

# *Tick-tock Europe: championing the Right to time!*

## EU Manifesto on Time Policies

*Ahead of the 2024 European Elections, we call on the European Union to actively engage in the protection and development of the Right to Time of its citizens. The European Union has the potential to develop and implement a set of effective policy solutions, tools, and mechanisms to become a true pioneer in defending the rights of its citizens to their own time.*

### *1. Introduction*

#### *The Right to Time for all Europeans*

Time as a resource is too often taken for granted. All of us, in Europe and the World, are supposedly equal: we have 24 hours of it every day. Not a second more, not a second less. The fact that each and every one of us possesses the exact same fixed amount of time every day does not mean we are equal in the use we can make of it.

Time is a growingly scarce and unequal resource. 20% of European citizens, rising to 34% among women with children, are experiencing **time poverty**: they do not have a literal minute for themselves after completing their necessary activities of work, sleep, and care. All of us are feeling this disturbing sensation of being under constant time pressure.

The consequences of **time poverty and time inequality** are far-reaching, affecting both individual well-being and social cohesion. Countless studies highlight the adverse impact of time poverty on mental and physical health, ranging from heightened risks of depression and obesity to anxiety and cardiovascular diseases. It corrodes the very fabric of our society, diminishing democratic participation and limiting social interactions with loved ones. It also hampers economic growth, as workers trapped in time-poor environments struggle to strike a healthy work-life balance, ultimately diminishing productivity. As a case in point, it is calculated that structural sleep deprivation leads to estimated losses in national GDP of 1% to 2%.

The **European Parliament** has already established a precedent with its [resolution of 5 July 2022 on women's poverty](#) in Europe calls for a **measurement of poverty that includes time poverty**, asking Eurostat to coordinate with Member States the gender-responsive design of the European Survey on the Use of Time and frequency with which it should be carried out.

European citizens should see their **Right to Time** safeguarded and nurtured. Every European citizen should have autonomy regarding the organisation of their own time and should have **time of their own**. No one should face discrimination when it comes to the use of their time.

Protecting and championing the Right to Time requires bold and **innovative time policies**. This responsibility falls on all levels of governance, from local authorities to the European Union. Considering the widespread nature of this challenge and its multifaceted dimensions, **the European Union must and is uniquely placed to play a pivotal role in addressing this issue**.

The **importance and potential benefits of time policies have already been recognized by the [Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities Resolution 313 in October 2010](#)**, recognising the role of time policies, in "help(ing) to improve quality of life and work towards greater social cohesion" and calling on "the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to take account of the 'right to time'".

As a global precedent, the [Barcelona Declaration on Time Policies](#) signed in 2021 has “acknowledged time as a political issue which can be conceptualised as a right for all citizens”. This political commitment has been endorsed by more than 100 signatories worldwide, including governments, non-profit organisations, academic institutions and private sector entities. Time policies do not only address an individual right in and for itself. As stated in the **position paper *The Right to Time – perspectives for the 20th Century***, “if at the individual level, the Right to Time requires that we enjoy a modicum of free time, the collective dimensions of this right require participatory means of decision-making”. Therefore, the capacity to share free time collectively is a necessary precondition to exercising our Right to Time, as well as a necessity to strengthen European democracy.

Time policies are meant to be an important pillar to address several dimensions of the poly crises our societies are facing now: the climate emergency, and the social and economic crisis. These crises require urgent solutions. The fight for the Right to Time for all Europeans can help address all of them rapidly.

The European Union has now **the chance to champion the Right to Time** as the first region to recognize the **right of time sovereignty for all its citizens**.

Join us on our mission to ensure the Right to Time for everybody as a well-being factor in the XXI century. ! Together, we can reshape our society, fostering greater well-being, stronger communities, and sustainable economic growth through forward-thinking time policies at the European level. It's time for change, it's time for time!

