



## COVID-19 WATCH ETUC BRIEFING NOTE

SOCIAL DIALOGUE  
8 MAY 2020

### COVID-19: Social Dialogue Developments

This briefing note outlines the role social dialogue has played, and continues to play, in contributing to responding to the COVID-19 crisis, protecting workers, their health and safety, jobs and livelihoods as well as measures for those who have lost their jobs at workplace, sector, national and EU level.

The COVID-19 outbreak has resulted in an unprecedented series of measures at both European and national level in an attempt to mitigate the potentially devastating impact on societies. The role of social partners in influencing these measures differs greatly by country, and in some cases the lessons from the 2008 financial crisis have not been learned, with governments taking unilateral decisions which undermines the role of social partners.

This is not the whole story however, and there are some positive examples where trade unions, together with employers and governments, have been able to lead the way in addressing issues such as health and safety concerns, short-time work, and temporary layoffs.

Social dialogue at all levels is essential central to ensure a safe return to work. Trade unions have already been active designing and influencing measures at all levels to protect workers as they return to the workplace. See for example the measures in Belgium, France and Italy below.

The importance of involving social partners in designing and implementing measures has been stressed [jointly](#) by the European social partners, the [ITUC and the IOE](#), as well as the [ILO](#) and other international organisations<sup>1</sup>. Numerous examples show that proper consultation of social partners and respect for their autonomy has resulted in timely, comprehensive, effective and fair measures. In other cases trade unions are ready with demands (e.g. the [return to work proposals](#) from the TUC in the UK) but the other parties may remain unavailable.

Some of the initiatives outlined below are tripartite, while some are bi-partite initiatives by the social partners which have had a bearing on the measures taken. Collective agreements have also been reached which seek to support workers and companies in this new context. Furthermore, national trade unions, supported by the ETUC, have been successful in putting pressure on governments to withdraw or amend unilateral decisions which undermine the autonomy of social partners and the collective rights of workers. However, as can be seen from some examples below, the challenge remains, at both national and European level, to fight against the endangerment of social partner autonomy, the weakening of social dialogue institutions and the disregard for trade union rights. The examples also highlight the need for the EU to adopt a more supportive approach to give trade unions a voice in EU policy development across all fields and to ensure the use of social dialogue as a tool for delivery of EU priorities at implementation stage. EU words of support for social dialogue needs to be backed up with concrete measures to guarantee involvement in the implementation of to EU measures at Member State level, including for example a rule that prevents companies that refuse to negotiate with unions from access to EU funded recovery initiatives or from public procurement.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example the OECD Publication "[Social Partnership in the times of the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)"



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*One note of caution, this briefing note captures a dynamic situation which is subject to ongoing change. We therefore kindly ask affiliates to provide us with further information on COVID 19- related measures that have been introduced in your country so that we can update this briefing note.*

*Many of the measures outlined in this briefing note are covered in the [briefing notes already published](#) which go into detail on the different issues. The briefing note on trade union rights is of particular relevance as it gives an overview of important and relevant international and European instruments and case law stressing amongst others the important role social dialogue and social partners have to play in crisis situations like Covid-19 in particular in the design, implementation and enforcement of policies and measures to mitigate the economic and social impact of such crisis.*

### **European Level:**

On the 24<sup>th</sup> of March the European cross-industry social partner organisations issued a [joint statement](#) urging Member States to take measures at both European and national level to support workers and companies, noting that Member States should involve social partners in the design and implementation of the measures.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of April the European social partners issued a [joint letter](#) to the European Commission on the situation in Poland, urging the withdrawal of a proposed regulation which undermines the autonomy of social partners. This letter the European social partners noted that “social dialogue is a key instrument to fight against the economic and social consequences of Covid-19 and Governments, all over Europe, should be supporting social partners for them to succeed in this endeavor.” More information on the developments in Poland is outlined below.

Following the roadmap towards lifting containment measures proposed by the European Commission on the 15<sup>th</sup> of April, [the ETUC noted](#) that social dialogue was a missing element from the Commission’s vision which should be taken into account in all steps of the return to work. The ETUC has also called for SURE to be implemented through social dialogue.

