

# 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. Our newsletter will come out every two 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, funded by the German Federal Foreign Office.

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## **EUROPEAN UPDATES**

### **ICELAND**

The issue of working-time reduction has been placed at the forefront of political debate in Iceland. A successful trial in Reykjavík City Council has been extended and expanded. Additionally, several Icelandic State departments outside of Reykjavík have also begun their own trials. The constant news coverage has inserted the idea of a shorter working week firmly into a public consciousness, and the ALDA think-tank held a conference on working time reduction in January which gained national attention. One major reason for the support for reducing hours is the widespread feeling that with both parents working long hours, there is not enough time for a full family life.

*"In the last year it has changed very much – the atmosphere and attitude has changed."  
– Magnús Már Guðmundsson, formerly working for Reykjavík City Council.*

Trade unions have been the central force in establishing these trials. They have been making the case for shorter hours for around a decade and raised their importance in negotiations. Within the trials themselves, the unions have had a seat at the table, have held many meetings, and have been a part of the process every step of the way.

The Samtök Atvinnulífsins (Confederation of Icelandic Enterprise) are a body representing the interest of Icelandic business. In 2016 they described the whole debate about shortening working hours as based on a serious misunderstanding, and that a bill on shorter hours would be an act of "[economic terrorism](#)". However, since the overwhelming success of the trials, and the widespread popularity for shorter hours, the Confederation have muted their opposition.

### **Reykjavík City Council**

The city of Reykjavík carried out an experiment in the city council which initially began with around 70 people. The trial began in March 2015 and in Árbæjar and Grafarholt

Service Center, as well as at the child protection department. These workplaces were chosen because the workloads for staff were considered heavy. The weekly reduction in hours varied between workplaces, but was generally a reduction of four hours, with one place reducing by five hours.

So far, four reports have been written about the trial which have consistently reported an improved work-life balance, a slight decrease in levels of sickness, a decrease in bodily ailments, improvements in health and wellbeing, and better sleep. It has also been found that people have been able to do their work as previously.

The extremely positive results from the early experiment meant that Reykjavík City Council expanded the trial to around 2,000 people within the council. The success of the trial so far, as well as the popularity within the Council, means that the change is likely to be made permanent.

No extra money was set aside for the trial. As such, workplaces were tasked with changing the way they worked to make up for the reduction in weekly hours. This was initially seen as a problem, for example in elderly and adult social care homes, because of the varying nature of the shift patterns. Some managers had been running the homes for many years and were completely against the trial, saying they needed more staff. However, this was addressed and solutions found when managers, workers and union reps sat around the table and looked for possible solutions.

Within the care homes, they changed how they worked and how they ordered and organised shifts. They discovered they could have two rather than three people on particular shifts, and the timings of some shifts could be changed. The nature of the change differed from one place to another depending on the internal structures and how many staff were in the homes.

*“Part of it is to talk about it and talk to the people who actually do the shifts – it is not just about the manager. It is about everyone working together. It doesn’t matter what the workplace is – it has to be a talk between everyone and everybody has to be to the same page.” - Magnús Már Guðmundsson*

The general public has been very positive and the introduction of the trial has catalysed a broader recognition of the necessity of cutting working hours, as well as the feasibility of doing so. Open meetings have been held discussing the results from the trials which have attracted a lot of media attention.

Across Iceland, there are hundreds of contracts up for renewal. In large part due to the overwhelming success of the trials and the media attention around it, the expectancy is

that workers and unions will prioritise working time reduction in their own workplaces. A number of major unions have already indicated that they will focus on the demand for shorter hours.

*“There is no one method for this. Each workplace is different. It was cooperation between lots of people.” - Gudmundur D. Haraldsson, Alda*

## **Iceland state departments**

Following the successful and widely publicised trial in Reykjavík City Council, it was decided in 2017 to establish separate trials across four state departments across Iceland, including at an immigration department, and a police station. In 2018 a hospital in Akranes was included as a fifth site in the trial. Across the government departments it was decided to reduce the working week by four hours.

In order to take part in the government trial individual state departments had to apply to the government and complete a series of forms. There have been cases of government departments taking up the trial without informing the government, however when this has been found out the department has been reprimanded and forced to abandon their self-organised experiment.

A report for the government trial is expected to come out in April.

