

# Why work less? Facts about working time

## Would you like to work less?

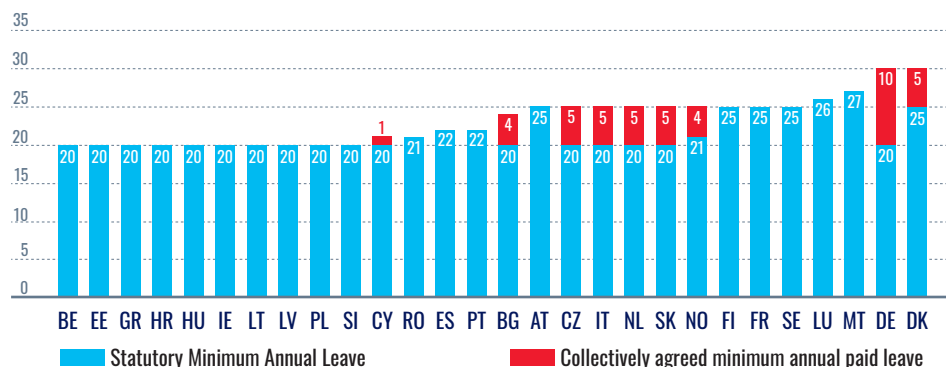
Sounds great! But how? You might have heard about the idea of a four-day week. One less day of work to spend with your family or pursue a hobby whilst receiving the same pay. It might sound like a dream, but in some places it is turning into reality. [Pilot projects](#) are testing it out around Europe and [some politicians](#) have been keen to support the idea.

## How much do Europeans work at the moment?

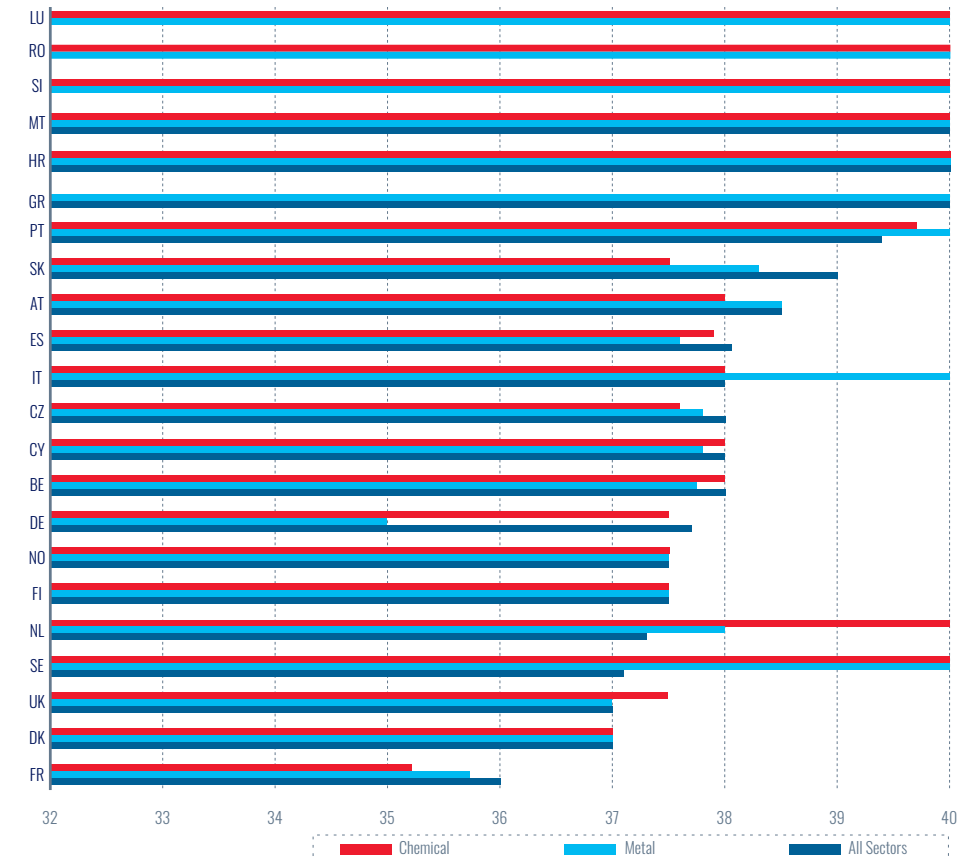
Working time maximums are currently set by the 2003 Working Time Directive. This stipulates that workers in the EU should not work more than 48 hours a week. A new study, commissioned by industriAll European Trade Union, shows that collective agreements between unions and employers bring the maximum down significantly to between 35 and 40 hours a week in all EU countries. In short, the power of unions to negotiate fewer working hours means that the maximum working day is lower than legal maximum.

