European Network for the fair sharing of working time

19th-20th October 2017 meeting, Brussels

Abstract

We should not let the markets decide for us how to share working time. To abandon the idea of working time sharing is to suffer the devastating consequences: unemployment, precariousness, inequalities, health deterioration, the rise of the extreme right, etc. Many organizations and citizens are mobilized all over Europe to put an end to this wild sharing and to resume the historic movement for the reduction of working time, with full compensation of wages, and full compensation through hiring. It is now vital to integrate the issue of working time into wider issues, starting with reinventing the concept of work itself: its conditions, its organizations, its goals, its mutations. Inseparable questions from those of income and the distribution of wealth generated by human or non-human labour. Moreover, the sharing of working time is also a powerful tool for balancing work and family life; moving towards gender equality; finding solutions for the intergenerational bond. Also to achieve prosperity and good standard of life independently of economic growth; to build a more sustainable economy; to respond to the fears of social decline with solidarity alternatives; and to resist those who desire exclusion and borders.

In October 2016, we brought together 35 participants from 7 countries, representing unions, NGOs, policymakers, and scientists to develop common strategies to make sharing of working time a major societal priority for the years to come. In the short term the first goal for participating organizations is to begin by spending time exchanging information and getting to know each other. Indeed, the objectives, the strategies, the methods of implementation and funding models differ greatly across Europe and even within each country. In this spirit, the organizers proposed in summer 2017 the constitution of three working groups to move towards the formation of a European network for the fair sharing of working time: what are the concrete proposals available? What strategies and actions? How to structure our network and our identity? Answering these questions is the purpose of this 3rd European meeting, organized by The Collective Roosevelt and the working group ArbeitFairTeilen (fair sharing of work) of Attac Germany; with support from the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

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The ongoing campaigns in Europe (identified by the network)

Initiatives from civil society

- Roosevelt.be, Belgium >> hyperlink
- Collectif Roosevelt, France >> hyperlink
- GR-PACT, France >> hyperlink
- Institut Veblen, France >> hyperlink
- JOC, France >> hyperlink
- MNCP, France >>> hyperlink
- Mouvement Utopia, France >> <u>hyperlink</u>
- MUNCI, France >> <u>hyperlink</u>
- Osons les Jours Heureux, France >> hyperlink
- Attac, Germany >> hyperlink
- KAB, Germany >> hyperlink
- NEF and Autonomy, UK >> hyperlink

Initiatives from unions

- GPA, Austria >> hyperlink
- Pro-GE, Austria >> hyperlink
- FGTB, Belgium >> <u>hyperlink</u>
- CNE, Belgium >> <u>hyperlink</u>
- CSC, Belgium >> hyperlink
- CGT, France >> hyperlink
- Solidaires, France >> <u>hyperlink</u>
- DGB, Germany >> hyperlink
- IG Metall, Germany >> hyperlink
- Ver.di, Germany >> hyperlink
- Walka, Poland >> hyperlink
- FNV, The Nederland's >> hyperlink

Initiatives from political parties

- Greens/EFA, Europe >> hyperlink
- GUE/NGL, Europe >> hyperlink
- Parti Socialiste, Belgium >> hyperlink
- PTB, Belgium >> <u>hyperlink</u>
- Génération.s, France >> hyperlink
- La France Insoumise, France >> hyperlink
- Nouveau Souffle, France >> hyperlink
- Nouvelle Donne, France >> hyperlink
- Die Linke, Germany >> <u>hyperlink</u>
- Rødt, Norway >> hyperlink
- Razem, Poland >> hyperlink
- Vänsterpartiet, Sweden >> hyperlink

Key resources on the situation of working time reduction in Europe

- 2017: "The why and how of working time reduction", Stan De Spiegelaere (ETUI) and Agnieszka Piasna (ETUI) >> hyperlink
- 2011: "Work more? Work less?", Jean-Marie Perbost for the Green European Foundation >> hyperlink
- 2010: « Development of working time in the EU", Dr. Steffen Lehndorff et al. for Die Linke >> hyperlink

The challenge of moving forward in a defensive context

Regaining control on the collective management of working time

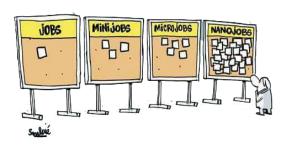
In Belgium, the legal norm in the private sector is 38 hours per week. This norm must be complied on average within the period of a quarter or a year. In some sectors like the automobile, it can be within 6 years. The legal norm is therefore complemented by a sectoral level decentralization and a company level decentralization. There is a great disparity of situations because this broad spectrum is dependent on union negotiations, especially since the unionization rate in Belgium is 70%.

