

ACHIEVING A SHORTER WORKING WEEK ACROSS EUROPE

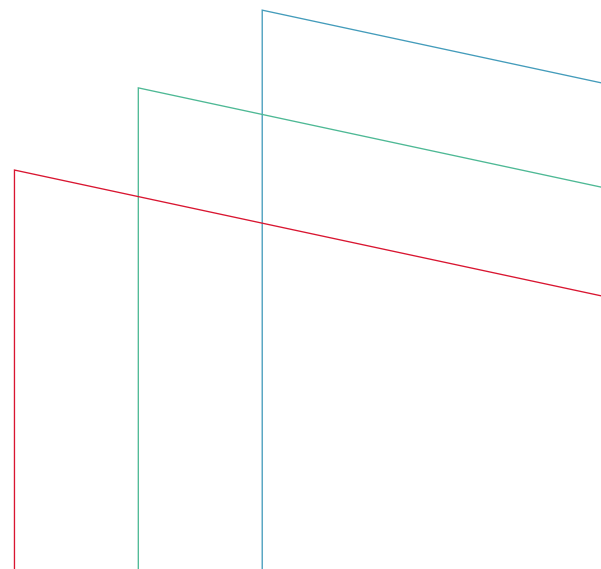
**Newsletter of the European Network
for the Fair Sharing of Working Time**

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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 Covid-19 crisis impacted our societies and economies unlike anything that has preceded it. It has exposed the vast inequalities which exist in our societies, and most clearly in the world of work. However, it has also meant that suddenly, working time and flexible working have taken on a new significance, and many of the changes to work which have happened are likely to be made permanent. At any rate, the pandemic and its aftermath have made it all the more urgent to move towards a shorter working week, and to ensure that we emerge from the crisis with a better world than the one we had going into it.

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. Our newsletter has been published every few months and captured the latest, most exciting developments in working-time reduction from across Europe. This is the final newsletter of this series.

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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EUROPEAN NETWORK CONFERENCE

Introduction to the conference

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.

Due to the ongoing pandemic, the conference was held on zoom, rather than in person. The conference was a truly international event and was organised by members of the European Network for the Fair Sharing of Working Time in a working group.

The programme for the conference can be found [here](#).

Recent examples of initiatives and experimentations of working time reduction in Europe

Moderator: Margareta Steinrücke, ATTAC Germany

Germany: Results of the IG Metall campaign on working time reduction by Sophie Jänicke, IG Metall

It took between five and seven years to get working time back on the agenda in IG Metall. To begin with, the union did two surveys internally in order to build support and see where the membership was at.

In 2018, the union needed industrial action and strikes to win new regulations. The focus of working time reduction was on individual needs - people wanted more self-determination and more choice in terms of how they used their time.

The coronavirus crisis has pushed collective working time reduction agreements onto the agenda again.

The 2018 working time reduction win filled IG Metall members with confidence and demonstrated that achieving working time reduction was possible. In victory for IG Metall, all metalworkers now have the option to reduce working time from 35 hours to 28 hours for up to two years – albeit without wage compensation. In addition, workers

with caring responsibilities, or those who work in shifts have the option to take either an extra pay increase or receive eight days more free time – where the monetary value of the extra days off is higher than the cash-value of the wage increase. The majority of workers have chosen to have the extra days off, over the cash.

At last year's congress, IG Metall committed themselves to more working time reduction. The union saw three big challenges as key to the decision to push for further working time reduction. These were the digital, ecological, and social transformations which will define the future of humanity.

In addition to the three pre-existing challenges, there is also a deep and worldwide economic crisis as a result of the pandemic. There is the current struggle in companies for employment and for the future of sites. The automotive industry is announcing 220,000 job losses. The union is fighting this.

Working time reduction can be used as a safeguard for workers and preserve employment through a fairer distribution of available work. But in all forms of working time reduction, workers must be able to afford it.

The current proposals are for a four-day week and an eight-hour day with part wage compensation.

