

# collective bargaining

Issue 1/2020 January

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

### Seasonal unemployment

*January 19, 2020*

The European Employment Services (EURES) platform has addressed the issue of seasonal fluctuations in the labour market. Seasonal fluctuations in employment and unemployment, particularly in the construction and tourism sectors, are common in many European countries. The degree of fluctuation differs between member states and is linked to certain conditions such as statutory regulations and regulations under collective agreements, corporate practice, and the mobility and proportion of the foreign workforce in a particular member state.

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### First-stage consultation of social partners on fair minimum wages

*January 14, 2020*

The European Commission has published a consultation paper on “possible action addressing the challenges related to fair minimum wages”. In the long history of the debate about a European minimum wage policy, this initiative represents a watershed moment because it is the first time the Commission has considered taking legislative action to ensure fair minimum wages in Europe. The Commission’s initiative is based on the belief that “adequate wages are key for ensuring fair working conditions and decent living standards for European workers” and that minimum wages, either set through collective agreements or legal provisions, help to protect low-wage workers and prevent in-work poverty.

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### First reflections on building a strong social Europe

*January 14, 2020*

The European Commission released a Communication on building a strong social Europe to enable just transitions. It sets out how social policy will help meet challenges, proposes action at EU level, and seeks feedback on further action at all levels in the area of employment and social rights.

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## Austria

### **Social sector workers demand 35-hour week**

*January 23, 2020*

Trade unions Vida and GPA-djp organised company meetings for nursing, health and social workers to inform employees about the ongoing negotiations on the 35-hour week with full salary and staff compensation. The latest round of negotiations took place at the end of January 2020.

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### **Negotiations begin for hospital workers**

*January 13, 2020*

Both the trade union Vida and the Chamber of Physicians are demanding a significant increase in wages and allowances for hospital workers, including for work on Sundays and night shifts. Negotiations for the 8,000 employees in religious hospitals started on January 10. The medical doctors agreed with the rest of the employees that staff investments are required.

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## Belgium

### **Translation company staff get unlimited paid vacations**

*January 28, 2020*

Global translation company Jonckers is offering its employees, including those in Belgium, unlimited paid vacation days, starting in March. All 172 employees of the company will be able to take paid time off whenever they like. At the very least, they are obliged to take 20 paid days of vacation. The aim of the programme is to improve employee well-being at work and address long-term absences but also to attract a talented workforce.

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### **Strike of air traffic controllers halted**

*January 17, 2020*

There will be no action taken before 10 February following a strike notice filed with air traffic controller Skeyes over new contracts with the Belgian Defence Department. Union ACV-Transcom had announced a strike against collaboration with the Belgian Defence Department. Later the same week a conciliation meeting was held in a constructive atmosphere. A further meeting will take place on 10 February. In the meantime, all actions and intentions to take action have been suspended.

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## Bulgaria

### **Young people prefer to work in the service sector**

*January 25, 2020*

Many young Bulgarians graduating from secondary school do not want to work in industry, but prefer to work in the service sector. These are the results of a PISA survey conducted for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Massive changes in the labour market and the emergence of new professions have made virtually no impression on young people in Bulgaria.

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### **Over 200,000 unemployed find work**

*January 15, 2020*

In 2019, 216,256 jobless people found employment through job centres. Since the beginning of 2019, 24,412 youths under 29 have found employment, as well as 24,398 long-term unemployed people, 43,975 who were jobless and over 55, 13,954 disabled people and 58,782 unskilled job applicants.

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## Croatia

### **Higher wages and stronger bargaining key priorities**

*January 16, 2020*

According to Croatian affiliates of EPSU, the European Public Service Union, workers need higher wages. The wages are too low to stem the wave of emigration. Many sectors such as health and care face staff shortages. The statutory minimum wage should be raised to 60% of the median wage. Moreover, the government should foster a better climate for collective bargaining.

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### **Increase of work permit quota**

*January 2, 2020*

The Labour Ministry has announced a higher work permit quota for 2020. Croatia will issue 78,470 work permits in 2020 for non-EU citizens. The country could be a good choice of destination for citizens of third-world countries like Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.

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## Cyprus

### **Average salaries rise slowly**

*January 13, 2020*

One in four employees in Cyprus receives a salary of less than €1,000 while half earn up to €1,500, according to data from the Statistical Service. Since 2010 only a slight shift of employees moving from the lowest wage scales to the highest has taken place. While 24.6% of employees had a salary of up to €1,000 in 2018, this figure stood at 25.5% in 2010.

