



YTUMUN24

UNECE

STUDY GUIDE

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Agenda Item: The Sustainability of “4-days working week”

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1. Letter from Secretary-General

Letter from the Secretary-General Esteemed Participants of YTUMUN'24,

As the Secretary-General of Yildiz Technical University Model United Nations 2024, it is my utmost pleasure to express my warmest welcome to every one of you.

YTUMUN'24 aims to provide a platform for students to engage in diplomatic simulations and discuss pressing global issues. Delegates from all over the world will gather to represent different countries and work towards finding innovative solutions to complex problems. Through lively debates, negotiations, and resolutions, YTUMUN'24 fosters critical thinking, diplomacy, and teamwork among participants

. As YTUMUN'24 Academic Team we cannot wait to have you all witness the outcome of our endless effort making the second annual edition of YTUMUN. I hope this conference makes a difference in every related way one can think of. Our goal is to make sure every single participant leaves with so much more than they had come with and widens their vision and perspective on these complex issues which they will be discussing in the committee sessions throughout these 3 days.

I am eagerly looking forward to meeting each one of you and wish everyone fruitful debates and success in the upcoming conference. Together, let us be the difference we all are looking for in ourselves and our world. Let us aim high and work cooperatively in order to make this conference memorable. Together, let us reach for the stars.

Best Regards,

Dilay Örüñg

Secretary-General of YTUMUN'24



3. Letter from Committee Board Members

When I started my studies at Bahçeşehir University in October 2021, I was a Business Administration student. It was my preparatory year at that time, and towards the end of 2021, the developments and changes in the Turkish economy had a significant impact on my life, leading me to interrupt my studies and return to Antalya where my family lived. The only phrase I told myself on the day I boarded the return bus was "I must understand why this economic situation is like this." From then on, I switched majors to economics and finance. Although this change didn't provide a solution to the heartbreaks I experienced at that time and still experience -unfortunately-, it at least gave me a different mission and purpose. It has defined how I will work in the future.

The field of economics revolves around our choices regarding limited resources, as mentioned in the guide. Time, being both limited and an infinitely valuable resource, is directly linked to how we construct ourselves. Therefore, the fundamental philosophy of this committee is to think about and take action on the motivation behind our work before transitioning to a 4-day work week. In the end, after spending just 3 days as board members or delegates, you and we will continue our lives as human beings. We hope that the three days we will spend together and this guide you are reading will leave positive effects on you, whether small or large. We are very excited for these three days we will spend with you.

We would like to express our gratitude to the YTUMUN Secretariat for their invitation and the trust they have shown in us. Danke sehr.

With Regards,

Doğa İNCE and Nazrin SADİGOVA.



4. Letter from the Academic Assistant

Dear delegates,

Welcome to YTUMUN,

We are delighted to have you as participants in the UNECE committee where you are going to be discussing the extremely interesting topic of the 4-day workweek.

Our debate's flow depends on your preparation, activeness, dedication, cooperation, and useful ideas.

Therefore we encourage you to read this study guide, do some further research, and take part in making the upcoming three days unforgettable!

Consider the opportunity of taking part in this conference, and getting enrolled in this committee, as a first step in your thousand mile journey, a step that enables you to invest in yourself, and become a more educated person.

We are looking forward to seeing you deliver a fruitful debate consisting of your hard work and outstanding ideas.

Good luck to you all.

Your academic assistant

Juman Salameh



5. Introduction to Committee: UNECE

One of the five regional commissions of the UN, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), was founded in 1947 with approval from ECOSOC. Together with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), UNECE plays a significant role in advancing economic cooperation throughout Europe.



UNECE is made up of 56 states that are spread over Europe, North America, and Asia. The UN has an international mandate because it is open to all member states. Moreover, UNECE incorporates a wide range of perspectives and expertise into its work through partnerships with over 70 international professional associations and non-governmental organisations.

UNECE works tirelessly to promote equitable growth, sustainable development, and economic cooperation amongst and among its member nations, all the while following the principles set by ECOSOC. Through partnerships and initiatives, UNECE seeks to address pressing issues in the fields of business, infrastructure, the environment, and other areas in order to promote prosperity and well-being for all.

Chapter X of the UN Charter outlines the duties and goals of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and emphasises the council's essential role in addressing a range of global challenges.

Article 62 empowers ECOSOC to investigate, report, and provide recommendations to the General Assembly, member states of the UN, and specialised agencies on a broad range of international issues concerning the social, cultural, educational, health, and economic domains. It can also propose human rights agreements and policies for the General Assembly's approval, as well as plan international conferences.

Article 63 gives ECOSOC the authority to organise events, collaborate with relevant organisations, and offer suggestions to the UN General Assembly and its member nations. Along with receiving regular reports from specialised agencies, it may also provide observations to the General Assembly and help the Security Council as appropriate.

Article 64 lists ECOSOC's responsibilities as implementing decisions passed by the General Assembly, offering assistance to UN members and specialised agencies upon request, and carrying out other tasks as assigned.



By putting these ideas into practice, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) significantly contributes to the promotion of economic integration and cooperation among its fifty-six member nations. UNECE promotes sustainable development and economic advancement through policy talks, negotiations for international legal instruments, the establishment of standards and regulations, the exchange of best practices, and technical support for transitioning nations. Additionally, UNECE improves UN performance by implementing decisions made at international conferences and summits regionally and upholding ECOSOC's stated standards.

6. Definition of Key Terms

Work: In physics, work is defined as the amount of energy transferred when an item is displaced by an external force, with at least some of the force being applied in the direction of the displacement. In economics, it is defined as any activity performed by persons of any sex and age to produce goods or to provide services for use by others or for own use.

Working Conditions: the working environment and aspects of an employee's terms and conditions of employment

Neolithic Revolution: The Neolithic Revolution, also known as the First Agricultural Revolution, was the wide-scale transition of many human cultures during the Neolithic period in Afro-Eurasia from a lifestyle of hunting and gathering to one of agriculture and settlement, making an increasingly large population possible. These settled communities permitted humans to observe and experiment with plants, learning how they grew and developed. This new knowledge led to the domestication of plants into crops.

