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# collective bargaining

Issue 7/2011 | July/August

This newsletter presents up-to-date information on collective bargaining developments across Europe since February 2008. It aims to facilitate information exchange between trade unions and to support the work of the ETUC's collective bargaining committee.



AMSTERDAM INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED LABOUR STUDIES  
UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM



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## Austria

### Unions organise extra-parliamentary hearing

*August 25, 2011*

The GPA-DJP and vida trade unions have been lobbying for better funding for the care sector and improvements to employment and working conditions of care workers. The unions have also been calling for a parliamentary enquiry into the sector to establish what level of funding and what kind of changes are needed to ensure that the sector can deal with the future demand for care. There has been no response to the call for an enquiry and so the unions have organized their own public hearing in Vienna on 19 September.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/436>

German: [http://www.gpa-djp.at/servlet/ContentServer?pagename=GPA/Page/Index ...](http://www.gpa-djp.at/servlet/ContentServer?pagename=GPA/Page/Index...)

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## Belgium

### Less benefit entitlements enlarge gender pay gap

*August 16, 2011*

The fact that male workers have more chances to be entitled to additional social benefits (pension plan, additional sickness insurance, et cetera) enlarges the gender pay gap. This is a main conclusion of recent research by the HIVA institute and the Faculty of Economics of the Catholic University Leuven. Based on the vacancy and salary survey 2008, the researchers calculated the "net" pay gap at 14.3%. If the additional social benefits are included, the gap increases to 18.0%.

Dutch: [http://www.abvv.be/web/guest/news-nl/-/article/313194 ...](http://www.abvv.be/web/guest/news-nl/-/article/313194...)

French: [http://www.abvv.be/web/guest/news-fr/-/article/317103 ...](http://www.abvv.be/web/guest/news-fr/-/article/317103...)

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### Division between white and blue collar workers declared unconstitutional

*July 8, 2011*

On 7 July, the Belgian Constitutional Court has declared the division in terms and conditions between white collar workers ("bedienden") and blue collar workers ("arbeiders") unconstitutional. Differences in terms of notice and waiting days in case of sickness allowance are discriminatory, and have to be removed within exactly two years, the Court judged. On its website, the FGTB/ABVV confederation hails this judgement, and says to feel supported in striving towards harmonized and non-discriminatory terms and conditions.

Dutch: [http://www.abvv.be/web/guest/news-nl/-/article/306466 ...](http://www.abvv.be/web/guest/news-nl/-/article/306466...)

French: [http://www.abvv.be/web/guest/news-fr/-/article/306079 ...](http://www.abvv.be/web/guest/news-fr/-/article/306079...)

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## Cyprus

### Difficult conditions for union negotiators

*August 31, 2011*

In June, unions entered the social dialogue with government concerning austerity measures government and political parties wanted to apply. Though the union movement was left alone, negotiations went rather well. That ended on 11 July, when a huge ammunition explosion blew up the country's power station, besides taking 13 lives causing billions of Euros of damage to the economy. In this situation and despite union efforts, parliament decided to a number of salary cuts for public sector employees. They have to contribute 3% of their salaries towards future pension benefits, with immediate effect. New hires have to pay into the social insurance fund, as opposed to

the present system with contributions paid by the state. As a temporary measure for two years, white collar public servants will pay progressive contributions between 1.5% and 3.5% for incomes above ? 1,500 per month. For blue collar workers, the SEK union confederation succeeded to limit the contribution to only 0.5%. A second package of austerity measures will be decided on 15 September. In between, the unions will put their efforts to avoid more cuts.

English: message of Tasos Kakoullis, organising secretary SEK Cyprus Workers Confederation

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## Czech Republic

### **Health and social care union asks for higher pay**

*August 18, 2011*

The Czech Health and Social Care Trade Union insists on a 10% increase in the salaries of all employees in the sector next year, its chairwoman Dagmar Zitnikova said on Wednesday 17 August. The government promised in a memorandum it signed with doctors' unions exactly half a year ago to raise the salaries of doctors by 10% as from March, while the salaries of other health care employees are to be raised in 2012. However, health care insurance companies have already stated to pay hospitals 5% less for treatment next year, and therefore the unions say they are afraid the hospitals will not have money to raise wages of employees other than doctors. The unions argue this may result in social unrest and they want to discuss the issue with government and employers in the tripartite meeting in September. On 12 July, unions staged a protest rally against the government's health reform package outside the Health Ministry.