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## Czechia

### **Four-day working week soon to be a reality?**

*January 23, 2020*

The Interior Minister has proposed the idea of a four-day working week, which might seem strange in a country with the lowest unemployment rate in Europe and one of the most competitive job markets. However, the four-day working week could serve to attract new talent to the labour market.

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### **Strong growth in the numbers of foreign workers**

*January 17, 2020*

Figures published by the Czech Statistics Office show that foreign workers made up 13% of the labour force in 2019. In 2010 it was just 6%, meaning the number has more than doubled over the last decade. This growth can be explained by the historically low unemployment figures in the same period.

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## Denmark

### **Trade unions demand hike in minimum wages**

*January 13, 2020*

Denmark has no statutory minimum wage. Ahead of the 'OK 2020' collective bargaining negotiations with industry, trade unions in Denmark mobilised for an increase in the minimum wage. Hundreds of activists from several professional trade unions in the private and public sectors demonstrated at the Copenhagen City Hall Square demanding a higher minimum wage.

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### **Plan for EU-wide minimum wage challenged**

*January 12, 2020*

The Nordic countries, including Denmark, are battling plans to introduce an EU-wide minimum wage. Both politicians and unions fear this will undermine their century-old models of collective bargaining, which set minimum pay rates. Denmark's employment minister said he supported higher wages for the least well-paid in Europe but that "the means to achieve this goal must respect national traditions and well-functioning models".

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## Estonia

### **Pension reform**

*January 29, 2020*

The parliament is expected to approve a pension reform, which will make the so-called second pillar, the private pension back-up fund, voluntary in the future. Until now all employees have had to pay 2% of their salary into savings accounts, with the state adding another 4%. Under the reform employees will be allowed to withdraw the money from their account.

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### **Minimum wage rises**

*January 2, 2020*

On 1 January 2020 the minimum wage rose from €540 to €584. The minimum hourly rate increased from €3.21 to €3.48. Trade unions and employers reached a minimum wage agreement through a national conciliator at the end of 2019. The minimum wage will rise to approximately 40% of the average wage.

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## **Finland**

### **3.3% pay rise in technology sector**

*January 16, 2020*

After several months of negotiations, a new collective agreement for the technology industry was accepted. Wages will rise by 3.3%. The agreement is valid for 25 months. The agreement covers some 100,000 workers in the technology sector, such as metal, mining, automotive, shipyards, etc. Industrial action was necessary to reach the agreement.

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## **France**

### **Unions promise months more of strike action**

*January 24, 2020*

Some of France's unions threatened industrial action for months to come, in order to force the President to withdraw the biggest reform of the pension system since the Second World War. Union leaders themselves acknowledge it is a now-or-never moment before the draft law heads to parliament.

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### **Minimum salary increases**

*January 7, 2020*

The government increased the minimum legal monthly salary requirement (SMIC) to €1,539.42 per month (a rise of 1.2%). The SMIC is the minimum legal salary for all workers in France. It is fixed as an hourly rate, with the monthly rate calculated assuming a 35-hour week.

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## **Germany**

### **Metalworkers union will fight for job security**

*January 24, 2020*

Because the metal industry is going through hard times, the metalworkers' union, IG Metall, will not make concrete wage demands in the upcoming collective bargaining round. The union's key focus will instead be



on employment protection by negotiating a “future package” that includes shorter working hours instead of layoffs.

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### **Minimum wages rise in construction sector**

*January 20, 2020*

The trade union IG BAU announced that a new wage agreement with construction employers was reached which will increase minimum wages in the sector. The minimum wages for unskilled construction workers will increase by €0.35 to €12.55 per hour. The so-called second minimum wage (for skilled workers) will increase by €0.20 to €15.40 per hour in West Germany and to €15.25 in Berlin. The new minimum wage rates will apply from 1 April 2020.

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### **Jobs cut due to CO<sub>2</sub> regulation**

*January 15, 2020*

Opel is to cut thousands of jobs as strict European CO<sub>2</sub> rules start to take effect. The carmaker has highlighted the emissions targets as a reason for cutting up to 4,100 jobs, a move that it says will secure other forms of employment and further increase its competitiveness.

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## **Greece**

### **Creditors approve pension hike**

*January 24, 2020*

A new social security bill will lead to varying increases in pensions according to Labour Ministry officials. The ministry stated that any cost will be covered for 2020 by the social budget. The main pension increases will only concern those who retire after 30 to 44 years of insured labour.

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### **Notaries strike**

*January 3, 2020*

In protest against a requirement that all property transfers should be recorded electronically, the unions of notaries from Athens and Piraeus called on their members to strike. The notaries said they are not opposed to taking over the responsibility from tax authorities, but warned about the lack of a legislative framework that will allow them to carry out these transactions safely for citizens and the state.