Specific agreements in certain sectors of the economy often reduce the maximum working week even further. In countries and sectors where trade unions are strong, workers work fewer hours.

## Annual leave days in European countries



## Max. weekly working hours in European countries



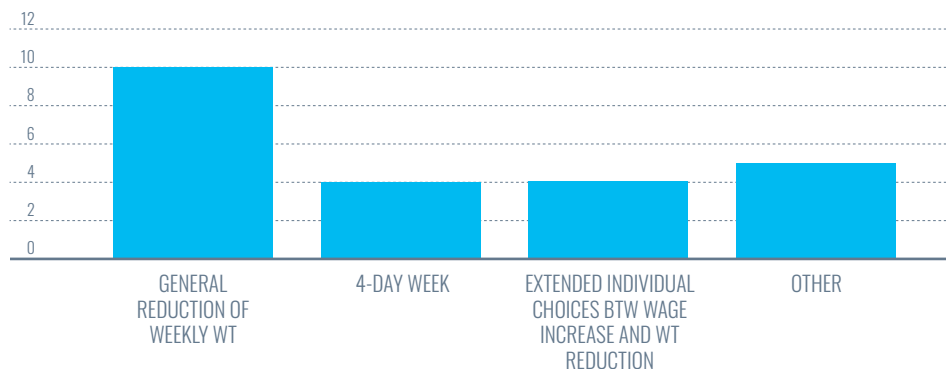
The graph above shows that all EU countries have weekly working limits below the 48-hour ceiling set out by EU law. Note the lower working hours in some countries for the chemical and metal industries, where unions are strong. There is also a gap between Western and Eastern Europe. The graph on the left shows how, in some countries, unions secure working-time reduction not just by cutting the hours worked in a week, but by winning more days off in a year. More on the different ways unions are pushing for working-time reduction overleaf.

# Now is the time for working time reduction

## With the cost-of-living crisis, is reducing working time really a priority?

European economies are stuck with wage growth well below the level of inflation. Employers consistently argue that keeping their workers' pay in line with price rises will cause more inflation. While there is increasing evidence that it is [corporate profits raising prices](#), lowering working hours without loss of pay may be an alternative or complementary way of restoring workers' quality of life. Cutting working time would compensate for the massive loss of purchasing power over the last decade whilst boosting productivity and managing the green transition.

## Main reasons for unions pursuing working time reduction



### UK

56 companies having participated in a national trial have decided to continue with 4-day weeks on a permanent basis.

### Spain

The government provides financial support to 70 SMEs in order to reduce hours by a least 10% without any pay cuts. Also manufacturing companies with less than 250 workers are encouraged to take part.

### Portugal

The government provides funding for 85 companies which are taking part in a project with 4-day weeks as an experiment to accentuate work-life balance.

### Germany

IG Metall has already negotiated possibilities for time off instead of paid work for carers in the metal sector. In the autumn of 2023, they will be negotiating a 4-day week in the steel sector with full pay compensation.

### Italy

Italy's Lenet Group, known for kitchenware, lets workers consider Fridays as Saturdays, provided they have achieved their objectives for the week. No meetings will be held on Fridays.

## What are unions doing to win working-time reduction?

Despite the buzz around a four-hour working week, this is only one way of lowering the total time we work. A four-day week may not work in every sector or company. Our survey shows that unions are pursuing a variety of approaches to lowering working time. See the graph on the left. The map (above) highlights some great examples of where working time reduction is improving workers' lives, while boosting productivity and attracting more workers to take up jobs in key sectors.

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