

The four-day week in Italy: approaches and benefits

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1. Introduction. 2. Trials of the four-day week in company-level agreements. 3. Benefits and challenges of introducing the four-day week. 4. Concluding remarks.

Abstract

This article examines the growing interest in the four-day working week with no loss of pay in Italy. It distinguishes genuine working-time reduction from compressed working-week arrangements and analyses recent company-level agreements adopted by Intesa Sanpaolo, Lamborghini and EssilorLuxottica, as well as initial trials in public administrations. The article highlights potential benefits for work-life balance, health, productivity, employee retention and business attractiveness, while also considering organisational, financial and distributive challenges. It concludes that company-level collective bargaining currently provides the most suitable framework for developing sustainable and mutually beneficial working-time arrangements.

Keywords: Four-day week; Working-time reduction; Collective bargaining; Work-life balance; Company-level agreements.

1. Introduction.

For some time now, renewed calls to reduce working time have emerged at political, trade union and company level. They are associated with the idea of the so-called *four-day week* with no loss of pay.¹ This expression encompasses a variety of working-time arrangements,² some of which may involve only a modest reduction in working hours.

As a rule, the organisational model of the four-day week involves reducing the number of hours worked, distributing work over fewer days and maintaining the same pay. For example,

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¹ See Varva S., ... *e se fosse ancora più "smart" lavorare soltanto quattro giorni a settimana?*, in *Labour & Law Issues*, 2022, 29, who emphasises that the debate on working-time reduction has long accompanied the evolution of society and industrial modes of production, and that, for a considerable period, it was regarded as natural to expect a progressive contraction of the time devoted to work, mirrored by a corresponding expansion of the sphere of individual freedom.

² For the different models, see Esposito M., *La conformazione dello spazio e del tempo nelle relazioni di lavoro: itinerari dell'autonomia collettiva*, in VV.AA. (eds), *Le dimensioni spazio temporali dei lavori*. Atti Giornate di studio Aidlass di Campobasso, 25-26 maggio 2023, La Tribuna, Piacenza, 2024, 223, who describes the shorter working week as a "karstic" issue – that is, one that periodically resurfaces.

weekly working time may be reduced from 40 to 32 hours and the working week from five to four days.

This model should not be confused with the so-called compressed working week, under which working time is not reduced but redistributed over fewer days, thereby lengthening the working day. A compressed week is involved, for example, where 40 weekly hours are organised as four ten-hour days rather than five eight-hour days.

The issue is well known outside Italy³ and has been the subject of numerous trials promoted through political initiatives (Belgium, Portugal and Spain), campaigns led by civil society (Iceland, Ireland and the United Kingdom) and collective bargaining (Germany).⁴

Initially, strong interest in the *four-day week*⁵ arose from the belief that reducing weekly working time could increase productivity at company level, since shorter, more concentrated periods of work may be considerably more efficient for completing tasks. Attention subsequently shifted to the measure's possible benefits for workers' well-being,⁶ particularly the improvement of work-life balance and the protection of employees' health and that of their families.

Today, with the rise of artificial intelligence and automation and the resulting possibility of job losses, the four-day week is viewed as a promising means of managing technological innovation. Technology itself is also an essential enabling factor in making a reduction or different distribution of working time sustainable within workplaces.

2. Trials of the four-day week in company-level agreements.

In Italy, a number of private companies have launched noteworthy trials of the four-day week through agreements with trade unions,⁷ adopting different models designed around the specific features of each workplace.⁸ The first areas affected were the tertiary sector and business services.

³ See Chung H., *A Social Policy Case for a Four-Day Week*, in *Journal of Social Policy*, 51, 3, 2022, 551.

