

“Impact of Covid-19 on economy, companies’ and workers – workers involvement in designing and implementing measures to address the impact of Covid-19 crisis”

Results of the Greek working team in the bilateral workshop of Madrid.

Themes:

Impact of Covid-19 on companies and employment in different sectors (hospitality, commerce, industry)

- On which economic sectors do you think the pandemic had the greatest impact? For example, in Greece the construction sector, which actually is recovering, suffers from shortages in staff, because in the period of the pandemic employees/workers of the sector in Greece searched for employment abroad and have not returned again. The same happens with the catering sector/hotel sector
- Do you consider that apart from the sector of the business, its size played a role in shaping the problems it has faced during the pandemic crisis?

The object, size and seasonality played a role. There were examples of companies adapting well, i.e. companies modifying their business scope, e.g. pharmaceutical companies producing caramels started producing antiseptics.

In companies where there was an attempt to employ subcontractors and replace permanent staff, the decision was taken, because of the pandemic, to stop working with subcontractors. This was a reason why information and consultation with the workers’ union was not necessary.

During the pandemic an exponential growth was recorded in the delivery and courier services. Workers’ unions were created for these sectors.

In the fur industry, and in particular at the stages of processing, both in the workshops and in the sale as well as in the rearing process, all business stopped and all employees were suspended, 2500 workers in total.

- Apart from the pandemic do you think that there are additional reasons that magnified the above problems?

The economic crisis (lasting in Greece for 10 years now), the energy crisis, the Ukraine-Russia war and the economic sanctions imposed on Russia.

Information, consultation and participation of representatives of employees during business closures and cease of activities

- It usually happens that in periods of crises, the management of companies has the tendency to make decisions in an “autocratic” way without previous consultation with employees. Do you think that this was the case during the pandemic?

Information and consultation did not exist in smaller businesses.

- In the case you have given a negative answer to the above question, what were the issues on which the management has asked the opinion of employees and their participation in consultation procedure?

In order to reduce staff, a large company, after information and consultation, launched 2 voluntary redundancy schemes, where anyone who wanted to leave could do so on favorable terms.

- How effective was the involvement of employees and their contribution to the establishment of solutions?

In cases where there was a culture of good faith dialogue and consultation beforehand, the result was also very positive during the pandemic.

It is considered very important that the worker's union is not influenced by political parties.

- In case the involvement of employees had positive results, why do you think this happened?

There must be unity and coordination among workers. The union must have won the trust and sympathy of the workers. This is a prerequisite for the success of the consultation.

Information, consultation and participation of representatives of employees in designing teleworking or hybrid work arrangements

- In particular, what was the information and consultation procedure and participation of employees' representatives as far as teleworking is concerned? Did the management take the initiative, or it happened under the pressure of the employees?

During the pandemic various digital communication tools were activated such as teams e.g. in a large multinational company (with facilities in three major cities) and trade unions/workers' associations in each city separately, there were for many years meetings of the Boards of Directors of the unions and they took decisions on how to prioritize their demands and how they were going to manage their achievement. During the pandemic, the meetings were online exclusively and their results were "poorer" and weaker so that the employer tried to isolate each union and break their unity.

In cases of teleworking, consultation was carried out under pressure from employees on issues of pay, computer's switch off, contract modification, employee evaluation etc.

- In the case employees' representatives participated in this process, how do you assess this participation?

The process has not been completed, so there can be no evaluation of it.

- In which way did participation take place? Did employees participate actively expressing their views or was it a matter the representatives handled by themselves?

The representatives are first informed by the workers in the specific department they work in, about the problems and the issues and then they plan the meeting with the employer. This of course is feasible in cases where teleworking is of course made possible by the scope of the job.

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