On the sectoral level, following a [joint statement](#) on 25 March, the social partners in the food manufacturing sector (EFFAT and FoodDrinkEurope) developed [guidelines](#) to support their members in dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak. The guidelines include recommendations on information to employees, hygiene practices, review of work organisations, management of employee sickness, inbound and outbound logistics, and travel to and from work. The social partners in the European Horeca sector, EFFAT and HOTREC, have issued 2 joint press releases.<sup>2</sup>

EPSU and the social services employers at EU level issued a [joint statement](#) on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March warning of the risks posed to care organisations and the 11 million social services workers in the EU,

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.effat.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Joint-HOTREC-EFFAT-Press-Release-COVID-19-recommendations.pdf> and <https://www.effat.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Joint-EFFAT-HOTREC-PR-Roadmap-towards-lifting-COVID-19-containment-measures-2020-04-27-1.pdf>



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while underlining the importance of delivering measures through national laws and collective agreements to support the sector.

There are numerous other examples of sector agreements - see end of the Briefing Note for links to access these online.

### **National Level**

#### *Austria*

The Austrian social partners called for an aid package for workers which has been supported by the government. This support includes funding dedicated to supporting short-time work.

Social partners in the construction and retail sectors have signed agreements addressing occupational safety and health in the light of the coronavirus spread, addressing inter alia the separation of working and recreational areas, and minimum separation distances, measures for employees belonging to risk groups, and opening hour restrictions for shops.

#### *Belgium*

On the whole, there has been a good climate of social dialogue and tripartism in Belgium, whether it was to negotiate accompanying measures during the period of containment, in particular measures concerning temporary unemployment, or to negotiate the broad outlines of a common framework for the gradual relaxation of confinement measures to come.

However, there have been social tensions at all levels. Indeed, faced with the desire of many employers and members of the government to favour the maintenance of economic activity and the fastest possible recovery, the trade unions, for their part, have always put forward the concern to protect first and foremost the health of workers.

At the federal level, there have been measures taken unilaterally by the government, without social consultation and by means of special powers, which constitute major social regressions such as an increase in the number of overtime hours or the multiplication of temporary contracts.

At sectoral level experiences are mixed. Faced with the refusal at times to negotiate with the trade unions, consultation has sometimes had to take place on a company-by-company basis.

The gradual relaxation of lockdown measures planned in Belgium from 4 May will be a new test for social dialogue. At the federal level, the social partners have negotiated a minimum framework which must now serve as a basis for sectoral negotiations and then negotiations within the companies, where there is a trade union presence. This framework stresses the need to respect the social consultation bodies at all levels and stipulates that the social inspectorate may be required to monitor and, if necessary, sanction.

Some examples of collective agreements and decisions of the social partners that have been negotiated are listed below



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At the level of the National Labour Council (national joint and interprofessional body):

- 6 March: [Declaration](#) by the social partners concerning the coronavirus;
- 18 March: [Collective labour agreement](#) addressing the suspension of work contracts and / or a reduced-time work;
- 18 March: [Opinion](#) on temporary unemployment in the context of the coronavirus crisis;
- 24 March: [Opinion](#) on the temporary suspension of the 2020 social election procedure
- Group of 10: (unions + employers' federations) provided government with a list of key businesses that were to continue operating during the crisis.
- 27 March: [call](#) from the group of 10 concerning work and respect for health.
- [Publication](#) on the application of social distancing in companies

Regarding the relaxation of lockdown measures and return to work, a guide to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at work was developed through the collaboration of the social partners of the Higher Council for Prevention and Protection at work, the Economic Risk Management Group, the SPF ETCS and the strategic unit of the Minister of Employment.

The Economic Risk Management Group (ERMG) was created bringing together employer and union organisations as well as public bodies such as the National Bank, the Federal Planning Bureau, the Federal Investment and Investment Company and Economic Affairs. However, the unions have criticized the group's attempts to replace the social dialogue bodies (CNT) on certain matters.

Unfortunately trade union organisations have not been associated with the expert group working on the relaxation of lockdown measures, although several players in economic life have been integrated into it.

