

ACHIEVING A SHORTER WORKING WEEK ACROSS EUROPE

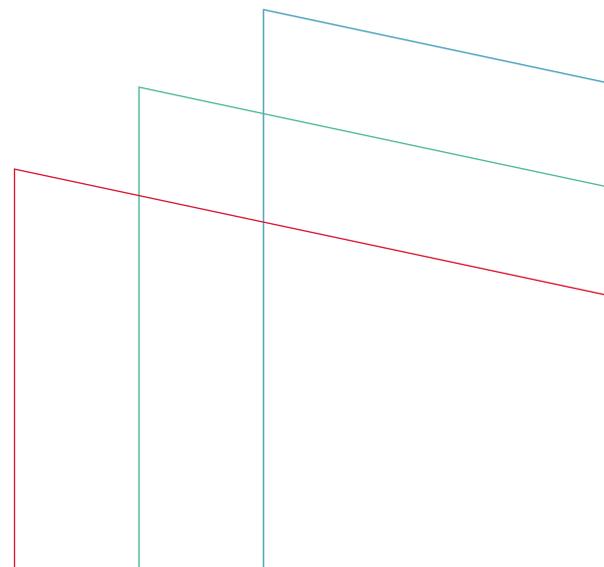
**Newsletter of the European Network
for the Fair Sharing of Working Time**

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WELCOME

The shorter working week has always been at the heart of the labour movement. The eight-hour movement extended beyond borders and ensured that today we enjoy things like the weekend and the eight-hour day. After decades in the political wilderness, the shorter working week is fast becoming one of the major political issues across Europe.

The European Network for the Fair Sharing of Working Time represents an attempt to coordinate the efforts of trade unions, political parties and civil society actors across Europe. This is the tenth newsletter of the series, which comes out every few months and captures the latest, most exciting developments in working-time reduction from across Europe.

The newsletter is produced by the New Economics Foundation (UK), and is coordinated by ATTAC (Germany – Group ArbeitFAIRTeilen) and Réseau Roosevelt (France). It is supported by Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, Brussels Office and funded by the German Federal Foreign Office.

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UNITED KINGDOM

Campaign developments in Wales

Four Day Week Cymru is calling on people in Wales to [sign a petition](#) and put pressure on decision-makers in the Senedd – the devolved Welsh parliament – to investigate the benefits of shorter working hours and trail a four-day working week in Wales. The petition will need to collect 10,000 signatures for the topic to be debated in the Senedd.

Mark Hooper, a campaigner with Four Day Week Cymru, [said that](#) ‘the time has come for Wales to follow Scotland and Spain’s example by moving ahead with four-day week trials’. The petition is collecting signatures until January 2022.

Jack Sargeant, Member of the Senedd (MS), [tweeted in support](#) of the petition, arguing that ‘a shorter working week could improve workers’ wellbeing and boost productivity’. He has written to Mark Drakeford MS, the First Minister of Wales, ‘to seek [his] views on the adoption of a four day week trial in Wales.

New report into a four-day week in the construction industry

In October, the UK-based four-day week campaign [published an investigation](#) into the potential of reduced hours in the construction industry.

The report notes that there are still four ‘blue collar’ workers to every three ‘white collar’ workers in the UK, but research and trials related to working hours have focused on the desk-based professions. To start to move beyond this, the authors consider the potential for construction workers. As they note, ‘for a four-day week to be truly transformative it must also be inclusive. We desperately need trials of a four-day week in construction and other similar sectors to demonstrate its potential for all workers and tackle some of the key problems faced by the sector’.

Employees in construction report some of the highest work-related physical and mental health problems, most of which are intimately connected to overwork, from high accident and injury rates to poor levels of work-related physical health. Last year, a quarter of all workplace fatalities were in the construction industry. Mental illness is also pervasive, particularly stress- and trauma-related illnesses like PTSD, depression and anxiety.

Various studies, cited in the report, demonstrate that reducing work hours, even modestly, has the potential to drastically improve these issues.

Moves in Atom and Lloyds towards four-day week

The online bank, Atom Bank, has introduced a four-day work week. Its staff of over 400 will work shorter hours without a cut in their pay. They will work 34 hours over four days, with either Monday or Friday off. They previously worked 37.5 hours across the whole week. Atom Bank CEO, Mark Mullen, [described](#) the move and its intention to 'help improve wellbeing and retain staff'. Atom are the largest employer in the UK to move to a four-day week.

Following this, trade unions are [pressing Lloyds Bank](#) to implement a four day working week without cutting pay. The unions Unite and Accord are asking the bank to reduce the working week as part of salary negotiations, following Lloyds chief executive Charlie Nunn's promise to support 'families and work-life balance'.