⁴ On experiences abroad, see Müller T., *Friday on my Mind – Working Time in the Manufacturing Sector*, IndustriAll-ETUI, Brussels, Working Paper, 08, 2023, 33; Deidda M., Menegatti V., *Riduzione dell'orario settimanale di lavoro. Riconoscimento comparativo delle sperimentazioni realizzate*, INAPP Working Paper, Rome, 96, 2023; see also De Spiegelaere S., Piasna A., *Perché e come ridurre l'orario di lavoro*, ETUI, Brussels, 2019, 67. Also noteworthy is Batut C., Garnero A., Tondini A., *The Employment Effects of Working Time Reductions: Sector-Level Evidence from European Reforms*, in *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society*, 62, 3, 2023, 217, which examines the employment effects of reductions in standard working time by analysing the reforms implemented in Europe between 1995 and 2007.

⁵ See the extensive analysis by Del Frate M., *Prove di sostenibilità per la c.d. four day week, tra contrattazione collettiva e poteri unilaterali*, in Ales E., Casale D., Fili V., Leccese V.S., Marinelli F., Tiraboschi M. (eds.), *Tempi di lavoro, misure di conciliazione e welfare negoziale tra legge e contratto collettivo*, Adapt University Press, Modena, 2024, 63.

⁶ In the latest Censis-Eudaimon Report on corporate welfare, published on 24 February 2026, the pursuit of well-being is described as “the guiding principle of social behaviour at this historical juncture”. Against this background, 88.2% of workers believe that having time to devote to their own subjective well-being should be recognised as a right for everyone, while 71.3% are convinced that “the technological and economic conditions are in place for a reduction in working time, for example by shortening the working week to four days and/or reducing daily working hours” (28-29).

⁷ For a review of the main collective agreements, see Adapt, *La contrattazione collettiva in Italia. XI Rapporto ADAPT*, Adapt University Press, Modena, 2024, 78.

⁸ See Pogliotti G., *La riduzione oraria è una realtà nei contratti aziendali*, in *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 19 August 2025.

In the banking sector, in May 2023 the Intesa Sanpaolo Group concluded a company-level agreement with the main trade union federations in the credit sector, aimed at implementing significant innovations in the organisation of work across the Group's various workplaces.⁹ Most of its provisions concern the strengthening of remote and flexible working, but the agreement also introduces the so-called "four-day week" on a trial basis. This does not entail a substantial reduction in weekly working time, but rather its reorganisation: Group employees may request to work nine hours per day on four days of the week – with an additional day off that need not be Friday – instead of the traditional schedule of seven and a half hours on each of five working days. Under this arrangement, weekly working time is therefore reduced from 37.5 to 36 hours with no loss of pay, consistently with Article 108 of the national collective agreement for the banking sector, which permits this distribution of working time. It is worth noting that participation in the new model is voluntary, although approval of employees' requests is subject to the company's technical, organisational and production requirements, and the working-time schedule must be approved in advance by the line manager.

Against this background, it should be noted that on 24 December 2025 the first part of the agreement renewing the Intesa Sanpaolo Group's second-level collective agreement (CC2L) for 2026–2029 was signed. It includes an agreement on Parenthood introducing an innovative arrangement known as the "Ultra-Short Working Week". Unlike the previous arrangement, this is not a hybrid form¹⁰ of compressed working week but a genuine 30-hour four-day week model, consisting of 7.5 hours on each of four days, with no loss of pay. The measure is available to mothers and fathers until their child reaches the age of three or, in the case of adoption or foster care, for three years after the child joins the family. It is offered as an alternative to voluntary weekly leave of up to 12 hours and is intended to enable a better balance between employees' work-related needs and their personal and family lives. The Agreement permits the working days to be varied during the week by agreement with the line manager, who must approve the schedule for its actual use in advance.

Specific working-time-reduction models have also been introduced in industry. Lamborghini's company-level agreement of 24 January 2024 has attracted considerable attention¹¹ (preceded by a draft agreement signed in December 2023), entitled *Contratto integrativo e di Partecipazione* ("Supplementary and Participation Agreement"). On a trial basis, it introduces a new working-time arrangement that includes reductions with no loss of pay, differentiated according to the roles performed within the company and intended to increase productivity.