### *Bulgaria*

The National Council for Tripartite Cooperation approved the proposal of CITUB for all sectors affected by the current crisis to be eligible for state aid under the 60:40 scheme, which envisions the government covering 60 per cent of salaries and the employers the remaining 40 percent. Workers that have passed to part-time work by order of the employer will also receive a proportionate compensation from the state for their lost income as a result of the reduced working hours, but not exceeding 60 percent of their remuneration. In addition, companies which have experienced a 20% revenue drop can also apply for assistance.

### *Croatia*

The Croatian Ministry of Labour and Pensions put forward a draft legislative Act regulating labour relations in the circumstances of the COVID-19 epidemic and by which bring some important changes to fundamental social rights as they are currently enshrined in the Croatian Labour Code. This was done without informing, let alone consulting, trade unions. The law foresaw “temporary” measures which would, amongst others, enable employers to unilaterally exclude certain provisions /material rights from collective agreements and alter employment contracts in areas including wages, working time, annual leave, work organisation, and information and consultation of workers.



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Following immediate and strong reactions of ETUC affiliates, SSSH/UATUC and NHS, and with the [full support of the ETUC](#) (as well as EPSU and the ITUC), the Croatian government abandoned these reform plans.

Regarding the public sector, the Government issued a Conclusion stating that it would launch negotiations with the social partners on the amount which will serve as the base for the salary calculation for civil servants and employees in the state administration and for other employees in the public sector. Apart from this, they will negotiate reducing other financial rights guaranteed to the civil and public servants and employees in the public sector by the applicable collective agreements.<sup>3</sup>

### *Denmark*

The Government and the social partners concluded a tripartite agreement on a temporary wage compensation scheme for employees who are at risk of redundancy for companies with employees who are at risk of redundancy. The agreement covers employees working in private companies that are particularly economically affected as a consequence of COVID-19, and requires the companies continue to provide full pay for their employees during the compensation period. Additionally, the company must refrain from dismissing employees for economic reasons and the worker for whom the company seeks wage compensation must take holiday or time off in lieu amounting to a total of five days in connection with the compensation period.

At sectoral level, the country's industry social partners (DI – employers and Co-industri – unions) signed an agreement recognizing that Covid-19-related disruptions to business activities were cases of force majeure under the industry's collective agreement that applies to blue-collar workers. This allows employers to terminate employment contracts without notice or compensation, however it also requires companies within its scope to steadily reinstate workers if and as soon as activity recovers.

Employers and unions in the different industries including in film and TV production have negotiated specific agreements to implement the tripartite agreement to production that have been stopped, suspended or postponed. The agreements aim at securing employment when production resumes and to implement the economic support measures as agreed by the government, employer and unions.

### *Finland*

In Finland the social partners agreed common proposals on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March addressing temporary layoffs, employer pension contributions, and income security. These proposals were mostly taken on board by the Finnish government in its economic support plan to tackle the coronavirus pandemic.

Social partners have jointly made proposals on strengthening education and training in the crisis. The proposals include improving access to e-learning through dedicated funding, increasing short training,

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<sup>3</sup> Grgurev, I. (2020) COVID-19 and Labour Law: Croatia, in Italian Labour Law e-Journal, [Special Covid-19 and Labour Law. A Global Review, Issue 1, Vol. 13\(2020\)](#).



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especially in sectors suffering from labour shortages, strengthening digital skills, addressing work-based learning and the recognition skills, and increasing the amount of opportunities for short online qualification training.

### *France*

The 8 representative trade union and employer organisations<sup>4</sup> at the national level met on March 19<sup>th</sup> to discuss the economic and social situation created by the health crisis and the means to deal with it. They affirmed the essential role of social dialogue and collective bargaining in the context of the of the COVID-19 crisis, and called on public authorities and companies to use all the resources necessary to protect the health and safety of employees who have to work. They welcomed the commitment of public service agents and employees who are particularly indispensable to start, of course, in terms of health, but also continuity of supply. They also underlined the major role of our collective social protection systems, which guarantee solidarity among all.

