

BARGAINING FOR WORKING TIME REDUCTION

ETUC Study on
Working Time Reduction
in Collective Agreements

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Disclaimer

This document provides general information and guidance and is not a comprehensive treatment of the subject. It is not intended to provide legal advice.

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Executive summary

The regulation and limitation of working time is a fundamental aspect of decent work and working life. Historically, the collective struggle of workers and trade unions has been instrumental in driving positive change through the progressive introduction of labour market reforms such as the 8-hour workday, the 5-day work week, and annual paid leave. Today, working time reduction is once again gaining traction, with trade unions setting the example through collective bargaining-led initiatives, to manage a changing world of work, claim a fair share for workers and reclaim time sovereignty.

This study examines working time reduction with no loss in pay, via a desktop review and analysis of relevant collective bargaining agreements (CBAs).

Chapter 1: A trade union narrative for working time reduction

The first chapter aims to develop a trade union narrative in support of working time reduction, by providing an overview of existing data, research and findings which trade unions can take into negotiations. This literature review is intended to equip trade unionists with arguments and evidence to bring the issue of working time reduction to the negotiation table, and to strengthen the case for reduced working hours in CBAs.

This chapter is organised by three perspectives:

- Workers and trade unions: factors that encourage workers and trade unions to bargain for working time reduction.
- Employers: factors that motivate employers and business-owners to introduce working time reduction.
- Macro and societal: factors that positively affect large portions of an economy or social groups, beyond a single workplace or sector.

The review considers wellbeing at work, job quality, productivity, organisational performance and the broader socio-ecological impact working time reduction could have.

Chapter 2: Working time reduction in collective agreements

The second chapter maps and analyses CBAs that include working time reduction, in most cases with no loss in pay. The study collected and analysed 119 relevant CBAs from across Europe. The agreements varied by country, sector, type of workers covered and type of working time reduction. This demonstrates that trade unions and their negotiators have a wide range of routes available to achieve working time reduction.

The chapter contains three sections. First, the introduction and the methodology for the collection and analysis of CBAs are outlined. The second section contains the results of the mapping and analysis of agreements. This includes analysis of the countries, sectors, types of workers, types of working time reduction, and negotiations for the collected CBAs. The third and final section includes five in-depth case studies of CBAs selected from those collected in this research, summarising insights gathered via desk research. The five case studies illustrate different types of CBAs in different countries, including Belgium, Scotland, Sweden, Germany and Italy. These CBAs vary by sector, level, type of working time reduction and number of hours or days reduced.

Chapter 3: Negotiations and implementation of working time reduction

The third chapter presents findings and recommendations for approaching working time reduction strategically as well as practically in collective bargaining. This includes a summary of the general trends of working time reduction in Europe, key considerations when negotiating for working time reduction and recommendations for trade union leaders and negotiators.

Key considerations when negotiating for working time reduction include five approaches and strategies to negotiate from:

- Leverage the broader political context and organise at the largest-scale possible
- Engage, inform, and organise workers
- Build robust evidence and arguments
- Strategise around both short term and long term goals
- Engage with and educate employers

When it comes to working time reduction design, there are four main aspects to consider - in particular for negotiations at an organisation-level but also more broadly when bargaining at sectoral level. These include: reserving the necessary time for preparation; determining the specific model or modalities of working time reduction; agreeing on implementation parameters; and ensuring a smooth interaction with other existing policies in the workplace or sector.

The chapter reviews aspects of importance to the evaluation of agreements, such as negotiating for implementation deadlines, equality impact assessments and clear metrics of success. Finally, the chapter includes recommendations for trade union leaders and negotiators when approaching working time reduction.

CHAPTER 1

A trade union narrative for working time reduction



Introduction

In order to strengthen the case for working time reduction in collective bargaining agreements (CBAs), trade unionists need to be equipped with both arguments and evidence when developing demands and entering negotiations.

For the 100 years after 1870, Europe saw an interplay between productivity improvements and shorter working hours. However, since the 1970s, the trend of reducing working hours has flattened out, and in many countries, the average full-time working hours have barely decreased over the past 50 years. In the meantime, productivity has continued to increase. Since 1975, productivity in European economies has increased by roughly 200%. This means that one average worker today produces as much value as three workers did in 1975.¹

Consequently, it is more important than ever that trade unions are bargaining and campaigning for working time reduction in Europe in order to demand a fair share for workers.

This chapter aims to develop a narrative in support of working time reduction, providing an overview of existing data, research and findings which trade unions can take into negotiations.

In this context, working time reduction is defined as a reduction in contracted working hours with no loss in pay. This study is primarily focused on the reduction of weekly working hours, but other forms of working time reduction, such as monthly or annual reductions in working time also included.

The narrative is organised below by three perspectives:

- **Workers and trade unions.** Factors that encourage workers and trade unions to negotiate for working time reduction.
- **Employers.** Factors that motivate employers and business-owners to introduce working time reduction.
- **Macro and societal.** Factors that positively affect large portions of an economy or social groups, beyond a single workplace or sector.

This chapter explores work-life related aspects such as well being, job quality, organisation, productivity and compensation, as well as situating the policy debate on working time reduction in a broader socio-ecological context.²

1 Feenstra et al, "The Next Generation of the Penn World Table".

2 The list of literature used in this review can be found in the Bibliography. It consists primarily of English-language research and publications. Research and publications have been complemented by the Autonomy Institute's organisation-level experience of the implementation of working time reduction, via consultancy services and large-scale pilots.

PERSPECTIVE 1

Workers and trade unions



Workers and trade unions

Wellbeing and health

Arguably the most significant benefit of working time reduction is the positive impact it has on workers' wellbeing, via improved mental and physical health, work-life balance and happiness.

↳ Work-life balance and wellbeing at work

Reduced working hours have extensive evidence of benefits for workers' wellbeing and work-life balance.

Unsurprisingly, almost all studies that look at the relationship between work-life balance and working hours found significant negative effects for longer hours, with more pronounced negative impacts for women.³ From research looking at the Portuguese reduction in weekly working time from 44 to 40 hours, working time reduction especially benefited women and employees with significant caring responsibilities.⁴ In the UK 4-day week pilot, workers reported being more satisfied with their lives, 54% of participants reported that it was easier to balance work with household responsibilities, 60% found it easier to combine paid work with care responsibilities and 62% stated it was easier to mix work with a social life. Workers were also more able to manage household finances and relationships.⁵ Participants in the Icelandic shorter working week trials, which saw a reduction from 40 hours to 35- or 36-hour weeks, reported a notable benefit in terms of work-life balance, and improved work and home life harmony, which was sustained a year into the trial.⁶

3 Spiegelare and Piasna, "The Why and How".

4 Lepinteur, "The Shorter Work Week".

5 Lewis et al, "The Results Are In".

6 Haraldsson and Kellam, "Going Public: Iceland's Journey".

Reaping the full benefits of working time reduction, however, requires careful planning and implementation. Studies warn of the risk of intensification linked to reduced working hours when the policy is introduced without additional employment, due to increased pressure to deliver the same amount of work in fewer hours.⁷ Matching working time reduction with additional staffing removes this risk. Alternatively, as evidenced by examples from the UK and Portugal - explored in more depth in the sections on 'productivity and longer working lives' and 'organisational performance' - intensification can be offset by increased efficiency without additional staffing. This will depend on a case-by-case basis, and should be given consideration during negotiations and implementation.⁸

↳ **Physical and mental health**



There is a close relationship between working time and health, including stress, energy and physical health. Research has shown that longer working hours are linked to circulatory heart diseases, depression, anxiety and worse sleep. Long working hours are also related to more unhealthy lifestyles, such as smoking, higher alcohol consumption and weight gain. However, when working time reduction is linked to unpredictable working patterns, health outcomes can worsen.⁹

The month-long 4-day week pilot in Valencia found participants' self-perceived stress levels decreased, health status improved, and better feelings regarding mood, happiness and tiredness.¹⁰ Results from the Portuguese 4-day week pilot found that all indicators relating to health at work improved: the percentage of workers reporting they felt tired at the end of the day reduced from 71% to 47% during the pilot; 24% reported burnout during the pilot, compared to 39% before; employees reporting anxiety decreased from 42% to 27% during the trial; and those with energy to spend time with friends and family increased from 61% before the pilot to 80% during.¹¹

Notably, the number of workers describing their mental health as good or excellent doubled after the 4-day week was introduced, and 93% of workers want to continue with their shorter working hours.¹²

7 Spiegelare and Piasna, "The Why and How".

8 Achieving working time reduction via collective negotiations will be explored in more depth in later chapters.

9 Spiegelare and Piasna, "The Why and How".

10 Soriano Abril et al, "Experiencia Piloto".

11 Gomes and Fontinha, "Four-Day Week".

12 *ibid.*

Employees in the UK pilot reported improvements in their physical health, including reduced fatigue (46% reporting a decrease at the end of the pilot). Occurrence of general sleep problems also declined, with 40% of participants seeing a reduction in sleep difficulties.¹³ At the end of the pilot, 71% of participants had reduced levels of burnout; 39% of employees were less stressed (48% reporting no change in stress levels); mental health improved; and anxiety decreased - 54% of workers reported a reduction in negative emotions.¹⁴ Research conducted for the study one year on from the UK pilot showed that the improvements in physical and mental health, work-life balance, burnout and general life satisfaction were maintained a year after the culmination of the trial. 96% of nearly 300 staff members surveyed in the research reported a positive impact on their personal lives, increasing to 97% for women and non-binary people, and 100% for people of colour and people who indicated that they are disabled or live with a long-term health condition.¹⁵

Whilst productivity and service provision improved or remained the same across the majority of trial workplaces in the Icelandic public sector working time reduction pilot, worker stress, burnout and physical health all improved. Across both public sector trials, symptoms of stress were reduced for workers in teams that cut their hours of work. Workers reported feeling more energised, less stressed and having more energy for activities such as exercising and socialising, which had a positive impact on their work.¹⁶ One of the Icelandic studies specifically looked at the effects of working time reduction on single parents, which found that single parents felt a positive effect of reduced hours.¹⁷

The Henley Business School study found that 78% of employers with a 4-day week reported their employees felt less stressed at work than on longer working hours, and 75% report staff are happier on reduced working week.¹⁸ Some research has indicated that 'time affluence' - having enough time to do what you need - is closely related to subjective wellbeing and happiness, as it enables individuals to engage in activities that support personal growth, interpersonal connections and community involvement.¹⁹ In this study, 70% of employees believed that working fewer days would improve their quality of life and savings on caring for children or adults was considered a major benefit by more than 80% of staff with children.²⁰

Research has found, however, that there is no single optimum number of weekly working hours where wellbeing and mental health are at their highest.²¹ Consequently, working time policies should be designed and implemented with worker input wherever possible.

13 Lewis et al, "The Results Are In".

14 *ibid.*

15 Pignon et al, "Making it Stick".

16 Haraldsson and Kellam, "Going Public".

17 *ibid.*

18 Henley Business School, "The Four-Day Week".

19 Spiegelaere and Piasna, "The Why and How".

20 Henley Business School, "The Four-Day Week".

21 Kamerāde et al, "A Shorter Working Week For Everyone".

Trade union mobilisation

Reducing working time has been a core demand of trade unions for over a century. Today, campaigning for working time reduction recalls the historical position of trade unions as collective actors of change, achieving the 5-day work week, 8-hour work day, paid annual leave and health and safety policies. Due to the tangible benefits working time reduction can provide workers, winning reduced working hours demonstrates the value of trade unions in being able to improve the lives of workers, and can be a useful engagement tool for recruiting new members.

Working time reduction can also be used to ensure that labour is getting a fairer share of the wealth created in the economy. The 40-hour work week originated when, usually, a male breadwinner would work to support a family with one income. Today, a household with two adults working a total of 80 hours per week may struggle to earn enough to do the same with two incomes.²²

Research has suggested that labour market regulations and strong union presence are significant contributors to Europeans working approximately 400 fewer hours per year than workers in the United States.²³

Working time reduction is popular across sectors. Recent polling found that 60% of respondents support the UK Government creating a plan to move the UK towards a shorter working week with no loss of pay by 2030.²⁴ A recent survey of over three thousand hospital staff in the Netherlands by the trade union FNV found that 86% are in favour of a shorter working week of 32 or 30 hours.²⁵ For certain trade unions, such as those affiliated with the European Public Service Union in Nordic countries, cutting working time is one part of a wider campaign to make work healthier.²⁶

In CBAs, radical reductions in weekly working time are mostly found in organisation-level agreements, and incremental ones in sectoral or national level agreements. Increasing annual leave allowances are the next most popular type of working time reduction.²⁷ An ETUC survey found that social partners also negotiate alternative forms of working time reduction, such as shorter careers via early and part-time retirement; increased childcare leave; and sabbatical and educational leave.²⁸

In Iceland, following its public sector pilots, collective bargaining negotiations have led to 86% of the country's entire working population either being moved to shorter working hours, or having a new mechanism available to them to enable them to negotiate shorter hours in their workplace.²⁹ This process has been supported by Iceland's union density of over 80% of the working population.³⁰

22 UNI Europa, "UNI Europa Vienna Declaration".

23 Alesina, Glaeser, and Sacerdote, "Work and Leisure".

24 Jones, Kellam and Stronge, "Delivering the New Deal".

25 Vries, "FNV-peiling".

26 European Public Service Union, "Reducing Working Time" (Nordic)..

27 European Trade Union Confederation, "New Frontiers".

28 *ibid.*

29 Haraldsson and Kellam, "Going Public".

30 *ibid.*

Complementing other working conditions

Real wages increases across Europe have slowed or stagnated since the 2008 financial crisis, despite significantly increased rates of productivity. Public sector pay in particular has failed to keep up with rates of inflation. Similarly, the share of company profits being given back to labour has decreased over time whilst some industries reap profits from the current financial system. In this context, working time reduction can provide an important complement to pay increases in collective bargaining negotiations.³¹

It can also complement requests for other modifications to working conditions. In many sectors, particularly in services, whilst working time in Europe has not shortened in the past two decades, many other flexible working arrangements have been introduced. This has opened opportunities to request flexitime, working from home, partial retirement, the right to disconnect, part-time education and more alongside working time reduction initiatives.³²

Research into the employment effects of national reductions in weekly working hours across European countries from 1995 to 2007 found that workers' purchasing power was protected. Employment was not increased and hourly wages rose, with firms absorbing higher labour costs either by improving productivity or reallocating existing resources. This research suggests that reductions in working hours could shift bargaining power towards workers.³³

The Swedish municipal workers' union Kommunal's report on working time reduction in Sweden found that there is no evidence to support the claim that reducing working time leads to lower wages or poorer wage growth.³⁴ The issue of whether to request working time reduction alongside or instead of other improvements to working conditions, such as pay, pensions or annual leave, is first and foremost a matter of political prioritisation and negotiation strategy, rather than an economic choice.

31 European Trade Union Conference, "New Frontiers".

32 Schneider, "Innovative working Time Policy"; Labour Research Department, "The Right to Disconnect"; Countouris et al, "The Future of Remote work".

33 Batut, Garnero and Tondini, "The Employment Effects".

34 Andersson, "Rapport".

PERSPECTIVE 2

Employers



Employers

Employee satisfaction and retention

Working time reduction can improve staff satisfaction, creating a more engaged workforce and improving motivation. It can also provide an attractive benefits package to increase retention and demonstrate an employers' investment in the workforce. More on employee wellbeing can be found within 'Perspective 1' above.

Improved job satisfaction can lead to higher morale and lower turnover rates. It can improve staff retention, and providing a shorter working week increases the attractiveness of a workplace. More on recruitment and retention can be found below under 'efficiency and savings', and more on reduced stress and improved wellbeing can be found above in 'Perspective 1'.

In the UK pilot, staff experienced decreases in work stress and burnout, and 48% reported an increase in job satisfaction. When asked about their preference on working a 4-day week (with reduced hours) or 5-day week, 96% preferred 4 days.³⁵

↳ Occupational health and safety

Working time reduction provides health and safety benefits. Employers have an interest in ensuring a healthy workforce, since they are legally obliged to guarantee safe workplaces for both workers and clients. Reduced sickness and injury also avoids costs for employers to temporarily or permanently replace a worker.