More specifically, production workers alternate over the year between full five-day working weeks and reduced four-day weeks, with one Friday off every two weeks in departments operating two shifts, or two Fridays off every three weeks in departments operating three shifts. The agreement thus provides for scheduled days of collective paid rest

⁹ On the agreement, see Porcheddu D., *Smart working e "settimana corta" in Intesa Sanpaolo: un esempio di transizione digitale "negoziata"*, in *Diritto delle Relazioni Industriali*, 3, 2023, 852; see also Del Frate M., nt. (5), 71.

¹⁰ Garnero A., Tondini A., *La settimana corta ha molte forme*, in *Lavoce.info*, 23 March 2023.

¹¹ On the agreement, see the extensive study by Carreri A., Gosetti G., Mattei A., *Il "caso" Lamborghini: contrattazione continua e tempi di lavoro*, in *Lavoro e Diritto*, 4, 2024, 663.

for each department, normally on Fridays. White-collar employees and blue-collar workers not directly involved in production are granted reductions of twelve and sixteen working days per year respectively. It should be noted that the cost of the reduction in hours is not borne entirely by the company, but is partly covered by portions of employees' annual paid leave entitlements.

It should also be noted that, in order to ensure equal pay treatment across Lamborghini's plants, from 1 January 2026 the four-day week with no reduction in pay is extended to the logistics workers employed there. This is provided for by the October 2025 agreement signed by the trade unions and Schnellecke Italia, the contractor providing logistics services to Automobili Lamborghini.

Finally, attention should be paid to the EssilorLuxottica Agreement of November 2023, which paved the way for an innovative model for organising working time and managing production flexibility. Its aim is to reconcile workers' personal time, in a sustainable and structural manner, with the need for continuity and planning in business operations.¹² The arrangement is a four-day week model known as the "new part-time working-time arrangement". It alternates thirty-two full-time weeks (40 hours) with twenty reduced weeks of 32 hours, with no loss of pay.

This reorganisation allows employees, on a voluntary basis, to trial a working week concentrated between Monday and Thursday. However, the reduction may be implemented only if all workers in the same area agree to participate in the trial.¹³ The agreement contains a further innovative element: the reduction is achieved partly by absorbing individual paid leave entitlements and partly at the company's expense; the company may reconfigure the remuneration package, supplementing it with corporate welfare measures.

Following the initial positive results of the shorter working week arrangement – reflected in favourable key economic indicators, lower staff turnover, a significant reduction in commuting accidents and greater sustainability – a new supplementary agreement signed on 9 September 2025 extended the model to a first production site.¹⁴ Accordingly, from 1 January 2026, for the first time all employees at an entire plant benefit (as an experiment) from twenty working weeks of four days each with no reduction in pay.

Alongside the signs of vitality displayed by company-level collective bargaining, which has sought to experiment with innovative working-time reduction arrangements capable of helping workers achieve a better balance between working time and time devoted to other activities without undermining company productivity, public administrations have also shown a cautious openness towards forms of working-time reorganisation.

Within the bodies covered by the Central Government Functions sector (namely ministries, tax agencies and non-economic public bodies) and the Local Government Functions sector (which includes Regions, Local Authorities and Chambers of commerce), it is now possible to introduce pilot schemes involving a new arrangement of working time.

¹² On the content of the agreement, see Alifano F., Porcheddu D., *Per una storia della contrattazione collettiva in Italia/ 188 – L'accordo Luxottica: un presidio di territorio oltre la "settimana corta"*, in *Boll. ADAPT*, 6, 2024.

¹³ Individual requests to participate in the new working-time model may not be accepted until the required level of uniform participation has been reached within the relevant area.

¹⁴ See Ganz B., *Essilux, test in Italia: settimana corta per un'intera fabbrica*, in *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 10 September 2025.

Article 18 of the National Collective Labour Agreement for the Central Government Functions sector for 2022-2024, signed on 27 January 2025, and Article 22 of the National Collective Labour Agreement for the Local Government Functions sector for 2022-2024, signed on 23 February 2026, provide that employees may, on a voluntary basis, work four days per week, for a total of 36 hours and without any reduction in pay.