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## **Hungary**

### **Demonstration on the National Day of Culture**

*January 22, 2020*

On the National Day of Hungarian Culture, the Trade Union of Public Cultural and Public Collections Employees, KKDSZ, held a demonstration to protest against the low level of pay across the culture sector

and the lack of any pay increase for their members for over 10 years. In a petition KKDSZ demands immediate wage negotiation between union representatives and the government, as well as a pay increase.

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### **More than 40% of disabled people employed**

*January 5, 2020*

About 42% of disabled people in Hungary are employed, up from 18% in 2010, the Human Resources Ministry said. In absolute terms, the number of disabled Hungarians holding jobs has risen to 150,000 from 60,000. Payroll tax exemptions are available for employees with disabilities on up to double the minimum wage.

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## Iceland

### **Paternity leave has positive effects on gender politics**

*January 20, 2020*

The Nordic Gender Effect at Work is one of the Nordic prime ministers' most important projects for the advancement of gender equality. Gender equality politics have brought increased employment, improved family life and economic growth in the Nordic region. In Iceland, fathers take roughly 30% of the total available leave. Longer periods of leave mean they rely less on the mothers for help, and identify to a lesser degree with traditional male stereotypes.

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## Ireland

### **Post-primary teachers go on strike**

*January 18, 2020*

The Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI), which represents some 19,000 members in secondary schools, colleges of further and adult education, institutes of technology and universities, announced a strike for 4 February 2020. The dispute centres around the big pay differences between those hired before and after 2011. New secondary school teachers earn 10% less in the first 10 years of their career than they would have before the recession-era cutbacks were implemented.

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### **Plea for four-day week**

*January 17, 2020*

"Four Day Week Ireland" is a campaign advocating for a gradual, steady, managed transition to a shorter working week for all workers, in the private and public sectors. It aims to start a public conversation on the case for reduced working hours.

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### **National minimum wage increase**

January 16, 2020

The national minimum hourly rate will become €10.10 on 1 February 2020 according to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. For workers under the age of 20, lower rates apply.

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## Italy

### **Lawsuit over European Works Council**

January 30, 2020

An Italian labour court will hear on 6 February 2020 the case presented by the Italian unions Fistel-CISL and SLC-CGIL against Sofidel for the company's repeated refusal to establish a European Works Council (EWC). The unions of the tissue paper industry in Italy, together with UNI Europa, started the process of establishing an EWC in Sofidel in 2015.

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## Latvia

### **Trade unions urge government to resolve transit company bank accounts issue**

January 16, 2020

The bank accounts of multiple transit companies have been blocked because of US sanctions against Aivars Lembergs. Trade unions associated with the transit industry have requested Latvia's highest-ranking officials to resolve the situation, promising to organise massive protests if the government does not act.

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## Liechtenstein

### **Trade union asks for controls on wage dumping**

January 23, 2020

In the hotel and hospitality industry more controls are needed to provide employees with a decent life. The tripartite commission has been summoned by the trade union LANV (Liechtensteinischer ArbeitnehmerInnenverband) to investigate if paid wages are lower than 2,600 francs (€2,432). If so, the commission should apply to the government for an employment contract with a mandatory minimum wage.

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## Lithuania

### **Workers on strike because of unpaid wages**

January 2, 2020

Turkish workers building a stadium in Kaunas are on hunger strike over unpaid wages. According to the Kaunas municipality, the contractor might be fined if the construction work falls behind schedule because of

the strike. The local authorities do not rule out cancelling the contract with the Turkish company in the worst-case scenario. The May 1 Trade Union says the 53 workers currently on hunger strike outside the Kaunas municipality building intend to continue their protest until all their arrears are paid.

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## Luxembourg

### **Teachers protest**

*January 22, 2020*

The teaching staff of a private international school in Merl will work to rule for three days. According to the Christian trade union LCGB (Lëtzebuerger Chrëschtliche Gewerkschafts-Bond), the protest is necessary because negotiations for a new collective agreement have so far failed. The issue at stake is a salary increase for around 270 employees.

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## Malta

### **2020: a year to look forward to**

*January 4, 2020*

Prospects look good for 2020. The number of unemployed is at its lowest and the number of employed at its highest since data started to be collected in the 1960s. The Eurobarometer conducted on behalf of the European Commission in the second half of November shows that 81% of those interviewed consider the Maltese economic situation to be good, against just 45% of respondents in the euro area.

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## Netherlands

### **More than half of primary schools participate in two-day strike**

*January 30, 2020*

Teachers, school leaders and other employees in education have been striking for higher wages and lighter workloads. Over 4,000 primary and secondary schools remain closed, with 59% of primary schools and 28% of secondary schools participating in the strike.