The CFDT denounces the fact that the unions are not members of the committee set up on April 22. This committee is responsible for monitoring the implementation and evaluation of financial support measures for businesses facing the covid-19 epidemic.

The end of the lockdown will be possible, and it is even necessary if we want to avoid the accentuation of inequalities, the irremediable loss of jobs or even collective depression.

We must prepare for the end of lockdown with social dialogue (at branch level and/or company level) to organize work and manage all measures to protect the health and safety of workers: Distribution of all individual protective equipment, compliance with social distancing measures / safety distances, disinfection of workplaces and materials, organization of public transport, etc.

It is necessary to find a good balance between reopening the activity and health risk management to protect the health and safety of workers and to co-build and manage an appropriate work organization and make it evolve over time. We should continue to favour the use of teleworking when possible.

Regarding the return to work - the social partners in the agri-food industry social partners have developed [a guide](#) to help companies exiting lockdown and/or resuming business. The guide recommends updating the single risk assessment document, providing information to all staff and stakeholders on all the extraordinary organisation measures being taken during the lockdown relaxation and the resumption of activity, as well as supporting employees when they return to work (training, understanding and implementation of instructions, etc.), and if necessary, to set up psychological support in addition to the health measures that have become standard.

### *Germany*

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<sup>4</sup> The trade union confederations (CFDT, CGT, FO, CFE-CGC, CFTC) and the employers' organisations (MEDEF, CPME, U2P)



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A [joint statement](#) from the DGB and BDA on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March reaffirmed the importance of social partnership. The social partners also highlighted the role of short time work during the COVID-19 pandemic, welcoming the extension of the regular short time working scheme. Short time work has also been one of the issues featured in collective agreements at sectoral level, including the chemical, metalworking, glass, film, textile services, and the wood and plastics sectors. Company-level agreements have similarly been struck which improve the statutory STW allowance, examples include Winterhall DEA, Volkswagen, Eurowings, Deutsche Telekom AG, and Deutsche Bahn AG.<sup>5</sup>

### *Hungary*

The Hungarian government adopted a law on 10th March 2020 on flexible labour law during the pandemic crisis. In addition, a state of emergency was declared on March 11 to fight the Covid-19. Four Hungarian trade union confederations (LIGA, MASZSZ, SZEF and ÉSZT) published a press release regarding those government measures introduced in the state of emergency warning that although some of the measures may safeguard jobs, they are concerned that the Labour Code changes endanger employees unproportionally. The new measure states that "The employee and the employer may deviate from the provision of the Labour Code in a separate agreement" is basically eliminating the entire Labour Code and autonomous collective agreements. The trade unions also find it unacceptable that such decisions regarding working life have been unilaterally made by the government without any consultation with the social partners. The ETUC has addressed its serious concern about these new developments to both [Prime Minister Orbán](#) and the [European Commission](#), deploring the absence of any consultation on the draft laws with the Hungarian social partners and calling on the government to negotiate with social partners in order to implement the measures in a balanced way.

On the last working day before Easter, the trade union KKDSZ (affiliated to EPSU) received the bill from the Ministry for Human Resources which is responsible for social partner consultation. This day was followed by four public holidays and the deadline for providing an opinion was 8:30 am on the first working day after Easter. This constitutes an unacceptable social dialogue process and during the Easter celebrations KKDSZ as well as the five Hungarian confederations affiliated to the ETUC (SZEF, ÉSZT, LIGA, MASZSZ, MOSZ) requested a real negotiation with social partners immediately.

### *Italy*

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of March, social dialogue between the Government, employers and workers' organizations led to the signature of a joint protocol to address the containment of the spread of the Covid-19 virus in the workplaces. Measures included, inter alia, teleworking arrangements, the use of paid leave also by collective agreements, PPE, work organisation, and workers' information.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of April the government published a decree announcing plans for the relaxation of the of the lockdown (Phase 2), alongside a protocol agreement with trade unions and employers'

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<sup>5</sup> More information available in the ETUC COVID-19 Watch [Briefing note on Short-Time Work Measures](#)



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organisations on health and safety at work. The protocol, which is enforced by law and covers all workplaces, includes measures on (inter alia), the right to information, access to workplaces, cleaning and sanitisation, personal hygiene, PPE, the use of shared spaces, work organisation including shifts and smart working, health surveillance/ Plant physician / H&S reps<sup>6</sup>. A specific committee with the task of monitoring the respect of the protocol is set up in all companies and includes workers' reps and H&S reps.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of April social partners in the rail sector reached a [framework agreement](#) on the management of Phase 2, addressing how to protect workers during the gradual restart of activities.

