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**SOC/819**

**Working time, efficiency of the economy and well-being of workers**

Brussels, 26 March 2025

**RECORD OF THE PROCEEDINGS**
European Economic and Social Committee

**Working time, the efficiency of the economy and the well-being of workers (including in the context of digital change and work automation): a legal and comparative analysis of the situation in EU Member States**

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595th plenary session

Brussels
26-27 March 2025

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Meeting of 26 March 2025
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Agenda item 8

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**The president** moved that the Committee turn to agenda item 8 - adoption of an opinion on the

*Working time, the efficiency of the economy and the well-being of workers (including in the context of digital change and work automation): a legal and comparative analysis of the situation in EU Member States*

Exploratory opinion at the request of the Polish presidency.

The preliminary work had been carried out by the Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (president: **Cinzia Del Rio**). The rapporteur was **Maria del Carmen Barrera Chamorro**.

The rapporteur presented the draft opinion, emphasizing the benefits of reducing working time, particularly in lowering workers' stress levels, promoting gender equality, and extending individuals' working lives. Social partners play a key role in implementing working time reductions, and many projects have demonstrated the feasibility of such measures. However, the strength of social dialogue varies across the European Union.

In the draft opinion, the EESC recommends that as many companies as possible adopt working time reduction measures, especially for vulnerable workers.

Finally, the rapporteur underlined the importance of recognizing the right to digital disconnection.

**Claude ROLIN, Cinzia DEL RIO, Christa SCHWENG, Anica MILIĆEVIĆ-PEZELJ**, and **Kinga JOO** participated in the debate. Topics discussed included the need to reframe the working environment, the productivity gains associated with shorter working hours without salary reductions, and the importance of considering the specific needs of vulnerable workers who require greater flexibility in their working time.

The following amendments had been tabled to opinion SOC/819:

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| **Amendment 1** (tabled by Christian Ardhe, René Blijlevens, Mira-Maria Danisman, Marie-Pierre Le breton, Mariya Mincheva, Jean-Michel Pottier, Christa Schweng, Isabel Yglesias)**Point 3.5****Amend as follows** |  |

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| ***Section opinion*** | ***Amendment*** |
| Even more recently, the effects of anthropogenic climate change have highlighted new challenges for the organisation of working time, including the need to ensure the health and safety of workers and that work is able to be organised in a safe and healthy way. The great Dana tragedy in Spain and the Spanish government’s regulations highlight this impact. Although it is true that other countries have experienced tragic events linked to climate emergencies (droughts, floods), the Spanish case is particularly significant both because of the number of victims (226 people killed, thousands affected) and the solution adopted, based on major legislative changes (e.g. Royal Decree-Law 7/2024 of 11 November[1]). In addition, increasing heatwaves caused 47 000 deaths in Europe in 2023 (the hottest year on record worldwide, and the second hottest in Europe) ***according to a study published in Nature Medicine***[2].[1] See link.[2] Nature Medicine, ‘Heat-related mortality in Europe during 2023 and the role of adaptation in protecting health’, 2024. | Even more recently, the effects of anthropogenic climate change have highlighted new challenges for the organisation of working time, including the need to ensure the health and safety of workers and that work is able to be organised in a safe and healthy way. The great Dana tragedy in Spain and the Spanish government’s regulations highlight this impact. Although it is true that other countries have experienced tragic events linked to climate emergencies (droughts, floods), the Spanish case is particularly significant both because of the number of victims (226 people killed, thousands affected) and the solution adopted, based on major legislative changes (e.g. Royal Decree-Law 7/2024 of 11 November[1]). In addition, ***although this is not related to working time, the EESC notes that according to a study*** – ***which applied epidemiological models to temperature and mortality records in 823 contiguous regions from 35 countries to estimate sex- and age-specific heat-related mortality in Europe in 2023, and to quantify the mortality burden avoided by societal adaptation to rising temperatures since the year 2000 –*** increasing heatwaves caused 47 000 deaths in Europe in 2023 (the hottest year on record worldwide, and the second hottest in Europe) [2].[1] See link.[2] Nature Medicine, ‘Heat-related mortality in Europe during 2023 and the role of adaptation in protecting health’, 2024.  |

The amendment was rejected by 132 votes to 77, with six abstentions.

