

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 second 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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EUROPEAN UPDATES

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

4 Day Week Ireland campaign to launch

The “4 Day Week Ireland” campaign will launch on Thursday, September 26th in the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin. The guest speaker at the event will be Andrew Barnes, founder of 4 day week pioneers Perpetual Guardian in New Zealand. The campaign will be led by Ireland’s largest public service trade union Fórsa, in partnership with environmentalists, businesses, women’s rights organisations, international campaigners and academics.

The campaign launch will be accompanied by a short research paper putting forward the central arguments around working time reduction, and publication of an extensive survey of public sector workers in Ireland about working time in the context of wellbeing and technological change, among other topics.

ICELAND

Materials from January conference released online

In January 2019 the Icelandic environmental and democratic think-tank Alda held a conference on working time reduction. The focus of the conference was the widespread trial for shorter hours in the Icelandic public sector which we discussed in our first [newsletter](#). Speakers at the conference included representatives from trade unions, researchers on working time reduction, representatives from parliament, and a CEO of a business operating on shorter hours.

Now a summary of the conference has been released in English on the Alda website which also contains a number of [valuable resources](#) around working-time reduction. The resources also include [a video from the conference](#), with English subtitles; in the talk, Sonja – the leader of BSRB – talks about the results of trials of shortening working hours.

Unions in negotiations for widespread adoption of shorter hours

There will likely be further steps taken regarding shortening of working-hours.

The BSRB and BHM unions are still negotiating, and one of their principal demands is shortening working hours. Their agreements are likely to be signed over the coming

weeks. The negotiations have taken longer than usual because of time spent agreeing on the practicalities of how to implement the shortening of hours.

GERMANY

SDP politicians run on shorter working week platforms

Germany's Social Democratic Party (SDP) has 420,000 members and is both the largest and oldest political party in Germany. The 2019 SDP leadership election will take place this autumn, following the resignation of the former party leader Andrea Nahles on 3 June 2019. The SPD will, for the first time since 1993, hold a member-vote to decide the candidate(s). Convention dictates that the party's executive board will propose the choice to the party-convention. A number of nominees have stood on a platform of working time reduction.

30-hour week

Ralf Stegner is the Deputy Leader of the SDP, and Gesine Schwan is the Chairwoman of the SPD's Commission for Fundamental Values. They are both prominent politicians in the SDP, and Gesine Schwan has also been the SPD's nominee for the German presidential election a couple of times – albeit unsuccessfully.

They are running on a [platform](#) that includes the policy to establish a 30-hours-work-week as the new standard, stating that:

Family and work really have to be compatible. The economy is there for people – not the other way around. This must not remain an empty phrase. We aim for the 30-hour week as a standard working time, which not least benefits families.

They also talk about the proposed impact of 'digitization' on the workforce, and the need to ensure that the benefits are shared fairly with workers in the form of working time reduction. These arguments echo the arguments made by trade unions in Germany who talk about 'Industry 4.0' and the expected impact of automation, such as IG Metall.

25-hour week

One of the less-known applicants for the chairmanship of the SPD, Christina Kampmann, went public with the [demand for a 25-hour week](#) with no-loss-in-pay. She has received some minor news coverage for the suggestion. Kampmann stated that:

We want to initiate this debate together with the trade unions. Employees working in

an agency in North Rhine-Westphalia, for example, only work 25 instead of 40 hours a week, that is, five hours a day – with full salary and 30 days' leave. This is a model that I can imagine for all of Germany. Especially young people want more time, for example for their family or volunteering.

German 4 Day Week Campaign established

A German branch of a growing 4-Day Week Movement has been established. This follows developments in countries such as the UK, the USA, and Ireland in creating targeted 4 Day Week campaigns.

They have a website which can be found [here](#), as well as a twitter account which can be found [here](#). The campaign is so far made up of a small number of researchers and activists.

Verdi, Germany's major service sector union, steps up working time reduction organising

Verdi is Germany's second largest union, with 2 million members across the retail, education, health, financial and other services. In May 2019 a workplace-based inquiry on working time and working time preferences was carried in all workplaces where Verdi have union representation. The results are not yet available. The aim of the inquiry is to find out what kind of working time reduction (e.g. shorter hours or fewer days) is the wish of the majority of the members. The inquiry follows a growing enthusiasm for working time reduction in the membership of the union.

In November 2019 all of the member groups of Verdi will participate in a week of action ("Aktionswoche") on the issue of "Arbeitszeiten: Vereinbarkeit von Arbeit und Leben" (Working times: Reconciliation of Work and Life).

BELGIUM

Town-hall staff to move staff to 4 Day Week

As part of a new trial, Saint-Josse, the smallest of Brussels' nineteen municipalities, will allow some town hall staff to work four days a week January 2020. The trial could be extended to all municipal staff at a later date. The municipality reached an agreement on terms with unions for the trial in July 2019.

The trial will begin with full-time municipal workers aged 55 and over can apply to

reduce their working hours, without any loss of salary, bonuses, holiday or pension contributions. In its current phase it is accessible for around 120 employed civil servants and contractors and is estimated to cost €700,000 a year. Applicants must give two months' notice if they wish to take up the new arrangements.

PORTUGAL

Frente Comun union campaigns for 35-hour week in public services

Under the banner: "35 hours for everyone", the Frente Comun public services trade union is campaigning for a 35 hour week across the public sector for all workers employed in the public sector – including those indirectly employed, and those who are self-employed. This campaign is part of a broader attempt to improve the public sector by the trade union. More information can be found [here](#).

