



Agile response to Covid-19 crisis in EU metal sector




**PUT THE PEDAL
TO THE METAL!**

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Funded by
the European Union



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AGILE RESPONSE TO COVID-19 CRISIS
IN EU METAL SECTOR



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The project is being implemented over a period of 21 months, from April 2021 to March 2023, and includes partners from five countries, including Bulgaria, Poland and Spain as members of the EU, as well as Montenegro and Serbia - candidates for membership in the European Union.

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The publication was prepared on the basis of national survey reports from five countries related to the analysis and evaluation of the current state of cooperation in the field of information and consultation between employers and unions during the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the possibilities of finding agile/elastic solutions as mechanisms for common strategy in the promotion of social dialogue.

The study is also based on the presentations of experts and the conclusions of participants and panelists, at the held Zoom workshops. The results of the survey, which were used to prepare the publication, were obtained in response to a survey of respondents from 5 countries, mainly representatives of trade unions and employers' organizations.

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1. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CRISIS MANAGEMENT

I Introduction

The spread of the Covid-19 pandemic around the world caused a large number of sick workers, loss of life (estimated at 649 million), weakening of the manufacturing industry and serious disruption of the global economy. A third of Europe's workforce were vulnerable to changes in working conditions, with millions facing redundancies.

The new situation has set in motion a vicious cycle: unemployment reduces consumption, sending the market into economic free fall. The metals industry - the backbone of European industry - has been particularly hard hit due to plant closures caused by isolated outbreaks or government-mandated lockdowns, limiting their capacity to operate, disrupting supply chains, causing major liquidity and delivery problems.

The proposed action is focused on the metals sector - the backbone of European industry as the basis for other sectors including construction, engineering, automotive, engineering and more.

With its fundamental problems at the beginning of the pandemic, the European metals sector has fought desperately against the recession, although it has a visible need for deep change in order to ensure global leadership. The metals sector faces challenging times in ensuring socially responsible management of the impact caused by the pandemic. Any move involving the workforce can have severe long-term consequences for the company and the market as a whole.

In times where decisions are often dictated by immediate cost reduction, companies are not realizing the full potential of workers' rights to information, consultation and participation in decision-making, as mechanisms that can work for the sustainable future of the company and its staff.

It is precisely in this situation that the involvement of employees in company management can be an appropriate model of labor market reform, in order to encourage employees to be more productive and adaptable to changes, and to create the basis for a better relationship between management and employees at all levels of the organization.

The involvement of employees in the management of the company can be an important factor that ensures social peace, strengthens the motivation of employees and thus creates a favorable environment for profitable activity. A quality social climate within the company is a prerequisite for increasing productivity.

The involvement of employees in the management of the company or the participation of employees in the decision-making process is one way of ensuring democracy in the workplace and a mechanism for dealing with employees that implies their greater involvement in the decision-making process in the organization.

In practice, we are faced with different forms and ways of implementing employee involvement, which depends on legislation and the organizational structure of the company.

Candidate countries for the European Union must raise awareness of the possible benefits arising from the implementation of employee participation models in the decision-making process. The key challenge in the future is not only of a legal nature, but also a challenge concerning the application of the institute of employee participation in decision-making in the existing legal framework at the company level. It is necessary to work with the trade unions on this issue, to define their role in the new circumstances, which implies the different roles of trade unions and workers' councils.

Employers often ask questions about why to include employees in decision-making, since at first glance it seems that the introduction of this institute implies a reduction in the rights of the employer or owner.

Nowadays, the rights of ownership and the associated rights of management and control occupy the most important place in capitalist economic systems.

For all the aforementioned reasons, within the project „Put the pedal to the metal! An agile response to the Covid-19 crisis in the EU metal sector“, an action is proposed that assumes a two-way approach to the solution:

1. Education on the mechanisms of information, consultation and participation in companies, with a focus on multinational companies;
2. Promoting the cooperation of interested parties in finding agile solutions for the crisis with the basic role of social dialogue at the company level in the planning and implementation of solutions.

Through the implementation of a series of activities, the achievement of the following *specific goals* is foreseen:

- Raise the awareness of employers' representatives about information, consultation and participation mechanisms in companies, especially works councils/ERW, promoted in the EU;
- Promote the above-mentioned mechanisms to develop company-friendly measures for a common strategy in dealing with the crisis caused by the corona virus, to find solutions specific to the country/location, but without discrimination based on that aspect, and to increase the overall cooperation between employers and workers;
- Promote the previous achievements of the workers' councils;
- Develop a framework for implementing anti-crisis measures based on key factors in the sector, driving forces in its macro environment and likely scenarios;
- Train participants for effective online collaboration, the importance of which is highlighted by the pandemic, and recommended protocols for online workers' council meetings;

- Inform participants about important considerations for social partners during the conduct of crisis negotiations;¹
- Instruct participants on the cross-border restructuring process (preparatory phase at the management level, information and consultation process, collective bargaining and negotiation, implementation of restructuring transactions);
- Promote transnational partnership between representatives of the social partners, representing employers and workers, based on a mutual understanding of their best interests;
- Acquaint the participants with the analysis of drivers of change in the metal sector;
- Acquaint the participants with the concept of an agile approach to crisis resolution at the company level and in the development of partnerships at the company level between stakeholders;
- Contribute to improving the health of the European metals sector through the development of long-term solutions;
- Promote the involvement of social actors from candidate countries to ensure their familiarization with EU laws in order to strengthen cohesion.

The project foresees 4 phases under the names I: „Beginning“, Phase II: „Impact“, Phase III: „Adaptation“ Phase IV: „Action“, through which project participants should acquire knowledge of the application of agile methodology in the management of the organization, which represents benefits for employers and workers in the Covid-19 crisis, as well as the development of possible and sustainable anti-crisis measures that will be used in the future as a method for managing crisis situations in companies.

II National case studies - methodology/desk research by partners - Bulgaria, Poland, Spain, Serbia and Montenegro

Methodology

National case studies as well as the results of interviews, by all participants in the project and national experts of 5 countries: Bulgaria, Poland, Spain, Serbia and Montenegro, on

¹ Detailed description of action: Put the pedal on the metal! Agile response to COVID -19 crisis in EU metal sector Ref: VP/2020/008/53

8 main questions, aimed to depict the situation in companies related to informing and consulting employees during the Covid-19 pandemic, i.e. developed risk management strategies, company actions to reduce the consequences of the epidemic, different levels of social dialogue, strategies for risk management, as well as practices related to the safety and health of employees developed during the Covid-19 crisis and consisted of answers to the following questions:

- Have there been any changes (measures) in your company since the beginning of the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus and how have these changes affected employees?
- Were employees involved during the activities of introducing changes (measures) in the company and in what way?
- During the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus, have strategies been developed in your company to manage risk situations that will be applied in the future?
- During the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus, have mechanisms been developed in your company for a joint strategy with workers' representatives, in solving the crisis caused by the coronavirus?
- What is the assessment of employer-employee cooperation (social dialogue) in your company during the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus?
- How is the right of workers-employees to information, consultation and joint decision-making realized in your company?
- Did your company have strategies related to mental health and helping employees during the Covid-19 crisis?
- In your company, does the collective agreement or some other act provide for the right to occupational disease for employees who contracted covid at work and had permanent health consequences afterwards?

SURVEY RESULTS — good practices and recommendations

The general conclusion of all participants after the presented surveys is that the majority of companies respected the regulations related to information and consultation, as well as labor laws, so that they are mostly in line with European legislation, and workers rated them as satisfactory during the Covid 19 pandemic.

BULGARIA

The situation in Bulgaria, and probably also in the partner countries, has changed fundamentally, it has become extremely difficult, it is very difficult for companies to work, and unfortunately it is not realistic to expect significant changes in the near future.

The price of electricity has increased in leaps and bounds, although the state has introduced compensations for the high price for companies, in any case the costs of electricity are many times higher than six or seven months ago.

Even before the sudden increase in the price of electricity, metal prices on international markets started to rise. Metals are the main item in the price of mechanical engineering products. Bulgarian mechanical engineering is export-oriented. Some of the contracting parties are reluctant to accept the increased prices of manufactured products, and because of this, some orders are abandoned.

