

# collective bargaining

Issue 6/2020 | June

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.



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## European sources

### Collective bargaining for the self-employed

*June 30, 2020*

The European Commission launched a process to ensure that the EU competition rules do not stand in the way of collective bargaining for those who need it. The initiative seeks to ensure that working conditions can be improved through collective agreements not only for employees, but also for those self-employed workers who need protection.

Read on: [in English ...](#)

### List of companies with largest job cuts

*June 11, 2020*

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, unemployment is rising in the EU. While furlough schemes helped some economic sectors and companies by putting employees on temporary leave, with governments paying a part of their salaries, others have been less fortunate. Companies across the EU have been cutting jobs – the airline and automobile industries in particular were severely hit. Some examples of companies who have seen large job cuts are Nissan (2,800 jobs cut), British Petroleum (10,000 jobs), British Airways (up to 12,000 jobs), Renault (15,000 jobs), Airbus (15,000 jobs) and Lufthansa (22,000 jobs).

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### **Second-stage consultation on minimum wage**

*June 3, 2020*

The European Commission launched the second-stage consultation of European trade unions and employers' organisations on how to ensure fair minimum wages for all workers in the European Union. Trade unions and employers' associations are invited to respond to the questions in the consultation by 4 September 2020. This follows the first-stage consultation from 14 January to 25 February 2020, to which the Commission received replies from 23 EU-wide social partners. Based on the replies received, the Commission concluded that there is a need for further EU action.

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### **Unemployment growth**

*June 3, 2020*

According to Eurostat, 14,079 million men and women in the EU were unemployed in April 2020, the second month of the implementation of the coronavirus measures. Of these, 11,919 million lived in the euro area. Compared with March 2020, the number of unemployed increased by 397,000 in the EU and by 211,000 in the euro area. Unemployment percentages for the EU were 6.6% in April 2020, up from 6.4% in March 2020.

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## **Austria**

### **Short-time work and unemployment drop**

*June 23, 2020*

The number of short-time workers has dropped by 326,000 persons to 812,745. The decline can be explained by the fact that only 17,000 of the total of 110,000 companies applied for an extra three months of short-time work, since the majority no longer found it necessary. Unemployment also declined by 10,520 in comparison to the previous week.

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### **Chemical industry workers fight for higher real wages**

*June 18, 2020*

Since the beginning of the month, workers have been threatening collective action after employers in the chemical industry suggested a rise of 1.45% in nominal wages for 45,000 employees. The trade unions PRO-GE and GPA-djp declared the offer unreasonable because the suggested rise was below inflation. After negotiations were suspended on June 10, an agreement was reached on June 18 with a wage increase of 1.6% and a €150 one-off corona allowance.

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### **Collective agreement at Laudamotion**

*June 6, 2020*

After weeks of fruitless negotiations, the traffic and services union vida and the economic chamber (WKÖ) agreed on a 'crisis' collective agreement for the 500 Laudamotion employees stationed in Vienna. Income for flight attendants will increase by 44% and for co-pilots by 18% compared to the initial offer by the company.

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## Belgium

### **Almost 71,000 full-time jobs lost in the first quarter of 2020**

*June 24, 2020*

In the first quarter of 2020, 70,900 full-time jobs were lost, compared to around 45,000 in previous years. This growth is still an underestimation of the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic, because the first containment measures to slow the spread of the virus only started in March.

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### **Government support for fired Swissport employees**

*June 18, 2020*

The 1,500 workers who lost their jobs after the bankruptcy of Swissport will benefit from free training and outplacement measures. This measure was an initiative of the 'curators' (liquidators) handling the bankruptcy. The support will be carried out by the employment services of Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia.

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### **Workers protest in the face of coronavirus uncertainty**

*June 18, 2020*

Symbolic actions by hospital employees, zoo staff, and workers in the events sector raised awareness about their plight during the coronavirus pandemic. Hospital workers expressed their need for more money via a livestreamed video on social media. Workers at Antwerp Zoo threatened to strike if the management continues to refuse to negotiate about the announced layoffs. And representatives of the events sector placed music boxes in Brussels to 'break the silence' of the government on their situation.

