



**European Foundation for the  
Improvement of Living and  
Working Conditions**

The tripartite EU agency providing knowledge to assist in the development of better social, employment and work-related policies

# Overview of recent findings on working time: Flexible working and reduction of working time

DEDICATED WORKING GROUP ON IMPROVING THE PERFORMANCE OF  
LABOUR MARKETS AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS

“Shaping working time: diverse collective bargaining practices”

**Oscar Vargas Llave**

3 October 2024

# EU Directives

- **Directive 2003/88/EC concerning certain aspects of the organisation of working time**

Maximum weekly working time, daily rest, breaks, weekly rest period, annual leave, night work

- **Directive 2019/1158 Work-life balance for parents and carers**

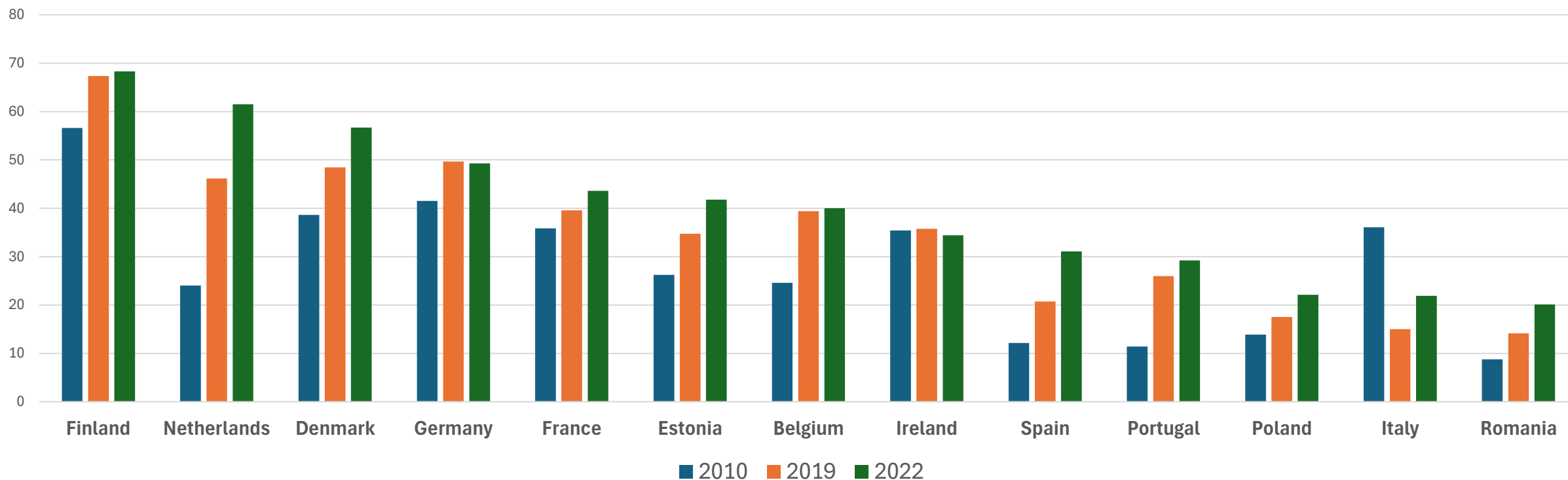
‘Flexible working arrangements’ means the possibility for workers to adjust their working conditions, including through the use of remote working arrangements, **flexible working schedules** or **reduced working hours**

# Eurofound research on emerging trends in working time: Patterns

- **Drivers:** dual earner families, ageing, pandemic, values change, **digitalisation** (teleworking, algorithms, etc.)
- **Continuous but slow reduction of weekly working hours**
- **Time porosity:** Temporal and spatial decoupling of work (“flexibility”)
- **Irregular working time and “fragmented work” in platform economy:** The role of algorithmic management
- **Extended availability**
- **Reduced commuting time**
- **Increased working time autonomy**
- **Dualisation of non-standard/flexible working time**

# Flexible working time statistics

Percentage of employees with some degree of flexibility to decide their working time schedule for selected MS 2010 2019 2022 (LFS)



