

Four-day working week or variable weekly schedule

Checklist



WHAT IS IT?

Full-time employees in the private sector have been able to work a four-day working week from November 2022. Specifically, this means that they **spread their working week across four days or use a variable weekly schedule**.

The measure stems from the **Labour Deal** passed by the federal government in 2022 and allows employees to have a better work/life balance.

WILL IT HAVE AN EFFECT ON WELLBEING?

The introduction of the four-day working week offers a range of benefits for employees, but it can also have disadvantages.

The future will shed light on the extent to which an adapted working week affects employees' wellbeing. Initial studies appear to indicate that employees find the four-day working week an interesting measure, but the lasting impact on their health and wellbeing has yet to be investigated sufficiently. Further studies will be necessary to measure objective health parameters.



To the checklist



What does the law say?

For employers too, the four-day working week entails a number of challenges in terms of work organisation. That is why it is important to develop a good framework of agreements to apply the work schedule in practice and carry out sufficient discussions with all parties involved. IDEWE's interview guidelines can be a useful source of information in this regard.

HOW TO USE THE CHECKLIST

In order to offer organisations support in this area, IDEWE Group has drawn up a **checklist**. We look at the best practices and specific actions you can take as an employer, from the initial request to implementing a specific approach. We pay attention to the individual, the team and the organisation. Take a closer look at these aspects and draw up the necessary agreements.



Checklist

Four-day working week

Request/Launch	
There is a clear request procedure for employees to use.	<input type="checkbox"/>
All employees (or specific job categories) are free to switch to the new weekly schedule.	<input type="checkbox"/>
The agreements on the approach to take are clearly defined.	<input type="checkbox"/>
The legal provisions are included in the company policy or in a sectoral CLA.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Managers have been informed of the new option and their role.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff have received an initial, general communication about the options provided by these new work schedules.	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Committee for Prevention and Protection at Work has been informed and has been able to provide an opinion.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Individual approach	
Employees who apply for an adapted work schedule are invited to personal meetings to discuss the reasons for this and any possible pitfalls (see also the interview guidelines).	<input type="checkbox"/>
Follow-up meetings are planned with employees (after three months, for example; see the interview guidelines).	<input type="checkbox"/>
Employees have been informed of who they can contact if they require a meeting (HRM, manager, confidential counsellor, etc.).	<input type="checkbox"/>
Manager approach	
Managers have been informed of the options in terms of adapted work schedules.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Managers are prepared to discuss the options with their employees.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Managers ensure regular follow-up within the team regarding the new way of working (together).	<input type="checkbox"/>
Team approach	
The teams in which one or more employees have moved to an adapted work schedule are closely monitored.	<input type="checkbox"/>
People are able to speak freely within the team about this adjustment.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agreements have been made at team level with regard to meetings, communication and availability.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Organisation approach	
The new work schedule system is monitored and assessed by a defined working group.	<input type="checkbox"/>
The internal prevention service has been consulted for its opinion, based on previous analyses and results that may relate to the wellbeing of employees on an adapted work schedule (e.g. risk assessment of psychosocial aspects, ergonomics, safety, etc.).	<input type="checkbox"/>
A clear communication strategy regarding the options and agreements relating to these new work schedules is in place.	<input type="checkbox"/>
A policy on psychosocial wellbeing, disconnection, resilience and so on is in place. The details of the new work schedules have been included in this policy.	<input type="checkbox"/>
A systematic risk assessment of psychosocial aspects has been carried out.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Actions have been taken to raise awareness about resilience and health related to an adapted work schedule.	<input type="checkbox"/>



What does the law say?



FOUR-DAY WORKING WEEK

Employees in full-time employment are given the opportunity to **spread their working week across four days** or switch to a variable weekly schedule. A four-day working week allows employees to have a longer weekend or enjoy a day off during the week. This allows employees to work 9.5 hours a day (in a 38-hour week) or 10 hours a day (in a 40-hour week) without overtime or an overtime allowance.

Employees who wish to work with such a schedule may request this in writing from their employer. Each request covers a period of six months and can be renewed. An employer may refuse an employee's request, stating its reasons for doing so. If the employer agrees to the request, the employer shall set out the new work schedule in a written agreement with the employee and amend the company policy accordingly.

VARIABLE WEEKLY SCHEDULE

In addition, it will also be possible to work a **variable weekly schedule**, where more work will be performed in one week and less in another. Such a schedule means the normal weekly working hours are respected over a cycle of two consecutive weeks. As an example, this may allow employees who co-parent to free up more time to spend with their children.

An exception to the two-week cycle is made in the summer months of July, August and September, and in the case of unforeseen events. In such periods and situations, the cycle is extended to four consecutive weeks.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN IN PRACTICE?

The Labour Deal also stipulates that employers must notify part-time employees on variable work schedules of their work schedule seven working days in advance. A sectoral CLA may reduce this notification period to three working days.

The bill provides for a transition period, with companies required to amend their company policy within nine months of the new rules coming into force. Sectors had until 31 December 2022 at the latest to update their CLAs.

Source: <https://www.sociare.be/kennisbank/arbeidsdeal-overzicht>