Two specific protocol agreements on COVID-19 containment measures have been negotiated by the social partners in the building sector for construction sites and in the transport sector and logistics. Both protocol agreements have been annexed to the Decree.

Trade unions in the agri-food sector have been successful in reaching agreements at company level to ensure the implementation of measures to protect workers' health, safeguard jobs and make use of short-time working arrangements. workforce will access the plants.<sup>7</sup>

### *Latvia*

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of March, following consultation with social partners, the Cabinet of Ministers of Latvia endorsed the bill on measures for overcoming the crisis caused by the coronavirus Covid-19, and its effect on businesses, which encompasses a comprehensive set of state support measures, including allowance that will be paid to employees on idle time, compensation of the allowance for idle time for self-employed persons and authors.

The government has established closed working groups which include representation from the trade unions. While this approach of working groups has been effective in providing an emergency platform for the social partner input, the space dedicated to trade unions is limited to only 1 or 2 trade union participants during the online meetings. Furthermore, the closed groups are not dedicated to social partners only, with other civil society stakeholders also taking part on an equal footing.

Despite concerns about the format (limited participation and time for providing opinions, inclusion of non-social partner organisations), Latvian trade unions have been able to influence measures taken, safeguard workers' rights and interests and are working together with employer organisations to provide joint input.

### *Lithuania*

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<sup>6</sup> A more extensive list of measure can be found here - <https://www.etuc.org/sites/default/files/page/file/2020-04/Update%203%20COVID-19%20Italy%2029.04.20.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> See agreements from with [Ferrero](#), [Nestlé-San Pellegrino](#), and [Granarolo](#)





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ETUC members LPSS (LDS) "Solidarumas" and LPSK have expressed their clear desire to find joint solutions in the Tripartite Council. Both organisations were critical of the proposals presented by employers' organisations, stressing the need to find common joint solutions which have been discussed in the Tripartite Council rather than to propose unilateral proposals.

### *Luxembourg*

Trade unions have reached an agreement with employers and government to ensure workers in partial unemployment will continue to receive 80% of their wage. The sum of this wage cannot be below the national minimum wage and these workers cannot be made redundant during that time. Trade unions, employers and government have also agreed measures with regard to family leave which may apply to all employees, both residents and non-residents, who are affiliated to the Luxembourgish social security system.

In the construction and gardening sector an agreement has been reached by the social partners and the government on health & safety measures. Activity in this sector has resumed since April 20<sup>th</sup> which with very strict provisions.

While such tripartite agreements playing an important role in addressing the impact of the pandemic through social dialogue, trade unions have expressed concerns about the unilateral government decision to extend working hours to 12 hours a day/60 hours per week for employees in the key sectors as well as the unilateral government decision that the employer can refuse leave requests and can cancel already granted leave.

### *Norway*

The well-established cooperation between social partners has continued in the new context of the COVID-19 outbreak. The government is in continuous contact with the social partners with the aim of finding solutions to soften the effects on work life and the economy as the consequences of the outbreak unfolds into different sectors of the economy and society. This has resulted in several agreements for a range of different sectors with targeted measures and tools.

### *Poland*

Unfortunately, from the very beginning of the pandemic, the Polish government ignored in its actions the role of the institution of social dialogue, and even sought to marginalise it.

On the 31<sup>st</sup> of March the Polish Parliament 'Sejm' voted a bill which seriously restricts the independence of social partners and even allows the Prime Minister to dismiss members of the Social Dialogue Council.

