

Questionnaire

My name is eng.Tsvetelina Ivanova

I work as the President of Federation of independent trade unions in construction /FITUC/ in Bulgaria

1. What impact does the Corona pandemic have on workers - in your case also on construction workers - in Bulgaria?

The state of emergency obviously affects the whole economy, but for the moment most of our construction companies seem to have kept the rhythm of work. So far, there is no decision by the state to suspend construction, as long as the precautionary measures for workers are respected. Work on residential buildings in cities has not stopped. The specificity of the construction activity is such that it cannot be carried out from home, however, the organization of work on construction sites, especially when working outdoors, can be made so that all requirements imposed by the state are met.

However, there are concerns among companies in the industry. On the one hand, they are linked to the timing of the operational programs, as they lag behind the absorption of European funds in the current programming period. The other is what will happen to public procurement and whether work on them will really stop because construction stops the economy. Our social partners, and in particular the Bulgarian Construction Chamber, also came out with the position that construction should continue.

The activities on the sites are continued in accordance with the discipline, the use of disinfectants and masks, rules for the distribution of people who are at work in order to maintain the necessary distance between them. We have addressed to all our members the most important recommendations regarding coronavirus protection, and accordingly to all workers. To this end, we have also used the assistance of the Committees and working groups in the respective enterprises in places where they exist. Enterprises are inspected once or more each week for compliance with these measures.

Optimization has been made for outdoor sites in relation to state recommendations. The breaks and meals of construction workers shall respect the principle of non-intrusion of persons in premises and workplaces. An electronic measurement of the temperature of the inlet of the enterprise is carried out before starting work.

Most construction company executives have said they rely on self-awareness and every employee. There are employers who distribute vitamins to their employees and are additionally provided with water and drinks.

The companies where the FITUC has trade unions and have not yet ceased their operations, nor even taken partial actions against their staff in this regard. The executives there have been able to organize their precautionary measures on COVID-19 and with them the production process is proceeding normally and the workers are at their jobs. Daily instruction, disinfection of entry and exit are made, protective masks are given to the workers, additional water dispensers are purchased, which are placed at the respective sites. Changes were also made to the schedules and working hours of employees in order to reduce outdoor work or to lay

it in certain time zones of the day other than the usual ones, as well as dashboards. Extra transportation is provided to transport people from appointments to workplaces to avoid clumping. Two different destination entrances are provided for arrivals and departures.

Concerning timelines, there are currently no serious concerns from companies as to whether they will complete their facilities in the circumstances. Most point out that winter has been auspicious for work and they have been able to fulfill a large number of requests.

As of the end of September 2019, the employed in the construction sector were 131.1 thousand, or 5.7% of the total employed in the country, with production for the same period amounting to BGN 11.3 billion.

One of the concerns of most of our procurement companies is to shift the funding towards anti-virus and have construction sites shut down, since for a branch like ours where deadlines are crucial, it will have a major impact the supply of various materials and services.

We believe that in order for the construction industry to develop steadily rather than peaks and downturns, the state needs to have a vision for infrastructure development over a longer period of time. This is essential for us, for the development of companies, for the retention of staff. If there is a clear perspective, our companies will also be able to plan investments in technology, innovation and digitalization.

2. What is your contribution as union secretary / how does the union support the workers during this time? What do the workers need?

For 2 years, the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria has proposed to increase the minimum unemployment benefit, which is BGN 9 per day, which is not in line with what is stated in the law - 60% of the income on which the worker was insured. Then the minimum compensation should be BGN 360, and currently it is below BGN 200. This will bring justice to those who were on the minimum wage. Those who do not have access to compensation for one reason or another should be given food vouchers for at least 60% of the minimum wage. This is a measure that an hour should rather be realized in order for these people to have at least what to eat.

Our confederation proposes measures targeting specific groups affected by the crisis, which will be included in the second socio-economic package.

CITUB proposes to provide for a measure for self-insured persons affected by the crisis. For this purpose, there must be an income test and, on this basis, for several months, individuals will have an income that allows them to go through the crisis. For mothers who care for their children now, there should be additional leave, like many other countries.

CITUB has proposed, and it has been accepted by our country, that all sectors affected by the current crisis should be eligible for assistance under the 60:40 scheme.

The list of sectors (which also includes construction) that will be eligible for support will be valid only if the enterprise has ceased operations as a result of the Health Minister's orders for the closure of malls, restaurants, playrooms, cinemas and etc. Assistance is eligible for a 20 percent drop in sales revenue when comparing March

to March 2019 turnovers. To prove the decline in the Labor Offices, companies will provide their reports from last year and data on this.

