

COVID19 updates for NIS

Cases of disease are registered in all the countries, but while the registered numbers are relatively small compared to EU countries and, as is widely understood, do not portray the real picture, almost all governments are introducing strict measures to prevent the spread. In most of the countries there was introduced a special regime, limiting movement, gatherings and encouraging self-isolation. In some cases stricter rules as curfew were introduced. Generally the region is still moving towards the stricter measures and stoppage of the businesses, etc.

Unions had to mobilise to 1) give advice to members on what rights workers have according to the current legislation (sick leaves, distant work, etc), 2) how to streamline OHS measure to be better protected. Some opened dedicated hotlines. 3) come with initiatives and/or positions to agree on additional social security, jobs and income protection.

Country situations (based on info received from affiliates, their web-sites and news agencies:

Azerbaijan: special fund to tackle COVID is established by the President, supported by individuals and businesses. AHIK leader also contributes. A special working group to tackle labour issues is set up. AHIK is part of it. The aim is to monitor the situation, ensure worker's rights and social protection and sanction the dishonest business for firing workers and non-payment of wages using the pretext of COVID. However a number of measures to support business and keep jobs is also on the table.

Armenia: the country is at the state of emergency till 14th of April. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs has taken the initiatives to draft the amendments to the Code of Labor of RA to regulate the labor relations in the state of emergency. The mentioned amendments of the Labor Code is not published yet and it is in process of drafting. The CTUA has presented its proposals to include them in the draft of amendments of the Code concerning the payments of the salaries during the special cases such as pandemic situations. Besides this, the CTUA is working hard during these days by helping the employees online or by phone with the legal advices, by making legal clarifications of the situation which the employees are facing now by media.

KPA's Trade Union Organizations of Miners, Metallurgists and Jewelers o organized online meeting with the employers in order to exclude or to reduce the risks to the health of the employees, to follow all regulations of hygiene adopted by the Government, to obtain the masks, alcohols, protective gloves, non-contact thermometers and etc which are obligatory to use for protection of the health. The result of above-mentioned collective bargainings the employees of the above mentioned field will be paid 2/3 of their tariff rate salary during possible and/or enforced idleness of the enterprise.

Belarus: BKDP executive committee adopted a statement where it addressed the government and called to revisit its policy and introduce stricter measures to combat the COVID spread. The country has not closed its borders or introduced quarantine.

BKDP calls to introduce where possible distant working, ensure disinfection and PPE on workplaces, free tests, full payment of sick leave from day one, additional payments to medical workers, measure to protect jobs and wages.

Georgia: State of Emergency till 21 of April, Government introduces quarantine in some parts of the country. Quarantine for workers equals the payment for sick leave. Those who refuse to self-isolate may be forced into quarantine by police.

In response, on March 24-29, new guidelines were issued for various sectors: construction, services, trade sectors, etc., detailing labour health and safety standards during the virus, including GTUC request to emphasize the employer's obligation to ensure that employees are not only provided with collective, but also individual protection gear (protection masks, gloves, disinfectant, etc.).

From the first days, GTUC called on the Georgian government to set up a special fund to raise funds to support measures against Covid-19. The government has set up such a fund, where GTUC has transferred GEL 20,000 (EUR6300) and in addition, they have offered two facilities in Kobuleti and Kechkhobi to the government for quarantine purposes.

In addition, GTUC provided food products and personal protective equipment to workers: health care personnel, journalists, railway workers, metro workers, couriers, etc.

GTUC appealed to the government to postpone utility bills for at least two months for those who became unemployed and provide certain financial assistance to those who need it most. In this process, the needs of the self-employed who account for almost 48% of total employment are especially significant.

GTUC is currently working on an initiative that will give parents who have kindergarten and school age children a flexible working regime or possibility to work remotely in order to enable them to take care of their children during the school suspension. Also, another important issue is provision of transport for employees by employers that we have already managed to achieve in several companies.

Moldova: in state of emergency, incentive measures to medical workers, additional funds for hospitals. CNSM has issued recommendations for labour issues and OHS measures. It calls to arrange flexible hours, individual work time, working from home in agreement with the workers, registration of stoppage of the enterprise with payment of 2/3 of the basic income, paid regular vacations, also to comply fully with OHS measures (PPE etc) as stipulated in the legislation. CNSM and Healthcare workers union "Sanatatea" had to additionally address the Prime-minister and Healthcare and Social Protection Minister in view of poor provision of PPE for medical workers, which exaggerates the risks of their exposure. The unionists call to fully equip public clinics with personal and collective protection equipment, train staff to work during pandemic, promote prevention measures, provide premises for medical workers who were exposed for quarantine, test medical staff as a matter of priority and increase their salaries.