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### **Lidl workers demand a better collective agreement**

*January 14, 2020*

A group of activists from trade union FNV held a “New Year’s reception” in front of Lidl’s headquarters in Huizen to demand a better collective agreement. The group handed over a petition signed by 500 employees. Lidl workers have been fighting for an agreement that decreases work pressure and provides a decent pay rise and better working conditions.

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## **Hospital employees receive pay increase**

*January 6, 2020*

Members of trade union FNV have agreed to a pay deal reached in December 2019 for 200,000 employees working in hospitals. Employees covered by the collective agreement will receive a total pay increase of 8% over 27 months. In addition, to help obtain a better work-life balance, they will receive additional recovery time after on-call duty, extended from six to eight hours.

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## Norway

### **Fresh threat of strike action in Scandinavian Airlines**

*January 7, 2020*

Scandinavian Airlines (SAS) is facing more turbulence this spring, just a year after striking pilots grounded most flights in and out of Norway, Sweden and Denmark. Now SAS flight attendants want more predictable work schedules and higher pay. Their current contract expires on March 31. A majority of flight attendants want more permanent duty schedules, while SAS management wants to retain as much flexibility as possible.

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## Poland

### **High inflation linked to rise in minimum wage**

*January 7, 2020*

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased from 2.6% to 3.4% year-on-year in December. The rapid increase was probably caused by rising goods and services prices, ahead of the January 2020 15.6% rise in the minimum wage, the highest ever.

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### **Changes to the rules on calculating statutory minimum wage**

*January 13, 2020*

On 1 January 2020, a significant amendment to the rules on calculating the payment of the statutory minimum wage came into force. According to the new rules, employers should no longer include length-of-service allowances, such as “jubilee awards”, overtime allowances, night-time work allowances and retirement severance, in the calculation of the minimum wage.

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## Portugal

### **Upcoming strike announced**

January 17, 2020

Police, nurses, teachers and public administration workers have announced strike action across Portugal, threatening to bring the country to a halt. PSP and GNR police unions have stated that they will be holding monthly protests until the government responds to their demands. Their demands include the payment of a risk allowance, higher salaries, an increase in staff and a call for better personal protection equipment.

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## Romania

### **Biggest retailer raises minimum wages**

January 31, 2020

Kaufland, the biggest retail network in Romania and one of the biggest local employers, will increase the minimum gross income of its employees, including wage, meal vouchers and bonuses, by 10.6%, starting in March. The minimum income level will vary depending on the social and economic particularities of each region, which means that employees in regions with higher-than-average wages and a low unemployment rate will probably receive higher minimum wages than those in poorer regions.

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### **Romanian employees' professional goals for 2020**

January 10, 2020

A new job, a salary increase and a job closer to home are the main professional goals of Romanian employees for 2020, according to a study by online recruiting platform eJobs Romania. More than 44% of respondents said they want to change their job this year, 30% hope for a salary increase, 24% want a job closer to home, and 22% put professional development on their wish list for 2020. Many Romanian employees would also like to change their field of activity this year, emigrate or start their own business.

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## Serbia

### **Difficult conditions for workers**

January 18, 2020

In an interview, the President of the Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions of Serbia (CATUS) said that the last five years were extremely difficult for Serbian workers. The period has been marked by low salaries and pensions and a ban on new employment in the public sector. CATUS did its best, but is still not satisfied with the results. Workers exposed to employer pressure could not always find "shelter under the union's umbrella".

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## Slovakia

### **Hauliers strike**

January 10, 2020

Hauliers have been on strike, blocking the roads in Bratislava and elsewhere. Their demands are a decrease of the road tax by 50% and the suspension of the toll system. The strike, organised by the Union of Slovakia's Road Hauliers (UNAS), continues despite the Ministry's offer of a 12.5% reduction of the road tax.

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## Slovenia

### **Police announce token strike for 3 February**

*January 21, 2020*

Police officers are planning a four-hour token strike on 3 February over the government's failure to implement commitments made in the December 2018 agreement that had ended a protracted strike. The strike was announced by the Trade Union of Police Officers (SPS), one of the two unions in the force, which also invited the second union, the Police Trade Union of Slovenia (PSS), to join. The union claims that agreed pay raises and promotions have not been fully implemented.

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### **Reduced income tax on labour**

*January 1, 2020*

Recently adopted tax changes slightly reduce the taxation of labour and increase taxes on capital. The thresholds for all five personal income tax brackets have been increased, effectively subjecting a higher share of income to lower tax rates. In the second and third tax brackets, which cover mostly the middle class, the tax rate will drop by one percentage point to 26% and 33%, respectively.