The main arguments for working time reduction now:

- Answer to structural change in automotive and supplier sector
- Response to calls for four-day week
- Good media response; broad discussion amongst members; leftist parties supportive; employers have been critical
- The 2021 bargaining round offers an opportunity and will be the next big step

There are inevitably some barriers and challenges for the union achieving a four-day week for its members. One of these barriers is that employers are still bitter about union's wins in 2018 and are resistant to further reductions in working time.

There are signs of encouragement that this reduction in working time to save jobs is feasible. For example, at Volkswagen in the 1980s in Germany, they saved 30,000 jobs through working time reduction to 28 hours a week.

IG Metall are already in contact with Friday 4 Future and have taken joint actions - especially the youth wing. This is a struggle over how wealth is distributed in society

The Train and Public Traffic unions are also entering negotiations for working time reduction (although not in the same way as IG Metall or the four-day week).

Iceland: Presentation of the experimentations by Gudmundur Haraldsson ALDA

There was a trial of shorter hours in Iceland in 2015 with 66 participants in the public sector. In 2016 this was expanded to 260 participants; in 2017 to 800 people; and by 2018 there were 2500 people involved in the extended trial.

In the 2018/19 round of national bargaining agreements, there were new contracts nationwide which include shorter working hours for thousands of workers in many different sectors.

The results from the trials were overwhelmingly positive. People had better work/life balance; there was no additional overwork done; and men did more home duties, helping to distribute unpaid domestic labour more fairly.

The BSRB trade union negotiated 36 to 40 hours a week for regular and shift workers. There were some workers who managed to negotiate a 32-hour week. There is no single model for reducing working time across the Icelandic labour market, with people reducing their hours in different ways and according to the nature of their work.

This is happening in the private sector too, with one company moving to a 32-hour week with no reduction in pay of its own volition.

In the first half of 2021, an English report by Autonomy on the reductions in working time in Iceland will be published.

Belgium: four-day week experimentation in the Saint Josse Ten Noode Townhall by Maxime Nys, CGSP ACOD

The FGTB-ABVV union made a historical demand for a four-day, 32-hour week on full pay with the recruitment of new workers to compensate the loss of working hours.

The experiment took place in the Saint-Josse municipality. The Mayor was involved in bringing about the trial for shorter working time, which started from 1 January 2021.

The experiment is not for all workers in the municipality. It is restricted instead to workers over the age of 55 in every job. The union intends to continue to campaign to reduce this age limit over time so that more people can work a four-day week.

As a public institution, one of the agreements for the experiment to go ahead was that the service to the public must be maintained.

In total, 121 people took part in the experiment (out of around 600 workers in total).

In order to compensate for the reduced capacity, the municipality created 22 jobs, prioritising young workers in the recruitment process. Each new job cost 32,000 euros, with an annual cost of 900k euros. Workers in the scheme are working a 28-hour week.

The Municipality of Anderlecht also implemented a four-day week in August 2018 on the level of the municipality. To be eligible for the scheme, workers must be over the age of 50 and work in the most physically demanding jobs - for example in refuse collection.

There is a feeling that these experiments have the ability to spread throughout Belgium and that “we’re basically just waiting for people to take the initiative to connect the various actors working on a reduction in working time.”

The place of working time reduction in a post-growth society

Moderator: Philipp Frey, Zentrum für Emanzipatorische Technikforschung (Germany)

Juliet Schor, Professor of Sociology, Boston College (United States)

It is impossible to move towards a sufficiently sustainable economy without a reduction in working hours. Energy system transformation is not enough. In order to accurately measure greenhouse gas emissions, one must do consumption accounting with the inclusion of exports and imports.

The relationship between GDP and emissions remains strong and ‘decoupling’ is not happening. ‘green growth’ is a myth. Renewable energy systems expand energy demand rather than replacing fossil fuels. Therefore, we need to slow down growth in energy demand.

In virtually all studies, working hours are positively correlated with higher carbon emissions. One of these is the GDP relationship. Households who are more time stressed are more high carbon because high-carbon activities tend to be time saving. More sustainable activities tend to be more time consuming.

