

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING NEWSLETTER



ETUI-REHS
European Trade Union Institute
RESEARCH
EDUCATION
HEALTH & SAFETY



AMSTERDAM INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED LABOUR STUDIES
UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM



YEAR 2, NO. 1 – JANUARY 2009

This newsletter presents up-to-date information on collective bargaining developments across Europe. It aims to facilitate information exchange between trade unions and to support the work of the ETUC's collective bargaining committee.

Contents

AUSTRIA	1
More flexible short-time rules to be adopted	
Union calls for representation in health reform talks	
Unions unimpressed by pay offer	
BELGIUM	1
Unions succeed to improve temporary unemployment arrangements	
BULGARIA	2
Minimum wages in construction increased	
CZECH REPUBLIC	2
Health unions consider industrial action over homes for the elderly	
FINLAND	2
Social partners agree on social policy package	
FRANCE	2
Short-time payments lifted	
GERMANY	3
Massive growth of short-time work expected	
Unions step up minimum wage campaign	
Union seeks better pay for childcare workers	
No progress in regional government negotiations	
IRELAND	4
Employers attack public sector pensions	
Government and social partners divided over crisis measures	
ITALY	4
Metalworkers and public servants plan strike	
LATVIA	4
Trade unions protest against government policies	
LITHUANIA	5
Broad protest against draconic government plans	
NETHERLANDS	5
Short-time support extended	
Union calls for 3.5% wage increase for care workers	
PORTUGAL	5
Public sector workers get 2.9% increase	
ROMANIA	6
Bank staff union postpones strike	
SLOVENIA	6
Union confederation wants control over short-time subsidies	
SPAIN	6
Agreement covers firefighters' training and safety	

SWEDEN

6

Global agreement with Elanders printing and publishing

UNITED KINGDOM

7

Civil service union plans meetings over pay agreement

Local government unions submit pay claim pay

AUSTRIA

More flexible short-time rules to be adopted

January 23, 2009

In January, the number of workers covered by the official "Kurzarbeitsbeihilfe" or "Kurzarbeit" (short-time support) provided by the Arbeitsmarktservice (AMS) will most likely grow to over 15,000. Talks between government and social partners have paved the way for a more flexible adoption of the current "Kurzarbeit" regulation. The government coalition parties have prepared an initiative proposal for such more flexible adoption, which will be decided upon in February. Press information suggests that the maximum term for adoption, currently one year, will be prolonged to 18 months (See also this *Collective Bargaining Newsletter* Year 1 No. 10).

(German: <http://www.wirtschaftsblatt.at/home/oesterreich/branchen/356863/index.do>;

<http://www.wienerzeitung.at/DesktopDefault.aspx?TabID=3858&Alias=wzo&cob=392781>)

Union calls for representation in health reform talks

January 7, 2009

The GÖD public service trade union has said that hospital workers should not lose out as a result of health reforms and has criticised government plans for cuts in finance. The union's president for health and social care, Johann Hable, has called for the union to be represented in discussions over health reforms in order to ensure that workers do not end up paying the price for the changes. (See also this *Collective Bargaining Newsletter* Year 1 No. 6).

(English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/281>; German: <http://www.goed.at/14823.html>)

Unions unimpressed by pay offer

January 22, 2009

The GPA-DJP and GMTN unions, representing workers in private electricity companies, have stated that the employers' initial pay offer of just over 3% was completely inadequate bearing in mind recent pay settlements. The employers focused on the current economic climate but the unions reminded them of the substantial profits that electricity companies have made in recent years. The unions will not resume negotiations until 29 January in order to convene a meeting of works council chairs on 26 January to discuss negotiating tactics. The employers also want to negotiate over working time flexibility.

(English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/282>;

German: http://www.gpa-djp.at/servlet/ContentServer?pagename=GPA/Page/Index&n=GPA_2.a&cid=1231810532141)

BELGIUM

Unions succeed to improve temporary unemployment arrangements

January 7, 2009

The three trade union confederations have succeeded in gaining improvements in the unemployment regulation, especially in the temporary unemployment arrangements – to be compared with the short-time arrangements of the surrounding countries. Per 1 January 2009 the temporary unemployment benefit has been lifted by 10%, based on a reference amount of gross Euro 2,200 a month instead of gross Euro 1,900. A debate in parliament is going on concerning the desirability to expand temporary unemployment arrangements, which in case of economic reasons only apply to blue collar workers, not to white collar workers.