An American study shows that working overtime is linked to a higher risk of becoming injured. Similarly, reducing working hours leads to lower occurrences of serious mistakes in healthcare settings. When the American Kellogg's factory introduced a 6-hour day in 1930, there was a 41% decrease in work-related accidents.³⁶ Savings for employers is explored in more depth below.

More generally, working time reduction also helps to improve and invest in a healthy workforce. Details on workers' physical and mental health and stress can be found above in 'Perspective 1'.

35 Lewis et al, "The Results Are In".

36 Spiegelaere and Piasna, "The Why and How".

Efficiency and savings

Working time reduction can save money for employers by reducing costs. This is generally via three routes:

- Increased staff retention, lower staff turnover.
- Attracting talent and qualified staff.
- Lower rates of stress, burnout and sickness.

Recruitment and retention are common reasons given by organisations for introducing reduced working hours for their staff. This is particularly the case for sectors or organisations that struggle to hire, that cannot offer competitive salaries or have challenging working conditions in other respects, such as unusual shift patterns or physically challenging work. Working time reduction can be a route to combat labour shortages as explained in more depth in 'Perspective 3'.

In Austria, for example, working time reduction has been negotiated in parts of the public sector to retain or recruit staff in face of competition, including for seven thousand doctors and medical staff in acute hospitals belonging to the AUVA group.³⁷ Similarly, in the care sector in Sweden, a key reason for introducing working time reduction has been to recruit and retain staff - this is the case for home care services in Degerhamn in Southern Öland which has reduced working hours by 16% (to 31 hours and 40 minutes per week) with no loss in pay.³⁸ When the Autonomy Institute surveyed teaching staff in the United Kingdom on their attitudes towards working time reduction, 69% of respondents say they would be much or somewhat more likely to stay in their roles if they had a 4-day week.³⁹

In the 2023 Portuguese pilot, managers reported “significant benefits” from the 4-day week, including reduced absenteeism, improved recruitment of new staff and decreased staff turnover.⁴⁰ When asked, workers valued this benefit at 28% of their salary - this increased among women, parents, those with lower salaries and lower qualifications.⁴¹

In the UK 4-day week pilot, the number of staff that left organisations participating in the trial decreased by 57% over the 6-month trial period, and 15% of workers in participating organisations said that no amount of money would make them return to a 5-day week.⁴² Research by the Henley Business School in 2021 found that savings to UK business from implementing a 4-day week totalled £104 billion per year. 66% of the employers they consulted reported a reduction in costs, whilst maintaining the quality of work produced.⁴³

37 European Public Service Union, “Reducing Working Time” (Austria).

38 European Public Service Union, “Reducing Working Time” (Nordic).

39 Kellam, Stronge and Ryle, “A Four-Day Week for Schools”.

40 Gomes and Fontinha, “Four-Day Week”.

41 *ibid.*

42 Lewis et al, “The Results Are In”.

43 Henley Business School, “The Four-Day Week”.

Research by the Swedish trade union Kommunal asserts that in the care sector, a shorter working week is part of the solution to issues of understaffing and improving efficiency (such as managing shifts better) could help the financial benefits of working time reduction outweigh any costs.⁴⁴

An additional route to savings is via closing down operations for part of the week. In the case of a 4-day week where all staff have the same day off, if productivity increases via finding efficiencies sufficiently to maintain output in fewer hours, office and operational space can be closed on the day off. Depending on the type of business an organisation conducts, this could provide significant savings through reduced energy usage.⁴⁵ Microsoft Japan reported a 23% decrease in electricity costs during their 4-day work week trial.⁴⁶

Organisational performance

Beyond the productivity improvements that can derive from a shorter working week, described in the 'productivity and longer working lives' section below, working time reduction often occurs in tandem with reviewed and improved ways of working. These can include streamlining processes, removing internal bureaucracy, redefining roles and responsibilities, and finding efficiencies in existing work settings. In many sectors, particularly in desk-based work, reducing the length and frequency of meetings is a common amendment.

When the Icelandic public sector reduced their weekly working hours to 35-36 (down from 40-44), organisational changes were implemented to sustain the level of service provided. This was achieved by reviewing how tasks were completed, such as shortening meetings, cutting unnecessary tasks and rearranging shift work. Existing standards of performance and productivity were maintained.⁴⁷

The Henley Business School study on 4-day week companies found that staff at 64% of surveyed companies were producing better quality work than on a 5-day week.⁴⁸ Managers in the Portuguese pilot found that a 4-day working week was beneficial for "team functioning, internal processes, and technology use, with positive client acceptance and improved interpersonal relationships".⁴⁹

A range of studies were conducted into the significance of non-work time for clerical workers, paramedics, schoolteachers, civil servants, and the self-employed. Findings from this work found that when workers can escape mentally from their work, they are often more productive, engaged with their work, and sociable with their colleagues.⁵⁰

In the UK pilot, 55% of employees reported an improvement in their ability at work.⁵¹ 1 year on from the end of the pilot, research found that 46% of organisations described positive changes in their ways of working and productivity; 38% of respondents named increased efficiency as a benefit on their work lives, and 30% reported increased levels of productivity and focus at work. 87% of survey respondents reported that the 4-day week had a positive impact on their work,

44 Andersson, "Rapport".

45 4-day week.io, "The 4-Day Work Week".

46 Chappell, "4-Day Work Week".

47 Haraldsson and Kellam, "Going Public".

48 Henley Business School, "The Four-Day Week".

49 Gomes and Fontinha, "Four-Day Week".

50 Haraldsson and Kellam, "Going Public".

51 Lewis et al, "The Results Are In".

rising to 91% among managers specifically.⁵² Considering revenue, in the UK pilot organisations' income rose by 1.4% on average during the trial period. Compared to a similar period from previous years, organisations reported a 35% increase in revenue on average, indicating healthy growth.⁵³ 80% of managers in the recent Portuguese pilot rated their trial as financially neutral – only one organisation out of 41 had to hire more workers.⁵⁴

In addition, increased time for leisure and to spend with family contribute to improved mental health and wellbeing, which are both strongly associated with better workplace performance.⁵⁵

Organisational reputation and branding

In certain contexts, working time reduction can help to improve the reputation and external image of an organisation. Good press coverage, promoting more “ethical” or responsible business models and attracting talent all relate to this.

Although there has been limited research on this factor, working time reduction is very popular with the public. In March 2024, a survey done by ifop politis found that 77% of people in France would like to move to a 32-hour 4-day week, and in May 2023 78% of UK workers reported wanting a 4-day week.⁵⁶ A poll by the trade union FNV found that 86% of hospital staff in the Netherlands are in favour of a shorter full-time norm of 30 or 32 hours.⁵⁷

Organisational reputation and using working time reduction to attract staff from marginalised communities are regularly cited as a benefit of introducing a shorter working week by employers. This is often linked to improving recruitment, as further described in the section ‘efficiency and savings’.

52 Pignon et al, “Making it Stick”. (These results are based on unprompted feedback, not responses to a survey)

53 Lewis et al, “The Results Are In”.

54 Gomes and Fontinha, “Four-Day Week”.

55 Henley Business School, “The Four-Day Week”.

56 Ifop politis, “L’adhésion Des Français”; Young, “Four-Day Work Week”.

57 Vries, “FNV-Peiling”.

PERSPECTIVE 3

Macro and societal factors



Macro and societal factors

Sustainability and a just transition

Reducing working hours across the economy can contribute to a reduction in material output and carbon emissions, via sectoral changes, reducing overconsumption and spending more time on sustainable lifestyles. It can also lead to a decreasing dependence on GDP growth to create jobs. Environmental benefits, in combination with supporting labour in impacted sectors to transition and avoid redundancies in the face of automation, mean that working time reduction can play an important role in ensuring a socially just transition.

↳ Contribution to a sustainable economy

The closure of offices and less time spent commuting can also reduce work-related emissions. Research by the Henley Business School found that 67% of employees would drive their car less if they worked a 4-day week; “if all organisations [in the UK] were to introduce a 4-day working week, with fewer journeys to work, travel would decrease by more than 691 million miles each week”.⁵⁸ During the city of Valencia’s month-long 4-day week pilot in April-May 2023, the drop in motor vehicle usage led to improved air quality and lower nitrogen dioxide emissions on the non-working days (Mondays).⁵⁹ In addition to transport impacts, energy savings could be found in “reduced office lighting, elevator operations, and heating or air conditioning”.⁶⁰

Working time reduction could contribute to environmental sustainability via a shift in consumption patterns towards more eco-friendly alternatives due to people having more free time. In households that work longer hours, a larger part of income is spent on products with higher ecological footprints, such as ready meals and household goods.⁶¹ With additional free time, people will have time for more varied forms of low-carbon leisure, such as community engagement, political participation, travel by foot and bicycle, repair and reuse, and care work.⁶²

58 Henley Business School, “The Four-Day Week”.

59 Soriano Abril et al, “Experiencia Piloto”.

60 Meynen and Budiman, “It’s High Time”.

61 Spiegelaere and Piasna, “The Why and How”.

62 Meynen and Budiman, “It’s high Time”.

When productivity increases, the benefits are generally distributed as profit and wages which create additional pressure on the natural environment. Research stipulates that if productivity increases are translated into greater leisure time via reduced working hours, these negative environmental effects would be reduced.⁶³

Various studies have found that nations with shorter working hours do or could have smaller ecological and carbon footprints.⁶⁴ Research from Platform London and the UK's 4 Day Week Campaign found that a transition to a 4-day week with no loss in pay could reduce the UK's carbon footprint by 21.3%, the equivalent of taking 27 million cars off the road.⁶⁵ A study by Rosnick and Weisbrot found that the United States' energy consumption could be cut by 20% if it followed EU trends in working time, and a paper by Nässén and Larsson estimated that a 1% decrease in working hours in Sweden could enable a 0.8% decrease in emissions.⁶⁶

↳ **Consequence of a sustainable economy**



The transition to a sustainable economy requires a reduction in production and consumption, due to the interrelation between GDP growth and carbon emissions and resource consumption.⁶⁷ To stay within planetary boundaries, less work is therefore needed. Working time reduction would decrease the dependency on GDP growth to create jobs and require the redistribution of labour across the population.⁶⁸

Less work, less consumption and less economic growth would support improved wellbeing and improve sustainability.⁶⁹

↳ **Addressing labour shortages and supporting the twin transition**



Redistributing labour via working time reduction is a route to addressing labour shortages in certain sectors, and supporting workers as part of the green and digital transition in a socially just and inclusive manner.

Labour shortages are also caused by a number of factors, notably including a scarcity of workers with the suitable skills and training for certain jobs and their undesirability due to poor working conditions (perceived or actual).⁷⁰ Reducing working time increases the attractiveness of a workplace, as outlined in 'Perspective 2' above, which could attract workers to those roles. A managed transition of workers within or between sectors, in the context of working time reduction, would also provide opportunities for retraining and upskilling. This could contribute to reducing labour shortages, particularly if workers are moved away from roles that are phased

63 Spiegelare and Piasna, "The Why and How".

64 Knight, Rosa and Schor, "Could working Less"; Rosnick, "Reduced Work Hours".

65 Platform London, "Stop the Clock".

66 Spiegelare and Piasna, "The Why and How".

67 Meynen and Budiman, "It's High Time".

68 Spiegelare and Piasna, "The Why and How"; Meynen and Budiman, "It's High Time".

69 Kroll and Pokutta, "Just a Perfect Day?"; Simms, Coote and Franklin, "21 Hours: The Case for a Shorter Working Week".

70 European Commission, "Labour Market and Wage Developments".

out as part of a digital and green transition. In addition, working time reduction can contribute to the fair distribution of work across the economy - at present, some workers have high workloads and long working hours, whilst others are stuck in involuntary part-time (or 0 hour) contracts.⁷¹ Collectively reducing working time without a loss in pay can support the redistribution of labour.

This is also relevant in the context of a socially just transition. Preventing redundancies and ensuring that workers are not left behind in the evolution to a green economy or as a result of automation and digitalisation is essential. Consequently, creating jobs using working time reduction can facilitate the redistribution of labour from environmentally harmful sectors and into low carbon jobs - such as care work, teaching and green technology.⁷² In the context of automation, rather than making staff redundant when tasks are replaced by machines (via hardware or software) and increasing rates of unemployment, employers can reduce working hours in proportion to the level of automation (e.g. 5%, 10%, 15%).

Full or higher levels of employment

Reducing hours can create more jobs, particularly in the face of growing automation. In many sectors, it is feasible to reduce working hours and maintain staff pay without increasing the number of employees due to increased efficiency and time savings in the role. However, there are others - particularly those that are 'person-centred' such as healthcare, social care, construction and education - which generally require additional staff to be hired to maintain operational output if regular working hours are reduced. Research has demonstrated that a 1% reduction in working hours could increase the employment rate by 2.5%, and analysis of France's move to a 35-hour week in 2000 found that the reduction led to a 1.58% decrease in France's annual unemployment rate and a 1.36% increase in real GDP growth between 2000 and 2007.⁷³

Increasing employment in these sectors is important to ensure that workload is reduced proportionately to the reduction in hours, avoiding the intensification of work.⁷⁴ In these sectors, by reducing the working week and increasing the number of employees by 20%, the number of available jobs and consequently rate of employment across a sector or economy would increase.

Research on a 4-day week in the German public sector calculated that the policy would create an estimated 610 000 new full-time equivalent jobs.⁷⁵ In a similar study for the UK public sector, the research predicted a 4-day week would create between 300 000 and 500 000 new full-time equivalent jobs.⁷⁶ For both of these national contexts, the cost of hiring these additional staff would cost around €11bn in Germany (totalling only 4% of the total public sector wage bill, and 0.8% of the German Government's spending budget) and £6-9 billion in the UK (£9 billion being only 6% of the public sector employment salary bill and just over 1% of the total Government spending budget).

71 UNI Europa, "UNI Europa Vienna Declaration".

72 Weise and Culot, "Reimagining Work".

73 Cette, Drapala and Lopez, "The Circular Relationship"; Du, Yin and Zhang, "The Macroeconomic Effects". However, it is important to note that the impact of France's transition to a 35-hour work week remains controversial within the literature. See, Boulon, "Working time reduction".

74 Spiegelaere and Piasna, "The Why and How".

75 Frey, "Costing A 4-day week".

76 Lewis and Stronge, "A Shorter Working Week In Government".

Research flags that there are also challenges in redistributing labour around an economy in this way: there are fixed costs of labour, the way tasks are divided makes it challenging to reallocate work, and “imperfect substitution[s]” between roles requires upskilling and retraining to move people into new jobs. However, the study highlights that a perfect redistribution of labour is not needed, and a managed transition of workers between jobs is achievable.⁷⁷

Gender equality

Working time reduction can contribute to gender equality for three main reasons:

- Women’s participation in the labour market is increased.⁷⁸
- Women are on a more equal footing with men in the labour market.
- Domestic labour is redistributed between men and women.⁷⁹

The composition of the labour market has shifted since the introduction of the 5-day week. As outlined earlier in the chapter, one (usually male) breadwinner could work 40-hours per week to support a family with one income. Today, a household with incomes from two adults working a total of 80 hours per week or more may struggle to earn enough to do the same. Despite the increasing participation of women in the labour force over the past century, the distribution of domestic labour has not changed and women often end up effectively working two jobs - one paid and one unpaid.⁸⁰

Working time reduction with retained levels of pay could support part-time working women to either earn more as part-time workers or be empowered to work and earn more in cases of involuntary part-time working.

Due to the unequal distribution of domestic labour, women are also more likely to work part-time which puts them at a disadvantage with regards to monthly income and pension earnings later on.⁸¹ Reduced working hours could lead to more equitable sharing of domestic responsibilities between men and women, as both partners may have more time available for household and caregiving tasks. Shorter working hours can also encourage men to take on more caregiving responsibilities, helping to break down gender stereotypes and promote gender equality at home and in the workplace.