However, when we think about campaigning for societal change on this issue, we cannot moralise consumption. To move families and households, we need to give people time rather than money. Therefore, we must reconfigure how the economy works.

The post-war period productivity group was tied to a wage increase; nowadays we can structurally tie working time reduction to productivity reduction. One such way of doing

this is to give people a 'right to work less' e.g. in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands from around 1980 up until the late 90s, real wages were barely reduced, productivity increased and working hours were reduced (for example there was a four-day workweek in finance, and all new government employees were on a reduced schedule).

There are other good reasons to go about reducing working hours, for example, countries with higher working hours are more unequal. This in turn has a harmful impact on greenhouse gas emissions as more unequal the countries tend to be more polluting.

Will Stronge, Think Tank Autonomy (United Kingdom)

Autonomy do research into shorter working time amongst other notions of "post-work". It would be useful to take a step back and think about work and post-work more broadly. Post-work means three things: revalue, redistribute, and reduce. It is a provocation rather than a detailed programme.

Post-work is centred around the same common themes, including automation and the repurposing of technology, universal basic income, and the shorter working week.

Autonomy works with other campaigns and organisations to collaborate on these issues, for example the 4 Day Week Campaign.

Productivity is a dangerous frame: it is a stick used to beat workers with and can push the economy in an environmentally catastrophic direction. There is also a desire to revalue forms of work – especially less carbon-intensive work such as care.

Covid is not going away soon and we must realise that it is also a crisis of work. Those that are working from home are working more, and those that are in "non-viable" industries are not getting enough work. But we must realise that the most significant moments of working time reduction have happened during and after crisis points.

Beate Zimpelmann, Professor in Politics and Sustainability, Hochschule of Bremen (Germany)

A post-growth society focuses on the arrangements

Working time reduction is a chance for a fair distribution of the socially available work and therefore a precondition for sustainable development. A shortening of working time is needed in the context of gender justice: shortening of working time in a full-time employment is demanded by both genders.

The approach of a "caring economy" emphasises that nature shows an absolute shortage and that some resources are not substitutable. It is a cooperative approach which takes

natural and social conditions as a basis. The analysis focuses on the relation between nature and humans. Thus, the consumption of natural resources must be seen in a societal context.

Approximately 80% of the CO₂ emissions of human activities come into existence by gainful employment. The gainful employment is not ecological – we need a change the ecology of work. There is a link between economic growth, volume of work and productivity. The economists say, we **need** economic growth to safeguard employment. This is in contrast to the ecological **demand** to save resources and the climate.

Working time reduction is a chance for a fair distribution of the societal available work and therefore a precondition for sustainable development. The post-growth society focuses on the arrangements of a good life for current generations and future generations. Growth can be necessary for society in some cases, but there is no pressure to reach growth. New ideas and sufficient lifestyles are also developing beyond the market. Change of work, change of production. This can lead to a reduction of working hours to 20 hours per week, as advocated by Niko Paech.

Shortening of working time means a consequent shift of perspective. Work is considered as whole work and thus changes the term of work and welfare (welfare of time) in general.

To conclude, the central and initiating role of reduction of working time for a transformation to a post-growth society is underestimated by political actors. Working time reduction changes the perspective on work and the distribution of work between men and women. It could disprove the argument that economic growth is needed to safeguard employment.

The place of working time reduction in the Green New Deal propositions and initiatives for climate: how to help people in the transition to working time reduction?

Moderator: Alexandra Arntsen, Nottingham Business School (United Kingdom)

Dr. Christoph Schneider, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (Germany)

The Green New Deal as an idea came from the New Economics Foundation in 2008 in the UK. It's main ideas are: to form a clear break with neoliberal ideology where markets

and private corporations drive decision making; use state investment to transform infrastructure and the economy; and from a green stimulus to create a sustainable and democratic economy. It became a lot more popular in the US in 2018.

The Green New Deal is not an elitist project. It is social movement-driven and has a transformative narrative which social movements can grab onto. For example, the Sunrise Movement in the US and their 'jobs for all' campaign.

