

Labour to controversially make requesting four-day working week a legal right in new law

Story by Joseph Wilkes



NMA-POOL Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner visits a development site in Basingstoke to mark the governments announcement of© Ian Vogler / Daily Mirror

[Labour](#) is reportedly on the brink of granting British workers the right to demand a four-day working week. [Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner](#) has been at the forefront of this initiative, and a new law expected to be rolled out this autumn will enable employees to compress their contracted weekly hours into four days instead of the standard five.

According to [The Telegraph](#), this "compressed hours" system will form part of a broader suite of new workers' rights. It appears that the proposed legislation has been shaped following extensive discussions with both trade unions and business leaders.

The proposal is divisive, and [Conservatives](#) have railed against the idea warning that it undermines Labour's promise to prioritise growing the economy. They accused Labour of leaving businesses "petrified".

Kevin Hollinrake, the Tory shadow business secretary, told the Telegraph: "Despite warning after warning from industry, Angela Rayner is pressing ahead with her French-style union laws that will make doing business more expensive in the UK.

"Labour must listen to businesses who are petrified about day one employment rights and bringing in the four-day week through the back door. It will be businesses and consumers who pay and growth that suffers if they don't listen."

Critics say flexible working, including working from home, leads to reduced productivity.



Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds in Downing Street© PA Wire/PA Images

Currently, workers can request flexible working arrangements from their employers, but there's no legal requirement for companies to comply. However, under Labour's proposed changes, employers would be legally bound to offer flexible working options from the outset of employment, unless it is not "reasonably feasible".

While the policy may be cheered by some British workers, the Tories argue argued that it contradicts Labour's commitment to economic growth.

Workers look set to gain significant powers to request that their contracted hours be condensed into a four-day workweek, with Fridays being the likely day off in addition to the usual weekend.

A Labour source, speaking with the Telegraph, pointed out that the Conservatives promised to make flexible working the standard practice in their 2019 electoral promises and highlighted research indicating this could lead to higher productivity.

The source said: "The Conservatives pledged to make flexible working the default then failed to do so. We'll build on their existing legislation to ensure flexibility is a genuine default, except where it is not reasonably feasible for employers to agree. Flexible working options such as compressed hours and term-time working can support more people to stay in the workforce and boost productivity, whether keeping parents in their jobs or helping those juggling caring responsibilities for older relatives."

Dubbed as Labour's Plan to Make Work Pay, the comprehensive package of workers' rights has been shaped following prolonged discussions with industry trade unions. According to insiders, Ministers plan to introduce these changes by October.

The debates encircling this issue have largely focussed on hybrid and remote working arrangements, as well as the right to 'disconnect' post-work with employees having the right to ignore work-related communications after office hours. Within the proposed plans, "compressed hours" are also allegedly taken into consideration.

Under the new scheme, an employee could potentially work longer days - for instance, 10 hours instead of eight - from Monday to Thursday, thereby securing Friday off. A key point to note is that companies will now be required to provide specific reasons for not adopting flexible working, a shift from the previous system where they could choose to adopt it.

Labour advocates argue that this move is as beneficial for shift workers as it is for Monday to Friday office staff. They also highlight its potential to assist new parents in returning to work and to alleviate the burden of exorbitant childcare costs.

It's reported that Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds is collaborating with Ms Rayner on the new law. The legislation is slated for publication in mid-October, with some aspects then entering a consultation process.