## *2. Proposals for electoral programmes*

### *Walking the talk: 12 EU-level Actions to Promote the Right to Time*

Ensuring the Right to Time for all European citizens requires EU action across sectors and institutions. The Time Use Initiative has identified **12 key actions that can be implemented by the EU from 2024 onwards**. We urge MEPs to champion these actions and to become innovators.

These actions are meant to provide further momentum, as well as to complement and reinforce the multitude of actions local, regional, and national authorities have already implemented. These good practices at all levels of government can be found [here](#).

#### **1) Adoption of an own-initiative resolution on the Right to Time by the European Parliament**

There is a crucial need to make the Right to Time a high-level fight. A political declaration by the European Parliament, under the form of an own-initiative resolution, declaring the Right to Time a central right of all European citizens, and inviting other EU institutions to take concrete steps towards defending this right would be a strong signal to send. The aforementioned resolution of the Council of Europe could serve as a blueprint for such a political declaration of the European Parliament.

Building on the 2022 time poverty resolution of the European Parliament, it is necessary to move towards a resolution that calls for recognition of the Right to Time as a universal right. The policy brief *The Right to Time – perspectives for the 21st Century* (TUI, 2023) shares a set of recommendations that could guide this trial.

#### **2) Creation of the Time policies European Parliament Intergroup to end time poverty and ensure the Right to Time**

Time policies have yet to fully enter the European political and policymaking arena. A European Parliament intergroup is a highly relevant first step to mainstream a new policy field and foster a cross-party understanding of the opportunities it offers.

Intergroups are often the result of broader coalitions under the impetus of civil society organisations. A wider intergroup on wellbeing economics, including other innovative initiatives such as the Doughnut Economics would be an equally relevant course of action.

### **3) Organisation of regular high-level stakeholder events on time policies, supported by the Committee of the Regions**

Local and regional authorities have been at the helm of developing innovative time policies, since 1990. Since 2008, they have been organised via the [Local and Regional Governments Time Network](#). The [Time Use Week](#), organised yearly, gathers the most relevant local and regional stakeholders in the field of time policies.

The Committee of the Regions could play an active role in the rapid and effective dissemination of these good practices by formally endorsing, participating in, and furthering the impact of this existing high-level stakeholder event on time policies promoted by the Local and Regional Time Network and Time Use Week.

### **4) Formulation of a roadmap towards ending DST (Seasonal clock change) by 2026.**

Seasonal clock change is outdated, and the EU can finally end it. Based on the proposal done by the European Commission in 2018, the European Commission should propose a roadmap towards ending DST no later than 2026.

The roadmap should be particularly focused on sectors that may expect a higher impact such as emergency and transport services to prepare for the change and should be accompanied by a public awareness campaign. The roadmap should be based on the [Proposal on implementing permanent time zones in the European Union](#) (2022), elaborated by experts.

### **5) Implementation of an EU-wide pilot on work-time reduction**

Trials of work-time reduction and the four-day work week have burgeoned all over Europe and beyond: Finland, Spain, and the UK have all experimented successfully at different scales with different employment sectors. It is time for the EU to explore work-time reduction by supporting member states in further pilot actions. The policy brief *Transforming working time towards a more balanced time organisation* (TUI, 2023) shares a set of recommendations that could guide this trial.

The European Union should initiate a research pilot program to thoroughly investigate the impact and practicality of reducing work hours across its member countries. This program could be launched either by the European Parliament or through its research division. The ultimate goal would be to gather well-founded evidence and draw informed conclusions about the social and economic consequences of implementing work-time reduction policies.

### **6) Creation of a cross-task force led by DG EMPL for mainstreaming time policies**

Time policies, while being social policies at their core, are eminently cross-sectoral and cross-cutting. Effective development of meaningful time policies will need to be coordinated across European institutions. The European Commission led by the DG EMPL should create a cross-DG task force to ensure the mainstreaming of time policies, in particular, to inform and input the EU Health strategy, the EU Urban Agenda, and the EU Care strategy. DG EMPL should also develop the role of the Time Chief Officer.