(Dutch: <http://www.fgtb.be/CODE/nl/fram001.htm>; http://www.belgium.be/nl/werk/werkloosheid/tijdelijke_werkloosheid/;

French: <http://www.fgtb.be/code/fr/fram001.htm>; http://www.belgium.be/fr/emploi/chomage/chomage_temporaire/)

BULGARIA

Minimum wages in construction increased

January 2, 2009

Low-skilled construction workers will be paid no less than BGN 360 (Euro 184) a month in 2009 under a two-year collective agreement signed between employers and trade unions, the Bulgarian Construction Chamber (BCC) said. This wage level is 50% above the national minimum wage laid down per 1 January 2009. High-skilled construction workers will earn a monthly minimum of BGN (Leva) 540, while supervisors will make no less than BGN 770 a month. The agreement is aiming at curbing the grey economy and protecting the interests of loyal construction companies, BCC explained (See also this *Collective Bargaining Newsletter* Year 1 No.'s 7, 8, 9 and 10).

(English: http://www.sofiaecho.com/article/minimum-wages-in-construction-increased-to-360-leva/id_33812/catid_67)

CZECH REPUBLIC

Health unions consider industrial action over homes for the elderly

January 22, 2009

The health and social services unions have announced they may take industrial action in protest at the funding of homes for the elderly. The unions argue that the funding crisis is undermining the service provided by the homes and is a factor in the low wages in the sector, with average salaries of CZK (Czech crowns) 14,500 (Euro 530), or CZK 6,000 (Euro 220) below the Czech national average wage.

(English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/282>; <http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/news/zpravy/czech-unions-threaten-to-strike-over-situation-in-elderly-homes/356159>)

FINLAND

Social partners agree on social policy package

January 26, 2009

Social partners have reached common understanding on changes in unemployment benefits and the financing of pensions. The organisations include the union confederations SAK, STTK and Akava and the employers' Confederation of Finnish Industry (EK). The social policy package is a compromise on important social policy issues that have in recent times been under discussion. Trade unionists regard the negotiations and their outcomes as a continuation of the income policy agreements existing since the late 1960s. The package proposes improvements in unemployment benefits. Unemployed members of the unemployment fund will be entitled to income-based unemployment benefit after having been employed for eight months during the 28 months preceding his or her unemployment. Actually the minimum condition is 10 months of work.

(English: <http://www.artto.kaapeli.fi/unions/T2009/m03>)

FRANCE

Short-time payments lifted

January 3, 2009

As was to be expected, the government has lifted the payments for workers in companies under the French short-time compensation program ("chômage technique" or "chômage partiel") per 1 January 2009 from 50% to 60% of gross wages, and the minimum hourly amount from Euro 4.42 to Euro 6.84. Moreover, the 600-hours' term per worker for application of the program has generally been lifted to 800 hours and for the textile, clothing and leather industry and the car industry to 1,000 hours (See also this *Collective Bargaining Newsletter* Year 1 No. 10).

(French: <http://eco.rue89.com/2009/01/04/le-chomage-partiel-etendu-travailler-moins-et-gagner-moins>)

GERMANY

Massive growth of short-time work expected

January 24, 2009

Olaf Scholz, Minister of Labour, has said to expect a massive growth of applications for the official short-time arrangement ("Kurzarbeit"), in view of the current economic crisis. Scholz said to count for 2009 with 250,000 short-time workers on average. He added that the government is prepared for a large-scale use of the short-time regulation and that funding is guaranteed: "We have reserved Euro 16 billion, and this will do till deep in next year" (See also this *Collective Bargaining Newsletter* Year 1 No. 10).

