



### **A four-day week for a greener, equal and fairer Europe**

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on jobs and unemployment is one of the most important challenges Europe faces. It is therefore urgent to respond to both the economic crisis arising from the pandemic and the climate change crisis.

Throughout history, reducing working hours has been useful in times of economic collapse and recession, helping to promote decent work, the redistribution of wealth and a move towards real equality of rights and opportunities.

It is time to start working towards a reduction of working hours by exploring and putting into practice policies such as the four-day working week or reducing the working week to 32 hours. Such policies need to ensure that the same pay, the same social rights, as well as annual leave is maintained while allowing for additional recruitments. The Covid-crisis and its consequences have yet again indicated the need to account for changes in the production model, as underlined by digitalisation and task automation.

Now that the climate agenda has started to gain momentum, we have the responsibility to make that our utmost priority. In doing so, we cannot continue to implement solutions from the past that have been condemned for increasing inequalities: the transformation must be ecological and social.

Introducing a four-day working week or reducing the working week to 32 hours with full wage compensation implies a transformative change in the design of the economy, which could contribute to employees' well-being, the quality of jobs, to a greater redistribution of wealth, and ensure less pressure on natural resources. We also recognise that this transformation may need to progress at a sectoral level to ensure that there is an adequate workforce to ensure particular services, such as healthcare or delivery of utilities.

The measures adopted to alleviate and contain the effects of COVID-19 have had a strong impact on working people with the almost total closure of non-essential economic activities and with sectors, such as tourism, lacking a clear solution in the short term.

Likewise, the pandemic has led, on the one hand, to the rapid digitisation of the world of work for the maintenance of certain productive activities. On the other hand, it has contributed to enhancing the visibility of essential and socially necessary jobs to sustain life, hardly recognised until now.

As European Greens, we want to overcome the notion of a competitive society based on individual performance in gainful employment. Therefore, we see reduced working hours as an opportunity to get involved in civil society, to pursue other fulfilling activities, and to take care of oneself and others.

The European Greens recognise the key role trade unions and labour movements have played for workers' rights, such as the creation of weekends, and also the role of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in the reduction of working hours per day - originally to 8 hours in



1919. We commit to working with and supporting unions in advocating for a reduction of working hours without compromising on other rights in the workplace.

From a social, economic, environmental and democratic point of view, the European Green Party considers that a reduction in working hours could bring many benefits, including:

### **1) Safeguarding the environment**

There is a strong correlation between long working hours and high carbon energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions. Moving towards a shorter working week is consistent with the reduction of harmful emissions and the protection of natural resources. Moreover, a shorter week would leave more time to consider eco-conscious habits and hobbies. This can increase consideration of planetary boundaries and resilience.

### **2) Quality time, better health**

Moving towards a shorter working week can help to bring about less stressful and healthier lives. Long hours and overwork are known to trigger severe levels of stress, negatively affecting our bodies as well as companies' productivity. Diseases associated with work, such as anxiety, stress and burnout, result in significant damage to mental health, which is sometimes irreparable. Lack of time may mean our diets are not as healthy as they should be, impacting cardiovascular disease or weight-related problems.

### **3) Leverage for women's rights and co-responsibility**

The persistence of gender inequality is also linked to the current working-time structure. Women are usually the ones pressured to reduce their working hours and subsequently their salaries to do care work without compensation. This leads to lower contributions to social security, with severe consequences. The combination of these two factors leads to a higher risk of poverty for women. All too often, family time is mistaken for personal time.

Reduced working hours can help to balance responsibilities between both partners; thereby raising awareness for the importance of care work for the social cohesion of our societies.

### **4) Enriching democracy**

Democracy requires spaces for participation. If we do not enjoy quality time, our involvement in the public sphere is relegated to the background and we run the risk that other agents will take the floor on behalf of the citizenry. Therefore, the reduction in working hours will also promote social involvement in public affairs, which will strengthen our democracies.

### **5) Voluntary Work**

This form of unpaid work must be cherished. Unfortunately, many people are unable to commit to voluntary work due to a lack of time. A reduction in working hours will ensure that more people can make an active contribution to their community by volunteering in civil society organisations and thus strengthen common European values such as solidarity and social cohesion.



All these points of view come together in a puzzle that represents the model of life we want to build. Indeed, although we need to put an end to job insecurity and alleviate social inequalities, we also need to improve companies' productivity, generate a new culture of working time, and transform the production model. We must rethink the economic model and move towards new, more sustainable paradigms in economic, environmental and social terms. As European Greens, we support the social partners on the national and European levels in finding new working time arrangements with the aim of reducing working hours with full wage compensation.

Therefore, the European Green Party demands the European Union:

- supports the development of a strategy to reduce working hours coherently across Europe, including starting to explore possibilities in those countries that have not yet done so, and to put into practice a four-day working week or the reduction of the working week to 32 hours. Such policies need to ensure that the same pay, the same social rights, as well as annual leave is maintained while allowing for additional recruitments. These policies should be developed in close cooperation with the social partners;
- calls for the implementation of the EU Minimum Wages Directive to safeguard a decent living wage for workers, with full respect to national labour market models;
- explores the possibilities for an agreement on a common European calendar for implementation of the reduction of the working week in the future to four days or the reduction of the working week to 32 hours without a cut in salary, where feasible;
- offers support, advice and guidance to enterprises and organizations to reduce working hours, as well as funding for training in organisational innovation and aid for job creation;
- strengthens the social partners such as trade unions in the Member States and on the European level;
- ensures that current working time standards are upheld and enforced in all member states. In particular, the maximum allowed average working time of 48h per week must be upheld. More attention must be given to the enforcement of those standards in precarious working relations, cross-border working conditions as well as ostensible self-employment.

In addition, the European Green Party calls on unions, employers, Member States, as well as regional governments where relevant, to:

- activate social dialogue for the implementation of a common strategy for reducing working hours. Concrete programmes must be carried out in a concerted manner and in dialogue with the social agents;
- address all the appropriate labour reforms to adapt the pension system and contributions from an eco-social point of view and not from austerity;
- take action to reduce work time of overworked workers such as in the medical and educational sectors, including hiring additional staff. Permanently reduce working hours within the public sector in order to lead the way towards the four-day work week.