

# collective bargaining

Issue 3/2019 March

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**

### **Committee of Social Rights' conclusions on labour rights**

*March 25, 2019*

The European Committee of Social Rights has published its annual conclusions on the articles of the European Social Charter relating labour rights. Some of the key conclusions of 2018 were that only a relatively low number of European countries have ratified the right of workers and their families to have a decent standard of living. In a number of states the statutory minimum wage is too low in comparison with the average wage. With regard to the right to organise and the protection against sexual harassment at work the Committee concludes that several countries still have a long way to go in order to comply with labour rights. Conclusions per country are also provided.

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

### **Conference on automation and the future of work**

*March 19, 2019*

The emergence of non-standard forms of employment has created challenges for decent work, in particular when employment in non-standard arrangements is not voluntary. In 2014, 62% of European workers replied that they were in non-standard employment because they could not find a permanent job. These developments were discussed at a recent Conference "Automation, jobs and the future of work: understanding political and economic consequences" organized by the New Direction Foundation. ILO offers an extensive interview on the future of work in relation to the emergence of non-standard forms of work with a link to some policy recommendations and further reading material.

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

### **European women still underrepresented in management**

March 9, 2019

According to European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) data, women are still underrepresented in management functions with just 36% of all managers in Europe being women. Even in female-dominated sectors such as education and health, women have a lower proportional representation in management. Furthermore, women that do work in management functions are more likely to be in a non-supervising managerial job than men. EWCS data also shows that women enjoy fewer of the advantages of being managers, such as autonomy, the power to influence change in the organisation. The authors believe that if we are serious about addressing this situation, and ensuring gender equality, we need to both address cultural hang-ups and structural issues in organisations and the broader labour market.

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

### **Job security and academic freedom**

March 4, 2019

Higher Education trade unionists and representatives from 20 European countries gathered on 21-22 February in Brussels 2019 for Higher Education and Research Standing Committee (HERSC) meeting. In this meeting they concluded that that the main threat to academic freedom is posed by precarious contracts which are preventing academics from carrying out independent research. Participants were also concerned that private sector funding was heavily influencing what research was being conducted. HERSC members proposed concrete examples of indicators and ways to measure academic freedom, namely gathering statistics on the percentage of lecturers and teachers on precarious contracts.

The report: [in English ...](#)

### **Annual WSI minimum wage report**

March 1, 2019

The new WSI Minimum Wage Report provides an overview of current developments in minimum wages both in Europe and elsewhere. The report is part of a series that is published annually since 2009. It draws on the WSI Minimum Wage Database that holds time series data for 37 countries, including all 22 of the current 28 EU Member States with a statutory minimum wage. Data is also held on seven EU neighbours (Albania, Macedonia, Moldova, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine) and eight developed and industrialising economies in the rest of the world (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Japan, Korea, Canada, New Zealand and USA). The report shows that minimum wages in most EU countries were increased at the start of 2019, with a median increase of 4.8 % compared with the previous year, continuing the recent trends towards faster minimum wage growth.

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

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## **Austria**

### **Employee assembly of Austro Control causes disruptions**

March 25, 2019

A number of flights was cancelled as a result of a meeting of air control employees. The unions Vida and GPF (Gewerkschaft der Post und Fernmeldebediensteten) are unsatisfied with the offer the employers made. The main issue is about workload and hence recruiting new employees is necessary the unions claim. In the meantime airline companies urge that parties go back to the negotiation table. They and their passengers are the ones who suffer from the conflict involuntarily.

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

### **Inclusive workplace instead of 'disabled to work'**

March 5, 2019

Some 250 people attended the conference *Inklusive Arbeitswelt versus 'hocknstad und behindert' – Und jetzt, was können wir tun?* (Inclusive workplace versus 'unemployed and disabled' – and now what can we

do about it?). This was the 6th time the unions and Arbeiterkammer (Chamber of labour) invited confidential counsellors for the disabled to discuss recent developments. Dancers, a rapper, a traveller in a wheelchair and more showed their ability to perform despite their disabilities. Discussions and a book presentation showed that workplace inclusion can work and why it is worth the effort.

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## Belgium

### **Social actions of air traffic controllers at Skeyes**

*March 1, 2019*

Unions declare strike actions at the national air traffic services provider until March 23, 2019 because the demands of the workers (a list of 25 points, including requests for career interruption, promotions and bonuses) are not heard. Already at the beginning of the month problems arose due to many sick leaves. Later during the month actions disrupted work in the control centres. On March 22, 2019 the Christian union ACV/CSC-Transcom, representing a part of the air traffic controllers at Skeyes, toughened its actions despite proposals by management. The actions resulted in “relatively small disturbances” for passengers and cargo flights. Despite an agreement with the socialist union the actions were prolonged until at least the end of the month with great support from a majority of the controllers.

