

EUROPEAN DEBATE ON SHORTER WORKING TIMES

20-21 October 2016, European Parliament, Brussels



Restart the debate on working time reduction to make Europe a better place for all

In the face of mass-unemployment and the resurgence of nationalist movements in Europe, the question of the fairer distribution of work becomes increasingly urgent. Growing demand for work is a consequence of various circumstances, from the digitalisation and automation of traditional jobs, to the large number of refugees who need to be integrated into the labour market.

The fairer distribution of work is also an opportunity for social progress, especially for gender equality, making possible shorter working hours for full time workers, mostly men, and longer working hours for part time workers, mostly women.

Work time sharing policies are still taboo in Europe

The trend is rather towards increasing work time. Working time limits are often not respected in contracts. In Germany workers have accumulated 1.8 billion hours overtime! The European Working Time Directive is regularly under threat of cancellation. Stereotypes and propaganda on working time reduction generally dominate the public discussion, especially on the 35-hour week in France. There is a general tendency towards coercing employees to work overtime. This comes at a cost for human dignity, health, and social protection.

A meeting to start a European scale coordination for advocacy

Fortunately, there are unions, researchers, policy makers, media, and NGOs throughout Europe, who consistently try to defend the relevance of fair work time-sharing. For this meeting we have tried to gather those advocates of the fair distribution of work through shorter working hours who believe we must become active ourselves and not wait for the market to drive the process of work time sharing.

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A meeting with 35 policy makers, scientists, representatives of trade unions, religious associations and non-governmental organisations, from 7 European countries

The organisers of this meeting are the working group ArbeitFairTeilen (fair sharing of work) from Attac Germany and the Collectif Roosevelt from France. The support of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation as well as Thomas Händel, Member of the European Parliament (GUE/NGL), and his bureau made the meeting possible.



35 participants from 7 countries were present of the 50 registered. Invitation letters were sent to more than 100 active promoters of working time reduction across Europe, from March to August 2016. The formal registration procedure was strict as the meeting took place in the European Parliament. Simultaneous translation was provided in English, French and German. The list of present participants is as follows:

| Austria | Germany |
|--|---|
| • Eva Scherz, GPA | • Jutta Schneider, Attac / IG Metall |
| • Mag. Susanne Haslinger, PRO-GE | • Christa Hourani, left wing of the unions |
| Belgium | • Petra Ziegler, Ver.di |
| • Wiebke Warneck, EGB/ETUC | • Sylvia Skrabs, Ver.di |
| • Aurore Joly, Young CSC | • Thomas Händel, GUE/NGL |
| • Delephine Houba, Roosevelt.be | • Frank Puskarev, GUE/NGL |
| • Ludovic Suttor-Sorel, Roosevelt.be | • Prof. Dr. Alfred Kleinknecht, Delft. University of Technology |
| Netherlands | • Dr. Steffen Lehdorff, IAQ |
| • Sam Groen, FNV | • Margareta Steinrücke-Pavicic, Attac AG Arbeitfairteilen |
| UK | • Michaela Amiri, Attac AG Arbeitfairteilen |
| • Madeleine Ellis-Petersen, NEF | • Carol Sue Duerr, Attac AG Arbeitfairteilen |
| France | • Stephan Krull, Attac / IG Metall |
| • Régis Granarolo, MUNCI | • Hans-Georg Nelles, Bundesforum Männer |
| • Muriel Wolfers, CGT- Chômeurs | • Andreas Luttmer-Bensmann, KAB |
| • David Feltz, Collectif Roosevelt | • Michael Klatt, KDA |
| • Jean-Marie Perbost, Collectif Roosevelt | • Dr. Martin Schirdewan, Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung |
| • Walter Verhoeve, Collectif Roosevelt | • Dr. Thomas Gesterkamp, Germany |
| • Zalihata Mansoibou, MNCP | Sweden |
| • Jacqueline Balsan, MNCP | • Alice Vernersson, Vänsterpartiet Göteborg |
| • Barbara Romagnan, Parti Socialiste | • Daniel Bernmar, Vänsterpartiet Göteborg |
| [Colour code] Unions=Green / NGOs=blue / Policy makers=orange / Researchers=purple | |