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## Bulgaria

### **Job retention scheme extended**

*June 30, 2020*

The government will extend the scope of its wage support scheme, introduced to cushion the impact of the coronavirus crisis, beyond July 1. More sectors will be able to benefit from it. Under the revised version of the scheme, known as 'the 60-40 measure', companies operating in the healthcare and private education sector can also apply for support.

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### **Pension increases**

*June 30, 2020*

The State Social Insurance Budget Act (SSSI) for 2020 approved increased pension expenditures. More than two million pensioners will receive an increase in their pension starting from July 1, 2020. The minimum amount of the basic pension will be increased to BGN 250 (€128).

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## Croatia

### **600,000 jobs saved**

*June 25, 2020*

The measures launched by the government to support businesses hit by the coronavirus crisis have helped to save 600,000 jobs and 103,000 businesses. The measures include payments to employers for workers' wages, the write-off of direct taxes and contributions, and the procurement of medical equipment for the health system.

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### **Measure for a shorter working week**

*June 17, 2020*

The government launched a measure for a shorter working week for employers with more than 10 employees. The measure is available for the period from June 1 until the end of the year and amounts to HRK 2,000 (€265) per worker.

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## Cyprus

### **Bus drivers' strike**

*June 23, 2020*

Employees from Larnaca's Zenon bus company went on strike after the failure of their employers to pay government contributions for five months. The unions Peo, Sek and Deok said the company has failed to pay into the employees' provident funds, provident loan funds, medical insurance funds, welfare funds and holiday funds since February.

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### **State nurses' strike**

*June 22, 2020*

State nurses went on a 24-hour strike. They said their employer, the state health services organisation Okypy, had not approached them since they announced the strike. Union Pasyno and the midwives and nurses branch of the civil servants' union Pasydy said their members would go on strike due to Okypy's delay in hiring more nurses and staff in public hospitals. The serious understaffing is causing problems in terms of arranging the shifts schedule and summer holidays.

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## Czechia

### **Households experience drop in income**

*June 23, 2020*

One third of households have experienced a drop in income due to the restrictions related to the COVID-19 outbreak, according to a media poll. Nearly half of all employees and three out of every four self-employed workers said they had felt the negative impacts of the coronavirus crisis. 11% of households experienced a significant drop in income and 20% of households faced a moderate drop at the beginning of May. The others said their income remained the same or even showed an increase.

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### **Renewed minimum wage debate**

*June 15, 2020*

The coronavirus crisis ignited a new debate about the minimum wage. Trade unions asked for an increase from CZK 14,600 (€545) to CZK 16,000 (€597). The rise would help in recovering the economy by boosting consumption. However, the employers' representative said that their main focus at present was keeping afloat. The government, which is responsible for setting the minimum wage if trade unions and employers cannot reach an agreement, is planning an increase in 2021.

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### **Wages up 5% in first quarter**

*June 4, 2020*

According to the Czech Statistical Office (CZSO), the average wage rose by 5% in the first quarter of 2020 compared to the first quarter of 2019. Consumer prices in the same period grew by 3.6%, hence real wages increased by 1.4% in one year. The median wage stood at CZK 29,333 (€1,096) in the first quarter of 2020. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is not yet visible in these figures.

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## **Denmark**

### **Consultation of social partners helps secure public support**

*June 26, 2020*

While the COVID-19 pandemic requires new medical and social innovations, it also draws attention to some of the long-standing challenges in innovation policy. Universal health care coverage and paid sick leave, for instance, benefit everyone: the former by reducing financial barriers to testing, and the latter by making it easier for ill workers to self-isolate. Between sending non-essential public workers home on March 13 and shutting down a large part of the private sector on March 18, the government consulted with employers' associations and trade unions. By presenting a united front and sharing responsibility for the lockdown, this inclusive approach made it easier for the government to take bold action and secure public support.

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### **Illness from coronavirus can be an occupational injury**

*June 3, 2020*

According to the Ministry of Employment's new guidance, employees who are affected by illness as a result of COVID-19 can have that illness recognised as an occupational injury (either as an occupational disease or a work accident). In the assessment, it is important to establish whether the employee forms part of the groups of persons who are exposed to severe risk of infection in connection with their daily work. The employer must notify the authorities if an employee has become ill with COVID-19.