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## Bulgaria

### **Sofia Municipality raises salaries of public transport workers with 10%**

*March 13, 2019*

The Sofia Municipality proposes a 10% wage hike for public transport in the city and the reduction of overtime work. With the 10% wage hike salaries will rise to 587.99 euro a month. Furthermore the municipality is planning to improve working conditions. Whether drivers are satisfied with the measures will become clear after the decision of the transport committee.

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## Croatia

### **Third round of strikes at shipbuilder Uljanik since last summer**

*March 23, 2019*

Workers at shipbuilder Uljanik organised yet another strike, again in demand of unpaid wages. According to the workers they have worked for 6 to 7 months without receiving wages. Government, that owns some 25% of the shipbuilding company, still has to come with a decision on the future of the company. Earlier this week the government said it would take more time to decide whether to place Uljanik into bankruptcy or to restructure the business.

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### **Unclear if wage deal will put an end to unrest at Županja Combine Harvester factory**

*March 3, 2019*

Management of the Same Deutz Fahr Žetelice company reached a wage deal with the Croatian Metal Workers' Union and the striking committee of the company. With the new deal monthly wages will be increased with 65.50 euro in 2019 and a further monthly increase of 15.11 euro in 2020 and 20.15 euro in 2021. It remains unclear if the wage deal will put an end to the industrial unrest at the company because the striking committee made clear not to be particularly satisfied with the new pay deal. Workers initially demanded a monthly increase in gross wage of 99 euro plus an 8% allowance for special working conditions in production. Because management rejected their demands workers went on strike in January 2019 (see our January and February newsletters) but when the supreme court ruled the strike to be illegal, they resumed work on 8 February 2019.

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## Cyprus

### **Different opinions on labour shortages in hotel industry**

*March 22, 2019*

The country's hotel industry is facing severe labour shortages but on the reason behind the shortages opinions differ. According to employers in the sector there simply aren't enough workers that can and are willing to work in the sector. They urge government to relax current regulations that prevent foreign non-EU college students from working on the island in the touristic season. The trade unions, on the other hand, have a different view on the matter. They accuse employers of willingly deregulating labour relations in order to keep the costs as low as possible. According to the unions the solution for the labour shortages lies in the hands of the employers. If they were willing to pay decent wages and offer normal working conditions more people would apply for jobs in the hotel sector.

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## Czechia

### **Growing number of pensioners economically active**

*March 25, 2019*

According to statistics from the Czech Statistical Office (CSU) approximately 342,000 pensioners worked last year. This figure is 30,00 more than the figure for 2017 and is the highest in the last eight years. According to experts, this is due to the increased demand for workers, given the extremely low unemployment levels in the country, and the need for pensioners to secure additional funds to maintain their quality of life. A large number of these pensioners are women and on average the pensioners tend to be qualified and educated, mostly working in managerial positions.

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## Denmark

### **Forced paternity leave in order to give women better career chances**

*March 8, 2019*

The Ledernes Hovedorganisation, a trade union for executives and managers, has proposed an obligatory four-month paternity leave to improve the position of women on the labour market. With the forced 16 weeks paternity leave for fathers, women would only get 30 weeks of publicly financed maternity leave. According to the union, the current situation has a negative effect on the career chances of women. If women are to have a chance of reaching the top, the care for children should be more equally divided between fathers and mothers. Whilst social and health care workers are in favour of the Ledernes Hovedorganisation's proposal on obligatory paternity leave, the employers' organisation is against earmarked paternity leave.

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

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## Estonia

### **Plans for pension reform under critique**

*March 25, 2019*

Public figures have published an open letter to express their discontent with plans to make the country's second pillar pension funds voluntary. The letter was signed by various high profile people including analysts, economists and entrepreneurs from a range of institutions broad enough to include all of the country's major important universities, banks, ministries, investment funds, industrial associations, trade unions and think tanks. They believe that at this moment there is no viable alternative to a pension system based on saving money and dismantling it would mean the creation of a large financial burden for coming

generations. Instead of the reforms that are being discussed now they urge politicians to improve the second pillar by making it more effective.

