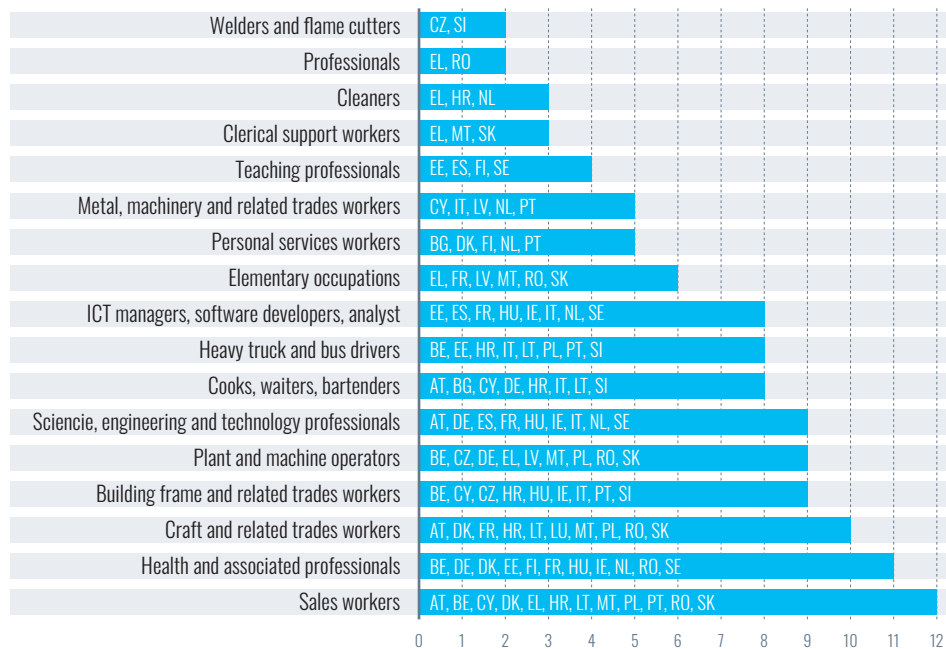


# Working less is good for everyone

**Figure 1:** Main shortages occupation – number of countries reporting shortages in different occupations



Source: Eurofound. Tackling labour shortages in EU Member States (2021)



You might have heard a lot about a four-day week. The idea is to work less, get paid the same, and be more productive, whilst having a better work-life balance. Our previous factsheet explained how the four-day work is only one way of reducing working time. Around Europe, industrial trade unions are winning working time reduction of many different types. And it's not just workers who win with lower working time. It's good for companies, the economy, society and the planet.



## Industry makes itself more attractive in a competitive labour market

Manufacturing and industrial firms are facing big skill shortages in many key sectors and professions. But the shortage of trained workers isn't reserved to industry: other sectors are experiencing similar problems, leading to tough competition for workers. Figure 1 shows where the shortages are most acute. Shortages are having a real impact on the economy. For example, 39% of manufacturing companies in Eastern Europe point to labour shortages as a factor limiting production. With a tight labour market entrenched across much of Europe, reducing working time is emerging as one way firms can attract skilled young workers into professions. Young people often value the flexibility and improved personal life that comes with shorter working time, particularly when starting a family. It's also a boon for women and people with caring responsibilities. Working time reduction can offer an edge to industrial sectors in the competition for the best workers.



## Working less is good for you...

Europe is not only experiencing a record tight labour market, but also a burnout crisis with stress at work increasing substantially in the past years. According to a recent [study](#) by EU-OSHA, 44 percent of workers say that their work stress has increased since the pandemic and 46 percent say that they are exposed to severe time pressure or work overload. Several work-related health issues that are commonly associated with stress are also reported by a large proportion of workers: 30 percent reported at least one health problem (overall fatigue, headaches, eyestrain, muscle problems or pain) caused or made worse by work.