## **UK**

### **Organisation begins trial of a four-day week**

Memiah Limited is an organisation that aims to build a happier, healthier society, by connecting people with self-care information, real stories and professional support across a range of mental health and wellness topics. From the 1<sup>st</sup> of March, the organisation will begin a trial of a four-day, 32-hour week with around 30 employees. Currently, full-time hours at the organisation are 34-hours over five days.

The six-month trial is split into two phases: beginning on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2019 the organisation will retain their normal hours but will enter into a three-month stage of collecting baseline data, in conjunction with university researchers. Staff involved in the trial will do a weekly survey, as well as a more detailed survey at the end of each month. The university will also measure cortisol levels at the end of both phases which is an indicator for levels of stress. The collection of data focuses on wellbeing, mental health, life-satisfaction, and levels of productivity.

For the second three-month phase, all staff involved in the trial will move down to a four-day week. Four part-time and one full-time employee will have had their wages raised for the period of the trial to ensure the trial remains fair as they will serve as the control group. In effect, those in the control group will have an hourly pay rise of 6%. The office will remain open for five days a week, with individual team leaders responsible for ensuring that the new working patterns cover the entirety of the usual five days.

Memiah decided to carry out the trial after director Paul Maunders identified the four-day week as a potential route towards further improving the wellbeing of staff at the organisation. He had been interested in the idea for a while and had spoken to researchers and campaigners in order to broaden his understandings of trialling a four-day week. In December 2018 Paul called an all-staff meeting where he presented the reasons for the move towards a four-day week. After having an organisation-wide and open discussion, a vote involving all workers was taken which resulted in the decision to trial the four-day week in the New Year.

After the six-month trial, the leadership team at Memiah will look at the findings from the evaluation and make the decision over whether or not they will make the change to a four-day week a permanent one.

## **New report on the shorter working week**

Think tank [Autonomy](#) have collaborated with the [4 Day Week Campaign](#) to write a new report, 'The Shorter Working Week: A Radical and Pragmatic Proposal', which can be found [here](#). The report offers a comprehensive overview of the arguments around shorter hours using the latest data. It also draws upon real-life case studies and discusses a number of policy proposals focused on the transition towards a shorter working week.

The report gained national coverage in the UK and was vocally supported by John McDonnell, the Labour Shadow Chancellor, as well as a number of Labour MPs. It was supported by the TUC and the CWU union, the Green Party, and a number of journalists. Katja Kipping, the co-leader of the Left Party (Die Linke) in Germany, also added her own supportive comments to the report.

## **Green Party suggests replacing GDP with a Free Time Index**

In October 2018 the Green Party announced it would [make free time a key measure of UK wellbeing](#) – replacing GDP as a barometer of economic progress. The new indicator

would count the number of hours people spend outside of work and commuting, and be published once a year by the Government as part of the Autumn Budget. The Free Time Index builds upon the Green Party's path-breaking commitment to working time reduction, including their policy for a four-day working week which was announced in 2017.

## **Royal Mail workers begin transition to 35-hour week**

Royal Mail workers in the Communications Workers Union (CWU) responded to the automation of parts of their job by demanding a shorter working week – so that increases in productivity are shared amongst workers and shareholders more evenly. In March 2018 they reached an agreement with Royal Mail for a transition to a 35-hour working week, to be completed by 2021.

In October 2018, 134,000 postal workers began the transition to a 35-hour week (down from 39 hours) by taking their [first hour](#) off their working week.

## **Wellcome Trust could become first large four-day week organisation**

In January 2019 the Wellcome Trust announced that they were considering moving to a four-day week in an attempt to increase productivity and improve work-life balance. The Wellcome is a £26bn London-based science research foundation, and with 800 staff the move would make it the biggest organisation anywhere in the world to try a four-day week.

The Trust's director of policy and chief of staff Ed Whiting [said](#): "Like many organisations, Wellcome is continually looking at how we can increase the impact we make towards our charitable mission and improve staff wellbeing. Moving to a four-day week is one of a number of very early ideas that we are looking at that might be beneficial to welfare and productivity for everyone at Wellcome."

The decision over whether to make the move to shorter hours – most likely in the form of a trial – is expected to be made by the autumn of 2019.

## **BELGIUM**

### **Union campaign for a 32-hour, four-day week**

The General Federation of Belgian Labour (ABVV/FGTB) [launched a campaign](#) in June 2018 in which they are campaigning for the 32-hour working week, ideally in the form of a four-day week. The central arguments made by the union revolve around

distributing work fairly, as well allowing for a more manageable combination of work and family life.