English: [http://praguemonitor.com/2011/08/18/czech-unions-call-higher-pay ...](http://praguemonitor.com/2011/08/18/czech-unions-call-higher-pay...)  
[http://praguemonitor.com/2011/07/13/trade-unions-stage-rally-against ...](http://praguemonitor.com/2011/07/13/trade-unions-stage-rally-against...)

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## Estonia

### **Nominal wages increase but purchasing power still falling**

*August 30, 2011*

Recent figures from Statistics Estonia show that the average monthly gross wages increased by 4.2% in the second quarter of 2011 compared to the same period of 2010, but purchasing power remains on a downward trajectory: inflation in July 2011 reached 5.3% on a year-on-year basis. Thus real wages, or the purchasing power of wage-earners, decreased by 1% on a yearly basis, declining for the 11th quarter in succession, though nominal wage rose for the fifth consecutive quarter.

English: <http://news.err.ee/economy/b6368f53-4b28-4f4d-aaa8-5233f5a90b65>

### **Union leadership criticizes unbalanced lowering of taxes**

*June 29, 2011*

By the end of June trade union leaders convened to discuss decision-making in parliament on economic and social issues. They in particular criticized the general lowering of income tax as unbalanced. The chairman of the Estonian Confederation of Trade Unions, Harri Taliga, stated: "If income tax for all is to fall uniformly by one percent, employees with high wages would gain most while revenue to the state budget would fall significantly". He pointed out that low-income earners would not profit, while they would suffer from the decline in social services financed from tax revenue.

English: <http://www.baltictimes.com/news/articles/28938/>

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## Finland

### **Unions back government call for coordinated agreements**

*August 29, 2011*

The Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions SAK has echoed the call of Finance Minister Jutta

Urpilainen to find ways to combine economic and wage policies together with both sides of industry and the government. On Monday 15 August, Urpilainen called for a return to a national agreement on wages and conditions promising that the government will participate in the process. For its part, the SAK says co-operation in the current climate is the best way to secure the purchasing power of employees and to strengthen employment and competitiveness. So far, the employers' association, the Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK), opposes a return to national agreements preferring deals in individual sector and businesses. Earlier the Finnish Confederation of Professionals STTK already made a plea for coordinated wage policies. More recently, Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen pushed for negotiations on confederation level by promising lower income taxation if social partners agree on a solution that safeguards the competitiveness of the country's economy.

English: <http://www.artto.kaapeli.fi/unions/T2011/032>

[http://www.yle.fi/uutiset/news/2011/08/unions\\_back\\_ministers\\_call\\_for\\_collective ...](http://www.yle.fi/uutiset/news/2011/08/unions_back_ministers_call_for_collective...)

[http://yle.fi/uutiset/news/2011/08/katainen\\_talks\\_cooperation\\_with\\_labour ...](http://yle.fi/uutiset/news/2011/08/katainen_talks_cooperation_with_labour...)

### **Steelworkers protest wage dumping**

*August 7, 2011*

On 4 and 5 August, over 1,000 employees at the Rautaruukki steel plant in Raahe participated in a two-day strike action. In doing so they demonstrated solidarity with the Polish workers who had been repairing a blast furnace at the plant since June. According to the Finnish Construction Trade Union, the Polish colleagues are victims of wage dumping, as they should be paid at least ? 15.54 per hour but their actual wages are ? 4 per hour or even less. The union holds that Beroa Deutschland, subcontracted to undertake the repair work, has committed itself to full compliance with the collective agreement, applicable to the tasks the Polish masons are performing, but that it has chosen to ignore the agreement in a flagrant manner. Beroa, whose headquarters are based in Spain, denies the union claims.

English: [http://www.yle.fi/uutiset/news/2011/08/steel\\_workers\\_end\\_walk\\_out ...](http://www.yle.fi/uutiset/news/2011/08/steel_workers_end_walk_out...)

<http://www.artto.kaapeli.fi/unions/T2011/029>

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## **France**

### **Loss of purchasing power in state sector**

*August 25, 2011*

The UGFF-CGT state sector federation has updated its figures on the loss of purchasing power faced by public sector workers since 2000. While inflation has risen by more than 21% over this period, the index point used to calculate public sector salaries has increased by only 9%. To show the impact of this, the UGFF-CGT gives examples of different salaries and what they would have been, had they kept up with inflation. The loss of purchasing power is between ? 181 to ? 538 per month, depending on the salary level (See also this Collective Bargaining Newsletter Year 4 February 2011).