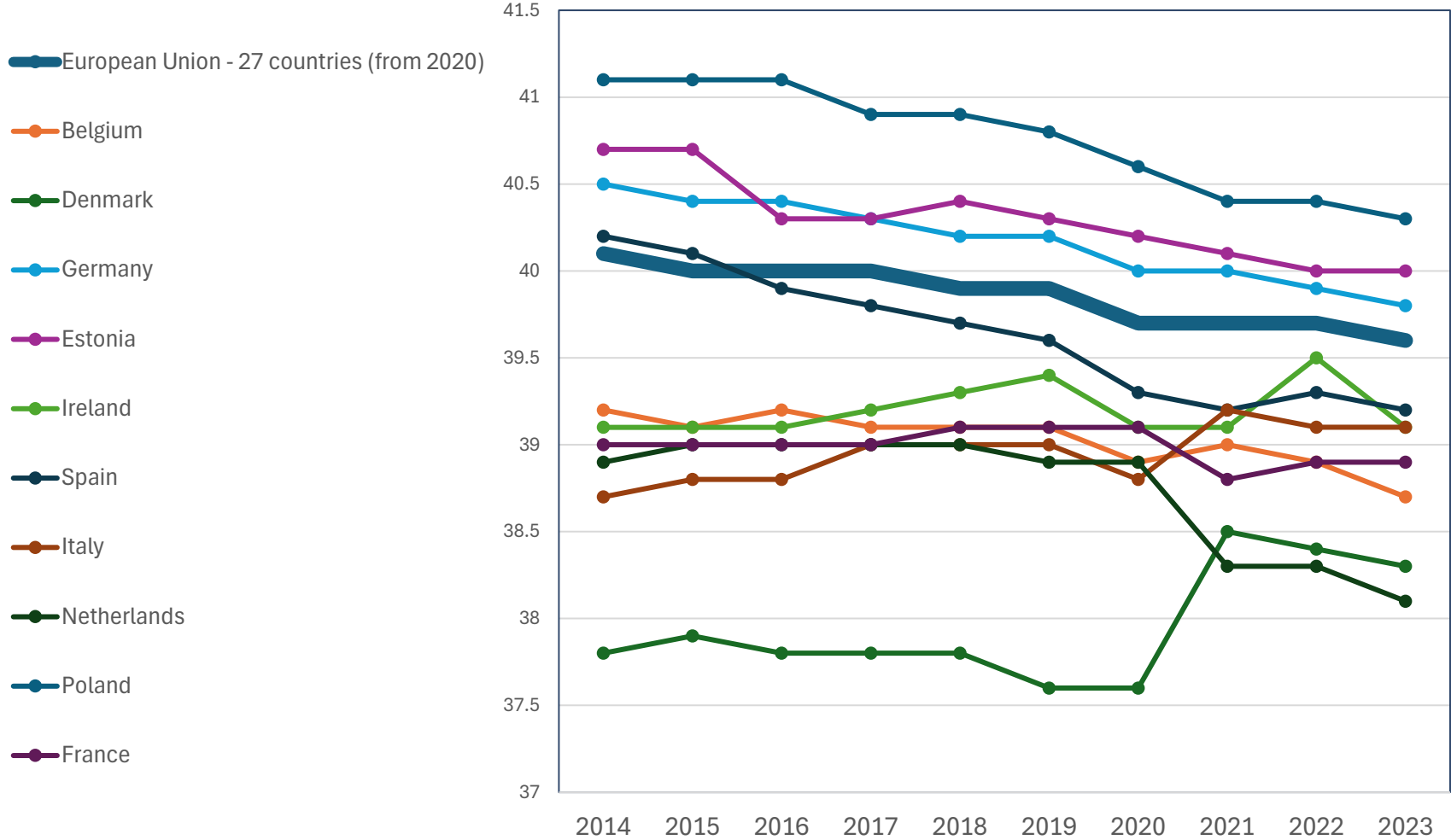
# Flexible working regulation and debates post-pandemic (2020-2023)

- Before the pandemic, flexible working time arrangements have been in place mainly in workplaces in specific countries: For example, in Nordic countries, Netherlands, and Austria (regulated mainly at sectoral or company level)
- Since the pandemic, initiatives on flexible working arrangements at sectoral and company level have taken place in most EU countries.
- However, there are also examples of national level legislation with provisions including flexible working (5 countries, some in Central-Eastern Europe)
- National debates have occurred on flexible working time, in 2/3 of the countries (mainly in Western and southern Europe), including social partners or national policy agenda.

Country/level	National	Sectoral	Only Company	Debates Social partners or Policy Agenda
Austria				
Belgium		x		x
Bulgaria	x			x
Cyprus		x		x
Czechia	x			x
Germany	x			x
Denmark			x	
Estonia				x
Spain			x	x
Finland	x			
France		x		x
Greece		x		x
Croatia				
Hungary			x	
Ireland		x		x
Italy		x		x
Lithuania			x	x
Luxembourg				x
Latvia				
Malta				x
Netherlands		x		x
Poland	x			
Portugal		x		x
Romania				x
Sweden		x		
Slovenia		x		x
Slovakia		x		x