### **30-hour week trial for non-profit organisation**

Femina have begun a one-year trial moving down from a 38 to a 30-hour working week with no reduction in pay as of 2019. Femina is a Flemish non-profit organisation with 63 employees. They strive for 'more time and happiness' and have been advocating for a 30-hour workweek for years, as they believe it would promote more equality between women and men. As policy makers in Belgium still do not believe in a collective reduction of working hours, Femina decided to put their ideas into action within their own organization. Research group [TOR](#) will be evaluating the effects of the trial.

### **Campaign for a shorter working week begins**

'Balance ton lundi' is a nascent [campaign](#) advocating for a four-day week in order to 'work less, share work, and live better'. They draw on the history of the winning of the five-day week, where one of the workers' tools was the use of "Saturday Strikes". In order to win the four-day week they advocate for the use of "Monday Strikes".

### **Political Parties**

- The Socialist Party (PS) and the Greens (Ecolo) are both in favour of working time reduction and have made solid proposals for fixed experiments.
- The Workers' Party of Belgium (PVDA-PTB) is in favour of working time reduction.

### **Research**

- Strijd om Tijd (The Struggle for Time) is a [book](#) written by Olivier Pintelon which examines whether our current working week is suitable for families with two parents working full time – and looks at alternative models of working time.

## **NORWAY**

### **Trade union conference passes shorter hours declaration**

In January 2019 the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions in Trondheim hosted the annual [Trondheims's Conference](#).

At the conference, a representative from The Action Committee for the Six-Hour Day,

Magnhild Folkvord, was this year invited to give a presentation titled '100 years since the 8-hour day, when do we win the 6-hour day? After the talk, the following declaration was agreed upon:

***6-hour day/30-hour week with full wage compensation. The Trondheim Conference 2019 recommends:***

- 1. That the Confederation's local organisations, and unions arrange seminars or conferences to mark the 100th anniversary of the eight-hour working day, and to showcase the experiences of the historical struggle, and discuss how a further shortening of working hours can be won.*
- 2. Demand 6-hour day/30-hour week with full compensation of wages by demanding ½ hour shorter normal working day in the next three year's wage negotiations. The goal is a 6-hour working day by 2020–2024.*

## **Event announcement**

[The Action Committee for the Six Hour Day](#) is hosting a full day conference titled '**Live More – Work Less**' in Oslo on 23 March 2019. Leading members from several trade unions will give their presentations at the conference.

## **FRANCE**

### **Le Conseil Économique Social et Environnemental (CESE) start consultation**

The CESE have started a [consultation](#) on "Young people and the future of work". Réseau Roosevelt have submitted the proposal "For a more equitable sharing of work" as one of the solutions to fight against mass unemployment and to give more meaning and interest to work. The proposal has been widely supported and will be published on 15 March on the consultation website.

The CESE will continue its work on the basis of the results of the consultation, hearings with experts and debates in its Labor Employment Section, and will give an opinion on 27 March during a plenary session open to the public and broadcast live on its website.

## **GERMANY**

### **IG Metall begin implementation of historic agreement**

The trade union IG Metall is in the phase of practically realising the historical agreement

for working time reduction it won in 2018. It was the first significant victory for the union in working time reduction after more than 20 years. Two forms of working time reduction were agreed:

1. All metalworkers have the option to reduce working time from 35 hours to 28 hours for up to two years – albeit without wage compensation.
2. 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 the cash-value of the wage increase. So far, the majority of workers have chosen to have the extra days off, over the cash. This option is only available for workers with caring responsibilities, or those who work in shifts.

### **Unions pave the way for IG Metall**

The option to take free days instead of a wage increase was first won by the EVG (Eisenbahn- und Verkehrsgewerkschaft) trade union for traffic workers. The Verdi union (Vereinigte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft) for postal workers and telecommunications workers also realised an effective shortening of working hours of 14 days per year, without the option to choose a wage increase instead.

### **New time-rights at work**

The German government has passed the “Brückenteilzeitgesetz” law, which dictates that all part-time workers in enterprises with more than 45 employees have the right to go back to their full working hours.

### **Celebration of the eight-hour day**

In October 2018, attac-AG ArbeitFairTeilen organised a big event in Erfurt (capital of Thüringen) together with Rosa Luxemburg-Stiftung Thüringen and the prime minister of Thüringen on “100 Jahre 8Studentag” (100 years 8 hours day).

### **Company implements 25-hour week**

In Bielefeld the IT-agency Digital Enabler introduced the 25-hours week with full compensation of wages. So far the implementation of shorter hours has been successful.