Still, there is no guarantee that reduced working hours will increase men’s involvement in domestic responsibilities. Research cites that the French transition to a 35-hour work week “stimulated men to become more occupied with children and the household [...] it did not, however, provoke a fundamental change in gender roles and women continued to be responsible for the bulk of the care and household work”.⁸²

77 Spiegelaere and Piasna, “The Why and How”.

78 Onaran and Jump, “A Shorter working week”.

79 Spiegelaere and Piasna, “The Why and How”.

80 UNI Europa, “UNI Europa Vienna Declaration”.

81 Schneider, “Innovative Working Time Policy”.

82 Spiegelaere and Piasna, “The Why and How”.

However, recent trials have supported the view that domestic responsibilities are likely to be redistributed under reduced working hours. A report studied the impact of a year-long shorter working week trial on an organisation of 60 female employees, which reported a “decrease in work-family conflict”, due to increases in free time, schedule control and reduced work pressure.⁸³ In the UK 2022-23 pilot, the largest 4-day week pilot in the world to date, the share of housework between men and women stayed broadly the same, but the time spent by men looking after children increased by more than double that of women (27% to 13%).⁸⁴ Research published 1 year on from the end of the UK pilot found that 24% of respondents reported that the 4-day week helped them to better balance caring responsibilities with work.⁸⁵ In the evaluation of Iceland’s transition to shorter working hours published in 2021, researchers found that “many male participants in heterosexual relationships took a greater role in home duties after the trial started, especially around cleaning and cooking [...] the division of household labour did change in many cases as a result of the trials, with men taking on greater responsibilities”.⁸⁶

Diversity and inclusion

In addition to improving gender equality, reducing working hours can make a workplace more inclusive and accessible for workers from marginalised backgrounds, and consequently increase workplace diversity.⁸⁷

Women and individuals with marginalised identities can face many barriers to the workplace. Long working hours is one of them. As outlined above, working time reduction can increase access to the workplace for those with caring responsibilities (disproportionately women).

Disabled people are also often excluded from accessing work, or full-time positions particularly, due to health conditions and accessibility requirements.⁸⁸ Reducing working hours can consequently increase access to work for those who are disabled. However, employee consultation and buy-in is essential to ensure that a transition to shorter hours does not unintentionally harm workers from marginalised communities.⁸⁹

83 Mullens and Laurijssen, “An organisational working Time Reduction”.

84 Lewis et al, “The Results Are In”.

85 Pignon et al, “Making it Stick”.

86 Haraldsson and Kellam, “Going Public”.

87 This is regularly cited by employers that the Autonomy Institute works with as a motivation for introducing a shorter working week.

88 Health and Safety Executive, “Principles To Support”.

89 Onaran and Jump, “A Shorter Working Week”.

Creativity and activism

Additional leisure time creates more space for individuals to pursue unpaid hobbies, interests and creative and political activities. This is positive on three fronts: providing opportunities for self-fulfilment; nurturing innovation and creativity which benefits an economy; and strengthening democracy and supporting progressive change via increased political and social engagement.

In the month-long Valencia trial, “many participants used the long weekends to develop healthier habits such as practising sport, resting and eating homemade food”.⁹⁰ Looking further back, when a Kellogg plant in the United States changed its working day to 6 hours in 1930, families spent more time together, there was improved care for sick and elderly members of the community, and men were more involved in gardening and fishing.⁹¹ In the Irish context, 85% of people are concerned about climate change and over 50% “are willing to volunteer time to an organisation working on climate change or engage in political actions to limit climate change”.⁹² Reduced working hours would provide communities with the time to fulfil these interests.

Productivity and longer working lives

In certain sectors, working time reduction can contribute to increases in productivity across the workforce. Additionally, by reducing working time, individuals may be willing and able to work longer - rather than retire early. Both of these factors could benefit an economy at a macroeconomic level, but they should be promoted carefully.

Increases in productivity as a result of working time reduction can emerge due to employees becoming more productive. Workers may be less tired, and work quicker or concentrate better as a result of the additional time off. They may also be more motivated and work faster, or changes to the way work is organised may improve efficiency.⁹³

Research has found that a 12.5% reduction in working hours from 40 to 35 hours per week could lead to a productivity increase of 8.75%. This working time reduction could therefore potentially cover 70% of the expected loss in production, and a reduction could largely be self-financed through productivity gains.⁹⁴ When Portugal reduced its working hours from 44 to 40 hours per week in 1996, research at the firm level identified a productivity increase of 55% - this increased to 100% among firms that had previously implemented reductions in working hours through CBAs.⁹⁵

90 Soriano Abril et al, “Experiencia Piloto”.

91 Spiegelaere and Piasna, “The Why and How”.

92 Kelly, “Let’s Work Less”.

93 Spiegelaere and Piasna, “The Why and How”.

94 Aghion et al, “Education, Market Rigidities”.

95 Asai, Lopes and Tondini, “Firm-Level Effects”.

In the UK pilot, 62% of employees thought their pace of work increased and most workers (78%) did not see a significant increase in workload.⁹⁶ A study of the same organisations one year on found that 46% of organisations described positive changes in their ways of working and productivity, leading to maintained or increased performance.⁹⁷ Similarly, research by the Henley Business School into companies working a 4-day week found that 64% of organisations found their staff completed more work due to increased productivity.⁹⁸ In the Portuguese 4-day week pilot which took place in 2023, 75% of companies made at least one organisational change, the most common being the reduction in the number and duration of meetings.⁹⁹

Productivity could also increase due to machines becoming more efficient or workers' tasks being automated, consequently enabling a reduction in workers' hours.¹⁰⁰ Research by the Autonomy Institute into the potential deployment of large language models in the UK identified the possibility for workers' hours to be reduced by 10-20% across different sectors in tandem with the introduction of AI in their roles.¹⁰¹

Researchers have examined how working time reduction could contribute to longer working lives from two sides: supply and demand.¹⁰² On the supply side, they stipulate that by reducing working time, work pressure will decline and employees will have more time to rest between periods of work, leading to staff being able to continue working for longer. On the demand side, they argue that the increase in employment levels enabled by the redistribution of work following working time reduction could lead to higher participation rates among older workers. However, they emphasise that whether working time reduction leads to working longer is highly dependent on its effect on stress and employment creation, and that taking early retirement is influenced by a wide number of dependencies.

96 Lewis et al, "The Results Are In".

97 Pignon et al, "Making it Stick".

98 Henley Business School, "The Four-Day Week".

99 Gomes and Fontinha, "Four-Day Week".

100 Spiegelaere and Piasna, "The Why and How".

101 Garcia, Kikuchi and Stronge, "GPT-4 (Day Week)".

102 Spiegelaere and Piasna, "The Why and How".

Key considerations for working time reduction



Key considerations for working time reduction

The evidence and arguments outlined in this chapter can be used by trade unionists to strengthen the case for working time reduction in CBAs.

The overview has been organised according to three perspectives and has considered wellbeing at work, job quality, productivity, organisational performance and the broader socio-ecological impact working time reduction could have. A brief summary of the key factors within each perspective are outlined below.

Workers and trade unions

↳ **Workers' wellbeing and health**

Working time reduction has a very positive impact on workers' wellbeing, via reduced stress, improved mental and physical health, work-life balance and happiness. There can be a risk of intensification when working time is reduced without a commensurate reduction in workload, however this should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

↳ **Trade union mobilisation**

Reducing working time has been a core demand of trade unions for over a century. Due to the tangible benefits working time reduction can provide workers, winning reduced working hours demonstrates the value of trade unions in being able to improve the lives of workers, and can be a useful engagement tool for recruiting new members.

↳ **Complementing other conditions**

Working time reduction can provide an important complement to pay increases in collective bargaining negotiations, and other improved conditions being negotiated. This should be judged by the union based on their context. It can also provide an opportunity to safeguard jobs in organisations that are in financial difficulty.

Employers

↳ **Employee satisfaction and retention**

Working time reduction can improve staff satisfaction, creating a more engaged workforce and improving motivation. It can also provide an attractive benefits package to increase retention and demonstrate an employer's investment in the workforce. This can help resolve labour shortages.

↳ **Occupational health and safety**

Working time reduction also provides health and safety benefits. Employers have an interest in ensuring a healthy workforce, since they are legally obliged to guarantee safe workplaces for both workers and clients. Reduced sickness and injury also avoids costs for employers.

↳ **Efficiency and savings**

Working time reduction can help employers improve efficiencies and make savings. This is generally via three routes:

- Increased staff retention, lower staff turnover.
- Attracting talent and qualified staff.
- Lower rates of stress, burnout and sickness.

↳ **Organisational performance**

Working time reduction often occurs in tandem with reviewed and improved ways of working. These can include streamlining processes, removing internal bureaucracy, redefining roles and responsibilities, and finding efficiencies in existing work settings. In many sectors, particularly in desk-based work, reducing the length and frequency of meetings is a common amendment.

↳ **Organisational reputation and branding**

In certain contexts and sectors, working time reduction can improve the reputation and external image of an organisation. Good press coverage, appearing "ethical" and attracting talent, qualified staff and workers from marginalised communities all relate to this.

Macro and societal

↳ Sustainability and a just transition



Working time reduction could contribute to sustainability and a socially just digital and green transition via:

- A shift in consumption patterns to more eco-friendly alternatives due to people having more free time.
- Closure of offices and less time spent commuting.
- A reduction in production and consumption.

Redistributing labour via working time reduction is a route to addressing labour shortages in certain sectors, and supporting workers as part of the green and digital transition. In the context of automation, rather than making staff redundant and increasing rates of unemployment, employers can reduce working hours proportionately.

↳ Full or higher levels of employment



Reducing hours can create more jobs, particularly in the face of growing automation. In 'person-centred' sectors in particular, such as healthcare, social care, construction and education may require additional staff to be hired to maintain operational output if regular working hours are reduced. This would increase employment.

↳ Gender equality



Working time reduction can contribute to gender equality for three main reasons:

- Women's participation in the labour market is increased.
- Women are on a more equal footing with men in the labour market.
- Domestic labour is redistributed between men and women.

↳ **Diversity and inclusion**



Reducing working hours can make a workplace more inclusive, and consequently increase diversity. This is regularly cited by employers as a motivation for introducing a shorter working week. This is particularly the case for workers with caring responsibilities and who are disabled.

↳ **Creativity and activism**



Additional leisure time creates more space for individuals to pursue unpaid hobbies, interests and creative and political activities. This supports self-fulfilment, increased political and social engagements, and nurtures innovation and creativity which benefits an economy.

↳ **Productivity and longer working lives**



In certain sectors, working time reduction can contribute to increases in productivity across the workforce, due to less fatigue, more motivation and changes to ways of working to find efficiencies (including automation). Additionally, by reducing working time, individuals may be willing and able to work longer - rather than retire early.

CHAPTER 2

Working time reduction in collective agreements



Working time reduction in collective agreements

This chapter maps and analyses a range of collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) that include working time reduction with no loss in pay.

Collected from trade unions across Europe, the diversity of CBAs analysed for this study highlights the expansive opportunities available to trade union representatives and negotiators when thinking about bargaining for working time reduction in their sector or workplace.

The chapter contains three sections. First, the introduction and the methodology for the collection and analysis of CBAs are outlined. The second section contains the results of the mapping and analysis of agreements. This includes analysis of the countries, sectors, types of workers, types of working time reduction, and negotiations for the collected CBAs. The third and final section includes five in-depth case studies of CBAs selected from those collected in this research, summarising insights gathered via desk research and interviews.

Methodology

The CBAs have been collected via four methods:

- **ETUC database.** CBAs already known to the ETUC and shared from the ETUC's database.
- **Online form.** an online form was shared with the ETUC's affiliated trade union organisations multiple times over the course of 3 months (July - October 2024).
- **Network contributions.** the research team's networks, including members of the European work-time network, have shared CBAs via email.
- **Desk research.** CBAs were identified via desk research performed by the research team.

The sample collected is not representative of all CBAs including working time reduction with no loss in pay in Europe. For example, the hundreds of organisation-level working time reduction agreements that can be found across Europe have not been included. Since this study focuses on collectively bargained reductions in working time, only CBAs concluded between trade unions and employers or employers' organisations are included, whereas pilot schemes or management-led initiatives are not.

The numbers presented here are based on the sample collected.

The case studies were selected from the database of CBAs collected, based on the following criteria:

- Representation of different sectors
- Representation of different countries
- Representation of different types of working time reduction
- Representation of different organisation sizes
- Number of workers covered

The contributions were reviewed and filtered to identify relevant CBAs (i.e. examples of working time reduction with no loss in pay, with sufficient information provided about the CBA).

Percentage figures in this chapter have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Collective agreements: mapping and analysis



Collective agreements: mapping and analysis

Reductions in paid working time have slowed since the 1980s. Where working time has been reduced across Europe, research has shown this is primarily due to increased instances of part-time and other non-standard forms of work. Full-time workers today tend to work approximately the same hours as they did in the 1980s.¹⁰³

During this research, 119 CBAs were collected that include working time reduction with no loss in pay for workers.¹⁰⁴

The CBAs varied by country, sector, type of workers covered and type of working time reduction. This demonstrates that trade unions and their negotiators have a wide range of routes available to achieve working time reduction.

↳ Countries



CBAs were collected from 29 different countries in Europe. This covered all European Union Member States excluding Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia, in addition to seven non-EU countries in Europe.¹⁰⁵

The most CBAs collected were from Belgium and Germany (18% of collected CBAs respectively), followed by Italy, Spain, the Czech Republic, Portugal and France.

103 Perez et al, "The Working Times".

104 Nine of the CBAs submitted are missing key information, and so not all of the numbers below account for all 119.

105 The Faroe Islands, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Serbia, Scotland and Switzerland.

Figure 1: Graph showing the distribution of CBAs collected by country.

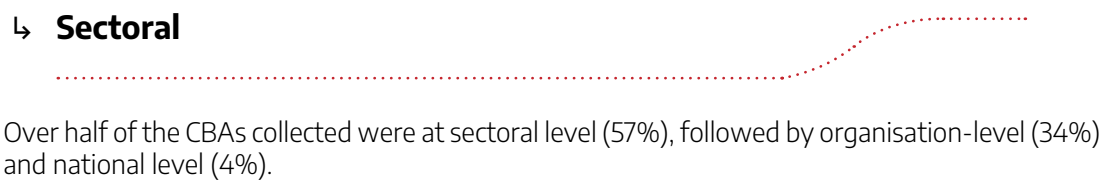


Figure 2: Graph showing the distribution of CBAs collected by bargaining level.

A CBA was categorised as 'national' if it covered multiple sectors within one agreement. The five national agreements were:

Denmark - 1987 by CO-Metal.

A CBA covering industry workers set the standard for the entire labour market, covering all workers in Denmark. The country moved from 39 to 37 hours per week via a phased reduction by 0.5 hours annually over 4 years.

Faroe Islands - 1980 by PEU.

Covering all workers, the country moved to a 40-hour work week alongside establishing an 8 hour rest period between working times. The islands transitioned from a 42 hour week in 1978 to 40 hours in 1980 by 0.5 hours annually over 3 years.

Iceland - 2019 and 2020 BYASÍ, BSRB, BHM, and KI.

Covering public sector workers in multiple areas (including municipal government and healthcare). Workers reduced their hours from 40 to 36 (some shift workers reduced to 32).

Liechtenstein - 2023 by LANV.

Covering 4 000 workers in skilled trades and services jobs. Alongside a pay rise, workers have reduced their hours from either 44 or 42.5 hours per week to 43.25 or 42.

Spain - 2024 by UGT-E.

Covering all workers in Spain, this agreement would see a staged reduction from 40 hours in 2024 to 37.5 by 2025.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ As of the publication of this study, this agreement remained in negotiations, and had not yet been implemented.

High-level case study: CO-Metal, Denmark

In 1987, CO-Metal negotiated a reduction in working hours from 40 to 37 per week. Whilst this initially covered industrial workers, it set the standard for the entire labour market and led to a national shift.

The reduction was phased, involving a 0.5 hour reduction per year for 4 years. The union demanded 35 hours, so 37 hours was a compromise with no wage sacrifice. The 4 year phased agreement was a concession from the union.

This case is an interesting example of a sectoral CBA leading to a national shift in working time.

The most common sector covered by the CBAs was healthcare, with 14% of CBAs provided. This was followed by manufacturing in the metal and electrical sector (11%), municipal government in the public sector (9%), finance, banking and insurance (6%) and transport and logistics (6%).

Figure 3: Graph showing the distribution of CBAs collected by sector.

↳ **Types of workers covered**



Approximately 50% of the CBAs collected included details of what types of workers were covered by the agreement. For the majority of those that provided details, the agreement covered all workers. This was followed by older workers and blue collar workers.

