

# ACHIEVING A SHORTER WORKING WEEK ACROSS EUROPE

ISSUE 2 • JUNE 2019

*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 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

### UK

In the UK, calls for a four-day working week (with no reduction in pay) have moved from being a utopian demand on the radical periphery, to a mainstream political idea over the space of two years. The UK can be seen as the centre of a growing international movement around shorter hours. Britain is [“the most enthusiastic” country in Europe](#) for a four-day week, and Britons are increasingly convinced of the benefits shorter hours could bring. There are dozens of UK businesses who have already moved to shorter hours, and many more who are looking to make the change in the near future. The union movement is also gearing up to campaign seriously for shorter hours, particularly in response to the expected impact of automation. The biggest recent developments have been political, where progressive factions have lined up in support of a four-day week to pressure the Labour Party to adopt it as official party policy.

### Momentum back a four-day week

Momentum are a grassroots political organisation in the UK. They have 40,000 members, all of whom are also members of the Labour Party. They have existed since 2015, and have aimed to “transform the Labour Party, our communities and Britain in the interests of the many, not the few”. Since their inception, they have mainly focused on internal Labour Party processes and mobilising grassroots supporters in elections.

In a recent turn of events, Momentum have expanded their purpose and have looked to pressure Labour into adopting a series of more radical policies at the September 2019 Labour Party Conference. These policies include supporting a Green New Deal, banning immigration detention centres, and the introduction of a four-day working week with no reduction in pay.

This is a significant step by Momentum, not least because of the high levels of grassroots mobilisation and influence they have within Labour.

### Labour Party independent review into working time

In March 2019, Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell announced that Labour had commissioned Robert Skidelsky to undertake an inquiry into Shorter Working Time. [He stated that](#), “Lord Skidelsky’s recommendations will inform our policy development on

working time reduction & how we face the challenges of automation.” Lord Skidelsky is a cross-bench peer and the review is an independent one.

The inquiry is expected to look at how Britain has historically achieved working time reductions, as well as examples of working time reduction from across the world. Based on these findings, the review will detail a series of policy recommendations that would focus on how the UK could practically move towards a shorter working week. The Labour Party will then choose whether or not to incorporate the recommendations of the review into Labour Party policy at the annual Conference in September 2019. The review is expected to be published in late July or early August of this year.

### **New report links carbon emissions with working time**

The UK thinktank Autonomy [wrote a report](#) titled The Ecological Limits of Work. The aim of the report was to make clear the connection between working time and carbon emissions. The report functioned as a provocation, stating that – should all else remain the same – the UK would have to reduce its working week to around nine hours in order for the UK to stay within environmental limits.

The report sparked a countrywide conversation and was reported on in a range of national papers from across the political spectrum – including front-page coverage. It was published in the midst of the Extinction Rebellion protests and the School Climate Strikes, and spoke to the significant concerns that people have in relation to climate breakdown.

### **Research finds no more than one day of work is necessary to maximise mental health outcomes**

A University of Cambridge [research project](#) has looked at the connection between mental health, wellbeing, and hours of employment. The report found that:

- Working eight hours a week is sufficient to gain the wellbeing benefits of employment.
- The wellbeing of employees is similar regardless of the length of the working week up to 48 hours a week.

The report gained [national](#) and international coverage and could have significant repercussions on the debates around the future of work. It is a commonly accepted assumption that ‘work is good for you’, however – up until this point – no one has carried out research looking at exactly *how much* work is necessary to achieve the health and wellbeing effects of work. The ground-breaking study provides empirical evidence

for theorising the future models of organising work in society, and especially in relation to shortening the working week.

### **Call centre announces four-day week trial**

Simply Business have [announced](#) that they will move their Northampton-based call-centre to a four-day working week (with no reduction in pay) from September 2019. Up to 250 workers could move from a 37.5-hour week to a 30-hour week as part of the change, making it one of the largest four-day week experiments anywhere in the world. The organisation is part of a swiftly growing trend in the UK, where dozens of companies have experimented with reduced working hours.