There are whole sectors that move to 35 hours and sectors that require 40 hours on average. The flexibility of the legislative framework allows for up to 50 hours of work per week alternating with lighter weeks. Overall, the average duration of work continues to drop since 1980 but this reduction of working time is no longer collective. Recent policies have notably encouraged the use of part-time work and made it possible for employees to work 100 extra hours a year. Working time-sharing is more and more endured, and less and less negotiated.

In Norway, the 1976 law sets the legal duration at 40 hours. The law also defines overtime, breaks and shift possibilities. But changes have been made to the law: liberalization of various clauses, and limitation of the role of the unions. This flexibility was nonetheless used very positively during the strike of the metalworkers' union in 1986. This resulted in a collective agreement with a reduction of working hours from 40 to 37.5 hours per week. More generally, in Norway, there is a 40-hour week in law, but in most collective agreements it is 37.5 hours. Similarly, for holidays, the law mandates 4 weeks but in most collective agreements, it is 5 weeks. With a union coverage of 50%, the tendency is to maintain the work hours proposed by the law and to leave the fight for better working conditions to collective agreements.

Creating precarious part-time jobs gives the illusion of a low unemployment rate

In the Netherlands, a new government took office in 2017 after 220 days of waiting. The direction is the same as in most European countries. The difference is that the number of jobs is growing faster than elsewhere. If the country is a model in terms of job creation, it should be noted that these are essentially precarious and flexible jobs. These forms of individual reduction of working time have led to significant inequalities. Despite low unemployment rates in some countries, the multiplication of small contracts has the main effect of impoverishing employees, especially women. In the end, full-time unemployment is replaced by part-time unemployment. It is urgent that the public debate integrate the issue of precariousness induced



by part-time and should be based on statistical indicators reflecting the lived reality of the populations.

A reform of the European directive to crown national reforms?

One of the objectives of our opponents is to erase any legal constraint on working time. In particular, *Business Europe* has for many years been lobbying on the European Directive (2003/88/EC), one of the pillars of the social dimension of Europe. However, the impact of a reform of the directive is to be nuanced, the national instruments to circumvent the directive are already numerous, as the "opt-out" in the case of the United Kingdom. There is a series of measures that do not respect the directive (zero hours contracts for example) and Brexit can be seen as a kind of "opt-out" too.

Moreover, the directive is mostly identified as a topic for unions and not as a topic for the public debate; there is currently no social mobilization to defend it. Civil society, politicians and the media are not excited to talk about this subject. In the current defensive context, the goal of the *European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)* is clearly to maintain a status quo on this issue¹. Indeed, the *European Commission (EC)* is again pushing to reform². At the union level, the discussions on the directive focuses currently on the transposition of case law from the interpretation of the directive by the *Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)* ³.

Who can restart the debate?

The unions on the offensive in Germany, Austria, Belgium, France and the Netherlands

For Germany, the momentum is historic: for the first time in 20 years, a union has finally made a proposal to reduce working time: an individual right to go from 35h to 28h in a period of 2 years. The basis of this mobilization of *IG Metall* comes mainly from employees, following a survey of 3 million employees of the sector. Among the 680,000 responses, there is a large gap between the desired and actual working hours. This demand for time is rather well received in the media because it responds to two social trends: the deterioration of health at work; and the time demand from families, especially from young parents. However, the issue of unemployment is not addressed, which limits the strength of this social mobilization.

In addition, *Ver.di*, the second largest union, the services sector, launched a collective bargaining to change practices in the personal services sector. Indeed, 10 years ago the health care professional to people ratio was 1 to 30, today it is 1 professional to 60 people. For its part, *the German Railways Union Eisenbahn und Verkehrsgewerkschaft (EVG)* has offered to employees to choose between a salary increase or more paid leave. This is the principle of the "free time option"; similar to what is happening in Austria.