High-level case study: FNV, Netherlands

In 2024, FNV signed a organisation-level CBA in the food sector with Nestlé, covering 600 workers.

The CBA included provision for older workers to reduce their hours by 10%, with a 5% salary reduction but keeping 100% of their pension contributions.

This is an example of ‘generatiepact regeling’, a Dutch policy aimed at enabling older employees to reduce their working hours as they approach retirement, while still keeping their salary and pension benefits largely intact. It is mostly used for shift workers. There are similar examples of this policy used in some Nordic countries.

In the Nestlé agreement, workers on a five shift system also received an additional 10 recovery days per year.

Night workers and shift workers, workers who had been at the organisation for a set number of years and workers in high risk occupations were also listed as specific types of workers covered by some agreements. For example, the Czech Republic’s metalworkers federation, OS KOVO, signed a sectoral CBA in 2023 that provided an annual reduction in working time for workers in high risk occupations. Covering 3 000 workers, workers in high risk occupations received an additional 5 paid days off per year for recuperation and rehabilitation. This was agreed with no accompanying concessions or sacrifices, and the weekly working hours stayed the same.

High-level case study: Union of Health and Social Care workers, Serbia

In 2019, the Trade Union of Health and Social Care Workers of Serbia negotiated a sectoral CBA with the Government of Serbia. The agreement covered around 100 000 workers but the working time reduction only affects certain roles.

The union agreed a weekly reduction in working hours with no loss in pay for workers in high risk or potentially harmful roles. The standard working week is between 36 - 40 hours per week in the sector, depending on other agreements. For high risk roles, the following working hours were negotiated:

- 36 hours per week for workers in pathology, forensic medicine and psychiatric care.
- 35 hours per week for workers in emergency medical aid teams, reception and neonatology.
- 30 hours per week for workers in roles that are in proximity to ionising radiation.

The CBA is monitored by a national commission which includes trade union representatives, and its implementation up to now has been successful.

↳ **Types of working time reduction**



The most common type of working time reduction identified in CBAs was a weekly reduction in hours (83%). This was followed by annual (14%), and monthly (3%).

Figure 4: Graph showing the distribution of CBAs collected by working time reduction type.

Among agreements with weekly reductions in working hours, the most common reductions were reductions of 1-3 hours per week. These were often negotiated with phased introductions, involving a gradual reduction each year until the reduced hours are reached.

There are diverse experiences of working time reduction across Europe.

Certain countries have cultural, political and institutional barriers which mean they have longer weekly working hours than other countries in Europe. Trade unions in, for example Switzerland, Lichtenstein and Cyprus, were more likely to be negotiating working time reduction from a starting point of longer weekly working hours (more than 40 hours). The recent legislation introducing a 48-hour work week in Greece, increasing from 40 hours, is demonstrative of certain reactive movements away from working time reduction. However, sectoral and organisation-level CBAs can still protect working hours well below this.

In France between 1998 and 2008, the 35-hour working week was progressively introduced across all organisations on a mandatory basis through legislation. A recent study analysed CBAs signed in 2023 in France that include provisions for the organisation of working time. Of 17 000 relevant agreements, 150 implemented a 4-day work week of some kind. 89% of those 150 kept a 35-hour work week (the legal weekly working time in France) but compressed into 4-days. 5% of the 150 implemented a 4-day work week longer than 35 hours.¹⁰⁷ The final 5% worked shorter than 35 hours, totalling approximately 8 agreements out of the 17 000 analysed.¹⁰⁸

Between 2014 and 2016 in Sweden, a 30-hour work week (6 hours per day) was negotiated in the Svartedalen old people's homes. This was introduced at the organisation-level, with the financial cost borne by the municipality of Gothenburg.

Between 1993 to 1999 in Germany, Volkswagen agreed a organisation-wide 28.8-hour week to avoid mass redundancies. However, this agreement did not maintain full pay. The 20% reduction in working hours was accompanied by a 16% annual wage reduction, sharing the cost between the employer and employees.¹⁰⁹

High-level case study: Lamborghini, FIM-CISL, Fiom-CGIL, Italy

In 2023, trade unions FIM-CISL and Fiom-CGIL signed a organisation-level agreement with Lamborghini in the automobile manufacturing industry. This agreement covered 30 000 workers.

The CBA agreed that production workers could have an additional 22 non-working days per year with no loss in pay. These non-working days are taken once per 2 weeks, so workers alternate a 4-day week and a 5-day week. For workers on a 3-shift rota, they received a 31-day reduction in working time, structured as two 4-day weeks followed by one 5-day week. White collar workers and blue collar workers outside of production received fewer non-working days than production workers, but still benefited from working time reduction.

In addition to the working time reduction, the CBA included the creation of 500 new jobs, an increase in pay and a 50% increase in current variable bonuses that workers receive.

As of December 2023, 70% of workers who could request to implement their working time reduction had done so and requests were rising.

107 These organisations likely employed their staff as 'cadres', a type of executive employee. Cadres can contractually work longer hours than the legal limit.

108 Grimaud, "La Semaine De 4 Jours".

109 Párraga, "Reduced Working Time".

High-level case study: Spain

In 2024, UGT-SP signed a sectoral CBA in the healthcare sector, covering ambulance workers in Catalonia. The CBA was updated from 2022.

The CBA included provision for an annual reduction in working hours, delivered progressively. Since 2022, the progressive reduction in hours was agreed as follows:

- 2022: 1 800 hours
- 2023: 1 752 hours
- 2024: 1 713 hours
- 2025: 1 674 hours
- 2026: 1 635 hours
- 2027: 1 596 hours

At the national level, unions have been negotiating for a staged reduction from 40 hours per week in 2024 to 37.5 by 2025. This would be a legal, regulatory change. In December 2024, unions CCOO and UGT signed an agreement with the Spanish Government to implement the reduced work week. However, the employers' group severed ties in November 2024 due to their opposition to the reduction in working time.

Negotiations

Whilst working time reduction can be a 'win-win' for workers and employers, as outlined in 'Perspective 2' of Chapter 1, timing and sequencing may be key for successful negotiations. Employers can view shorter working hours as a concession and politically they may not be willing to agree or able to justify too many concessions in one bargaining round.¹¹⁰ Consequently, depending on their position and context, trade unions must judge whether working time reduction should be tabled alongside or instead of other amendments to working conditions. Depending on their national and sectoral context, trade unions may also negotiate in collaboration with one another to achieve working time reduction across a larger number of workers.

110 UNISON Bargaining Support Group, "Bargaining on Working Hours".

High-level case study: Iceland

In 2019 and 2020, a number of public sector unions in Iceland (including ASÍ, BSRB, BHM, and KI), signed a CBA including working time reduction.

The CBA introduced a 4-hour weekly reduction in working time for all workers covered by the agreements, from 40 hours to 36 hours. Some shift workers saw their hours reduced to 32 hours per week.

These agreements set a country-wide precedent, leading to the majority of Iceland's workforce having access to reducing their working hours (from 2022 - 2024, 59% of workers were offered reduced working hours).

Where information was shared about the negotiations for working time reduction in the CBAs gathered for this study, shorter working time was negotiated alone as well as alongside other improvements to workers' terms and conditions. Such complementary improvements included:

- General wage increases
- Higher wage floor (the lowest possible pay within the organisation increases)
- Sick pay improved
- Additional meal vouchers
- Annual leave allowance increases
- Parental pay and leave increased
- Shorter maximum working day lengths
- Right to disconnect

When negotiating for working time reduction, trade unions should be clear on: the objectives and benefits the reduction could bring both workers and employers; whether the reduction is introduced all at once or progressively; and whether the reduction is weekly, monthly or annual. These will all vary based on the negotiation strategy and conditions of the organisation and sector involved.¹¹¹ Practical and strategical considerations linked to the negotiation and implementation of working time reduction is further explored in Chapter 3 of this study.

111 Párraga, "Reduced Working Time in the European Union".

A recent study looked at the negotiations involved in the CBAs of two manufacturing companies in Italy, both of which included working time reduction. Both companies have high unionisation rates among blue collar workers and were performing well, which made it possible for the trade unions (including Fiom-CGIL and Fim-UIL) to make strong demands. All workers were covered by the agreements, which included alternating 5-day and 4-day weeks for the majority of teams. There were some trade offs to avoid productivity losses, including growing the size of teams and shortening some rest breaks.

The negotiations took over a year to ensure the agreements were sustainable and equitable for all teams across the organisation. The organisations were quite diverse with a range of working schedules and operational processes.

“In terms of the process of bargaining on working time reduction, the analysis revealed that it requires not only perseverance from the unions, as the negotiations usually took a long time to conclude, but above all a very specific know-how on the part of the negotiating team. This includes detailed knowledge of how work is organised in all departments of the company, a good understanding of previous negotiations on similar issues and an awareness of the solutions adopted in other companies to serve as a point of reference.”¹¹²

In one of the companies, there were five shift systems, ranging from five shifts per week to 21 shifts per week, each involving different working time arrangements and pay conditions. Employees classified as blue collar could work on any of the shift systems but white collar staff and managers could only work the five-shift system (completing five 8-hour days between 8am - 5pm).

112 Piasna et al, “Negotiating Working Time Reduction”.

Collective agreements: in-depth case studies



Collective agreements: in-depth case studies

The case studies analysed in-depth in this chapter are:

ABVV-FGTB - Belgium, 2023

A sectoral agreement for a 2 hour weekly reduction, covering 5 000 workers in the petroleum industry. This case study includes historic negotiations from 1983 onwards within the petroleum sector. It is included as an in-depth case study due to interest in its sector and the use of a nationally-specific mechanism to implement the working time reduction.

PCS - Scotland, 2024

A sectoral agreement for a 2 hour weekly reduction, covering over 20 000 workers in the public sector. Following a multi-year campaign for working time reduction, this CBA is included due to its diverse negotiating tactics, such as use of research evidence and leveraging significant collective bargaining power.

Kommunal - Sweden, 2022

A national agreement for a 2-hour weekly reduction for 40 000 night workers in the public sector. The agreement saw a closer alignment of working conditions between night workers within the trade unions Kommunal and Vårdförbundet. This CBA is included due to its scale, indirectly impacting over 500 000 workers, and application at a national level.

IG Metall - Germany, 2024

A sectoral agreement for a 3 hour weekly reduction with 50% wage compensation, covering 80 000 workers in the steel industry. The CBA was negotiated with job protection in mind, to defend workers against potential future job losses as the industry adapts to decarbonisation and green practices. The CBA was achieved following strike action. It has been included because of the sector's commitment to working time reduction in Germany, and to demonstrate the use of working time reduction as part of long-term job security strategies.

CGIL/CISL/UIL - Italy, 2023

An organisation-level agreement for 20 additional days leave per year taken once per two-weeks, affecting 15 000 workers in the fashion industry. The working time reduction is technically annual, due to the provision of a set number of additional paid days leave per year. The agreement is the only organisation-level CBA examined as an in-depth case study.

In addition to analysing the CBAs, these case studies have been informed by interviews with the negotiators and trade union representatives involved in achieving these agreements.

CASE STUDY 1

ABVV-FGTB Belgium, 2023



Case study 1: ABVV-FGTB - Belgium, 2023

Quick summary	
Country:	Belgium
Trade union:	ABVV-FGTB
Year:	Various (1983 - 2023)
Level:	Sectoral
Sector:	Petroleum industry
Organisation name:	N/A
Number of workers covered:	In 2023: 5 164 ¹¹³
Working time reduction type:	Weekly
Details on working time reduction:	38 > 36 > 33.6 weekly hours
Types of workers covered:	All workers, in 2023 shift workers

↳ Context

Prior to 1983, the unions in the petroleum sector negotiated a reduction from 40 hours per week to 38. There was Government support for these negotiations, and the unions successfully negotiated a 2-hour per week reduction (equivalent to a 12 day reduction) with no loss in pay. Most employers provided the reduction as 'réduction du temps de travail' (RTT), which could be taken on an annual basis as additional paid leave.¹¹⁴

Between 1983 and 1985, and 1999 to 2004, the unions negotiated additional RTT.

More recently, in refineries and companies producing petroleum, it is well understood that production is declining. There are fewer refineries in Europe, closures are happening, and the future looks bleak. Therefore, a primary focus for workers is job security.

¹¹³ Numbers are not available for the number of workers covered by the earlier agreements.

¹¹⁴ RTT is a policy in France and Belgium. In Belgium, employees who work beyond the standard work week may accrue additional leave days as RTT. For example, if an employer works a 42 hour week, they could take 4 hours or a half-day of leave as RTT. In this case study, RTT days were provided as the route through which workers could take their working time reduction.

This sector is known for having some of the best working conditions in Belgium. In addition to working time reduction and other demands, workers aim to establish a job security fund financed by employers to handle restructuring, layoffs, or transitions to other sectors. This fund would ensure salary maintenance, provide training, or offer severance payments.

↳ **Reaching the agreement: process and strategy**



In 1983, the unions negotiated an additional 4 days of RTT per year, and in 1985 increased RTT up to 18 days. This took weekly working hours to 37 per week. For the following 14 years, the subject was deprioritised and further reductions were not achieved.

From 1999 to 2004, the union achieved further RTT which led to the sector working a 36-hour week:

- 1999: 1 additional day of RTT
- 2000: 2 additional days of RTT
- 2002: 2 additional days of RTT
- 2004: 1 additional day of RTT

As noted above, not all employers distributed the RTT (now totalling 24 days) as weekly working time reduction.

In addition to RTT across the board, unions negotiated additional days of paid annual leave if employees had worked at a organisation for a certain number of years:

- 1-5 years of service: 1 additional day off
- 5-10 years of service: 2 additional days off
- 10-20 years of service: 4 additional days off
- More than 20 years of service: 5 additional days off

Therefore, if a worker was with an employer for more than 20 years, the RTT and days off from 'years of service' would average out to a 35-hour week.

After 2004, the issue of working time reduction was again deprioritised by the unions.

In the latest 2023 negotiations, ABVV-FGTB have called for a reduction in working time for shift workers, down to 33.6-hours per week. Workers have voted in favour of this demand, but as of the end of 2024 it had not yet been successfully negotiated by the unions. A key demand of shift workers is the ability to transition to daytime jobs with no loss in pay, as part of efforts to "humanise work".

↳ Implementation: monitoring and evaluation



Sectoral agreements are negotiated every 2 years. In the negotiations for working time reduction, ABVV-FGTB clearly outlined justifications for working time reduction to the employer and workers.

- **Maintaining the workforce during productivity increases:** working time reduction is positioned as a preventive measure to avoid workforce reductions in response to rising productivity.
- **Supporting workers' longevity in their careers:** as people are required to work for longer periods, reducing working hours during their active work years helps them sustain their careers healthily until the end. It has been observed that reduced working hours result in fewer illnesses, less burnout, and lower stress levels within companies. This has been particularly noticeable among continuous-shift workers in the chemical industry, who sleep better, are healthier, and are more productive.
- **Increased productivity and fewer sick days:** international studies, especially from Nordic countries, show that reducing working hours increases productivity and reduces sick days. ABVV-FGTB argued those benefits would be seen following a reduction in working hours to 33.6 per week.

ABVV-FGTB does not routinely conduct evaluations of CBAs following agreements being signed. Whilst an evaluation is not required by these CBAs, the continued negotiation for working time reduction over a 40-year period indicates that reducing working hours have been successful from a trade union perspective.

↳ Success factors



The process of achieving working time reduction can vary depending on organisational, economic and political context. The negotiation period from 1983 to 2004 was quite long, taking over 2 decades to achieve just 2 hours of working time reduction per week.

However, before 1983, with the Government's assistance, the transition from 40 to 38 hours happened much faster, taking only 2 years.

When negotiating, the unions reflected on work organisation as a way to advocate for the reduction of working hours (e.g. RTT days, daily reductions, or weekly reductions, depending on the company's organisational needs). This approach helped address employers' objections by demonstrating a thorough understanding of the company's work organisation and operational needs. For example, in companies operating continuous shifts with 4 teams working 42 hours per week (7 days on, 2 days off, 7 days on, 2 days off, etc.), the pace is extremely intense. RTT days helped to slightly alleviate this pace up to 2004. Further, transitioning to 5 teams could provide better organisation. It is crucial to have a deep understanding of the systems where the new working time arrangement will be implemented.

