

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

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the questions. Give details.

- How many paid days off a year do you have?
- How many of these days are your annual leave and how many are public holidays?
- Why are public holidays important?

2 Reading for gist

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

1. France needs more money in their budget for 2026 and is trying different solutions.
2. Many countries reduce public holidays to improve budgets, but it isn't a good idea.
3. Paid days off cost too much money for the government to be able to afford.

3 Key words

a. Find these words in the article and try to guess what they mean. Then match the words to the definitions. Check your answers and your understanding of how the words are used by using them to complete the example sentence 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.

gee-up	nebulous	offset
enable	law-abiding	proclaiming
cutbacks	manoeuvre	the daily grind
embedded	measly	trade union
conducive	lambasted	slip into
enticingly	negligible	yawning
federal	policymakers	went down like a lead balloon
bounceback	output	

1. _____ are the people in the government who design and introduce laws.

The new tax plan was criticised heavily by the _____ themselves.

2. _____ means harshly criticised someone in public.

The public _____ the finance minister for ignoring rising unemployment.

3. If an idea or comment _____, it was received very badly.
Last year, there was a proposal to increase wages, but it _____ with senior management.
4. _____ refers to the amount of goods or services produced.
A rise in training budgets led to higher staff _____.
5. _____ an extremely large difference in amounts.
There is a(n) _____ difference between wages in the private and public sector.
6. To _____ someone is to encourage or motivate them.
The management tried to _____ the sales team with a promise of large bonuses before the Christmas season.
7. _____ means attractively, in a tempting way.
The HR department tried to _____ use its new benefits packages to hire more specialists.
8. Something described as _____ relates to the central government of a country.
The _____ budget included funding for the national employment support programme.
9. _____ means announcing something publicly.
The CEO will be _____ the results of the new marketing strategy tomorrow.
10. _____ means reductions, especially in spending.
Large _____ in training funds led to falling staff morale.
11. If something is _____, it is so small it is not worth considering.
The savings from the cancelled coffee service for staff were _____ compared to the deficit.
12. Something _____ is seen as too small and inadequate.
Employees received only a(n) _____ bonus at the end of the year.

13. To _____ means to balance one effect against another.

Rising health costs will _____ any savings from reduced overtime.

14. A(n) _____ means a quick recovery after a decline.

After the slowdown during Covid-19 lockdowns, the job market saw a surprising _____.

15. If something is _____ to a result, it means it creates a good environment for that result.

Offering the option of working from home is _____ to higher productivity and staff retention.

16. _____ means routine, everyday work and life that can feel tiring or repetitive.

Many new mothers say _____ is harder when they have to take care of the kids and work.

17. To _____ means to make something possible.

Digital tools _____ employees to work from home and save office costs.

18. To _____ means to gradually enter into a situation or state, often without noticing.

After months of low sales, sharp cuts began to _____ the budget plans.

19. To _____ means to move or manipulate something carefully.

The project leader tried to _____ around the reduced budget.

20. A(n) _____ is an organisation of workers focused on protecting their rights and campaigning for benefits.

The teachers _____ went on strike after the Ministry of Education announced the new budget.

21. If someone is _____, they follow the rules and obey the law.

Most people are _____ citizens who just want to live their life quietly.

22. If something is _____, it is vague and not clearly defined.

The minister's promises on job security in the healthcare sector remained

_____ *after the announced budget cuts.*

23. If something is _____, it is well fixed and difficult to remove.

With aging populations, high pension costs are _____ in the system

and hard to reform.

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 vFrance’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. Read the article carefully. Then pick the correct option (a, b or c).

1. The French government tried but failed to reduce the number of public holidays because ...
 - a. people protested.
 - b. they realised the financial benefits would be negligible.
 - c. they found other ways to cover the budget gaps.
2. The French Prime Minister suggested that ...
 - a. people are lazy and don't work enough.
 - b. May has too many public holidays, which reduce the economic output.
 - c. multiple public holidays in May created the budget deficit.
3. Denmark and Slovakia ...
 - a. removed some days of public holidays.
 - b. have huge budget deficits due to too many public holidays.
 - c. don't have enough workers.
4. The US President ...
 - a. added extra public holidays free of work.
 - b. added extra public holidays but did not make them free of work.
 - c. removed public holiday days because they cost too much money.
5. The French Prime Minister's plan to cut holidays would cover the cost of ...
 - a. the entire budget gap.
 - b. the entire 2026 budget.
 - c. around 10 per cent of the budget deficit.

