

# LOCAL AND REGIONAL TIME AGENDA

Topic 5

TOWARDS A  
MORE  
**RATIONAL AND  
SUSTAINABLE  
WORKING TIME**



## Local and Regional Time Network

The **Local and Regional Time Agenda (LRTA)** is a pioneering compilation of time policies implemented by local and regional authorities around the world. It provides an updated compendium of time policies grouped by topic and practical recommendations on how to implement them.

The Agenda is coordinated by the **Local and Regional Time Network**, the international alliance of cities, metropolises, and regions aimed at promoting the right to time where people need it most. It is the main forum to exchange and promote implementable time policies that are already changing daily life for more than 90 million people in Europe, Asia, and the Americas.

**More information:**

<https://timeuse.barcelona/local-and-regional-time-network/>



The **Time4All 2.0** project is a two-year initiative (2025-2026) that includes a series of exchanges and workshops in partner cities. Its main objective is to raise awareness about time policies and promote a balanced and sustainable use of daily time, engaging citizens and cities in discussions on the right to time. The project targets 1,800 participants, focusing on young people and women, who are disproportionately affected by time poverty.

**Funded by the European Union through the EACEA Agency** (European Education and Culture Executive Agency), Time4All 2.0 seeks to explore the value of time organisation while developing policies that enhance health, equality, productivity, sustainability, and civic participation. The project is part of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme and builds upon the achievements of its predecessor, Time4All project, implemented in 2023-2024.

The project is led by the city of Bergamo and Time Use Initiative (TUI), the international organisation promoting time policies and the right to time, which currently runs the Network's secretariat.

**More information:**

<https://timeuse.barcelona/time-networks/time4all-2-0/>

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# WORKING TIME TENDENCIES ACROSS EUROPE

## Advancing local economies through working time reduction

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A number of pilot programmes and policies involving working time reduction with no loss in pay are flourishing all over Europe, aiming to reap the benefits in dimensions such as social wellbeing, economic productivity, ecological sustainability and gender equality. A striking trend is that local governments are taking a leading role in this movement. While national legislation often moves slowly, local and regional authorities are emerging as key innovators, piloting shorter working weeks even in countries where central governments remain cautious or resistant.

In **Portugal**, the Regional Government of the Azores is preparing a six-month pilot in public administration, reducing hours from 35 to 32 per week. This initiative stands out not only as the first of its kind in Portugal but also for its participatory approach, as employees will help redesign workflows to improve productivity and citizen services.

Similarly, in the **United Kingdom**, local governments have taken bold steps despite the absence of national mandates. South Cambridgeshire District Council, for example, made its four-day week permanent after a successful trial that improved service delivery and cut recruitment costs. Similarly, Scotland's public sector pilot demonstrated significant gains in wellbeing and productivity, reinforcing the case for broader adoption.

Elsewhere, **Spain's** Asturias region is exploring pilot programs even as national efforts to legislate a 37.5-hour work week face political roadblocks. In **Norway**, a surgical ward at Østfold Hospital tested a 90% work schedule for full pay, reporting positive outcomes for staff and patients alike. In France, compressed hours models (35 hours over four days, with no reduction in pay or service) have been successful in several municipalities, such as Lyon or Strasbourg.

What makes these initiatives remarkable is that they occur in contexts with very different competencies and traditions of labour regulation. These examples show that local actors are not waiting for top-down reforms — they are experimenting with mo-

dels that fit their operational realities. Local governments are leveraging their autonomy to respond to workforce challenges, improve wellbeing, and modernise public services. Work-time reduction initiatives contribute to this agenda by raising productivity and efficiency, advancing more sustainable lifestyles, and promoting social justice. It has become a strategy that can be mobilised by local and regional governments to deal with a range of place-based issues.

## Key drivers

Trade unions have historically been the driving force behind reductions in working hours. The eight-hour day was won through decades of union-led strikes and campaigns in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries — and in many countries, changes like the five-day week and paid holidays were achieved through sectoral bargaining and coordinated industrial action before they became law. **Today, trade unions remain instrumental in driving work-time reduction across Europe, both at the national and at the local level:** the Scottish Government's reduction of the working week from 37 to 35 hours, for example, as well as its 32-hour pilot, was won as a result of a long-standing campaign by the PCS union. But unions are no longer the only ones advocating for WTR.

A key new factor in recent years is that local governments are increasingly approaching work-time reduction from an employer's perspective. Interest in WTR from employers increased rapidly in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, in light of renewed conversations about work-life balance, wellbeing at work, and mental health. Across Europe, hundreds of employers have already introduced forms of work-time reduction with no loss in pay in an effort to improve working conditions, address work-related stress and sickness, and strengthen their ability to recruit and retain staff. Similarly, many local governments now see the possibility for work-time reduction as a strategic investment in people and performance. In competitive labour markets, offering a four-day work week or reduced hours has become a powerful tool to attract talent and reduce turnover, even when salaries cannot compete with the private sector. This was the main reason behind **South Cambridgeshire's** successful experiment with the four-day work week, or **French municipalities'** efforts to provide a better work-life balance to their staff.

Notably, some local governments are using work-time reduction as a strategic policy to address place-based issues and support wider local development. Another example — perhaps the most ambitious to date — was the city of **Valencia's** experiment with a month-long four-day week in April-May 2023, intended to examine

the impacts it would have on the people, the environment, and the economy. The study's results — covering 360,000 residents — were overwhelmingly positive, from improved wellbeing, reduced stress and more socialising to improved air quality and a dynamised local economy, particularly in the hospitality and leisure sectors.

### **The potential of working time reduction for local economies**

**Though locally-run working time reduction initiatives are still in the early stages, their potential to advance local economies and communities is considerable.** Pilots in Europe and beyond show that shorter working weeks can boost productivity by encouraging employees to work more efficiently and focus on high-value tasks. More importantly, they reveal substantial well-being improvements — including reduced stress, lower absenteeism, and better mental health — which translate into fewer sick days and higher engagement at work, but also more time for care work, better quality relationships, less conflict, and more social engagement outside of work. Individual improvements yield wider benefits for families and communities, and support local economies by freeing up more time for hobbies, personal interests, and social activities. WTR can enable a more equitable distribution of care work between men and women: data show that men on shorter working hour schedules assume more responsibilities at home. Livelier, happier communities also support more dynamic local economies. There are suggestions that work-time reduction, especially in the format of a four-day workweek, could have positive effects for local tourism: the experiment in Valencia showed increased spending in the service industry and improved employment rates.

A striking feature of the work-time reduction movement is its reach across vastly different political, economic, and institutional landscapes. The fact that an increasing number of local governments, with different levels of autonomy and different political interests, are pioneering such initiatives shows just how transformative the policy can be. In a world of polycrisis, working time reduction is one of the most promising policy avenues available to local authorities — strengthening economic resilience while enabling social justice and environmental sustainability — with the potential to yield transformative benefits to people, the environment, and the economy alike.

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