The Austrian trade union for private sector employees *Gewerkschaft der Privatangestellten (GPA)* launched a campaign in 2015 with the aim of achieving a reduction of the legal standard to 38.5h with full compensation of wages. In collective negotiations, the objective is to obtain a 35- hour week and to promote various forms of reductions in working time: 6 weeks of paid leave, 1 week of paid annual training. In addition, the *PROduktionsGEwerkschaft (PRO-GE)* union is working on 3 collective bargaining options in the industry sector: a free time option "Freizeitoption", which allows everyone to choose between a salary increase or more free time; a time savings account "Zeitkontenmodell", which enables a better combination of flexibility and autonomy; and a solidarity incentive model "Solidaritätsprämienmodell" which allows partial compensation of wages by public funds when compensatory hiring are made.

In Belgium, two unions are also on the offensive on the issue of working time with the demand of 32 hours or the 4-day week: the Fédération générale du travail de Belgique (FGTB) and the Confédération des syndicats chrétiens (CSC) which notably includes the Centrale nationale des employés (CNE). This is a big step forward because five years ago it was impossible to talk about this issue with one voice at the CSC. However there is still a North / South divide on this topic and widespread mistrust among employees in sectors most exposed to international competition, or among the employees with the most degraded working conditions.

In France, union pressure regarding working time issues has weakened since the introduction of 35 hours in the early 2000s, although the average working time of a full-time employee is still 39 hours per week in 2017. Even if the subject is discreet, it is always present. The *Confédération générale du travail (CGT)* launched in 2016 a campaign for a reduction of the legal term to 32 hours and this claim is also supported by the *Solidaires* union. Finally, in the Netherlands, *Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging (FNV)*, the largest trade union confederation, resulting from the merger of different sectors, has recently adopted a resolution for a 32-hour week with income compensation: "*free full hours*". The union will organize a working hour festival in October 2018 and is reaching out to *IG Metall* and Belgian unions. A great opportunity to advance on common initiatives!

Most of European trade unions are falling behind

For collective agreements, Norway has a centralized form of biannual negotiations. The national conferences of the largest trade union congress, *Landsorganisasjonen i Norge* made decisions in May 2017 that in reality blocked the possibility of priority on negotiating reductions in working time in 2018 and 2020. However, the Congress stated that there will be a need to reduce hours of work in different ways in the future. This decision stems from the balance of power between two unions. On one hand, *Fagforbundet*, the largest public service union, which is predominantly female, has made the 6-hour work day a priority for collective negotiations. On the other hand, *Fellesforbundet*, the largest private sector union, which is predominantly male, has priorities on other topics.

We generally find the same dynamics on a European scale. There was only few unions on the offensive on this issue the last time the debate took place inside *ETUC* in 2015. Most unions did not have any interest in it. Until the debate resumes among the *ETUC* members, it is essential that the *ETUC* supports, in one form or another, the few initiatives launched on the issue of work sharing, especially when they come from civil society. It may also have a ripple effect for unions that are rather supportive but have not yet clearly positioned themselves on the subject. The dialogue between unions and society is key.

¹ Last ETUC's position: https://www.etuc.org/issue/working-time

² EC's proposal: <u>In English</u> / <u>Other languages</u>

³ Example of an interpretation of the CJEU: <u>In English</u>

Political parties also have a role to play

In the UK, the idea of work sharing is not linked to any large social or trade union movement. But the dynamic could come from an alliance between left-wing politicians and intellectuals, as it was the case in 2015 with the "Momentum" movement to support Jeremy Corbyn. In Norway, the result of the 2017 parliamentary elections is a status quo in terms of working time. The three parties that have the sharing working time in their programs are the Red Party (Rødt), the Socialist Left Party and the Greens. They have 13 of the 169 seats. In Germany only the party "Die Linke" asks for a 30-hour week for all in its program, while the SPD and the Greens ask for reductions in working time for certain life periods (parenting, care). In France, the idea reappeared timidly during the 2017 election campaign with the candidates of the Socialist Party, Benoit Hamon, and of the radical lef,t Jean Luc Mélenchon (France Insoumise)⁴.

At the political level, what is mostly missing today is a real debate in the European Parliament, starting with a debate of quality in the left parties. Parties are expected to prioritize this topic in their programs. We are not expecting from Parties that they formulate their own implementation proposals, which may be distinct from the already too many proposals from unions and civil society. It is crucial that the issue is systematically integrated into the party agenda at the European level.

