



North Macedonia 15 April

Joint letter from trade unions to government over response to COVID-19

The initial measures taken by the Government in response to the biggest growing global economic crisis indicate that our country will not be an exception to the prediction that half a billion people worldwide will fall into poverty due to inappropriate reactions from the countries. The only way to prevent this is to take decisive and courageous measures to protect workers and the poor, measures that unfortunately we have neither seen nor are expected to happen.

On the contrary, the government acts only on the side of the business community and listens only to their suggestions. The government's Economic Committee, led by a party that wants to be called the Social Democrats, does not include a trade union representative or labor rights activist, but does have representatives from all chambers of commerce and other large companies.

Therefore, the measures that have been adopted are measures to protect the business community without almost any protection of workers.

Dissatisfied with the underestimation and ignorance of the workers, whose work ensures the livelihood of both businessmen and politicians, we demand:

- The right to financial compensation for unemployed persons in the crisis to be applied also to workers whose employment has been terminated due to their own statement, by agreement or due to alleged violation of discipline. Many workers have been deceived by employers in recent weeks and their employment has been cut off, and the government must now protect these workers as well. Pregnant women who have not had their employment contracts extended or have signed a contractual dismissal, to acquire the right to paid maternity leave by the state.
- Not to provide financial support to companies that have laid off workers since the beginning of the crisis, i.e. since the beginning of March. Many companies have fired workers in recent weeks, but can now receive state aid again, despite layoffs.
- The government to adopt a Decree that stipulates that workers' wages shall not be reduced by more than 20% during this crisis, as defined by the General Collective Agreement for the private sector, and not below the minimum wage level. In recent weeks, many companies have cut wages by as much as 50%, citing "force majeure", which is contrary to the General Collective Agreement for the private sector.

- To provide protection for precarious workers (freelancers, etc.), who are the most vulnerable category of workers and do not have any social or health insurance. Specifically, we ask these workers, following the example of the artists and athletes, to receive financial support for the months of April and May 2020, in the monthly amount of 14,500.00 MKD.
- To prohibit the calculation of interest rates for the duration of the crisis by banks, savings houses, financial companies and enforcement agents, i.e., to prevent the previously mentioned entities from profiting in this crisis on the backs of the poor.
- To annul the Decree restricting the payment of compensations and salary allowances for public sector employees during a state of emergency, as such allowances are received by workers working at this time, and without which the country would collapse in this crisis (inspectors, firefighters, media workers, forest police, railroad workers, etc.). Depriving these workers of their legal allowances and compensations is unfair, ungrateful and not in line with any solidarity principles.
- The provisions for the use of the unused part of the annual leave for 2019 and the part of the annual leave for 2020, to apply to all workers, and not only to the workers covered by the temporary measures for protection against spread and prevention of Coronavirus COVID-19 . This will ensure job preservation and prevent workers' wages from being reduced.
- State services (Labor Inspectorate, Employment Service Agency and Public Revenue Office) to react more effectively to prevent abuses during the crisis, in case of dismissals by employers, etc. We also urge the civil service to initiate proceedings to establish liability in the event of criminal misconduct by employers in connection with the agreements and other dismissals of workers in recent weeks.

In addition to this letter, we also submit specific proposals on how each of these requirements can be easily realized.

Ladies and gentlemen, we do not have our own media or easy access to them, as the business community does. We do not have the financial power, as they have. We do not fund politicians and political parties. We do not have the privilege of calling you, politicians, whenever we want.

But we represent the 700.000 workers in this country, without whom neither the business community will be able to get rich, nor will you be in power.

So it's high time you started listening to us and consult us every time when making decisions.

Signatories of the Letter

- Federation of Trade Unions of Macedonia (SSM)
- Confederation of Trade Union Organizations of Macedonia (KSOM)
- Trade union of workers from the administration, judicial bodies and citizens' associations (UPOZ)
- Independent Academic Union (NACS)
- Independent Trade Union of Journalists and Media Workers (SSNM)

- Trade Union of workers in Culture of the Republic of Macedonia (SCRM)
- Trade Union of Macedonian Diplomatic Service (SMDS)
- The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia
- Citizens' Association "Glasen Tekstilec"
- Leftist movement "Solidarnost"