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| **Amendment 2** (tabled by Christian Ardhe, René Blijlevens, Mira-Maria Danisman, Marie-Pierre Le breton, Mariya Mincheva, Jean-Michel Pottier, Christa Schweng, Isabel Yglesias)**Point 3.11****Amend as follows** |  |

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| ***Section opinion*** | ***Amendment*** |
| The EESC also notes that in Greece the possibility of working a sixth day a week has been introduced by law, effective from 1 July 2024 (Law 5053/2023, Articles 25 and 26). This rule was introduced to combat undeclared work, as well as to increase the employees’ salaries (on the 6th day, salaries are increased by 40%). This mainly concerns companies that operate five days a week, 24 hours a day, with a rotating shift system. This regulation is favoured by employers and opposed by trade unions. | The EESC also notes that in Greece the possibility of working a sixth day a week has been introduced by law, effective from 1 July 2024 (Law 5053/2023, Articles 25 and 26). This rule was introduced to combat undeclared work, as well as to increase the employees’ salaries (on the 6th day, salaries are increased by 40%). This mainly concerns companies that operate five days a week, 24 hours a day, with a rotating shift system. This regulation is favoured by employers and opposed by trade unions. ***It should be mentioned that when employees make use of this voluntary option, it allows them to increase their income[1].******[1] See BBC News,*** [***Greece starts six-day working week***](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/czd9g7yzn4jo)***, July 2024. The legislation applies to certain industries only, and clearly indicates that the possibility to work up to 48 hours is optional for workers, who get paid an extra 40% for the overtime they do.*** |

The amendment was rejected by 128 votes to 86, with seven abstentions.

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| **Amendment 3** (tabled by Christian Ardhe, René Blijlevens, Mira-Maria Danisman, Marie-Pierre Le breton, Mariya Mincheva, Jean-Michel Pottier, Christa Schweng, Isabel Yglesias)**Point 1.1****Amend as follows** |  |

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| ***Section opinion*** | ***Amendment*** |
| The EESC considers that working time is one of the aspects of work with the greatest impact on people’s quality of life (well-being) and is key to the efficient organisation of economic activity in companies. Appropriate working-time arrangements can make enterprises more sustainable and improve their productivity. This view is shared by the social partners. The EESC considers the definition of working time reduction as working fewer hours per reference period ***with the same salary levels***, to clearly differentiate between shorter working days in the form of part-time work and compressed working days (that is, the same number of hours worked in fewer days, for example, 4 days of 10 hours). | The EESC considers that working time is one of the aspects of work with the greatest impact on people’s quality of life (well-being) and is key to the efficient organisation of economic activity in companies. Appropriate working-time arrangements can make enterprises more sustainable and improve their productivity. This view is shared by the social partners. The EESC considers the definition of working time reduction as working fewer hours per reference period, to clearly differentiate between shorter working days in the form of part-time work and compressed working days (that is, the same number of hours worked in fewer days, for example, 4 days of 10 hours). |

The amendment was rejected by 131 votes to 92, with three abstentions.

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| **Amendment 4** (tabled by Christian Ardhe, René Blijlevens, Mira-Maria Danisman, Marie-Pierre Le breton, Mariya Mincheva, Jean-Michel Pottier, Christa Schweng, Isabel Yglesias)**Point 1.9****Amend as follows** |  |

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| ***Section opinion*** | ***Amendment*** |
| The EESC ***highlights among the pilot projects on working-time reduction*** ***the*** Eurofound ***one***: ‘Working-time reduction with a focus on the four-day week***’,*** which ***states in its first conclusions: ‘Reduced working time improves productivity, enhances mental health and reduces stress, and is key to a sustainable balance in the current context of digital transformation. It also contributes to preventing work-related illnesses and strengthening the general well-being of*** working ***people’***. In this regard,the EESC highlights ***the*** positive effects ***of reduced working time*** on society, such as demographic renewal, gender equality, a reduced burden on the healthcare system and potentially keeping workers in the world of work for longer, thus creating a positive environment conducive of creativity and innovation. A good social environment not only benefits the state but also companies and workers. | The EESC ***notes that*** Eurofound ***has published a working paper***: ‘Working-time reduction with a focus on the four-day week***:*** ***Literature review***’ ***[1]*** which ***presents some experiments in reducing*** working ***hours***. In this regard,the EESC highlights ***that a shortened working week, if agreed by social partners at company level, may have*** positive effects on society, such as demographic renewal, gender equality, a reduced burden on the healthcare system and potentially keeping workers in the world of work for longer, thus creating a positive environment conducive of creativity and innovation. A good social environment not only benefits the state but also companies and workers***.******[1] Eurofound, '***[***Working time reduction with a focus on the four-day week: Literature review'***](https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/publications/eurofound-paper/2024/working-time-reduction-focus-four-day-week-literature-review)***, 2024 (the literature review has the disclaimer: This working paper has not been subject to the full Eurofound evaluation, editorial and publication process)***. |