This is therefore a pilot scheme for a compressed working week rather than a genuine shorter working week, since weekly working time remains fixed at 36 hours, to be performed over four days instead of five. Daily working time must consequently amount to nine hours, in addition to the lunch break. This working-time arrangement will entail a proportionate adjustment of annual leave entitlements, as well as of all other forms of daily leave.

The distribution of working days under the compressed-week arrangement must not adversely affect the level of services provided to users and must respond to the needs of employees who choose to participate on a voluntary basis. Lastly, since this innovation concerns the organisation of working-time arrangements, it must be subject to “consultation” between the administration and the trade unions.

3. Benefits and challenges of introducing the four-day week.

As might be expected, the introduction of new working-time arrangements has prompted differing reactions and interpretations, both in relation to the reasons that led companies and trade unions to adopt them and to their resulting strengths and weaknesses.

The benefits of introducing a four-day week appear considerable for workers, who regain time to devote to other activities, such as caring for family members or pursuing personal development, thereby improving their work-life balance.

Studies have assessed the impact that adopting a four-day working week could have on gender inequalities.¹⁵ On the one hand, because the number of hours expected to be devoted to paid work is reduced, women may be encouraged to increase their labour-market participation. On the other hand, greater participation by male workers in family and domestic care work, made possible by having more non-working time, may promote a fairer distribution of family responsibilities and, in turn, facilitate women’s participation in the labour market.

Among the advantages, mention should be made of the positive effect that a reduction in weekly working time may have on employees’ well-being, particularly their mental and physical health. It may also free up time for training and reskilling, which are necessary to navigate the digital and green transitions.

From the company’s perspective, potential advantages include higher - or at least stable - productivity, as well as improved employee performance. Reduced working hours may lead to higher productivity because shorter, more concentrated working periods can be considerably more efficient in completing tasks and achieving objectives.

¹⁵ Particularly noteworthy is the study commissioned by the European Commission: Chung H., *Flexible Working Arrangements and Gender Equality in Europe*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2024, 76.

More compelling are the potential improvements in certain aspects of management, such as reducing sickness absence – especially stress-related absence – lowering the number of occupational accidents, particularly commuting accidents, and decreasing staff turnover, since more motivated and committed employees may be less likely to leave their jobs.¹⁶ At the same time, offering reduced working hours may make companies more attractive to new workers, especially highly skilled workers who are difficult to recruit.

Looking at the broader economic and social context in which companies operate, it cannot be ruled out that widespread use of the four-day week model could generate significant business savings, owing to reduced requirements for physical workspace, lower energy costs¹⁷ and more effective management of the organisational changes accompanying technological innovation.

Finally, this organisational model may contribute to a more resilient and sustainable economy, benefiting not only the environment – through lower pollution and a reduced climate impact – but also the welfare system, through a possible reduction in healthcare expenditure.¹⁸

The challenges include, first, greater complexity in company management, which may in some cases adversely affect productivity. In this respect, the four-day week model is undoubtedly more practicable in medium-sized and large companies with mature organisational structures and adequate technology.

Moreover, where total weekly hours are merely redistributed over fewer days, as under a compressed working week, there is a risk that workers' stress will not genuinely be reduced but instead increased as a result of more intensive daily work.

A further concern is the possible widening of inequalities between workers, since this model appears easier to apply in certain sectors – particularly highly skilled or highly profitable ones – and to certain occupational groups.¹⁹

Indeed, the most common objection to the *four-day week* is that it is not financially sustainable for companies.²⁰ A reduction in working hours may result in lower output, at least in companies where productivity depends heavily on time worked. There is also the question of how to finance the new working-time model, which, it should be recalled, entails maintaining pay levels. The simplest solution – although trade unions oppose it – is to use part of the paid leave entitlements provided for by collective agreements. This enables the company to offset the hours no longer worked by drawing on a cost item that has, at least in part, already been budgeted for. Alternatively, the cost may be offset through corporate welfare measures – as in the EssilorLuxottica agreement²¹ – combined with a partial

¹⁶ See Fraioli A.L., *Prove tecniche di riduzione dell'orario di lavoro a parità di retribuzione*, in *Massimario di Giurisprudenza del Lavoro*, 3, 2024, 468.