Things get even more complicated with the war in Ukraine. Bulgaria used to get sheet steel and consumer steel from Ukraine, which is not possible now. This leads to delays in the procurement of metal for companies in the mechanical engineering sector, as well as to an additional increase in production costs.

The mentioned problems introduce companies from the sector into a new crisis situation, even more difficult, because in most cases the possibilities of management and influence on processes are minimal or influence is not possible.

Still not recovered from the Covid crisis, the companies are exposed to even more severe shocks and these are currently very acute problems for them, so for these reasons, talks have been started with representatives of the company's management regarding work on a project related to Covid-19, because activities during the Covid crisis represent a kind of preparation for undertaking activities in dealing with other crises.

Have there been any changes (measures) in your company since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and how have these changes affected employees?

Neither citizens nor employers were prepared for this kind of crisis. The measures introduced by the government, as well as the spread of the virus, have required employers to take measures as well. Bearing in mind the specifics of mechanical engineering and mechanical production, the most successful method of prevention - remote work - can be applied to a very limited number of employees in companies. The imperative was to take measures that would not stop the production process, but also to maximally protect the workers and their families.

These measures, related to the declared state of emergency, significantly affected the work process, which completely changed the daily life and work of workers in the mechanical engineering sector. The result was a change in working hours, use of paid and annual leave. In some companies, work even had to be suspended for a while, which led to serious difficulties.

In this regard, the state has introduced a measure to compensate wages due to reduced workload and the transition to part-time work 60/40, in order to save jobs, with the hope that production will be restored.

Did the employees participate /through their representatives, trade unions/ in the activities for introducing changes (measures) in the company and in what way?

Employees participate in planning and undertaking activities and measures related to Covid-19 in companies mainly through their representatives in committees and working conditions groups. In companies with a serious trade union organization, in the process of planning and implementing measures by employers, their help was also requested.

For its part, BGKM (Bulgarian Branch Mechanical Chamber) organized seminars in companies from the mechanical engineering sector in the regions of the country on the main issues of health and safety at work, where the dangers, consequences and measures taken by the mechanical companies in response to the crisis were discussed. The seminars were attended by company managers, managers of occupational safety and health services and managers of production units (from larger companies).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, has your company developed risk management strategies that will be implemented in the future?

From the conversations with the companies, we learn that the risk assessment was carried out together with the Occupational Medicine Service. As a result of the risk assessment, systems of measures have been taken to prevent the spread and to respond in the event of the presence of workers suffering from Covid-19. With the exception of 3 large companies, in which there are SFMM trade unions under the „Podkrepa“ labor confederation, the help of the trade union organization was not requested.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, has your company developed mechanisms for a joint strategy with employee representatives to address the coronavirus crisis?

Approaches to solving the problem of limiting the spread of Covid-19 are different in different companies. In large companies and some medium-sized companies, a comprehensive program has been developed and specific measures have been identified for responding to different situations.

In smaller companies, possible dangers were discussed and decisions were made about prevention. When an event occurs (an infected team member), immediate measures are taken - testing, etc. those who work in contact with him/her. These actions were carried out either together with employee representatives/unions or they were informed about their undertaking before they were undertaken.

What is the assessment of cooperation (social dialogue) between the employer and employee representatives in your company during the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus?

The social dialogue between the employer and employee representatives during the

pandemic is dialogic and with an understanding of the problem, a willingness to discuss the changing situation and a timely solution to the problem (e.g. purchase of protective masks, solutions on the isolation of workplaces, which are connected in the production line, motivating employees to get vaccinated by personal example - we know that the first vaccinated was the SFMM „Podkrepa“ team, who asked their colleagues in the companies to inform themselves and follow the example, etc.)

How is the right of employees to information, consultation and joint decision-making realized in your company?

All measures taken in companies are discussed with the Working Conditions Commission/ Working Conditions Group, employee representatives, the reasons for their imposition and possible consequences if they are not taken are explained. In prominent places in companies, there are instructions and reminders for the use of disinfectants, for keeping a distance, for wearing masks and more.

In most cases, only a few workers protested against the imposed measures, which were complied with despite the difficulties and inconveniences. In this regard, a great contribution is made by the joint motivational activity of the trade union, the Working Conditions Commission/Working Conditions Group and employee representatives (the practice is different, there are many companies that do not have a trade union organization and cooperation takes place through the Working Conditions Commission/Working Conditions Group and / or employee representatives).

Were there any strategies in your company regarding mental health and helping employees during the Covid-19 crisis?

In several companies, special measures related to the mental health of workers were taken - due to the lack of specialists in this field, due to the lack of knowledge of the problem and the „surprise“ factor, and the lack of knowledge of the possible consequences.

Does your company have a collective labor agreement or other act that provides for the right to occupational diseases for employees who contracted covid at work and had permanent health consequences as a result?

No information was provided on the negotiation of additional clauses in the company's Collective Labor Agreement regarding workers suffering from Covid with permanent health consequences.²

CONCLUSION

The last wave of Covid-19 in Bulgaria has subsided, and due to the aforementioned difficulties for the country's economy, the Government has lifted a number of previously introduced restrictions on the spread of the infection.

In practice, from April 1, 2022, most of the measures will be abolished, the wearing of protective masks in certain places and the limitation of the number of places in catering facilities will be retained.

The situation with Covid-19 in our country is still problematic. The number of deaths has dropped significantly, and on some days it is several people each, the number of patients in hospitals and intensive care units is decreasing, but those suffering from Covid-19 still make up about 10% of the total number of patients.

We should not underestimate the problems that may arise due to the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, and this must continue to be in the constant attention of company management and trade union leaders, because the preservation of workers' health is the concern of both administrative and trade union leaders.

The position is that the difficult situation in which the sector is found can be overcome with less losses only by unifying the efforts of the company management and the trade unions, including joint actions to protect workers' health and raise their qualifications on the labor market with new high demands, by introducing artificial intelligence.

POLAND - TRADE UNIONS

The survey was conducted among members of the The Trade Union of Workers of Metallurgical and Mining Industries in Poland and its aim is to examine the impact of the coronavirus epidemic on the position of employees in the metal industry.

The results of the survey show that the epidemic had a significant impact on the position of Polish metalworkers and metallurgists. Respondents agree that the pandemic had a huge impact on the way work is managed, as well as on the relationship between the company and employees, while the activities related to informing and consulting employees during the pandemic conducted by companies were evaluated differently.

All respondents agree that there have been changes (restrictions) in their company since the beginning of the epidemic, but there was no unanimity regarding the nature of those changes. The employees emphasized the obligation to wear a mask during work, while one of the interviewees pointed out that the employees did not look favorably on this obligation.

In addition, other measures were introduced: mandatory temperature measurement before

entering the workplace, maintaining a physical distance from other employees, limiting the number of people at meetings to five, banning trainings and seminars, partial introduction of remote work, expansion of office space, rotation of employees, reduction of wages, use of annual leave while the company is not working.

When asked whether employees were involved in the process of introducing changes due to the pandemic, positive answers prevailed. The interviewees pointed out that consultations were held with trade unions and trainings were organized on that topic. In addition, information emerged that during the pandemic, a crisis headquarters used to meet in the company, which continuously was making decisions and informing employees about further steps. On the other hand, there were also those who claimed that the decisions on restrictions were not previously consulted with the employees.

When asked whether the company implemented risk management strategies during the epidemic that could be used in the future, negative answers prevailed, with some answering about the important role of the crisis headquarters; one employee pointed out the significant role of employee rotation and remote work, while another emphasized that the authorities in the company regularly monitored and checked how that strategy was working.

When asked about the mechanisms of the joint strategy with the representatives of employees in overcoming the crisis, negative answers prevailed. One of the interviewees indicated the shortening of working hours, so that workers would come into contact as little as possible in the dressing room, and the other pointed to the creation of a shift schedule at work in order to maintain the continuity of production. The other respondents did not notice the mechanisms of cooperation between the company and employee representatives.