The Green New Deal for Europe was founded by Diem25 and is a coalition with organisations from across Europe. They have created a 120-page document on the transformation towards a democratic and sustainable society.

The aim was to combine the aims of social justice with environmental justice and aspirations for democratisation. This is represented with 10 pillars: meeting the scale of the challenge; pressing idle resources into public services; empowering citizens and their communities; guaranteeing decent jobs; raising the standard of living; entrenching equality; investing in the future; ending the dogma of endless growth; supporting climate justice around the world; and committing to action today.

Will Stronge, Autonomy (UK)

There is a clear overlap between the Green New Deal movements and the movement for shorter working time. The original New Deal in the US came partly from Francis Perkins. She came from the labour movement in the US and was one of the main drivers of the Fair Labour Standards Act that limited working hours to 40 hours a week. Lessons learned from the past is that any Green New Deal movement must have labour movements behind it.

There has been a big stall in working time reduction across OECD countries, particularly from the 1980s and the emergence of neoliberal forms of economic governance and the smashing of organised worker power.

Working time reduction, caps on working time, and reducing both underwork and overwork should be a key part of any Green New Deal. The definition of "good jobs" should also be ones with reduced working hours.

The French Example: Behind the myth: effects and consequences of the 35 hours 20 years after

Moderator: Adrien Tusseau, Roosevelt Network (France)

Anne Eydoux, Senior lecturer in economics Cnam, Lise-CNRS & CEET (FR)

The 35-hour week was always a controversial policy. It is today a topical policy because from an economic point of view, France has experienced slow GDP growth and high unemployment in recent years. There have been many evaluations of the 35-hour week.

In France there is a long history of working time reduction. The issues have related to employment creation, work sharing and working time flexibility. In the 1980s and 1990s there were part-time and flexible working time agreements. In 1996, the Robien Law and collectively negotiated working time reduction. The Aubry laws I (1998) and II (2000) established the French 35-hour working week.

There were several discussions which informed the decision to pass the Aubry laws. Firstly, workers must not have their incomes negatively impacted, so pay must be maintained. It was also thought to help contribute towards job creation in an economy suffering from high levels of unemployment. Finally, it was thought that a reduction in working hours would help boost economic productivity, for example through the reorganisation of working patterns and industrial equipment.

There have been many evaluations of the impact of the 35-hour week on job creation, but the general consensus is that around 350,000 new jobs were created between 1998-2002 at a reasonable budgetary cost. Additionally, most workers were satisfied with the new working conditions, although there was an increase in time pressure for some “unskilled” workers. It was also found to have a positive impact on labour productivity and had no negative impact on the competitiveness of firms.

Nelly Mbila, Public Relations Manager, YPREMA (FR)

Yprema is a specialist in recycling construction materials, that switched to a four-day week in 1997. They have managed to make this change successfully after the director was inspired by arguments over working time reduction. Salaries were not reduced as a result of the reduction in working time.

The company increased productive capacity by 12%. To provide customer service for

five days a week, they hired salespeople. And to maintain activity, they trained their employees so that they are able to perform four different positions per week. Thus, when one takes their day off, their colleague can replace him.

They had 42 employees when they initially moved to the four-day week and now there are 90 employees. The four-day week is very popular among workers who now have more time to spend with their family.

Coalition of Trade Unions and NGOs to promote working time reduction in the fight against the climate crisis

Moderation by Aidan Harper, News Economics Foundation (United Kingdom)

Esther Lynch, Deputy General Secretary, ETUC

We need to call out exploitation of both workers and the planet and the two strategies of the climate and trade union movements need to be more joined up.

In 1919, the International Labour Organisation ruled for an eight-hour day, a 42 hour week, and paid annual leave. They did this in the wake of a war for which people had sacrificed so much. Perhaps there is something similar now. A relation that the most vulnerable workers are also the most important: the “key” workers.

The 1993 working time directive sets out a maximum working week of 48 hours a week. This varies widely across Europe from country to country. You can, however, see a steady and slow reduction in working time over the last few decades.

