

# ACHIEVING A SHORTER WORKING WEEK ACROSS EUROPE

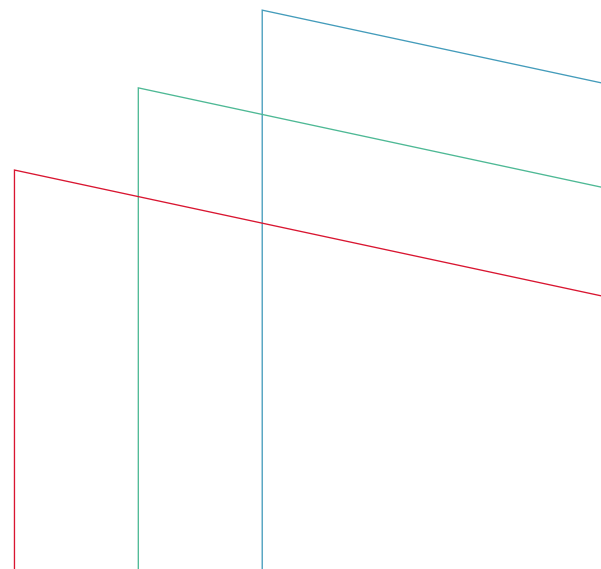
**Newsletter of the European Network  
for the Fair Sharing of Working Time**

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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. 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

### GERMANY

#### **Kurzarbeit payments increase**

Like other countries around the world, Germany imposed strict social distancing measures in order to stop the spread of the virus. In order to support workers through the crisis, the German Government has turned to a policy it has used before: Kurzarbeit, roughly translated as 'short-time work'.

There are around 7 million workers on the Kurzarbeit scheme. Initially, the government would pay 60% a worker's salary, or 67% if they have children (although employers can top-up their wages, and trade unions have negotiated for a minimal drop in salary).

The amount of the compensation payment has now been elevated to 70% of a worker's salary, or 77% if they have children after three months of Kurzarbeit and to 80%, or 87% with children after six months. Some enterprises made agreements with an elevation to 90 or even 100%. but the demand of Verdi, the trade union for the service workers, to elevate the compensation payment by the state to 90/97% for everybody, because even 80/87% is for the many workers with low wages not sufficient, was not fulfilled.

#### **SPD leader makes case for a 30-hour week**

Serpil Midyatli is deputy leader of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), and chairwoman of the SPD in the Schleswig-Holstein state. She is proposing a campaign for a general reduction in working time to a 30-hour working week.

She makes the case for a general reduction in working time for three main reasons: to reduce levels of unemployment as a result of the pandemic; the expected consequences of automation and Artificial Intelligence; and the need of many families to reconcile work and family time.

#### **Manufacturer of automotive parts considers shorter working time**

The German automobile industry is in deep crisis. Already before the Covid-19 pandemic the big automobile enterprises announced significant job cuts. Volkswagen had announced 20,000 redundancies, Mercedes had announced 10,000, and BMW 7,000 job losses.

Continental AG, commonly known as Continental, is a German multinational automotive parts manufacturing company. The Human Resources board member of the company is proposing a working time reduction for all Continental workers, along the lines of the collective agreement for employment security between the trade union IGMetall and employers in the metal industry. The agreement allows to reduce working hours from 35 (agreed working time in the metal industry) down to 28 hours with no compensation or wage loss. The Continental board member is proposing a wage compensation for the workers in the lower wage groups by the state employment agency.

## **Verdi trade union to negotiate for 35-hour week for transportation workers**

Verdi is Germany's second largest union, with 2 million members across the retail, education, health, financial and other services. At the beginning of July 2020 they began their collective bargaining process for public transportation workers – looking to negotiate on for the wages, working conditions and working time of public transportation workers.

As well as looking for higher wages, the union is demanding that working time agreements are unified across the entirety of the sector in the 16 German länder (counties). They are also looking to campaign for a general reduction in working time to a 35-hour week.