Initially, the government intended the bill to exclude trade unions from representing workers if, during the crisis, employers planned to introduce special measures amending workers' terms and conditions. Following union protests, the regulation was removed from the draft before submission to parliament. However, the lower chamber (*Sejm*) introduced two amendments on the functioning of the Social



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Dialogue Council (the Polish tripartite body), which allowed the Prime Minister to dismiss members of the council.

The Polish and European social partners have jointly [expressed their concerns](#) at this endangerment of the autonomy of social partners<sup>8</sup>.

At the request of the NSZZ "Solidarność" the above amendments were to be challenged by the President of the Republic of Poland at the Constitutional Tribunal but this has not yet happened.

During the three meetings of the RDS (Social Dialogue Council) which have addressed anti-crisis solutions, the government only presented information about planned legislative actions, but there was no possibility to consult them. Generally, any legal requirements for consultation of draft legal acts with social partners have not been met. It should be stressed that in the period preceding the spread of the pandemic in Poland trade unions and employers' organisations adopted joint resolutions within the RDS, i.a. calling on the government side to increase the unemployment benefit. However, there was no reaction from the government.

The tension reached its zenith when, on the occasion of work under subsequent package of anti-crisis solutions (the so-called Shield 3.0), the government secretly prepared a draft introducing far-reaching flexibility in dismissals of employees, including practically a departure from the application of the provisions arising from Directive 98/59/EC on collective redundancies. The new act would also allow for the suspension of existing collective labour agreements and other collective agreements, depending on the government's assessment of the condition of companies according to an arbitrarily set algorithm. The right of trade unions to conduct consultations was to be limited. When these plans were released on 25th of April, the fierce immediate trade union protest (among others intervention of the chairman of NSZZ Solidarność with the deputy prime minister responsible for the "Shield") caused the government to withdraw from them for now, but the fact that the project was prepared without any knowledge of the social partners raises distrust about future intentions and actions of the government. Generally, the willingness of the government to conduct dialogue with social partners around the Covid-19 issues is being assessed more and more negatively both by trade unions and employers' organisations.

### *Portugal*

The Portuguese declaration of State of Emergency issued by the Portuguese President and foresees the limitation of workers' fundamental rights. The new measures allow the Prime Minister government to restrict movement of people, temporarily suspend the right to strike in vital sectors — such as health care units, civil protection, security and defence as well as 'economic sectors vital to the production and supply of essential goods and services to the population' — and ban protests and social or religious meetings. The Emergency Decree was renewed on 3rd April for another 15 days and contained two new elements: 1) suspension of the right to strike for all essential public services and 2) the suspension

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<sup>8</sup> See also this article on Social Europe: <https://www.socialeurope.eu/how-law-and-justice-misused-the-pandemic-to-dismantle-social-dialogue-in-poland>



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of the right to participate in the drafting of new labour legislation (enshrined in Constitution for trade unions and in the Labour Code for trade unions and employers associations) insofar as the exercise of such right may delay the entry into force of urgent legislative measures for the purposes provided for in this Decree.

The UGT-P has expressed publicly some concerns regarding the suspension of the right to participate in the drafting of new labour legislation in order to prevent abuses and not to undermine their capability of influencing new legislation that is coming out all the time. Nevertheless, in practice the national social dialogue body is functioning and informal communications with the Government to they are confident that, even if formalities are suspended, there is still the possibility to have some influence.

However, ETUC's Portuguese affiliates, CGTP-IN and UGT-P, have expressed that they will remain vigilant on how these measures will indeed apply in practice.

### *Romania*

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of March the law covering states of emergency was amended by an emergency ordinance stating that "During the state of siege or the state of emergency, the legal norms regarding decisional transparency and social dialogue do not apply in the case of draft normative acts establishing measures applicable during the state of siege or state of emergency or which are a consequence of the establishment of these states."<sup>9</sup>

### *Spain*

The most representative trade unions in Spain, CCOO and UGT, have maintained a continuous dialogue with the Spanish Government since the beginning of the COVID-19. In a first joint document they established as a priority the attention to the health emergency, while establishing the necessary measures for the maintenance of employment.