Despite the declared lack of cooperation between the employer and employee representatives, the majority of respondents positively evaluated the social dialogue in the company, although one of the respondents wrote that remote communication between the company and staff is only a half-measure that replaces real dialogue. Another employee emphasized the positive role of the crisis headquarters in this context.

When asked how the company respects employees' rights to information, consultation and participation in decision-making, the answers were quite uniform. In this sense, almost all respondents wrote about the company's contact with unions. One of the interviewees mentioned the procedures specified in the collective labor agreement, and the other referred to the agreements between the employer and the employees. Part of the respondents also mentioned the employees' council and labor inspectors.

When asked whether your company had strategies related to mental health and helping employees during the epidemic, all respondents answered negatively.

Negative answers also prevailed when asked if your company has a collective agreement or other legal act that refers to employees who were sick with Covid-19 and then suffered permanent health consequences. Only one of the interviewees mentioned the Collective Labor Agreement.

At the same time, the data of the trade unions associated in the Federation show that their companies have introduced work stoppages and reduced working hours. Because of this, workers received lower wages during that period, with the percentage of wage reductions varying from company to company. The largest number of employees received 80% of their previous salary, while in two companies in the Greater Poland region, employees during the work stoppage received only 50% of their previous salary.

POLAND - UNION OF EMPLOYERS

In the first months of 2022, discussions were held with representatives of employers about the situation in companies that arose as a result of the Covid-19 virus pandemic. Interviews were conducted by telephone or directly at meetings organized by the expert.

An interview was conducted with a total of 20 people, representatives of companies of various sizes operating in the processing industry, including the metal industry.

Have there been any changes (restrictions) in your company since the beginning of the pandemic caused by the coronavirus and how have they affected employees?

The pandemic of the Covid-19 virus has led to the deterioration of the economic situation not only in Poland, but also in the whole world. Restrictions and industrial blockades introduced since March 2020 also affected the production activities of the metal industry related to steel, as orders and production were often stopped.

During the pandemic, the condition of the retail, service and industrial sectors deteriorated significantly. Sudden forced passivity of contractors, interruptions in the supply chain, suspension of investments, stagnation and stoppages in companies in conditions of uncertainty, inconsistency and unpredictability of government decisions are the reasons for the difficulties that have arisen in industrial business..

According to the interlocutors, the economic situation is uncertain, although the indices show that the slight drop in GDP and the maintenance of a low unemployment rate is a consequence of the relatively strong position of production. Employers seek to obtain orders or expand the scope of their business activities to ensure financial liquidity and continuity of employment.

However, they postpone development plans in order to allocate their funds to cover current costs and obligations, including ensuring occupational safety and compliance with orders from the top and epidemiological and sanitary restrictions. The necessity to respect hitherto unknown restrictions influenced the behavior of employees who showed great understanding in a situation where not only their health, but also their lives were threatened.

Were the employees involved in the activities related to the introduction of changes (restrictions), and if so - in what way?

Employers adapted the functioning of their companies to the general health measures adopted by the state, aimed primarily at introducing various restrictions to protect the population from the spread of the coronavirus (wearing masks, keeping physical distance, limiting the number of places, disinfection, and ban on entering public institutions).

Decisions on various orders and restrictions were closely related to the current epidemiological situation in the country, which changed from day to day. The total closure (quarantine) was particularly serious - and repeatedly announced - as it resulted in the suspension of operations of many industries. An important role was also played by reporting in the media, primarily on government portals, about what is happening and what needs to be done in order to avoid social unrest. The turning point was when the vaccine against the Covid-19 virus was developed.

In the first place, the employers believed that the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic on the economy and the labor market should encourage the competent state authorities to urgently start working together with social partners on the principles of safe operation of companies and the restart of many suspended activities. Employers were able to define their own internal procedures together with employee representatives based on general guidelines.

The advisory voice of employees is important, but professional (expert) knowledge is needed on how to act in order to protect people's health and life in the best way.

Did your company develop crisis management strategies during the coronavirus pandemic that will be applied in the future?

A key element of human resource management during the Covid-19 virus pandemic is compliance with safety standards while building trust with employers.

Such support in the creation or development of a strategy is especially needed by small and medium-sized enterprises that do not have specialized personnel services that deal with safety and security at work. In large companies, it is easier to design programs, regulations, instructions that could be applied in the present, but also serve for the future.

At the very beginning of the pandemic, employers expected clear and precise guidelines on how to act and how to use the powers they received, regardless of the branch they belong to. A lot of controversy in the public debate was caused by the proposal to allow the employer to terminate the employment relationship with an employee who has not been vaccinated against Covid-19.

During the pandemic caused by the coronavirus, did your company create joint strategy mechanisms for overcoming the crisis in cooperation with employee representatives?

Many employers have established joint action mechanisms with employee representatives in order to mitigate the negative consequences of the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

These are, among others:

- limiting (to the extent possible) direct contact between employees (eg during meetings or breaks, skipping shifts),
- shortening working hours, introducing additional breaks,
- maintaining a minimum distance or using shields (screens) between employees at the workplace, as well as in contact with clients,
- improving the organization of communication routes within buildings (corridors, entrances),
- better tools for remote work and remote process management,
- organizing meetings, meetings, sessions, gatherings in the form of video conferences,
- regular cleaning and disinfection of facilities,
- more frequent cleaning of the air conditioner, letting in outside air, airing the rooms,
- increasing the level of safety for employees with a high risk of illness (elderly people, people with chronic diseases, pregnant women),
- introduction of additional hygienic and sanitary measures regarding the use of disinfectants and personal protection.

In addition, the employers, together with the representatives of the employees, adopted solutions for the protection of workplaces. They used various forms of state aid, mainly in the form of wage subsidies during the introduced economic stagnation or reduction of working hours to a maximum of half-time, with the provision of minimum compensation for work in proportion to working hours if there was a decrease in the economic turnover of the company due to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.

As part of the aid measures, the payment of one-time social assistance is foreseen for the self-employed and persons who work under a part-time contract or on temporary and occasional jobs. In order to prevent collective layoffs, employers changed the way work was organized, changed working conditions and wages, and reduced the number of working hours per workplace.

How do you rate the cooperation (social dialogue) between the employer and the employees in your company during the pandemic caused by the coronavirus?

In crisis conditions, it is difficult to conduct social dialogue, because there are differences of opinion and different views on employment issues. Despite the inconsistency in the ways of dealing with the negative consequences of the coronavirus pandemic, employers have tried to continuously inform employees about all preventive measures taken and available forms of support, including psychological help.

They explained the need to adapt the organization of work and the intensity of task realization to the reduced number of employees due to the fact that part of the staff is on sick leave or in isolation. They introduced the staff to new work methods and procedures, changing the roles and responsibilities of employees.

When it comes to dialogue, the interlocutors pointed out that the process of consultation takes place much more easily in favorable economic circumstances, when the company is developing and when funds enter the company.

It is much more difficult to reach a compromise when the conversation is conducted in unfavorable circumstances. The law adapted to the real state of affairs and the awareness of the necessity to respect the law then play an important role, and the human factor is of crucial importance for building relationships.

The strength and effectiveness of social dialogue depends on the goodwill of the employer. On the other hand, trade unions must be active and show understanding in situations that do not depend on the company's internal politics, but arose as a result of force majeure, as in the case of the coronavirus pandemic, whose course and consequences were absolutely unpredictable.

According to the employers, the demanding attitudes of the trade union are problematic, because they can lead to an escalation of the conflict. It is necessary to exchange arguments and understand the complexity of economic issues on which the situation in the company and future planning depend.

How does your company respect employees' right to information, consultation and employee participation in the decision-making process?

If there are trade unions in the company, the exchange of information and consultations take place on a regular basis, in accordance with the standards established by the parties on the basis of legal provisions that require cooperation with the application of various mechanisms (means) of social dialogue. This is not only about the information process, but also about making arrangements, giving suggestions and opinions, concluding agreements, expressing opposition.

Another type of body that represents workers is employee councils, established for the purpose of information and consultation. They form a special body that performs an intermediary function between the employer and employees and has the right to receive information about: the activity and economic condition of the company and planned changes; employment status and structure; activities that can cause significant changes in the organization of work or the scope and legal basis of establishing an employment relationship.