## **UNITED KINGDOM**

### **Scottish First Minister advocates for a four-day week**

Nicola Sturgeon – the First Minister of Scotland – has said that businesses should be “encouraged” to allow employees to work [a four-day week](#) to help a return to work be effective in tackling Covid-19.

Sturgeon's call for a four-day week follows the Scottish Post-Covid-19 Futures Commission [advocating](#) for a four-day week as a response to the pandemic.

### **Welsh Future Generations Commission looking at four-day week**

The Welsh Future Generations Commission was set up after the passing of the Well-

being of Future Generations Act in 2015. The Act requires public bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change.

In May of 2020, and in response to the coronavirus pandemic Sophie Howe the Future Generations Commissioner said that climate action and ‘well-being economics’ must play a role in rebuilding a Wales that’s resilient to future challenges – calling for an urgent transition to a low-carbon society.

They advocate for piloting a [four-day working week](#) as a way to reduce our carbon footprint and keep people well, and an end to GDP as the measure of the strength of an economy.

## **High profile public figures call on government to look into four-day week**

The Four Day Week Campaign coordinated a letter to the Chancellor urging the government to explore a four-day week. The public letter gained widespread media attention which gained coverage across the media in [The Guardian](#), [Daily Mail](#), [Ladbible](#) and [Vogue Magazine](#).

[The letter](#), signed by MPs including the former shadow chancellor John McDonnell, SNP MP Mhairi Black and Green MP Caroline Lucas, said a four-day working week would reduce stress and overwork, boost mental health and wellbeing, and increase productivity.

## **Early day motion tabled in Parliament calling for a four-day week**

In June 2020 Labour MP Clive Lewis tabled an [early day motion \(EDM\)](#) calling on the government to set up a commission to consider the range of options and models in relation to shorter working times which could help the UK recover from the pandemic.

An early day motion is a motion tabled by Members of Parliament in the Westminster system that formally calls for debate. In practice, they are rarely debated in the House and their main purpose is to draw attention to particular subjects of interest.

At the time of writing the EDM had 42 supporting signatories from MPs from the Labour Party, the Green Party, the Scottish National Party, the Social Democratic & Labour Party, and Plaid Cymru – demonstrating extensive cross-party support for the idea.

## **Publishers begin a four-day week in response to pandemic**

Target Publishing is a family owned publishers situated half way between London and Cambridge. It has 20 members of staff. In June 2020 during the lockdown – Target decided to move to a [four-day working week](#) with no reduction in pay.

Target said they decided to move to shorter hours as a direct response to the pandemic. They said “Covid-19 has changed how every business operates. We’re determined to make the change a positive. Lockdown highlighted the importance of time with family.” They say they moved to a four-day week “to support our employees’ mental health, well-being and give them a healthier work-life balance.”

## **New research makes case for working-time reduction in manufacturing**

The New Economics Foundation – working with the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions (CSEU) – has released [a new report](#) making the case for reduced working time in the manufacturing sector.

It’s key finding is that – up until the early 1980s – strong collective bargaining ensured that working hours decreased significantly for workers. Over this period, gains in productivity and wages and reductions in time spent at work went hand-in-hand. However, since 1980, while productivity and wages have broadly risen in tandem, gains for workers in terms of leisure time, the measure of how much time workers have away from work, have stagnated.

The report makes the case that there is a backlog of productivity gains in the British economy, where over the last four decades increases in productivity have not flowed to workers in the form of reduced working time. It says that workers in the UK are therefore effectively owed a significant reduction in working time.

The report illustrates its arguments with economic analysis, various in-depth case studies of shorter working time in manufacturing, and suggestions for trade unions looking to campaign on the issue of shorter working time.

## **Report makes case for Liverpool to move to a four-day week in response to pandemic**

A [new report](#) titled *Responding to COVID-19 in the Liverpool City Region* has made the case to transition towards a four-day working week. The report is written as a collaboration between the University of Liverpool, the Liverpool City Region Combined

Authority, and the Heseltine Institute.

The report states that “a shorter working week could help the UK economy transition in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in a way that brings positive benefits for people and planet, including improving workforce health and wellbeing”.