To support negotiations, union officials developed tools such as a calculation programme in Excel. This tool calculates the employer's cost per hour worked based on various working conditions (e.g., RTT, salary, team bonuses, year-end bonuses). The program includes all costs to the employer, such as contributions to the job security fund and Government subsidies.

In a second step, the programme allows negotiators to simulate changes, such as adding an RTT day or increasing wages, and calculates the new cost per hour worked, both in total and as a percentage. This enables the evaluation of different scenarios (e.g., reduced working hours, wage increases, or enhanced bonuses). It is an effective model for comparing the relative costs of different proposals and has been used to challenge the figures presented by employers during negotiations.

This structured approach helps negotiators quantify the impact of proposals and advocate more effectively for workers' demands.

↳ **Limitations**



While political support for working time reduction has historically helped ABVV-FGTB, currently only the Socialist Party in Belgium advocates for reduced working hours.

The unions are also dependent on wage margins set by the Belgian Government. The Government sets the wage norm for the petroleum sector, with a margin permitted of 4-5% higher. Unions successfully negotiated to either allocate the margin to wage increases or RTT. However, in recent years, the margin has been very narrow, making such adjustments challenging. Larger increases are only allowed on an individual level, making RTT dependent on wage norm calculations in Belgium.

CASE STUDY 2

PCS

Scotland, 2024



Case study 2: PCS - Scotland, 2024

Quick summary	
Country:	Scotland
Trade union:	Public and Commercial Services Union, Scotland
Year:	2024
Level:	Sectoral
Sector:	Public Sector (Scottish Devolved Sector)
Organisation name:	40 different devolved public sector organisations
Number of workers covered:	20 000-30 000
Working time reduction type:	Weekly
Details on working time reduction:	37 > 35 hours per week (one case 42 > 35)
Types of workers covered:	All

↳ Context



Proposing working time reduction

Since 2016, the Public Commercial Services Union (PCS) Scotland has advocated for working time reduction across the Scottish devolved public sector (the Scottish civil service and related public bodies, excluding health and education).

In around 2018, the Scottish Sector Committee - formed of trade union representatives from every employer in the sector that PCS has recognition in - collectively decided to include the objective of a 4-day, 28-hour week with no loss in pay in the pay claim.

In 2020, with the advent of the Covid pandemic, the 4-day week entered mainstream public discussions. Working time reduction became a goal that appeared more winnable for PCS. One organisation in the sector, natureScot, trialed a 35-hour work week in 2018, which was very successful but the Scottish Government would not give the organisation approval to permanently implement the 35-hour week.

Conducting a feasibility study

In 2021, PCS commissioned a worker-led feasibility study into a 4-day week in the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government was targeted because it has a diverse range of job roles and a large scale of employment, making the results of the study applicable across the rest of the Scottish devolved sector.

This study provided invaluable evidence for both employers and PCS members, and built confidence among the membership around how realistic working time reduction was as a trade union goal. As such, the study proved pivotal to the success of the subsequent negotiations.

The study was used as part of a significant education programme. The report was sent to all members of Scottish Parliament and discussed in political meetings. The report was shared with PCS members, and webinars and Q&A sessions were hosted. This built investment and interest in working time reduction across the Scottish devolved sector.

In December 2021, the Scottish Government pay policy - which affects 40 employers across the Scottish devolved sector - was published, and permitted employers to introduce a standard 35-hour week for the first time. The pay policy is an annual publication from the Scottish Government that outlines the framework for pay increases and employment conditions for public sector workers in Scotland. It serves as a guide for public bodies under the Scottish Government's control when setting pay awards for their employees. In 2021, this did not introduce working time reduction, but created permission for employers to transition to shorter working hours. PCS' mobilisation helped to push the Scottish Government towards opening this possibility in the pay policy.

↳ Reaching the agreement: process and strategy



2022: Cost of living crisis

PCS' commitments to working time reduction and use of the feasibility study came to fruition in 2022.

The cost of living crisis in the UK, caused by high levels of inflation, led to strike action across the UK focused on increasing pay. PCS' negotiations in 2022-2023 included pay as well as working time reduction.

In November 2022, PCS Scotland's industrial action ballot came back with a historic majority backing industrial action. On this basis, PCS held significant leverage in subsequent negotiations with the Scottish devolved sectors. Scottish Government ministers instructed senior officials to engage with PCS at a sectoral level. This meant that instead of PCS negotiating individually with each of its 40 employers, the union would negotiate for the Scottish devolved sector as a whole.

This arrangement, i.e. Scottish Government leading discussions centrally on behalf of normally autonomous bodies, was entirely exceptional and in response to the specific circumstances of the current PCS dispute.

2023: Sectoral negotiations

Throughout early 2023, PCS engaged with officials acting on behalf of all employers involved in the dispute. The trade union mobilisation and negotiations on working time reduction over the previous 6 years had moved the social and political opinions of working time reduction within the Scottish public sector, so it was seen as a more reasonable position. A strike would be across the sector, which gave PCS a lot of leverage thanks to their industrial action ballot.

From these negotiations, a temporary, non-contractual wellbeing hour was introduced (reducing working hours from 37 to 36 hours per week). All but three of the employers were happy with this.

Given that the goal of the union was 35 hours per week as a first step towards a 4-day, 28-hour week, Scotland's national galleries, national museums and prisons pushed to move straight to 35-hours per week due to the significant effort it would involve to reorganise work internally (for example, changing shift workers' rotas) first to 36, and then to 35 hours. The Scottish Government committed some funding to cover some of their transition costs to 35-hours per week.

2024: Transition to the 35-hour week

Throughout 2024, the national museums of Scotland, national galleries and prisons have transitioned to a 35-hour week. Security staff in the national galleries moved from 42 to 35 hours per week.

In the 2023-2024 pay negotiations, using CBAs negotiated with each Scottish devolved sector employer, PCS achieved a reduction from 37 to 35 hours per week with no loss in pay.¹¹⁵

↳ Implementation: monitoring and evaluation



Implementation

As of December 2024, almost all Scottish devolved sector employers have moved to a 35-hour week. There are three yet to move. A few employers outside of the Scottish Government pay policy are moving to 35 hours via separate agreements (including Scottish Parliament and Parliamentary office holders).

For organisations such as the national galleries, national museums and the Scottish prison service, that have a high proportion of operational and public facing staff, the transition to a 35-hour week posed more complex considerations than for more office-based organisations. For example, opening and closing times, rosters and sufficient shift cover were factors that had to be considered and looked at in detail as part of the plan to reduce working time. PCS worked with these employers via worker consultations to support the transition to working time reduction. Security staff in the national galleries designed their own rotas and transitioned from 42 to 35-hour weeks.

¹¹⁵ As noted above, the move to 36 hours in early 2023 was a temporary arrangement - not a permanent change.

The 35-hour week is a contractual change, and PCS expects this to stay as the standard maximum until a further reduction is negotiated.

Monitoring and evaluation

The successful implementation of the 35-hour week has not been even across the Scottish devolved sector employers. The Scottish Government is building an evaluation template, including surveys and qualitative engagements, with external consultants to create a consistent way to assess how employers have implemented the policy and ensure that workers are benefiting from the policy in full.

Two employers within the Scottish Government are trialling a 32-hour week. The results from these trials will be published in spring 2025, on the basis of which PCS will plan its next campaigns and negotiations. Improving the implementation of the 35-hour week will remain PCS' focus in relation to working time reduction in the meantime.

↳ **Success factors**



Although the implementation of the 35-hour week has been carried out with varying efficacy, the CBAs have been successful in introducing a shorter working week in the Scottish public sector. The 35-hour week is the new standard across the Scottish devolved sector, affecting 40 employers and over 20 000 workers.

The negotiations were successful due to:

- The **leverage** PCS had over the employers from the industrial action ballot, and the sectoral-level negotiations which were novel.
- The **evidence** PCS had in support of working time reduction from the feasibility study.
- **Mass education campaigns** across employers and workers on the subject.
- Employers being **catalysed** by the three 'first mover' employers going to 35 hours before all others.

The success of the CBAs is being monitored ad hoc by PCS, and will be assessed formally using the evaluation template being developed by the Scottish Government.

↳ **Limitations**



Education and understanding

A significant barrier PCS faced in the early stages of advocating for working time reduction was members' understanding of the proposal, its feasibility and benefits. Educating and winning over members across every employer on what working time reduction is and how it is possible was a limitation. The feasibility study was important in addressing this.

Part-time workers

Based on legal advice, financial limitations and remaining united with PCS' sister union, Prospect, part-time workers were in most cases not provided an option between a pro rata reduction in hours or a pro rata increase in pay (keeping their current hours).

PCS and Prospect's position was to give part-time workers a choice. However, all bar one employer did not and part-time workers' hours were reduced proportionately to full-time workers' hours. A letter went out to inform part-time workers of this, and workers could appeal to have an increase in pay if they could show that the changes caused them a financial detriment.

CASE STUDY 3

Kommunal Sweden, 2022



Case study 3: Kommunal - Sweden, 2022

Quick summary	
Country:	Sweden
Trade union:	Kommunal
Year:	2022
Level:	Sectoral
Sector:	Public sector
Organisation name:	N/A
Number of workers covered:	40 000 (directly) / 540 000 (indirectly)
Working time reduction type:	Weekly
Details on working time reduction:	Reduction from 36.33 to 34.33 hours per week
Types of workers covered:	Night workers working exclusively night shifts

↳ Context

The 2022 agreement between Kommunal (the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union) and SKR (the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions) introduced a reduction in weekly working hours for employees on constant night shifts. Previously contracted to 36.33 hours per week, these workers' hours were reduced to 34.33 hours - a 2 hour decrease. This change applies specifically to those working constant night shifts, a common arrangement in elderly care.

Institutional framework for agreements

To understand the agreement, it is necessary to consider the broader institutional context. SKR's agreements with unions are structured in two tiers:

- **General terms (Allmänna Bestämmelser, AB):** this applies universally to all unions negotiating with SKR.
- **Main agreements (Huvudöverenskommelse, HÖK):** these are union-specific agreements negotiated directly with SKR.

The specific 2022 adjustment for night work was made within the HÖK agreement between Kommunal and SKR, which covers approximately 540 000 workers, of whom around 40 000 work permanent night shifts.

Other unions with HÖK agreements with SKR include Vårdförbundet (110 000 workers), general municipal unions such as Vision, SSR, Ledarna, and Film och Scen (210 000 workers), Doctors represented by OFR (40 000 workers), AkademikerAlliansen (90 000 workers), and the Teachers' Union, Sveriges Lärare (230 000 workers).


Historical background and rationale

The agreement between Kommunal and SKR follows the 2016 Vårdförbundet (the Swedish Association of Health Professionals) HÖK agreement (implemented by April 2018), which reduced weekly hours for constant night shifts to 34.33. In the 2020 bargaining round, Kommunal sought the same terms for its members. SKR proposed reduced hours for rotational shift workers working at least 30% of their time at night, but Kommunal chose to focus on constant night shifts instead. This decision stemmed from structural differences between sectors; while rotational shifts are common in hospitals, they are rare in municipal elderly care. Kommunal feared accepting SKR's proposal would normalise rotational shifts and disrupt established working patterns in elderly care.

Impact on night shift workers

The decision addresses the challenging working conditions faced by night shift workers, who often experience higher levels of absenteeism, turnover, and recruitment difficulties due to the demanding nature of their roles. By reducing working hours for those on constant night shifts, the agreement aims to alleviate these challenges and improve conditions for this critical workforce.

↳ **Process, strategy, and implementation**



The agreement between Kommunal and SKR was negotiated centrally but allowed for flexibility in its implementation and potential funding at the local level. Kommunal drew inspiration from Vårdförbundet's earlier success, where a similar reduction in night working hours was achieved without affecting wage growth. This success was largely attributed to Vårdförbundet's use of "numberless agreements", which set no fixed salary increase rates but historically enabled positive wage drift due to the strong local bargaining power of their members (e.g. Nurses). Kommunal leveraged this precedent to argue that the night work reform should similarly incur no additional costs for its members.

In these negotiations, Kommunal's strategy was to replicate Vårdförbundet's success. The union focused on securing a reduction in working hours for constant night shift workers to 34.33 hours per week, without impacting wages. A central argument was fairness, as night work is particularly demanding and carries significant health risks. Kommunal emphasised that it was only fair for workers in the municipal sector on constant night shifts to benefit from the same reduction in hours that Vårdförbundet had secured.

A key consideration for Kommunal was ensuring that the reduction in hours would not result in wage cuts, especially since Vårdförbundet had achieved this outcome without affecting wages. Kommunal aimed to achieve the same result, ensuring there was no financial disadvantage to workers.

The wage benchmark ("märket"), which sets the standard for national wage increases, is centrally established by industrial social partners and closely scrutinised. While SKR is a signatory, it is bound by the benchmark and risks criticism if exceeded. However, local salary formations have more flexibility in practice. Municipalities that deemed the reduction in night working hours necessary or cost-effective could implement the reform without reducing wage increase budgets. The agreement specified this approach, with key clauses noted in the protocol of HÖK20:

- **Working hours.** For employees working constant night shifts, regular working hours were reduced to an average of 34 hours and 20 minutes per week, effective from April 2022, unless otherwise agreed by local parties.
- **Salary deduction clause.** Local salary reviews for 2022 could include a deduction of up to 0.3 percentage points from wage increase allocations, depending on the proportion of constant night shift workers. The actual deduction could be higher or lower, depending on the local circumstances.

Based on this agreement, Kommunal developed detailed guidelines to support local representatives:

- **Primary strategy: full employer funding.** Argue that the reduction in night working hours should be achieved without financial concessions from workers. Emphasise that Vårdförbundet secured a similar reform in 2018 without cost to workers, strengthening the case for municipalities to fully fund the reform. Investigate if nearby municipalities funded the reform, and if so, use this as leverage to pressure less cooperative employers. Coordination between local representatives is key to this strategy.
- **Alternative strategy 1: shared cost between night workers and the employer.** If full employer funding is not possible, Kommunal could propose that night workers and the employer share the cost. In this model, night workers would forgo their wage increase in exchange for reduced working hours, with the employer covering the remaining difference. Since the reduction in hours is valued at 5.8% of wages, but the wage increase is 1.4%, night workers would still benefit by 4.4%. This approach would ensure that other employees' wage increases remain unaffected.
- **Alternative strategy 2: cost distribution across all employees.** As another option, Kommunal could suggest that the cost would be calculated for night workers but distributed among all employees to reduce the individual burden. This could be done in two ways: a one-to-one trade-off where wage increases are adjusted proportionally to reduced hours, or a mixed approach where the employer and all employees share the financial impact. If costs are spread across all, the impact on wage increases could be minimal, reducing the financial strain on any single group.

Outcome

While the official cost of the reform was set at 0.3% of the wage increase budget, many municipalities resolved the funding locally, often avoiding the full deduction. Some absorbed the cost entirely, while others negotiated partial deductions. This flexible implementation allowed Kommunal to uphold the national wage benchmark while achieving the working hours reduction. In practice, the reform had little to no impact on overall wage increase allocations.

↳ Success factors



Several critical success factors contributed to the agreement on reduced working hours for constant night shift workers. These factors encompassed both Kommunal's core arguments and the broader context of employer perspectives.

- **Fairness.** Kommunal emphasised fairness, arguing that its members, often in weaker bargaining positions, should not be treated less favourably than those in other unions. Drawing comparisons to Vårdförbundet's previous success in reducing night work hours, Kommunal framed the reform as an issue of equitable treatment.
- **Recognition of night work strain.** Employers increasingly recognised the physical and psychological strain of night work, including burnout, absenteeism, and long-term sick leave, which supported the case for reduced hours.
- **Workforce allocation challenges.** Employers also acknowledged the difficulty in attracting and retaining workers for unpopular night shifts. Offering reduced hours helps address this imbalance, aligns staffing with needs, and maintains a sustainable workforce.

By combining fairness with evidence of strain and workforce challenges, Kommunal secured reforms that addressed both member needs and employer concerns.

↳ Limitations



While the agreement represented a significant step forward, several limitations became apparent in its implementation and outcomes.