This is still far from being the case today, for example the new pan-European political movement *DiEM25* does not include the issue in its program. Only the *Greens/EFA* and *GUE/NGL* have fully integrated the topic at the European level. In addition, it is also a question of supporting politically and systematically the progress of the various countries, including inside national parliaments. For instance, there has not been much reaction in Europe to support the results of the 35-hour week in France, which remains very positive with the creation of 350 000 jobs with a net cost of 2.5 billion euros per year. The actual cost per job created or saved amounts to 8,000 euros, far cheaper than the cost of current labour policies.

Civil society can help to better coordinate actors

In Belgium, the citizen movement Roosevelt.be published a book in May 2017⁵ to tell the story of those who provided concrete answers: Gothenburg, the French companies Trans Auto + and YPREMA, or the Belgian companies Auto 5, VRT, and Cockerill. In February 2017 Roosevelt.be also launched an appeal with 70 personalities from the civil society and trade unions. This call was made independently of any political party, which brought together a variety of different actors. This helps to legitimize trade union speech if we take into account the results of a Belgian survey that estimates trust in unions is less than 10%, compared to 30% for NGOs. In addition, the citizen movements are well positioned to speak and unite on a subject on which most unions are divided and defensive.

In May 2016, the French newspaper *Alternatives Economiques* published a major call signed by 150 personalities from civil society, unions and politics. The citizen movement Collectif Roosevelt responded to the call and launched a campaign in 2016 and 2017. One of the objectives of this campaign⁶ was to answer the issue of a scattered landscape of sharing of working time supporters. For this purpose, the *Collectif Roosevelt* initiated, at the end of 2017, a French network with the objective of creating a common and permanent discussion framework for NGO's, unions, decision-makers and experts. The second step would be to enable some coordinated actions by the network. One goal that all have in common is to prevent the propagation of fake news.

Indeed, orthodox economists regularly and violently deny the effectiveness of the 35-hour work week in France. In October 2016, Pierre Cahuc and André Zylberberg went to the point of calling "economic holocaust deniers" those who agree that reducing working time can bring down unemployment. Besides the fight against false information, one of the biggest challenge is to convince that sharing of working time is a sustainable, viable solution. This involves complementing words with more and more concrete actions, in order to accumulate local wins. For that, it is necessary to work on multiplying and valorizing the concrete, implemented examples of change in companies.

In 2013, Attac Germany launched an appeal signed by more than one hundred economists, researchers, trade union officials and some left-wing or independent politicians (Die Linke, SPD and Pirates). The call was for a normal 30-hour workweek for Europe with full compensation for income and hiring. Since then, the most active partners on the subject are the unions but also catholic employee groups, environmental groups, the forum of the unemployed, groups of women, groups of men, some researchers, some of the leftist political parties, and sometimes even companies and institutions.

A need to reformulate the terms of public debate

Perception of workers is not always positive

For employees, reducing working time is often synonymous with lost wages. Most arguments fail to convince in particular the social argument of a more fair distribution of work between those who work too much and the unemployed or underemployed. The economic argument of the annual total volume of working hours to be shared among the population is not more promising even if it has been decades since this volume is not enough, in fact, to give enough jobs to a growing demography. The arguments towards employers are also not reaching out, even though there are many benefits for companies both in terms of productivity and quality.

But the debate today exceeds the sphere of the company because precarious work causes in reaction a huge expectation of the citizens. If some wish to work less without loss of wages, others seek to work more. At the moment, sharing of working time does not seem to crystallize this growing necessity for solidarity. The idea is not generally put forward during the mobilizations of social movements. As in the fight for the 8-hour day the priority is to address people in all their diversity to convince the undecided and not lose too much energy to convince economic decision makers.

⁴ More (in French): <u>https://avenirencommun.fr/carte-programme/un-retour-aux-35h-pour-aller-vers-32h/</u>

⁵ More (in French): <u>http://www.dutravailpourtous.be/</u>

⁶ More (in French): <u>https://dutravailpourtous.fr/</u>

An idea might be to start with challenging symbols in order to create a strong will on this topic. For instance, *Roosevelt.be* will launch a campaign to free our Mondays because everyone hates Monday. In this context, citizens will be asked what they would do if their Monday was free and if they think it could create jobs.