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## **Estonia**

### **Job mediation for short-term foreign workers**

*June 16, 2020*



The Social Ministry and the Unemployment Insurance Fund are to offer job mediation to those short-term foreign workers who have lost their jobs but have the right to continue working, in order to more flexibly match the labour supply and the need for seasonal labour.

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### **Employers responsible for short-term workers' costs**

*June 11, 2020*

As a result of a legal amendment, employers who employ short-term foreign workers are now responsible for the costs of their accommodation, their stay and their departure from the country. An amendment to the Aliens Act establishes financial obligations for employers who register short-term employment of foreigners also with regard to workers temporarily staying in Estonia from third countries. Until now, obligations only applied regarding foreigners with a residence permit.

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### **Equal pay for equal work**

*June 4, 2020*

Estonia has the highest gender pay gap in the European Union, but following consultations with the European Commission, the government confirmed its support for increasing wage transparency. The goal is to identify the most effective opportunities for ensuring the principle of equal pay for women and men.

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## **Finland**

### **Furloughed workers face uncertainty**

*June 29, 2020*

Thousands of workers who were furloughed or temporarily laid off when the coronavirus pandemic hit industries are now preparing to return to work as the 90-day maximum layoff period is set to expire. However, there is still a question mark over whether or not they will return to work, remain furloughed under an 'exceptional circumstances' ruling, or be laid off permanently.

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## **France**

### **Air France cuts jobs**

*June 30, 2020*

The Air France group plans to cut over 7,500 jobs by the end of 2022 according to union sources. That includes 6,560 jobs in Air France itself and over 1,000 at the regional airline Hop!. Two Hop! maintenance sites are reportedly threatened with closure, as is an Air France flight crew base in Toulouse. At Air France, departures would happen through collective agreements for flight staff, while a voluntary departure plan is favoured for ground staff. Management wishes to start negotiations with ground staff unions at the beginning of July for the first departures at the beginning of 2021.

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### **Crisis jobs scheme extended for up to two years**

*June 8, 2020*

The temporary unemployment scheme to avert mass bankruptcies and lay-offs as a result of the coronavirus crisis will be extended and is now expected to last up to two years. The labour minister said that at the end of April some 8.6 million employees were benefiting from the scheme, under which the state pays subsidies to companies to fund the salaries of those prevented from working.

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### **Hospital unions set to strike**

*June 4, 2020*

A group of ten unions called for a strike in hospitals. The group includes four of the five main unions in the public healthcare sector – the CGT, FO, SUD, and Unsa – and the two hospital collectives – Inter-Emergencies and Inter-Hospitals. The unions are calling for a general revaluation of wages, new recruitment and training plans, and the halt of the closing of establishments and reduction of services and beds.

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## **Germany**

### **Amazon workers strike over virus safety**

*June 29, 2020*

Amazon warehouse workers have gone on strike over safety concerns relating to the coronavirus, as the company announced it would hand out \$500 million (€445 million) in “special one-time Thank You” bonuses to its frontline employees globally. Staff at six Amazon facilities did not clock into work, according to the union Verdi, which has demanded that the company sit down with it to negotiate a collective agreement on health protection at work and better pay. Up to 40 Amazon workers at two fulfilment centres in Bad Hersfeld have tested positive for the virus in the past two weeks. The union said the strike would last for two days.

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### **COVID-19 outbreak in meat plant**

*June 26, 2020*

More than 1,500 of the 7,000 workers at the Tönnies meat-packing plant in the Gütersloh district have tested positive for COVID-19, and all are now under strict quarantine. Workers complain of harsh working conditions and poor accommodation that appear to have fuelled the outbreak of the deadly disease. The plant has been temporarily closed.

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### **Lufthansa announces up to 26,000 job losses**

*June 11, 2020*

Airline company Lufthansa had previously announced a loss of around 10,000 jobs. Now, the numbers have gone up to 26,000 employees or 22,000 fulltime jobs. The company is trying to reach an agreement with trade unions on part-time work and other ways to cut personnel costs.