The report makes the case for a transition towards shorter working time led by trade unions and the public sector, which “offers an ideal setting for a trailblazing rollout on a wider scale”.

## BELGIUM

### **Over 70% of Belgians want to radically reduce their working hours**

A [new survey of Belgians](#) conducted by the Catholic University of Leuven (UCLouvain) in collaboration with the University of Saint-Louis and the Socialist Centre for Continuing Education (CESEP) found that 73% of Belgians support a radical reduction in working hours in the period following the coronavirus epidemic.

The survey also found that nine out of 10 respondents thought the post-Covid period should include a job-guarantee, a shift towards an ecologically sustainable economy, the recognition of socially useful jobs, the creation of a sustainable investment fund, and the democratisation of companies.

## SPAIN

### **Launch of Spanish four-day week campaign**

In May of 2020, [a new campaign](#) was launched calling for a four-day working week. The campaign is called 4suma and is a coalition of companies and workers that proposes reducing the work week to a maximum of four days and with no reduction in pay.

[On its website](#), the campaign says that shorter hours would give more time to care, increase gender equality, improve productivity and wellbeing, reduce unemployment, increase local consumption, improve traffic and transport congestion, reduce CO2 emissions, and help facilitate social distancing during the pandemic.

### **Software company moves to four-day, 36-hour week**

Software Delsol is a software development company in the province of Jaén that has moved to a [four-day, 36-hour working week](#) from the beginning of January 2020. The



company employs 185 people and has reduced working hours with no reduction in pay.

They are seeking to demonstrate that output can be maintained, mental health can improve, absenteeism can be lowered, and the carbon footprint can be made smaller.

The organisation looks to focus on the wellbeing of its staff, with a swimming pool, free lunch at midday, a rest room, a slide to lower the floor, a library and massage services.

The reduction in working time is seen as a way of “reinvesting” profits – not in the company – but in the community in which it is situated.

## **Barcelona Time Use Initiative organises of the International Time Use Week in 2020 and 2021**

The Barcelona Time Use Initiative for a Healthy Society is born in Barcelona (Catalonia) and aims at continuing the legacy and experience from the Iniciativa per la Reforma Horària (Time Use Reform Initiative), which managed to put a reform of time-use policies on the political agenda in Catalonia.

On Friday [5 June 2020](#), the [Initiative](#) agreed for the promotion of time use policies at the local and international level and for the organization of the International Time Use Week in 2020 and 2021 – where more than 300 researchers, political representatives, activists and organizations from around the world will participate in a conference devoted to time use.

The world meeting International Time Use Week, will take place from 23 to 29 November 2020, and the International Time Use Week 2021 will take place from 25 to 31 October 2021.

## **ITALY**

### **Working time improvements won by private healthcare workers in union agreement**

Three public service unions – the Fp Cgil, Cisl Fp and Uil Fpl – won an [agreement](#) with private healthcare providers Aris and Aiop covering 100,000 private healthcare workers. The deal was won after significant pressure by the unions, who had threatened strike action for the 12<sup>th</sup> of June.

The new deal won significant improvements including a 4.21% monthly pay rise – equating to €154 a month. Specifically in relation to working time, the agreement guaranteed 14 minutes of dressing times included in the timetable, ensured that no workers can work for more than 12 hours consecutively, and provided respite days for workers in times of personal difficulty.

## INTERNATIONAL

### **New Zealand Prime Minister calls for four-day week**

Jacinda Ardern – the New Zealand prime minister – has [suggested employers consider](#) a four-day working week and other flexible working options as a way to boost tourism and help employees address persistent work/life balance issues.

*“I hear lots of people suggesting we should have a four-day workweek. Ultimately that really sits between employers and employees. But as I’ve said there’s just so much we’ve learnt about Covid and that flexibility of people working from home, the productivity that can be driven out of that.”*

*“I’d really encourage people to think about that if you’re an employer and in a position to do so. To think about if that’s something that would work for your workplace because it certainly would help tourism all around the country.”*

As of yet, her vocal support has not been followed by any material policy change despite the strong support for shorter hours in New Zealand and the pioneering example of [Perpetual Guardian](#), the New Zealand company who made headlines around the world after successfully moving to a four-day week with no reduction in pay.