At the written request of the employees' council, the employer is obliged to provide timely information on all the actions it intends to take, in a form and scope that allows the council to consider the case, analyze the information received and prepare for consultations, which does not always go smoothly. It happens that employers refuse to provide detailed information, citing the protection of business secrets as the reason for this. Sometimes they provide information with a delay, because they treat consultation as a distraction that delays the decision-making process.

Did your company have any strategies related to mental health and helping employees during the crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic?

Concerns about the coronavirus pandemic, changes in the way people function on a daily basis, organizational changes in the workplace, among other things, the transition to remote work and concerns about preserving the workplace, have negatively affected the psychological state of employees.

Whenever possible, employers took various measures to prevent or mitigate the occurrence of health problems. In addition, they put great emphasis on informing employees about the situation in the company, in order to appease the employees. They mostly appointed people of general trust and prestige as contact persons to cooperate with psychologists to give advice to workers in trouble.

However, the majority of respondents pointed out that no actions were taken to improve the psychological state of employees. In their view, the issue of mental health remains a taboo subject, marginalized in relation to other more pressing issues, such as wages and job stability.

Comprehensive programs of support and specific measures aimed at supporting the mental state of employees are rare; here and there they can be found in international corporations that pay great attention to the concept of establishing a balance between work and private life.

Some interlocutors pointed out that, regardless of the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic, training courses on dealing with stress and creating a friendly atmosphere at work have already been organized for management, as this issue has been a serious challenge for employers for a long time.

Does your company have a collective agreement or other legal act that provides occupational disease rights for workers who contracted the coronavirus at work, which later left them with permanent health consequences?

Employers are not aware of any solutions that would allow diseases caused by the Covid-19 virus to be treated as an occupational disease. According to national legislation, occupational diseases occur when they are caused by harmful factors in the workplace or the way work is performed.

Their list is specified in the decree on occupational diseases of June 30, 2009 (Compendium of Laws from 2013, item 1367). This by-law establishes the conditions for the method and procedure for reporting suspicions, diagnosing and confirming occupational diseases by authorized entities.

However, there are no obstacles for employers in their internal acts and regulations to independently determine benefits (compensations) for employees who were exposed to the coronavirus or who suffered from ailments and consequences caused by the aforementioned disease. In order to encourage employees to get vaccinated, employers also provided a monetary reward as a form of preventive activity.

SPAIN

In general, all companies in this sector adopted emergency measures after the state of emergency was declared on March 14, 2020, which lasted in a less restrictive form until May 9, 2021.

Circulation of people on the streets and public areas was prohibited from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., except for providers of basic or essential services, gatherings of more than six people in public areas were prohibited, the use of protective masks, disinfectants and even personal protective equipment at the workplace was mandatory, and after all that, the measures began to be eased.

During that time, since many companies were closed, a system of temporary suspension of contracts (ERTE) was adopted, on the basis of which workers began to receive benefits from the state, and companies were exempted from paying social insurance contributions in the amount of 80% of the total amounts, whereby these fees did not exclude the rights of workers to receive benefits in case of termination of employment.

This reduced the burden on companies that were not working, and employees slowly began to work again, with the implementation of a remote work system for all those jobs that could be done via computer.

A special legal regulation was adopted for remote work, fees for internet connection, computer equipment, entrance registration, etc.

Of course, all methods had to be harmonized with the legislative decree, while for questions related to the system of temporary suspension of contracts (ERTE), shift work, restrictions and optimization of workplaces, a consensus had to be reached with employee representatives through the employee council. A general consensus was reached.

It is true that all companies have learned a lot during this implementation of emergency measures, so we have activated protocols that can be applied in the future (hopefully they will not have to be applied to this extent).

Remote work was partially implemented (one to two days a week, on a general level), as it proved to be compatible with working on the employer's premises.

In Spanish companies, it was not necessary to develop and implement any kind of joint strategy in cooperation with the employees, since employee councils are a common mechanism through which the right to information and consultation enables smooth relations between employees and companies, as well as participation in decision-making, so such an instrument already existed.

The general assessment of our employers in terms of cooperation with employees during the pandemic was very good. The risk of company closures or mass layoffs was very high, as we now have a situation where companies are facing problems related to the increase

in production costs, energy and raw materials, with tax increases, inflation, whereby employees' salaries do not increase at the rate at which everything else increases in price, which greatly hinders sustainable business.

All rights of workers in terms of information, consultation and participation in decision-making are exercised through the employee council.

In the beginning, no one assessed the risks that isolation and fear had on the mental health of employees, we all believed that bringing the pandemic under control would happen much faster. However, the consequences of the long-term fight against the coronavirus and the psychopathologies resulting from it led to an increase in sick leave, which is dealt with by private health insurance companies, with which companies enter into contracts.

In principle, Covid-19 is considered an ordinary and not an occupational disease in our sector. It is treated as an occupational disease only in persons who provide services in the field of health or social protection, since such persons have an increased risk of illness precisely because of the nature of their work. However, benefits received during sick leave resulting from such a cause are equal to benefits based on work-related injuries. From the day the sick leave starts, the employee has the right to be paid 75% of his personal income which belongs to him/her by law.

SERBIA - TRADE UNIONS

Surveys as well as contacts with employers have shown that almost half of employers believe that the forms of employee involvement should only be those provided by law, they even resist such employee participation. This reflects employers' lack of willingness to deal with issues that do not create legal obligations for the company.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy is planning changes to the Labor Law and pays little attention to the European Union's recommendations for the involvement of employees in management. Union representatives believe that workers' councils and work through employment agencies reduce the role of unions.

Since the beginning of the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 corona virus, there have been changes in the companies of the metal complex by introducing various measures that have had a positive effect on employees. During the activities of introducing measures in companies, employees were involved through their trade unions.

During the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus, various crisis management strategies were developed in the companies of the metal complex, which will be applied until the end of the pandemic.

The social dialogue between workers and employers in the companies of the metal complex during the pandemic was at a satisfactory level considering the situation, in mutual interest.

It was important to everyone that the production processes were not interrupted and that the companies functioned in difficult business conditions.

The right of employees to information and joint decision-making in companies of the metal complex is hardly realized. Most of the companies were privatized by foreign employers from different countries. The owners of those companies primarily look at their own interests and only then the interests of their employees. In the companies of the metal complex, there are strategies related to mental health and employee assistance at an enviable level for the duration of the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Crisis staffs were formed that coordinated activities and helped employees in different ways.

1. Were crisis management strategies/actions developed in your company during Covid-19?

2. At what level was the social dialogue, information and consultation of employees in your company during the Covid 19 crisis?

3. What employee safety and health practices developed during the Covid 19 crisis have been developed in your company?

1. Our company had a strategy to prevent the emergence, spread and suppression of the covid 19 pandemic. The strategy in question has a series of adopted measures by the state and the employer, i.e. the company. That is, the strong and responsible synergistic action of the Government of the RS, which sometimes made appropriate decisions on a daily basis, as well as the Ministry of Health of the RS, which obliged us in companies (employers and employees) to carry out a series of organizational, legal decisions and other activities, such as e.g. „Plan to prevent the emergence, spread and suppression of the Covid 19 pandemic“! The subject „Plan to prevent the emergence, spread and suppression of the Covid-19 pandemic“ was the obligation of all factors in the company to prevent the emergence and suppression of the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic (Emergency Headquarters, DG and Management, OSH Board, Trade Union, Employees).

It is also important that the company has provided conditions for: means for additional hygiene, devices for measuring temperature at the entrance to the company, disinfection of equipment and people, at the entrance to the company and at workplaces, social distancing (1,5m), masks...

Many company decisions were made in a timely manner regarding the obligation of employees to use the provided means of personal protection against Covid.

Also important is the measure adopted by the company, which is the obligation of the employees to act and act in case of infection of employees and immediate family members with Covid 19, that they are obliged to inform the employer (through the Coordinator for Emergency Situations and Health and Safety) that they are they or members of their immediate families are sick with Covid 19 and to send proof of the same (SMS, viber, mail...).