A program to build up collective intelligence and to give a voice to all participants

The program of the 2 days meeting was as follows:

Thursday 20.10.16

| | |
|-------|---------------------------------------|
| 15.30 | Welcome |
| 16.00 | Opening and presentation |
| 16.20 | Statement of Thomas Händel |
| 16.30 | Keynote lecture Dr. Steffen Lehndorff |
| 17.15 | Panel 1 Unions and policy makers |
| 17.45 | Keynote lecture Jean Marie Perbost |
| 18.00 | Discussion |
| 18.30 | Closing |
| 20.00 | Dinner together |

Friday 21.10.16

| | |
|-------|---------------------------------------|
| 9.00 | Welcome and Opening |
| 9.40 | Panel 2 trade unions |
| 10.40 | Coffee Break |
| 11.00 | Panel 3 NGO's |
| 12.15 | Lunch |
| 13.00 | Panel 4 Policy Makers |
| 13.30 | Discussion of steps in working-groups |
| 15.15 | Presentation of a common declaration |
| 15.30 | Discussion |
| 15.55 | Closing |
| 16.00 | End of the meeting |

Each participant was invited to speak 5-10 min and reply to these 3 questions:

- What is your groups' concrete proposal for the reduction of working hours?
- Who do you encounter as opponents and what are their reasons?
- Who are your partners on this topic? What should an alliance/platform/campaign do to make the debate move forward in your country and/or in Europe?



No “one fits it all solution” but an open target of 28 to 35 hours a week

The participants discussed concrete proposals for working time reduction, and the motives of partners and opponents they encounter in their home countries. A consensus emerged: at the moment, there is no possible “one fits it all solution” because working time reduction objectives are not identical for all European countries (40h, 38h, 35h, 32h, 30h etc..). An open target of 28 to 35 hours a week could, however, be supported by all participants. An informal network on the European level is welcomed to explore possible ways to implement and finance it. There are some proposals of Austrian, Belgian and French trade unions for 35 or 32, prospectively 30, hour week. In addition, it is needed to defend evaluations of past working time policies. For instance, the French national statistical institute INSEE established in 2004 that the Aubry acts created around 350.000 jobs between 1998 and 2002, but these policies have been accused of being responsible for a supposedly lower productivity for French workers.

The need to integrate working time reduction in a broad set of questions

In order to make working time sharing more attractive, various aspects must be developed and emphasized (gender, training, family, climate, right to log off computers and telephones, etc...). Nevertheless, the fight against unemployment should remain the primary objective. A stronger voice should be given to the unemployed and precariously employed in policymaking. It is a challenge to create bona fide solidarity between workers and the unemployed. This will require a change of perspective for many: unemployment is a societal, not an individual problem.

Many workers fear that working time reduction may increase work intensity and lower their incomes. In the ideological context of austerity and obsession with competitiveness, working time reduction discussions should be associated with Occupational Safety and Health policies (OSH), increase of labour inspections, and more protective labour laws for both workers and employers.



A common declaration to work on key shared messages and values

At the end of the meeting, participants had been invited to discuss a 250 words-long common declaration that could be revised and signed after the meeting. For most participants, a definitive adoption of the declaration would need time and many internal discussions.

- The declaration can be found in the following weblinks : in [English](#), in [German](#), in [French](#)
- This common declaration was signed by ArbeitFairTeilen, ATTAC (Germany), Initiative zur Vernetzung der Gewerkschaftslinken" (Germany), Collectif Roosevelt (France), Evelyn REGNER, MEP (Austria)

A need to exchange knowledge and practices before taking actions at European scale

Overall, this meeting revealed that most participants were not aware of the actors and the initiatives outside of their own countries. We still need intermediate steps between networking and coordinated actions on the European scale.