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/436>

French: <http://www.ugff.cgt.fr/spip.php?article1822>

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## **Germany**

### **Union seeks alternative for job cuts at energy giant**

*August 25, 2011*

E.ON, the country's biggest energy company, has announced plans for savings of ?1.5 billion by 2015 that would involve cutting around 11,000 jobs from its total global workforce of 85,000. As many as 6,000 of these job cuts will be in Germany. The company has not ruled out compulsory redundancies. The ver.di union and the E.ON works council argue that workers are being forced to shoulder an unfair share of the savings. They also point out that there is an agreement that there should be no compulsory redundancies before the end of 2012. Ver.di wants to look at the company's figures in more detail and will be working with experts of the Hans Böckler Foundation to come up with alternatives to the company's proposals.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/436>

German: [http://www.verdi.de/themen/nachrichten/++co++dd1c3dd6-c806-11e0 ...](http://www.verdi.de/themen/nachrichten/++co++dd1c3dd6-c806-11e0...)

### **Strike for collective agreement at home care company**

*August 25, 2011*

Members of the ver.di trade union working at three care homes in Berlin are taking all-out strike action in order to get a collective agreement. The strike began at the three Alpenland care homes on 18 August. The ver.di collective bargaining committee has demanded a framework agreement covering working time, shifts, shift pay and annual leave and has given the employers until 28 August to respond. Workers at other Alpenland homes are covered by collective bargaining and this means that they are on better pay and conditions, earning around ? 300 a month more than those striking for a collective agreement.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/436>

German: [http://www.verdi.de/themen/geld-tarif/++co++e5cdfd9e-ca76-11e0 ...](http://www.verdi.de/themen/geld-tarif/++co++e5cdfd9e-ca76-11e0...)

### **Slightly higher wage increase in first half year**

*August 18, 2011*

In July 2011, the Institute of Economic and Social Research (WSI) presented its interim report on collective bargaining. The study evaluates the collective agreements concluded by trade unions affiliated with the DGB in the first half of 2011, affecting about 25% of all employees covered by such agreements. Calculated on an annual basis, the average nominal increase in wages and salaries will be around 2% in 2011, slightly above the average of 1.7% for 2010. This rise reflects the improvement in the economy. However, as prices in 2011 seem to be increasing more than predicted, employees in some industries might not enjoy real wage increases. On the other hand, data provided by the Federal Statistical Agency indicates that effective gross wages might increase more than collectively agreed wages. The average increase in eastern German pay levels is estimated to be about 2.2%, thereby bringing the 2011 increases above the western German level.

English: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/2011/07/articles/de1107019i.htm>

German: [http://www.boeckler.de/pdf/p\\_ta\\_hjb\\_2011.pdf](http://www.boeckler.de/pdf/p_ta_hjb_2011.pdf)

### **Mediation in air traffic control conflict**

*August 9, 2011*

Shortly after midnight on Tuesday 9 August, a judge in Frankfurt rejected an appeal from the air traffic controllers' authority, the DFS, thus allowing a six-hour strike planned by air traffic controllers' union GDF for that morning from 4 to 10 AM. However, just after the final decision was announced, the DFS said it would enter mediation, thus invoking a no-strike clause for four weeks. In the weeks before the union had rejected renewed talks, after it declined a management offer for a 4.1% salary increase. GDF, claiming to represent more than 3,000 of 5,500 air traffic controllers, is demanding a 6.5% rise.

English: [http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/08/09/uk-airtraffic-germany ...](http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/08/09/uk-airtraffic-germany...)

<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,15301861,00.html>

### **Regional governments implement fair pay rules in procurement**

*July 25, 2011*

Eight of the 16 regional governments (Länder) have introduced new rules on procurement to improve the pay and conditions of workers employed by contractors. A further four Länder will join them shortly. The regions are using three mechanisms to protect pay. First, there are the sectoral minimum wages that have been introduced in some sectors like waste and social care. Second, there are specific rules covering the transport sector and third, some regions have introduced their own hourly minimum wage rate. These are some results of recent research by the Institute for Economic and Social Research (WSI).

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/433>

German: [http://boeckler.de/2877\\_37424.htm](http://boeckler.de/2877_37424.htm)

## **Strikes lead to higher pay increase**

*July 25, 2011*

The 9,000 workers covered by the GWE (gas, water, electricity) agreement in North-Rhine Westfalia will see their pay increase by 3.3% in 2011. The unions won an increased offer (up from 3%) following a series of warning strikes. The agreement will last 14 months rather than the 15 proposed by the employers. The agreement also commits the employers to maintain the level of apprenticeships and to take on apprentices for at least 12 months after they have qualified.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/433>

German: [http://energie-bergbau.ver-und-entsorgung.verdi.de/tarifarbeit/private ...](http://energie-bergbau.ver-und-entsorgung.verdi.de/tarifarbeit/private...)

