

Can reducing public holidays inject the much-needed extra cash into the economy?

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the questions. Provide details for your answers.

- What is the law regarding public holidays and paid leave in your country?
- Do you think the government should force employers to give their employees paid days off? Why / Why not?
- What are some of the consequences of an overtired workforce?

2 Reading for gist

a. Read the article quickly and choose the statement that best summarises the main idea.

1. Countries with budget gaps have cut down public holidays, but this may not fix their financial problems.
2. France failed to boost its budget, and public holidays are the main cause for this.
3. Paid days off cost too much for employers to be able to afford.

3 Key words

a. Read the definitions and find the key words in the article that match them. The section number is given in brackets to help you. Check your answers and understanding of the words by using them to complete the example sentences immediately after each definition. Use a capital letter where needed. Then read the complete article to see how the key words are used in context.

1. _____ are government officials or other authorities responsible for making rules and policies. (subheading)

The _____ introduced new regulations regarding maternity leave compensation.

2. To be _____ is to be harshly and publicly criticised. (Paragraph 1)

The company was _____ for their treatment of employees with disabilities.

3. _____ is an idiom meaning to be received poorly. (Paragraph 2)

She watched her idea to swap paid leave for a small bonus _____.

4. _____ means an extremely large difference in amounts. (Paragraph 3)
There is a _____ gap between the number of paid time off in the US and in Europe.
5. To _____ means to encourage or to increase effort or start an activity. (Paragraph 4)
The CEO tried to _____ the team to finish the project on time by promising a performance bonus.
6. _____ means formally announcing something. (Paragraph 5)
The HR representative appeared at the meeting, _____ that there will be changes to the employee benefits.
7. _____ are reductions in spending. (Paragraph 6)
Because of the low sales numbers, there will be _____ in bonuses this year.
8. _____ is something too small to notice. (Paragraph 6)
The overall cost of the new holiday scheme was _____ compared to the profits from increased productivity.
9. _____ is too small or inadequate in amount or size. (Paragraph 7)
The bonus they offered was _____ and failed to motivate anyone.
10. A(n) _____ is a recovery or improvement after a period of decline. (Paragraph 7)
The sales department is optimistic about a quick _____ in the next quarter with the Christmas holidays coming up.
11. To _____ is to move or manipulate something. (Paragraph 11)
The boss tried to _____ around the budget restrictions.

12. _____ means complying with the law and regulations. (Paragraph 12)

_____ *companies should follow the right regulations for waste disposal.*

13. _____ means vague or unclear. (Paragraph 12)

After the merger, the company's future strategy remains _____.

Cutting public holidays to boost growth? Don't bank on it

REDUCING DAYS OFF IS TEMPTING FOR POLICYMAKERS, BUT REST CAN HELP US WORK MORE EFFECTIVELY

BY SRINIDHI BALAKRISHNAN

- 1 It was decried as “a direct attack” on France, lambasted as “a symbol of social violence” and, to one critic, compared to being given the finger.
- 2 It is safe to say French Prime minister François Bayrou’s attempt last month to scrap two of the country’s 11 public holidays went down like a lead balloon.
- 3 The proposal for the 2026 budget hoped that two extra days of work would boost output and help plug a yawning government deficit. “The entire nation must work more to produce [more],” Bayrou declared, comparing the month of May, dotted with four public holidays, to a Gruyère cheese full of holes.
- 4 With governments globally casting about to plug state deficits and gee-up growth, the idea of cutting public holidays can seem an enticingly quick fix. In the past few years, Denmark and Slovakia have both cut public holidays.
- 5 In the US, President Donald Trump marked Juneteenth, a new federal holiday commemorating the end of slavery, by proclaiming on Truth Social that there are “Too many non-working holidays in America. It is costing our Country \$BILLIONS OF DOLLARS to keep all of these businesses closed”. Although he himself announced two new public holidays to mark US victory in the world wars, neither will involve a break from work because “there are not enough days left in the year”.
- 6 But does working more actually produce more? Bayrou claimed his national holiday cutbacks, which would order France back to work on dates such as Easter Monday and Victory in Europe Day, would raise roughly 4.2 billion euros. That is almost a tenth of the planned 43.8 billion euros in savings needed to narrow France’s deficit, the third-worst in the EU after Romania and Poland, according to Eurostat. Yet France’s statistical agency Insee estimated that an additional worked holiday would only boost GDP by a negligible 0.06-0.08 per cent.
- 7 In England and Wales, which on August 25 observes one of a relatively measly eight annual public holidays, officials found negative effects of public holidays to GDP are partly offset by a “bounceback” the following months. Plus, while some businesses may take a hit, others such as in retail and tourism are likely to see an increase in demand. As a 2024 House of Commons briefing states, “it is challenging to measure the economic effects associated with an additional bank holiday”.
- 8 On the individual level, working longer hours is not necessarily conducive to productivity. Rest is important, particularly what psychologists call “recovery processes” away from the daily grind.
- 9 On vacation days “we’re detaching from work, so we’re essentially not using the bits of our brain and body that we would be using while working”, says Michael Clinton, a professor of work psychology at King’s College London. “There’s also a resource gain, regaining the energy and motivation that enables us to go back to work with our batteries recharged.” He points to a study by the psychologist Sabine Sonnentag, who surveyed workers and found that those who rest after work reported feeling more proactive and engaged the next day.
- 10 Not getting enough rest can also be harmful. Clinton’s research shows people have a limited capacity for “self-control”, and those who use it up at work can slip into dangerous behaviours later — they are more likely to engage in risky driving, like breaking the speed limit, for example.