One of the key reasons the organisation will trial shorter hours is because of technological changes which have improved productivity within the call centre. Greater use of data analytics and web and email contact means fewer calls should be needed, reducing the overall workload of the employees. The organisation has made the decision to share the benefits of increased productivity with their employees in the form of reduced working time. Debs Holland, the general manager of the Simply Business call centre, said: "This is about sharing the upside with our people and creating a workplace which is as great as it can be."

### **Trade union movement gears up to campaign on working time reduction**

A number of trade unions in the UK have recently announced plans to begin campaigning for a shorter working week. Shorter hours have swiftly risen up the agenda of the trade union movement over the past few years, especially as a practical response to the expected impact of automation. The unions are concerned over the potential harmful impact of new technologies like artificial intelligence, and make the case that workers should stand to benefit from the introduction of these new technologies through a reduced working week.

#### *The Trades Union Congress (TUC)*

In May, the TUC held a [conference](#) with the New Economics Foundation (NEF) reaffirming their commitment to the shorter working week as a central aim of the labour movement. NEF and the TUC held a participatory session on organising and campaigning for a reduction of working time where they discussed why they should demand a shorter working week and how trade unions could organise to get there.

## *Unite*

Unite the Union – the largest union in the UK – are also preparing for industrial campaigns around shorter hours. The [draft](#) of their New Technology Agreement states that “where New Technology offers the possibility to reduce the overall number of individual working hours required from a group of workers, the Employer and the Union will prioritise the reduction of the number of hours to be worked by employees without any loss of pay.”

Sharon Graham, executive officer for Unite with responsibility for automation [said](#): “A shorter working week without loss of pay can help workers stay in work when new technology reduces the number of tasks that need to be done by people...The gains from technology should be used to change the lives of working people including better retirements and shorter working time.”

## *PCS*

At this year’s Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) Conference, a [resolution](#) was passed in which “Conference instructs the NEC to lead a PCS campaign for a four day, 28 hour, working week with no loss of pay”.

## *CWU*

The Communication Workers Union have also [continued](#) to organise around shorter working hours following their historic [victory](#) in reducing the working week for 120,000 postal works at Royal Mail from 39 to 35 hours.

## **ITALY**

### **New trend of union agreements allows for time to be exchanged for money**

A growing [trend](#) in Italy allows workers to choose between extra time outside of work, or a pay increase. Trade unions have reached agreements with some Italian companies for workers to exchange time for money.

This new agreement can be deployed in a variety of ways, for example workers can convert part of their productivity bonus into additional days of annual leave. Additionally, workers are encouraged to use up their unused holidays through productivity bonuses which are only triggered once workers have used up all their days of leave. This benefits the company too, since backlogs of unused holiday can weigh on companies’ balance sheets.

## FRANCE

### Publication marks one hundred years of the eight-hour day in France

The Roosevelt Network has published an article titled '[It is urgent to revive the debate of the sharing of working time](#)' in the monthly economics magazine *Alternatives Economiques* for the centennial of the eight-hour day on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April. *Alternatives Economiques* has a monthly circulation of around 90,000 and is a very well respected magazine in economics. The article is an important addition to the debate around working time in France.

### National consultation 'The young and the future of work'

The Conseil Economique Social et Environnemental (ESEC) launched a public consultation at the beginning of 2019 on the subject of 'The young and the future of work'. The ESEC is a constitutional consultative assembly. It represents key economic, social and environmental fields, promoting cooperation between different socio-professional interest groups and ensuring they are part of the process of shaping and reviewing public policy.

During this consultation the Roosevelt Network has proposed a contribution in favour of the fair sharing of working time titled 'Work for all! For a fair sharing of working time'. The contribution proposed a law to allow to volunteer companies the right to conduct experiments on working time. The proposition was one of the most popular on the platform where the public could vote for their favourite responses. As such, the fair sharing of working was one of the three proposals selected by the Council.

When the final report and accompanying recommendations were published by the ESEC on 27 March, the Roosevelt Network was surprised to find that the fair sharing of working time was not present. The subject was discussed by the Commission on Social Affairs, which brought together trade unions and employers' organisations, but it seems that a compromise could not be reached. The Roosevelt Network have said that they will contact the authors of the consultation to know exactly the content of the debate and the reason why the fair sharing of working time was absent in the final report.