The amendment was rejected by 126 votes to 97, with seven abstentions.

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| **Amendment 5** (tabled by Christian Ardhe, René Blijlevens, Mira-Maria Danisman, Marie-Pierre Le breton, Mariya Mincheva, Jean-Michel Pottier, Christa Schweng, Isabel Yglesias)**Point 1.10****Amend as follows** |  |

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| ***Section opinion*** | ***Amendment*** |
| The EESC encourages the ***EU institutions,*** national governments and social partners to ***accelerate the recognition of digital disconnection as a*** right ***for all EU workers. According*** to case ***law of the Court*** of ***Justice*** of ***the European Union of 19 December 2024, C-531/23, Loredas[1])***, ***digital disconnection policies*** and time ***recording systems in organisations are essential safeguards*** to ***ensure*** the ***effectiveness*** of ***working***- ***time rules, including, where appropriate, rules on the reduction*** of ***working time.******[1] See link***. | The EESC encourages the national governments and social partners***,*** ***especially at company level,*** to ***continue discussions on how to promote the*** right to ***disconnect, which, in*** ***the*** case of ***some types*** of ***jobs***, ***can help to better manage working time both for workers*** and ***employers. At the same*** time***,*** ***the EESC acknowledges that the right*** to ***disconnect will not solve*** the ***challenge*** of ***over***-***use*** of ***digital tools for private purposes***. |

The amendment was rejected by 126 votes to 90, with four abstentions.

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| **Amendment 6** (tabled by Christian Ardhe, René Blijlevens, Mira-Maria Danisman, Marie-Pierre Le breton, Mariya Mincheva, Jean-Michel Pottier, Christa Schweng, Isabel Yglesias)**Annex I****Delete the whole of annex I** |  |

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| ***Section opinion*** | ***Amendment*** |
| ***ANNEX I: PILOT PROJECTS FOR THE REDUCTION OF WORKING TIME: STATE OF PLAY******[...]******This initiative reflects Lithuania’s commitment to advance progressive labour policies adapted to the needs of today’s society.*** |  |

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| **Reason** |
| It is proposed that the entire annex be deleted. Firstly, the annex was added to the text after the first study group (without any discussions in the study group on adding such an annex). The content of the annex was not discussed in the second study group meeting (due to lack of time). The written proposals put forward by Group I study group members following the second study group were mostly discarded. The amendments proposed by Group I members in the SOC section meeting were presented and voted on in one go, and therefore there was no in-depth discussion of the content of the annex in the section either.Although it was argued at the SOC section meeting that the text of the annex is factual and neutral, the annex in fact includes text that either gives a positive assessment or indicates ‘faults’. For example, in the case of the Belgian reform (that allows workers to work four days while maintaining the same weekly working hours), the annex mentions as one of the challenges the ‘lack of real reduction of hours’.All of the section amendments from Group I members, including those aimed purely at making the text more neutral or clarifying the text, or those proposing additional text with the sources indicated (just to mention two examples: the proposed addition from the 4 Day Week Global Website – also referred to by the rapporteur – in the German example, as well as the proposed addition from discussions in the 2023 National Labour Council in France), were rejected by the rapporteur and not adopted in the section vote. In these circumstances, and especially given that the content of the annex was not discussed in any of the study group meetings, it is proposed that the entire annex be deleted.  |

The amendment was rejected by 129 votes to 93, with three abstentions.

The opinion was adopted by 146 votes to 89, with four abstentions.

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