7. Introduction to Agenda Item: The Sustainability of 4-Days Working Week

There are few things that have remained unchanged from ancient times to the present day. The most important of these are: the very concept of change itself, the unfairness of the birth lottery, and the fact that most of us will spend approximately 90,000 hours of our lives working⁽¹⁾. Beneficial to discuss, first the work concept should be understood. In physics, the concept of work is a measure of the energy transfer that occurs when an object is moved over a distance by an external force, at least part of which is applied in the direction of the displacement⁽²⁾. Since the dawn of humanity, humans have used their energy to stay alive and to provide for themselves. This effort began with gathering food outside the caves of early humans during the hunter-gatherer era and has evolved into the services we produce today to sustain our lives. The concept of work, like everything else changed by the advancement of technology over the ages, has transformed as well. John Maynard Keynes, one of the founders of modern economics, made a prediction about this transformation. According to Keynes, in 2030, a working week would consist of 15 working hours⁽³⁾. Although Keynes



predicted a 15-hour workweek by 2030, the belief that modern working conditions have reduced people's workload is a common misconception.

As mentioned before, the idea that the modern day's working conditions have reduced people's workload is a long-standing misconception. While some argue that modern workweeks are shorter compared to the past, history tells a different story. Before the industrial revolution, people didn't work long hours, and life was more leisurely. However, the industrial revolution and its impacts changed that by promising more wealth while taking away free time. In reality, people worked harder during the mid-1800s than ever before as a result of the demanding working schedule of the Industrial Revolution while in 1400s people was working between 1400 and 1500s in a year, so⁽⁴⁾ to truly understand the 4 - days working week concept, it is a necessity to look at the history of our work lives. However, while mentioning history, it should be looked back several centuries, not just a hundred years. Looking at what has changed from past to present can help us in generating ideas and solutions about the concept of a 4-days working week.

7.1 A Historical Overview of Work and Working Week from Past to Present

7.1.1 Those Who Submit to Nature: From Hunter - Gathering Period to The Neolithic Revolution

Human beings lived like predatory animals for thousands of years. For a long time, they tried to sustain their lives by hunting, fishing, gathering wild fruits, and even killing their own kind to obtain food. One of the ancient Sumerian texts refers to that era, stating: "When man was created, he knew neither bread nor clothing. He used his hands to walk along with his feet. Like sheep, he grazed, tearing off grass with his mouth, and drank water from the river in the same way."⁽⁵⁾

Over time, new techniques, and skills such as stone carving, manufacturing some weapons, and making transportation vehicles were discovered and developed. However, all these innovations remained within the framework of an economy based on gathering. These skills and innovations did not go beyond assisting humans in hunting wild animals, fishing, and killing their own kind. For 99% of his known life, man has remained at a truly primitive level as a hunter of wild animals and a gatherer of wild fruits and vegetables. Humanity continued hunting and gathering for a long time. But as it was said from the beginning, the only constant thing was the change itself.

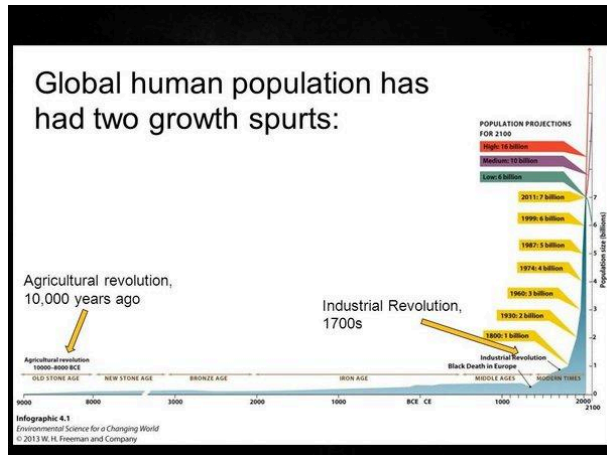
Over time, the balance of the world started to shift. Around 10,000 to 12,000 years ago, hunter-gatherer communities began a transformative journey. Once travelling under the open sky, hunters and gatherers moved underground with the Neolithic Revolution. The earth provided them with greater security and stability. Humanity successfully domesticated plants and animals, gaining mastery over both the land and the animals. Cultivating the land, planting seeds, and raising animals in close proximity to their homes empowered them.



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Embracing agriculture and settled living led to changes in people's diets. Hunting and gathering for food became less necessary. Furthermore, as civilization progressed, dietary habits evolved.

During this period, people were not only interacting with the land but also with technology.



New technologies such as pottery making and weaving were developed. This made people's lives more comfortable and enabled them to create more complex societies. With the first light of the sun, the people of the Neolithic era would awaken and prepare to face the challenges of a new day.

People involved in farming and raising animals would experience exhaustion from ploughing fields, planting seeds, and collecting crops for 8 to 10 hours.⁽⁶⁾

Throughout the day, they worked under the hot rays of the sun, breathing life into the earth despite the challenges of the season and weather. In the darkness of the night, under the stars, people would come together to share the fatigue of the day, telling stories around the fire, but these peaceful moments were nothing more than a pause from the difficulties faced by the people of the Neolithic era.

During the Neolithic Revolution, humans transitioned from a hunter-gatherer existence to one centred around agriculture and settlement, marking a significant shift in their way of life and cultural development. This pivotal period laid the groundwork for the initial stages of civilization, setting the course for the future of humanity.

7.1.2 From Antic Age to Feudal Age

As mentioned in the previous section, In ancient times, people shifted to agriculture and settled down during the Neolithic Revolution. They started growing their own food by cultivating plants and domesticating animals. In farming communities, individuals would head out to the fields at dawn to work the land and sow seeds.

Farming quickly became a crucial part of people's everyday lives, shaping their daily schedules. As societies became more structured, individuals began to prioritise and dedicate specific time for tasks related to agriculture. To effectively manage their time, humans created calendars and sharpened their timekeeping skills.