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## **Hungary**

### **Labour Code draft seriously criticized**

*August 26, 2011*

A new draft Labour Code has been published on the government's website. The draft has been severely criticized by the parliamentary opposition and the trade unions. Peter Pataky, president of the Confederation of Trade Unions (MSZOSZ), told a press conference that the proposed changes would result in a decrease in jobs of the legally employed workforce and to lower wages and longer working hours. Pataky said also to expect heated debates about the planned rules of holiday leave and changes in dismissal rules. Legal experts have warned that the new code dismantles the system of checks and balances in the labour sector, and seriously challenges the position of trade unions and the collective rights of employees. In a press statement, the law enforcement workers' union BRDSZ said the draft protects employers, blocks the operation of unions and greatly diminishes the power of strike rights. For 12 September, four union confederations, ASZSZ, ESZT, MSZOSZ and SZEFG have announced a demonstration in front of Parliament to protest government measures that negatively affect workers, including the draft Labour Code (See also this Collective Bargaining Newsletter Year 4 April and May 2011).

English: Máté Komiljovics, union correspondent;

[http://www.realdeal.hu/20110803/planned-labour-changes-to-result-job-decline ...](http://www.realdeal.hu/20110803/planned-labour-changes-to-result-job-decline...)

### **Mass lay-offs at public media questioned**

*August 26, 2011*

Media service support and asset management fund MTVA, established earlier in 2011 to manage the public media, has announced to lay off some 500 media workers already in August and a total of 1,000 in 2011. Currently the public media employ about 3,300. The reaction of Balasz Nagy Navarro, president of the public media trade unions' council, was that "Public media have never been fully independent in Hungary, but now they are not independent in a very blunt and primitive way". Nagy Navarro pointed out that some 40% of those to be dismissed are over 50 years of age, with hardly any chances of finding new jobs.

English: Máté Komiljovics, union correspondent

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## **Ireland**

### **Pay freeze continues in small businesses**

*August 22, 2011*

Employees in the majority of small businesses continue to face a pay freeze with the trend set to continue in 2012, according to a survey by the employers' association, the Small Firms Association (SFA). The study found that wage increases were only being given to reward productivity and innovation. The survey of 592 companies found 76% have frozen basic pay rates this year, with 69%



planning to continue the trend next year. 13% have implemented a basic pay increase of 2.5% on average, with 22% expecting to increase basic pay in 2012 by 3% on average if their firms continue to grow.

English: <http://www.rte.ie/news/2011/0822/pay.html>  
via [http://www.labourstart.org/cgi-bin/show\\_news.pl?country=Ireland](http://www.labourstart.org/cgi-bin/show_news.pl?country=Ireland)

### **Union criticises timing of JLC announcement**

*July 28, 2011*

The MANDATE trade union, organising retail, bar and administrative workers, has described the government's timing of the announcement of the new wage-setting system for low-paid staff as opportunist and cowardly. MANDATE General Secretary John Douglas said: "The agreement to scrap the Sunday premium pay for those covered by the Joint Labour Committees (JLCs) and the inability to pay clause will leave thousands of low-paid workers vulnerable to having their pay cut. The timing of this announcement means we will now have to wait until the autumn for legislation to protect the lowest paid," adding: "This new system creates a situation where thousands of the most vulnerable workers in retail, hotels and restaurants will have their wages targeted by unscrupulous employers" (See also this Collective Bargaining Newsletter Year 4 January, February, March, May and June 2011).

English: [http://www.mandate.ie/News/Mandate/367/mandate-criticises ...](http://www.mandate.ie/News/Mandate/367/mandate-criticises...)

### **Croke Park agreement continues to deliver**

*July 25, 2011*

In a joint statement from the government and public service unions, issued in response to the first review of the Croke Park Implementation Body, the government reaffirmed that there will be no further pay cuts or compulsory redundancies in the public service so long as staff and unions continue to deliver savings and reforms set out in the Croke Park agreement. The statement acknowledges the success of the agreement although it notes that further restructuring and redeployment still need to be implemented. The government has said the restriction on recruitment might be more flexible but there is as yet no scope to compensate for the pension levy and pay cuts that were put into effect in 2009 and 2010 (See also this Collective Bargaining Newsletter Year 3 July-August 2010; Year 4 April and June 2011).