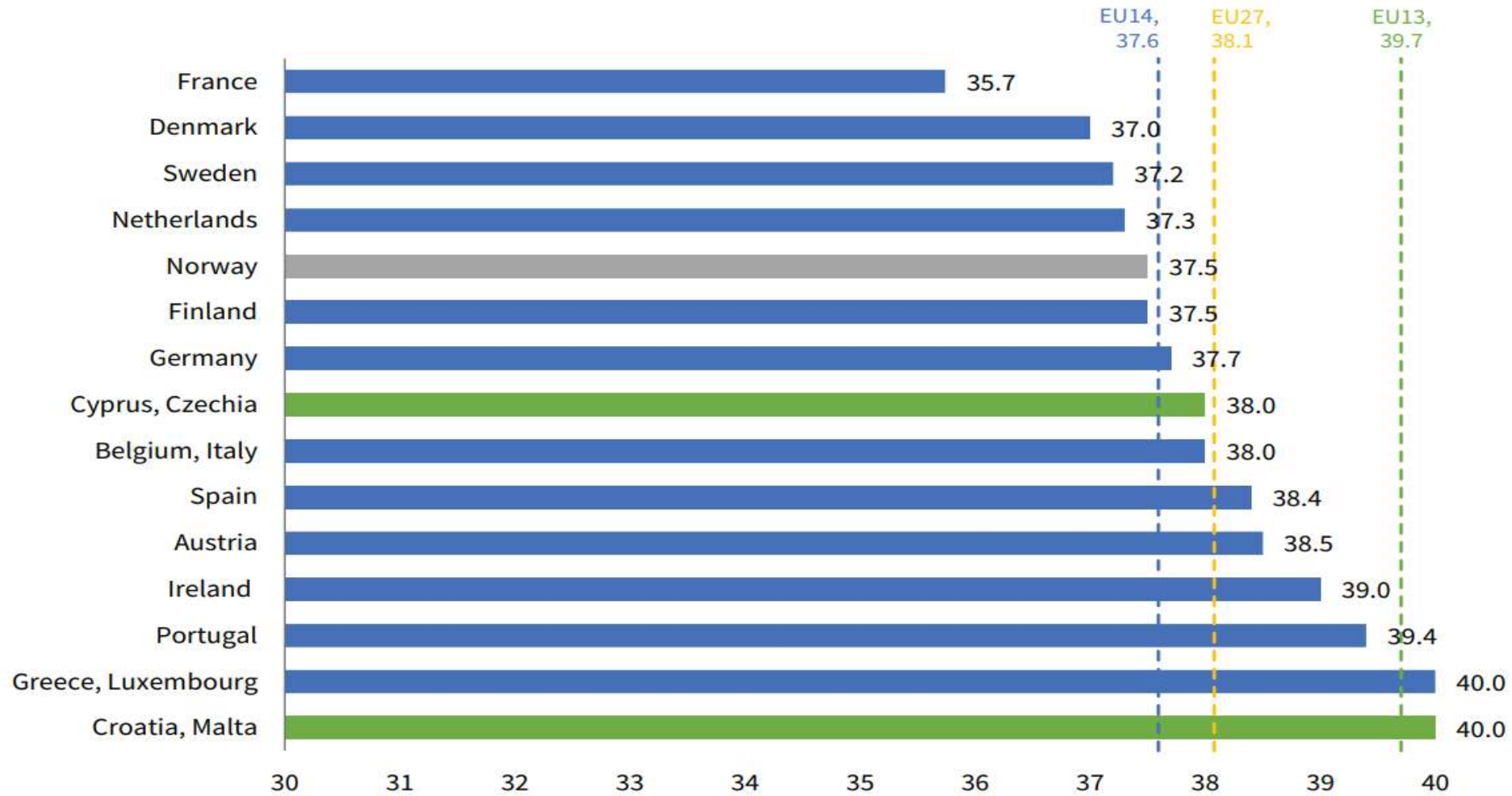
# Evidence of slow reduction of weekly working hours for full time jobs

From 2014 to 2023 half hour reduction in the EU27



# Collective Agreements: Average weekly working hours

## 2021-2022 remains almost the same compared to 10 years ago.





# Reduction of working time: Mapping recent initiatives I – Legislation (2020-2023)

- There have been few legislative changes affecting the upper limit of working time in the EU.
- However, compression of working time has been more developed (for example, in Austria, The Netherlands and Belgium)
- Part-time work and flexible working time are much more widespread than working time reduction to support workers with care responsibilities.

# Reduction of working time: Mapping recent initiatives II – Experiments and pilots (2020-2023)

- **Few Sector Agreements:** For example, CA in the health care sector in Austria.
- **Some Government initiatives:** older workers (NL), pilots launched and financed by governments (BE, ES, PT), DE no financed, only for public sector (DK, FR, LT)
- **Company level agreements:** Austria, Germany, Italy, Hungary, the Netherlands and Portugal, and interestingly, in a variety of sectors.
- **Experimentation with various models of working time reduction in companies across Europe:** 4-day week vs. 5 days 30-hour week, many times in conjunction with other flexible arrangements (increased time flexibility and broader availability of telework)

# Reduction of working time: Outcomes of experiments

- Improved work life balance
- Better motivation
- Higher productivity in the shorter working time
- Increased loyalty and attractiveness in the job market

# Conclusion

- Several factors are driving changes in working time patterns across various jobs and sectors.
- Changes are not occurring uniformly across the entire workforce but are instead impacting specific groups.
- However, over time, other jobs and sectors will likely be affected by these trends as some of the drivers begin to influence them. There will be specific demands for comparable working conditions (the ones related to better work life balance).
- Flexible working arrangements are taking shape in digitalised workplaces, while the reduction of working hours largely remains in an experimental phase at the company level, except for a few sectoral agreements.
- Despite existing debates in many EU countries, the statutory decrease in weekly working hours is still in its infancy in most countries.
- Despite societal and technological drivers, social partners will have a critical role in shaping conditions.



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**Thank you!**

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