We are seeing demands for the four-day week, and unions like IG Metall putting shorter working time onto the bargaining agenda. Increases in productivity shouldn't just be taken by the shareholders, they should be shared with workers in the form of shorter working time.

There should not be a single one-size-fits-all model of shorter working time. Not everyone works a nine-to-five, five-day week. European Social Dialogue can help get templates for shorter working time in countries where unions are strong and share them with other unions across the continent.

Sean Sweeney, Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED)

Trade Unions for Energy Democracy started in 2012. Many unions around the world were disgruntled with the green growth model which they saw essentially as a privatisation model. There was a split in the trade union movement over who supported the package of measures related to green growth.

There are now 72 unions in the coalition. They offer research and analysis on climate change and trade unions. They found there wasn't too much in the way of detail for how to implement ideas of "climate justice" where support was high, but details were weak. They are looking for a programmatic shift to defend and expand public services to make public what was privatised – especially in energy.

They have some influence on the Green New Deal in the US, initially with the Sanders Plan. They also worked a lot with Rebecca Long-Bailey in the Labour Party.

What is their critique of green growth? Firstly, it's not happening. Secondly, it's essentially a privatisation agenda.

The change that needs to happen is through the public, not the private sector. They advocate for a Public Goods Approach. This needs to be part of an agenda which extends public ownership. They make the case that emissions reductions and climate adaptation benefit everyone. Governments must be allowed to invest in the future of people, within a framework of international cooperation and sharing. Returns on investment should be measured in better health, cleaner water, enhanced public mobility, and quality public services that can deal with climate instability.

Katharina Stierl, Students for Future (Germany)

Students for Future are part of the movement fighting for a sustainable future. It is an activist movement which focuses on campaigns and action. Katharina joined because the climate crisis is the biggest crisis of our lives and yet, so few people were doing anything meaningful about it. In addition, the effects of climate change are already taking hold, especially in countries in the global south.

They are campaigning for a project for better transport with the Verdi trade union. Two years ago, they set up the German Fridays for Future group. They then spoke to the big unions in Germany who are not natural allies for the environmental movement as they make cars and dig coal. However, the unions have a lot of power and are very important in this space. They contacted them to find a way to work together.

Working with the unions, the Fridays for Future workers joined a campaign for Verdi bus drivers affecting 90,000 people who were impacted by the contract. They joined with striking bus drivers and supported them publicly. This helped with the media support for the bus drivers, who are often demonised for the adverse impact on school children as a result of their strike.

The public sector working conditions are poor for bus drivers. They earn 12 euros an hour. They are not paid for delays and the extra time it takes. There are also higher rates of colon cancer and bladder problems from the job.

The Fridays for Future students found common cause with the unionised striking bus drivers. Public transport should be at the heart of a sustainable economy, but also the working conditions must also be drastically improved. The students demonstrated solidarity with the striking bus drivers by attending picket lines and making public statements of support.

Rachel White, 4 Day Week Campaign (United Kingdom)

The campaign has been running for about four years. It is made up of around 10 people, mostly volunteers. Some study and write on the subject, others have a general interest. We meet monthly and have close relationships with The New Economics Foundation and Autonomy – two UK think tanks.

We have written reports, done research, and press releases. We have had very little funding, but this also means we can be a bit more explicitly political, have more fun on social media and be more agile as we do not have to be careful about how funders or trustees view us. As we're small, we have a lot of scope to influence the campaign as members.

We now have our first paid worker on the campaign which has enabled us to step up activity and respond more quickly to things as they crop up.

The UK has long working hours with a relatively weak trade union culture (although this is changing in recent years). The majority of the workforce is not unionised, and this poses challenges.

Quite a few unions have passed motions on the shorter working week and some have incorporated it into negotiations with employers, for example the CWU, Unite, the RMT and others have it as a demand. Although it is not a "common sense" demand just yet.

