

FOUR-DAY WORKING WEEK EXPERIENCES IN HUNGARY



Practical aspects

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Hungarian Labour Market Basic Parameters



- **population:** 9.8 million people in 2017
 - **employees' no.:** 4.5 million in 2017 (in 2010: 3.7 million)
 - **average monthly wage** (involving all sectors): 294 000 HUF (around 948 eur in 2017)
- employment rate:** 69 % in 2017 (in 2010: 57%)
- unemployment rate:** 3.8 % in Q4 of 2017 (in 2010: around 11%)
- rate of part-time work:** 4,8% (2/3 are women) Q4 2017

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At the beginning of the 20th century, it was a radical idea to reduce the **six-day working week to five days**, at least as much as today, to reduce the **five-day working week to four days**.

It is often said that the introduction of the four-day week in the century of robotics or 4th industrial revolution is inevitable, but still, **very few companies** open free way to this.



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Some years ago...

- an SME (a handmade wooden article producer) from the northern part of the country introduced the four-day working week. This news has been highlighted and quoted widely by the press.
- this four-day working week is extended every year according to the agreement of the parties

No specific Labor Code rules

- existing ordinary labour law rules allow to organise the work in a four-day frame but...



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Manager's reasons for introducing:

- too much wasted time spent on getting dressed, preparing to work, chatting, eating etc.
- says it took around half an hour each day (x10 people x 5 days x 4 weeks = 100 hours in a month).

40 hours:

- 4x10 instead of 5x8
- 2 more hours per day
- Starting one hour earlier
- Ending one hour later

Advantages

(Up to the manager's report!)

- Every weekend is a long weekend: off work activity can be better planned
- Workers are more relaxed and satisfied
- Friday utility costs of the enterprise and commuting travel costs of the employees can be spared
- Effective daily work (the same amount of work is done maybe even more)

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Basic legal conditions



The main relevant rule according to Act on the Hungarian Labour Code: [47 Daily working time] Section 92

- (1) The daily working time in full-time jobs is **eight hours** (regular daily working time).
- (2) Based on an **agreement between the parties**, the daily working time jobs may be increased to not more than twelve hours daily for employees:
 - a) working in stand-by jobs;
 - b) who are relatives of the employer or the owner (extended daily working time).

The jobs at the firm do not meet the criteria of Section 92 paragraph 2.

How did they introduce the four-day working week then?



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Time-framework-type solution



Working time framework

(limits on working hours - working hours account)

Section 93 (1) The **employer may define** the working time of an employee in terms of the framework of working time or working hours as well.

(4) Where working time is defined within the framework of working time, the **beginning and ending date shall be specified in writing** and shall be made public.

Section 94 (1) The maximum duration of working time framework is **four months or sixteen weeks**. (+ collective agreement: 12 months at most)

Therefore: once the employer wishes to introduce the „**four-day working week**” **for a whole year period**, it may use the working hours framework but only if a collective agreement is concluded (apart from unilateral restart of 4 month period frameworks).



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PROBLEMS WITH TIME FRAMEWORK-TYPE SOLUTION

Problem no 1.: In this case, employee transfers even wider rights to the employer to organise daily working time above 8 hours without overtime compensation (within the framework).

Problem no. 2.: Friday is not secured, only the unilateral promise of the employer can ensure the Monday to Thursday working week.



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Contractual solution



Principle of interpretation of the Act on the Labor Code: the rules stipulated in the Code can only be altered and substituted by the parties if the code itself does not ban that.

Ban of altering from stipulated rules is specified at the end of every chapter of the code by marking the sections affected.

The rule on eight-hour full-time job daily working time is not specified therefore altering is allowed.

Therefore four-day working week is introduced throughout the (interim) modification of the contract of each employee.



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Remarks



1. Four-day working day is not widespread at all in Hungary;
2. The case described can be considered as a rare attempt that works locally:
 - at a little company with around 10 employees
 - the company itself is a handmade wooden article producer
 - these employees are probably mostly men (with children's activity, this kind of working day may hardly be compatible)
 - employees work in only one shift
3. In this case four-day working week has nothing to do with robotics or 4th industrial revolution



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Conclusions



Even if the idea is very frequently treated in public conversations, four-day working week introduced in operation is **very rare**. Why?

- Some say that **employees do not want** four-day working week but more flexible organisation of working time (mainly because of family reasons).
- Others say that **healthcare reasons** are against four-day working week as health problems are generated by long workdays (fatigue, stress, chronic diseases).
- Effectiveness problems: more **mistakes** are made in the end of a 10 hours working day than in the case of an 8 hour one.
- Among counter arguments we find those of the **family life**, as less time is left to spend together with the children who go to bed early in general.

Still, just because of the spreading of robotics, the topic will remain with us in the future too. As we saw, there might be always a company that would find advantageous its introduction.





Thank you for your attention!