Voluntary experiments are precious

Sweden has shown that a strong political will can lead to concrete results. Together, the Left Party, the Social Democrats and the Green Party have decided to conduct an experiment to show that it is possible to reduce working hours with good results and to share best practices. The experiment was carried out between 2015 and 2016 at the senior care center of Svartedalen. The goal was to test how the 6-hour work day has an impact on the health and quality of life of 80 nurses. But also to study the benefits of socioeconomic factors and the possibility of creating jobs. The trial included an interactive research to analyse the effects: fewer sick days, better work continuity and less stressed employees. Patients also enjoyed a better care and more time with employees.

More generally, the arguments often appear more convincing when they are pragmatic and related to concrete cases. Especially if the narrative is done by the practitioners themselves rather than by intellectuals or politicians. Many examples already exist but they are not sufficiently valued. Moreover most of the available examples are rather old, some companies have even gone backwards after experimenting, like "Macif" in France or "Audi" in Belgium. There is a consensus on the need to multiply concrete experiences to regularly have examples to show in small businesses, NGOs, cities, etc ... If shedding light on the examples is necessary, it is not sufficient to establish a new social norm: the whole society must participate.

The need to anchor sharing of working time in a broader context

Work is currently undergoing a complex and multifaceted crisis. To meet these challenges, we must radically rethink the way in which work - both paid and unpaid - is distributed, the role that work should play in society, especially in response to automation. Books such as "Inventing the Future" by Nick Srnicek & Alex Williams encourage this debate in the UK. The 4DayWeek⁷ campaign launched in 2017 by the *New Economics Foundation (NEF)* and the *Autonomy Institute* shows that a shorter workweek is an essential and beneficial element for our society, our economy, our environment and our democracy.

For instance to strengthen our communities with more time to build relationships, care for children, the elderly and the disabled. A more sustainable lifestyle – more time to cycle and walk instead of drive or cook with fresh ingredients rather than buy energy intensive ready meals. Many other topics related to the sharing of working time have been identified: demographic aging, psychosocial risks, workplace deaths, etc. For example, in the Netherlands, FNV is negotiating for intergenerational contracts to allow older workers to work less with additional income. They can work 60% but be paid 80% while maintaining the 100% pension right. FNV will notably negotiate with *ThyssenKrupp* and *Tata Steel* to provide 50% working time for 90% of the salary.

A major challenge for sharing of working time is also to move forward in the fight for equality between women and men. Part-time work is a major driver of low wages and job insecurity for women. Lowering the standard of working hours is allowing women who do not work enough to work more - and men who work too much to work less.

In Norway, the new standard to strive for is the 6-hour day with full wage compensation. 3 national women's organizations have it in their programs. In the 1970s, only 45% of women had paid work. Today, 77.1% of women are in paid work, but 34.7% of them work part time. The pay gap between men and women is such that women work free for a 6-hour day. The Rødt Party has made this issue one of its priorities⁸.

Multiple forms of reduction of working time are possible

6-hour day, 4 day-week, 35h, 32h, 30h, 28h, we observe a multiplication of claims with different forms of working time reduction to meet different social needs: automation, health, gender equality, climate, etc. There is also the idea of a phased retirement or a slow transition. Should we choose a single model?

The reality of working time is so varied that it would be really difficult to adjust a single model at the European level when it is already complicated to do it within a country, a sector, or a business. It is not conceivable that a single model is applicable to all types of workers. Not to mention that the trend is towards flexible solutions, and that hot topics for unions currently are telework or self-employed work. Choosing a model would make the debate more clear, but it would limit the extend of our collective actions since we want to use the reduction of working time to meet multiple social needs.

On one hand, we need to have an overview, in the form of a list, of the many proposals we choose to defend, including concrete examples. On the other hand, we need to define criteria for a desired general direction:

- What weekly standard? Around 28h-32h.
- In what form? The 6-hour day or the 4-day week
- At what level should the agreements be negotiated? At state law level, in collective agreements, and in company agreements.
- Who are we talking to? Speaking specifically to different audiences is essential.
- What conditions must the reduction of working time respect? First, to ensure that income is maintained and that the intensity of work is not increased. Then make sure of a real decrease in unemployment through mandatory compensatory hiring and lower inequality. For example, it is possible to finance the total wage compensation for low wages with a differential contribution based on income, income maintenance if the salary is lower than the median income and decrease if it is higher.