Ged Nichols, general secretary at Accord, [said](#): "We're trying to start the conversation on this, and it's something we'd hope to deliver in stages over a number of years rather than a one-off."

Polling shows public support for reduced hours

[New polling](#) by Opinium Research for Neon shows significant support for moving to a four-day, 32 hours working week to save the planet. 25% of participants said they strongly support the move and 31% said they somewhat support the move. This compares to just 6% and 7% who said they strongly or somewhat oppose, respectively.

[Polling](#) by Survation for Autonomy and PIRC show that over a third of people in UK sectors hit by acute labour shortages – including care, transportation, logistics and hospitality – say that a shorter working week with the same pay would keep them in a jobs.

IRELAND

A call to action from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions

[In a message](#) to delegates attending the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (Ictu), the incoming president, Kevin Callinan, said he wanted to see trade unions secure support from business and government North and South for private and public sector four-day week pilot programmes. He also urged that links be built between trade unions and organisations campaigning for the four-day work week.

GERMANY

The costs and benefits of a four-day week in the public sector

[A report](#) by the think tank Autonomy, published at the end of October, explores the costs and benefits of a four-day working week if it were implemented in the German public sector with no loss in pay. The paper finds that a 30-hour week is not just desirable for worker wellbeing and for reducing the cost of burn out and presenteeism; a 30 hours week would also create hundreds of thousands of jobs and establish a new standard for all employment in Germany. Such a policy, argue the authors, is 'eminently affordable and achievable: on Autonomy's conservative calculations, a 30-hour week could cost around 11bn euros'. This equates to 4% of the total public sector wage bill, and 0.8% of the German government's spending budget.

IG Metall agreement for convergence of working time

Last quarter, we reported that IG Metall – Germany's largest trade union – had negotiated a 2.3% wage increase for metal workers to be paid either in full or as part of a switch to a four-day week. The package is structured with the aim of allowing some workers to move to a four day week without a significant loss of earnings.

IG Metall [have now agreed](#) a framework collective agreement for convergence between the east and the west of Germany, where there has long been inequality in working hours, so that companies can negotiate phased plans for the 35 hours week with voluntary company agreements.

In May, Volkswagen began implementing a 35-hour working week at its east German plants, equalising working hours with its plants in the west. However, it did not hire additional workers, instead expecting its East German plants to boost productivity.

After the framework for collect agreement, company agreements on the convergence of working hours were concluded at Porsche, effecting 4300 employees at the Porsche plant in Leipzig. The supervisory board of Porsche AG approved the outcome on 30 September 2021. In a first step, the weekly working hours for employees will be reduced to 36.5 hours per week from 1 January 2022. In a further step, weekly working hours in Leipzig will then be reduced to a 35-hour week as in the west from 1 January 2025. The reduction in weekly working hours will be made with full wage compensation and without tariff cuts.

BMW will also cut working hours at its plant in East Germany from 38 to 35, in line with its West German factories. To compensate for the shorter weekly working hours, 300 additional employees are to be hired. The BMW HR director, Ilka Horstmeier, [noted that](#) ‘working closely with the works council, we have achieved an important negotiation result for both the company and the workforce at Leipzig location’. BMW General Works Council Chairman Manfred Schoch [said that](#) ‘with the step-by-step plan for the 35-hour week, we have achieved a historically unique success in harmonizing working conditions between east and west. More than 30 years after the fall of the Wall, our BMW Group employees from the east finally don’t have to work three hours a week more than their western colleagues’. The reduction in weekly working hours will begin for employees on 1st January 2022 with a 37-hour week. The second reduction to 36 hours will take place on 1 January 2024 and on 1 January 2026, the working week will be fully aligned with the 35 hour week that is standard in the west.

IG Metall note that ‘more agreements will now follow in many more companies. Some are already waiting in the wings to negotiate.

Mercedes agree on flexible work

Mercedes-Benz, Sindelfingen, [has announced](#) an agreement with its works council to recruit new software experts. The agreement allows for flexible hours and introduces ‘trust-based working time’, that does not physically record time worked and will replace the current system of fixed time slots where all employees must be present. This means that Mercedes-Benz software developers will be free to organise their working hours as they wish.

Union warns off attempt to water down Working Hours Act

The Working Hours Act stipulates that employees are allowed to work a maximum of 48 hours a week, they can break after six hours of work at the latest and after work are entitled to eleven hours of rest. The employers’ association, BDA, is arguing that the Working Hours Act is ‘no longer up-to-date in times of digital work’. Unions have expressed fears that the traffic light coalition of parties – the SPD, Greens and FDP – could heed to BDA arguments with their consideration of ‘flexible working time models’. Before the election, the FDP urged that companies should be able to deploy their employees in times of evening e-mails and concentrated work before deadlines without coming into conflict with the Working Hours Act. DGB union leader Reiner Hoffman

[said that](#) 'you don't experiment with the health of employees [...] employees and unions have already given enough flexibility. Employees already work two billion hours of overtime every year, half of which is not paid'.