### **7) Incorporate a holistic view of life balance between work, care, rest, and recreation in all its strategies**

The European Commission should promote overall well-being and address the challenges of time poverty and inequality, the EU should adopt a holistic approach to life balance. This means considering not only work but also caregiving co-responsibilities, rest, and recreation when formulating social, employment, and health strategies.

Ensuring that care services are available and affordable, with better working conditions and work-life balance for carers has already been established as a priority in the EU Care Strategy and other directives. The European Commission should include the assessment of time policies within the overview of the state of play of implementation that is expected in the coming years.

The Commission should further prioritise the alleviation of caregiving responsibilities, a burden particularly faced by women who often bear a disproportionate share of care work. This could be translated into drawing rights for care-time for men and women and additional funding to create more opportunities for women, contribute to their well-being, and reduce their time poverty.

### **8) More time-use-data and integration of time-use as a key component of EU social surveys**

The EU regularly runs surveys on social issues to understand the concerns of its citizens, find policy gaps and address them. Time-use is in general an under-recognised issue also because it is not fully considered in such mappings of the social reality of Europeans.

The European Commission should ensure that surveys run by Eurofound, and the Eurobarometer regularly include questions around time-use, time poverty and time autonomy. This will rapidly help map these issues but also identify further targeted gaps to address.

Moreover, the European Commission and EU Council should make mandatory that all EU Member States implement Time Use Surveys, based on the Eurostat harmonised methodology, at least every 10 years. Eurostat should actively seek to ensure coordination among Member states to promote that the Harmonised European Time Use Surveys (HETUS) are done on a more frequent basis.

### **9) Inclusion of time-use, time policies, time inequalities and the Right to Time in Horizon Europe**

Horizon Europe, the historically successful research-funding programme of the EU is a powerful tool to advance knowledge in diverse fields. The Social Sciences and Humanities dimension of Horizon Europe could adequately be opened to research projects studying time use, time policies, the right to time, time poverty and time inequality. Advancing knowledge in that field is equally important to develop effective policy solutions. During the next couple of years new information will arise from the Harmonised European Time Use Surveys (HETUS) and the EU should dedicate funding to enhance research on time poverty and time use data in a cross-country comparative analysis.

The study of the impact of circadian rhythms and lack of sleep issues on European citizens' health should also be supported through medicine and biology studies.

### **10) Establishment of a citizen panel on time-Use and the Right to Time by the European Commission**

Citizen panels composed of randomly selected citizens have become an increasingly effective tool used by the European Commission to consult citizens and inform its policymaking.

Time use and the Right to Time are deeply personal topics connected to the daily lives of European citizens. To develop effective European policies and European coordination on the topic, the voice of citizens must be heard by the institutions.

### **11) Launch of a pilot project to support the development of Time Banks by the EU**

Time banks are community-based exchanges of services using time as a currency. They are an innovative and effective tool to build intra-community social cohesion. As a powerful builder of citizen communities, the European Commission should explore the support and development of time banks across Europe through an ambitious pilot project.

### **12) Launch a comprehensive public awareness campaign about time-use and the Right to Time**

Civil society and many local authorities across Europe have started to seriously address the question of time-use and the Right to Time. The multiplicity of good practices that already exist (campaigns on healthier schedules based on chronobiology, awareness-raising campaigns to reduce time poverty, etc) and that are growing daily and must be supported by the EU.

The EU should support the dissemination and awareness-raising efforts of all stakeholders by launching public awareness campaigns such as the European Time Capital, developing the existing Time Use Week, and considering making 2025 the European Year of Time.

### **13) Promote and implement internally more rational time schedules at all levels of institutions**

When it comes to time policies, EU institutions must lead by example in the adoption of more rational and humane schedules.