Due to the reduction in the volume of work, the company sent employees on annual vacations, paid leaves of up to 45 days and longer if necessary. Earnings, i.e. wages, were paid regularly in the agreed amount.

2. Social dialogue in our company during the Covid 19 crisis, informing and consulting employees, was at a very fair level.

3. The “Plan for preventing the emergence, spread and suppression of the Covid-19 pandemic”, as a practice and obligation of the trade union trustees to monitor and implement the planned measures from the act in question, was a constant daily obligation of the trade union trustees and members of the OSH Board from among the company’s employees, as well as informing SSMS about the number of people infected with covid and the quality of implementation of the plan in question.

SERBIA - EMPLOYERS’ UNION

Question 1 - Have there been any changes (measures) in your company since the beginning of the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus and how have these changes affected employees?

Most of the respondents answered positively:

The changes were on a daily basis and related to the adaptation of the business to the new situation, the employer organized a redistribution of working hours, there was a change in the organization of the business, the number of employees on sick leave increased, there was a feeling of fear for life and health, preventive measures were introduced, increased the level of measures for OSH (safety and health at work), 14.28% of respondents answered that there were no changes in the company.

Question 2 - Were employees involved during the activities of introducing changes (measures) in the company and in what way?

The majority of respondents answered positively and involved their employees in the introduction of changes due to the pandemic: the employer and the employee jointly made decisions about changes and adaptation to the situation, and then jointly implemented them; employee representatives for OSH and union representatives were involved; employees decided to what extent and at what time they would hold online meetings, trainings, educations...

Question 3 - During the duration of the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus, did your company develop strategies for managing risky situations that will be applied in the future?

Most of the respondents answered positively:

Covid19 taught us that we must be ready for anything in order for the company to survive future crises so that the company adapts to the given situation. A number of new procedures and instructions were adopted. A plan of preventive measures was adopted. 28.57% of respondents had a previously adopted risk management strategy that they applied.

15% of respondents did not develop new strategies during the pandemic.

Question 4 - During the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus, were mechanisms developed in your company for a joint strategy with the workers' representatives, in solving the crisis caused by the coronavirus?

Most of the respondents answered positively and involved worker representatives in solving the crisis:

without workers' representatives, it was not possible to implement strategies - example of the corona police, monthly meetings are organized with employee representatives during the crisis, joint strategy and joint action are part of daily business, 30% of respondents declared that there is no employee representative in their company.

Question 5 - What is the evaluation of employer-employee cooperation (social dialogue) in your company during the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus??

All respondents answered that the social dialogue within the company exists and is constantly active regardless of the duration of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Question 6 - How is the right of workers-employees to information, consultation and joint decision-making realized in your company?

Companies apply immediate information, but also various systems of electronic and communication through printed publications:

a joint meeting of all employees once a week when proposals are made and decisions are made, a chat system in which all employees are involved and where information is exchanged on a daily basis, through internal emails, through an internal magazine, through union representatives, in accordance with the Statute, the Collective Agreement at Employer and other acts of the company.

Question 7 - Did your company have strategies related to mental health and employee assistance during the Covid-19 crisis?

The surveyed companies do not have strategies related to mental health, with the emphasis that the employer and employees „sticked to each other and communicated daily so that everyone remained mentally and physically healthy“. Certain companies paid non-refundable financial aid to all employees who fell ill and were hospitalized.

Question 8 - In your company, does the collective agreement or some other act provide for the right to occupational disease for employees who contracted covid at work and had permanent health consequences afterwards?

3% of surveyed companies included this right in the collective agreement. All surveyed companies declared that they always respect the doctor's assessment regarding the health status of their employees.

CONCLUSION:

In the surveyed companies (from the employer's point of view), information and consultation with workers was described as satisfactory during the crisis due to the pandemic. Based on this sample, the conclusion is that most companies comply with the provisions of the Labor Law of the Republic of Serbia regarding information and consultation with workers.

However, given that it is not clearly established which data the employer is obliged to inform, consult and enable the participation of employees in management, as well as the method of that notification and information, it is up to the „creativity“ of the employers in how they ensure this right of the employees, as can be seen from the answers.

MONTENEGRO - EMPLOYERS

The Covid 19 epidemic in Montenegro was officially declared in mid-March 2020 and brought with it a series of new, unexpected and unforeseen circumstances that drastically affected all segments of life, including economic activities.

In this sense, we can say that Montenegrin companies were unprepared for the new circumstances, which in the first days of the epidemic and the markedly restrictive measures was reflected in the confusion regarding how to continue the company's operations. In a formal sense, the largest number of Montenegrin companies did not have a risk management plan and strategy, but the reality demanded that the essential business should adapt to the new circumstances.

Observing social dialogue in a formal sense through the existing regulatory framework governing this area, its presence in Montenegrin companies is unfortunately not at the desired level. This, on the other hand, does not mean that adequate communication between employers and employees is not inevitable, on which the business performance of economic systems largely depends.

In this sense, it is a legitimate assumption that the Covid-19 epidemic has improved the presence of timely and effective communication between employers and employees, especially since such communication was more necessary in order to maintain the work process in the current circumstances.

We believe that the experiences of dialogue, information and consultation of employees during the Covid-19 epidemic will contribute to the formalization of social dialogue within Montenegrin companies.

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 epidemic and during its duration, the state authorities (the Council for the fight against the coronavirus) adopted measures aimed at suppressing

the infection. Within these measures, the dominant part was aimed at regulating the behavior of economic entities in the context of combating the Covid-19 infection.

Apart from the obligation to comply with the mentioned measures, which were aimed at protecting both employees and clients and the population in general (obligation to wear masks, obligation to keep distance, use of disinfectants, reduced working hours, prohibited work) one of the practices that stood out during the duration is working from home as a way to protect employees from the possibility of infection while at the same time maintaining the work process. Of course, this practice appeared in workplaces where it is possible to work remotely.

MONTENEGRO - TRADE UNIONS

In-depth interviews were conducted with the presidents of union organizations from the metal-mining sector that operate within the Union of Free Trade Unions (Aluminium Plant Podgorica in bankruptcy; Metalac Nikšić; Bauxite Mine „Bumech“ Montenegro; Coal Mine Pljevlja; Lead and Zinc Mine Pljevlja; Uniprom metal Nikšić). Below are the results of the interview:

In only one of the collectives mentioned above, there is a signed collective agreement with the employers.

The largest number of respondents (over 80%) responded negatively to the question of whether there was a reduction in the number of employees in the company during the pandemic, confirming the findings obtained through interviews as well as the general situation in the country when it comes to the reduction in the number of jobs caused by the pandemic. Namely, in this sector, as in other sectors in Montenegro, mass layoffs of employees were not recorded, of which there was a justified fear, especially at the very beginning of the pandemic.

However, in this as in other sectors, the number of employees whose employers did not extend their employment contracts for a certain period of time is not negligible. Therefore, employees with precarious work contracts, such as fixed-term work contracts, were the first to be hit when it came to reducing the number of employees at employers;

When it comes to changes in the work process during the pandemic, the most frequently used institute by employers was the introduction of „interruption of work through no fault of the employee“, as well as the institute of working from home for those jobs whose nature allowed such work. The institute of termination of employment through no fault of the employee implies, according to the Labor Law, that the employee, within a period that cannot be longer than 6 months, receives salary compensation in the amount of 60%, which is his/her average salary earned in the previous half-year and cannot be lower than the minimum wage in Montenegro.

However, since the General Collective Agreement, which is binding for all employees and all employers in Montenegro, prescribes a more favorable solution in terms of salary compensation during work stoppages without fault of the employee, which is 70% of the basis for compensation, so the employers were obliged to pay the employees compensation in the amount stipulated by the General Collective Agreement when using this institute. However, it should be emphasized here that this institute was mainly used for employees in the administration, while over 75% of respondents said that due to the nature of their work, they were not involved in a work stoppage, and that they were engaged in work for almost the entire duration of the epidemic;

When asked whether employees were involved during the introduction of changes (measures) in the company, some 30% of the respondents answered that they were not informed or consulted, 50% of them answered that they were partially informed, while only 20% of the respondents answered that they were informed about the changes/measures. It is indisputable that employers in these sectors passed individual acts introducing the institution of "interruption of work without fault of the employer" and delivered them to employees, and made a decision on working from home for employees in the administration with general acts, which acts they introduced to the employees, that is, delivered them to the employees. However, the fact is that the largest number of employees, nor trade union representatives, were not previously consulted.