English: <http://www.impact.ie/iopen24/government-repeats-more-cuts-n-428.html>

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## **Italy**

### **Unions angered by further cuts**

*August 25, 2011*

The CGIL trade union confederation has called a general strike for 6 September to demonstrate its opposition to the latest government plans to cut public spending and raise taxes on income rather than wealth. According to this confederation, the measures pose further threats to workers' pay and conditions with later retirement, more flexibility in labour contracts and the possibility of further privatization and liberalization. Although not taking strike action, the CISL public sector and school sector federations are also concerned about the cuts and the possibility that workers will lose their 13th month salary if efficiency saving targets will not be met.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/436>

Italian: <http://www.fpcgil.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/19012>  
[http://www.fp.cisl.it/fp\\_nuovo/](http://www.fp.cisl.it/fp_nuovo/)

### **New agreement in craft industries**

*August 6, 2011*

On 16 June, a new agreement between the FIM, FIOM and UILM unions on the one hand and the



employers' federation has been agreed. It is a merger of all previous agreements (national contracts) in the craft metal industries facilities, dental labs and goldsmiths into one national contract, covering nearly 500,000 workers in 150,000 businesses. In addition to an average wage increase of ? 86 per month, the agreements amends, among other things, the provisions on part-time work, fixed-term contracts, the integration contract and apprenticeships. The agreement does not include any opening or deviation clause.

English: message of EUCOBAN network of EMF / EFFAT / ETUF-TCL / EMCEF

### **Union federations argue about public budget and pay increases**

*July 25, 2011*

The main public service union federations have come together to argue for a different approach to the public finance crisis. They want to see action to deal with wasteful expenditure but say that this has to be done in consultation with the trade unions and should not be about freezing or cutting public sector pay. The unions want to see space in the budget to cover the renegotiation of public sector collective agreements, underlining the importance of the workforce in delivering effective public services that can play a key role in the country's recovery. A report from CISL FP calls for "a commitment from public authorities to involve workers and their representatives in a comprehensive process to tackle spending inefficiencies, optimize work organization to improve service management and delivery, and so retrieve money that can be redistributed to public workers through second-level bargaining."

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/433>

Italian: <http://www.fpcgil.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/18515>

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## **Liechtenstein**

### **Negotiations to start in various sectors**

*August 23, 2011*

In December 2010, due to very low wages and an almost 22 year-old collective agreement with unacceptable conditions the LANV union association has cancelled the collective agreement in the private transport sector. New negotiations will start in the beginning of September. Negotiations on a new collective agreement for the retail trade have failed ; the union insists on higher wages, referring to wage levels in Switzerland. Further negotiations regarding the security and the gastronomy and catering sectors are on their way. In particular negotiations in the catering sector will be challenging as two employers' organisations are mutually hostile, and the respective collective agreements cannot be declared binding as both organisations do not have enough members, a situation that leaves many workers without agreement.

English: message of Petra Brunhart, international secretary Liechtenstein Employees' Association (LANV)

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## **Lithuania**

### **Unions press for minimum wage increase**

*August 11, 2011*

The legal minimum wage in Lithuania was last increased in January 2008. It is almost the lowest in the EU, currently equal to LTL 800 or ? 232 per month respectively LTL 4.85 (? 1.41) per hour. During 2011 the trade unions have exerted pressure to increase the minimum wage, arguing that its very low level does not encourage people to take up employment, inhibits competition in the labour force, hampers recovery of the domestic market, facilitates a grey economy, and is one of the factors behind large-scale emigration from the country. Union demands, however, have until now been rejected by government and parliament. Employers' organisations are also split on the issue. On 28 June, parliament failed to adopt a resolution to increase the minimum to LTL 900 (? 261) per month with effect from 1 October 2011 and to LTL 1,000 (? 290) per month from January 2012. Unions have now approached Lithuanian Members of the European Parliament as well as the ETUC for help.

English: <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/2011/05/articles/lt1105029i.htm>

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## Netherlands

### **Unions remain divided over pension accord**

*August 31, 2011*

In early July, the FNV union confederation refrained from a referendum of its own among the 1.4 million members of its affiliates, concerning the basic accord the three union confederations agreed with government and employers' associations in June, that will see the pension age increased from 65 to 66 in 2020 and then to 67 in 2025. For the time being, the two largest FNV affiliates oppose the pension accord. The private sector union, FNV Bondgenoten, takes the strongest stand. A referendum in July-August organised by FNV Bondgenoten, in which 23% of membership took part, resulted in 95% opposing the accord. Public services union FNV Abvakabo currently takes a "no, unless" position, with the "unless" clause focusing on repairing the income fall of 6.5% for those who still want to retire at 65. Both unions regard the concessions the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment, Henk Kamp, made in August in this direction as largely insufficient. On 12 September the final decision-making on the basic accord in the FNV confederation will take place.