During ancient times, particularly as societies shifted from hunter-gatherer to agricultural lifestyles, the lines between work and personal life were blurred. Individuals' daily tasks were intricately linked to their efforts in providing for themselves and their loved ones.



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In these times, a farmer's day was filled with various tasks beyond just ploughing the fields at dawn. Along with tending to animals, fixing tools, and ensuring shelters were maintained, there was also the responsibility of providing for the family. Skilled craftsmen were valued members of society, mastering crafts like pottery, metalworking, weaving, and woodworking. Their creations ranged from everyday items to luxury goods, which were traded with nearby communities, fostering economic and cultural exchange during those times.

Back in ancient times, farming was a demanding task, particularly for farmers toiling in the fields under the hot sun. They had to sow crops, gather harvests, and navigate through the varying seasons, resulting in a strenuous workload. Nevertheless, individuals found ways to adjust to their surroundings and utilise resources effectively to overcome the hurdles. The advent of the agricultural revolution, though, ushered in significant transformations. With better farming, people were eating better, got healthier, and lived longer and also they had worked less than modern day people.

7.1.2.1 The Paradox?!

The Agricultural Revolution ended the hunter-gatherer era and paved the way for the development of settled civilizations. Despite being technologically far behind today's standards, people in those times worked less than modern humans. The argument that people work less today holds true for the 1800s and 1900s, but not for earlier times. The assumption that an 80-hour workweek has been the standard for centuries is flawed. This comparison paints a misleading picture of mediaeval peasants toiling from dawn to dusk. In reality, life was slow-paced, and work was not as demanding before the Industrial Revolution. Our ancestors may not have been wealthy, but they had plenty of leisure time. However, the Industrial Revolution increased their income while taking away their time. In fact, the mid-19th century saw the most intense working hours in human history.

To make a comprehensive comparison of working hours, it is a necessity to look back not just a hundred years, but three or four, even six or seven centuries. Think about a typical workday during the Middle Ages. It lasted from sunrise to sunset (about 16 hours in summer, 8 hours in winter), with breaks for breakfast, lunch, a customary afternoon nap, and dinner. Depending on the time and place, there would also be mid-morning and mid-afternoon rest periods. These breaks were workers' traditional rights, and they still enjoyed them even during harvest times⁽⁶⁾. It wasn't common to adhere to regular working hours during periods that made up most of the year's time. In fact, a workday during the Middle Ages was not more than eight hours. An 8-hour workday towards the end of the 19th century was seen as an attempt to regain what our ancestors had four or five centuries ago, and Keynes's envisioned future seems to have regressed to the pre-Industrial Revolution era, at least for now.

It is notable that for only one lord working a full was a rare occurrence, serving as a significant piece of evidence. This was because a day's work was commonly considered as only half a day's worth, meaning when a slave worked a full day, it counted as two days⁽⁷⁾



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work. Detailed records exist for craftsmen's workdays⁽⁸⁾. Data from the 14th century indicates an average of 9 hours a year (excluding meal and rest breaks). For stone masons, data shows an average workday of 8.6 hours.⁽⁹⁾

The contrast between pre-Industrial Revolution and post-Industrial Revolution working conditions is most apparent in terms of working days per year. The mediaeval calendar was full of holidays. Church holidays, along with numerous saints' days and religious festivals, were celebrated not only with solemn church visits but also with feasts, drinking, and entertainment. In addition to official celebrations, there were weeks-long festivals to mark significant life events (such as weddings or funerals) and less significant occasions. All this holiday time probably made up about a third of the year in mediaeval England. And the English seemed to work more than their neighbours. The old order in France guaranteed fifty-two Sundays, ninety rest days, and thirty-eight holidays. Travellers reported finding five months of holidays in Spain. Interestingly, someone living in the United Kingdom in 1424 worked about 12 hours a day and around 120 days a year, totaling around 1440 hours, while someone today, considering official holidays and legal leave, works an average of 1800 hours.

These changes in working conditions and the working hours concept have impacted workers' decisions as well. There is significant evidence for the concept of the "backward bending supply curve of labour,"⁽¹⁰⁾ which states that workers work less when offered fewer working hours. During a period of exceptionally high wages (the late 14th century), many workers refused to work "annually or semi-annually or in any traditional term, but only daily." And they worked only as many days as necessary to earn their usual income - about 120 days a year, assuming a 12-hour workday in spring, summer, and fall. According to a 13th-century estimate, peasant families did not work more than 150 days a year on their own land. Records from a manor in 14th-century England show a very short working year of 175 days for servant workers. Later evidence for farmer-miners who controlled their own working hours shows that they worked only 180 days a year.⁽¹¹⁾⁽¹²⁾

7.1.3 Masters of Their Fate: Industrial Revolution and Industry 4.0⁽¹³⁾

‘The Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race’⁽¹⁴⁾ by some, while others argue that it propelled humanity towards its technological potential.

The name that historians have given the Industrial Revolution is accurate. It triggered deep and long-lasting changes in society's foundational institutions as well as in the commercial and economic spheres. During the Middle Ages, social structures remained the same until industrialization took place. Small-scale farming and handmade crafts were the main economic activities in most European countries. The shift to industrialization brought significant changes to how people lived, worked, and interacted with their families. Countries

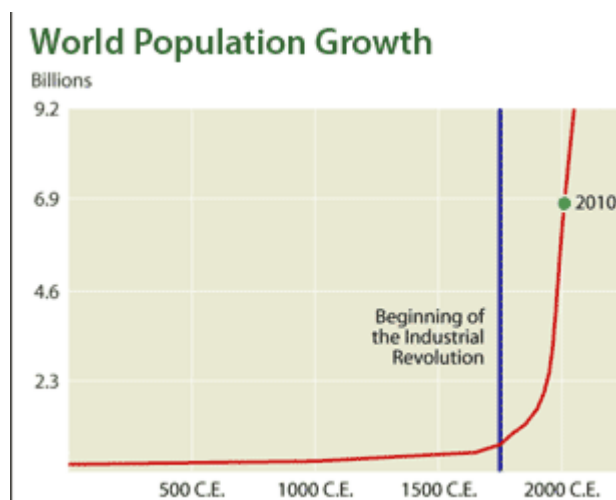


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like Europe and the US transitioned to the modern era due to the impacts of industrialization.⁽¹⁵⁾

The majority of historians agree that the Industrial Revolution began in Britain during the 17th and 18th centuries.⁽¹⁵⁾ In the British Isles and most of Europe at this time, most social activity took place in small and medium-sized villages. Outside of their native village, people hardly ventured. The 18th century saw a soaring in the human population across Europe, particularly in Britain. Among the first signs of economic transformation was an increase in agricultural productivity, making it possible to feed this rising population. When these elements came together, they drastically altered the way people in rural areas lived their lives.