A bipartite agreement was then reached with the most representative business organisations, with a similar approach, which was conveyed to the Government. The agreement contained proposals for measures to make the labour market more flexible, in particular temporary layoff (ERTEs) and aid to businesses and the self-employed to ensure their liquidity.

Since the beginning of the Coronavirus crisis, a permanent General Bureau for the management of the pandemic has been functioning in Spain. The Bureau is made up of representatives from five ministries, with the respective Ministers at the head (Economy, Finance, Labour, Social Security and Just Transition). The Social Partners also participate.

At the same time, there are several boards that meet regularly. They involve the social partners and the relevant representatives of the administration. The most active is the board established with the Ministry of Labour for the negotiation of ERTes. In the first phase, the discussion focused on the

<sup>9</sup> Translation, Article 33, index 1, <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/16739>



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conditions of the ERTes and the current stage of return to activity, discussions are being held on their validity and extension.

Social partners in the hospitality industry (FESM-UGT - CC.OO Servicios and CEHAT) agreed [joint proposals](#) on 18<sup>th</sup> April. With these proposals the Social Partners jointly request Government:

- To extend the provision of state wage compensation through short time arrangement schemes (ERTes – Expedientes de regulacion de empleo temporal).
- To include in these schemes of Seasonal workers with contrato fijo discontinuo
- To provide financial support to businesses operating in the sector

Social partners in the Food sector (FICA-UGT, CC.OO Industria and FIAB) signed a [joint protocol](#) on the 28<sup>th</sup> of April 2020. Social Partners in the food manufacturing sector, have developed guidelines to support their members in dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak. The aim is to protect the health and safety of workers by identifying minimum standards to be applied in food businesses during this period of emergency.

### *Sweden*

In close consultation with the social partners, the Swedish government presented a crisis package on the 16<sup>th</sup> which includes measures on short-term layoffs, sick pay, deferment of employers' social security contributions, self-employed.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of March Unionen, the Swedish white-collar trade union and Swedish Confederation of Enterprise agreed on a national wide collective agreement on short-time work. The social partners HORECA sector have signed a collective agreement based on the new rules for short-time layoffs. Almost all collective agreements are to expire during the spring. The large wage negotiations round of 2020 is postponed due to the Corona crisis. Trade unions and employer organisations in the industry sector have agreed to restart the negotiations in the autumn. Similarly, LO, The Swedish Trade Union Confederation, and The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise will put off the wage negotiations. Collective agreements in the industry sector that are about to expire, will be prolonged until October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020.

### *United Kingdom*

At the start of May the government called in the unions from various sectors of the economy to draft the return to work plan but there's no indication they are listening to what we are saying, indeed there are signs of the opposite e.g. the draft plan does not include any new health and safety measures and all seems rather voluntary, i.e. no new obligations imposed on employers<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> See criticism <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/may/04/lockdown-goodwill-bosses-staff-safe-infection-coronavirus>



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The TUC has called for a tripartite recovery council to embed consultation of social partners in devising post-Covid reconstruction measures, but again there is no indication the government will follow our recommendation.

While there has been joint understanding with employers in proposing economic emergency measures, and the government has introduced the job retention scheme on the back of that, it is less clear whether employers are willing to engage with unions to reach collective agreements or health and safety protocols to meet their responsibility of ensuring workplaces are safe.

### **Further Trade Union Resources**

More information on European and national measures, initiatives, and agreements can be found through the following links:

- ETUI - <https://www.etui.org/Covid-Social-Impact>
- ETUCE - <https://www.csee-etu.org/en/policy-issues/covid-19/3738-message-from-etu-president>
- EPSU - <https://www.epsu.org/article/coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>
- UNI-Europa - <http://www.uni-europa.org/>
- industriAll - <https://news.industriall-europe.eu/p/covid-19>
- ETF - <https://www.etf-europe.org/activity/covid-19/>
- EFBWW - <https://www.efbww.eu/publications-and-downloads/press-releases/covid-19-efbww-info-from-and-for-efbww-affiliates/481-a>
- EFFAT - <https://www.fffat.org/featured/covid-19/>
- EFJ - <https://europeanjournalists.org/?s=COVID+19>