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## **Greece**

### **Unemployment falls**

*June 11, 2020*

The jobless rate dropped to 14.4% in March from 15.9% in the previous month, according to data from the statistics office ELSTAT. It was the lowest jobless rate since November 2010. Seasonally adjusted data showed the number of unemployed at 653,686 people, with those aged up to 24 bearing the brunt of being out of work. Among persons aged 15 to 24, the jobless rate fell to 32.4%, from 37.7% in the same month in 2019.

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## Hungary

### **Revision of the Labour Code**

*June 6, 2020*

A new revision of the Labour Code would allow employers to set the maximum duration of cumulative working time at 24 months. The government says the change is needed to prevent mass layoffs in certain sectors affected by the COVID-19 epidemic. But unions fear the new regulation would allow employers to exploit their employees.

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### **Wages increase**

*June 26, 2020*

The steady growth of wages continued according to the Central Statistical Office (KSH). In 2019, the average net wage was 11.4% higher than in the previous year. However, compared to other EU countries, wages are still low. In 2019, the average net wage was €9,079, the third lowest in Europe.

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## Iceland

### **Collective agreement at Icelandair**

*June 25, 2020*

The labour dispute between Iceland's flight attendants union (FFÍ) and Icelandair has come to a close, as the two parties signed a collective agreement. According to statements from both FFÍ and Icelandair, the agreement secures both the airline's flexibility and aims to increase its workload, while at the same time ensuring both the safety and the incomes of its flight attendants.

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### **Nurses' strike called off**

*June 22, 2020*

The Icelandic Nurses Association called off a planned strike hours before it was scheduled to start. The nurses have been working without a valid contract for over a year. Thirty meetings between union leaders and state representatives have been held since the dispute was handed over to a state mediator in February. An agreement has been reached on arrangements for shift work, but the dispute over nurses' wages is yet to be resolved.

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## Ireland

### **Trade unions and employers welcome new government**

*June 26, 2020*

Environmental activists, trade union leaders and employers have welcomed the endorsement of the programme for government and are calling for major investment in the economy as it struggles to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic while achieving key policy goals. The general secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) said the group of unions will work with the incoming government.

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### **High Court rules wage legislation unconstitutional**

*June 23, 2020*

Legislation which allows for the setting of legally enforceable pay and conditions for thousands of workers in various employment sectors has been deemed unconstitutional by the High Court. The ruling means many particularly lower-paid employees will only have a legal entitlement to the National Minimum Wage and other basic statutory protections, rather than to better sectoral minimum rates and conditions established through negotiation between employers and unions and the setting of legally binding Sectoral Employment Orders. According to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) this could have very serious implications for tens of thousands of construction workers.

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## Italy

### **Labour market frozen**

*June 26, 2020*

Employment numbers in Italy show the heavy impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a rise in the size of the inactive population. This is a sign that the labour market is frozen. The unemployment rate surprisingly fell from 8% in March to 6.3% in April. But this was because many people moved into the inactive category, which rose by 746,000 and pushed up the country's inactivity rate from 36.1% to 38.1%. The country's overall employment numbers fell by 274,000.

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### **Loan for Fiat Chrysler**

*June 25, 2020*

The government has approved a €6.3 billion loan for carmaker Fiat Chrysler's (FCA) Italian unit, in a bid to salvage the car industry from the pandemic's economic aftermath. The loan includes conditions not to relocate or cut jobs as the firm merges with French PSA.

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## Latvia

### **Latvia should implement shortened working hours, say employers**

*June 29, 2020*

The Employers' Confederation (LDDK) calls for the introduction of short-term working hours, temporarily addressing the employment problem in times of crisis. Such a mechanism could replace downtime compensation, which expires by the end of June. The LDDK stresses that Latvia currently has one of the

fastest rates of unemployment growth in the European Union, which shows that many companies are unable to save jobs in times of crisis, while downtime benefits will cease to be paid.

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### **Construction workers' wages rise**

*June 29, 2020*

Compared to May 2019, construction costs rose by 1.4% and labour remuneration of workers rose by 7.4%. Compared to April 2020, remuneration of workers rose by 1.4 % in May.

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## **Liechtenstein**

### **Compensation for short-time work**

*June 6, 2020*

The government provided the Unemployment Insurance Fund with CHF 100 million (€940,000) to pay compensation for short-time working due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Companies will also be entitled to direct subsidies for losses during the pandemic.