AUSTRIA

Reduction of working hours in the private health and social sector

From January 1st 2022, 200,000 employees in the private health and social care sector in Austria will work one hour shorter with no loss of pay. This was an agreement reached between employers and the GPA and Vida union that took 8 rounds of negotiation, 3 days of demonstrations and 2 days of strike involving over 40,000 workers. The [GPA union note](#) that this is 'a first step towards a general reduction in working hours. With the 37 hours week, the social economy is a pioneer when it comes to reducing hours. We are sticking to our demand for a 35-hour week'.

Michaela Guglberger, negotiator for the Vida union, said that "The Corona crisis shows the importance of social professions [...] these people have earned respect and appreciation for their commitment. We expect this appreciation in the form of a reduction in working hours".

The next collective bargaining negotiations will take place in autumn 2022 for 2023. The GPA want to 'work with employers to make the industry more attractive and to take measures to alleviate the shortage of skilled workers'.

GREECE

Protest against proposed changes to labour law

Earlier in the year, [thousands of public and private sector unions](#) joined a nationwide general strike, taking to the streets of cities across Greece as part of industrial action to oppose a new labour law proposed by the government.

The wide ranging law sought to reform working time, telework, the right to disconnect, parental leave, sexual harassment, strike action, platform work and collective bargaining. The bill puts the 8-hour working day into question by promoting what it calls 'flexible working'. Mitsotakis, the leader of the Conservative government, said it sought

to modernise labour laws constructed when the internet did not exist, and where employees worked fixed hours in fixed locations, such as offices and factories. The Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Kostis Hatzidakis, introduced the government's plans. Hatzidakis highlighted that "*[t]he core of the bill goes back to 1982. In 1982 the Internet, let alone teleworking, was a distant dream.*"

Unions and the main opposition party, Syriza, say the new law will erode rights, making it more difficult for strikes to be called, threaten Greece's eight-hour work day and threaten Sundays as a non-work day.

NORWAY

Political parties calling for working time reduction strengthen position in Parliament

The socialist Left party, the Red Party and the Green Party, who all advocate for working time reduction, gained votes and seats in [latest parliamentary election](#). Together, the three parties went from 13 seats to 26 seats out of a total of 169 seats.

Progress on trials in local municipalities

In local municipalities, the three parties are pushing for local trials in the public sector focused on six hour days without a loss in pay. A majority in the city council of Stravanger have agreed to fund a public organisation to run a trial. Negotiations between the Red Party and the City Council in Oslo resulted in a budget where two million Krone (approximately 200,000 euros) has been set aside as funding for six hour day trials. The projects are planned to start early in 2023, based on applications from local companies and new negotiations in November 2022 for the 2023 budget.

EUROPE-WIDE

Working time reduction and climate crisis

On 22-23 October 2020, the European Network for the Fair Sharing of Working Time held its first ever online conference.

The conference was titled "Working time reduction and climate crisis: What role for

working time reduction when addressing climate change?” The aim of the conference was to discuss the potential contribution of working time reduction to the socio-ecological transition, its role in initiatives addressing climate change and its place in approaches to the European Green New Deal. The public conference brought together key actors from campaigns on the reduction of working time, policymakers, and climate initiatives from across Europe.

Recordings of each conference roundtable and session are now available online: <https://www.etui.org/events/working-time-reduction-and-climate-crisis>

Tilt campaign for a four-day week

[Tilt](#), founded by the European Greens, is a citizens’ movement demanding that ‘the European Union works for all of us – not just a privileged few’. As part of their work, Tilt have started pushing for a four-day work week at a European level. [They argue](#) that ‘it’s time for Europe to put people at the core of our societal structures, and follow what science tells us works for our health and wellbeing’. Tilt are demanding that ‘national governments follow Iceland, Spain, Ireland and Scotland’s lead by initiating public dialogues, programs and trials to work towards a strategy of reduced working hours, for the same pay’.

BEYOND EUROPE

US pilot program launches

4 Day Week Global is coordinating a [six-month trial](#) of the four-day working week in the USA. Organisations interested in taking part will receive: training from those who have already implemented a four-day week; mentoring from international experts; networking with others participating; and research and analysis support to establish metrics and success measures to monitor progress throughout the trial. The trial was set up in September 2021, and each organisation is now preparing and training to take part. The trial itself will start from April running through to September 2022.

