



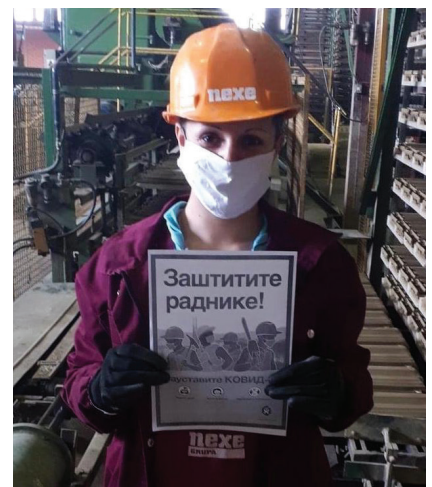
15 May 2020

Trade Union Responses to COVID-19 Pandemic - Part 1

A. REGIONAL PANDEMIC SITUATIONER: IMPACT ON BWI INDUSTRIES

1. Impact on BWI industries and affected workers

Confirmed cases of the COVID-19 epidemic reached Russia and Central Asia from early February and Southern Europe from mid-February 2020. Italy was the first country to introduce full lockdown measures from 21 February, and other EU countries, including Spain, Portugal, France, the Netherlands and Czech Republic quickly followed with full or partial lockdowns. Some countries such as Poland and Serbia imposed curfews as well as border closures. By mid-March, Ukraine had introduced strict emergency measures and localised lockdowns were imposed in some cities in Russia, including Moscow. However, in other countries, including the Netherlands, Germany and Sweden, social distancing measures were encouraged but were less strict. Beginning in late April 2020, measures to lift the lockdown have started gradually, although there are fears of a second wave of infections and the impact on health services, the economy and daily life will continue for many years to come.



Worldwide, according to the ILO, there was a 4.5% drop in working hours in the first quarter of 2020 compared to the pre-COVID-19 period and there could be up to a 10.5% drop in the second quarter of the year, April – June 2020. In Europe and Central Asia, these figures are estimated at 1.9% and 11.8% respectively. The ILO also estimated the impact of COVID-19 on the earnings of informal workers based on a purchasing power parity index. Worldwide, there has been a drop of the equivalent of \$535 median earnings per month and in Europe and Central Asia, the figure is estimated at \$866.

While the impact on the BWI sectors has varied within the region, there are certain common issues. In countries with strict lockdown measures, only essential operations were allowed to continue. Generally speaking, for the construction sector, urgent repairs to public utilities, some public works projects and large-scale infrastructure projects were classified as essential, and in the forestry and wood sector, State forestry programmes and the production of packaging and wood pallets. However, in countries where work in BWI sectors was not expressly prohibited, companies had to interpret the new laws and regulations, particularly in relation to social distancing, transport and use of public space. Many companies faced difficulties with the cross-border provision of goods and workers. Posted and migrant workers found they were unable to travel to work or needed to return to their country of origin. Hence, because of large-scale disruption, operations were often suspended.

2. Pathways and social partner agreements on COVID-19 policies

From the outset, unions were quick to respond, stating they should be an integral part of the crisis management; that workers should not be the victims of the crisis; and calling for job retention and wage subsidy schemes. Social partners, at EU level, through the European Works Councils, and at national, regional and enterprise

1 ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work Update 29 April https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_743146.pdf



Know more about BWI and Affiliates' COVID-19 Responses at:
<https://odoo.bwint.org/cms/covid-19-union-response-1689>



level, sought to agree appropriate OHS and hygiene protocols, and specific working arrangements, in order to maintain operations to the extent possible, while protecting workers' health. With a view to the post-crisis situation, unions also called for guarantees that there would be no deterioration in working conditions once operations resumed, new vocational training schemes, particularly for young workers, and that any future stimulus or public procurement plans should support the transition towards a low-carbon European green recovery.

According to a BWI survey, in Europe and Central Asia, in the construction sector, in 47% of cases, governments introduced schemes unilaterally or with some level of consultation with social partners, in 30% of cases, there were bipartite agreements and

in 23% of cases, there were tripartite agreements. In the wood and furniture sectors, the level of social partner consultation was evenly distributed between government measures and bipartite or tripartite agreements.