(German: <http://www.noows.de/arbeitsminister-scholz-rechnet-mit-einer-welle-von-kurzarbeit-5442>)

Unions step up minimum wage campaign

January 7, 2009

The ver.di service union and the NGG food and catering union are raising the minimum wage issue in regional elections. In a campaign "Vote for the minimum wage" the unions are highlighting the results of a recent opinion poll that found 81% of people in favour of a minimum wage as a response to growing child poverty. A recent government report found one in eight children in Germany at risk of poverty. The union campaign includes the use of container lorries with minimum wage information displays. The containers are deposited in city centres for people to visit and find out more about the issues around poverty pay and minimum wages (See also this *Collective Bargaining Newsletter* Year 1 No. 9).

(English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/281>;

German: <http://presse.verdi.de/pressemitteilungen/showNews?id=75f9ced0-cffb-11dd-742f-0019b9e321cd>)

Union seeks better pay for childcare workers

January 22, 2009

Services union ver.di is negotiating with public sector employers over pay rates for 200,000 childcare and other workers in public education and social services. Currently childcare employees are in pay grade 6 which means that they have a starting salary of Euro 2,130 a month. Ver.di argues that this pay level fails to reflect the increased responsibility and workload for these workers and that they should be moved up to pay level 9 with monthly salaries of between Euro 2,237 and Euro 3,423. The union also wants to see better safety provisions covering these workers and those working with disabled. The stress of the job and physical demands mean that many employees suffer from headaches and back problems.

(English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/282>; German: <http://presse.verdi.de/pressemitteilungen/showNews?id=b4b5739a-e6f5-11dd-7ddf-0019b9e321cd>)

No progress in regional government negotiations

January 22, 2009

The first round of negotiations between unions and regional government employers failed to bring any significant process. The two sides were left some way apart according to the ver.di service union general secretary Frank Bsirske. Ver.di called for an 8% increase for the 700,000 workers in regional government with a minimum increase of Euro 200 a month. The union also wants to see trainees get an extra Euro 120 a month as well as a guarantee of employment after training. Ver.di is looking to ensure that regional government employees catch up with pay levels in local and central government. The union also wants to negotiate an agreement on equal pay.

(English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/282>; German: <http://presse.verdi.de/pressemitteilungen/showNews?id=1c6269b2-e627-11dd-6b33-0019b9e321cd>)

IRELAND

Employers attack public sector pensions

January 22, 2009

The IMPACT public service union has reacted strongly to suggestions from the IBEC private employers' organisation that public sector pensions should be cut back. Impact argues that the employers are using the economic crisis to launch another attack on public sector workers and that they overstate the level of pension that most public servants are likely to get at retirement. IMPACT also responded by highlighting the fact that employers benefit from low levels of tax and social security contributions.

(English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/282>; http://www.impact.ie/iopen24/newsdesk_info.php?newsdesk_id=194)

Government and social partners divided over crisis measures

January 27, 2009

Government and social partners are remaining bitterly divided over public spending cuts. Cutting the early childcare payment will be among the measures considered by ministers on 27 January as they continue to seek ways to slash Euro 2 billion from public spending. The so-called "list of possibles" the Cabinet will go through also includes capital spending on roads, regional airports and higher-education building projects. Concerning the pay talks, unions said progress had been made in redrafting the framework document for the talks but key headlines for discussion, and alterations to text, still have to be agreed. The Government is still saying a deal will have to be struck by around the end of the month, but the lack of progress prompted speculation that the timeframe for agreement on the cuts could extend as far away as the end of next month (See also this *Collective Bargaining Newsletter* Year 1 No.'s 4, 9 and 10).

(English: <http://www.independent.ie/national-news/crisis-pay-talks-deadlocked-as-job-losses-soar-1615607.html> via <http://www.labourstart.org/>)

ITALY

Metalworkers and public servants plan strike

January 22, 2009

Members of the CGIL confederation's metalworking (FIOM) and public service (FP CGIL) federations will be taking strike action on 13 February. The two federations are coming together in protest at a range of government policies that are attacking public sector workers, public services and undermining progress towards equality not just between men and women workers but also between domestic and migrant workers. The federations also argue that government policies are weakening workers' rights in both public and private sectors.

