

WORKSHOP

Saturday, October 22, 2022, LIMNEON RESORT & SPA Hotel, Kastoria

"IMPACTS OF THE PANDEMIC ON BUSINESSES AND EMPLOYEES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL – TRADE UNION RESPONSE TO THE NEW CHALLENGES"

MAIN DISCUSSION POINTS

Start of works by Konstantinos Margaritis, OVES President.

Despina Kozatsani, Deputy Governor of Region of Western Macedonia, Head of Kastoria.

As a doctor, I consider the topic of the pandemic, which statistically strikes humanity every 100 years to be extremely interesting since it has caused 3,200,000 deaths worldwide. In Greece the city of Kastoria was hit first and very hard, due to a business trip of fur entrepreneurs to a fashion show in Italy . About 3,000 people had to go into strict quarantine and we had to organize ourselves to distribute daily to them essentials such as food and medicines. In our region we also mourn human souls, while the health system of the prefecture of Kastoria exceeded its limits. We have tried, as a region, to dispose and offer all available resources. Now that the corona virus epidemic has mitigated significantly, the unexpected event of the war between Russia and Ukraine happened, which completely leveled the fur industry. As a local government, we must quickly find our reflexes to help our workers and businesses.

Akis Tsoukas, President of the Hellenic Fur Federation

The fur was hit first by the pandemic and will come out last. It should also be noted that the pandemic coincided with 2 other events: the war in Russia and the killing of 17 million fur-bearing animals in Denmark, which was finally, recently, deemed as unnecessary. In our region there are thousands of workers in fur production both in the primary (animal breeding) and in the secondary and tertiary sectors. Today, as far as breeding farms are concerned, Greece is the second power in the world. Fur is an ecological product, which for northern climates constitutes a necessity and not a luxury. Before the war we had impressive orders. The fur auction in Kastoria should work again, which will provide work for 100 families. I am sure that in 3 years from today we will be number one in the world.

Charalambos Karataglides, President of the Chamber of Kastoria

Our region was hit hard by the pandemic. On the other hand, the pandemic also brought changes in the way of working and insecurity of people considering basic issues, which were previously resolved, such as: Will I work? When will I go back to work? Will I get paid? Businesses feel the same insecurity.

Throughout the pandemic, we stood by and put the issues of our employees first. In Kastoria we still have 600 workers with their work contracts suspended, who get €580 gross per month and with this amount they have to find a way to live and survive in the cold of Kastoria. We will continue to work and strive for the good of our businesses and employees.

Socrates Pelkas, Deputy Mayor of Kastoria

I convey to you the greetings of the Mayor of Kastoria, Mr. Ioannis Korentsidis. Your conference is very important, because it explores a critical issue for our city. In the fur industry, in the trade, in catering, in all the businesses of Kastoria there were many problems with the pandemic and unfortunately they still exist. In order to overcome them, the effort and ideas of all of us are needed.

Nasos Papandreou, President of the Labor Center of Kastoria

I will focus on the effects of the pandemic and the new challenges. Teleworking has set new standards both for employment and for the existence and functioning of trade unions. Effective unions in the new conditions will require many people not only to decide that they want to work together, but also to do something about it. With flexible forms of work and teleworking come new challenges indeed. With INE GSEE we are conducting a study, which documents that we need to orient ourselves towards the acquisition of digital skills. Trade unions should find ways to work together and reach out to everyone, including non-union members and people with disabilities.

New Challenges Plus project presentation, Sofia Spiliotopoulou, OBES expert (see presentation)

Effects of the pandemic on employment and businesses, Vassilis Ninos, Vice-President of OBES (see presentation)

The pandemic happened at a time when technology has enabled us to find solutions so that businesses don't shut down completely and workers still somehow work. The challenges of the pandemic and its effects on workers and businesses are many and important. The New Challenges+ project gave us the possibility and the opportunity to explore them both in Greece and in all of Europe, through the European Workers' Councils and our foreign partners in the project. We have seen examples of ways in which businesses and workers have been able to survive and hold on. A key problem and challenge today is digital transformation. In a few years there will be no ATMs, banks have laid off half their workforce and all employees will have to go digital training within the next three years. Businesses say they have a 50% shortage of people with digital skills. We see phenomena of older children tutoring younger children and introducing them to IT. There is now a serious problem in businesses with many generations working together. Younger ones need to teach older ones how to work and handle digital media. Younger generations have a different way of dealing with work. They consider themselves obsolete if they stay in the same job for over 2 years. The phenomenon of digital nomads appeared with the pandemic. As a result of the pandemic, teleworking has increased greatly. One of its features is that it is now irrelevant where teleworkers live. More and more people decide to stay in bigger and cheaper houses, in beautiful places in areas with a better quality of life. Kastoria could become one of those places. Local government should provide quality digital services. Already the website of the region of Crete has become easier and more user-friendly. The regional governor of Western Greece, Mr. Farmakis, has asked the University of Patras to do the same for his region.

Giorgos Kasapidis, Regional Governor of Western Macedonia

Welcome to Kastoria. I consider that what we have heard is very important and is being said for the first time. Our region has submitted a request for the digitization of 198 of its services, amounting to 1.3 million euros. The University of Western Macedonia is located in Kastoria, specializing in digital media and IT. The right to work is sacred. We should not expect robots to work and workers to sit at home and get paid. We are already faced with the dilemma of which

development do we want, an investment with 1000 workers or an investment with robots and 200 workers? We want employment. We don't want young people to finish what they have to offer by their forties and then have psychological problems. We want regional product to be produced and distributed evenly in our region. Our question is how can we use technology to bring orders and work back to Kastoria? I have some reservations about using technology. It should be used as long as clear limits are legally set so that moral barriers are not broken. Moreover, I believe that education and training can also contribute productively. I wanted to share these thoughts with you.

Effects of the pandemic in Kastoria. Challenges for employment in the prefecture, Eleni Markou, President of the "Prophet Elias" Workers trade union (see presentation)

Discussions in groups (see the groups' answers to the questions).

Lunch - discussion

Closure, evaluation