B. BWI AND ITS AFFILIATES IN ACTION

1. Employment and wage protection

In many EU countries, governments in consultation with the social partners passed laws or other measures with the aim of protecting workers from redundancies. Procedures for temporary and partial unemployment measures were made more flexible and governments agreed to a variety of compensation packages for workers and companies on condition that workers were not dismissed. The European Commission established the SURE fund to mitigate unemployment risks and to channel up to €100 billion to national systems facing the greatest pressure.

EU countries. In the Nordic countries, tripartite agreements between governments, unions and employer associations covered wage subsidies for those on temporary unemployment or reduced hours. For example, in Sweden, the government introduced a compensation package valid until the end of 2020 so that workers placed on temporary unemployment or reduced working hours could access a state subsidy. The worker was to receive 90% of their average salary with 75% paid for by the government and 15% by the employer. GS-Facket, the Swedish Union of Forestry, Wood and Graphical Workers signed an agreement with its industry counterpart on 18 March on reduced working hours to avoid redundancies.

In the Baltic countries, various government schemes were introduced. For example, in Lithuania, the government revised the unemployment benefit so that workers were guaranteed 60% of their wages capped at the equivalent of two minimum wages and the self-employed received €257 per month in income compensation.

In Western, Southern and some Central European countries, the social partners played a key role in the adoption of employment protection and wage subsidy measures. For example, in Spain, the Federal government reached an agreement with the unions aimed at preventing dismissals during the COVID-19 crisis, including those on temporary employment contracts. The government provided a 70% wage subsidy for temporary unemployment or reduced working hours. In the Netherlands, workers were eligible for a 90% wage subsidy if placed on reduced working hours because the company had been affected by the COVID-19. In addition, the government announced a 3-month allowance for the self-employed to guarantee a minimum income.

In South East Europe, while some protection has been offered by governments, it has not prevented many job losses and the unions generally consider that income compensation is very insufficient. Particularly in Croatia, Poland and Hungary, the BWI unions expressed grave concerns that governments are using the COVID-19 emergency as a justification to weaken labour laws and undermine collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) at national or sectoral level.

Outside the EU. In many countries outside the EU, unions needed to exert considerable pressure on the government to provide wage protection for at least one or two months. In the Western Balkans, in North Macedonia, forestry production dropped by 80% and workers were at risk of losing 2 months' wages. SIDEMK took the initiative to demand support from the government and held meetings with the Prime Minister and the Ministry. In the end, the government agreed to provide support to the forestry companies so they could pay two months' wages. In Bosnia & Herzegovina, for the first month in April, the government agreed to pay the equivalent of one month's minimum wage and social contributions to protect jobs but the situation for the coming months was not clarified.

In the Ukraine, a bipartite agreement included a prohibition on dismissals or making workers take unpaid leave although the BWI affiliate, PROFUD, reports it was not strictly enforced. PROFUD was able to negotiate with employers in the cement and building materials sector for telework options where feasible, but many employers requested that previously agreed wage increases be postponed. In contrast, in Moldova, almost all construction sites were closed and SINDICONS reported that workers were laid off without wages. In Russia, a tripartite agreement was reached whereby for one week all workers in non-essential industries would be placed on paid leave and for the duration of the lockdown, workers would be paid 67% of wages. The unions stated they would take up any cases of dismissals or employers forcing workers to take unpaid leave.

2. Health and safety at the workplace

European Union: The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work issued a detailed guidance on COVID-19, including a section on the construction sector. The European Construction Industry Federation (FIEC) and other construction associations issued a joint statement with the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers (EFBWW), BWI's independent partner organisation, stating that in 'our industry, it is possible to maintain the activity while protecting workers' health and complying with enhanced sanitary emergency requirements.' The EFBWW also issued a joint statement with the wood and furniture industry associations calling for clear occupational health and safety guidance and the involvement of workers and their representatives in the planning and implementation of all related measures.

EU countries. Within the EU, many countries engaged in tripartite or bipartite discussions leading to protocols or other agreements concerning OHS provisions for work during the COVID-19 crisis or on resumption of work where closures had occurred. Issues reviewed included social distancing measures, regular disinfection of sites and communal spaces, appropriate Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) including masks, safety glasses and gloves, introduction of shift work and staggered working times; exemptions from work for 'at risk groups' and other measures, concerning canteens, worker accommodation and transport facilities. Social distancing was variously placed at between 1.5 metres and 2 metres, including in the provision of transport. However, in many countries, unions have reported that the protocols are inadequately enforced.