### Poll: "60% of the French workers are in favour of the four-day week"

A poll of tens of thousands of European workers examined the attitudes of different countries to the prospect of working fewer hours. [The Workforce View in Europe 2019](#) found that 60% of French workers would prefer to be working a four-day week.



However, respondents were divided on the impact this would have on their salary, with more than three-quarters (83%) preferring to work longer for four days to keep the same salary. The Collectif Roosevelt commented on the poll and were quoted in the newspaper [Les Echos](#), the first economic and business newspaper in France.

## **European Elections elect supporters of shorter working week**

After the European Elections in France, two people deeply involved in the fight for the fair sharing of working time agenda have been elected:

- Aurore Lalucq, economist and cofounder of the Veblen Institute. She is very close to the Network for the Fair Sharing of Working Time.
- Pierre Larrouturou, economist and co-founder of the Collectif Roosevelt and Nouvelle Donne. He is the preeminent public figure of the four-day week fight in France.

Additionally, the Green Party had a surge in the popular vote and have had 12 people elected to the European Parliament, some of whom are in favour of the fair sharing of working time.

## **SPAIN**

### **Unions sign agreement to return to 35-hour week**

The FeSP-UGT (the Federation of the General Workers Union and of Public Services Workers) and the public service federations of the Federación de Servicios de Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) confederation have negotiated an [agreement](#) with the region of Castilla and Leon that will bring 85,000 public sector workers back on to a 35-hour week. The initial working hours increase was imposed under a series of austerity measures and has long been resisted by the trade unions.

The reduction in working hours will be rolled out at different times for different public sector workers. For workers in health and administration the reduction will take place from 1 June and from 1 September for teachers.

## **FINLAND**

### **Unions preparing to ensure end of working hours increase**

A number of Finnish trade unions are preparing to end the agreed extension in working hours. The initial extension occurred in 2016, when the unions signed up to an



exceptional national Competitiveness Pact under heavy pressure from PM Sipilä's right-wing government. The pact that involved an additional 24 hours work a year with no extra pay, a 30% cut in holiday pay for public sector workers and a transfer of pension contributions from employers to employees.

Some unions have already [confirmed](#) that they want the additional hours to be cut in preparation for the upcoming round of negotiations. Petteri Oksa, the director of collective bargaining for YTN (a Federation of Professional and Managerial Staff), has said that "Extending working hours was an exceptional solution in exceptional times. The time for that is past."

## **ACROSS EUROPE**

### **European Court of Justice ruling that companies must record staff working hours**

In May of 2019, the European Court of Justice passed a [ruling](#) stating that companies in the EU must set up a system to record how many hours their employees work every day which the court said were necessary to enforce legal limits on working hours.

The ruling was in response to the Spanish CCOO trade union, who brought an action before the Audiencia Nacional (National High Court, Spain), seeking a judgment declaring Deutsche Bank SAE to be under an obligation to set up a system for recording the time worked each day by its members of staff.

### **A Green New Deal for Europe?**

There is a swiftly growing movement around the world aimed at declaring a climate emergency and making changes to the economy to avoid irreversible climate breakdown. Emerging from this movement are calls for a 'Green New Deal' – a plan of action to radically decarbonise the economy, whilst simultaneously addressing a series of other structural deficiencies including inequality and stagnating pay.

Within Europe, Diem 25 have led calls for a pan-European [Green New Deal](#). They call for 10 Pillars of Change across the European economy, with Pillar Five being an aim to 'Raise the Standard of Living'. They view shortening the working week as a [key element](#) of their plan to raise living standards.

## INTERNATIONAL

### An International Employers Network?

New Zealand firm Perpetual Guardian made [headlines](#) around the world when they moved 240 staff to a four-day week last year, with no reduction in pay. They [estimate](#) that around 800 million people have engaged with their story. They have described the move as an ‘unmitigated success’ after finding improvements in work-life balance, stress levels, and sense of empowerment at work – whilst output has not dropped.