(English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/282>; Italian: <http://www.fpcgil.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/9124>)

LATVIA

Trade unions protest against government policies

January 22, 2009

Police estimated that 10,000 people joined the demonstration on 13 January in Riga against government economic policies, making it the biggest since the country's independence in 1991. The fact that a small group of rioters clashed with the police could not hide the broad support the demonstration got from the trade union side and from the Latvian general public. The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) called for a New Social Deal across Europe that would provide an alternative to the neo-liberal policies being proposed by the governments of Latvia and Lithuania. As John Monks, general secretary, declared, ETUC wants to see more of a focus on decent work rather than policies that resort to cuts in pay and reliance on precarious employment.

(English: <http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5gF8KGHYUhCXSEEH4Pa7fiWjyGK2AD95MKBC00>; <http://www.etuc.org/a/5732>; French: <http://www.etuc.org/a/5733>)

LITHUANIA

Broad protest against draconic government plans

January 22, 2009

Organised by the public service unions LPSK and LVDPS and opposition parties, on 16 January in the capital Vilnius a demonstration took place in protest against the draconian measures the Lithuanian government is attempting to push through in reaction to the economic crisis. Reports indicate, for example, that this government is planning a 15% cut in the public sector wage bill. Both ETUC and the European Federation of Public Service Workers (EPSU) sent messages of support to the Lithuanian trade unions.

(English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/282>; <http://www.epsu.org/a/4455>; <http://www.etuc.org/a/5732>; French: <http://www.etuc.org/a/5733>)

NETHERLANDS

Short-time support extended

January 24, 2009

On 15 January, under heavy pressure of the three trade union confederations and the employers' associations the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment, Piet Hein Donner, announced that the deadline for applications to the official short-time arrangement has been extended another six weeks to 1 March 2009 (and not to 1 April, like the social partners jointly had asked earlier). Four days later the minister said to accept that the costs involved would go over the former limit of Euro 200 million. He envisaged that after 1 March a weaker version of the arrangement will be introduced, to be discussed in the so-called crisis team that has been put up of government, unions and employers' associations. The FNV union confederation has plead for continuation of the short-time arrangement linked up with training programs and labour pools, pointing at the continuously large labour shortages in a number of sectors (See also this *Collective Bargaining Newsletter* Year 1 No. 10). (Dutch: *NRC-Handelsblad*, 14, 15, 17, 19 and 24 January 2009; information Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment).

Union calls for 3.5% wage increase for care workers

January 22, 2009

Public service union AbvaKabo FNV has called for a 3.5% pay increase for the 500,000 workers employed in health and social care and covered by three major collective agreements – hospitals, mental health and disabled care. The union argues that the sector is being affected by demographic change with staff shortages at the same time as there is an increasing demand from an ageing population, with the numbers in care likely to rise by 50% to 1.5 million over the next 15 years. As part of the claim the union also wants a 13th month payment.

(English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/282>; Dutch:

http://www.abvakabofnv.nl/cao/bericht/35_procent_meer_loon_en_13e_maand_voor_500000_zorgmedewerkers/)

PORTUGAL

Public sector workers get 2.9% increase

January 22, 2009

Salaries for public sector workers rose by 2.9% from 1 January 2009. With a sharp drop in inflation to 0.8% in the year to December this means that workers should see a real increase in pay over the year. However, this will only begin to compensate them for a loss of purchasing power of between 7.2% and 10.4% in the years 2000 - 2008.

(English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/282>)

ROMANIA

Bank staff union postpones strike

January 13, 2009

Employees of Romania's biggest bank BCR, with over 9,000 employees and owned by Austria-based Erste Bank, postponed a pay strike planned for 14 January after receiving a new pay offer. "There will be no strike tomorrow in BCR," Ciprian Ionescu, head of the bank's Independent Trade Union told a local television station, adding : "The conflict is not over. We will decide what comes next after talks." The union demanded an additional 3% wage increase over the bank's offer to raise wages by half of Romania's 6.6% inflation rate in 2008.

(English: <http://www.reuters.com/article/rbssFinancialServicesAndRealEstateNews/idUSLD14550720090113> via http://www.labourstart.org/cgi-bin/show_news.pl?country=Romania)

SLOVENIA

Union confederation wants control over short-time subsidies

January 19, 2009

The largest trade union confederation, ZSSS, announced that it will demand to see the accounts of companies subsidised for introducing shorter working weeks. ZSSS president Dusan Semolic reiterated that the new act providing subsidies to companies working shorter hours does not prevent pay cuts; he stressed that the legislation should specify that wages should not drop. Unionists find it unacceptable that public funding would be turned into companies' profits. The legislation, that passed parliament on 14 January, stipulates that companies shortening the working week from 40 to 36 hours get Euro 60 per worker in monthly subsidies. They will be eligible for another Euro 60 per employee if they agree with in-company unions to shorten the week to 32 hours. The total budget envisaged for this measure is Euro 230 million.

