

# Nicholas Vrousalis: The EU should institute a statutory maximum 35-hour workweek for all European workers

## Background information on existing regulations/policy issues/initiatives

**Keywords:** *average working time; average working hours in the European Union; Eurostat working time data; maximum weekly working hours; maximum working hours, maximum working time; regulation on maximum working hours; working hours legislation; working time data; working time directive EU*

## Topic: The European Union should institute a maximum working week of 35-hours in all member states

### Overview

- Average working hours per week within the European Union vary from country to country
  - Example: While Greeks still average long hours, working 41.2 hours per week, it is the United Kingdom that has the longest working week. According to Eurostat, employees in the UK were found to work 42.3 hours per week on average<sup>1</sup>
- According to recent studies, weekly working time within the European Union has been gradually decreasing over the past years<sup>2</sup>
- Currently, a 48-hour working week is set as a maximum by EU-legislation<sup>3</sup>

### In detail

- The maximum of working hours per week within European Union member states is limited by a concrete EU-directive, namely:
  - The Working Time Directive (2003/88/EC)  
**Content:** This directive sets limits to weekly working hours, which must not exceed 48 hours on average, including any overtime  
**Full document:** <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32003L0088>
  - This directive additionally institutes ...
    - i. ... a minimum daily rest period of 11 consecutive hours in every 24 hours
    - ii. ... a rest break during working hours if the worker is on duty for longer than 6 hours
    - iii. ... a minimum weekly rest period of 24 uninterrupted hours for each 7-day period, in addition to the 11 hours' daily rest
    - iv. ... paid annual leave of at least 4 weeks per year

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/02/greeks-work-longest-hours-in-europe/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=ANHRS>

<sup>3</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=706&langId=en&intPagelId=205>

- However, this directive does not apply to the United Kingdom and Malta, who have opted out, meaning that employees may work longer than 48 hours if they wish, but cannot be forced to do so<sup>4</sup>
- With regards to lowering the maximum of working hours per week, member states are free to institute their own legislation. There are daily, weekly, monthly or annual limitations to the maximum number of hours workers should work in many states
  - Most notably, France in February 2000 had already adopted the 35-hour working week, lowering the weekly working hours by 4 hours from 39 hours previously<sup>56</sup>

## Topic: NGOs/organizations supporting the lowering of maximum working week hours within the EU and/or changing existing EU legislation on maximum work hours in general

New Economics Foundation

<https://neweconomics.org>

The European Trade Union Federation

<https://www.etuc.org/en>

Timewise Foundation

<http://timewise.co.uk/about-us/timewise-foundation/>

### Further reading

- <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/topic/working-time>
- <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork/comparative-information/comparative-analysis-of-working-time-in-the-european-union>
- <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/6fa3ea3b-e471-11e7-9749-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>  
[https://www.cep.eu/Analysen\\_KOM/KOM\\_2010\\_106\\_Arbeitszeitrichtlinie/cepPolicyBrief\\_KOM\\_2010\\_106\\_Working\\_Time\\_Directive.pdf](https://www.cep.eu/Analysen_KOM/KOM_2010_106_Arbeitszeitrichtlinie/cepPolicyBrief_KOM_2010_106_Working_Time_Directive.pdf)
- <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2015/nov/09/fewer-working-hours-doctors-eu-negotiations>
- <https://global.handelsblatt.com/companies/breaking-new-ground-on-working-hours-838194>
- <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=6417&langId=en>

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/maximum-weekly-working-hours>

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/35-hour\\_workweek](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/35-hour_workweek)

<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contrat\\_nouvelle\\_embauche](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Contrat_nouvelle_embauche)