UNITED KINGDOM

Study of businesses in UK shows success of 4-day week model

Henley Business School is affiliated with the University of Reading and has released a new study on businesses on a 4-day week model (with no reduction in pay) titled: '[Four Better or Four Worse?](#)' The white paper exploring the growing business trend found that of those businesses who have already adopted a four-day working week, nearly two-thirds (64 per cent) have reported improvements in staff productivity. The study shows how a shorter working week could improve businesses' bottom lines through increased staff productivity and an increase in the physical and mental health of staff.

The research also found that working a 4-day week increased overall quality of life for employees, with more than three quarters (78 per cent) of businesses saying staff were happier, less stressed (70 per cent) and took fewer sick days (62 per cent).

University of Cambridge study shows we only need one day of work a week to maximise mental health benefits

'Employment Dosage' is a research project looking at the link between mental health and work at Cambridge University. They have released a paper that seeks to look at the amount of work needed to accrue maximum benefits to mental health. The study, published in the journal [Social Science and Medicine](#), shows that when people moved from unemployment or stay-at-home parenting into paid work of eight hours or less a

week, their risk of mental health problems reduced by an average of 30 per cent.

However, the study also found that there was no evidence that working any more than eight hours provided further boosts to wellbeing. The full-time standard of 37 to 40 hours was not significantly different to any other working time category when it came to mental health. These researchers therefore conclude that – in order to maximise the mental wellbeing benefits of paid work – the most “effective dose” is only around one day a week – as anything more makes little difference.

ACROSS EUROPE

ETUI Report translated into Korean

‘The Why and How of Working Time Reduction’ written by Stan De Spiegelare and Agnieszka Piasna of the ETUI (European Trade Union Institute) has been [translated into Korean](#). 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](#). This follows the translation of the paper into Italian, and it is also awaiting translation in Croatian and German soon as well.

INTERNATIONAL

4 Day Week US Campaign launched

A shorter working week campaign has also been launched in the USA. The campaign is in its nascent stages but has a website which can be found [here](#). The campaign states that:

“Working Americans power our economy, but the economy has not been working for them. Too many Americans are one paycheck away from bankruptcy and stressed to their limits. This is toxic to American workers, their families, and their communities, who are seeing rising illness rates, lower educational outcomes for their children, widening divides in society, and environmental catastrophe.

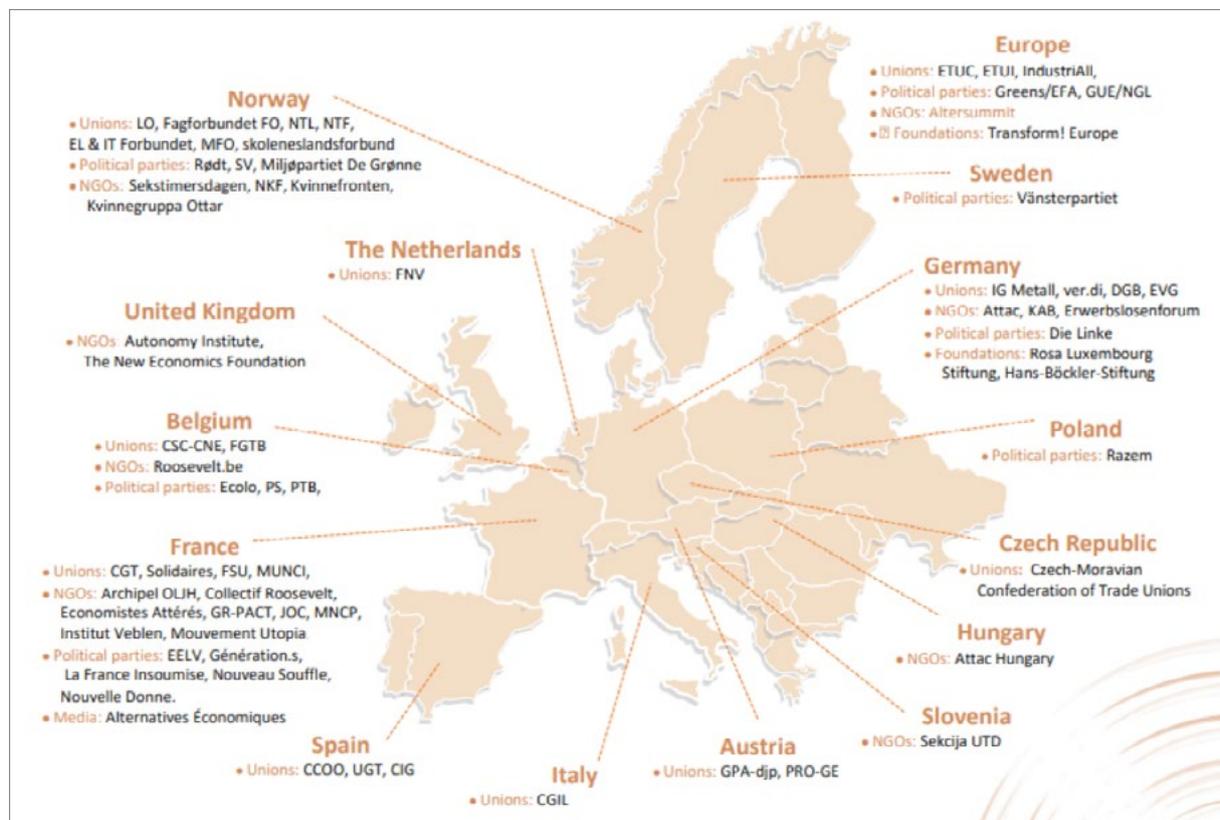
The 4-Day Week is an investment directly in America’s workers, who in turn will invest in themselves by learning new skills; find more time for family; and contribute to community, civic, and educational activities.”

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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