

ACHIEVING A SHORTER WORKING WEEK ACROSS EUROPE

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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 fourth newsletter of the series. Our newsletter will come out every few months and capture 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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BRITAIN

Labour Party adopts 32-hour week as policy

The Labour Party formally adopted a 32-hour week with no loss of pay after a motion was passed at their annual conference which John McDonnell [supported](#) with a commitment to make it a reality within 10 years should Labour form a government. This follows the [Green Party's](#) commitment to a four-day week in the 2017 election.

At the conference McDonnell said that: "We should work to live, not live to work. As society got richer, we could spend fewer hours at work. But in recent decades progress has stalled, and since the 1980s the link between increasing productivity and expanding free time has been broken. It's time to put that right."

The motion was brought to conference by the Communication Workers Union (CWU) and seconded by Perth and Kinross Constituency Labour Party. The proposal has been endorsed by TUC, Momentum and campaign groups inside and outside of the Labour Party.

The Labour Party have adopted or designed a series of specific policy measures which target working hours. The manifesto states that the Labour Party will bring about a 32-hour working week within ten years by:

- *"Ending the opt-out provision for the EU Working Time Directive and enforcing working-time regulations.*
- *Setting up an independent Working Time Commission to advise on raising minimum holiday entitlements and reducing maximum weekly working time.*
- *Mandating bargaining councils to negotiate reductions in working time.*
- *Investing to increase productivity and making sure workers share the benefits. We will keep restrictions on Sunday trading in place and review unpaid overtime."*

Factory moves to four-day week

A manufacturing firm in Suffolk has been running on a four-day week for the past five years. [CMG Technologies](#) employ 22 staff and has a turnover of £2.4million. It manufactures intricate parts for items such as razors and scalpels using a unique process which enables metal to be moulded to create precise, complex parts with low wastage.

Rachel Garrett, managing director of CMG Technologies, based in Rendlesham, near Woodbridge, said they had introduced a four-day week some time ago after deciding to implement a “better and smarter way of working”.

Ms Garrett said the four-day working model had worked well for staff – and for the business.

“It has absolutely transformed life for our employees – creating significantly lower job stress and helping them strike a better work-life balance,” she said.

“Beyond wellbeing, our team is stronger and functions better and this has impacted the bottom line and allowed us to retain our very valuable employees.

“What we do is very specialised so it’s vital we attract and retain talent and the four-day week appears to be the icing on the cake for employees who want to split their week in a more efficient way.”

DENMARK

Municipality moves 300 staff to a four-day week

Odsherred Municipality has become the first local authority in Denmark to implement a [four-day](#) working week. 300 staff will move down from a 37.5 hour, five-day week, to a 35-hour, four-day week with no reduction in pay.

The office will be closed on Fridays, but opening hours will be extended to between 7am and 7pm enabling members of the public to call earlier and later in the days. This extension of opening hours is thought to provide a better service for the public. Staff timetables will be individual, but each week is likely to contain at least one long working day.

Søren Kühnrich is a representative for one of the staff sections moving towards a four-day week. He said that:

“We are looking forward to getting started with the trial four-day week. We’ve had a good dialogue with the municipality about the arrangement, which is a break with the conventional way of conceiving a working week”.



NETHERLANDS

‘Coal fund’ established to transition workers to sustainable jobs

The Dutch government has created a €22million [“coal fund”](#) in response to the planned closure the Hemweg coal-fired power station in the western port area of Amsterdam which will close early on 1 January. The power station is closing as a result of the Netherlands’ commitment to transitioning towards a sustainable economy. Part of this transition includes the closure of coal-fired power stations. The Hemweg coal-fired power station is planned to close on 1 January 2020.

The fund is to be used for workers that want to have assistance finding another job or be retrained for another type of job. These measures will be put in place before the closure of the plants, enabling a smooth transition to a new job. In addition to training and work-to-work programs, the fund will also be used as compensation for workers who lose their jobs or accept a job with a lower income.

For the Hemweg coal-fired power station, a special [unit](#) has been put in place to introduce short term measures for the 200 workers affected. This unit includes the Government, the Employee Insurance Agency (UWV) and trade unions. The coal power plant operator has announced that only 12 of the 200 workers have not been able to find a new job. Most of the workers were relocated to other Vattenfall Business Units, while others were able to find other job alternatives. For these workers, no money from the fund has been used so far.

Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging (FNV) is the Netherlands largest trade union and they are very happy with the fund. They have started a “coal chain mobility centrum”, which can use the fund’s money to help workers in the process of finding a new job in retraining programmes.

ICELAND

Unions reach agreement to reduce working hours

A number of unions that are part of the Icelandic Confederation of University Graduates (BHM) have signed and voted to formally accept a new agreement on pay and benefits that include a small cut in working hours. The agreement will commence on 1 January, 2021.

The unions include the [Icelandic Social Science Association](#), the [Union of University Graduates](#), the [Union of Information Scientists](#), and the [Union of Solicitors](#).

According to these agreements, employees can negotiate with the institution they work for to get a cut in hours, but they will have to give up coffee breaks instead (currently they are entitled to two breaks per day). If they pursue this line of negotiation, they can cut working hours by around 18 minutes per working day on average. Workers are still able to take breaks and get refreshments, but there are no specific times agreed for this.

However, if no agreement is made, a cut in working hours by 13 minutes per working day is automatically applied after a certain time period. How people utilise the cut in hours is flexible; people can choose to have one shorter day per week, or reduce their amount of time at work by one day a month. The unions see this as a small victory on the path towards even greater reductions in working time.

SPAIN

Barcelona Time Use Initiative for a Healthy Society launched

The '[Barcelona Time Use Initiative for a Healthy Society](#)' is an International initiative that comes from a Catalan initiative called [Iniciativa per a la Reforma Horària](#) (Time Use Reform Initiative) and continues its legacy. The Time Use Reform Initiative managed to put a reform of time-use policies on the political agenda in Catalonia.

The initiative aims to build a cross-border network focussed on the issue of time-use, sharing lessons learned and projects with other organizations. To that end it wants to generate knowledge with the intention of changing time-use across the world and creating better policies to regulate it.

Last June the [Barcelona Time Use Initiative for a Healthy Society](#) was presented at CIDOB within the Time Use Week.

SWITZERLAND

Care workers needed more protection on pay and hours

The VPOD/SSP is a Swiss trade union for employees in the public service. VPOD public service workers have [called](#) on the federal government to deliver nationwide, binding rules on pay and working time for home care workers – many of whom are women from Eastern European countries. They make the case that non-binding, regional agreements

are not effective enough, particularly on key issues of working and rest time.

The union is also pushing for a monthly minimum of CHF 4000 Swiss Francs in order to guarantee a living wage for workers in the sector.

AUSTRIA

Public sector negotiations focus on excessive workloads

The two major Austrian public service unions – younion and Gewerkschaft Öffentlicher Dienst (GÖD) – have gone through the first two rounds of [bargaining](#) in their annual pay negotiations.

The unions are looking to increase wages in line with inflation for all public sector workers along with recognising understaffing with concerns around workers facing heavy workloads and precarious employment conditions.

ITALY

Factory workers on 30-hour week and paid for 40 hours

In 2014 Ducati Motor Holding reached an agreement with its workforce in the Bologna motorcycle factory. The agreement with the unions saw 13 new jobs created in the factory, which now stays open seven days a week.

The factory workers have moved from 15 to 21 shifts per week, with a format of three days on, and two days off. In exchange, factory employees will work fewer hours per week on average with an increase in pay. This means that the factory workers work 30 hours per week earning the same amount of money they would have got for working 40 hours under the previous agreement.

Ducati have also invested €11.5 million over the next five years into Borgo Panigale, with a specific eye on camshaft and crankshaft production. The agreement helps consolidate Ducati's sourcing of parts to the industrial area around Bologna.

71% of the workforce voted in favour of the agreement, reflecting its popularity amongst factory workers.

ACROSS EUROPE

New report shows European working time reductions stall

The Eurofound research agency has launched its [biennial report](#) on working time and has found that there have not been any significant developments in working time across Europe. This means that the average European working week stays at 38 hours. The report noted some specific sector developments with particularly negative legislation passed in Hungary affecting public administration allowing for longer hours and more flexibility. More positive agreements were noted in Estonia in the health sector, and Greece in the local government and waste sectors.