The New Zealand firm have not stopped there though. Their CEO has become something of a four-day week evangelist, and is seeking to convince the business world of the merits of the four-day week. Perpetual Guardian have been travelling to the UK to hold meetings with several UK employers in both the public and private sector to discuss the benefits of shorter hours. It was their meeting with Simply Business (see above) which encouraged them to trial the four-day week.

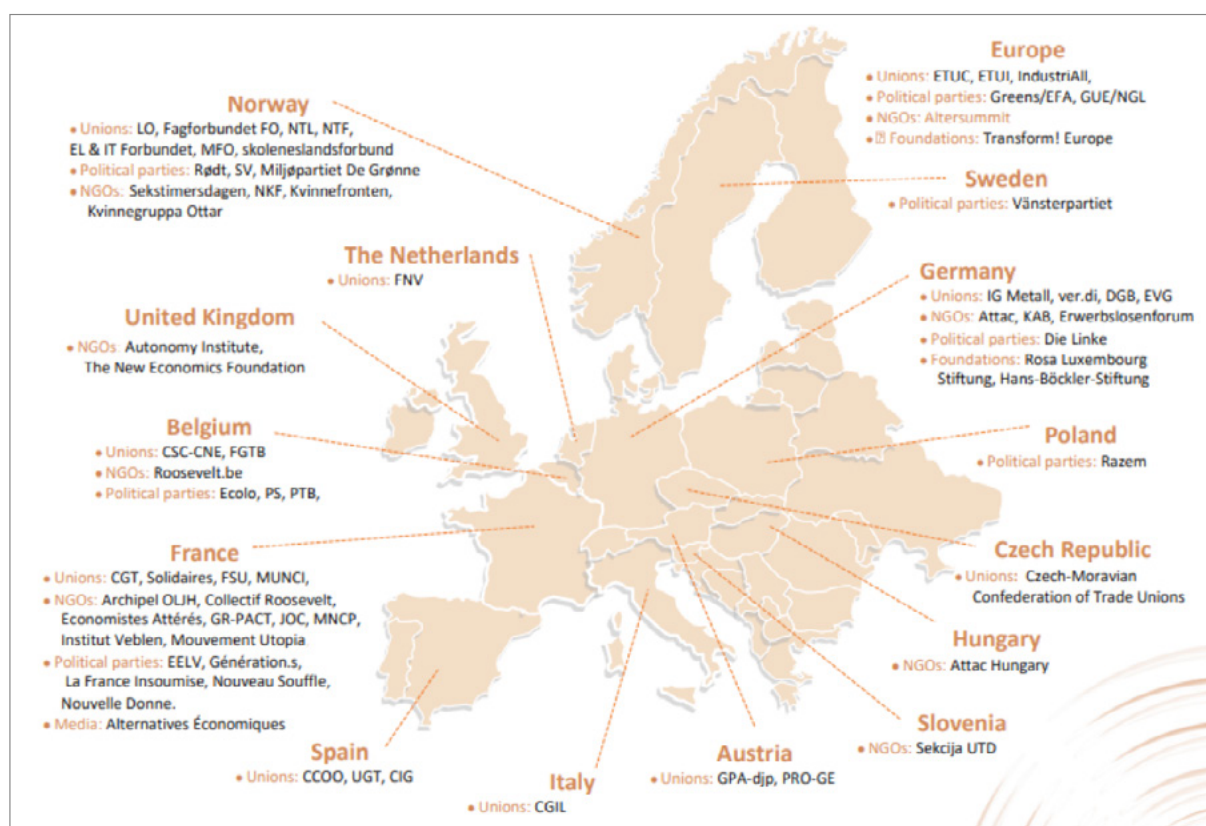
Perpetual Guardian have been hosting industrial site visits from European companies interested in the four-day week and who are keen to see how the reduction in working time operates in practice. They have also written a [white paper](#) which details their approach to moving towards a four-day week, and which can be used by other companies. They have found that the white paper has been downloaded thousands of times by companies across Europe who have signalled that they are intending to experiment with shorter hours in the near future.

## 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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