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## **Lithuania**

### **More working permits**

*June 17, 2020*

Workers from Ukraine and Belarus will be able to come to Lithuania more easily after the lockdown ends. The head of Lithuania's Migration Department says not only foreigners who permanently reside in Lithuania or already have a valid work permit, but also those who will be issued national visas for work will be able to come to Lithuania.

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## **Luxembourg**

### **Trade union demands more rights for unemployed youth**

*June 19, 2020*

The youth department of the national trade union confederation OGBL demands an expansion of support for unemployed youth. Now that youth unemployment has reached 25%, young trade unionists are asking for the restoration of a universal right to unemployment benefits, regardless of age. They also demand that only companies hiring young people on permanent contracts be supported.

Read on: [in English ...](#) Read on the statement of the trade union: [in French ...](#)

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## **Malta**

### **Government package to safeguard employees and employment**

*June 13, 2020*

A government package aims to ensure that employees do not lose their jobs and that they have a decent income. For this reason, the COVID Wage Supplement will be granted until September. The government is also granting a tax refund to 210,000 employees, covering their work in 2018, and it will support a skills development scheme.

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### **Taca Construction workers' strike**

*June 11, 2020*

Fortina Contracting has terminated its relationship with Taca Construction after eleventh-hour talks to restart works on its Sliema project failed. Construction works on its redevelopment project in Tigné have been stalled for the past three weeks after Taca's workers went on strike claiming the Turkish company had failed to pay their wages.

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## Netherlands

### **Tata Steel workers on strike**

*June 28, 2020*

Tata Steel factory workers went on strike for the second time in three days to protest planned job cuts in the Netherlands. Unions say Tata aims to cut more than 1,000 of the 9,000 jobs at the IJmuiden plant to improve the profitability of its European business. Workers have held work stoppages since June 10, but the actions were suspended because of negotiations with Tata Steel Europe's management.

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### **Bonus for healthcare workers**

*June 25, 2020*

Following a decision by the government and parliament, healthcare workers will receive a bonus of €1,000 to show appreciation for their hard work during the coronavirus outbreak. The Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sports will work out how the bonus can be paid out with only a minor burden on the administration of the healthcare institutions. From October 1, workers will be able to apply for the bonus.

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### **Pension agreement**

*June 13, 2020*

The government, unions and employers have reached a definitive agreement about a new pension system. In the new system, the level of pensions will not be based on coverage ratios and official interest rates, but will instead depend on stock exchange developments. The state pension age will rise less quickly than originally planned, and there will be an early retirement option, aimed at people doing hard physical work. The reforms aim to spread the burden of paying for pensions more fairly across the generations. The unions will discuss the agreements with their members.

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## Norway

## **Unemployment benefits for foreign workers**

*June 8, 2020*

Many foreigners were previously not eligible for unemployment benefits if laid off or furloughed. Skilled workers who have come from outside the EEA to work in Norway are currently not entitled to unemployment benefits if they are laid off, something which has put as many as 13,000 skilled workers under enormous pressure during the pandemic. Many of these workers have paid taxes for years but risked seeing no benefit if suddenly laid off. Recently the parliament agreed to temporarily change the rules, making foreign skilled workers eligible for benefits retroactively, for the period of unemployment between May 4 and October 31.

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## **Poland**

### **Unemployment up to 6%**

*June 24, 2020*

Unemployment in Poland rose to 6% in May, up from 5.8% in April. According to the Minister of Labour the measures taken to stop the spread of COVID-19 have saved five million jobs. There were 1,011,700 people without a job at the end of May.

Read on: [in English ...](#) Read on the data: [in English ...](#)

### **Migrant workers left jobless and homeless**

*June 14, 2020*

Georgian, Russian and Ukrainian workers were left homeless and stranded during the coronavirus pandemic, after which municipal authorities had to support them. Migrant workers not only lost their jobs but also shelter and the possibility to return home. Some local residents also sought to help with charitable acts.

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## **Portugal**

### **34% increase in number of jobseekers**

*June 22, 2020*

The number of people registered at national employment centres increased by 34% compared to last year. Data for May shows there were 103,763 more jobless this year than at the same time last year. The total rose by 16,611 from April. In all, there are 544,351 people actively looking for jobs.