# Unions push for working-time reduction to protect health and the planet!

Figure 2 shows that improving work-life balance and health and safety is a top priority when reducing working time for unions. The same study, conducted by the European Trade Union Institute in cooperation with industriAll Europe, shows that the recent pilot projects which tested working time reduction in the form of the '4-day week' led to workers reporting less stress, fatigue and burnout. The situation has been a win-win for both workers and employers, as companies reported improved productivity, less costs for health care, reduced employee turnover and better chances when recruiting new employees.



**...and it's a win for the planet!**

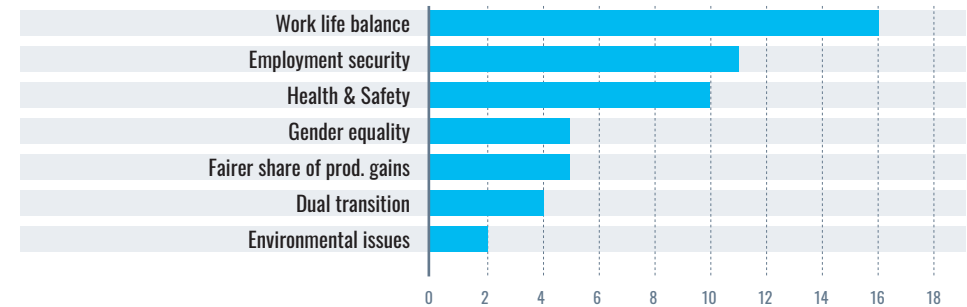
Over 25 million manufacturing, mining and energy workers in Europe will be affected by the transition to green and digital industry. Figure 3 shows the massive impact of the green transition on the European economy. It shows a disproportionately large effect on industrial sectors.

A big part of this challenge comes from the new skills needed to do green jobs. According to the European Battery Alliance, 800,000 re/upskilled workers are needed to reach the EU's battery ambitions, while BCG research for the European Electromobility Platform estimates that 2.4 million automotive workers will need to be retrained by 2030.

Working-time reduction allows more time and flexibility for training and guarantees better employment security for workers in fast-changing industries.

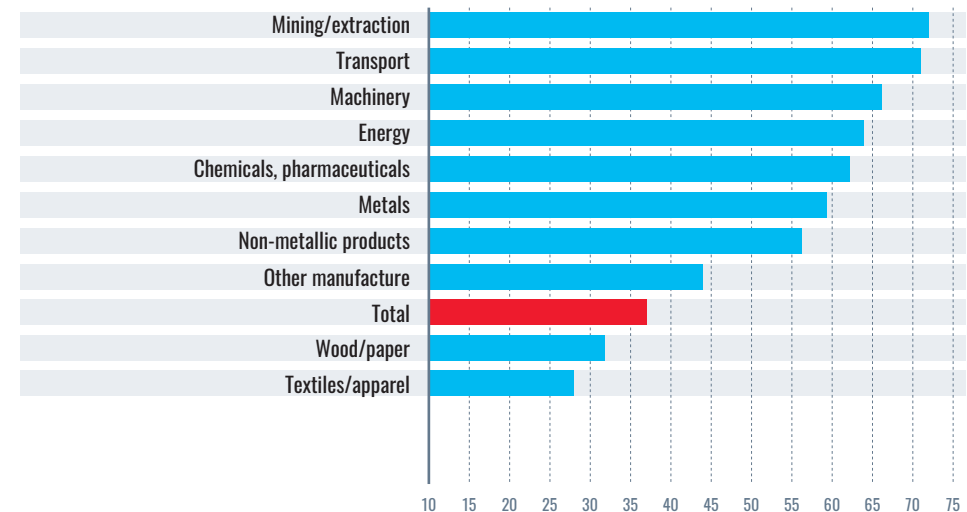
A great example of this comes from [Sweden](#). Two landmark collective agreements have been turned into law to strengthen the support for job-to-job transitions and lifelong learning. A transition study aid and a new collectively agreed financial study aid give individuals the right to financial support for both shorter and longer courses to develop their skills, both while in employment and in between jobs.

Figure 2: Principal reasons for pursuing collective working time reduction



Source: industriAll Europe Working Time Survey; multiple answers possible.

Figure 3: Impact of greening on occupations %



Source: ETWCS 2021