When it comes to direct involvement in the decision-making process, the situation is significantly worse than in the previous question, and only 5% of respondents answered that they were involved in the decision-making process, while the rest of the respondents claim that they did not participate at all or that they participated partially in that process;

It was indisputably concluded that in the companies whose employees participated in the interviews, no special strategies for mental health and assistance to employees during the Covid/19 crisis were developed, apart from the general guidelines related to the obligation to wear a mask, keep a distance where possible, provide disinfectants and highlight guidelines for recognizing symptoms of infection.

The same conclusion was drawn in relation to the question of whether strategies have been developed for management in risky situations. In addition to the relatively correct legislative framework, the most pronounced problems in Montenegro are its inadequate application in practice and non-sanctioning of those who violate legal obligations. In addition, the lack of a culture of social dialogue appears as a special problem, which is supported by the fact that in this sector a negligible number of collective agreements have been concluded with the employer, and that there is no branch collective agreement.

The fact is, however, that at the level of almost none of the companies (that participated in the interviews), the level of dialogue, during the duration of the epidemic, regarding issues of safety and health at work was not raised to a higher level compared to regular circumstances. Crisis management remains insufficiently developed, and the degree of involvement of employees/unions in its creation is very low.

Privatization processes in the industrial sector in Montenegro led to a significant loss of jobs in the previous period, which weakened the trade union edge, since the trade union movement rested on the so-called „blue collar workers“. The largest number of companies in this sector have been shut down, have gone through bankruptcy proceedings or are in the process of doing so. Insufficient investments in the modernization of the production process lead to the further collapse of the metal sector in Montenegro, and bankruptcies are becoming the only reality that implies the need to resolve the status of employees in this branch of industry. In privatized companies in the metal sector, employers have double rights to the rights of employees in Montenegro compared to employees in the home countries from which the capital comes. The recovery of this sector in Montenegro is not even in sight.

In Montenegro, in the legislative and institutional sense, the process of information, consultation and co-decision is realized through trade unions. For the purposes of this report, it is particularly important to emphasize that Montenegrin labor legislation does not recognize the institute of works councils and European works councils. All rights related to informing and consulting workers in Montenegro are entrusted to situations that which would be applied in the future to trade unions and as such are almost fully harmonized with European legislation regarding the rights of workers' councils. There is a need for greater networking of trade unions from industrial activity at the regional and European level as a first step towards a better understanding of the importance of adequate and timely inclusion of workers in the decision-making process, with a special emphasis on the decision-making process in crisis situations.

III Economic, social and psychological impact of the crisis

Regarding the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the economy, Eurostat data and indicators that showed how the course of the crisis went were processed, with reference to the state of GDP in the EU, inflation, energy prices, imports of goods, and all according to the coefficient of industrial production, which measures the development of the industry.

From these data it is clear that in September 2021 there was a drop in production. According to all indicators, a significant economic decline in production followed in March 2020.

The main challenges, apart from the health crisis, were the great impact on the economy, which is reflected in the problem of raw material procurement, raw material prices, recession and liquidity. Economic Indices in May-August show a slight recovery of industrial production and continuous growth, although in the metal industry there is a decline in the production of chips and new technologies.

According to the quarterly employment coefficient, young people aged 15-29 are at risk, because they do not work or study, the labor market has weakened, there is an imbalance between the need for work and the offer, certain sectors are more affected by the crisis. Many workers have been excluded from the labor market and have lost skills and abilities during the crisis.

The impact of the crisis on women is especially visible in the labor market, which was significantly unfavorable and many were forced to leave it due to childcare and absence from school during the lockdown and isolation, because they did not have the option of childcare.

Various psychological conditions in people are presented, which are reflected in feelings of emotional insecurity, fear, and collective grief, loss of control, pessimism, traumatic conditions, and feelings of panic, aggression, social isolation and disorientation.

In people who were employed and worked regularly during covid, states of burnout at work, chronic fatigue, negative attitude towards work, lack of insomnia control, cognitive problems related to memory, analysis, lower intellectual activity and understanding of the environment are observed. In relation to young people and children during the covid crisis, there are emotions related to anxiety about the future, limited movement, reduced level of education, and fear for the existence of parents.

IV Agile methodology in organization management. Benefits for employers and workers in the Covid-19 crisis

- Application of “agility” in the metal industry as a counter-crisis;
- Moving to agile partnerships within companies: company leaders and trade unions / works councils.

Stretchable-elastic method in management, is a method that defines elasticity during management, represents a flexible and adaptable influence on changes in the company. Given that the crisis had an external character, changes must be faster, they cannot be planned, and efficiency must be increased during implementation.

This methodology requires more intensive cooperation in the company between employers and workers in order to quickly respond to changes that occur in the market, short-term plans are made, risk in business is reduced, transparency is increased, people become the main factor in the success and development of innovations.

It is moving to easier ways of communication and flexible partnership. The decision-making process is “cascading”, like a waterfall, because an agile approach means that the decisions made are changed during consultations, on the fly.

This approach requires the ability of workers to adapt and an organization that applies flexible management through constructive dialogue.

Regarding the changes in the metal sector, the drivers of changes and crisis measures, it is concluded at the beginning that the crisis itself is the main driver of changes that require more intensive and two-way cooperation between employers and workers. The main factors of change are reflected in the change in production. The consequences of these changes in the metal sector in Bulgaria led to shorter working hours in the machinery sector, which led to limited production and reduced wages.

The consequences of the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic in the mechanical industry are reflected in the lack of qualified labor, a decrease in efficiency, a lack of investment in modern technologies and modernization of production, an increase in the price of electricity and raw materials.

The biggest decline was recorded in the automotive industry, where production decreased by 10%, as well as a lack of chips and semi-finished products. In the metal industry, transport has slowed down and there has been a halt in the production of ships.

The biggest problems that disturb the production process are sick days of workers, flexible working hours, lack of investments, the production process is changing in the automotive industry, which requires retraining of workers, the production of cars with a classic drive - diesel, is being reduced, switching to hybrid vehicles.

There are layoffs in production due to workers' lack of interest in education, which is necessary for retraining, and which requires knowledge of new technologies and new skills.

Due to the energy crisis that hit the metal sector - high electricity prices for industries, working hours are shortened and workers are laid off.

The conclusion is that the crisis itself is the main driver of changes and that it requires mana

V Change in the metal sector: drivers of change and the main concern of company management and workers

- Social dialogue at company level: the interaction between human resource management policies and worker representation structures.

- Social dialogue and response to the crisis in candidate countries

As part of the social dialogue at the company level during the Covid-19 crisis, it is important to increase the flexibility of business and ensure greater interaction between management policy and human resources. Poland focused flexibility on working hours, shift work, i.e. flexible working hours. So that other forms of work appear, such as working from home and remote work, and the so-called hybrid forms of work that combine various forms of work, i.e. that apply employee rotations both at the workplace and from home, in order to avoid social isolation of all employees.

The production was organized in such a way that the business tasks were fulfilled, while at the same time the safety of the workers was maintained. The conclusion is that where there are unions, the workers were informed about the changes in the company, and where there are no unions, the issues were resolved individually. Various modifications and adjustments were applied by the company in order to find savings and use financial assistance from the state.

The state's policy moved in the direction of maintaining employment. In order to maintain safety at work, going on annual vacations was implemented. Regulations in Poland allow for an agreement with the trade unions, with the consent of the trade unions, whereby certain decisions related to the company's internal acts can be „frozen during the crisis“ for a limited time.

These restrictions (immediate suspension) are used in order to maintain employability. When resolving or suspending issues related to the financial position of employees, it is necessary to have the consent of the trade union and prior consultation, in order for certain rights of employees to be temporarily suspended for the duration of the Covid-19 crisis, while for issues of termination of jobs, individual dismissals due to economic reasons, the employer was not obliged to seek the consent of the trade union.