Dutch: *NRC-Handelsblad*, 5 July, 15 and 30 August 2011; *De Volkskrant*, 24 and 31 August 2011;

<http://www.abvakabofnv.nl/Thema%27s/aow/?OverviewType=Nieuwsbericht&id ...>

<http://www.fnvbondgenoten.nl/nieuws/nieuwsarchief/2011/augustus ...>

### **Confederation demands repair of purchasing power**

*August 23, 2011*

In July, Statistics Netherlands published that in 2010 the population's average purchasing power fell by 0.5%, whereas CPB, the government's main economic body, predicted a continuous decrease in purchasing power of on average 1-2% yearly till 2015. Against this backdrop, on 23 August the FNV union confederation wrote a letter to MP Mark Rutte, arguing that the effects of the budget cuts announced by the government are highly unfair and will heavily hit the low- and middle-income groups. The confederation points at the cumulative negative effects of a number of measures, rising the costs of for instance child care and house renting. At a press conference, FNV bargaining coördinator Catelene Passchier characterised the expense cuts of the government, totaling ?18 billion till 2015, as too large; she stressed the importance of maintaining purchasing power for the recovery of the Dutch economy.

Dutch: *NRC-Handelsblad*, 23 and 24 August 2011; *De Volkskrant*, 12 July and 23 August 2011

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## Norway

### **Government supports action to protect decent work**

*August 25, 2011*

Following recent scandals over social dumping by private contractors, the Fagforbundet municipal union reports that the government is determined to maintain and improve a regulatory framework to protect contractors' employees, based on the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 94, that was introduced into Norwegian law in 2008. The ESA, the body that monitors legislation in the European Economic Area, argues that Convention 94 conflicts with EEA/EU rules and so the government is looking at new legislation in response to these criticisms (See also this Collective Bargaining Newsletter Year 4 June 2011).

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/436>

Norwegian: <http://www.frifagbevegelse.no/meninger/article5704445.ece>

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## Poland

### **Confederation delivers petition on minimum wage increase**

*July 25, 2011*

The Solidarnosc union confederation has delivered a petition with 300,000 signatures to the country's parliament calling for an increase in the statutory minimum wage. The confederation wants the government to meet its commitment to raise the minimum wage so that it reaches 50% of the average wage. Earlier, on 30 June, up to 50,000 people took part in a Solidarity demonstration in Warsaw in protest against the government's record of "high prices, high unemployment and low wages". Those participating in the demonstration also signed the minimum wage petition.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/433>

[http://www.thenews.pl/1/12/Artykul/46775,Solidarity-trade-union-protests-low-wages ...](http://www.thenews.pl/1/12/Artykul/46775,Solidarity-trade-union-protests-low-wages...)

Polish: [http://www.solidarnosc.org.pl/pl/aktualnosci/pietrowym-autobusem-po ...](http://www.solidarnosc.org.pl/pl/aktualnosci/pietrowym-autobusem-po...)

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## Portugal

### **Unions plan demonstration against austerity measures**

*August 31, 2011*

On 30 August, Finance Minister Vitor Gaspar told reporters that the government plans "unprecedented" spending cuts in 2012 to meet debt-reduction targets agreed in return for a ?78 billion bailout. The government already announced to levy a one-off tax, taking half of workers' Christmas bonus, to help reach the target for the budget deficit in 2011. The bonus is equivalent to a month's pay. The Minister also announced that the number of civil servants will be reduced by 2% annually over the next three years while civil service salaries will be frozen over the same period. Observers agree that the plans will bring more pain for families and companies already finding it hard to make ends meet amid tax hikes and welfare cuts. The unions have vowed to fight the measures and plan demonstrations on 1 October (See also this Collective Bargaining Newsletter Year 4 May and June 2011).

English: <http://www.businessweek.com/ap/financialnews/D9PF5ED8o.htm>

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## Slovakia

### **Confederation says new Labour Code weakens workers' rights**

*July 25, 2011*

With 74 against 70 votes, the Parliament has agreed significant changes to the Labour Code, including: either severance pay or a layoff notice period but not both; longer periods for fixed-time employment; longer overtime hours permitted; less pay for overtime work; more night shifts allowed. While agreeing that there are some positive elements in terms of holiday entitlement and maternity benefits, the KOZ union confederation says that the overall impact will be the weakening of workers' rights and the creation of more flexibility for employers in the labour market (See also this Collective Bargaining Newsletter Year 4 January, April and June 2011).