## **ACROSS EUROPE**

### **ETUI Report translated into Italian**

“The Why and How of Working Time Reduction”, written by Stan De Spiegelaere and Agnieszka Piasna of the ETUI (European Trade Union Institute), has been [translated into Italian](#). The comprehensive case for working time reduction written in 2017 is full of case studies, methods and arguments around working time reduction, and can be read in English [here](#).

### **Agreement for European Commission’s new directive on work-life balance**

In January 2019 The European Parliament and the Council reached a provisional agreement on the European Commission’s proposal for a new directive on work-life balance for parents and carers.

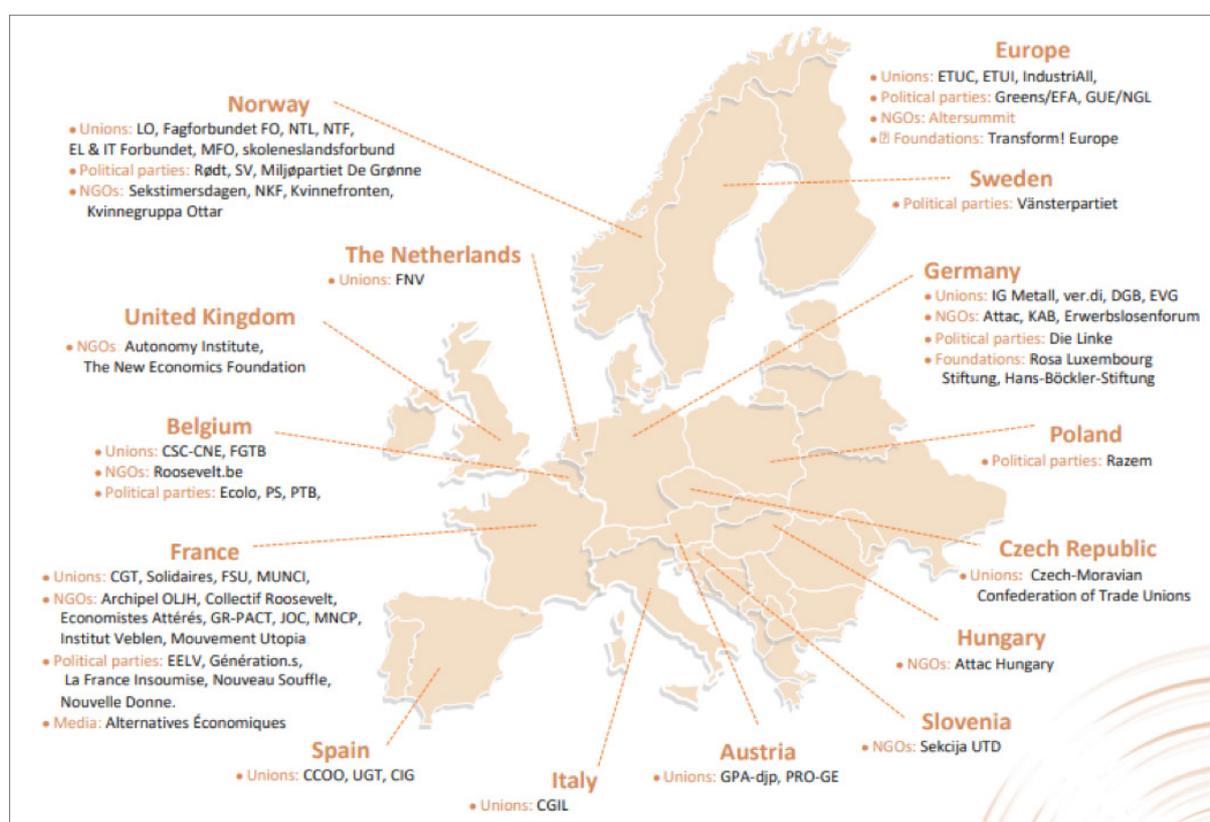
The [agreement](#) sets a European minimum standard of 10 days of paternity leave for fathers following the birth of their child, to be compensated at the level of sick pay. It also strengthens the existing right to four months of parental leave, by making two months non-transferable between parents and introducing compensation for these two months at a level to be determined by the member states. It also established rights for carer’s leave by attributing five days per worker per year, as a new European entitlement for workers. Finally, the new rules strengthen the right for all parents and carers to request flexible working arrangements.

## 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 please contact:**

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