This transformation should encompass not only the internal timetables, improving the work-life balance of senior officials, but also extend to political work affecting decision-makers and officials such as plenary sessions, press conferences, and public events. Innovative time policies will also improve the political work of European institutions.

## *3. Annex: Our Vision for Europe as a Champion of the Right to Time by 2030*

### *12 Changes that Need to Happen in Europe*

#### **1 - The EU must recognise and protect the Right to Time for all its citizens**

The European Union must acknowledge and safeguard the fundamental Right to time for all its citizens. This is a prerequisite for the development of future well-being-centered time policies.

This includes recognizing that time is not a limitless resource and that its distribution and accessibility are not equal. By acknowledging the Right to Time, the EU can establish a framework that ensures individuals have the necessary time to engage in activities beyond work and care, such as leisure and democratic participation. This recognition will help address the imbalances and pressures caused by time poverty and inequality, fostering a more equitable and inclusive society.

#### **2 - The EU must incorporate a holistic view of life balance between work, care, rest, and recreation in all its strategies.**

For too long, the use of time suffered from a blind spot: the outdated 8-hour triangle of work, rest, and recreation left out the core idea of care.

To promote overall well-being and address the challenges of time poverty and inequality, the EU should adopt a holistic approach to life balance. This means considering not only work but also caregiving co-responsibilities, rest, and recreation when formulating social, employment, and health strategies. By recognizing the interconnections between these aspects of life, the EU can support policies that enable individuals to have adequate time for work, care for themselves and others, leisure, and recuperation. This approach will lead to healthier, more equal, more sustainable, and more efficient use of time, benefiting individuals, businesses, families, and society as a whole.

#### **3 - The EU must promote flexibility in working time.**

Fixed working time inherited from the Fordian era of management has lost its relevance for many workers and businesses in Europe. Flexible working time can greatly boost productivity while ensuring better working conditions for workers.

The European Union should prioritise the promotion of flexible working time arrangements to address time poverty and inequality. This includes facilitating social dialogue between employers and employees, to balance the needs of production and the needs of workers. By encouraging more flexible scheduling options, the EU can empower individuals to have greater control over their time. This shift toward flexibility and sharing working hours will not only contribute to a healthier and more fulfilling life for European citizens, but will also increase productivity. Trials transforming working time across Europe have proven successful for both employers and employees.

#### **4 - The EU must encourage the full use of digital transformation for the mutual benefit of businesses and employees**

The European Union is fully engaged in digital transformation. It must further foster the potential benefits of this transformation for increased productivity and efficiency for businesses, while facilitating better working conditions for workers.

To adapt to the changing nature of work and enable individuals to have more control over their time, the European Union should actively promote flexibility in working arrangements, with a particular focus on facilitating telework policies.

Telework allows employees to work remotely, providing greater autonomy in managing their time and location, all the while increasing businesses' efficiency and productivity. By encouraging and supporting telework initiatives, the EU can help individuals achieve a better work-life balance, reduce commuting time, and enhance productivity. Telework can contribute to reducing the carbon footprint associated with commuting, thereby aligning time policies with efforts to address the climate crisis.

The EU can play a crucial role as a catalyst, pioneer, and facilitator for the exchange of good practices on life balance, flexible working time, and digitalisation-related work practices between public authorities, social partners and businesses.

#### **5 - The EU must protect and defend the Right to disconnect for all workers and the reduction of working hours.**

With the advancements in technology and increasing connectivity, the boundaries between work and personal life have become blurred, leading to heightened levels of stress and time pressure.

By establishing regulations that ensure workers have the Right to disconnect outside of working hours, and by ensuring these rules are enforced, the EU can promote work-life balance, reduce time poverty, and enhance well-being. Addressing the Right to disconnect is a core pillar to address the current mental health crisis. Additionally, the EU should advocate for the reduction of working hours to provide individuals with more leisure time and autonomy over their schedules.