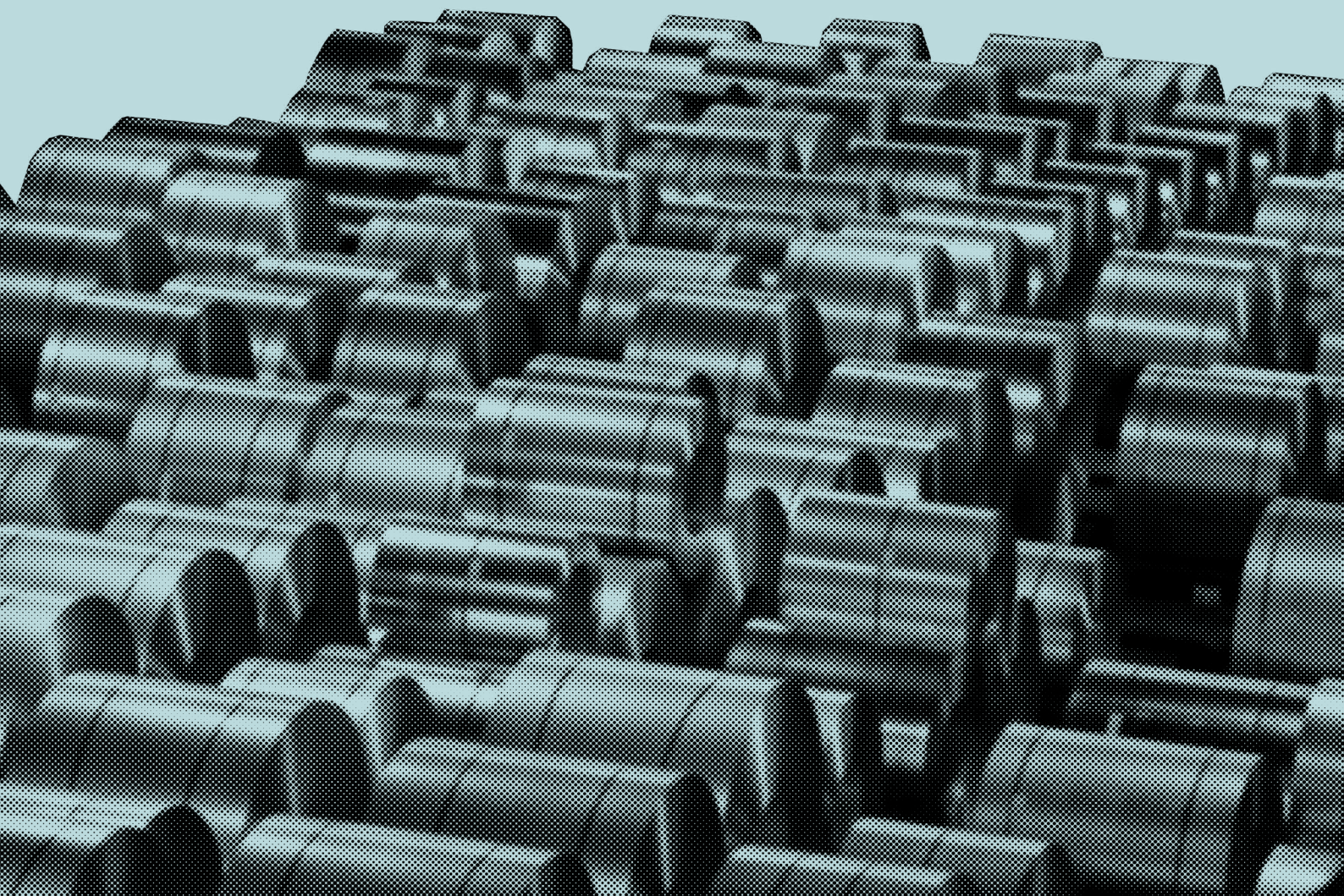
- **Restricted scope.** The reduced hours applied only to constant night shift workers, excluding other groups who also face challenges related to night work, which caused some dissatisfaction among broader member groups.
- **Unintended consequences on scheduling.** The aim of reducing shifts often resulted in the same number of shorter shifts instead of fewer, longer shifts. Many members preferred fewer, longer shifts to minimise disruptions and maximise recovery time.
- **Local implementation and funding inequalities.** Although centrally negotiated, the reform's financial implementation was localised, leading to inconsistencies. Some municipalities applied the reduced hours without offsetting wage cuts, while others deducted up to 0.3% from the wage increase budget. This caused criticism, with some members feeling unfairly penalised.

These limitations highlight the complexities of implementing reforms in a decentralised system and underscore the importance of anticipating unintended outcomes and addressing member concerns to ensure widespread satisfaction and equity.

CASE STUDY 4

IG Metall

Germany, 2024



Case study 4: IG Metall - Germany, 2024

Quick summary	
Country:	Germany
Trade union:	IG Metall
Year:	2024
Level:	Sectoral
Sector:	Steel industry
Organisation name:	N/A
Number of workers covered:	80 000
Working time reduction type:	Weekly
Details on working time reduction:	35 > 32 hours per week
Types of workers covered:	All workers

↳ Context

The background of working time reduction in the German steel industry

Since the 1980s, the standard working week in Germany's steel industry has been set at 35 hours. However, IG Metall has played a key role in negotiating temporary, local reductions in working hours below this standard, often as a strategy to protect jobs during economic downturns and transitions. These agreements have typically involved reducing working hours without a corresponding pay reduction, thereby ensuring job security during challenging times.

For example, in 2013 thyssenkrupp steel implemented a reduction to 31 hours per week, with employees compensated for 32 hours, covering 25% of the lost working time. Many other organisation-level agreements have adopted shorter working hours, which have been used as leverage in central bargaining to protect employment. This approach has helped the steel sector navigate challenges, including fluctuating demand and increased global competition.

The shift towards green transition and the need for working time reduction

The steel sector is currently undergoing a significant transformation, driven by the transition from traditional blast furnace methods to more sustainable hydrogen-based production technologies. This green shift will initially increase the need for workers, as both the old and new technologies are used in parallel. However, once the transformation is complete, fewer workers will be needed as some production processes become obsolete.

In addition, the decline in steel consumption, driven by changes in key consumer industries, compounds the need for effective strategies to secure jobs in the sector. Demographic measures such as partial retirement schemes alone cannot address these challenges. As a result, working time reduction has emerged as a critical tool for ensuring continued employment and supporting the sector's transition to greener production methods.

The 2023 collective agreement: a step towards sustainable employment

In 2023, a significant CBA was reached in the steel sector, marking a major shift in the approach to working time reduction. The agreement introduced a 32-hour work week for employees, with partial wage compensation for the reduced hours. This measure aims to ensure job security as the industry undergoes its transformation and to promote work-life balance for workers. Furthermore, the agreement seeks to make the steel sector more attractive to skilled workers, thus supporting the industry's long-term viability and green transformation.

↳ **Reaching the agreement: process and strategy**



The bargaining process involved significant pressure from both unions and employers. Negotiations between IG Metall and employers began with substantial disagreements on wage increases and working time reductions. Employers initially rejected the demand for wage increases alongside reduced working hours, arguing that this would harm competitiveness and disturb shift models. The unions, on the other hand, focused on safeguarding jobs during the transformation and ensuring that working hours would be reduced without severely impacting wages.

The first formal collective bargaining commission meetings took place in April 2023, with both parties acknowledging the benefits of working time reductions but differing on the specifics. Employers were particularly resistant to the proposed wage increases, offering a one-time payment of €1 000 in January 2024, and a 3.5% wage increase starting in July 2024, for a contract term of 19 months. Despite IG Metall's insistence on a wage increase to balance the working time reduction, these offers were seen as insufficient.

Massive warning strikes ensued in December 2023, with more than 23 500 workers involved, as both sides moved closer to a solution, though a resolution remained elusive in early December. In December 2023, IG Metall escalated the strike action to 24-hour strikes, involving around 30 000 workers across Germany.

↳ **Implementation: monitoring and evaluation**



In December, 2023, IG Metall reached a new CBA in the steel industry, applicable until September 2025.

The agreement, which covers workers in the North-West and East of Germany, includes wage increases, working time reductions, and provisions for job protection amid the sector's ongoing transformation.

The key components of the agreement are as follows:

- **Inflation compensation:** a one-off bonus of €1 500 net will be paid in January 2024, with further payments totalling €1 500 for workers (€800 for apprentices) to be spread across 2024. Monthly payments of €150 net (€80 for apprentices) will be made from February to November, with part-time workers receiving the bonus on a pro-rata basis.
- **Wage increase:** from January 2025, wages will rise by 5.5%, with a similar increase for apprentices.
- **Working time reduction:** a collective reduction of up to 3 hours per week will be implemented, with wage compensation for the reduced hours. For example, workers will be paid for more hours than they work:
 - 34 hours per week will be compensated as 34.5 hours.
 - 33 hours per week will be compensated as 33.75 hours.
 - 32 hours per week will be compensated as 33 hours. This reduction will be applicable if companies are under pressure during the transformation process.
- **Temporary working time increases:** in some cases, working hours may increase temporarily to support the transition to greener technologies. Overtime will be paid at a 25% premium for hours worked beyond 35 hours per week.
- **Individual working time reduction:** workers can reduce their individual working hours to 33.6 hours per week. For older workers (aged 60+), a reduction to 33.6 hours will be available starting in January 2025, with partial wage compensation.

The agreement will be evaluated in 2027 to assess the impact of the transformation and its effects on employment. Further negotiations will also take place on a “future in training” CBA to ensure workers are equipped for the shift to greener steel production.

↳ Success factors



Strong union presence

A key factor in the success of the agreement was the high union density and IG Metall's ability to mobilise workers effectively behind their demands. The union has the power to bring production to a halt, and even a short disruption - such as a 24-hour production stoppage - can be extremely costly for employers. This leverage allowed IG Metall to apply significant pressure and demonstrate their determination to secure favourable terms for workers.

Organisation-level agreements

The agreement's success was further supported by the flexibility offered through organisation-level agreements. These localised deals allowed for tailored working time reductions, creating a foundation for broader changes across the sector. By addressing the specific needs of individual organisations, these agreements laid the groundwork for more extensive, sector-wide progress.

Flexibility in implementation

The gradual implementation of the agreement allowed both workers and employers to adapt to new working time structures at a manageable pace. This flexibility ensured that production could be adjusted without overwhelming organisations, while giving workers the time needed to embrace changes in their work-life balance.

Wage compensation models

The wage compensation model helped balance the reduction in working hours with the need for financial stability. While workers did not receive full compensation for all reduced hours, the model was designed to ensure that the income loss was manageable, making the transition to shorter working hours more acceptable to workers and aiding in the overall success of the agreement.

↳ **Limitations**



Resistance from employers

Resistance from employers played a significant role in shaping the agreement, with many opposing the combination of working time reductions and wage increases. Employers feared that these changes could undermine competitiveness and production efficiency.

Temporary nature of the agreement

The temporary nature of the agreement is another key limitation. The temporary working time reductions are contingent upon both the employer and IG Metall agreeing that an organisation is undergoing a green transformation. These reductions are temporary and will only remain in place for as long as the transformation continues, with the overall model running until 2034. This means that permanent, industry-wide working time reductions cannot be negotiated before this date. Some IG Metall members have expressed frustration with this limitation, arguing that the inability to secure permanent reductions before 2034 hinders the potential for more structural change. However, temporary agreements have often paved the way for further progress, as evidenced by protests from thyssenkrupp workers after their temporary agreement expired, demanding its continuation.

This and other examples suggest that once workers become accustomed to shorter hours, reversing such agreements can provoke strong resistance, making it difficult for employers to withdraw them without facing significant pushback.

Only partial wage compensation

Although workers benefit from reduced working hours, they will not receive full compensation for the hours they reduce, leading to some income loss. However, given the relatively high wages in the steel industry, the impact is less severe compared to other sectors. Furthermore, any wage gap is typically addressed in subsequent bargaining rounds, with workers often catching up to or surpassing their previous wages. IG Metall has noted that workers highly value more free time, even when facing temporary wage reductions.

CASE STUDY 5

CGIL/CISL/UIIL Italy, 2023



Case study 5: CGIL/CISL/UIL - Italy, 2023

Quick summary	
Country:	Italy
Trade union:	CGIL - CISL - UIL
Year:	2023
Level:	Organisation
Sector:	Fashion
Organisation name:	Essilor Luxottica
Number of workers covered:	15 000
Working time reduction type:	Annual
Details on working time reduction:	20 days reduction taken fortnightly, 15 days paid for by the company, 5 days taken from additional individual paid leave.
Types of workers covered:	All types but not all included in the first phase

↳ Context

The primary motivation for the Italian trade unions CGIL, CISL and UIL in these negotiations was improving workers' quality of life. The unions wanted to negotiate for working time reduction to give workers more time to dedicate to themselves, their families, and other personal interests. At the same time, it was about adapting to technological advancements that allow for increased productivity with fewer working hours. This was to help avoid redundancies.

Luxottica performed well over the previous financial years, which made it more feasible to negotiate for working time reduction.

↳ Reaching the agreement: process and strategy

The Italian unions brought the proposal of working time reduction to the negotiating table. Collaboration with the employer was foundational to the success of these negotiations.

The unions conducted **internal surveys** to demonstrate strong worker support for the reduction in working time. The negotiators emphasised the benefits of working time reduction based on evidence, including increased productivity and reduced absenteeism.

The employer was **open to dialogue** because they were invested in employee wellbeing, and saw mutual benefits: higher employee satisfaction and improved retention.

The unions proposed a **phased implementation** to mitigate risks, which included managing staff shortages and the need to maintain output. Negotiators suggested seasonal adjustments to working hours to align with business demands.

Luxottica's proactive engagement in the negotiation process was a significant enabler. The company's willingness to innovate and adopt a forward-thinking approach toward workforce management played a crucial role in reaching agreement.

↳ **Implementation: monitoring and evaluation**



The agreement was signed with Filctem Cgil, Femca Cisl and Uiltec Uil and concerns almost 15 000 workers at the factories in Agordo, Sedico, Cencenighe Agordino, Pederobba, Lauriano (Turin) and Rovereto (Trento).

The CBA includes two working time reduction options, both of which provide workers with 20 additional days of leave per year - taken in alternate weeks. In the first option, the employer covers 15 days of leave per year with the remaining 5 days taken from individual paid leave (distinct from annual paid holiday days). In the second option, the employer covers 13 days and the remaining 7 days are covered with individual paid leave. The choice between the two options depends on the agreement reached for specific departments and roles, or individual choice.

Individual paid leave, or 'Permessi Individuali Retribuiti', in this case consists of 11 nationally negotiated days that each worker can use for personal reasons - outside of annual holiday leave.

The agreement also includes 1 500 additional permanent hires, through the stabilisation of workers with fixed-term or temporary contracts. Furthermore, the right to study has been expanded, the 'staffetta generazionale' relay was enhanced, wellbeing days were increased and permits for placing children in nursery schools were implemented.

Monitoring and evaluation following the pilot phase of the working time reduction is ongoing. Both the unions and the company are collecting feedback to assess the results.

The unions and employer are **tracking metrics** including productivity, absenteeism, and employee satisfaction. Luxottica has been proactive in using internal surveys and data collection to measure the impact.

The **phased approach** to implementing the changes was proposed to address any uncertainties. This ensured both the unions and the employer could monitor and adjust the process gradually, minimising risks and addressing concerns as they arose.

↳ Success factors



The employer's **openness to negotiation** was crucial for the success of this working time reduction policy. Luxottica saw the long-term benefits of happier and more engaged employees, and was **invested in the wellbeing of their workers**.

This was partly enabled by the company's **positive financial performance** over the previous financial year.

Strong support from workers, backed by survey data, strengthened the position during negotiations.

The **same level of workload was maintained** on shorter working hours, and there has been a reduction in the number of sick days employees are taking. This reflects an improvement in productivity.

↳ Limitations



One of the biggest challenges was addressing the company's concerns about maintaining productivity levels. Additionally, in the region (Veneto), finding enough qualified workers to compensate for reduced hours posed a challenge. The unions had to ensure the new structure would not disrupt operations.

To overcome these challenges, the unions proposed flexibility in the implementation. For example, they suggested seasonal adjustments to working hours, ensuring the distribution of hours matched business demands.