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## Finland

### **Union puts Lapwall factories on 'blacklist'**

*March 21, 2019*

The Industrial Union accuses Lapwall, a company that has 3 factories in the country that produce prefabricated wooden wall, floor and roof elements, of discriminating on the grounds of union activity. According to the Industrial Union a 500 euro company bonus is paid to employees who leave the union, do not participate in strikes or do not put in for sick leave during the year. Therefore the union has declared an embargo on the company. The embargo is a legal measure in Finland which can be used when a company does not belong to the employers' association. With the embargo the employment office must inform jobseekers about the industrial dispute, and they are not allowed to break the embargo by guiding jobseekers in the company. The Industrial Union wants to negotiate with Lapwall but thus far the company has not shown any willingness to do that.

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## France

### **Custom officers' 'Brexit protests' affects Eurostar trains**

*March 20, 2019*

French customs officers are in their third week of industrial action. The custom officers are not on strike but are carrying out longer and more thorough checks than normally which leads to severe delays and train cancellations. Besides a long standing conflict over working conditions they resorted to industrial action to warn that they are not ready for Brexit because there has not been sufficient preparation for a no-deal Brexit. It remains unclear how long the industrial action will continue to affect train traffic between the UK and France.

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### **National strike in education sector**

*February 19, 2019*

After an earlier strike in nurse and elementary schools, teachers organised a nationwide strike demanding a rise in purchasing power and in protest of a new education bill that was voted through parliament in February 2019. Some 40% of the countries' teachers are believed to have participated in the action. Part of the new education bill is to increase compulsory education with 3 years without allocating additional funding for schools. Another mobilizing factor was the public service reform project. It provides for increased recourse to contract workers, greater individualisation of remuneration, and measures to "promote mobility" of staff, which are part of the objective of reducing the number of staff by 120,000 by 2022.

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### **Study on the measure of the employers' cover in France**

*February 18, 2019*

A new study was published that measures the employers' coverage and the impact of the representativeness of the branches on these companies. Measuring the employer audience also makes it possible to determine the coverage rate of employers' organizations in a given branch. This kind of systematic measurement of the audience of employers' organizations at the national, inter-professional and professional levels was set up for the first time in 2017. The study shows that one in four companies, on average, are members of an employers' organization while two out of three employees work in these companies. In general, it is in sectors where employment is highly concentrated around a few large companies that employee coverage rates are high. Furthermore it appears that conventional wages are slightly higher in the branches where the employers coverage is high



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## Germany

### **Union reaches deal with Ryanair**

*March 27, 2019*

Union Ver.di reached a deal with Ryanair about pay and working conditions for some 1100 Ryanair employees in the country. According to the union with the new deal cabin crew employees will receive an increase of €600 per month and separate increases of up to €250. The employees will also be given a minimum of flight hours. The company will in the future apply national labour laws. Ryanair refused to comment.

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

### **Union calls strike against job losses after bank merger**

*March 25, 2019*

The two largest private banks (Commerzbank and Deutsche Bank) are negotiating a merger that may cause up to 30000 jobs lost. Especially employees of the smaller Commerzbank fear to lose their jobs. Union Ver.di therefore declines the possible merger. Rolling warning strikes are announced as of March 28, 2019. First in Frankfurt and different cities every following day. The largest shareholder of both banks, Blackrock, so far is not convinced that the proposed merger will solve any problems.

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### **Salary increase of 8% for public workers**

*March 4, 2019*

Fruitful negotiations between public authorities and public service trade unions, including education unions affiliated to Education International, have led to salary increase of 8% for public workers. The Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft (GEW) qualified the salary increase for those working in the civil service of the German federal states (Länder) as an appropriate conclusion to collective bargaining after three day-negotiations with employers. 'By agreeing on a comprehensive package in several complex areas, trade unions and employers have shown that they have lived up to their socio-political responsibility. The result strengthens the attractiveness of the civil service, 'according to a statement by the GEW President.

Read on: [in English ...](#) The collective agreement: [in German ...](#)

### **Minister tackles working conditions in parcel delivery sector**

*March 2, 2019*

In response to complaints by union Ver.di that some parcel delivery companies pay Eastern European workers as little as €4.50 an hour (minimum wage is €9,19) the Labour Minister declared these working conditions 'shameful'. He therefore announced a new law to force these companies to cover failures by subcontractors to comply to minimum wage and social insurance regulations. This way wage dumping practices by three out of five parcel delivery firms will be made unlawful.