For all other issues, the employer is looking for solutions in order to reduce the impact of covid on the company, together with the trade union. According to the Polish regulations, there are clear differences between the situations when the employer is obliged to inform and when to consult the trade union (Law on Information and Consultation).

Social dialogue and flexibility in management have proven to be extremely important during the pandemic, precisely as a way of reducing the negative impact on the company and maintaining employability, all through the application of information and consultation institutes.

Regarding the topic Social dialogue and the response to the crisis in the candidate countries, whose presentation was presented by the UPV, it was pointed out that here it is necessary to raise awareness that we are all on the same boat in this pandemic situation, and that social dialogue should not be overvoting but the glue that holds society together.

Good results in companies during the pandemic were achieved where there was a minimum of social dialogue and the involvement of social partners by the state in matters of implementing measures.

Regarding the experience of Serbia and the social situation at the time of the Covid crisis, it was indicated that the Social and Economic Council met 14 times during the crisis, as well as that extraordinary sessions were held when the state of emergency was introduced. Regarding the experience of Serbia and the social situation at the time of the Covid crisis, it was indicated that the Social and Economic Council met 14 times during the crisis, as well as that extraordinary sessions were held when the state of emergency was introduced.

What was missing was the adoption of the proposed plan of preventive measures and the proposal of the social partners to enter the crisis headquarters.

What has been observed as a trend during the crisis is that collective agreements are not concluded and that there are no special collective agreements in the real sector.

Labor rights are also being reduced due to fear of uncertainty surrounding the course of the pandemic, and women are more threatened in their workplaces during the crisis. The effectiveness of social dialogue in times of crisis has shown its purpose and need, as well as representing a framework for development. The realization of agreed measures between employers and trade unions is mostly hindered by the state, so it is important to reach an agreement before negotiations with the state and then influence the government with arguments.

2. FRAMEWORK FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF MEASURES

I Forms of representation of workers in companies.

- Workers' representation structures in candidate countries and how they are used during a crisis

Regarding the structure of workers' representation and candidate countries" presented by SSMS during the project, it showed that the economy will never be the same again after the pandemic, that there has been a change in production chains, production problems due to employees falling ill, problems with the supply chain, demand for final products.

There is an evident need for the development of joint plans for exiting the crisis, as well as the improvement of the Law on Safety and Health at Work and the work of the safety committee..

It is also concluded that in Serbia there is no knowledge of workers' councils, that the inclusion of employees in decision-making would lead to the reform of the labor market and the management of enterprises, as well as better relations between employers and workers. It is necessary to strengthen the role of employee representative and his/her involvement in the decision-making process.

it is necessary to raise awareness in implementing the model of involving employees and workers in the company's decision-making. In practice, there are different forms of worker involvement in decision-making processes, depending on the way EU directives were transposed into national legislation.

II Best practice for worker health and safety in the time of Covid

Regarding the challenge of the virus, the World Health Organization (WHO) and public health authorities around the world have been taking steps to slow the spread and reduce the rate of infection of the Covid-19 virus.

Governments undertook a whole range of policies and measures that included border closures, mandatory quarantines, movement restrictions, bans on mass gatherings, isolation of cities or entire countries, which led to major changes in everyday life and business.

Many companies created and implemented plans to maintain business continuity during the pandemic, all employers had to adequately prepare and react in accordance with the development of the situation surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic, including preparing to limit their business activities for the sake of protecting workers' health, they may even be forced to close businesses.

It was concluded that examples of best practice for worker safety during Covid-19 were mainly used in production plants, where a large number of people worked, and most of the examples related to specific measures taken in the metal sector and that: provision of personal protective equipment, masks and disinfectants, ensure safe transportation of workers from home to work, work in multiple shifts to reduce contact and infection, work from home where possible, usually for the administration of the clinic in production plants, temperature measurement upon entering the company of all persons who enter the employer's premises, separate rest areas, canteens for meals in multiple shifts, dispensers with disinfectant before entering the company, employee training for safe work, revision of the act on risk assessment with handling during Covid-19, disinfection of tools and equipment before starting work, disinfection zones/chambers when entering the employer's premises, points for vaccination in the production facility and in the company, reduction of unnecessary contacts, minimum distance of 2 m, assigning a contact person to implement the measures, redistribution of working hours with shift work and a smaller number of employees, enhanced hygiene and disinfection of work premises, which includes the engagement of companies that carry out disinfection, frequent ventilation of the work area, provision of a sufficient amount of soap, towels and alcohol-based disinfectants, instructions for the safe work of employees.

III The role of trade unions and workers' councils during the Covid-19 crisis

Crisis Negotiations and Cross-Border Restructuring - Process and Considerations for Works Councils, Trade Unions and Employer Representatives, Business Impact Information and Recovery Scenarios.

The joint conclusions of experts and participants define that trade unions can help their countries emerge stronger from this crisis by demanding urgent action from governments and by providing new and innovative proposals to transform short-term crisis measures into systemic reforms.

Demands for urgent action by unions to be taken by state governments during the Covid-19 crisis relate to: universal health care, extended sickness due to Covid-19, special protection of the unemployed and family, job and income security through the adoption of flexible part-time work schemes, financial support for businesses to avoid layoffs, compliance with OSH regulations, recognition of Covid-19 as an occupational disease, strengthening of social dialogue, improvement of the entire system of social protection for all categories of workers and their work status, long-term investments in social services, partial or complete forgiveness of external debts and financial assistance to endangered companies, i.e. economic activities, in order to maintain employability.

In front of the FPP organization from Poland, the following presentations were presented to the participants by the experts:

- Crisis negotiations and cross-border restructuring - process and consideration for works councils, trade unions and employer representatives

In connection with the crisis negotiations, the expert pointed out that in these situations it is crucial to strengthen dialogue and foster mutual trust in companies in order to improve the predictability of risks, more flexible work organization and facilitate access to training for employees in the company, because quick business solutions must be made in order to successfully overcome the crisis.

In those situations, it is also necessary to increase the level of information and consultation about the situation and likely changes in employment in the company; where, in the employer's opinion, employment in the company may be at risk, informing about possible anticipatory measures, especially in terms of employee training and skills development.

The conclusion of experts and participants is that timely information and consultation are a condition for successful restructuring, as well as that the effectiveness of social dialogue depends on a transparent, regular and reliable process of information and consultation and that the basis of negotiations is trust and respect for agreements.

For successful crisis negotiations, it is necessary to develop timely predictions and prevention of crisis situations in the company, because the problem of reacting too late to changes can affect the neglect of the economic aspects of the decisions made, as well as that delayed reaction does not contribute to predicting the actual development of employment in companies or risk prevention, relationships should be maintained and improved regardless of the surrounding circumstances. Negotiation in times of crisis requires trust, flexibility in accepting compromise solutions, as well as new solutions, i.e. ad hoc strategies and scenarios..

- Information on business impact and remediation scenarios

In connection with the presentation on the topic of information that affects business and rehabilitation scenarios, the concept of benchmarking was explained - concrete solutions and good practices based on experience. This issue is particularly important in personnel management. Adapting to new jobs and new working conditions is key, so it is necessary for the organization to be flexible in order to have flexible responses to the crisis.

This issue is particularly important in personnel management. Adapting to new jobs and new working conditions is key, so it is necessary for the organization to be flexible in order to have flexible responses to the crisis.

The main problem consists in the fact that trade union organizations negatively perceive flexibility in the field of work organization, which does not always mean a deterioration of work standards, while employers mistakenly associate greater protection of the employment relationship only with additional employment costs, in order to avoid any doubts in in terms of interpretation, it is necessary to understand the interlocutor's intentions and explain the meaning of regulations and procedures.

For all the above reasons, it is important to motivate, create a friendly atmosphere, eliminate the feeling of threat, by 1. improving the process of information and consultation

in order to make it transparent, reliable, regular and stable. 2. establishing an exchange of experiences and professional counseling. 3. using experts or consultants and coordinators for better cooperation with the central management of the company. 4. decisive factor - state and related optimization, vision, organizational culture and image of the company 5. introducing measures for the systematic professionalization of information and consultation representatives.