For generations, peasants had relied on subsistence farming to make a living. However, this traditional way of life started to change as large-scale mechanised agriculture became more popular in order to meet the needs of a growing market. The enclosure movement also played a role in this shift, as it transformed shared grazing areas into privately owned land, creating additional challenges for the impoverished rural population.



The population increase added to the number of people facing difficulties making a living on the land. In search of better economic opportunities, many abandoned their rural lifestyles and moved to the cities. Industrialization and the rise of mass production in factories hastened Britain's urbanisation tendency. Manchester and Leeds, two major industrial cities, experienced explosive growth in just a few decades. Twenty percent or so of Britons resided in cities in

1800. Half of that percentage had been reached by the mid-nineteenth century. There was a similar, though slower, urbanisation trend in other Western European countries like Germany, the Netherlands, and France. These shifts completely upended established norms of interpersonal interaction that had their origins in the Middle Ages.

The nature of work in the new urban industries also had significant social impact. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, most manufactured items in Europe were created by skilled artisans. Their labour was constrained by the constraints of their trade's traditions and the resources at their disposal. Power during that time came mostly from the waterwheel, as well as human and animal force. The coal-fired steam engine and associated technology introduced a new, faster pace to labour with the advent of factory-based industry. Working conditions were typically bleak and hazardous, and hours were long, in the coal mines and industries. During the 19th century, as industrialization spread around the globe, manufacturing businesses grew in both scale and scope. In the cutthroat world of international trade, larger companies with



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the ability to attain economies of scale had the upper hand. New manufacturing methods led to the extinction of slower ways of life and work in the industrialising world.

The already difficult circumstances facing workers were getting worse while unemployment rates were increasing. Their managers speculated that they could be replaced. Due to several circumstances, such as population expansion and landowners enclosing common areas, more people were commuting to cities in search of work, increasing competition for the limited number of jobs available. Even though they worked just as hard as men, women and children were paid significantly less due to the glaring wage inequality.

Workers were forced to endure horrible working conditions throughout the Industrial Revolution without any kind of organised representation since the Combination Acts forbade unions. They worked six days a week at dangerous tasks for long stretches of time. Considering that even the most basic safety protections were absent, children as young as five may operate potentially dangerous machinery. The workers in these dusty, gloomy workplaces suffered from respiratory ailments and visual problems as a result of low lighting and prolonged smoke exposure. Child labourers experienced physical malformations and health problems, and injured miners frequently lost their jobs and got little help⁽¹⁹⁾. Because of the strict regulations and constant output pressure, there were little opportunities for the staff to unwind or enjoy themselves. It was simple to witness the horrors of industrial labour practices in the 20th century, especially in contrast to the rural lives that labourers had previously experienced.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the industrial revolution had a significant impact on global industry, resulting in higher production levels and more job openings. Unfortunately, this era was also marked by dangerous work environments, inadequate salaries, extended workdays, and the unethical use of child labour. These difficulties were not limited to a single region but were felt across the globe.

During the 1800s and early 1900s, workers around the globe endured dangerous conditions, low wages, and mistreatment from employers. This resulted in widespread labor movements, with workers staging strikes and demonstrations to advocate for better pay, laws protecting children in the workforce, and enhanced safety measures.⁽¹⁶⁾

Labour unions played a crucial role in advocating for workers' rights across different countries. For example, in the United Kingdom, trade unions like the Trades Union Congress (TUC) campaigned for better working conditions and employment rights. In Germany, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) pushed for labour reforms, leading to the implementation of measures such as workers' insurance and collective bargaining agreements.⁽¹⁷⁾

Tragic incidents, such as the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in the United States, also drew attention to the need for stronger workplace safety regulations globally. In response, governments in various countries passed legislation to address these issues, establishing minimum wage laws, regulating overtime pay, and protecting workers' rights to organise and strike.



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While progress was made in various areas, such as technological advancements and safety measures in industries globally, challenges still remained, particularly in the realms of civil rights and equal pay for minority groups and women. The efforts of labour movements, including the International Labour Organization (ILO), were instrumental in promoting equality and social justice. In the latter part of the 20th century, automation advancements and improved safety measures led to a decrease in hazardous manual labour tasks, and the implementation of safety protocols and emergency stop systems improved workplace safety. Union membership saw a peak in many countries during this time, resulting in further advancements in workers' rights and protections.

Globalisation has presented new challenges, with multinational corporations now outsourcing production to countries with weaker labour regulations. This has resulted in ongoing exploitation of workers in those regions. Nevertheless, today's challenges are vastly different from those of the past. Thanks to changing conditions and technological advancements, the average worker now enjoys better conditions than workers in the 1850s.

In the forefront of evolving conditions are the fields of production and industry. The advancements in technology are transforming the industry landscape, reshaping the way we think about production. The emergence of Industry 4.0, unveiled at the Hanover Exhibition back in 2011, has piqued the interest of manufacturers and researchers alike. Some experts see it as the seamless integration of digital technologies into production processes, where automation is key, and everything from products to services is interconnected.

This industrial revolution is primarily driven by the internet, facilitating communication not only between humans but also between machines in a cyber-physical system. Another perspective posits that the evolution of manufacturing processes is propelled by market demand for more efficient technologies, cost reductions, adherence to quality standards, and technological advancements. Industry 4.0 plays a pivotal role in intelligent data collection, interpretation, and decision-making, enabling faster procedures for data collection and interpretation.