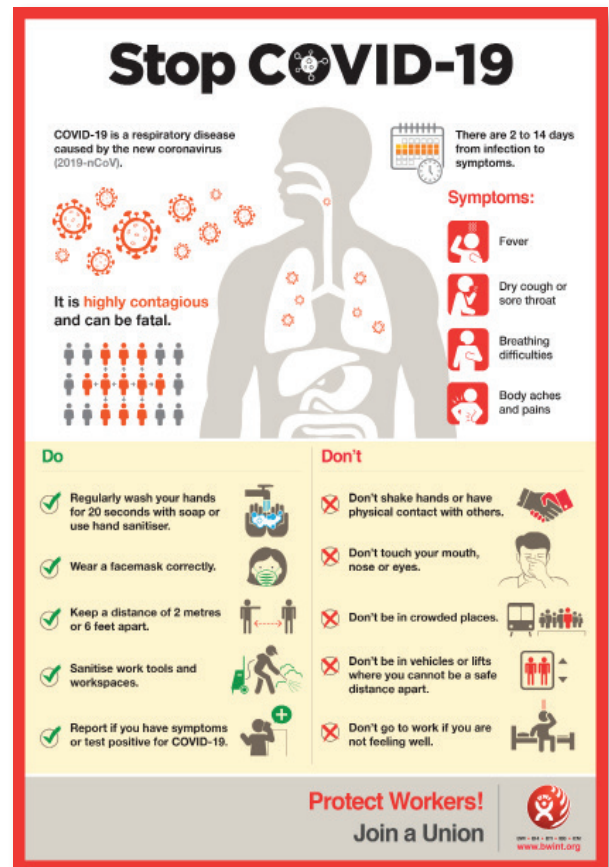
In the Netherlands, a 'corona' supervisor was appointed at each construction site to monitor employers' compliance with a tripartite agreement on 'how to work safely in construction'. However, a survey of over 1000 construction workers carried out in early May by the Dutch construction union, FNV Bouwen en Wonen, found that 36% of those surveyed stated it was not possible to comply with the 1.5 metre social distancing rules on worksites and there were too few hand washing facilities to comply with the new regulations. According to 19% of those surveyed, no additional protection measures were currently in place. The union has called for the labour inspectorate to take urgent action to enforce the tripartite agreement. In Belgium, the social partners also agreed a joint protocol in order to resume construction work from 4 May, which included social distancing measures and the right to refuse work if a COVID-19 case was detected on site or if a worker was considered particularly 'at risk'. The measures are monitored by a Committee for the Prevention and Protection at Work or by a trade union delegation.

Outside the EU. In Central Asia and South Caucuses, in Kazakhstan, the Building and Communal Workers Trade Union reported that from 20 April all sites resumed under strict COVID-19 measures including daily screening of workers. In Kyrgyzstan, the union organised a webinar to inform members about safety measures and noted that one positive aspect is that the COVID-19 emergency has resulted in a revival of site labour inspections that had previously almost stopped. In some countries, however, such as in Georgia, although the union has distributed information about COVID-19 safety measures to workers, it has been denied access to sites to carry out safety inspections.

3. International Framework Agreements and engaging multinational companies

On 26 March, BWI sent a letter to the major multinational companies (MNCs) operating in its sectors, in particular those with which it had signed an International Framework Agreement, to encourage good practice in the protection of workers in response to the threats posed by COVID-19. BWI urged the companies to recognise their duty of care and to carry out due diligence for all workers in business and value chains, including in contracts with suppliers, prioritising the rights and welfare of these workers.

