**Four-day work week means more free time — but that doesn't guarantee you can put your feet up**

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"We should work to live, not live to work," declared Britain's shadow chancellor John McDonnell last month, as he announced the British Labour Party would reduce the standard working week to 32 hours, without loss of pay, within 10 years of winning office.

The promise followed a report from economic historian Robert Skidelsky on [how to achieve shorter working hours](https://progressiveeconomyforum.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/PEF_Skidelsky_How_to_achieve_shorter_working_hours.pdf). Mr Skidelsky predicted a 15-hour working week would be possible within a few generations. The report deals specifically with British conditions but presents an agenda with universal appeal. It describes fewer work hours as a win-win — improving productivity for employers while giving employees what they want.

It says:"People should have to work less for a living. Having to work less at what one needs to do, and more at what one wants to do, is good for material and spiritual wellbeing. Reducing working time — the time one has to work to keep 'body and soul alive' — is thus a valuable ethical objective."

Mr Skidelsky's argument for the ethical desirability of working fewer hours is essentially this:

People are generally happier when spending time on what they want to do, rather than on what they have to do to earn an income.

Less time spent on work, and more free time, will thus promote happiness (or wellbeing)

Promoting happiness (or wellbeing) is ethically desirable, so it is ethically desirable to reduce the number of hours a person has to work.

One problem is that reducing the amount of time spent in work doesn't necessarily increase the amount of time available for doing what you want. Much family life, for example, involves doing things that need to be done rather than want to be done. Studies, for example, show that [free time is unequally distributed](https://theconversation.com/men-do-see-the-mess-they-just-arent-judged-for-it-the-way-women-are-118728) between the sexes.

Men enjoy a larger share of socially available free time, because women spend more time on duties related to child rearing and care giving. Working fewer hours might give women more free time if men do more in the domestic sphere.