⁷ Read more : https://www.4dayweek.co.uk/

⁸ Read more (in Norwegian): https://rødt.no/sekstimersdag

Development of a European network for the fair sharing of working time

A network to exchange information and good practices at the European level

Since there is more than one good way to reduce working time, implementation should be designed and adapted to different situations. It must be noted that countries do not start from the same realities. When it comes to launching initiatives, the national or even local context take priority. But it is important for the network to have a common base that shows that countries are not isolated in their efforts. One of the main functions of a network on working time would be to promote the international dynamic by sharing of good practices and concrete cases.

Today, the reality is that the European promoters of work sharing are rather scattered and isolated. To connect them, there are very concrete steps to take: regular meetings, a translation challenge, a sharing of arguments, or a collaborative information watch. It is also about having a platform as international as possible. For the moment, few contacts have been established with the countries of Southern and Eastern Europe. Regular participation in the *Alter Summit* can help significantly.

Identity and structuring of a network for sharing of working time

Beyond the question of information sharing, the reason for the network's existence depends essentially on what we want to achieve collectively. At this stage the network is a completely informal structure and we are not planning to form an association or any legal structure. The priority is to work on the relationships between the participants so that everyone can find their place within the network. The first difficulty is to organize at the international level. Another very concrete challenge is to bring together different types of actors who are active on the topic: NGOs, unions, political parties, decision makers, experts, companies, media. The network must therefore work first on its identity in terms of relationships.

For example, what is the distinction between civil society and political parties? On the one hand political parties are often the target of our advocacy and it is therefore incompatible that they can animate the platform. On the other hand it would be a mistake not to involve the parties since, for example, without Thomas Handel (MEP GUE/NGL) we could not have organized a meeting in 2016. One solution might be to give political parties the status of "observers". This status must be clearly defined. For the moment, certain criteria have been debated: political parties can participate in the network but only as individuals. They can not put their logo on the platform productions or represent the platform, especially during an election campaign. On the other hand, they can participate and support the dynamic of the network.

The word "network" is used primarily because it reflects our reality today. The words "coalition" or "alliance" could also have been used. Maybe once more actors start working on these issues - popular campaigns, political parties, celebrities, intellectuals, etc. - we can say that our network is part of a larger "movement". Several projects are planned to animate this network:

Regular meetings

- 1 big meeting in June 2018 in Brussels
- 2 working meetings in April and October 2018 in Brussels.
- 2 to 3 telephone meetings per month for coordination

Discuss and define our identity

- A permanent online discussion area: Basecamp (see below)
- Choosing a name and a logo
- Drafting a charter that defines what each type of actors can or can not do on behalf of the network.

Develop the network

- Drafting of a unifying statement
- Finding ambassadors for our messages in different countries
- Production of a presentation brochure
- Compiling a list of all possible implementation options

What outreach strategies and actions for the network?

It is not easy to promote transnational or national campaigns. It takes a "momentum" for actions to work, the success or failure mostly depend on the context. To avoid being paralyzed, it is however feasible for the network to launch action projects with only a part of the network participants, not all network members need to participate in all the actions. This is essential in the mid term because we must be able to give activists from organizations represented in the network very simple things to do to start a dynamic. Here are some actions mentioned during the meeting:

- Days of joint actions in 2019 for the 100th anniversary of the 8-hour days;
- Some actions towards the media: opinion pieces, creation of small videos, press conferences;
- Create a seminar in the European Parliament;
- React collectively to defend the status quo on the European directive on working time;
- Support of the national experiments to reduce working time;
- Writing simple common content on sharing of working time. For activists and social networks.

In practice, proposal for the use of Bascamp as an online exchange space

We use Basecamp mainly to allow structured discussions and avoid receiving too many emails. To require access to basecamp or to ask technical support: david@collectif-roosevelt.fr or adrien@collectif-roosevelt.fr



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How does it work?

- https://basecamp.com/how-it-works
- https://basecamp.com/help/3/guides/home
- https://basecamp.com/learn