#### **6 - The EU must ensure the availability of high-quality and affordable care (children, the elderly, and persons with disability) across the EU.**

Families in Europe are under pressure because of the lack of time. The lack of time amounts to a lack of care for children, the elderly, and close ones with disabilities, and erodes the strength of the family unit. High-quality and affordable care can reverse this trend.

The European Union must support accessible care systems for children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities throughout the EU. By ensuring that care services are available and affordable, the EU can alleviate the burden of caregiving responsibilities, particularly for women who often bear a disproportionate share of care work. This measure will create more opportunities for individuals to engage in other activities, contribute to their well-being, and reduce time poverty.

#### **7 - The EU must promote a more equal sharing of caring responsibilities.**

To address time inequality and alleviate the burden of care predominantly placed on women, the European Union should actively promote a more equal sharing of caring responsibilities and domestic work. Better sharing of caring responsibilities would benefit the strength of European families.

This can be achieved through targeted policies and initiatives that encourage men to take on a more significant role in caregiving and promote shared parenting. The EU can help create a society where caring responsibilities are shared more equally, allowing both men and women to have more time for personal pursuits and reducing the time poverty experienced by many individuals. A better sharing of caring responsibilities will greatly benefit children and those in need of care.

#### **8 - The EU must recognise and give value to community work and democratic participation.**

Community work, such as volunteering, and democratic participation, plays a crucial role in society but often goes unrecognised and undervalued. It plays a crucial role in social cohesion, togetherness and a strong social fabric.

The European Union should acknowledge the significance of these contributions and design support mechanisms to allow time for them. By valuing and supporting all forms of community work, the EU can foster a more inclusive and participatory society. From allowing time for volunteering in local NGOs, to encouraging time availability for more participatory democracy mechanisms, innovative time policies are bearing strong potential for togetherness and renewed trust among citizens.

### **9 - The EU must promote better health practices, particularly sleep and mental health by ensuring enough time autonomy**

The sleep deprivation crisis is one of the key drivers of the overall mental health crisis across Europe. It stems directly from the time pressure every European citizen is facing.

Sufficient time autonomy, which includes having control over one's schedule and the ability to allocate time for rest and self-care, is vital for overall well-being. The EU can support initiatives that raise awareness about the importance of sleep and mental health, encourage good practice sharing across stakeholders, and advocate for work-life balance policies that allow for adequate rest. In particular, the EU should allocate funding across health, education, and research programmes to address the topic.

### **10 - The EU must support time policies for sustainability**

The 15-minute city has become a well-known concept that cities across Europe are slowly embracing. Cities that prioritize proximity where all essential services are accessible within 15 minutes by foot, bike or public transport are a key pillar to fighting transportation-induced pollution, but also to foster social cohesion and quality of life in cities, where 75% of EU citizens are living. The EU must support the development of such urban arrangements through sharing experiences, good practices, research, and the inclusion of the concept in its urban agenda.

### **11- The EU must end seasonal clock changes as a way to quickly reap benefits for health, the economy, and the environment.**

The EU must react to the negative impact of misaligned clocks by pushing for the implementation of permanent time zones as close as possible to solar time (natural time) in Europe.

Misaligned clocks that make schedules start earlier than the natural day-night cycle (like in Western European member states and everywhere during “summer time”), increase sleep deprivation, causing negative effects on human health, economy, and safety. The EU has the power to change that. The European Parliament's most successful public consultation in history, with around 4.6 million replies, showed that 84% of respondents were in favour of discontinuing the bi-annual clock changes.

### **12 - The EU must develop indicators to monitor time use, time inequality and time poverty and monitor data and the impact of its action in that field.**

The potential impact of time policies must be evidence-based. A solid data-driven approach allows the EU to quickly evaluate these innovative policy interventions.

By collecting and analysing data on how individuals allocate their time, the EU can identify trends, disparities, and areas that require attention. This data-driven approach allows policymakers to assess the impact of their actions, evaluate the effectiveness of time policies, and make informed decisions to further promote time equality and well-being.