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## Greece

### **Strike in protest against privatization energy sector**

*March 9, 2019*

Energy sector workers went on a one-day strike to protest against government plans to further privatize the sector. In 2018 the government already sold 66% of the national transmission sector. The new bill that was passed in parliament, calls for a merger of subsidiaries. With the new plans the Public Gas Corporation of Greece (DEPA) will also have to split again into DEPA Trading and DEPA Infrastructure, and overseeing the sale of 50.1% of DEPA Trading and up to 14% of DEPA Infrastructures. In their statement, the union said that "the SYRIZA government is pushing for the policy of liberalizing the energy market, which leads to the



striking of labour relations, while at the same time increasing prices for households, thus transforming Energy from a social commodity into an expensive commodity”.

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## Hungary

### **Strike at Hankook ends with 18.5% pay deal**

*March 25, 2019*

A 10 day strike at a Hankook tire plant in the country ended when a pay deal was reached with the VDSZ, the trade union representing chemical workers. The 10 day strike was the longest strike in the 116-year history of the VDSz. The strike actions in which some 1700 workers participated cut the plant's production by 75%. The overall gains negotiated for workers combine different improvements that add up to an average of 18.5% increase. The settlement includes a 6% increase in shift allowance for all, improvement to the annual personal bonus, improvement of the seniority loyalty bonus, and fair distribution of wage increases.

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### **Public sector workers on strike in demand of higher wages and normal working hours**

*March 14, 2019*

The union of public service workers (MKKSZ) organised a nationwide day of strike action in front of parliament in Budapest in which some 75000 public workers participated. The main demand of the public sector workers is an increase in basic salaries, which have stagnated for 11 years. Lower income workers in the public sector that work fulltime sometimes receive less than 800 euro per month. Beside their demands for higher wages, public sector workers were also protesting the new law that raises the number of possible overtime hours and that, according to the unions, will increase the working day of public sector workers from 8 to 9 hours a day.

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## Iceland

### **Strike actions hotel workers and bus drivers**

*March 27, 2019*

After the labour court ruled that the process was fully legal, several hundred workers in hotel and guesthouse cleaning and laundry services in Reykjavík and the surrounding area went on a one day strike on 8 March 2019. The hotel workers organised the strike to protest low payment in the sector and was part of a broader union campaign (see our February newsletter). A 48-hour strike action, in which bus drivers would also participate and that was planned for the end of the month, was cancelled the day before the strike action would take place. However, the cancelled strike doesn't mean that the threat of industrial action in the country is over. Trade union Efling has planned more strikes in the coming weeks in order urge employers to meet their demands for a living wage. The unions also wants tax relief, rent control, and actual penalties for companies which violate labour contracts and the law.

Read on: [in English ...](#) Read on: [in English \(2\) ...](#)

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## Ireland

### **SIPTU wants minimum wage to increase from 9.80 to 10.20 euro per hour**

*March 28, 2019*

T In a public hearing on low pay trade union SIPTU has called for the national minimum wage to be increased from 9.80 to 10.20 per hour next year. According to SIPTU this increase in the minimum wage is necessary because of research indicating a lack of “wage progression” for low paid workers, unacceptable levels of in-work poverty and that such an increase could be paid by employers due to the improving economy. The union also stated that the hourly minimum wage based on full time hours required to deliver a minimum essential standard of living was 11.90 euro per hour in 2018.

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### **Nurses and midwife dispute not over**

*March 18, 2019*

The nurses' and midwives' dispute that centred on pay and staff shortages in the health service and resulted in industrial action (see our February newsletter) is still not over. Last month the labour court issued a recommendation aimed at settling the nurses and midwives dispute and the Irish Nurses and Midwives Organisation said there was enough in the recommendation to warrant suspending three days of back-to-back strike action which were due to start the following day. The labour court proposed a new higher paid Enhanced Nurse Practice grade which nurses could access within four years, as well as a significant extension in the entitlement to some valuable allowances. But the costs that lead to 50 million euro for 2019 and 2020 were to be part-funded by cost-offsetting productivity measures in a new contract. Unions argue that these measures would make nursing insecure, rejected the deal and threaten with further industrial action.

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

### **Ban on zero-hours contracts**

*March 6, 2019*

Trade unions have won their fight against zero-hour contracts. Legislation came into force this month by which zero-hours contracts are banned in almost all circumstance. Furthermore workers now the right to compensation from their employer if they turn up for a shift but are sent home without work and they are entitled to guaranteed hours of work that reflect their normal working week. With this new legislation workers will have greater financial security and job security.