Russia: restrictions introduced, getting stricter with growing numbers. COVID situations is legally a force-majeure. Quarantined people have to be considered on sick leave, they get an electronic version of the sick leave and are supposed to get 2 weeks payment. Additional incentive for people over 65 to self-isolate – around 45EUR bulk payment for Moscow region. Have to be considered on sick leave, if they work. Some banks speak about mortgage and loan reliefs for individuals, but no state ruling yet. On March 25, the President's addressed the people. He announced a week of official

days off, to ensure uninterrupted and timely social payments, sick pay (not lower than the minimum wage), increased unemployment payments to the minimum wage, noted the need for credit reliefs in case of loss of income, reduced the tax burden for small and medium-sized businesses, including reduced insurance contributions to 15% instead of 30% for those whose salaries are above the minimum wage. He also introduced a tax on interest on individuals' deposits in banks in excess of 1 million rubles (11k EUR), income from bonds and securities, and also introduced a tax on dividends that go abroad. As of March 30th, some regions started to introduce additional lockdown measures, limiting people's movement (e.g. Moscow and the region, Kalinigrad, and some others). However, quarantine was not officially announced, thus putting those workers who still are summoned to work but not supposed to be authorized by municipality as essential at risk. Many employers do not comply with "official paid holidays", that caused a lot of misunderstanding and brought about many labour right violations. Unions provided their comments and explanations. So far no fines for unauthorized movement are introduced. Also, there is no clear proof yet how announced social support measure are working.

Unions are working in the tri-partite commission to have proper labour arrangement in response to COVID, mostly related to arrangement of distant working and compensations so that to protect workers' interests. The prime-minister calls not to dismiss people during COVID outbreak. Both affiliates are publishing legal and OHS advice on how to protect on workplaces during the COVID.

FNPR leader turned to union members with the message Solidarity is stronger than disease!, where he announced the declaration of tri-partite commission on the actions of workers and employers in the pandemic situation, calling to reinforce social dialogue, local governments to support business and workers and to keep social and economic stability.

Some trade union volunteering initiatives are being arranged.

Ukraine: The country is in quarantine. Government introduced some tax alleviation measures for businesses, a ban for state inspections. Legal status of force-majeure. In social media, the KVPU started the campaign "What is your quarantine situation?" to show best practices at enterprises, highlight violations of workers' rights and urge workers to inform about their problems. KVPU called all members and employees to inform trade unions about cases of termination of employment during the implementation of the measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The employer has no right to dismiss the employee under the pretext of saving funds during the quarantine. According to the Criminal Code of Ukraine, those who violate labor laws can be fined UAH 51000 (EUR 1700) and be deprived of the right to occupy certain posts for up to 2 years. However, there is a practice of staff termination during the quarantine. Some workers have already complained to the KVPU that they were threatened to be fired when they refused to take unpaid vacations.

FPU has set up a special web-page where they publish all the info on COVID covering the issue of remuneration, health and safety issues, the issue of vacations, payment of sick leave, unemployment. FPU urged the public authorities and employers to take all possible steps in order to: prevent dismissal of workers that have temporarily suspended/reduced their production activities and services in accordance with Government decisions, as well as to avoid any violation of workers' rights guaranteed by law and collective agreements in case of suspension of work; no worker, including informal sector workers, temporary or subcontracted workers, should suffer from wage loss or deterioration working conditions during quarantine; where possible, send the workers

to telework from home, keeping their wages; at the request of the worker, to agree with him short working hours or paid leave, if necessary, to provide sick leave; trade unions' and workers' rights should be at the heart of the COVID response, they are important to reduce the risks and build confidence; necessary preventive and protective measures must be introduced at the workplaces in order to protect the health of workers, especially those at the forefront of the fight with the epidemic outbreak

Central Asian countries also confront the COVID. Kazakhstan introduced state of emergency and put biggest cities into quarantine. Bishkek introduced a curfew, while in Uzbekistan there is state of emergency.

Kazakhstan introduced payments (@85 EUR) for the loss of income related to state of emergency (cover also service contract workers, and "large business" workers, self-employed, individual entrepreneurs, lifted the need to prove that loss of income happened due to emergency state. This is done electronically. However, it only covers workers, whose employers made transfers to social security funds.

Healthcare union in Kazakhstan is involved in awareness raising campaigns and is mobilizing volunteers to help medical workers.

Kyrgyzstan had initiated a fund, where Federation and its unions also contributed to. The Federation made a statement where it urges to raise salary to medical workers, make them exempt of income tax and social insurance transfers; adopt a package of economic measures, digitalise public services and enforce control over compliance with the labour legislation, provide the workers with PPE etc.