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### **Redundancy rate to rise**

*June 6, 2020*

The Portuguese Public Finances Council (CFP), an independent administrative entity, stated that the country's redundancy rate may rise by 11% to 13.1% this year because of the coronavirus pandemic. In the best-case scenario, the employment rate may drop by 5% and the redundancy rate may increase by 11% in 2020.

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## Romania

### **Employment rate for working age population declines**

*June 26, 2020*

In the first quarter of 2020, the employment rate was 65.4% for the population aged 15-64, decreasing by 0.6% points compared to the previous quarter, whereas the unemployment rate stood at 4.3%, up 0.4 percentage points compared to the previous quarter, according to the National Institute of Statistics (INS). In the first quarter of 2020, the employment rate for the population aged 20-64 was 70.6%, 0.6% points over the national target of 70% established in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

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### **Debate on the Labour Pact**

*June 12, 2020*

Representatives of employers, local and central public authorities, entrepreneurs and multinational companies gathered together in Timisoara to debate the problems faced by the labour market and launch solutions to overcome the current situation. The event is the first debate this year of the 'Labour Pact – Together We Rebuild Romania' initiative.

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## Serbia

### **Lower wages and more layoffs**

*June 30, 2020*

According to the latest research of the Serbian Employers' Association and the International Labour Organization, more than half of all companies (54%) have been affected financially by the crisis. Many small companies have already reduced their salaries, usually between 10 and 20%, and some have had to opt for a more drastic cut, up to 30%. Many workers have been made redundant and, according to official figures, about 15,000 people lost their jobs in the period from March to mid-June. Redundancies are still in progress, very often for people with a fixed-term contract, and a new wave of wage cuts is expected from July.

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## Slovakia

### **The economy will probably drop by more than 9%**

*June 18, 2020*

The coronavirus pandemic will probably cause the economy to drop by 9.3% in the second quarter of 2020, compared to the first quarter. The calculation was made by analysts from the central bank.

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### **Unemployment grows faster than EU average**

*June 3, 2020*



According to Eurostat data the unemployment rate went up to 6.8% in April, the month that was most affected by anti-pandemic measures. In other EU countries, unemployment increased from 6.4% in March to 6.6% in April; the Slovakian figures were 5.6% and 6.8%, respectively.

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## Slovenia

### **Average net wage rises**

*June 17, 2020*

According to the Statistics Bureau (SURS), the average real net monthly earnings rose by 11.5% month-on-month to €1,266 in April, after decreasing by 1.2% in March. The statistical office furthermore stated that the crisis resulted in a drop in the number of persons in paid employment and an increase in average gross and net earnings compared to earnings for March.

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## Spain

### **Closure of Nissan plant announced**

*June 8, 2020*

Prompted by the announced closure of Nissan's three Catalan plants, the European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights held an online meeting with representatives of the three Spanish unions represented in the company, CCOO, USO and UGT, the leadership of industriAll Europe, and the trade union coordinator of Nissan's EWC. The meeting followed several prior trade union initiatives regarding Nissan. The announcement of the closure came as a shock to Barcelona workers and trade unions, as well as to the European Works Council who had not been informed and consulted during the review process Nissan conducted prior to its decision.

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### **Employment grows for the first time during the corona crisis**

*June 2, 2020*

Spain's temporary layoff scheme, known as ERTE, is shoring up the labour market during the corona crisis, new figures show. Employment grew in May, as measured by new social security registrations, which rose by an average of 97,462 new contributors and a total of €18.5 million. ERTE is preventing the kind of debacle experienced during the last two weeks of March, when around 900,000 people lost their jobs in the wake of the lockdown introduced by the government on March 14. Although 450,000 furloughed workers have gone back to their jobs, there are still nearly three million people on ERTes across Spain.

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### **Supermarket workers strike over virus safety**

*June 1, 2020*

The CCOO and UGT unions want members at Lidl supermarkets in Costa del Sol and Costa Blanca to strike for 24 hours after failing to reach an arbitration agreement over safety rules as 'state of alarm' rules are eased. Unions are upset over the lack of anti-coronavirus protocols implemented by Lidl bosses. The CCOO said that Lidl's labour relations are based on mistrust and conflict.