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

### **Wage improvements for public servants recruited on low pay**

*March 1, 2019*

As part of a deal to address pay inequality, more than 60,000 public servants will gradually see pay improvements. The new arrangements are set to benefit more than 60,000 employees, including more than 16,000 teachers, almost 10,000 nurses and around 5,000 Special Needs Assistants. These public servants were recruited in times of economic crisis and therefore were faced with pay scales for all new entrants being slashed by 10%. The pay increases that, starting this months, will gradually come into effect are about 3300 euro on average. These increases come on top of pay rises already scheduled under the public service pay agreement. Some trade unions have rejected the wage improvement deal on the grounds that it did not restore full pay equality.

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## **Italy**

### **Workers Aviano air base threaten with strike**

*March 30, 2019*

Workers organised a protest outside the main gate of Aviano Air Base in demand of the air base to honour long-standing agreements regarding employment on base. According to the union, there are American civilians holding jobs on base they shouldn't have under decades-old basing agreements between the U.S. and Italy. Furthermore the workers are angry with the base for changing days and hours worked for Italian employees without negotiating and using contractors for jobs that Italian workers on base have traditionally done or could do instead. The unions also state that the base has hired more than a dozen local workers on a temporary basis instead of offering them permanent jobs. The workers and their union don't rule out strike actions.

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### **2% pay hike for 87 000 Fiat workers**

*March 11, 2019*

Renewal of company-trade union agreement that covers 87 000 workers. After months of negotiating a renewed collective agreement was signed with Fim, Uilm, Fismic, Uglm and the Fiat Framework Association.

The new collective agreement covers 87 000 workers in the industry and will be valid in the period 2019-2022. The agreement provides for an increase in contractual remuneration of 2% per year, which means an average increase of 144.5 euro per month, and an increase in the annual bonus linked to the productivity and efficiency objectives.

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## **General strike 8 March**

*March 8, 2019*

The Union of Trade Unions, the Basic Union of Trade Unions, the CUB Trasporti and SGB trade unions and the Basic Confederations - SI Cobas and Cobas del Lavoro Privato - organised a general strike of the public and private sectors on Friday 8 March 2019. The unions organised the strike in protest to male violence against women, gender discrimination, and harassment in the workplace. Besides the point specific to women's day, by using the hashtag 'Fridays for future' the unions also want to focus the attention of citizens and institutions on the urgent issue of climate change, to ask for a serious reflection on their lifestyles and a rapid and decisive implementation of policies aimed at reducing emissions and promoting a circular economic model.

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## **Latvia**

### **Ongoing pay dispute teachers may lead to strike action**

*March 6, 2019*

In an ongoing pay dispute (see our February and January newsletters) the council of the Latvian Trade Union of Education and Science Employees (LIZDA) decided to start formal procedures for strike action. The teachers were promised higher wages but when discussing the 2019 budget, the government did not support the proposal submitted by LIDZA on the allocation money for additional wages. According to government officials it is necessary to implement several important reforms in the educational system to improve the quality of education in the country before teacher's wages can be increased. The LIDZA criticizes rhetoric regarding reforms in education which, according to the union, is merely used as a reason to not increase wages for teachers.

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## **Liechtenstein**

### **Growth course continues**

*March 4, 2019*

Population, overnight stays and exports all rose in 2018. On the other hand, the number of motor vehicles and buildings costs fell by 19.2% and 6.5% respectively. Unemployment also continued to fall. These and other numbers were published by the Office of Statistics...

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## **Lithuania**

### **Latest working life developments**

*March 11, 2019*

Eurofound published the quarterly working life developments for the country that focusses on the fourth quarter of 2018. Main points of interest are the new national collective agreement on the basic level of pay for state officials, a proposal regarding quotas for foreign workers, and protest campaigns organised by cultural workers, forensic medical staff and teachers. In order to tackle the problem of remuneration for work in the public sector, the government set up a commission which started work on 6 December. The commission is due to provide parliament with a draft strategy for the sustainable financing of the salaries of

public sector employees until 2025. Instruments delivered by the commission are expected to lead to the implementation of a balanced financing system and sustainable changes throughout the public sector.

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## Luxembourg

### **Workers paid more per hour than in other EU states**

*March 22, 2019*

The national workforce benefits from the highest hourly rate of compensation of any region in the European Union, alongside Brussels. It came out on top of an EU ranking, with workers clocking up 44 euro an hour of pay and benefits in 2016 on average. It was also far above the EU average of 23 euro per hour. The latest figures from the European Union's statistical office Eurostat include wages, salaries and employer's social contributions. In contrast, workers were paid below 4 euro per hour in three regions in Bulgaria (Severe tsentralen, Severozapaden and Yuzhen tsentralen), and one region of Romania (Nord-Est).

