

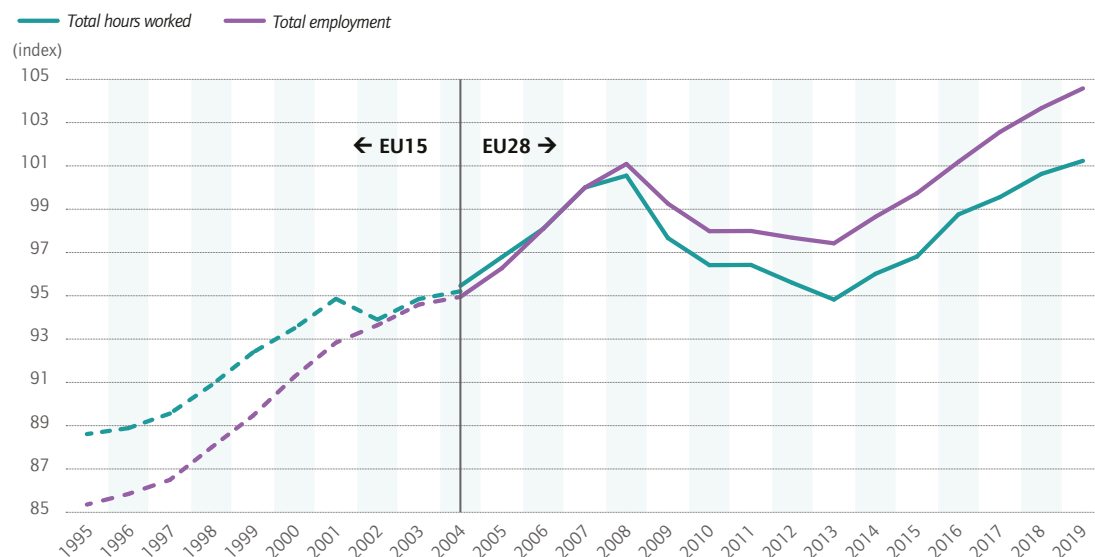
Working hours

An average employee works

36 minutes less per week in 2019 than in 2009

Working-time reductions cushioning employment losses in the EU

Figure 2.8 Trends in employment and total actual hours worked (Index 2007=100)



Source: Eurostat, own calculations.
Note: 1995-2004 = EU15; 2004-2019 = EU28.

In recent decades, macroeconomic shocks have had a significantly disruptive impact on otherwise relatively stable working hours in the EU. As shown in Figure 2.8, in the economic slowdown of the early 2000s, and again in the post-2008 recession, the decline in the number of people in employment was cushioned by a more profound decline in the volume of work, measured by the total number of hours worked by all employed (see also Myant et al. 2016; Piasna and Myant 2017).

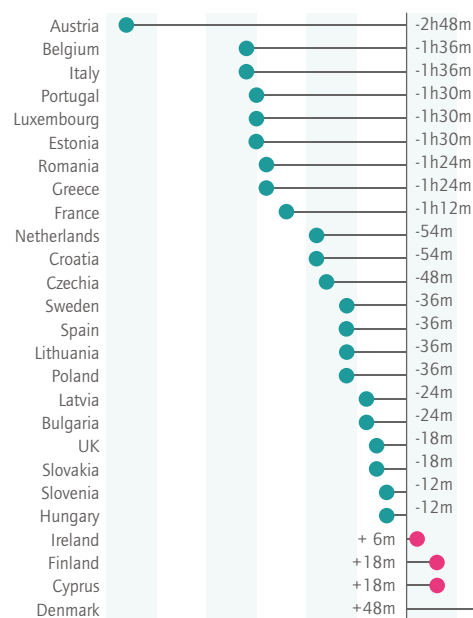
Overall, this resulted in a process of work redistribution, with the total number of working hours declining more than the number of workers performing them. The recovery period preserved much of this discrepancy: working hours caught up to pre-crisis levels at a slower rate than employment. In the EU28, the net job growth over the last decade (2009-2019) amounted to 5.4%, while the total number of hours increased by 3.7%. In other words, an average employed person would have worked 36 minutes less per week in 2019 than they did in 2009, and about one hour and 18 minutes less than in 2002. However, neither the redistribution of working hours in previous recessions nor an assessment of its role is straightforward, and a lot of the changes were also linked to sectoral composition effects and a steep growth in part-time employment, including that which was involuntary (De Spiegelare and Piasna 2017).

Moving on to 2020, although the Covid-19 crisis is still unfolding, its profound impact on working time is already tangible. As shown in Figure 2.9, in the second quarter of 2020 the actual hours worked per week were much shorter compared to the same period in the previous year, with a decline noted in 22 out of

26 EU28 countries for which data were available at the time of writing. The biggest reduction in working hours was observed in Austria (by two hours and 48 minutes per week on average), followed by Belgium, Italy, Portugal, Luxembourg, and Estonia.

This huge decline in working time is in large part a result of policies implemented very early on in the Covid-19 crisis with the deliberate aim of

Figure 2.9 Change in weekly working hours, 2019-2020 (second quarters)



Source: Eurostat-LFS [lfsq_ewhan2].
Notes: Average number of actual weekly hours of work in main paid job. No data available for Germany and Malta.

2. Labour market and social developments

3. The path to 'zero carbon' in a post-Covid world

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By the end of April 2020, an estimated 50 million employees in Europe were participating in short-time work schemes."

preserving employment while at the same time reducing operations in most sectors of the economy. By the end of April 2020, an estimated 50 million employees in Europe were participating in short-time work schemes, and almost 50% of the workforce in some countries (Müller and Schulten 2020a). At the European level, the SURE (Support to mitigate unemployment risks in an emergency) programme was launched with the objective of providing financial assistance to countries that have put such policies in place. It provides favourable loans (up to €100 billion) to Member States to support systems of short-time work. The SURE instrument gave the signal that reduction in working hours was one of the most important measures to combat the effects of the Covid-19 crisis and reduce job losses.