English: [http://spectator.sme.sk/articles/view/43304/2/labour\\_code\\_changes\\_pass ...](http://spectator.sme.sk/articles/view/43304/2/labour_code_changes_pass...)

Slovak: [http://www.kozsr.sk/?page=../tlac/tlac\\_18](http://www.kozsr.sk/?page=../tlac/tlac_18)

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## Slovenia

### **Massive rejection of higher retirement age**

*July 11, 2011*

In June, an overwhelming 72.2% of Slovenians rejected the raising of the retirement age in a referendum. The government prepared a draft of a new pension reform which passed Parliament in December 2010. The proposal included gradual rises of the statutory retirement age to 65, lowering the replacement rate on pensions, and changes to the way pensions can access their second-pillar retirement savings. However, trade unions opposed the reform and secured a referendum on the issue, and their campaigning contributed to a massive rejection of those plans.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/429>

<http://www.europeanpensions.net/ep/slovenians-reject-pension-reform.php>

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## Spain

### **Unions criticize government's budget deficit proposals**

*August 25, 2011*

The UGT and CCOO union confederations have attacked the government for proposing a change in the constitution that would restrict any government's ability to run a budget deficit of more than 4% of GDP. The UGT argues that this is a mistaken priority and that the government should focus on the need to create jobs and respond to the proposals drawn up by both the UGT and CCOO confederations. FSC-CCOO, the public service federation of CCOO, opposes the measures highlighting in particular the risk of the government looking for more outsourcing and flexibility in order to stick within the spending limit, with serious implications for public sector workers' pay and employment conditions (See also this Collective Bargaining Newsletter Year 4 May and June 2011).

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/436>

Spanish: <http://www.fsc.ccoo.es/webfsc/menu.do?Inicio:230978>

[http://www.fspugt.es/Limitar\\_el\\_dficit\\_en\\_la\\_Constitucin\\_puede\\_introducir ...](http://www.fspugt.es/Limitar_el_dficit_en_la_Constitucin_puede_introducir...)

### **Unions respond to attack on civil servants**

*July 25, 2011*

Juan Rosell, head of the CEOE employers' organisation, has angered unions with his statements about civil servants, describing them as arrogant and unreliable. The civil service unions have reacted by referring to the fact that civil servants have played an important role in response to the crisis, pointing out that not only were they not responsible for the crisis but they also did not benefit from the boom years that led to the bust. While inflation averaged 4%, civil servants' pay was increasing by an average of 2% over a period of more than 10 years. Moreover, following the slump civil servants have had a 5% pay cut and a pay freeze imposed upon them.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/433>

Spanish: [http://www.fspugt.es/Consuelo\\_Rum\\_responde\\_a\\_Rosell.htm](http://www.fspugt.es/Consuelo_Rum_responde_a_Rosell.htm)

<http://www.uso.es/content/view/13146/33/>

### **Confederations call for action against gender pay gap**

*July 25, 2011*

Both the CCOO and UGT union confederations are calling for increased action to deal with gender inequality at work. The latest data show an increase in the gender pay gap in Spain. The statistics also reveal that women make up just over 64% of all low-paid workers and predominate in low-paying sectors like health and social services where they make up 69% of the workforce. The CCOO wants to see action to deal with discrimination in terms of job classification, recruitment, promotion and training. The UGT emphasizes the importance of tackling gender inequality through collective bargaining and ensuring that there is an increase in the number of women negotiators.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/433>

Spanish: [http://www.fspugt.es/UGT\\_observa\\_un\\_retroceso\\_en\\_las\\_politicas ...](http://www.fspugt.es/UGT_observa_un_retroceso_en_las_politicas...)

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## Sweden

### **Nordic unions oppose forced dismissals at Nordea**

*August 29, 2011*

The top management of Nordea bank has announced to reduce the total number of jobs by close to 2,000. The Nordic Financial Unions point out, however, that the bank's decision to reduce staff comes at a time when it has obtained very good results, and that profits in the first half of 2011 went up 21%, and reject the staff cuts. "At a time when Nordea is being a very profitable bank with an excellent reputation in the financial market, the management presses through the New Normal plan and staff reductions at the cost of employees," says Steinar Nickelsen, President of Union in Nordea,

representing over 20,000 Nordea staff. The unions have demanded that Nordea takes every possible step to avoid job losses and focus on re-training and redeployment. Furthermore, they insist that any staff reductions must be on a voluntary basis and packages must be negotiated at national level.