Progressives endorse 32-Hour Workweek Act

The Congressional Progressive Caucus, a bloc of around 100 House Democrats, has endorsed the 32-hour Workweek Act, [noting that](#) the measure is a move “towards a modern-day business model that prioritises productivity, fair pay, and an improved

quality of life for workers across the country'. The measures were first introduced by Rep. Mark Takano in July, garnering endorsements from several labour unions. While it would not eliminate the 40-hour work week, it would require employers to offer employees overtime pay after 32 hours.

UAE cuts working week

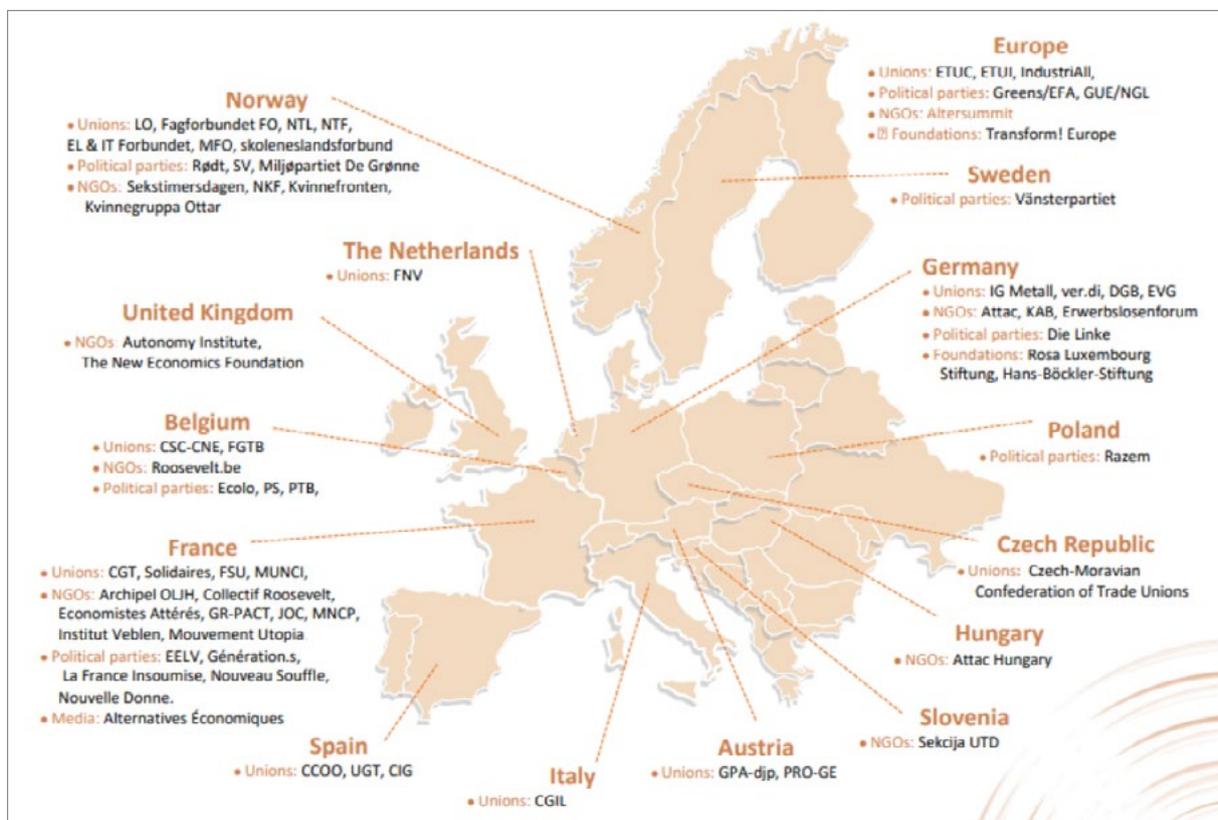
The United Arab Emirates is changing its working week to four and a half days in a shift aimed at 'improving the country's competitiveness'. New working hours will be mandatory for government bodies from 1st January. WAM, the state news agency, [says](#) [that](#) 'the extended weekend comes as part of the UAE government's efforts to boost work-life balance and enhance social wellbeing, while increasing performance to advance the UAE's economic competitiveness'.

ABOUT THE NETWORK

The shorter working week has always been at the heart of the labour movement. The eight-hour movement extended beyond borders and ensured that today we enjoy things like the weekend and the eight-hour day. After decades in the political wilderness, the shorter working week is fast becoming one of the major political issues across Europe. This network represents an attempt to coordinate the efforts of the trade unions, political parties, and civil society actors across Europe.

- The main objective of the network is to create a permanent and open forum between structured initiatives for the sharing of working time.
- This informal network is opened to representative of organisations, experts and activists.
- The activity of the network entirely relies on the voluntary contributions of the participating organisations.

Members of the network



If you would like your organisation to become a member of the network, or have information on shorter hours you would like to be included in the next newsletter, please contact:

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