It is indisputable that Industry 4.0 is a broad concept with constantly evolving content. It encompasses a variety of technologies, systems, and processes, aiming to make manufacturing processes more flexible, autonomous, and dynamic, all integrated into a network. Leveraging digital and cybernetic resources in production and industrial management environments, integrated manufacturing includes technologies such as 3D printing, automation, and artificial intelligence. Intelligent manufacturing incorporates the Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT), cyber-physical systems (CPS), and virtual and augmented realities to create smarter and more adaptive processes through optimised utilisation of production resources.

According to the definitions presented, Industry 4.0 is poised to transform the entire corporate value chain, extending beyond the organisational framework to impact the global job market. The authors of this study adhere to the definition that Industry 4.0 encompasses automation, robotics, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things (IoT) in services and



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manufacturing. This transformation will lead to systems that blur the boundaries between the real world and virtual reality, interconnected by cyber-physical production systems (CPPS). While Industry 4.0 cannot be encapsulated in a single term, the literature often employs the terms "digitalization" or "digital transformation" interchangeably with Industry 4.0.

"Automation and replacing human workers is not a new concept. It dates back to the Industrial Revolution in the modern era. However, the way we view the impact of these processes has changed with the rise of Industry 4.0. In the past, when technology advancements resulted in automation and job loss, it was seen as a temporary issue.

Using machines to do work that used to be done by people is not a new idea. In our time, it goes back to the Industrial Revolution. But since Industry 4.0 came along, our ideas about how these processes affect things have changed. When new technologies led to automation and job loss in the past, it was thought to be a short-term problem. With the rise of technology, this may be changing, though. Recent research from Riskbank shows that as the economy grows, people who have lost their jobs will be able to find new ones. In general, advances in technology have not caused a net loss of jobs. Instead, they have created new ones.

Industry 4.0 has reshaped the traditional working-week concept by introducing greater flexibility and efficiency into the workforce. With the advent of remote connectivity, cloud computing, and digital collaboration tools, employees now have the flexibility to work from anywhere at any time, leading to more diverse work arrangements such as telecommuting and flexible schedules. For example, companies like Google and Facebook have implemented remote work policies, allowing employees to choose their work locations and hours.⁽¹⁷⁾

Additionally, automation technologies such as artificial intelligence and robotics have streamlined production processes, increasing productivity and reducing the need for manual labour. Companies like Amazon have deployed robots in their warehouses to handle tasks such as picking and packing, freeing up human workers for more complex tasks. However, this automation has also led to concerns about job displacement and the need for reskilling and upskilling programs.

Furthermore, while Industry 4.0 has enabled greater flexibility, it has also created an "always-on" culture, where employees feel pressure to be constantly available. This has blurred the boundaries between work and personal life, leading to longer working hours and increased stress levels. Despite these challenges, the shift towards outcome-based performance measures has empowered employees to focus on results rather than hours worked. Companies like Netflix and LinkedIn have adopted outcome-based performance models⁽¹⁸⁾, allowing employees to manage their time more effectively and achieve their goals without being tied to a strict working-week schedule. Thus, industry 4.0 has transformed the way we work, offering both opportunities and challenges as we navigate this new era of digitalization and automation.



8. Overview of COVID-19 and Post-COVID Era: “How did COVID-19 shape our working life?”

Not too long ago, the thought of working from home seemed like an impossible dream for many workers. The usual eight-hour workdays ruled the offices from Monday to Friday, when everyone was busy.

Then, in the blink of an eye, the world changed. The Coronavirus pandemic swept across the globe in March 2020, disrupting lives and businesses alike. Suddenly, employers found themselves facing a dilemma: adapt or perish. With no other choice, they reluctantly embraced remote working and rallied to support their employees as they set up makeshift offices in their living rooms and spare bedrooms.

To the surprise of many CEOs, the transition to remote work was smoother than expected. In fact, it turned out to be a resounding success. According to the IWG Global Workplace Survey, a staggering 85% of global businesses reported that allowing flexibility in work location boosted productivity among their staff.

But it wasn't just the employers who were reaping the benefits. Employees, too, found themselves enjoying the perks of working from home. No more long commutes or stuffy office cubicles – just the comfort of their own homes and the freedom to work at their own pace. It's no wonder that 63% of the global workforce feel they are more productive when working remotely.

And then there were the financial perks. With months of zero travel costs and home-cooked lunches, many workers began to question the necessity of returning to the office. In fact, a whopping 98% of employees expressed a desire to continue working from home for the rest of their careers.

As the world gradually emerges from the shadow of the pandemic, there's a growing realisation that the traditional working week is outdated and ineffective. In response to this sentiment, the concept of the four-day working week is gaining momentum in boardrooms worldwide. While some companies have already embraced this revolutionary idea and are witnessing remarkable results, others remain undecided. However, one thing is certain: the landscape of work is undergoing a profound transformation that will alter the way we work forever.

Three big changes in how people and businesses act have been sped up by COVID-19. These are the rise in e-commerce and digital transactions, the broad use of remote work and virtual interactions, and the deeper integration of automation and artificial intelligence. There will likely be a lot of effects from these changes, especially for the weakest parts of the workforce. It's more important than ever to adapt and learn new skills because over 100 million workers in eight countries may have to switch jobs. This is a 12 percent increase from pre-pandemic numbers and up to a 25 percent increase in advanced economies.⁽¹⁹⁾



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Across nations, job growth is projected to concentrate more in high-wage sectors, while middle- and low-wage jobs may decline. The pandemic prompted swift adaptations by policymakers, businesses, and workers to new modes of work, underscoring the agility and collaborative capacity of stakeholders in times of necessity. Looking ahead, similar responsiveness could foster higher productivity growth and create pathways for upward mobility for workers. Businesses may respond by reimagining traditional work arrangements and exploring innovative approaches to hiring, training, and redeploying workers, focusing on specific tasks rather than entire job roles. Policymakers could play a role in facilitating this transition by investing in digital infrastructure, promoting labour market flexibility, and providing support for workers navigating job transitions, including those in the gig economy.