English: <http://www.nordicfinancialunions.org/unions-protest-against-staff-reductions ...>

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## Switzerland

### **Long-running dispute over health workers' pay resolved**

*August 25, 2011*

Health workers in the Sankt Gallen region (Canton) are finally benefitting from higher pay after a long-running dispute was resolved. The VPÖD public service union supported a number of workers in an initial claim in 2003 that the workers should be on higher pay rates and grades. The administrative court for the Canton agreed that the health workers were paid less than comparable jobs (ambulance workers, police) but that this was not primarily an issue of gender discrimination. This workers' claim was eventually recognized by the federal court in 2010, leading finally to a settlement earlier in 2011, with health workers and midwives moving up the pay scale as well as getting back pay.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/436>

German: <http://www.vpod.ch/aktuell/nachrichten/ansicht/article/sankt-gallen ...>

### **Unions negotiate collective agreement for cleaners**

*July 25, 2011*

The VPÖD public service union was one of the unions involved in negotiating a new five-year collective agreement covering 50,000 cleaning workers in the German-speaking area of the country. The authorities have declared the agreement generally binding and so it will also cover workers who are employed by firms who are not party to the agreement. The minimum wage set by the agreement will increase by 2-2.5% in 2012 and there will also be a 13th month salary. The sector is also running a campaign, "Fair-Clean", that calls for a fair price for cleaning contracts and respect for cleaning workers. It will highlight the economic importance and professionalism of the sector.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/433>

German: <http://www.fair-clean.ch/>

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## United Kingdom

### **Nurse wins equal pay case**

*August 25, 2011*

Public services union UNISON has supported one of its members in a successful equal pay case. Under the National Health Service's Agenda for Change job evaluation system introduced in 2005, the job of a nurse is rated as equivalent to a maintenance supervisor. While acknowledging this, the local health service employer tried to argue that the local labour market and different bargaining arrangements justified higher pay for maintenance workers. The tribunal rejected the employer's case.

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/436>

[http://www.unison.org.uk/asppresspack/pressrelease\\_view.asp?id=2391](http://www.unison.org.uk/asppresspack/pressrelease_view.asp?id=2391)

### **Unions fight back against local authorities**

*August 25, 2011*

Trade unions organising local government staff are facing employers who are taking a tough line on pay cuts. In Plymouth the City Council has withdrawn recognition of the UNISON union for collective bargaining in response to the union's rejection of proposals to cut workers' pay. Meanwhile, the dispute over pay cuts at Southampton City Council is continuing with members of

the Unite and UNISON unions taking strike action. In addition, these unions have started legal proceedings against the City Council for the way in which it dealt with the dismissals (See also this Collective Bargaining Newsletter Year 4 May and June 2011).

English: <http://www.epsu.org/cob/436>; <http://www.epsu.org/cob/433>  
[http://www.unison.org.uk/asppresspack/pressrelease\\_view.asp?id=2411](http://www.unison.org.uk/asppresspack/pressrelease_view.asp?id=2411)  
[http://www.unitetheunion.org/news\\_events/latest\\_news/council\\_pays\\_for\\_empty...](http://www.unitetheunion.org/news_events/latest_news/council_pays_for_empty...)

### **Unions discuss NHS-wide strike over pensions**

*August 24, 2011*

Unions representing staff at every level of the National Health Service (NHS) are meeting on 25 August in London to plan the first NHS-wide strike, in anticipation that current negotiations with the government over public sector pensions will fail by the autumn. Doctors, nurses, midwives, hospital administrators and cleaners will discuss plans to shut down swathes of the NHS in industrial action which could take place by Christmas if negotiations fail. Union leaders are keen to start early contingency planning to ensure that any strikes do not compromise patient safety. UNISON, whose 1.4 million members include 460,000 NHS workers, is hosting the meeting.

English: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/aug/24/unions-plan-nhs-strike-pensions>

### **Union calls for unity concerning public sector pensions**

*July 25, 2011*

Following the national strike by civil servants, teachers and college lecturers, the PCS civil service union is calling for unity across the various public sector pension schemes. There are different schemes for the civil service, teachers, health service, local government and other public sector workers. However, they are all facing similar changes - higher retirement ages, higher employee contributions and a change to the level of protection against inflation. The government is so far unwilling to move on these fundamental points. The TUC union confederation is involved in the talks with government and will be co-ordinating the 29 unions whose members are covered by the public sector schemes (See also this Collective Bargaining Newsletter Year 4 April, May and June 2011).

English: [http://www.pcs.org.uk/en/news\\_and\\_events/news\\_centre/index.cfm/id...](http://www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/index.cfm/id...)  
[http://www.unison.org.uk/news/news\\_view.asp?did=7063](http://www.unison.org.uk/news/news_view.asp?did=7063)

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