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## Malta

### **Low pensions might mean workers have delay retirement**

*March 28, 2019*

Given that pensions in the country are only 1.2 times the poverty line workers might have to delay retirement if they want to maintain living standards. Government is keen to launch a discussion of additional measures to encourage elderly workers to stay in the workforce but there are other ways to solve this problem. Government could also substantially increase pensions. In comparison, in Spain pensions are on average 1.7 times the poverty line.

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## Netherlands

### **Unions announce industrial action at Shell in demand of higher wages**

*March 22, 2019*

Workers at Royal Dutch Shell's Pernis refinery will organise industrial action if Shell does not meet their demands for a pay raise. FNV and CNV trade unions are demanding a 5% wage hike per year but so far Shell is only offering a 2.5% wage hike for 2019 and a 2% wage hike for 2020. The current collective agreement has expired 1 March 2019. Both trade unions stated that the workers at refinery will determine the shape and timing of possible actions at the beginning of next week.

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### **Pension strikes aborted due to attack tram Utrecht**

*March 18, 2019*

The attack on a tram in Utrecht killing three and wounding several others caused the three organizing union federations to abort the national strike that started successfully in the early morning. Employees of various sectors were striking for better pensions and to freeze the retirement age at 66. The first and most disrupting strike was in public transit early at 6:00 a.m. Public transit employees were however not the only ones performing actions. Employees of the police, fire department, military and ambulance, among others, were driving from across the country to the Malieveld in The Hague at a speed of only a symbolic 66 kilometres per hour. There they would meet other employees such as dockworkers and construction workers. Already tens of thousands of people were in action when the news arrived about the attack on a tram in Utrecht. The attack had nothing to do with the pension action but still all actions were aborted out of respect for the victims.

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## **Nationwide strike in education**

*March 15, 2019*

Teachers of all levels of education went on a nationwide strike in demand of higher wages and more investment in education. The teachers believe this to be necessary because the quality of education is under pressure. More than half of primary schools were closed because of the strike. The teachers gathered with 40,000 colleagues on the Malieveld in The Hague. This month's protests of today are a follow-up of strikes in 2017 and 2018. The strike and manifestation were supported by all layers in education. It was also a union wide protest with the Christian union abstaining from the strike but not the other actions. The main demand was an extra investment in education of nearly 4 billion euros for workload reduction and salary improvement. Because salaries are too low there exists a shortage of teachers and hence the workload grows.

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## Norway

### **Private sector workers threaten with strike**

*March 27, 2019*

As part of an ongoing pay dispute around 25.000 private sector workers threaten to go on strike that will start at April 1 2019. With the strike the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions and the smaller Confederation of Vocational Unions urge employers to meet their demands for higher wages in the sector. While the unions start with a strike in which 25.000 private sector workers will partake, they could extent this to some 190.000 workers. Government has appointed a mediator in order to try to prevent strike action.

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## Poland

### **Government reopens pay talks with teachers' unions**

*March 25, 2019*

The government sat down for talks with teachers' unions amid a protracted dispute over pay. The president recently appealed to the government and teachers to hold talks and try to resolve the dispute. The head of the Polish Teachers' Union (ZNP), told reporters that up to 90% of employees in schools nationwide were ready to support an all-out strike, which the union wants to begin on April 8, 2019 just before key exams at various levels of education. Teachers represented by the ZNP have warned they will launch a strike of unlimited duration unless the government increases their wages. The Trade Unions Forum (FZZ) demands the same monthly pay raise. Meanwhile, the Solidarity union wants teachers' monthly pay to rise a lesser amount. The education ministry has said that it began carrying out a government plan to raise teachers' pay. According to the ministry the spending on teachers' salaries is set to increase by 16.1% from September 2019 onwards.

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## Portugal

### **National demonstration in education**

*March 22, 2019*

Following the strikes in the public sector last month (see our February newsletter), the countries' largest teachers' union federation organised a national protest in demand of higher wages. ETUCE stands in solidarity with the teachers and states that the teachers demand concrete and tangible improvements. They should not be punished and suffer unfair treatment for having provided quality service during times of recession and budget cuts in education. The ETUCE writes that they support FNE, FENPROF and SINDEP in their demand to the Portuguese government to stop making small concessions and commit to an important step in investing in teaching staff and quality education.

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## **CGTP: raising minimum wage reduces gender inequality**

*March 6, 2019*

According to the countries' largest trade union federation CGTP proposes to raise the minimum wage to 650 euro a month. According to the union raising minimum wages has a stronger impact in the battle to reduce gender equality than guaranteeing a higher percentage of female board directors. Because 27% of women were on the minimum national wage compared to 17% of men, according to CGTP figures inequality between men and women have been decreased by 1.6% if minimum salaries were raised to 650 euro a month.

