

Finland's new prime minister wants her country on a four-day workweek

[Michelle Cheng](#) January 6, 2020



Reuters/Vesa Moilanen/Lehtikuva

Finland's Prime Minister Sanna Marin.

Finland has been at [the forefront of flexible work schedules](#) for years, starting with a 1996 law that gives most employees the [right to adjust their hours](#) up to three hours earlier or later than what their employer typically requires.

The country's newly installed political leader, Sanna Marin, just upped the ante, though, [proposing](#) to put the entire country on a four-day workweek consisting of six-hour workdays.

Marin, [the world's youngest](#) sitting prime minister and the leader of a five-party center-left coalition, said the policy would allow people to spend more time with their families and that this could be "[the next step](#)" in working life.

Marin is not the first politician to recently float the idea of scaling back work hours. Neighboring Sweden [tested out six-hour work days](#) a couple of years ago. And the UK's Labour Party [said in September](#) that if elected, it would bring a 32-hour working week to the UK within 10 years. (It [wasn't elected](#), however, and details on how the hours would be structured were in any case vague.) In France, the standard work week is [35 hours](#), reduced from 39 hours in 2000.

A slew of companies around the world have been running their own experiments lately. [Perpetual Guardian](#), a small New Zealand firm that helps clients manage financial estates, trialed a four-day work week before formally adopting the policy in November 2018. Its CEO, Andrew Barnes, is [now an evangelist](#) for the idea. In Ireland, a recruiting firm called [ICE Group](#) shifted to a four-day workweek and found that people's habits changed, with staffers taking fewer breaks and checking social media less often.

Both firms are small—Perpetual Guardian trialed the schedule with 240 employees; ICE Group has a staff of about 50 people in Ireland. But larger companies have been experimenting, too. Microsoft Japan, for example, implemented a four-day workweek this past summer. The company said employees [reported being 40% more productive](#), and that the policy was particularly popular among [younger workers](#).

While shorter work weeks can bring clear benefits to employees' well-being, they also can be [difficult](#) to implement. The Wellcome Trust, a science research foundation in London, [dropped plans for a four-day workweek](#) last year, saying it would be "too operationally complex to implement" for its staff of 800.

But for those that have latched onto the idea, there is the prospect of baking even more flexibility into the system. At Perpetual Guardian, for example, a four-day workweek isn't the only model; after measuring the productivity of its staff during a typical, five-day workweek, the firm set a standard benchmark and then allowed its employees to work out how to get there in

80% of the time, which could mean fewer workdays per week, or shortened hours spread across five days.