There was not significant resistance from the employer, but there were some concerns from certain departments about how the changes would work in practice. The phased approach and ongoing evaluations were critical to mitigate this.

The global economic situation could also pose a challenge. For example, if the economy slows down, organisations would be less willing to invest in changes like working time reduction. Finding the right balance between reducing hours and maintaining operational efficiency is always delicate.

Success depends on the sector and the company's ability to innovate. For instance, the negotiator theorised that industries with higher automation and productivity gains are more likely to adopt these measures. Others may struggle if they do not have the right resources or flexibility.

CHAPTER 3

Negotiations and implementation of working time reduction



Negotiations and implementation of working time reduction

This chapter presents conclusions and recommendations about approaching working time reduction strategically and practically in collective bargaining, both as regards the negotiation and implementation phase.

The diversity of negotiation contexts, national legal frameworks, sectoral and organisation-specific conditions highlights the need for a thorough and pragmatic approach to the implementation of working time reduction. The impact and success of working time reduction largely depends on buy-in from workers as well as employers, which can be achieved through thoughtful preparation and appropriate implementation parameters.

Collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) are a valuable tool for achieving working time reduction. Collectively bargained working hours are consistently lower than the statutory maximum weekly working hours in Europe.¹¹⁶ In addition to this, collectively bargained working time reduction adds value by:

- Allowing working time arrangements to be tailored to the specificities of the sector or organisation.
- Ensuring the interests and voices of workers are considered throughout the process.
- Enabling the design and implementation of working time reduction to strike a fair balance between the interests of the employer and the workers.
- Establishing adequate safeguards around the working time reduction, which protects and can improve the power-balance between workers and employers.

The chapter contains three sections. First, the general trends and contexts for working time reduction across geographies and sectors are presented. The second section reviews the key considerations to include when engaging in negotiations for working time reduction. The third and final section contains recommendations for trade union leaders and negotiators when approaching working time reduction.

¹¹⁶ Eurofound data from 2022 indicate that statutory provisions on maximum weekly working time (excluding overtime) stood at 40 hours in a majority of EU Member States, whereas the EU average for collectively agreed normal working time was 38 hours per week. Eurofound, “Working Time in 2021-2022”.

Methodology

The insights in this chapter have been drawn from three sources:

- The research and analysis in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 of this study.
- The research team's experience working with organisations during individual trials and large pilots.
- Desk research based on existing literature.

Trends in working time reduction

For this study, CBAs from 29 different countries in Europe were collected. The CBAs varied by country, sector, type of workers covered and type of working time reduction. This demonstrates that trade unions, their leaders, members and representatives have a wide range of routes available to demand, negotiate and achieve working time reduction. The CBAs collected are further analysed in Chapter 2's section 'Collective agreements: mapping and analysis'.

This research has provided a snapshot of working time reduction with no loss in pay with CBAs across Europe. From these examples and wider research on the subject several trends relating to working time reduction can be identified:

The majority of CBAs include reductions of 1-3 working hours per week.

Despite attention-grabbing headlines of 4-day working weeks across Europe, the majority of instances of working time reduction with no loss in pay involve a reduction of 1-3 hours per week. These were often negotiated with phased introductions, involving a gradual reduction each year until the reduced hours are reached.

There is a proliferation of high profile examples of organisations implementing significant reductions in working time with no loss in pay.

Within and outside of CBAs, over the past 5 years there has been a spike in the number of high profile examples of organisations reducing working hours by 10-20%. These can be found in large-scale pilots taking place across Europe within the private sector or carried out in the public sector with support from regional or national Governments. Notable examples include the 2022-2023 UK private sector pilot, 2023-2024 Portuguese pilot and the ongoing Spanish pilot. Outside of pilots, it is not uncommon to see media coverage of a large employer moving to a 4-day week or 9-day fortnight. Cases in Italy - such as Essilor-Luxottica, Lamborghini and Lavazza - are prominent examples in this regard.

Progress towards working time reduction is moving faster in Western and Southern Europe than the rest of the continent.

As evidenced by the sample of CBAs collected in this study, trade unions and workers based in Western and Southern Europe are more likely to achieve working time reduction with no loss in pay. 73% of the CBAs collected were from trade unions in Western and Southern Europe, whilst 14% were from Eastern Europe and 13% from the Baltics and northern Europe. While the collected sample may not be representative, the findings nevertheless suggest there may be fewer instances of collectively agreed working time reduction in these regions of Europe. The reasons for these differences may relate to political attitudes, trade union density and/or a shorter existing working week.

Working time reduction is regaining political momentum

The issue of working time reduction was a politically heated topic throughout the 20th century, but since the 1980s it has not been as prominent. The issue is once again gaining political traction. From a trade union perspective, this is important because collectively bargained reductions in working hours are more likely to succeed if there is political pressure in the background (such as a “threat” of incoming legislation). Conversely, collective bargaining can also be a driving force for change, paving the way for legislation or the multiplication of collectively agreed working time reduction within and across sectors.

In countries like Spain and Sweden, for example, discussions on working time are ongoing, with unions, employers, and policymakers all involved. Trade union-political cooperation can be a useful strategy for achieving working time reduction.

Working time reduction is increasingly necessary to defend time sovereignty

Institutions and employers across Europe are asking workers to extend their working life as people live longer, putting forward arguments about the need for pension reforms and policy measures for active ageing. Longer working lives are not desirable, but a minimum requirement for their reluctant acceptance is the widespread achievement of weekly working time reduction with no loss in pay. Sufficient time outside of work is essential for individuals’ leisure, health, time spent with family and friends and political engagement. Time should sit at the centre of any debate on working life, workers’ rights and pension reform.

Key considerations for negotiation and implementation



Key considerations for negotiation and implementation

Approach and strategy

Different country, sector, and trade union contexts will influence the process and strategy that trade unions should take to achieve working time reduction. This section outlines five key successful approaches that have emerged from across case studies and CBAs when negotiating for working time reduction:

- Leverage the broader political context and organise at the largest-scale possible
- Engage, inform, and organise workers
- Build robust evidence and arguments
- Strategise around both short-term and long-term goals
- Engage with and educate employers

↳ **Leverage the political context and organise at the largest possible scale**



- **Harness political momentum.** Where there is political support, trade unions should harness the political momentum and context when mobilising their members and pushing for reduced working hours. Preparing a robust argument for working time reduction alongside this creates political pressure towards employers and decision-makers. In the case of Belgium, ABVV-FGTB built off the political support from two socialist ministers in the mid-1990s who introduced legislation to encourage working time reduction.
- **Organise at the largest-scale possible.** Where possible, organising and negotiating for working time reduction on as large a scale as possible can achieve the most significant impacts. This may be facilitated by harnessing political momentum. For example, in the case study of PCS Scotland, the trade union's strike ballot came back with a historic majority in favour of industrial action. This provided significant leverage for PCS to negotiate for and achieve working time reduction. Conversely, trade union mobilisation for working time reduction can also be used to put political pressure on decision-makers. As illustrated by political developments in Spain, over the course of 2024, trade unions successfully negotiated with the national Government on new working time reduction legislation that would reduce the current 40-hour working week to 37.5 hours. In early 2025, the Spanish Council of Ministers adopted the draft bill and was awaiting a Parliamentary vote as of the publication of this study.

- **Build off popular demands.** Where the political context is less favourable for working time reduction, trade unions should identify where this goal may be connected to other more popular demands, which can strengthen the relevance of working time reduction. This could include flexible working policies, equal pay claims, stronger rights for disabled workers, the just transition debate, the working life debate and tackling labour shortages within sectors.

↳ Engage, inform and organise workers



- **Engage, inform, and mobilise members.** Engaging, informing, and mobilising trade union members is tantamount to the success of working time reduction initiatives. In the case of PCS in Scotland in 2022, the trade union commissioned a worker-led feasibility study, which was then utilised to raise awareness among members about the feasibility and benefits of working time reduction to help increase the support among the workers. As a result, workers gained confidence in the feasibility of working time reduction, which built momentum for trade union led demands and subsequently the proposal.
- **Build strong internal union organisation.** The very demand of working time reduction can become a flagship initiative for recruiting new members in the workplace or in the sector, demonstrating the value of trade unions in tangibly improving workers' lives. In Germany, IG Metall has successfully organised for working time reduction for decades, and in 2023, reached a CBA introducing a 32-hour work week. A crucial lesson from the agreement is the importance of strong union organisation. Higher membership and union density were fundamental to achieving success. The ability to mobilise workers, demonstrate collective strength, and exert pressure on employers played a decisive role in securing the agreement. This was also crucial to the success of PCS in Scotland.

↳ Build robust evidence and arguments



- **Demonstrate comprehensive understanding of the organisation.** Trade unions must possess a thorough understanding of the organisation's work, internal structures and operational needs. Employers will have fewer counterarguments against working time reduction if the working time reduction proposals showcase comprehensive knowledge of work organisation and considerations. This could include an understanding of: how the workplace is organised, for example in shifts, the distribution of tasks among blue and white collar workers and tasks that are labour intensive (and therefore more difficult to reduce); and the economic situation and prospects of the organisation/sector, such as levels of profit, share of wages within total turnover and risks facing the sectors.
- **Utilise data tools.** Employers respond well to comprehensive modelling and calculations that trade unions conduct to showcase expertise and robust arguments. ABVV-FGTB in Belgium found the use of tools, such as those used to calculate and highlight the costs and savings of different working policies to the employer, to be a persuasive argument for employers.

- **Conduct feasibility studies.** Where resource exists and context permits, a worker-led feasibility study can be a useful reference point for arguments for working time reduction. In Scotland, PCS conducted a worker-led feasibility study, which provided an in-depth feasibility argument that PCS could use to negotiate with their employer.
- **Leverage fairness to multiply impact.** In many European countries, there are occupational groups or workplaces where working hours are shorter than average, often as a result of collective bargaining. Using a fairness argument has been central to many working time reductions throughout the 20th century, not least as a means of levelling conditions between blue collar and white collar workers. Depending on political context and employment sentiments, this dynamic can help to create synergies: trade unions with strong bargaining power can take the lead in securing shorter working hours for certain professional groups, while others can subsequently use the fairness argument to push for more equal conditions. In turn, this improves the conditions for the initial frontrunners to advance further, setting a cycle of gradual progress in motion. In these contexts, collective bargaining is an effective trigger for multiplier effects.

For example, Kommunal found the fairness argument to be a powerful tool in the negotiations for their 2022 agreement, building on previous achievements by a sister union. The fairness argument highlighting the interconnected nature of the labour market - that prosperity and growth are achieved collectively - also resonated well with both employers and policymakers. Ultimately, other unions' successes can act as a locomotive, pulling similar reforms forward across sectors and different groups of workers.

↳ Engage with and educate employers

- **Educate employers about working time reduction on your terms.** Provide employers robust evidence from feasibility studies, large-scale trials, and other relevant examples. Provide organisation-specific scenarios created by data-driven tools and modelling to showcase the impact of working time reduction and how the work could be reorganised to anticipate and address concerns. The use of the feasibility study for PCS in Scotland was imperative to their success.
- **Engage in constructive dialogue with employers and find mutually beneficial solutions.** Framing the changes as mutually beneficial allows both sides to work towards solutions that address their concerns, facilitating smoother negotiations and helping to secure agreements. IG Metall found that even when there are material conflicts of interest, seeking constructive dialogue with employers is important. Benefits to emphasise to the employer may include reduced sickness and injury, improved staff retention and the resolution of labour shortages.

Successful negotiations often hinge on presenting solutions that can be perceived as wins for both parties. If necessary, concessions made by the employer can be framed or “hidden” to ensure their palatability while focusing on achieving the desired change. Internal communication can then highlight the victories to members without unnecessary public focus on trade-offs. Kommunal in Sweden found this tactic particularly successful, focusing on how working time reduction could address the negative health impacts of night work and difficulties retaining workers.

↳ **Strategy around both short-term and long-term goals**



- **Balance short-term and long-term goals.** Ensuring that an agreement is fit for purpose, sustainable and forward-thinking requires a balance with regard to both short- and long-term goals. IG Metall's agreement in Germany was designed to address immediate concerns such as job security while also laying the groundwork for future improvements in working conditions and anticipating changes for just transition. Balancing these two perspectives was vital to its success.

Linking working time reduction to other working conditions, such as pay increases, should also be considered by trade union negotiators. Pay has failed to keep up with rates of inflation since the 2008 financial crisis. Working time reduction should and can be negotiated alongside pay increases. It can also be introduced in negotiations where an employer refuses or is unable to offer a satisfactory pay rise, enabling the union to still provide a meaningful improvement to their working lives of members.

- **Anticipate and address organisational adjustments.** To secure and preserve the overall benefits of working time reduction, it is important to anticipate and address outcomes contrary to the original intentions of the agreed measures. A key takeaway from Kommunal's 2022 agreement in Sweden is the necessity of assessing how reforms may trigger organisational changes. While the reduction in hours was designed with the current working patterns and shift allocations in mind, its implementation sometimes led to unintended reorganisations. Instead of fewer shifts, the workers sometimes found themselves working the same number of shorter shifts. This highlights the importance of not only pursuing reductions but also considering their broader implications, such as the length and distribution of shifts. These considerations are equally key to secure workers' buy-in and long-term support for continued efforts to reduce working hours.
- **Understand the expectations and diverse needs of workers.** Trade unions must understand, anticipate and cater for the needs of a diverse workforce, developing a solution that corresponds to those needs where possible. Working time reduction proposals should be considered from the perspective of higher and lower skills workers, workers of different genders, part-time and full-time workers, workers in arduous and high risk roles, and other groups with specific needs. Whilst ideally all workers should be able to benefit from working time reduction in the same way, practically this may not always be possible. Resolving this may be done via separate CBAs, internal reorganisations and the model of working time reduction that is selected.

Working time reduction design

When advocating for working time reduction at a large-scale, such as at a national or sectoral level, it is important to present straightforward general demands, for instance a 4-day work week, 32-hour work week, or a 20% reduction in weekly working time. At this level, political leverage (at the national level) and bargaining power (at the sectoral level) should be utilised to negotiate for the working time reduction policy itself, rather than specifics around preparation and design of the policy.

Sequencing is key: creating a clear narrative around the working time reduction, building support and momentum and generating political leverage or bargaining power. Detailed demands and proposals for the way forward can be proposed once the negotiations are underway, when the need to reconcile different interests might become more apparent. After the reduction has been agreed, the particulars of the implementation can then be adjusted to suit the specificities of different workplaces and occupational groups, including scheduling and preferences.

However, when advocating and negotiating for working time reduction at a smaller scale such as at organisation-level, a more detailed approach to preparation, model design, implementation parameters and interaction with other existing workplace policies can ensure that both workers and employers buy in to and experience the benefits of working time reduction.

Most often, the planning and design process for working time reduction at a organisational-level takes place in the lead up to bargaining, with a specific model included in the agreement.¹¹⁷ The following considerations may be of relevance prior to and when negotiating arrangements for working time reduction:

- Preparation phase
- Model of working time reduction
- Implementation parameters
- Interaction with existing workplace policies

While these considerations may all be relevant when bargaining at organisation-level, several also merit attention in the context of sectoral collective bargaining for working time reduction.

¹¹⁷ In certain circumstances, the design of the working time reduction model may be decided after the negotiations are complete. In this context, the model may be less well protected than if it is enshrined within the CBA. However, negotiating to a high level of detail may take a long time and lead to challenges between negotiators, workers and the employer. Identifying a model in a complex organisation or where there is no consensus among different groups of workers may also benefit from taking place after negotiations are complete.

↳ **Preparation phase**



Trade unions should reserve sufficient time for preparations when bargaining for working time reduction. Preparations are key in the lead up to the negotiations as well as in the course of the process for the following reasons:

- To identify the benefits of working time reduction and how to harness them to the fullest extent possible;
- To ensure there is time to address potential concerns from employers that may undermine the policy and to proactively identify and mitigate those risks. These could include disruptions to work processes, reductions in output or impact on reputation;
- To prevent adverse effects on workers that compound work intensification or micromanagement, by implementing adequate support measures;
- To facilitate staff support, getting feedback and input from colleagues across the organisation on the potential positive and negative impacts;
- To identify the best, and most equitable, model of working time reduction for different working arrangements and roles.