### **US company moves to four-day week over the summer**

inkWELL Press Productivity Co. based in Asheville, North Carolina provides organizational products and services to empower women to be more organized & more successful in their lives. It has around 10 employees, and normally closes the office at 3pm on Fridays.

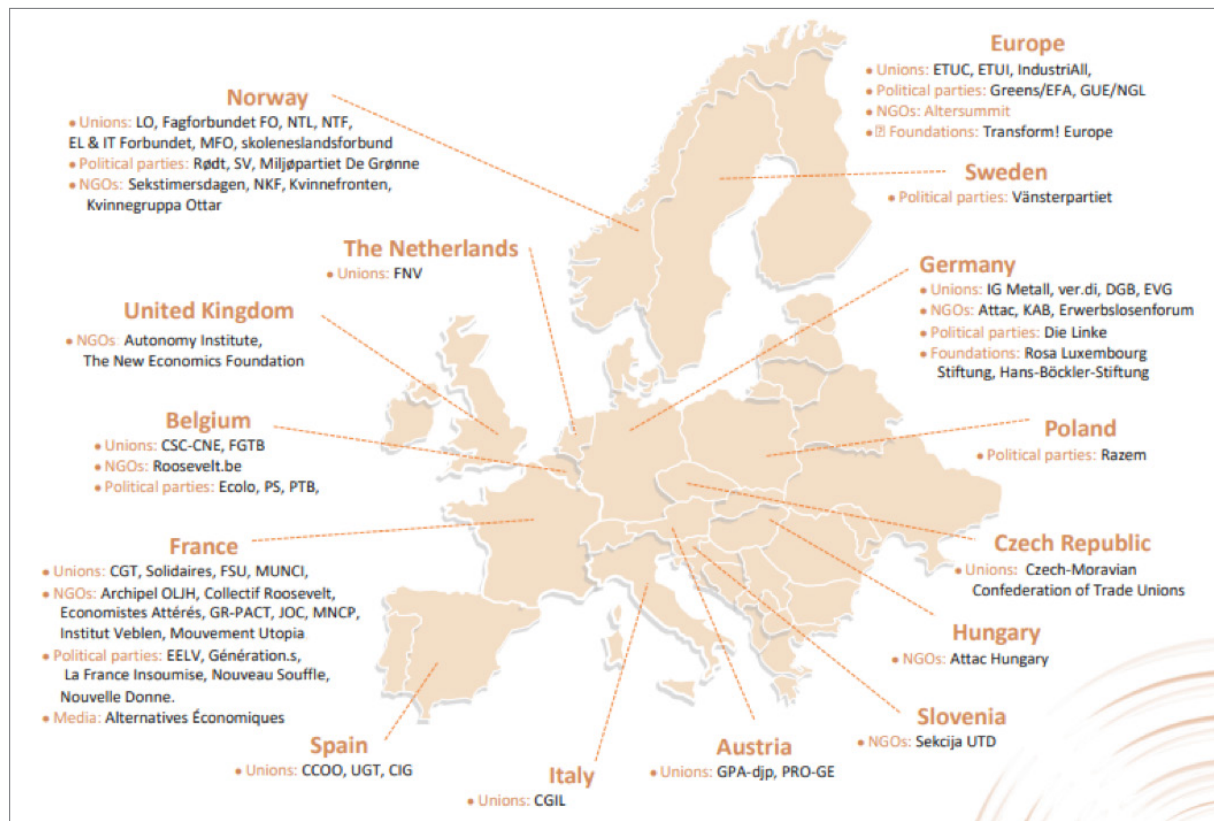
As a company that focuses on productivity, CEO Tonya Dalton is “a firm believer that employees can be just as productive (or maybe even more productive!) in four days than in five”. As such she has moved the company down to a four day week with the office now closed on Fridays.

# 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



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