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To the point!

Cross-Asset- and Strategy-Research

Are the Germans too lazy, Mr. Chancellor?

Indeed, low working hours contribute to economic stagnation

Recently, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz called on Germans to work more. This wasn't just a swipe at recipients of the country's new "citizen's income" (the recently rebranded social safety net). No, this time, he was addressing all of the Germans. Unsurprisingly, his comments sparked a national debate over whether the implied accusation of idling Germans was fair.

Here's the reality: In 2023, the average German worker clocked just 1,343 hours per year. This is the lowest among all 38 OECD member countries, where the average stands at 1,746 hours per year (see Fig. 1). The trend in Germany has been steadily downward for years. One reason is the country's high rate of part-time employment: in 2023, 21% of German workers were part-time, compared to 15% across the OECD. Only the Netherlands and Switzerland have higher part-time rates.

However, if we look at the proportion of working-age people actually in employment—whether full- or part-time—Germany performs significantly better. In fact, based on this metric, Germany ranks among the highest (see Fig. 2), and this success applies equally to men and women.

Yet despite this high labor participation rate, the total number of hours worked across the entire economy grew by just 6% in Germany between 2000 and 2023. By comparison, total hours rose by 11% in the rest of the EU and by an impressive 16% in the United States. This sluggish growth in labor input is one reason why Germany's economy has stagnated in recent years.

Shorter working hours: A sign of progress?

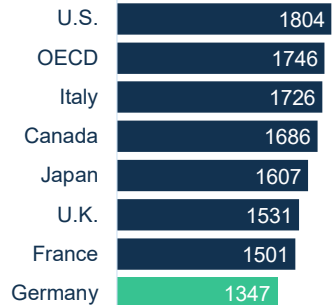
Of course, there's a positive side to all this. Germany's lower working hours can be seen as a mark of prosperity. They reflect

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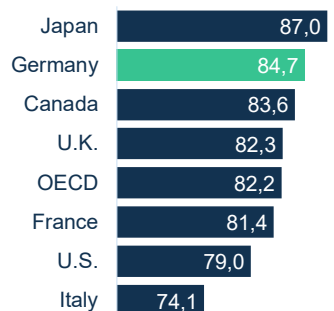
May 30, 2025

Fig. 1: Hours worked per employee (G7, 2023)



Source: [OECD](#), LBBW Research

Fig. 2: Employment rate 2023 (% of 25-64 year-olds)



Source: [OECD](#), LBBW Research

the fact that many Germans today enjoy greater freedom – the ability to prioritize personal development over earning additional income. John Maynard Keynes, one of the founding fathers of modern economics, famously predicted in the 1930s that by the 21st century, technological progress would reduce workload so drastically that most people would only need to work 15 hours per week to satisfy their material needs. While Keynes underestimated humanity’s apparently endless appetite for consumption, he wasn’t entirely wrong.

That said, there’s a darker side too. Germany’s low working hours put additional pressure on the country’s already overburdened pay-as-you-go social security system, which relies heavily on contributions from workers to fund pensions, healthcare, and unemployment benefits. With fewer hours worked per capita, the financial viability of these systems is increasingly in jeopardy.

The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree

Still, it’s misguided to lay the entire blame for Germany’s work aversion on the younger generation. This phenomenon spans all age groups. At my 40th high school reunion (yes, do the math!), the leading topic of conversation wasn’t old memories but retirement plans. The general sentiment? The sooner my old classmates can leave the workforce, the happier they think they’ll be.

This growing indifference towards work is also reflected in surveys. In 2024, a record 78% of German employees reported feeling [emotionally disengaged at work](#) (up from 67% in 2023). These workers can’t be expected to go the extra mile; they’re merely doing the bare minimum. Alarming, only a little more than one-third of them expect to remain with their current employer three years from now, a sharp decline from 65% in 2018. Cynicism has replaced loyalty, marking a mindset shift that could have serious economic and social consequences.

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is also a sign
of prosperity

"Work-to-rule"
becomes
the norm

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