6. England and Wales ...
 - a. have more public holidays than Scotland.
 - b. have no public holidays.
 - c. do not have many public holidays.
7. English and Welsh governments discovered that ...
 - a. public holidays do not greatly affect financial outputs in the long term.
 - b. public holidays negatively affect financial outputs in the long term.
 - c. public holidays have a very large positive effect on the GDP.
8. Days off may boost productivity because ...
 - a. people spend more money when they have free time.
 - b. they support rest which has positive effects on productivity.
 - c. other people work during that time.
9. Longer holidays impact people's motivation levels ...
 - a. negatively.
 - b. positively.
 - c. neither positively nor negatively because motivation is a personal trait.
10. The author thinks ...
 - a. rest during holidays is the right of honest and hard-working people.
 - b. only people who work hard should get time off to rest.
 - c. we need to change how people view work and play time.

5 Business language – reduction with *-ing* forms

a. Look at the sentences from the article and compare the two versions.

A1: 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 ...”

A2: In the US, President Donald Trump marked Juneteenth, **a new federal holiday that commemorates the end of slavery**, by proclaiming on Truth Social that there are “Too many non-working holidays in America ...”

B1: Bayrou declared, **comparing the month of May**, dotted with four public holidays, to a Gruyère cheese full of holes.

B2: Bayrou declared, and he **compared the month of May**, dotted with four public holidays, to a Gruyère cheese full of holes.

b. Answer the questions.

1. What do you notice about the difference between A1 and A2?

- Which sentence is shorter?
- How did the writer make the sentence shorter?
- Which sounds more formal?

2. What do you notice about the difference between B1 and B2?

- How does B1 reduce two clauses into one?

3. Why does the writer use the *-ing* form instead of the longer version?

c. Transform the sentences by reducing the relative clause or combining clauses by using the *-ing* form without losing the meaning.

1. The CEO announced changes to the use of office space that encourage remote work.

2. She entered the meeting room, and she was carrying the necessary legal documents.

3. The company hired several new programmers who specialise in AI.

4. He explained the plan, and he highlighted its potential risks.

5. The report outlined a strategy that aims to reduce costs.

6 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- Do you agree with the last paragraph that honest, hard-working citizens deserve paid time off and rest?
- Do you agree with the author that it is hard to change the perception of how many holidays people deserve? Why might it be difficult?
- Do you think there are differences between how people in different countries view paid time off? For example, the article mentions the US and France. What are some of the differences between paid time off in these countries?

7 Wider business theme – working with different cultures

- a. You work for a multinational company that works in different countries. Your company has multiple teams that work across borders and time zones. This means that the management needs to learn about cultural differences regarding paid time off, holidays and people's attitudes to those topics. The company is preparing an info document outlining these differences to train their management team. You were asked to fill in the part about your own country.

1. Read the text below and fill in the gaps in the notes.

Not all countries are made equal when it comes to time off

People from different cultures have different expectations about work dynamics, paid time off, and rest. In the United States, working long hours and responding quickly to emails and calls are often seen as signs of commitment. Most employees may feel pressure to stay connected even during vacations. In contrast, many European countries, especially in the EU, place a strong emphasis on work-life balance and workers' rights. Employees are legally entitled to disconnect outside

working hours. In countries like France, Germany and Spain, it is illegal to expect staff to answer work calls or emails during their time off. Europeans also typically take their full paid leave each year. Some countries, like Poland, require employers to enable workers to have a minimum of a fortnight's holiday every year. By contrast, in the US, some companies discourage people from disappearing from work for long periods of time.

Aspect	United States	Europe (EU)
Overall work culture	Often working (1) _____ hours and responding rapidly to emails / calls are valued.	Emphasis on (2) _____ and respecting personal time.
Responding outside work	Employees feel (3) _____ to stay connected during vacations.	Employees are (4) _____ entitled to not respond outside working hours.
Paid leave	People are (5) _____ from taking long holidays.	Employees take their (6) _____ paid leave each year.

- Write a short description of the holiday and day off culture in your country. Include the elements listed in the left-hand column of the table above.
- Share your description with your partner. If you are from the same country, did you include similar information? If you are from different countries, what did you find surprising about your partner's description?

Useful language

In Mexico, the employee is entitled to ...

The employer is legally required to ...

Usually, people do not ...

You have to be mindful of ...

In contrast to many other places, Poland ...