ENGIE, the French energy company, which is currently negotiating an IFA with BWI and other global unions, agreed to extend a minimum social protection to all its employees worldwide to cover full hospital treatment and a life insurance; and extend the coverage to those who have been put on paid leave until the end of the year. In Croatia, the French construction company, Bouygues, was not providing adequate PPE and through the BWI, SGH construction union was able to raise their demands with the French unions and the local management agreed to implement additional safeguards and working conditions were improved. In the Ukraine, in two plants that were formerly owned by the Heidelberg Cement Group, unions were able to oppose measures to force workers to take unpaid holiday leave. Instead, the company agreed to pay workers 65% of their wages for the lockdown period, provide additional PPE and transport services, and carry out temperature checks at the plant entrance. In Russia, a group of 45 Turkish migrant workers in accommodation near a building site for the IKEA-owned Mega Dybenko shopping centre in St Petersburg contracted COVID-19. BWI raised concerns about the sanitary conditions on the site and in workers' living quarters with the main contractor, the Swedish Ingka Group, which has committed to ensuring strict adherence to all government sanitary guidance and quarantine measures.



4. Migrant hotspots and support for migrant workers

In Europe, many cross-border, posted and migrant workers benefit from equal status with nationals in terms of employment and social protection, in law if not always in practice. However, with the closure of borders or quarantine provisions for returning workers, many migrant workers returned to their country of origin and have not been able to access employment protection or wage subsidy schemes offered in their country of work. Unions have provided information to migrant workers about the different employment protection and wage subsidy schemes in migrant workers' languages and where necessary, have called for equal access to these programmes for migrant workers.

In Norway, according to Fellesforbundet, many migrant workers returned to their country of origin. However, they face discrimination as they are required to be in Norway to access unemployment benefits. The union is negotiating with the government so that when the migrant workers return, they will be able to access the same benefits as other workers. In France, the FNCB-CFDT reported on 30 April that some migrant workers were in lockdown and living in very difficult conditions. In Italy, FILLEA-CGIL issued an information letter in various languages to explain what benefits migrant workers can access during the COVID-19 crisis. The union cautioned migrant workers not to leave the country without notifying their employer so as to ensure they received the wage subsidies owed them. In Serbia, there is both an outflow of nationals to other European countries and an inflow of workers, largely from Turkey. SRGMIGM reported that the union faces challenges to organise the migrant workforce and that even during the COVID-19 emergency, the labour inspectorate claims it is not authorised to monitor working conditions on sites operated by foreign companies. In Israel, from 4 May 2020, employers must provide health insurance for Palestinian construction workers who are now required to spend at least 3 weeks



in Israel before returning home as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. Accommodation regulations have been upgraded and there will be additional labour inspections to ensure compliance with new sanitary requirements.

5. On humanitarian actions

Many unions have found ways to support the health services and their workers as well as others in the community at risk. For example, YOL-IS, the Turkish Union of Road Construction and Building Workers, decided at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis to open their hotels, guest houses and social facilities in several cities to health workers so they could stay near the hospitals and at the same time reduce the risks of infection within their households.



After the earthquakes in Albania in November 2019 and in Croatia in March 2020, construction workers have continued to repair houses and other buildings that had left many people homeless and living in tents. Despite bad weather conditions, and the need to take additional measures to protect from COVID-19, the work has continued. SGH reported there were two fatal accidents during roof repairs in April

in Zagreb. In paying tribute to the workers, the union called for urgent measures to improve OHS standards to ensure safe work.

6. On organising and member retention

Unions have sought to ensure mechanisms for effective information, consultation and decision-making were put in place. They set up dedicated information networks, using social media, telephone hotlines and SMS, to keep members informed on the overall health situation and the impact of government measures on the workplace and how to access different government compensation schemes. For example, in Austria, every GBH union member received regular updates on the COVID-19 emergency as SMS messages on their phone. In cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce, the Austrian trade union centre, OGN, produced a video to explain how to apply for the short-time work compensation scheme. Many unions also developed special outreach programmes to migrant workers and to informal workers who were most at risk. In Ukraine, given the large numbers of informal workers, PROBUD extended assistance to workers regardless of whether they had a registered work contract. Some unions have waived membership fees: for example, 3F/CO provided free union membership for unemployed members for the three month period from March 2020.