As discussions about the future of work gain momentum, the concept of the four-day working week emerges as a beacon of hope amidst the uncertainty. Originating from the recognition that the traditional five-day model is no longer aligned with modern productivity and well-being needs, the idea of condensing work into four days gains traction. It promises not only increased employee satisfaction and work-life balance but also greater productivity and efficiency in the workplace. With pioneers already paving the way and proving the viability of this paradigm shift, the four-day working week stands poised to revolutionise the way we approach work in the post-pandemic era.

In the dawn of this new era, as we embark on a journey of reimagining work and its place in our lives, the four-day working week emerges as a transformative force, embodying the spirit of progress and adaptability.

9. Understanding the Concept of 4-Days Working Week⁽²⁰⁾:

In the 19th century, workers were toiling away in factories for endless hours, facing harsh conditions after the Industrial Revolution. People were pushing themselves through exhausting 80 to 100-hour workweeks, prompting activists and labour unions to demand change. Their efforts gained steam in 1866 when the National Labor Union asked Congress for a shorter, eight-hour workday. While they didn't succeed at first, the idea caught on, and President Ulysses S. Grant eventually granted government employees this right in 1869.⁽²⁰⁾

Progress was slow but steady. It wasn't until 1886 that Illinois⁽²¹⁾ passed a law requiring eight-hour workdays, but many employers resisted. This tension boiled over into the Haymarket Riot in Chicago, highlighting the urgent need for reform. Fast forward to 1926, when Henry Ford⁽²²⁾ shook up the status quo by introducing the 40-hour work week. He realised that squeezing more hours out of workers didn't necessarily lead to more productivity, so he offered better pay and shorter workweeks, setting a new standard about working conditions and workweek.

By 1938, Congress made things official with the Fair Labor Standards Act⁽²³⁾, mandating overtime pay for those working more than 44 hours a week. And just two years later, the 40-hour work week became the law of the land in the United States, marking a major milestone in workers' rights.



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As time went on, our attitudes toward work started to shift. Enter the idea of the 4-day work week, a fresh take on how we organise our work lives. With COVID-19 shaking up our routines, businesses began exploring new ways of working, and the idea of a shorter workweek gained traction. People saw the appeal of having more time for themselves while still getting the job done.

In this era of change, the 4-day work week represents a step forward in how we approach work. It's a reminder that progress is possible when we listen to the needs of workers and adapt to the world around us. You see, for us who'll spend a minimum of 40 to 45 years working, our working conditions, while maybe a tad better than those of our great-grandfathers⁽²⁵⁾, still leave much to be desired. Thus, discussing the sustainability of a four-day work concept can push us all one step further, offering a better standard of living, a better working philosophy for ourselves and, more importantly, time. After all, in the economy and finance, time is essentially infinite in its cost. What could be more priceless than the cost of spending time with our hobbies, our soon-to-be families, both present and future?

9.1 Marx's Labour Theory of Value and "Gattungswesen"⁽²⁴⁾

Karl Marx's insights into labour and value theory were groundbreaking and challenged the prevailing economic doctrines of his time. He contended that in capitalist societies, the value of goods and services is fundamentally derived from the labour invested in their production⁽²⁴⁾⁽²⁵⁾. This perspective emphasised the central role of workers as the true creators of value within the economic system. However, Marx observed that despite their essential contribution, workers often received only a small portion of the value they generated in the form of wages.

Furthermore, Marx introduced the concept of "Gattungswesen"⁽²⁵⁾ or species-being (türlerin doğası), to underscore the inherent creativity and potential innate to human nature. He argued that under capitalism, this intrinsic human capacity is stifled and commodified. In capitalist modes of production, workers are reduced to mere instruments of labour, compelled to perform repetitive tasks in exchange for wages. This alienation from their labour⁽²⁶⁾ and the products they create leads to a sense of disconnection and estrangement from their own humanity.

In essence, Marx's analysis highlights the systemic exploitation inherent in capitalist economies, where workers are relegated to subordinate roles and denied the opportunity to fully realise their creative potential. He envisioned a more equitable society where labour is valued, and workers are empowered to participate in the productive process in a meaningful and fulfilling manner.

In light of these ideas, Marx advocated for a system that would prioritise the well-being and fulfilment of working people. He argued for shorter working hours and more leisure time, not only to ensure a better quality of life for workers but also to allow them the opportunity to



realise their full creative potential. Marx envisioned a society where work was not just a means of survival, but a source of fulfilment and self-expression.

From Marx's perspective, a 4-day working week aligns with these principles by providing workers with more time for rest, leisure, and personal development. By reducing the hours spent at work, workers may experience less fatigue and burnout, leading to increased productivity during their working hours. Additionally, the extra time off could enable workers to pursue hobbies, spend time with family, or engage in activities that nurture their creativity and well-being. It is further discussed in the next sub-chapter.

Now in other chapters, the positive sides and negative sides of the 4-days working week concept is going to be discussed and the question of “Is the 4-Days Working Week new meta?” will be answered.

9.2 The Positive Sides of 4-Days Working Week Concept

In today's dynamic economy, the norm is to work smarter rather than harder. Emerging workplace cultures, such as open-space offices, remote work arrangements, and digital nomad setups, reflect this evolving paradigm. With technology continually providing more efficient work solutions, individuals have a plethora of options to explore and determine what suits them best. This flexibility empowers people to choose the setup that aligns with their comfort and maximises their productivity. One notable experiment gaining traction is the adoption of a four-day workweek, where employees work four longer days instead of the traditional five, yet maintain their productivity levels. This model offers the allure of three consecutive days off, promoting work-life balance and employee satisfaction.

The rise of the four-day workweek can be attributed to advancements in automation and data analytics, coupled with a growing recognition among companies of the importance of providing employees with ample leisure time. Several successful startups, such as Teksavvy, Panasonic, and Google, have embraced this model, setting new standards for achieving work-life balance while fostering productivity and growth. However, like any innovation, the four-day workweek comes with its share of challenges and risks that require careful management. In this chapter, it will delve into the advantages and disadvantages of the four-day workweek and explore strategies for making it work effectively, enabling individuals and companies to leverage this evolving work culture to their advantage.

