

Updates on minimum wage directive and working time



FAIR WAGES!
Collective bargaining **FOR ALL**
and fair minimum wages

Representatives from more than 40 EPSU affiliates in 19 countries joined an online meeting on 5 April to discuss minimum wages, collective bargaining and working time.

Adequate Minimum Wages Directive

The meeting kicked off with a presentation by ETUC advisor Lorenzo Repetti who outlined the main issues at stake in the current triologue negotiations on the Adequate Minimum Wages Directive (see powerpoint below). He summarised the key differences between the positions of the European Commission, Council and Parliament (EP), reminding participants that the EP position strongly reflected the main demands supported by the ETUC.

While the negotiations were confidential, the ETUC had received some indications of progress so far, noting that the French presidency of the European Council was now driving the discussions forward after a slow start in January. It was still expected that an agreement would be reached before the end of the French presidency in June.

It was clear that the Council was pushing back at some provisions that the ETUC said were important to strengthen the directive and was challenging the EP report particularly on its proposals on collective bargaining in Article 4. The EP had put forward a range of amendments that would improve trade union rights to access and organise workers and that would outlaw union-busting tactics, amendments regarded by the Council as outside the scope of the legal basis of the directive.

There was some discussion about the provisions in Article 4 and the threshold of 70% or 80% collective bargaining coverage that would require action at national level in the form of a plan to increase the number of workers covered by collective bargaining. For the ETUC the threshold should be more of a target and it would be important for the plans to be drawn up with concrete measures for action.

The ETUC also supported the idea that plans could be drafted by the social partners only rather than governments as one of the measures to try to protect collective bargaining systems that were working well.

The ETUC was pleased that there appeared to be agreement on some important points such as ensuring that the directive covers all workers and that the definition of collective bargaining should refer to trade unions and not just workers' representatives.

Participants were urged to keep in contact with their confederations as the negotiations progressed to find out if the ETUC needed to target specific governments to try to defend key points in the directive.

Working time

The second half of the meeting focused on working time reduction with a presentation from Joe O'Connor, formerly campaigns officer at the Irish public services union Fórsa and now temporarily in charge of the four-day week campaign in the United States (see powerpoint below).

Joe set out some of the main social, economic and environmental arguments for a shorter working week and how the response to the pandemic had given impetus to discussions about new ways of working. He underlined the fact that the campaign was bringing together employers, trade unions, academic bodies and civil society organisations campaigning on issues like the environment and gender equality. The campaign is developing a series of pilot projects and Joe said that in-depth evaluations of these would provide invaluable research on the costs and benefits of implementing a four-day week.

Contributions from participants revealed some variation of the approach at national level with a focus on changes in work organisation, including remote working, rather than just working time, an interest in seeing how shorter working time could be achieved in services reliant on shift work on 24-hour service delivery and discussion about other forms of working time change such as a six-hour day.

EPSU would be following progress of the four-day week pilot projects and proposed that Joe return towards the end of the year to discuss the results and have a further exchange on the different ways to exploit the potential for a short working time.

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