¹⁷ In this sense, see Del Frate M., *Trasformazione digitale e orario di lavoro: warm up lap per la settimana corta*, in Lunardon F., Menegatti E. (eds.), *I nuovi confini del lavoro: la trasformazione digitale*, Italian Labour Law e-Studies, Bologna, 2024, 106.

¹⁸ On this point, see Carcano M., *Accordi sulla "settimana corta": vantaggi e limiti*, in *Diritto & Pratica del Lavoro*, 5, 2024, 301.

¹⁹ This point is highlighted by Seghezzi F., Tiraboschi M., *Settimana lavorativa di quattro giorni e mestieri di serie A e serie B*, in *Boll. ADAPT*, 11 December 2023.

²⁰ See Fraioli A.L., nt. (16), 470.

²¹ See Del Frate M., nt. (17), 106.

absorption of paid leave entitlements and a restructuring of remuneration in line with the reduction in working hours.²²

4. Concluding remarks.

The foregoing analysis supports several concluding observations. The four-day working week is an instrument worth exploring, particularly as a means of promoting flexibility and work-life balance. It shares these features with remote working, with which it is often combined, but is more widely applicable because it can benefit a broader group of workers, including those whose duties cannot be performed remotely.

Implementing the four-day week is, however, neither simple nor immediate.

First, legislative intervention to promote trials appears unlikely, following Parliament's rejection in early March 2026 of a bill tabled on 1 October 2024 by representatives of the opposition parties (AVS, M5S and PD), which contained provisions intended to encourage agreements reducing working time. The bill sought to incentivise the conclusion of national, territorial and company-level collective agreements between companies and their representatives and the trade unions that are comparatively most representative at national level. Under such agreements, normal working time could be reduced from forty to as few as thirty-two hours per week with no loss of pay, including by arranging shifts over four days. To that end, the bill would have granted private employers – excluding the agricultural and domestic work sectors – a 30% exemption from social security contributions. This would have risen to 50% for private employers that are small and medium-sized enterprises and would have applied for the duration of the agreements, in proportion to the agreed reduction in working time. The bill allowed territorial trade union representatives affiliated with the trade unions that are comparatively most representative at national level, their workplace representatives, or at least 20% of the employees of the company or production unit, to submit a proposal for an agreement reducing working time with no loss of pay. The proposal was to be brought to the attention of all employees of the company or production unit by means of a company notice and put to a referendum for approval within the following ninety days. It also provided for a system to monitor the characteristics and economic effects of collective agreements reducing working time. This task was to be entrusted to a new National Observatory on Working Time, based at the National Institute for Public Policy Analysis and chaired by a representative of the Ministry of Labour, with two experts in labour law, two experts in business organisation and, on an equal basis, eight representatives of the workers' and employers' organisations that are comparatively most representative at national level. Plainly, such an exemption would have removed much of the reluctance to introduce a four-day working week with no loss of pay; the decisive issue, however, would then have been finding the resources needed to finance the measure.²³

²² Bottini A., *Settimana corta, modelli variabili su orario e soluzioni retributive*, in *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 5 February 2024.

²³ The bill was in fact rejected following objections raised by the State General Accounting Office and the Budget Committee concerning the lack of adequate funding.

With direct legislative intervention ruled out – and bearing in mind that uniform regulation risks overlooking the particular features of different production settings – the preferable approach to governing the introduction of the four-day week appears to be company-level action, implemented through second-level collective bargaining. Within that framework, the social partners can devise shared models for managing working time that reconcile the interests of companies and workers through a *win-win* approach.

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