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## Spain

### **5.5% hike in minimum wage**

*January 23, 2020*

Spain's new government have announced a 5.5% rise in the minimum wage from 1 January. The government's move is part of a plan to boost the net minimum wage to 60% of the average monthly pay of €1,944 by the end of its four-year term. The new government has also announced rises in pensions and civil servant salaries.

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### **Changes in legislation expected in 2020**

*January 3, 2020*

The government will propose to increase purchasing power for those receiving non-contributory pensions. Moreover, there will be a proposal for a reform of the workers' statute, resulting in better protection for workers. Several elements of the Labour Reform of 2012 will be revoked, including the possibility for employers to fire employees for being sick and to change working conditions unilaterally.

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## Sweden

### **Paid for time off**

*January 22, 2020*

Workers in Sweden enjoy relatively generous rights, especially when it comes to holidays. Most employees of Swedish companies receive an extra so-called “holiday supplement” or “holiday salary” when they take their annual leave. Workplaces in Sweden must offer employees a minimum of 25 days’ paid annual leave, while many companies offer more, particularly for long-term employees.

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### **More work permits**

*January 22, 2020*

More people applied for work permits in Sweden in 2019 than the year before, a continuation of an upward trend. 59,307 applications for Swedish work permits were submitted, according to new figures by the Swedish Migration Agency. The majority of applications where a decision was reached were approved, with a huge 42,095 work permits granted.

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## Switzerland

### **Higher wages in insulation industry**

*January 22, 2020*

For the first time, the trade union and employers’ organisation in the insulation industry have agreed on a binding minimum wage for apprentices. The agreement came into force on 1 January 2020. It not only benefits learners but also around 2,000 insulation plumbers. Apprentices at the beginning of their apprenticeship will receive a minimum wage of 1,000 francs (€932,40) per month.

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### **Trade union will fight for more solidarity in 2020**

*January 9, 2020*

The national trade union confederation SGB (Schweizerischer Gewerkschaftsbund) aims to revive solidarity in 2020 after a thirty-year period in which it has weakened. Solidarity has increasingly been sacrificed to competitiveness, said SGB, making it understandable why so many people feel left behind. One union president feared that competition leads to a fight in which only the strongest can win.

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## Turkey

### **Agreement in metal industry after strike**

*January 21, 2020*

Strike action by over 2,000 workers in Turkey has paid off as union Birleşik Metal İş won a major victory in securing a better deal for metalworkers. Some 2,200 workers at three companies and 13 plants across Turkey began strike action on 20 January. A breakthrough came following talks on 23 January between union



representatives and management. The companies finally increased their offer and reached an agreement that will increase workers' wages, social benefits and overtime pay, as well as provide other benefits.

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### **Trade unions united in fight for fair wages**

*January 7, 2020*

Against the background of intolerably low wages in the Turkish metal industry, unions are joining forces to announce decisive industrial action. In a joint press conference, Özcelik-Is, Birlesik Metal-Is and Türk Metal, the three Turkish trade unions organising workers in the metal industries, have announced industrial action to increase pressure in their negotiations with the Turkish employers' organisation MESS. At present, wages in the metal industry are barely above the recently increased national minimum wage, as a result of high levels of inflation.

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## United Kingdom

### **A quarter of minimum wage workers underpaid**

*January 8, 2020*

A quarter of people aged 25 and over who should be receiving the minimum wage are being underpaid, according to the Resolution Foundation think tank. The number of firms not complying with minimum wage payments has increased since the National Living Wage was introduced in 2016. Before then, about one in five workers aged 25 and over was underpaid, but this figure is now more than one in four. The government said it wanted to ensure that all those eligible were correctly paid.

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### **Top bosses earn 117 times the annual wage of an average worker**

*January 6, 2020*

Bosses of FTSE 100 companies only needed to work until 5 PM on January 6 to earn as much as the average worker does in a year. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and think tank the High Pay Centre said the findings revealed that the average FTSE 100 chief executive was paid £3.46 million (€4.12 million) in 2018, equivalent to £901.30 (€1,072.55) an hour. This is 117 times the wage of the average full-time worker, who takes home an annual salary of £29,559 (€35,175).

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### **Increase of state pension**

*January 6, 2020*

From April, the state pension is set to rise at its fastest rate since 2012, with retirees receiving up to £342 (€407) more a year (up by 3.9%). Retirees on the new state pension will see their weekly pay rise to £175 (€208), while those on the basic state pension will get an increased weekly income of £134 (€159).

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