IV Effective online collaboration in complex organizations

- An overview of work tools that can facilitate information channels, including the use of the Internet and online meeting software
- Recommended protocols for online representative meetings

As for new challenges and opportunities for trade unions amid the Covid-19 pandemic, they mainly relate to national digital technology deficits and growing informalization.

Digital technologies, especially virtual meetings, threaten the traditional model of industrial relations. There are two main challenges to working online, ie. online: unaffordability and lack of connectivity. The adoption of these technologies by trade unions and employers is recommended, given that they provide opportunities and benefits that would otherwise not be realized through physical meetings and conferences.

Covid-19 has made it more obvious that unions must: recognize information technologies as a critical force in shaping their relevance in the future, as a strategic plan for greater visibility of IT in union structures; improve online cooperation, for the sake of mutual connection and solidarity, mobilizing and uniting workers in that way; ensure that provisions for digitization and the spread of technology are integrated into the collective agreement and the structure of social dialogue in the workplace; develop their own applications and databases that are available to their membership.

The advantages of online cooperation are new forms of online communication that allow unions to engage more members. During the pandemic, numerous online meetings and webinars were held, which were accepted by the trade unions as a way of communication during 2020. In this way, they received more immediate and better quality information from their members. Increased engagement online allows unions to better represent members and strengthen their role with employers. Trade unions should invest in upgrading their knowledge and understanding of new technologies, as well as adapt to the online sphere and improve their communication infrastructure through online communication.

V Conclusions and recommendations of possible anti-crisis measures

During the duration of the project, the participants pointed out that new problems had already appeared even before the end of the Covid crisis, which were caused by the war in Ukraine, and which are reflected in inflation and the rise in prices of basic foodstuffs and the energy crisis. All these problems affect the labor market, and again, they mostly affect

employers and workers in terms of business problems and living and working conditions.

The general conclusion is that during previous crises, such as the World Financial Crisis of 2008, a great role was played by the cooperation of social partners, as well as that during every crisis there is a limitation of the possibility of sales and reduction of costs, as well as the workforce.

It was also pointed out that an intelligent response to the crisis is an agile and elastic compromise that everyone in the tripartite dialogue is ready for. The governments of the participating countries mainly helped through the Covid 19 crisis with public funds to get through the crisis with financial assistance to the most vulnerable activities in maintaining employability.

The recommendation is that the countries should have learned a lot about globalization and that it is necessary to return production within the borders of the country, develop strategic autonomy, develop the country's economic policy, economic independence, develop economic strategies, because a crisis always represents an opportunity and a challenge. The Covid 19 crisis has led to uncertain times that pose a risk to the rollback of workers' rights, to increased labor migration and labor shortages.

It is necessary to have elasticity in the social dialogue, to quickly adapt to new circumstances and endurance, new rules and new obligations for employers and workers.

A major role can be played by European works councils, by devising and developing economic strategies for the European Union.

A large number of countries participating in the project concluded bilateral agreements with employers as a measure to solve crises, as a type of social pact with which they acted together with demands and proposals in relation to the state and demands for creating anti-crisis plans.

Existing or developed trade union structures aimed at informing, advising and involving workers at national level, as established in European countries, still vary significantly depending on factors directly related to the national context of industrial relations.

Cooperation between social partners and a compatible strategy are essential conditions for a proper flow of information and consultative processes. The fundamental importance of all initiatives and campaigns should be a thorough understanding of employee involvement in business and employment. Trade unions, identified (in all the countries included in this in-depth analysis) play a vital role in informing, consulting and involving workers, bear great responsibility for the proper implementation of the process at all levels. Their initiatives and actions should focus on monitoring the implementation of EU regulations, as well as demonstrating the support and expertise needed for that process. All forms of gathering of interested parties and actors have a positive impact on the development of the process.

Social actors, given their representativeness and role in the process of workers' participation, should not only be consulted but also actively engaged from the early stages of transposition and development of national mechanisms and procedures in order to ensure the best compatibility with existing practices, workplace realities and specific characteristics of labor relations at all levels. Although the competent authorities have finally initiated the process of transposition of the law, social partnership is crucial for successful implementation. Active cooperation, consultation and shared responsibility have always been promoted as EU values.

The legal framework and harmonization of legislation with the EU have a strong influence on national labor relations, as well as on the development of the labor market. The European Social Dialogue must ensure that all aspects affecting the field of work and the rights of workers in all Member States are prioritized. Mid-term and long-term strategies should be closely related to development perspectives and trends, as well as aspects of the overall environment, because the legal dimension is necessary.

The EU legal framework is a guarantee of equal rights for workers, a joint responsibility of social partners at the national level. That is why it is of crucial importance to empower them, encourage their proactive attitude and active participation, because the participation of representatives of workers and employers is of crucial importance for strengthening the right to information, consultation and participation of workers in Europe.

The general conclusion from the project is that the health and economic crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic had a pronounced negative impact on businessmen from the metal sector. Although it did not mean a complete suspension of work, it was often the result of efforts for businessmen to adapt to the new reality. Reduced business income, disruptions in the market, disruptions in the value chain are just some of the side effects of Covid-19.

To a greater or lesser extent, the above was reflected in the labor relations within the company, which further resulted in the need to ensure the sustainability of business and workplaces through constant and timely communication between the employer and employees. Although employers are not required by law to inform and consult unions in all countries participating in the project, the impression is that, to a greater or lesser extent, consultation and counseling with employees was not absent during the Covid-19 pandemic, which indicates the essential existence of social dialogue and the need to consolidate all the resources of a business system in times of crisis.

During the crisis, employers together with employee representatives came up with solutions to protect jobs. They used various forms of state aid, mainly in the form of wage subsidies during the introduced economic standstill or reduction of working hours to a maximum of half-time, with the provision of minimum compensation for work commensurate with working hours if there was a reduction in the economic turnover of the company due to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic.

All the countries participating in the project also provided for the payment of one-time social assistance for the self-employed and persons working under part-time contracts or temporary and occasional jobs as part of the aid measures. In order to prevent collective layoffs, employers changed the way work was organized, changed working conditions and wages, and reduced the number of working hours per workplace.

If there are trade unions in the company, the exchange of information and consultations take place on a regular basis, in accordance with the standards established by the parties on the basis of legal provisions that require cooperation with the application of various mechanisms (means) of social dialogue.

Surveys as well as contacts with employers have shown that almost half of employers believe that the forms of employee involvement should only be those provided by law, they even resist such employee participation. This reflects employers' lack of willingness to deal with issues that do not create legal obligations for the company.

The Ministries of Labor in the participating countries pay little attention to the recommendations of the European Union for greater involvement of employees in management through binding legal norms in regulations. Union representatives also believe that workers' councils and work through employment agencies reduce the role of unions.

Since the beginning of the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 corona virus, there have been changes in the companies of the metal complex by introducing various measures that have had a positive effect on employees. During the activities of introducing measures in companies, employees were involved through their trade unions.

During the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus, various crisis management strategies were developed in the companies of the metal complex, which will be applied until the end of the pandemic.

The social dialogue between workers and employers in the companies of the metal complex during the pandemic was at a satisfactory level considering the situation, in mutual interest. It was important to everyone that the production processes were not interrupted and that the companies functioned in difficult business conditions.

The general conclusion of all the workshops held on this project is that social dialogue and flexibility in management proved to be extremely important during the pandemic, precisely as a way of reducing the negative impact on the company and the possibility of maintaining employability during the crisis, all thanks to the application of the Institute of Information and Consulting.

It was concluded that there is a need for greater networking of trade unions from industrial activity at the regional and European level, as a first step towards a better understanding of the importance of adequate and timely inclusion of workers in the decision-making process, with a special emphasis on the decision-making process in crisis situations;

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- Business communications Prof. Slobodan Nešković

- The material is taken from national reports and materials used during project implementation "Put the pedal to the metal".

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Agile response to COVID-19 crisis in EU metal industry



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