Long term goals could include scandalising long full time, building a platform for policy development, establishing the 40 hour week as the new working hours limit in the EU. The experiments in Goteborg and in some private companies also demonstrate that local scale initiatives can and should be developed, in addition to European and national scale efforts. This meeting is the start of a long-term process, warmly welcomed by all participants.

19 short reports made by the participants to get more insights

All participants were asked to provide a 1 page background note in English on their activities and the situation in their home countries. The available reports are the following;

Policy Makers

- Contribution from Barbara Romagnan, member of the French Parliament, Socialist Party >> [Read more](#) (weblink)
- Contribution by Laurette Onkelinx, Vice-president of the Socialist Party Belgium >> [Read more](#) (weblink)
- Contribution de Daniel Bernmar, deputy of the Left Party Gothenburg/Sweden >> [Read more](#) (weblink)

Unions

- Position paper on shorter working hours FNV Netherlands >> [Read more](#) (weblink)
- GPA-djp initiatives on working time reduction >> [Read more](#) (weblink)
- Short Report IG Metall, compiled from the records of the Working time campaign (S.K.) >> [Read more](#) (weblink)
- Working Time Debate in Austria / PRO-GE >> [Read more](#) (weblink)
- Positions and steps of the women in ver.di towards SHORT FULL-TIME WORK FOR ALL >> [Read more](#) (weblink)
- Contribution from Sylvia Skrabs, Department for Collective Bargaining Policy Ver.di Headquarter >> [Read more](#) (weblink)
- Short report of the trade union Left by Christa Hourani >> [Read more](#) (weblink)

NGOs

- Short report –ArbeitFairTeilen, Attac-Germany >> [Read more](#) (weblink)
- Contribution by Collectif Roosevelt France >> [Read more](#) (weblink)
- Contribution by Collectif Roosevelt.be >> [Read more](#) (weblink)
- Contribution by the Katholische Arbeitnehmer-Bewegung (KAB) >> [Read more](#) (weblink)
- Statement European Debate on shorter working hours by Michael Klatt, president of KDA >> [Read more](#) (weblink)
- Short Report- MNCP >> [Read more](#) (weblink)
- The New Economics Foundation's proposal for the reduction of working hours >> [Read more](#) (weblink)



Launch of 3 workgroups to pave the way for a European platform

During Friday afternoon, participants have split in 3 groups, for a duration of 2 hours, to make discussions more lively and participative. Discussions were carried out as a « world café exercise » and also fuelled a scope statement, which will help to start 3 working groups after the meeting.

1) Outreach/strategy

- What do we want to achieve together?
- How can we achieve these objectives?
- How can we measure our progress?
- What time frame is realistic?
- What should be our next step together?
- Who likes the idea in your country? How can we engage them more?
- What strategies and arguments do you employ to counter opponents?

2) Proposals for working time/how to implement them

- Is your proposal a daily, weekly, annual or life course reduction of working hours and how many hours in the average it will have per week?
- Is it a proposal for special groups of the labour market (elder people, parents, youngsters e.g.) or for a new general working time norm?
- Shall it be implemented by law or by collective contract?
- How shall the compensation of wages and personnel be organised?
- By which resources the working time reduction shall be financed?
- What is the time scale of the realisation of your proposal?
- How do you want to mobilise members of your organisation, the public and others for your proposal?

3) Internal communication/building the network

- What will drive and motivate the network?
- What are potential differences or conflicts and how will we deal with those?
- What initiatives and tools are critical for the network to keep up its dynamics?
- So how, when, how often and where will we share ideas, progress and obstacles further?
- How do we welcome and inform newcomers into the network?
- How should the network be organised and financed?

The next meeting should be held in 2018 and include more countries. For any information contact:

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