INTERNATIONAL

Microsoft Japan trial a four-day work week increase productivity 40%

In August 2019 [Microsoft Japan](#) moved 2,300 employees to a four-day week with no reduction in pay as part of a month-long trial. The shorter working weeks led to more efficient meetings, happier workers and boosted productivity by 40%.

Japan's workforce is characterised by [extreme working hours](#) and an estimated 10,000 workers die every year from overwork (it even has its own name: karoshi).

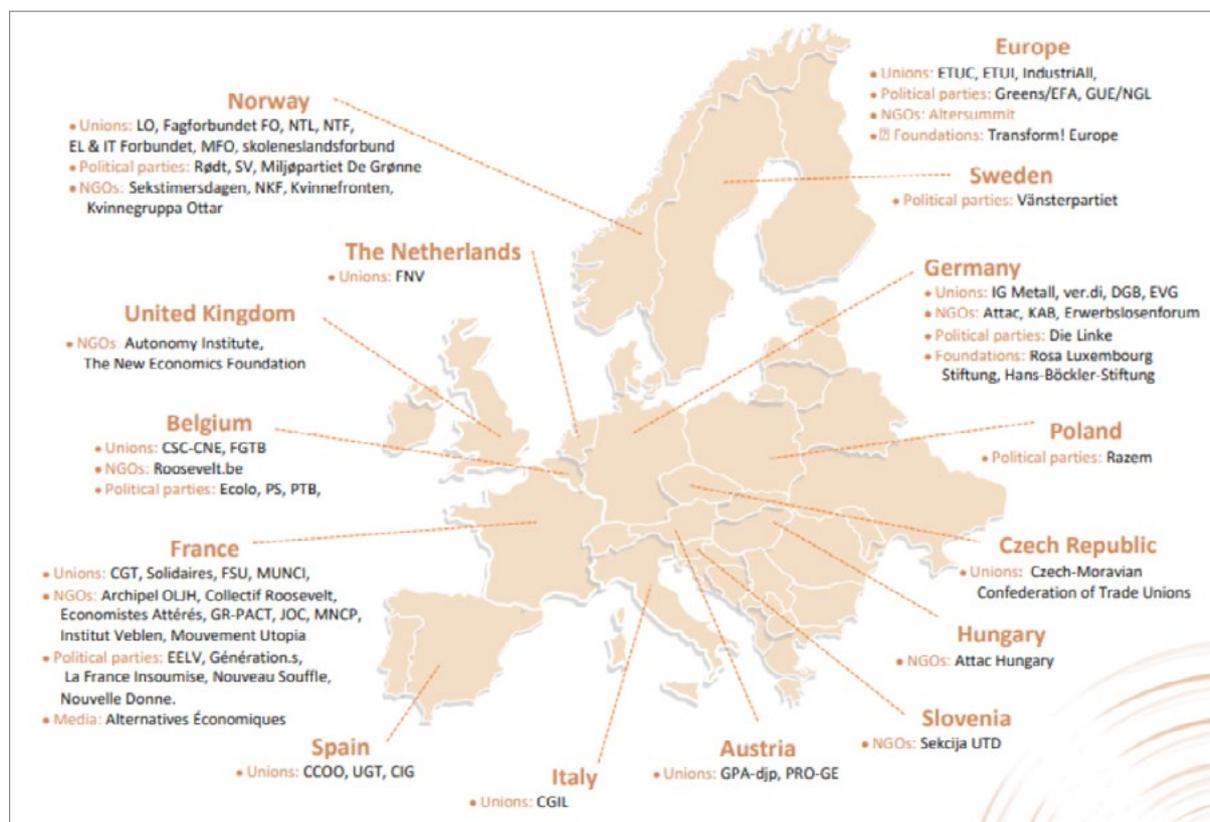
In addition to the increased productivity, employees took 25% less time off during the trial and electricity use was down 23% in the office with the additional day off per week. Employees printed 59% fewer pages of paper during the trial. The vast majority of employees – 92% – said they liked the shorter week.

ABOUT THE NETWORK

The shorter working week has always been at the heart of the labour movement. The 8-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 please contact:

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