(English: <http://www.ukom.gov.si/eng/slovenia/publications/slovenia-news/8141/8222/>;
<http://www.ukom.gov.si/eng/slovenia/publications/slovenia-news/8141/8167/>)

SPAIN

Agreement covers firefighters' training and safety

January 22, 2009

The FSAP-CCOO public service federation has signed a new framework agreement with CONBÉ, an association of fire service consortia that covers around 4,000 firefighters across 2,000 municipalities. The agreement covers training and aims to improve the way that fire services deal with health and safety of firefighters.

(English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/282>; Spanish: <http://www.fsap.ccoo.es/webfsap/menu.do?Inicio:47836>)

SWEDEN

Global agreement with Elanders printing and publishing

January 27, 2009

UNI Global Union and Sweden-based printer and publisher Elanders have signed a global agreement that guarantees international labour standards at work and employees' organising rights and sets a new standard for working conditions and union rights in the printing and publishing industry. The accord is the result of coordinated action by UNI's Swedish affiliate Grafiska, other UNI affiliates representing Elanders employees around the globe and UNI Graphical who organised the series of consultations between the company and the unions leading to the agreement. "The co-operation with Elanders and their pro-worker attitude marks a turning-point in the printing industry and sets a model we are confident other companies will follow ", said Adriana Rosenzvaig, head of UNI Graphical.

(English:

UNITED KINGDOM

Civil service union plans meetings over pay agreement

January 7, 2008

At the end of 2008 the PCS civil service union secured a framework agreement with the government that allowed efficiency savings to be taken into account in pay negotiations across the civil service. However, the union is keenly aware that the agreement is only the beginning of the process and the challenge now is to monitor what takes place at local level to determine whether individual ministries, agencies and other employers shift their bargaining positions accordingly. The union has decided to organise a round of regional campaign forums during January 2009, to discuss the national agreement and consider the next stage of the union campaign (See also this *Collective Bargaining Newsletter* Year 1 No.'s 6, 7, 9 and 10).

(English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/281>; http://www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/index.cfm/id/B51C3238-C9C0-4881-8122A073DADA5CFC)

Local government unions submit pay claim pay

January 22, 2009

The three main local government unions – UNISON, GMB and Unite – have submitted their pay claim for 2009-2010. They want a pay increase that compensates for inflation with higher increases for the lower paid. The unions want a 12-month agreement and are not looking for any other changes in terms and conditions. A detailed document supporting the claim has been published. It compares pay rates in local government with pay in the rest of the public sector and with similar jobs in the private sector. The report also looks at minimum pay and shows that the lowest pay rate in local government is just over 10% below the average minimum rate in 36 other public sector agreements (See also this *Collective Bargaining Newsletter* Year 1 No.'s 3, 8 and 9).

(English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/282#a4480>; http://www.unison.org.uk/news/news_view.asp?did=5097)

For more information, please contact the editor Maarten van Klaveren, Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Labour Studies – AIAS (M.vanKlaveren@uva.nl), or the communications officer of the ETUI-REHS Tristan Macdonald (tmacdonald@etui-rehs.org). For previous issues of the *Collective bargaining newsletter* please visit www.etui-rehs.org/publications.

You may find further information on the ETUI-REHS at www.etui-rehs.org, and on the AIAS at www.uva-aiaas.net.

© ETUI-REHS, Brussels 2009

All rights reserved. We encourage the distribution of this newsletter and of the information it contains, for non-commercial purposes and provided the source is credited.

The ETUI-REHS is not responsible for the content of external internet sites.

The ETUI-REHS is financially supported by the European Community. The European Community is not responsible for any use made of the information contained in this publication.

To unsubscribe, please contact Tristan Macdonald (tmacdonald@etui-rehs.org).
