

Viktor Orbán
Prime Minister of Hungary

János Áder
President of the Republic of Hungary

Letter sent by e-mail :
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Dear Prime Minister,
Dear President,

The COVID-19 emergency is already seriously affecting all European countries, with many companies struggling to survive the crisis and workers losing their jobs. If not addressed with adequate and urgent mitigation and support measures, the current emergency will result in a massive recession and unemployment, which will take long time and huge resources to recover from. That is why social partners in all countries are strongly advocating for financial support to companies and for short-time work and income compensation arrangements for workers.

In this context, I am writing to you to express deep concern about the set of measures adopted in Hungary to mitigate the economic fallout from the spread of COVID-19, including the legislation passed on 30th March 2020. While welcoming the steps taken by the government to alleviate the effects of the coronavirus on the national economy, the ETUC deplors the absence of any consultation on the draft laws with the Hungarian Social Partners. While it is clear that the coronavirus brings extraordinary challenges, nonetheless checks and balances and democratic norms must be kept in place. It is exactly during this time of crisis when social dialogue is most needed to bring positive contributions and solutions to combat the crisis, since the role of social partners in designing and implementing emergency measures in an efficient way, is essential.

When comparing the adopted provisions with measures introduced in other EU member states, it is apparent that the Hungarian measures leave workers largely unprotected in the current unprecedented situation, and some industries without equal support. Immediate and long-term plans need to be balanced and must apply to all sectors of the economy to keep people in employment, including through short-time work and income compensation arrangements.

Therefore, we call on the Government to:

- Negotiate with the Social Partners in order to implement the measures in a balanced way.
- Reinforce the measures previously taken by the state to support the economy and take further steps in support of workers by adopting public funding schemes to maintain employment, measures to support workers health and safety in particular for those sectors who are working hard to fight the pandemic, like health care workers or those who continue to provide essential services during the crisis like transport and food production & retail workers.

- Guarantee labour legislation to keep the balance of power between workers and employers, with a special emphasis on collective interest protection.

Furthermore, any measures taken to undermine workers' rights now will have negative effects on the economic recovery once the crisis will be over. Large number of unemployed workers will require longer assistance from the state and will weaken any chance of a quick, strong recovery of the national economy.

Our first assessment is that the changes introduced in this law and in the previous measures will bring Hungary into breach of its obligations to secure the rights provided to workers under EU Directives. The measures of particular concern are the changes to the Labour Code "to make employment regulations more flexible, in order to facilitate future agreements between employers and employees." With this move, the provisions of the Labour Code render employment rights vulnerable to being breached in whole or in part. The ETUC will raise these concerns at the highest level with the President of EU Commission, Council and Parliament.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Luca Visentini', written in a cursive style.

Luca Visentini
General Secretary