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## Romania

### **Pay dispute leads to general strike at Electrolux plant**

*March 19, 2019*

As negotiations on a pay rise hit a deadlock more than 420 workers of the Electrolux plant in Satu Mare, that produces gas cookers, started a general strike. The workers are also organising a protest march to make their demands clear. The workers asked for a wage increase of 75 euro a month in net terms while company management is offering not even half of the demanded wage increase. The union that represents the workers at Electrolux states that the workers are determined to fight for their wage demands but remain open for further negotiations. According to official data, in 2017 Electrolux Romania SRL had a turnover of 130 million euro.

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### **Protest at Nestle Plant: laid off workers demand equal severance payments**

*March 18, 2019*

Nestle is shutting down its Romanian plant by the end of May 2019 and this means that the current 388 workers will lose their jobs. The workers that will lose their jobs are angry with the companies' management that refuses to give them the same kind of severance package that workers in other European countries receive when Nestle plants are closed down. The protesting workers are supported by the International Union of Food, Agriculture, Hotels, Restaurants, Catering and Tobacco Workers (IUF) that invited Nestle for an emergency meeting to discuss the topic of a general procedure for severance payment throughout Europe.

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## Serbia

### **Economic update**

*March 13, 2019*

According to the Statistical Office the value of export in January 2019 grew 3% compared to the same month last year, whereas the imports increased by 11.5%. The total foreign trade value stood at 2.84 billion euro, an increase of 7.8%. The export to import coverage in January was 71.8% and was lower relative to the same period last year when it was 77.7%. The biggest foreign trade was with the countries with which Serbia has free trade agreements. The European Union member-states make up 61.8% of the total trade reservations.

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## Slovakia

### **Difficulties finding qualified foreign workers**

*March 19, 2019*

The Elite Language Centre recently conducted an online survey to learn more about foreign language use for business purposes. Companies made it clear that the need for foreign workers will very probably increase in

the near future, especially for people who speak languages other than Slovak. According to a recent report about every fourth new job position is currently filled by a foreigner. For individuals who seek employee or self-employed status, anecdotal and media-reported evidence indicates that the police has in recent years presented a discouraging obstacle for job seekers and workers. The survey also found that while many companies offer language training for their employees many courses are taught by people who are not suited for the job. There is a significant number of under-qualified teachers being hired at cheap rates by language companies that win contracts by offering the lowest bid. Training should be given more structure, the survey concludes.

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## Slovenia

### **Chamber of commerce wants to link wages to productivity**

*March 6, 2019*

The chamber of commerce wants pay to be more performance based and recently proposed to link wage growth to productivity. With the proposal average gross wages would increase by nearly a quarter in 2025. The country's biggest trade union ZZP is optimistic about the plans but other trade unions have some reservations.

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## Spain

### **Real wages fell again**

*March 27, 2019*

According to the report *Benchmarking Working Europe 2019* published by the European Trade Union Institute countries affected by the combination of austerity and erosion of collective bargaining show sharp declines in the share of wages over GDP. This is one of the main elements of a scenario in which wage performance, at various levels and in many countries, has not reflected the economic growth situation. The report highlights that the Spain is the country with the highest rate of temporary employment, and that this is undesired in 85% of the cases. Furthermore the report shows a downward evolution of real wages, with a decrease of 0.7% in 2018.

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### **Sanitary transport workers suspend indefinite strike action**

*March 21, 2019*

The workers of the sanitary transport of Galicia with 80.81% against 14.89% voted in favour of a new preliminary collective agreement with the employer's association. Following the vote they suspended a planned indefinite strike action that was scheduled to begin this month. Trade unions UGT, CIG and CC OO however warn that with the approval of this pre-agreement strike actions are only suspended and not called off in total. Whether new strike actions are to be expected is depended on the next part of the negotiations on the new collective agreement

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### **International Women's Day: strike action and protests**

*March 8, 2019*

International Women's Day saw multiple strike actions and more than 500 street demonstrations throughout the country. The strike and many of the demonstrations were organized by the Comisión 8M (March 8 Commission), made up of feminist assemblies scattered throughout the country. The strike conditions were debated by around 500 groups in the northern city of Gijón in October of last 2018. This the second year in a row the country has massive protests on women's day that call for gender equality and to rally against ongoing discrimination of women. Last year more than 5 million people joined in a national strike on women's day (see our March 2018 newsletter).