↳ **Model of working time reduction**



If a specific model would have the most beneficial impact (e.g. 32 hours spread over 4 days), explicitly bargain for that model and specify the relevant modalities in the CBA. Otherwise, employers may attempt to implement their own understanding of how the reduction in working time should be realised. Alternatively, a suitable model may be elaborated in the course of the negotiations, and its parameters further specified during implementation.

Where relevant, it is best to avoid a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to designing a model, to ensure that models are tailored to specific operational contexts and working conditions. Models should be co-designed, also involving workers in a conversation about what models are feasible and desirable. This level of detail is most relevant for negotiations and implementation at organisation-level.

There are four common working time reduction models that can be considered as a starting point during negotiations. In some organisations it may be possible to implement combinations of these models across teams. Combining models may meet the needs of different types of workers, such as blue collar and white collar workers, but can introduce more operational and management complications.

Universal day off

Everyone in the organisation has the same non-working day and the organisation closes for the day. This model can provide savings via the closure of an organisation for one day (e.g. less energy and running costs for an office) and is straightforward to communicate internally and externally. However, it is less feasible in organisations which must operate 5 or more days per week

Staggered day off

Workers have an entire non-working day, but they are staggered across the organisation so that it can maintain full operating capacity throughout the week. This could be paired with rotational schemes, to enable all workers to have the day off they want at least occasionally. A benefit includes the organisation continuing to be available all working days of the week, but it may be more complex to organise. It may be a better option for organisations who already use shift systems. One important consideration here is to design rotation coverage for specialised skill sets if operations continue to run throughout the whole week, as well as clear communication parameters so that colleagues know who is working and when. This ensures there is less likelihood that people are called in to work on their non-working day.

Shorter days

Shorter days are popular models particularly for those with caregiving responsibilities either in the mornings or afternoons. Shorter days may not reap the same benefits as entire non-working days: for example workers may be inclined to work over their hours and do not receive the health and wellbeing benefits from a full additional day off. This model would also be more likely to require amendments to shift systems. However, it may be a desirable and viable model for other considerations such as maintaining coverage across the week and for workers managing external responsibilities.

Annualised hours

Workers work longer hours in busier periods and shorter hours in quieter periods of the year. Annualised hours are particularly popular for service-based organisations or organisations with seasonal busy periods. The benefits are concentrated in certain periods, and it is important to anticipate and prevent the intensification of work during busier times.

↳ **Implementation parameters**



Conditionality

Trade unions should clarify the level of conditionality around working time reduction, specifically whether an employer can revoke it if certain objectives are not met. Non-conditional working time reduction is highly recommended and also more common to be negotiated in CBAs.

Flexibility of the model and protection of non-working time

Trade unions should secure effective guarantees for the protection of non-working time, to prevent circumstances where agreed reductions in working time are not complied within practice, or workers de facto stay on call during their newly acquired non-working hours. This is particularly relevant if the organisation remains operative while employees have non-working time. It is highly recommended to negotiate for high levels of protection for non-working time such as a right to disconnect, and if coverage is desired to also negotiate for paid overtime.

↳ **Interaction with existing workplace policies**



Annual leave and public holidays

Trade unions should consider the impact working time reduction may have on annual leave allotment and public holidays. Unions should be clear that working time reduction should not impact annual leave allocations. In some cases, however, it may be necessary for negotiations to revise annual leave allocations in order to reflect the new length of the working week.¹¹⁸

Part-time workers

Preparation for working time reduction must also consider the impact on part-time workers and workers with flexible working arrangements. Typically, the proportion of working time reduction that is allocated for full-time workers is pro-rata'd for part-time workers.

Where it is politically viable, trade unions should also consider negotiating for a pro-rata pay increase for part-time staff who wish to keep their hours. For example, workers may have moved to part-time for care responsibilities or to manage health conditions and may rather keep their current working hours and see a pay increase. There is research to suggest that this could help with gender and disability pay gaps. Part-time workers should be consulted where possible on what is the best format for implementation, including whether working time reduction is possible on a weekly basis, as well as how to protect flexible working arrangements that may be organised around caregiving responsibilities, managing disabilities and health, or other reasons, including personal economic situations. Alterations to these working patterns may have negative knock-on financial or health effects if not managed properly.

¹¹⁸ For example, there are examples of an organisation moving to a 4-day week with a 20% reduction in working time, and reducing workers' annual leave allocation by 20%. This is because the employer argues that workers need fewer days leave to have the same number of weeks off. In practice, this may look like a reduction from 25 days annual leave, equivalent to 5 weeks holiday on a 5-day week to 20 days annual leave, still equivalent to 5 weeks holiday on a 4-day week.

Implementation and evaluation

The significant majority of submitted CBAs reported the successful implementation of their negotiated working time reduction. However, there remained some where the reduced working hours have not been respected by the employers. For example, despite the fact that healthcare workers in accident clinics in Germany were granted working time reduction in a 2021 agreement, 35% of union members in their clinics reported that one year later these reductions had not yet been implemented in practice.

↳ **Set implementation deadlines and accountability measures**

For this reason, trade unions should negotiate for implementation deadlines, where possible. These should include accountability measures in the case of non-compliance, such as scrutiny meetings with trade union and employer representatives. As CBAs are legally binding, hours worked over the agreed reduction working time could be considered and paid as overtime. In principle, a trade union could even resource to collective action if the CBA is not respected.

↳ **Assess the impacts on equality within work**

Unions should negotiate for equality impact assessments, to ensure that the implementation of models and monitoring evaluation frameworks do not have a negative impact on any demographic group. This should include dedicated attention to those from marginalised communities, including disabled workers, workers with caring responsibilities, who are disproportionately women, and workers of colour.

↳ **Establish monitoring and evaluation processes**

Unions should, where relevant, negotiate for clear and fair metrics of success. Evaluation is largely utilised for organisations that are undergoing working time reduction trials, rather than permanent policies - though an evaluation of a permanent agreement may provide arguments for further reductions in future agreements.

Clear metrics of success ensure that workers know how their work is being monitored to evaluate the long-term viability of working time reduction and the CBA. They also ensure that employers agree to a monitoring and evaluation plan from the outset and reduce the room for the manipulation of both qualitative and quantitative data. Metrics could include staff surveys, monitoring hours worked, staff sickness and absence, staff retention and tracking key performance indicators.

The metrics should be scrutinised by the trade union to ensure their fairness; it is important that the CBA and the working time reduction is evaluated - not the performance of individual workers.

Recommendations when bargaining for working time reduction



Recommendations when bargaining for working time reduction

For trade union leaders

The recommendations below would deliver support for trade union representatives and negotiators advocating for working time reduction in their sectors and workplaces. By securing support from the political leadership within a trade union, working time reduction will be set high on the union's priority list, ensuring trade union leaders are vocal in the public debate and enabling trade union officials to dedicate the necessary time and resources to develop and advance such demands. This is particularly important to enable large scale or sector-wide mobilisation on working time reduction.

↳ **State public and political support for working time reduction**

Make sure to publicly advocate for working time reduction for your union members. This could include: identifying working time reduction as a key priority to be debated at congress and included in multi-annual action programmes; raising the issue in social dialogue at cross-industry and sectoral levels to pave the way for collective bargaining; engaging in political dialogue and supporting political initiatives on the subject; making a public statement in support of working time reduction; stimulating public debate by engaging with the media; taking part in high-level events and joining relevant networks and affiliate groups such as the European Work-Time Network.

↳ **Provide funding to conduct relevant research**

Provide funding for your branches to conduct relevant research on working time reduction. This includes feasibility studies, sectoral research pieces and identification of good practices. Building expertise, arguments and the evidence base to support working time reduction is essential.

↳ **Build capacity and facilitate knowledge sharing**

Facilitate capacity-building and knowledge-sharing within your trade union and with other trade unions on working time reduction. This includes holding conferences, seminars, training and webinars to share experience and learnings.

For trade union negotiators

The recommendations below are split into three sections: approaches and negotiation strategies; working time reduction design; implementation and evaluation. They can apply at the organisation, sectoral or national level depending on your negotiation context.

↳ Approaches and negotiation strategies



- **Leverage the political context and organise at the largest possible scale.** In a favourable political context, identify opportunities to harness political momentum to increase pressure towards the employer.

Organise at the largest possible scale to lead to more far-reaching effects, particularly in a context of political momentum.

- **Educate, inform and organise workers.** Make use of existing - and commission new - evidence to raise awareness among your trade union members on the benefits and feasibility of working time reduction in their context.

Use demands for working time reduction to mobilise members, demonstrate the relevance of trade unions and organise more workers.

- **Build robust evidence and arguments.** Make use of robust evidence and arguments in working time reduction negotiations.

This includes demonstrating comprehensive understanding of the organisation, making use of data tools, conducting feasibility studies, adapting to the economic landscape and leveraging the fairness argument.

- **Strategise around both short-term and long-term goals.** Use working time reduction negotiations to facilitate short and long-term goals, such as job security and attractiveness, as well as managing the digital and green transition.

- **Raise awareness and engage with employers.** Proactively engage with employers on working time reduction to increase their awareness of the feasibility and desirability and find mutually beneficial solutions.

↳ Working time reduction design



These recommendations are most relevant for working time reduction negotiated at a smaller scale (organisation-level), although some may also be of relevance for the negotiations of larger-scale (sector-level) reductions in working time.

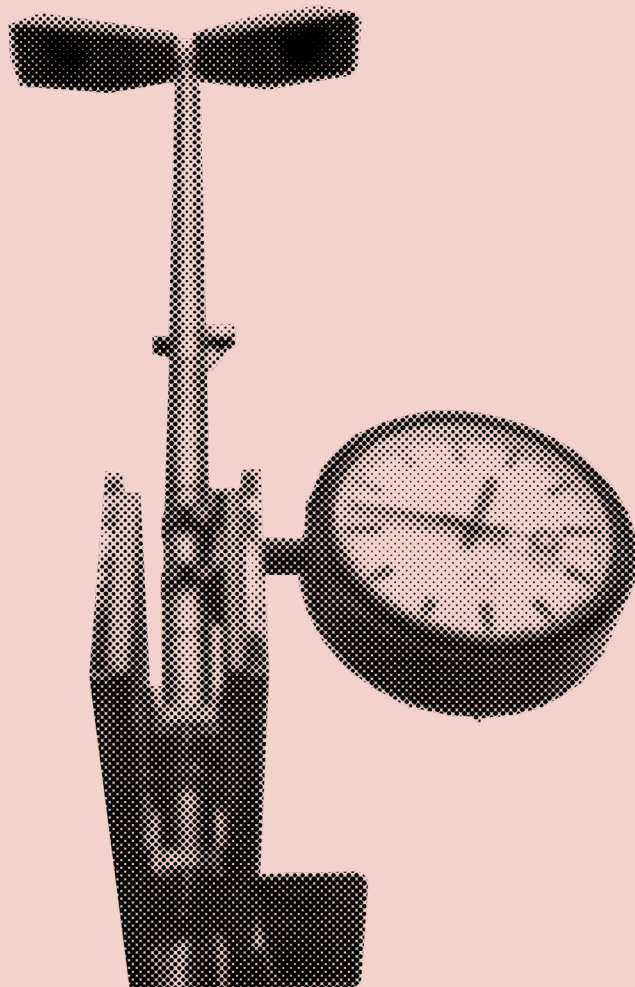
- **Foresee a preparation phase.** Reserve sufficient time to plan and prepare the implementation of the working time reduction. This is necessary to identify and address opportunities and risks and to build staff commitment.
- **Decide a model of working time reduction.** Set out the way in which the reduction in working time is arranged. This will help to ensure the change in working hours brings the most benefits for workers and suits the operational conditions of the workplace.
- **Define parameters for the working time reduction.** Establish the implementation parameters for the working time reduction policy. This includes conditionalities and the protection of non-working time.
- **Determine how the working time reduction interacts with existing policies.** Identify and address the ways in which the reduction in working time interacts with existing workplace policies. This includes any impact on annual leave and on part-time workers.

↳ Implementation and evaluation



- **Set implementation deadlines and non-compliance accountability measures.** Establish deadlines by when the working time reduction must be implemented, alongside accountability measures in the case of non-compliance.
- **Assess the impacts on equality within work.** Require equality impact assessments of any monitoring and evaluation frameworks introduced by the employers. This is to ensure they do not have a negative impact on any demographic group.
- **Establish monitoring and evaluation processes.** Negotiate for clear metrics of success, where relevant. If an employer is using a monitoring and evaluation process or indicators to assess the impact of a working time reduction policy, establish union parameters alongside or agree them jointly with the employer to ensure their fairness and acceptability.

Concluding reflections for the way forward



Concluding reflections for the way forward

The way we organise our professional lives significantly impacts our wellbeing both at work and at home. In this sense, regulation and limitation of working time are important guarantees for decent work and work-life balance. By organising in trade unions, workers can also actively participate in shaping the future of work and how we manage our time. Collectively bargained working hours are consistently lower than statutory ones. In other words, bargaining for reduced working time with no loss in pay represents a key piece in solving the puzzle of our everyday life.

Time is one of the most precious things we have in life. A better balance between professional and private life allows us to spend more time with our loved ones, invest in self-fulfilment, and pave the way for a more sustainable society. Working less offers considerable advantages both in terms of wellbeing and productivity.

As workers, reduced working hours helps us improve our physical and mental health, with less stress and lower risks of accidents. With improved job satisfaction and motivation, working time reduction also allows employers to benefit from improved performance, a better reputation and greater attractiveness. Beyond the workplace, a shorter work week contributes to more sustainable and inclusive societies. It offers opportunities for alleviating labour and skills shortages together with better labour market access for wider and more diverse groups of people. Working less enables us to use our planetary resources more responsibly, making sure the digital and green transition is also socially just and works for all of us.

Trade unions represent a driving force in reducing working time and improving working conditions for all. Since the industrial revolution, this collective struggle has delivered important achievements with historical milestones such as the 5-day work week, the 8-hour work day, and the introduction of paid annual leave. Today, working time reduction is once again gaining traction, and trade unions are showing the way forward through collective bargaining. Working time reduction offers a solid platform for trade union mobilisation, and winning reduced hours without a loss in pay demonstrates the tangible improvements trade unions can bring to the life of their members.

With time, increases in life expectancy, labour market participation, automation and digitalisation have all contributed to higher productivity rates across the entire European economy. Still, the labour share of national income has not developed along the same lines as capital profit over past decades. Rather, real wage increases have slowed down or stagnated. The concept of a 40-hour work week dates back to a society characterised by single-earner households, but today even double-earner families may struggle to make ends meet. It is high time workers claim their fair share. The value of work must become more fairly rewarded, both in terms of higher wages and shorter working hours.

Collective bargaining is a powerful tool to redistribute wealth and rebalance power relations in the labour market. Along with wages, working time is among the most commonly negotiated working conditions in collective bargaining agreements (CBAs). When designing and implementing measures for working time reduction, trade unions can ensure the voice of workers is heard throughout the process, and that a fair balance is struck between the interests of management and labour. Reconciling productivity and wellbeing requires that flexibilities not only consider organisational needs, but also those of workers. Collectively bargained working time arrangements can be tailored to the specificities of a sector or organisation, but also ensure they come with adequate safeguards for workers to remain in control of their work-life balance.

The multitude of CBAs at national, sectoral and organisational levels demonstrate that the time for shorter working hours is now. Numerous examples of successful agreements, pilots and studies help to raise awareness among workers, employers and policy-makers about the feasibility and benefits of working time reduction with no loss in pay or productivity. These positive experiences also act as important multipliers, equipping trade union leaders, representatives and negotiators with the evidence, arguments and tools they need to bring the question of a shorter work week to the negotiation table, to the policy agenda and to the public debate.

In a changing world of work, the importance of defending our time sovereignty is growing and urges us to rethink the organisation of professional life. This calls for tools and policies that empower workers to reclaim their freedom. Time should sit at the centre of any debate on working life, social policies and labour rights. To this end, trade unions dispose of a wide range of routes to demand, negotiate and achieve working time reduction.

We have the opportunity of a professional lifetime to transition towards a work-life culture that values fairness, balance and time – bringing benefits to workers, families and society at large – socially, ecologically as well as economically. Working people increasingly value personal time and private life. Change is already happening and will continue to pave the way for this working time revolution as one of the collective struggles of our time.

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