As a campaign, we have had challenges with the lack of political will to move towards

the four-day week. Secondly, the lack of public understanding or knowledge of the idea has also proved a challenge. For example, there has been a lot of miscommunication and misunderstanding around the implementation of a four-day week in the NHS, where right wing media voices said it would pose an unmanageable burden.

We have a strong social media following and have made our own explanatory four-day week video. We also wrote a report making the case for shorter working time. We built a coalition of MPs to support the idea, and we pushed the Labour Party in 2019 to adopt the four-day week as a manifesto pledge. Unfortunately, Labour lost the election and the Conservatives are unfriendly to the idea.

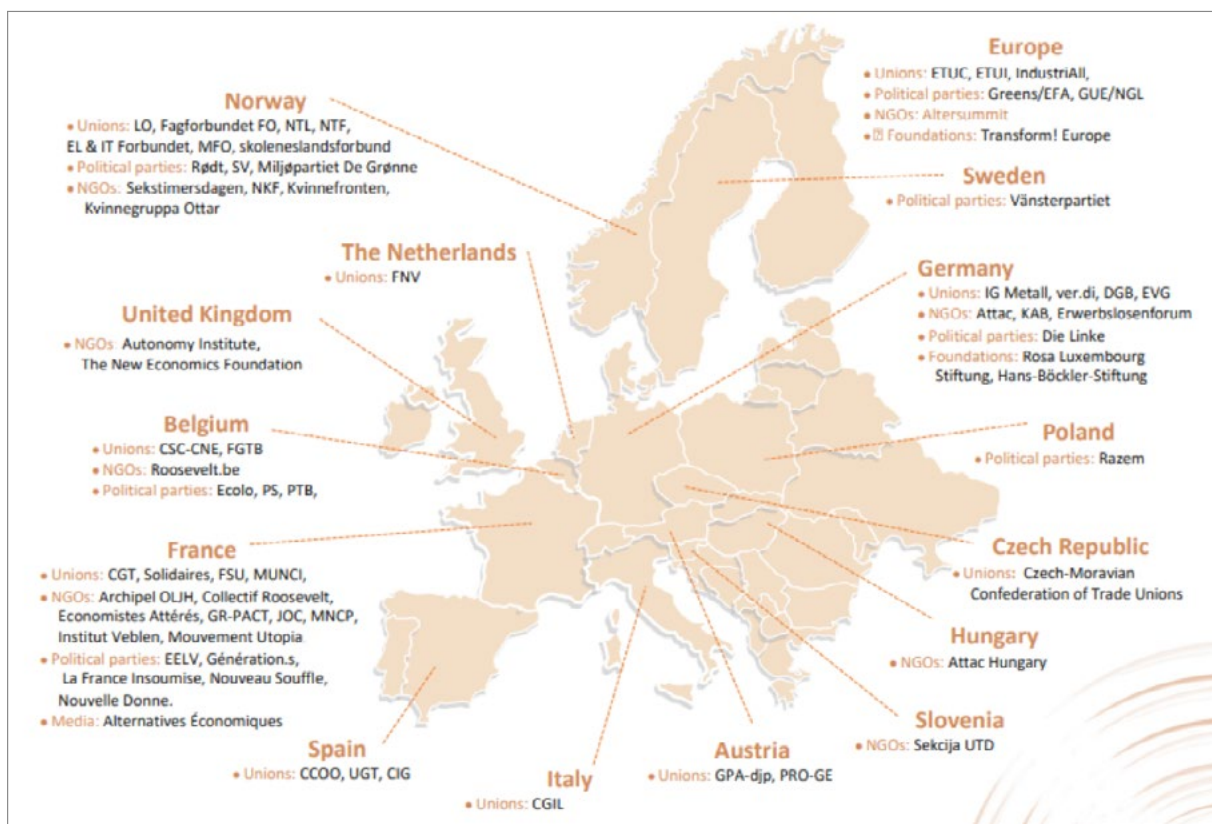
We continue our work this year and have carried out polling which has revealed that the four-day week remains a very popular idea, especially as people reflect on the nature of their work over the course of the pandemic.

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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