According to the research conducted in Spain⁽²⁷⁾, the implementation of four-day work weeks has yielded notable improvements in various aspects of workers' health and lifestyle, as well as environmental outcomes. The pilot program, carried out in the coastal city of Valencia, involved scheduling local holidays on four consecutive Mondays, affecting a significant portion of the workforce comprising 360,000 individuals. The findings, evaluated by an independent commission of health and social science experts, revealed several positive outcomes.



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One of the key findings was the enhancement in self-perceived health status among participants, accompanied by lower stress levels and improved feelings regarding tiredness, happiness, mood, and personal satisfaction. Additionally, the initiative led to the adoption of healthier habits among workers, including increased engagement in physical activity, rest, and consumption of homemade food during the extended weekends. Moreover, the program contributed to environmental benefits by reducing the use of motor vehicles, resulting in improved air quality due to decreased nitrogen dioxide emissions on the designated Mondays. However, it was noted that individuals who smoked or consumed alcohol exhibited an overall increase in their usage during this period.

Furthermore, the initiative had a positive impact on individuals' leisure activities, with a significant proportion expressing a greater inclination towards reading, studying, watching films, and pursuing hobbies such as photography, music, or painting.

Importantly, the research highlighted the positive effects on children, attributed to the improved work-life balance enjoyed by their parents as a result of the shorter workweek. However, certain sectors experienced mixed outcomes, with the hospitality and tourism industries benefiting from increased customer traffic during extended weekends, while retailers reported a decline in sales. Additionally, emergency medical services faced potential challenges due to more healthcare workers taking time off during the program duration.

Health and Well-Being

The first benefit of the 4-day workweek comes directly from its name, which is the essence of working for 4 days. According to a study by the World Health Organisation⁽²⁸⁾, long working hours are causing hundreds of thousands of deaths each year, in a trend that is worsening and may be further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In a paper published in 2016 in the journal *Environment International*, it was revealed that 745,000 people died from stroke and heart disease associated with long working hours. This represented an increase of nearly 30% from 2000⁽³⁰⁾.

In view of the strong positive changes in employees' work situations, it is not surprising that health and well-being outcomes also show noticeable improvements six months into the trial. Some well-being outcomes are specifically related to work. It is found that work stress decreased over the trial period. On a 1-5 scale from never to all the time, reported work stress declined from 3.15 before to 2.95 after the trial. While nearly 17% of employees did experience an increase in stress, twice as many were less stressed, with the remainder recording no change in stress levels.⁽²⁹⁾ Burnout also declined—this is a 7-item scale capturing experiences of tiredness, exhaustion, frustration, and leisure time regarding work. Over the course of the trial, burnout fell significantly— from 2.74 to 2.30. Two out of three (67%) employees reported lower levels of burnout, compared to only 20% who registered a higher burnout score⁽³⁰⁾. Corresponding to the decreases in work stress and burnout, employees are



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more satisfied with their job, registering a significant increase from 7.34 to 7.62 on a 0 to 10 scale⁽³¹⁾.

Productivity

According to research done in the UK, switching to a four-day workweek produced a steady output level and a noticeable increase in employee satisfaction. This broad pilot investigation involved 61 enterprises from various industries; these companies ranged in size from small local businesses to large conglomerates employing up to 2,900 people. The employees did not get a pay decrease while working a shorter workweek of four days instead of five. The majority of enterprises maintained their levels of productivity and business success, according to the poll conducted by 4 Day Week Global in collaboration with Autonomy, the 4 Day Week Campaign, and researchers from Boston College and the University of Cambridge. A 1.4% increase in sales was even claimed by certain companies. Furthermore, nearly 92% of the participating companies maintained the four-day workweek after the trial programme, with 18 of them making it a permanent change. The study also found significant improvements in worker well-being, including decreased levels of stress, burnout, anxiety, tiredness, and sleep issues.

Improving working conditions does more for the economy than just make people happy with their jobs. It also changes how well the business runs as a whole. One important idea in economics is that marginal gains decrease over time. This makes sense. The little gains in output finally go away as people work longer hours. This means that in real life, making people work longer hours doesn't lead to equal increases in output after a certain point. The other way is to give workers enough time to rest and do personal things. This can give them more energy and motivation, which can help them be more efficient at work.

Based on what was said above about the UK study, this idea makes sense. When businesses changed to a four-day work week, they either didn't change how much they got done or did more. Companies gave their workers an extra day off and kept their pay the same to show they cared about their health. It was better to be at work after this. Because of this, employee happiness and participation went up, which probably caused productivity to go up or stay the same. This backs up the business case for putting the well-being of workers first.

Aside from the study from the UK, there are many other cases from around the world that show how different work arrangements can help people do better financially. Some companies in Sweden switched to a six-hour workday, which made workers more efficient and cut down on sick days. Japan's business culture also values long hours, but tests with shorter workweeks have shown that they can greatly boost output. The success stories from these different places back up the idea that making working conditions better can really help the economy.

In the end, the link between workers' health and happiness and how much money they make is seen as a key factor in figuring out how well a business does. Businesses that allow flexible work schedules that value work-life balance will be able to make their employees happier and



boost their bottom line. Together, cases from around the world and research projects like the UK study show how important it is to have progressive workplace policies that adapt to the needs and wants of today's workers.

9.3 Concerns, Criticisms and Negative Sides of 4-Days Working Week Concept

The idea of a shorter working week, such as the four-day, 32-hour model, has gained traction recently as a solution to issues such as low productivity and high stress levels, in addition to the fact that a working day doesn't only mean 8 working hours, but more after taking into consideration the time wasted in transportation to and from the workplace.

However, the long-term effects of such changes remain uncertain, as productivity levels may eventually plateau, moreover, the transition to a shorter workweek which includes the need for societal change and the impact on business operations in a globally connected world comes accompanied with many concerns, and obstacles.

