productive workers.

The article highlighted different companies across the Netherlands that had moved to four-day week and found it beneficial. Companies highlighted increased work-life balance, an increase in utilising AI tools, and increased recruitment.

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Norway

Johan Petter Andresen, activist

Shorter working time in Norwegian surgical ward

A surgical ward at Østfold Hospital in southern Norway has had a pilot project with 100 % pay for 90 % work per week for 6 months (October 2024 to April 2025).

The reduction in working time has delivered positive results for the ward.

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Portugal

Pedro Gomes, Birkbeck, University of London

Portugal's Four-Day Week Reaches the Public Sector: The Azores Pilot

The Regional Government of the Azores — led by AD, a centre-right political alliance — launched a pioneering pilot to test the four-day working week in public administration: the first initiative of its kind in Portugal. The six-month project, prepared over recent months and expected to start in December 2025, is coordinated by Dr Rita Fontinha (Henley Business School) and supported by Prof. Pedro Gomes (Birkbeck, University of London) together with researchers at the University of the Azores.

Building on the lessons of the 2023 private sector pilot, the aim is to evaluate the effects of shorter working time on employees and organisations, while testing different implementation models. Public servants will move from 35 to 32 hours a week, either through a four-day week with eight-hour days or a four-and-a-half-day week, without longer shifts. Participation will be decided by managers in dialogue with staff, but final selection of services — aiming to involve about 500 workers — will ensure diversity of occupations, geographic balance, and operational feasibility. A control group will allow more precise measurement of impacts.

Key principles remain unchanged: no pay cuts and a sizable reduction in working hours. The focus is not simply on doing the same in less time, but on reorganising work collectively to improve productivity, reduce bureaucracy, and foster a more agile, citizen-focused state. Employees will play an active role in redesigning tasks, processes, and goals, ensuring that change is participatory rather than imposed.

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Spain

Joan Sanchis (Universitat de València)

Spanish bill to cut work week to 37.5 hours heads to parliament

On 10th September, the Spanish Parliament voted down a debate on the government's proposal to reduce the maximum legal working week to 37.5 hours. Junts, a small liberal right-wing party, joined forces with the Popular Party and the far-right to stop the proposal from being debated.

The influence of Catalan employers' organisations was key to influence Junts' stance, who had argued that the measure would greatly damage small and medium companies. The government has announced its intention to bring back the debate to parliament whenever it seems feasible, but social interest in the topic seems to be diminishing. However, trade unions are still campaigning and significant advances could be made either through collective bargaining or new pilot programmes such as one announced in the Asturias region.

Time Use Initiative host Time-Use Week

The Time-Use Initiative, based in Barcelona, is hosting their annual Time-Use Week with the theme "The Right to Time in the Era of Artificial Intelligence." It will take place from October 13 to 15 in Barcelona and online via YouTube. You can register for the event here.

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Sweden

Hampus Andersson, Kommunal

LO sets sights on 35-hour week

In Sweden, working time reduction has taken a major step forward within the trade union movement. Following extensive investigations by Kommunal and later the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO), LO has now formally decided to pursue shorter working hours, with an unofficial target of reducing the collectively agreed standard working week to 35 hours.

This decision has already been adopted at board level, and regional information campaigns are currently under way. In December, LO's bargaining council will determine the concrete demands and bargaining format for the 2025 round.

Three potential negotiation strategies are on the table:

- **Central negotiations**: LO negotiates directly with the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise (the preferred and most likely path).
- **Coordinated negotiations:** individual unions negotiate separately but with identical demands, and may support one another through industrial action.
- **Union-specific negotiations:** each union negotiates independently and prioritises freely (considered unlikely).

What is already decided is that the focus will be on reducing the normal working week. Preparations are ongoing within the affiliates to develop sector-specific material on how this should be implemented in practice.

