



UGT-PORTUGAL NOTES

ON SOME PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY THE PORTUGUESE WORKERS

Social partners have maintained regular contact with the Government, namely through online social dialogue meetings, with a view to discussing measures to be approved and already approved and to their monitoring, improvement and correction.

However, and despite such contacts, some problems remain, as it appears that the speed that the measures demand has often resulted in confusing legal regimes raising doubts on both workers and companies.

UGT-P has insisted on the need to respect some fundamental principles, namely the one determining that the rule of adoption of the different social protection regimes must be that of no loss of income (for social and economic reasons), that no redundancies are made during this crisis (especially for those receiving support from the State), that of not allowing and punishing exemplary attacks on workers' rights and the need for more structural measures in areas that go beyond employment, such as housing, transport and lower prices for essential services (water, electricity, gas).

However, many of the proposed measures have been postponed (except in the more direct social protection areas, where the Government has closed gaps that did not cover the current situation), with priority having been given to economic protection measures.

Some problems UGT and its unions have pointed out as significant:

- loss of income by workers - apart from prophylactic isolation or children support measures by working parents, the rule has been that measures imply loss of income, which will cause serious problems for families' subsistence. Examples:

-simple lay-off scheme (reduction or suspension of activity - workers with 2/3 of the base salary (the minimum being the minimum wage and the maximum, 3 minimum wages)

- the government decreed the closure of schools - support for workers of 2/3 of their wages. Not applicable when other member of the household is teleworking or during school holidays. The unions have strongly contested.

- insufficient measures for workers

- there is, for example, a reference to measures regarding the payment of housing credits, but they have still not advanced

- unions have requested postponement or exemption from the payment of social security contributions' (as for companies and self-employed workers), postponement of the payment of taxes (as for companies and self-employed workers), cost reduction with gas, electricity and water, the non possibility of cuts in these essential services, support to rents (it was announced that evictions would be suspended, but there is no support);

- mandatory teleworking was determined by the state of emergency, whenever possible, but employers force workers to remain in their work places (they claim confidentiality, non-portability of software, etc.);

- workers forced to take vacations, in a clear violation of the purpose of that right - added danger with the fact that on May 1st (if the government does not anticipate this deadline) companies can legally enforce closures for vacations for periods of up to 15 days (UGT wants the regime to be suspended, employers want it to be brought forward to 1 April);

- companies proposing unpaid leaves (eg. air transport);

- changes in workers' time and place of work, in abusive conditions. Some may be understandable - e.g. in the social sector when workers from childcare facilities (closed) are transferred to care for the elderly - but even there the lack of preparation / training / protection causes problems;

- risk of redundancies - despite measures such as access to credit lines by companies (with specific allocations for SMEs) or support via the now created simplified lay-off regime (for companies that have a significant reduction in their activity or determined stoppage by a public authority), there is the fear that this may speed up redundancies at this stage so that the measures can then be accessed without dismissing during their application, since the Government will proceed with the ban on collective redundancies and on jobs extinction (objective dismissals) for companies that access such support measures. Moreover, the announced measure leaves out all other forms of termination of the employment contracts;

- High precariousness leads to frequent non-renewal of contracts, as in the previous crisis. Precarious workers (fixed-term contracts and temporary work in general) are again suffering the first impact of this crisis and Portugal has still one of the highest rates of non-permanent employment in the EU;
- Termination of contracts during the trial period, which is longer for some workers;
- Workers forced to ask for termination, with no documents that entitle them to access unemployment benefits;
- Non-payment of meal allowance to workers who are teleworking;
- Absence of adequate working conditions (inadequate equipment, non-compliance with distance rules, etc.), not only in critical sectors such as health, but more generally. The Government's logic was to maintain the maximum number of economic activities in operation, having only closed the establishments open to the public (but not in sectors such as catering, where the activity proceeded in a conditioned way - takeaway and home deliveries).

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