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## Sweden

### **IKEA starts returning government aid received to cover wages**

*June 17, 2020*

The Ingka Group, the owner of most IKEA stores, announced that it had repaid aid received from the Serbian government to cover wages for furloughed staff during lockdown, and was about to do the same in Romania. The world's biggest furniture retailer will also repay aid in Belgium, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and the United States.

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### **76% of Swedes are looking for a job**

*June 16*

76% of Swedes say they are actively looking for a job, regardless of whether they are working or not, according to a new survey from Swedish recruitment firms Poolia and CareerBuilder. The survey aimed to find out how Swedes' career and job searches were affected during the pandemic. The survey showed that of those who are not looking for a job, 40% state that they are open to contact from recruiters, while 19% refrained from applying for a job because they think it is safer to stay with their existing employer.

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## Switzerland

### **Minimum wage debate returns**

*June 18, 2020*

A new political alliance, including trade unions, left-wing political parties and aid organisations, has launched new initiatives demanding higher minimum wages. This is a reaction to the coronavirus outbreak and counters a defeat in a 2014 referendum. The alliance is fighting for a statutory hourly wage of at least CHF 23 (€21.63) in three major cities. The main beneficiaries of a higher minimum wage in this expensive country would be the working poor.

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### **Lockdown increases productivity**

*June 7, 2020*

The Swiss Trade Association (SGV) calculated that productivity per worker rose by up to 16% during the COVID-19 lockdown. The increase can be explained by a greater focus on the most essential tasks, and also by the fact that, being forced to avoid daily commutes, employees were able to streamline work habits at home. In response to these findings, the association asks politicians to consider deregulatory reforms to facilitate remote working and more flexible working rules. Such a request already met with resistance by trade unions.

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## Turkey

### **Unions threaten general strike**

*June 29, 2020*

Members of the largest union gathered in the 81 provinces to denounce proposed changes to severance pay laws, threatening a general strike if the measures are introduced in parliament. Though the draft bill has yet to be made public, the government has outlined measures in recent weeks for a Supplementary Pension System (TES) that would cut severance pay rights for workers under 25 years of age and over 50.

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### **Unemployment rises**

*June 10, 2020*

The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in March (including February, March and April) rose to 13%, from 12.7% in the previous month. Several factors helped to limit the pace of the increase in the March unemployment rate: legislation banning layoffs for three months, introduced in mid-April; the presence of February data in the series, which is prior to the COVID-19 impact; and the arrival of the pandemic at a relatively later date than in other countries.

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### **Employment shield package**

*June 5, 2020*

Amid efforts to revive economic activity and shield employment and sectors affected by the corona pandemic, the government is working on a comprehensive employment shield package to support jobs, the Treasury and Finance Minister announced. In response to the outbreak of COVID-19, the government topped up the wages of employees whose work hours were cut and whose employers applied for funding.

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## **United Kingdom**

### **Tower Hamlets workers strike**

*June 30, 2020*

Thousands of workers in east London are to stage strikes after the Labour-run council that employs them announced it would dismiss and rehire them all on less favourable terms. Social workers, children's services workers, environmental health workers and benefits office workers are among 4,000 staff at Tower Hamlets council affected by the dispute. They say a new contract that includes cuts to travel allowances and out-of-hours payments will leave them worse off. The package includes deep cuts to severance pay, which have sparked fears over potential, as yet unannounced, plans for redundancies.

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### **Self-employment income support scheme extended**

*June 19, 2020*

HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) announced an extension to the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS). The extension will allow eligible claimants to apply to HMRC for a second liquidity grant to partially compensate for the loss of three months' worth of trading profits due to coronavirus business interruption occurring on or after 14 July 2020.

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### **Job cuts**

*June 16, 2020*

The number of workers on payrolls dropped by more than 600,000 between March and May. Meanwhile, the number of people claiming work-related benefits - which includes the unemployed - was up by 126% to

2.8 million. The early estimates reflect the impact of around six weeks of lockdown, but economists say the full effect on employment will not be felt until wage support schemes end in October. A total of 9.1 million workers are having their wages paid through the government's furlough scheme - more than a quarter of the workforce.

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