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11 Physical and mental wellbeing aside, recent history tells us scrapping public holidays is not the sharpest political manoeuvre. The abolition of the Great Prayer Day holiday in Denmark in 2023 was met with fierce opposition. In France itself, the 2005 attempt to turn Whit Monday into a working “solidarity day” to fund care for the elderly faced similar resistance. “The non-remuneration of work is illegal,” declared the not-so-God-fearing Confédération Générale du Travail trade union. “It is not for employees to pay for the negligence and disengagement of the government.”

12 There is, after all, the principle of the thing. As law-abiding, hard-working citizens, we are entitled to days of rest and relaxation. It’s part of that nebulous contract we all signed with the invisible HR department. Budget deficit or not, any attempt to shift deeply embedded perceptions of work and play — and rights and responsibilities — was not to going to be easy.

FT

Srinidhi Balakrishnan, 24 August, 2025.

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4 Understanding the article

a. Are these sentences True or False according to the information in the article? Tick (✓) the true sentences and rewrite the false ones.

1. The French government tried but failed to reduce the number of public holidays. ☐
2. The French government wanted to remove the holidays because it needed more money in its budget. ☐
3. Denmark and Slovakia removed two days of public holidays. ☐
4. The US President agrees there is no money in the budget for extra holidays, so he hasn't added any. ☐
5. The French Prime Minister's plan to cut holidays would cover around 10 per cent of the budget deficit. ☐
6. England and Wales do not have many public holidays. ☐
7. The English and Welsh governments discovered that public holidays do not affect financial outputs in the long term. ☐
8. Days off may boost productivity because they support rest, which has positive effects. ☐
9. Longer holidays impact people's motivation levels negatively. ☐
10. The author thinks rest during holidays is the right of honest and hard-working citizens. ☐

5 Business language – talking about the law and government

a. Find the words in the wordpool in the article. Work with a partner and try to define what each of these words means. Then fill in the definitions below.

abolition	House of Commons	president	rights and responsibilities
citizens	illegal	Prime Minister	
federal	officials	trade union	

1. _____ is the democratically elected house of the UK Parliament, responsible for making laws and checking the work of the government.
2. _____ is the head of the government in some countries (e.g. the UK) who is elected from the ruling or majority political party.

3. _____ are the people who live in the country and have the nationality of that country.
4. _____ is the title given to the person holding the highest political position in a republic.
5. _____ means related to the central government in countries with a specific union structure such as the US or Mexico.
6. _____ is an organisation that works in the interest of people who work in a specific industry, e.g. education, to protect their rights and negotiate with employers and the government.
7. _____ is the act of ending a custom officially.
8. _____ are the people who hold power and have legal responsibility.
9. _____ means not allowed by the law.
10. _____ are the things a citizen of a country must do and is entitled to.

b. Fill in each sentence with the appropriate word or phrase from the list above.

1. Narendra Modi has been the _____ of India since 2014.
2. The _____ law regulates education funding in the US.
3. Jury duty and due process are some of the _____ of a US citizen.
4. Driving while drunk is _____ in most countries.
5. Claudia Sheinbaum is the first woman _____ of Mexico.
6. The teachers _____ regularly goes on strike to lobby for an increase of salaries in education in Poland.

c. Work with a partner. Write sentences about your own country using the vocabulary from a and b.

6 Discussion

- a. Look at the statement from the article. What do you understand by it? Do you agree with it? Why? Why not? Discuss in pairs or groups.**

As law-abiding, hard-working citizens, we are entitled to days of rest and relaxation. It's part of that nebulous contract that we all signed with the invisible HR department.

7 Wider business theme – describing a political system

- a. You are hosting a delegation of colleagues from a branch of your company that is in another country. You want to introduce them to how our country's political system affects the way your company operates here. Prepare a brief presentation explaining to them how the government of your country is structured and what the key government offices for your industry are. Look at the text below about the UK as a model.

1. Read the text below and fill in the notes with tips on the UK's political system with special regard for the pharmaceutical industry.

UK government and the regulation of pharmaceutical industry

The UK is a constitutional monarchy. The king serves as the ceremonial head of the state. The prime minister is the head of the government leading the executive branch which makes policies and legislations. Parliament consists of two chambers: The House of Commons elected by the public, and the House of Lords where some positions are hereditary. The Regulatory Agency (MHRA) regulates medicines, medical devices and blood components for transfusion in the UK. It is sponsored by the Department of Health and Social Care. However, the actual health system is different in England and Scotland who have their own NHS branches, which work differently.

2. Fill in the blanks in these notes based on the text:

- The UK has a king who is the _____ and a PM who is the _____.
- Two chambers of _____: House of Lords & House of Commons.
- The _____ is the elected branch.
- The _____ regulates medicines and medical devices.
- Important! England and Scotland do not have the same _____

3. Prepare a short presentation on the branches of your country's government. You should include:

- the main structure of the government
- what each branch of the government does
- what are the important government agencies making rules and supervising your industry
- how you work with these government agencies
- any other related information that is relevant to your industry

Useful language

In Poland, we have a president, who is ...

The government consists of two chambers ...

The government agency that regulates ... is ...

They make laws about ...

We also need to be mindful of ...