For example, some shift-based occupations already have shorter weekly hours, and here the aim is to reduce hours proportionally. In other sectors, overlap time may be reduced or removed, while in others new shift teams might be required.

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United Kingdom

James Reeves, 4-Day Week Foundation

More than 200,000 UK workers have moved to a four-day week since 2019, new analysis shows

Nearly 1.4 million people said they worked full-time on four days of the week between October and December 2024, an increase of more than 100,000 compared with the same period in 2019, when 1.29 million reported this work schedule, according to figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Scottish Government public sector pilot of four-day week found 'an increase in productivity and improvements in staff well-being'

A trial of a four-day working week in the public sector has found an increase in productivity and improvements in staff well-being.

The pilot saw workers at Accountant in Bankruptcy and South of Scotland Enterprise switch to a 32-hour week with no loss of pay or benefits.

Research from the Autonomy Institute, which was commissioned by the Scottish Government to coordinate the pilot, found that 98% of staff judged morale and motivation to have improved.

The year-long pilot found sick days for psychological reasons dropped by 25.7%. Employees' days off were staggered to make sure services were provided for the full working week.

Accountant in Bankruptcy found mental health improved by 18.4% and work stress dropped by the same amount.

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Report finds nearly 50% of Scottish workers could move to a four-day week in the near future

Research from the Autonomy Institute, commissioned by the Scottish Government, has found that 48% of jobs in the Scottish labour market (~1.3 million full and part-time workers) are amenable to a 20% reduction in hours (i.e., a four-day week for full-time workers) either immediately or within a decade. Read the report here.

Local council pilot at South Cambridgeshire 'a success' – and votes to make four-day week permanent.

A council that has been trialling a four-day working week said independent research showed all of its services had improved or maintained standards.

Staff at Liberal Democrat-led South Cambridgeshire District Council have been trialling doing 100% of their work in about 80% of their hours since January 2023, without losing pay.

The authority said a new report showed the number of job applicants had risen by more than 120% and there were ongoing yearly savings of £399,263, due to reduced agency staff costs.

Following the pilot, the council voted in July to make the four-day week permanent.

Updated interim findings from University of Sussex neuroscience research into four-day week.

Dr Charlotte Rae and her research colleague from the University of Sussex are looking into the four-day week's effect on mental health and wellbeing.

Her team is conducting brain scans of people who've made the switch to a four-day week. They've found from a sample

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size of 80 employees across 13 employers working a four-day week that anxiety has reduced by 8%, depression reduced by 10% and stress reduced by 14%. Read the paper here.

Pilot meeting of new Working Time Council in Westminster

The 4 Day Week Foundation is bringing together a Working Time Council made up of trade union, industry and business leaders to coordinate with MPs on policy and implementation of a shorter working week in the UK.

On 21st October, 17:30 GMT, they'll be meeting at the House of Commons for a meeting that will draw insight about the four-day week from employers and workers, researchers, campaigners and politicians.

All attendees will be given an opportunity to share their views on the most important opportunities and challenges related to working time reduction. Sign-up here.

RMT bring London Underground to standstill through strike action backing a four-day week

At the start of September, the RMT union brought significant disruption to London Underground transport through strike action, centred around a central union demand to reduce the working week from 35 to 32 hours.

Talks between employer TfL and the union are ongoing.

4 Day Week Foundation publish blog with RadHR highlighting key business policy considerations

'The Four Day Week Revolution: What Policies Must Evolve to Make It Work' sets out the key changes employers need to make for a successful transition to shorter hours.

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Beyond Europe

New journal article published in *Nature*

Wen Fan, Juliet B. Schor, Orla Kelly & Guolin Gu have recently had an article published in prominent academic journal *Nature,* titled: 'Work time reduction via a 4-day workweek finds improvements in workers' well-being'.

Analysis of pre- and post-trial data from 2,896 employees across 141 organizations in Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the UK and the USA shows improvements in burnout, job satisfaction, mental health and physical health.

Read the article here.

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