9.3.1. Negative Sides of 4-Days Work-Week.

Coverage:

Numerous business executives face the concern about the potential lack of sufficient coverage for both customers and coworkers, as the requirement for team availability to support customers or assist colleagues may impede efforts to shorten the workweek.

Reduced hours can mean reduced work:

Reduced working hours might lead to reduced work output, although this outcome can vary depending on factors such as team commitment and awareness.

less days can mean longer days:

to fit a five day's work in four days it can cause the lengthening of those four days, which can be draining to some workers, and obliges the business/firms/organisations to pay overtime.

Pressure to perform:

having to be more productive in the 4- day workweek in order to fulfil all the responsibilities might be stressful for some employees.

Not suitable for all industries:



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Industries such as healthcare or emergency services don't have the ability to shut down for three days a week, which can be considered as -not fair, since not all the workers in the workforce are benefiting from this reform.

Wage concerns:

A reduction in working days might lead to lower wages depending on the contractors' policies.

potential drop in income:

If a business follows the 4-day workweek, it can cause a potential loss in revenues, especially the businesses that rely heavily on daily transactions, which could lead to a drop in wages, and a rise in unemployment rates,

The probability of it not being suitable for all employees:

The emeritus professor of health services administration at the University of Central Florida Myron Fottler made a study in which he shows that after a trial period, employees were given the chance to reject or accept the four-day workweek, employees' acceptance dropped where only 56% of employees voted to continue the program after 6 months of adoption.

Less team bonding time:

A reduction in working days means less meetings, cooperation, and socialising, which can highly affect the homogeneity amongst the working team, leading to difficulties in teamwork, communication, and harmony, affecting efficiency and productivity.

9.3.2. Critical approaches to the 4-day workweek.

Alternative approaches to the four-day workweek policy, such as those listed below, can be utilised to critique its necessity, feasibility, and effectiveness:

Flexible hours and location:

Remote and hybrid work have demonstrated their impact on employee productivity, which was shown during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees have reported being able to complete a full day's work in just a fraction of the time, attributing this efficiency to the autonomy to choose when and where they work.

Unlimited paid time off:

where employees are able to take as much time off as they need as long as it doesn't affect their work.

setting responsibilities not hours:



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In companies where the focus is on task completion rather than hours worked, there's a potential to enhance the employer-employee relationship, fostering greater commitment and a higher sense of responsibility.

shorter work days:

which produces similar results as the 4-day workweek productivity rates.

10. Questions to be Addressed

1. *How does a four-day working week influence employment rates, labour market participation, and skills development in UNECE member states?*
2. *What legal and regulatory reforms are necessary to support and also sustain the implementation of a four-day working week in UNECE countries?*
3. *How does the feasibility and sustainability of a shorter workweek vary across different industries and sectors within the UNECE region?*
4. *What lessons can be learned from global experiences and best practices in implementing shorter workweeks, and how can they be applied to UNECE member states?*
5. *What considerations determine whether the 4-day workweek is a better system? How can its drawbacks be effectively managed?*
6. *What makes the provided alternatives functional ones? How can they be criticised?*
7. *What alternatives or systems could effectively maintain the pros of the 4-day workweek while minimising its cons?*

11. Notes and Further Reading Recommendations

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<https://www.economicshelp.org/blog/glossary/backward-bending-supply/>

If you interested in its mathematics also:

Şengür, M. (2020). Tersine Dönen Emek Arz Eğrisi: Türkiye Sınaması. Yaşar Üniversitesi E-Dergisi, 15(58), 304-312. <https://doi.org/10.19168/jyasar.650181>



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Rahman, Adib J. (2013) "An econometric analysis of the "backward-bending" labour supply of Canadian women," Undergraduate Economic Review: Vol. 10 : Iss. 1 , Article 6. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/uer/vol10/iss1/6>

(15) If you are interested in the economic enlightenment and its foundations these books are highly recommended:

- Acemoglu, D., & Robinson, J. A. (2012, March 8). *Why Nations Fail*. Profile Books.
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http://books.google.ie/books?id=axrD2M9dBE8C&pg=PA556&dq=the+unbound+prometheus&hl=&cd=1&source=gbs_api

(17) If you are interested in understanding unions and their bargaining power, you can check this PDF. This PDF can help you understand unions-firms relations with game-theory dynamics.

https://baltzersen.info/files/mathecon_bachelor/mathecon_bachelor.pdf

(19) Cartwright, M., & Hine, L. (2024, March 18). *Child Labour in the British Industrial Revolution*. World History Encyclopedia.

<https://www.worldhistory.org/article/2216/child-labour-in-the-british-industrial-revolution/>

(20) The events and processes that have occurred in the United States are entirely due to the use of the ongoing change in explaining the effects of the concept of the workweek. The main reason for this is to illustrate a process that will occur regarding the sustainability of the four-day workweek by looking back at the past. After all, "history repeats itself."



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(24) Karl Marx is an important thinker in political and economic philosophy. The main reason for mentioning Karl Marx and his theories here is to send a subtle nod to what he did for the working class in his time, and also to create a transition paragraph. The things mentioned here are essentially to prompt readers of this study guide not only to think about the "4-Day Work Concept and Its Sustainability" but also about the concept of "gattungswesen" and thereby about our own nature.

(25) Dive into Fight Club after soaking up Freud's take on religion and "Civilization and Its Discontents", along with Jung's mind-bending concepts like the Shadow, Archetypes¹ and the Collective Unconscious. It will be a whole different book/film after that.

(30) The worst impacts of harsh working culture in human health can be seen in Japanese working culture. For further information:

Karoshi: A Deep Look Into Japan's Unforgiving Working Culture. (n.d.). Pulitzer Center.
<https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/karoshi-deep-look-japans-unforgiving-working-culture>

H. (2022, June 29). *The Rise and Fall and Rise and Fall (and Rise) of Japan.* YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFP-apajFCU>

Also, I will add a lot of further resources related with both agenda and life as well.

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