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### **Fired for a more than two-minute loo break?**

*March 5, 2019*

Workers at a canning company in the south of the country claim that they are fired if they take longer than two minutes loo-breaks. A video has provided evidence for the accusations. Workers and their trade unions have denounced this kind of pressure and humiliation that they say is common in the industry. The canning company denies any misdoing and instead claims that the video is manipulated.

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## Sweden

### **Years of conflict end with collective agreement for dockworkers**

*March 6, 2019*

For the first time in its 47-year history the Swedish Dockworkers' Union was able to establish a national collective agreement for dockworkers across the country. The union was fighting for a collective agreement since 2016 and held several strike actions (see our January newsletter). A strike action planned for this month, that would have had a huge impact on European food import and export was called off because of the new collective agreement that is linked to collective agreement of transport workers.

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## Switzerland

### **Half bus drivers suffer from stress**

*March 4, 2019*

One in two bus drivers is suffering from the symptoms of stress, twice the rate among the general population. 'Respect for bus drivers has completely disappeared in recent years', one bus driver declared. Indeed, some 70 percent of bus drivers said that the cyclists who disobeyed the road rules made their job more difficult. Meanwhile, technologies that allow buses to be tracked in real time are also causing stress as drivers fight to ensure their services don't run late. Asked by union SEV about their reasons for visiting a doctor if they had done so, they cited symptoms including tiredness, anxiety and irritability. It was also found that one third of all drivers had gone to work "without being at full strength", a result described as 'alarming' by the union secretary.

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## Turkey

### **Workers win demands after 297 days of struggle at Yves Rocher subsidiary**

*March 12, 2019*

After a long struggle (see our February newsletter) workers at Yves Rocher's Turkish subsidiary Flormar have finally reached a deal with the company. The company agreed to pay out severance payments, notice payments and special compensation equal to 16-months' salary to 132 dismissed workers, without waiting for the results of the pending union court cases. Another major breakthrough is recognition for rubber union Petrol-Is. If the court rules that the union has sufficient members to be a legal bargaining partner, the company will recognize them as collective bargaining agent. A majority of the workers voted in favour of the deal.

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# United Kingdom

## **Use of social dialogue in wage-setting**

March 27, 2019

This national report examines the use of social dialogue in wage setting in the country and offers an overview of the trajectory before and after the 2008 economic crisis. Furthermore the report provides a justice-based evaluation of two social dialogue mechanisms: collective bargaining and the tripartite Low Pay Commission advising the Government on minimum wage rates. Results include that post-crisis developments reinforced and deepened pre-crisis trends. This effect is manifest in the continuation of the decline in collective bargaining coverage and unionisation. These developments are complemented by new legal reforms placing additional constraints on unions' already heavily circumscribed ability to act as effective collective bargaining and political actors. However, the minimum wage has gained strength in terms of value and legitimacy in recent years.

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## **Possible strike at Northern Ireland's electricity supply**

March 22, 2019

More than 90% of staff at Systems Operator Northern Ireland (Soni) voted in favour of industrial action, including strike, if the pay dispute with their employers is not resolved. The possible strike threatens to disrupt electricity supplies to homes and businesses in Northern Ireland from next month. Soni has been part of the State-owned Eirgrid group since 2009. According to trade union Prospects the union was willing to continue talks but it argued that it required a more realistic approach from the company for such negotiations to be fruitful.

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## **Will government be able to protect workers' rights after Brexit?**

March 7, 2019

Government has stated that after the Brexit the standards of workers' rights will not deteriorate from as they currently are under EU laws. In order to ensure this any new legislation changing those laws will be assessed as to whether they uphold this commitment. Furthermore parliament is to consider any future changes in the EU law that strengthen workers' rights or workplace health and safety standards, and vote on whether they should be adopted into UK law. Proposals for a single labour market enforcement body will be brought forward in the coming months. The trade union movement is sceptical about these promises. According to the general secretary of the TUC government's proposals come nowhere close to ensuring existing rights are protected. And they won't stop workers' rights in the UK from falling behind those in the rest of Europe.

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## **Teaching unions announce strike ballot Scotland**

March 5, 2019

In a dispute over low pay, high workload and indiscipline the second Scottish teaching union announced plans to organise a ballot over strike action. The last offer was rejected by the teachers' side of the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) last month. This offer included a 9% rise as of April 2019, consisting of a series of 3 times 3% increases. The first of the 3 pay rises would be backdated to April 2018 and the last one would be applied in April 2020. Trade unions, the Scottish government and the local council umbrella body had their last scheduled meeting yesterday but the meeting did not end with a new offer.

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