

IRELAND TO THE FORE AS CAMPAIGN GATHERS MOMENTUM

Ireland is a leading proponent in the movement to promote the benefits of a four-day working week. Kevin Donoghue, Director of Campaigns with Fórsa trade union and Chairperson of the ‘Four Day Week Ireland’ campaign updates ‘Health & Safety Times’ on the latest developments including plans to roll out a trial for the public service sector.

Since it was launched in 2019, the Four Day Week Ireland campaign has been gaining momentum in bringing about a steady transition to a four-day week as the standard working week in Ireland.

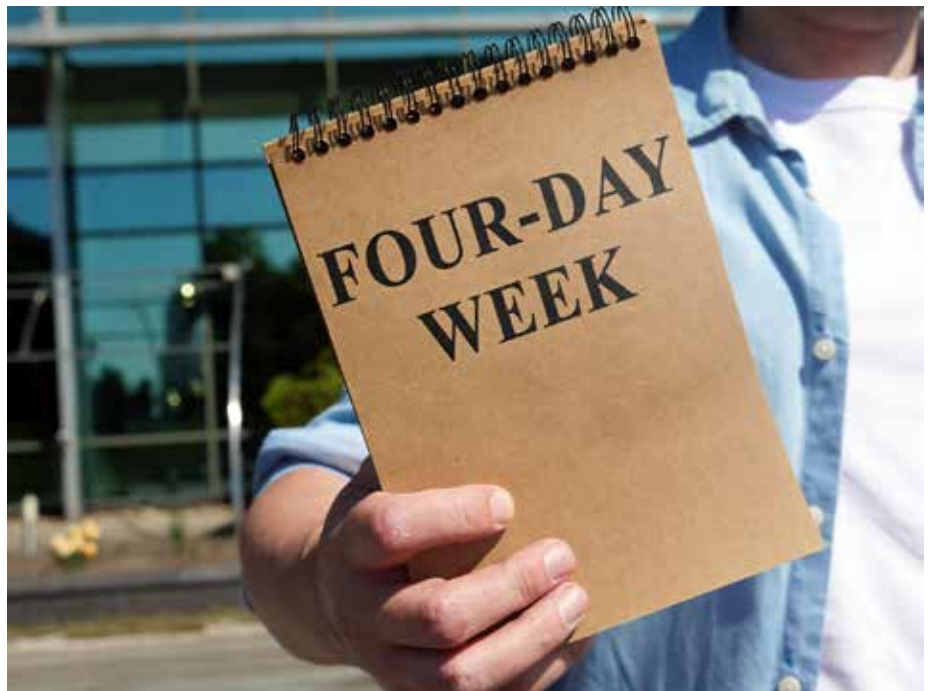
Critically, the reduction in working hours comes with no loss of pay, explains Fórsa’s Director Campaigns Kevin Donoghue, who is also the Chairperson of the Four Day Week Ireland campaign. “You will sometimes see this as the ‘100-80-100’ model – this means 100% of pay, in 80% of the time for 100% of the output,” Donoghue notes.

The campaign is a coalition of members representing the ‘pillars of the campaign’ – which includes Fórsa trade union, the National Women’s Council of Ireland (NWC), Friends of the Earth (FoE) and ICE business group, which is based in Galway.

IRELAND’S GLOBAL CONTRIBUTION

The Irish campaign is also making a significant contribution on the global stage. The three members of the 4-Day Week-Global (4DWG) campaign are also members of the Irish campaign; the Director of Communications for 4DWG Hazel Gavigan is from Ireland, while the current CEO of the campaign Dale Whelehan, and former CEO Joe O’Connor, are also Irish.

“We played a significant part in the initial research trials and published our own report on the experiences of Irish companies that participated in the trial. Dr Orla Kelly, Assistant Professor in Social Policy at the UCD School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice, was the lead on that research,” he points out.



As regards the positives and the benefits of the four-day-week initiative, he says it aims to bring balance back into people’s lives by challenging received wisdom and pervasive myths around work.

“Firstly, in the last few decades, we’ve seen a significant increase in the productivity of workers, but those increases in productivity have not been matched by corresponding increases in wages. There is an imbalance there that needs to be addressed,” he notes.

“Secondly, the idea that spending long hours at work makes people more productive or better workers in general

doesn’t really stand up to significant scrutiny. There is an ‘always on’ culture around work that benefits no-one when you look at it.

“Thirdly, the model we support essentially boils down to the following statement. *People can do the same work in less time.* When you look at it like that why would you spend five days doing work you could do over four?”

BUILDING AN EVIDENCE BASE

The campaign has invested significantly in building an evidence base. “In November 2022 we published a report that outlines the experience of both

workers and employers who trialled the four-day week in their organisations. The results were overwhelmingly positive for everyone involved,” according to Donoghue.

“Indeed, workers had reported being happier at work, and in general, stress levels and burnout levels reduced. People slept and exercised more and reported higher levels of life satisfaction.”

The report also revealed that employers, on average, rated their experience with the trial as 9.2/10 and no company made the decision to return to pre-trial working arrangements. A larger four-day-week trial in the UK had a similar outcome.

He also claims that Ireland remains to the fore in the movement and is certainly providing a lot of leadership in this area. “With the CEO and Director of Communications for the global campaign being from Ireland, the Irish campaign played a leading role in developing the evidence-based focus of the campaign.

“The publication of research around the trial has been critical in engaging sceptics about the benefits. In less than four years we have moved from a space where people think the four-day-week is a nice idea to one where people see it as inevitable.”



“The ‘100-80-100’ model means 100% of pay, in 80% of the time for 100% of the output” –Kevin Donoghue, Fórsa’s Director Campaigns and Chairperson of ‘Four Day Week Ireland’ campaign.



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He acknowledges that while there is still a long way to go of course, he says the four-day-week is now seen as a “credible option by workers, employers and governments across the world”. Ireland has played a big role in that and will continue to do so in the coming years, he maintains.

SUPPORTERS AROUND THE WORLD

Meanwhile, the four-day week has also received strong support in every part of the globe now. Governments and politicians in Portugal, Spain, Wales and Australia now working on initiatives to transition to the new working model, while American states such as California and New York have also made waves on the idea.

The Irish Government has also commissioned research on the four-day-week model, and Donoghue says that companies like those who participated in the Irish trial have become some of the “biggest champions of the transition”.

The chairperson of the ‘Four Day Week Ireland’ campaigns says he recently met with a company in Poland that wants to develop a coalition similar to the Irish model in a bid to bring the

four-day-week to Polish business. There are also similar initiatives underway in Germany, the UK and Brazil.

“Workers themselves love the four-day week. I think in years to come we will look back at the five-day week and wonder how we did it at all.”

PUBLIC SECTOR TRIAL

As to what’s next on the agenda, Donoghue says that further campaign trials will be launched while efforts to build support will continue. “The next big move is a public sector trial, which would be a game changer for Ireland in my opinion. We’ve seen other regions engage with that elsewhere; for example, such as South Cambridgeshire local authority in the UK.”

The campaign is now going from strength to strength, following what he describes as some “healthy scepticism” at the initial stages. “Since the campaign was launched, we have proved it can work for those who are willing to trial it. Now we must prove it can work for everyone. and I am extremely optimistic for the future of a four-day working week.”