7. Matrix of Actions relative to the 7 BWI Convergences

BWI Convergence	Summary of Actions and Outputs Relative to COVID-19 Pandemic
	Unions have participated in differing degrees in the drawing up of government schemes or signed bipartite or tripartite agreements for job retention during the lockdown period, including moratoriums on dismissals or unpaid leave; wage subsidy schemes for companies to retain workers over the period, with support from unemployment funds which have been extended to cover more groups of workers, including those on temporary contracts. Special measures have been introduced in some countries to protect the incomes of the self-employed or provide cash transfers to the most vulnerable.
	Unions have been active in calling for new industry protocols or guidance to protect workers in all BWI sectors during the COVID-19 emergency, including in disseminating information about the virus and the enhanced safety measures. Unions have participated in drawing up company and site occupational and health safety measures and monitored compliance with the appointment of dedicated 'coronavirus' site delegates. Where necessary, unions have acted promptly to denounce unsafe work conditions with local authorities and labour inspectorates, such as in Lviv, Ukraine.

	<p>In many countries, apprentices were affected by the closure of vocational training schools. In some EU countries, such as Austria, apprentices were included in job protection and wage subsidy schemes, IG-BAU and IG-Metal in Germany called on the government to protect apprentices as some were facing the threat of dismissal. They reminded employers that German law stipulates that companies should continue to pay full training allowances for up to six weeks even without work and that training could continue through on-line courses. Many unions called on governments to promote apprenticeships to support the economic recovery.</p>
	<p>Pregnant women are considered among the group of workers particularly at risk during the COVID-19 crisis. In some countries, unions negotiated that workers at risk would be given paid leave. The BWI European Women's Committee called for women representatives to be included in all COVID-19 response planning and negotiations and for multinational companies to provide support for women working throughout their supply chains. In Italy, the government provided a special parental leave grant for two-parent households with children under 12 years old or an alternative childcare allowance. In Poland, there was a paid leave provision for working parents whose children were at home because of school closures. In Switzerland, the union has raised the issue of increased domestic violence as a result of the lockdown.</p>
	<p>On 15 April, BWI President, Per Olof Sjöö, called for government recovery plans to focus on creating sustainable economies. On 24 April, the European wood and furniture industry associations issued a joint statement with EFBWW, stating that wood and wooden products are the most appropriate basis for a circular and recycling-oriented economy; and that public procurement oriented towards a low-carbon timber construction will play a vital role in the European green recovery.</p>
	<p>In May 2020, the Paris Olympics Committee, Solidéo, reaffirmed its commitment to the 2018 social charter signed by five unions and industry associations and stated that the COVID-19 crisis would not result in any backtracking on environmental and social standards. At the beginning of May, the Olympic Village site in Seine-Saint-Denis, Paris, operated by Eiffage and Prodemo, resumed work. Union representatives from the two companies reported that the companies were not complying with the tripartite protocol requiring additional sanitary precautions or social distancing measures for transport facilities and locker rooms. They added it was objectively impossible to carry out some tasks on the sites and maintain social distancing. They noted that this situation was unfortunately not very different from other sites which were starting up again.</p>
	<p>On 26 March, BWI urged MNCs to recognise their duty of care and to carry out due diligence for all workers in business and value chains, including in contracts with suppliers, prioritising the rights and welfare of these workers. ENGIE, the French energy company, which is currently negotiating an IFA with BWI and other global unions, agreed to extend a minimum social protection to all its employees worldwide to cover full hospital treatment and a life insurance and extend the coverage to those who have been put on paid leave until the end of the year. In Croatia, in the case of the French construction company, Bouygues, Croatian unions with the support of their French counterparts were able to put pressure on the company to provide additional PPE.</p>

BWI is the Global Union Federation grouping free and democratic unions with members in the Building, Building Materials, Wood, Forestry and Allied sectors.

BWI brings together around 334 trade unions representing around 12 million members in 130 countries. The Headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland while the Regional Offices are in Panama, Malaysia, and South Africa.

Our mission is to defend and advance workers' rights, and to improve working and living conditions in our sectors. The BWI, above all, has a rights-based approach. We believe that trade union rights are human rights and are based on equality, solidarity and democracy, and that trade unions are indispensable to good governance.

BWI goals include 1) to promote and defend human and trade union rights; 2) to increase trade union strength; 3) to promote a stable and high level of employment in our sectors; and 4) to influence policy and strengthen the capacity of institutions and tripartite structures in our sectors.

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