There is also another CITUB proposal, which is for workers who have part-time jobs by order of the employer. For them, the criterion for sales decline applies, with the measure providing for workers to be compensated proportionately for their lost income as a result of reduced working hours, but not more than 60 percent of their remuneration. Part-time support will apply to all sectors of the economy.

FITUC experts in Sofia and the country engage in professional and personal efforts in the fight against crisis.

In many cities, our regional structures have announced hotlines that all workers can get free advice on employment and social security issues. Thus, in a difficult and uncertain situation, anyone can seek clarity on their labor rights and, if necessary, protection. Calls are answered from 9am to 6pm.

Specific measures for the construction sector have not been announced, with the Bulgarian Construction Chamber addressing an open letter to the authorities at national and local level, expressing its position that despite the situation, construction work must continue under strict anti-epidemic measures. At the same time, a letter was sent by trade unions to convene the Tripartite Cooperation Councils on measures to combat COVID-19 and deal with the crisis.

3. How does your union celebrate May 1st - what are the main demands?

This year CITUB stands behind the state of ITUC that On May 1 we salute the workers in health, care and other frontline sectors whose work is essential to saving lives and providing vital products and services.

Tens of thousands of people have died and many more will suffer lasting health effects. 200 million jobs are forecast to be lost, millions are at risk of being thrown back into poverty and the vast inequality that already existed is growing yet deeper. The two-thirds of the world's population with inadequate or no social protection are severely exposed, with many facing destitution and starvation.

The impacts of this crisis have brutally exposed the failings of the model of globalization which has been imposed on working women and men. Public health systems have been debilitated by austerity, and the erosion of workers' rights has left untold millions of workers exposed. Women, migrant workers, ethnic minorities and others who face discrimination are bearing a particularly heavy burden. This must change.

All countries must work together to overcome the initial COVID-19 wave and to prepare for the future. We applaud those governments that are making full use of social dialogue to tackle the crisis and secure wages and income support for their people.

Three major aspects are important for our union:

WORK: Millions of jobs are being destroyed. Therefore, we must strive for full employment, decent work for all, healthy and safe conditions, ending precarious work and formalizing informal work.

PAYMENT: The share of wages in the global economy has been declining for decades, and it is likely to decline with this crisis. Minimum wages must be

everywhere, the right to collective bargaining for all workers must be guaranteed, and the gender pay gap must be closed.

SOCIAL PROTECTION: Billions of people have been left without social protection and are at serious risk of damaging health and the economic consequences of this crisis. Now is the time for global cooperation to fund social protection for all. The world cannot turn its back on the most needed now or in reconstructing an inclusive and sustainable future.

Due to the state of emergency abroad, we have lost many activities that are worth celebrating this day, such as youth happenings, a national fair with over 15,000 workers, planting 3,000 trees and more.

Actions we have taken on Labor Day in time of pandemic is creating a video clip for a song written for gratitude to the Bulgarian Medics. The video will be with pictures of Bulgarian citizens with posters or notes saying "Thank you!", "You are heroes!", "Everything will be gone!" and other.

4. What gives you personally hope in these difficult times?

The universe has stopped us! Told us a definite stop. It shows us that we have gone the wrong way ... Leave us days for reflection, not the political, but the SPIRITUAL ... The time has come for reflection, for prayers, for the belief that once the danger is over we will take a new, brighter, more meaningful path!

The crisis will wake up the people in us who have been asleep deep ... For everything!

And now we are reminded of how little we need. To be healthy, to be together. Thank you for these simplest things - that we are breathing, we are laughing, we are hugging, we are kissing ... that we are here! To do something, to leave something behind ...

We must thank the pandemic for the chance it gives us!

The chance to get back to ourselves, to hear our soul, to re-establish true connection with the people around us.

We will not shop in malls, we will not dine in restaurants, we will not be demonstrating, we will stop pumping our ego with material benefits.

Perhaps we will realize that we are valuable with who we are, not what we have! I believe nothing is accidental!

A new time is coming! Those who can live simply, cleanly and consciously will enter it!

With love! And faith ...

We're home ... No way! I know that this situation is more difficult for us all. We try to share positives every day, but it is clear that everyone feels their own personal negatives ... fight them, hide them, turn them around, process them somehow ... save yourself, not worry your loved ones. Fears, doubts, panics ...

Everyone defeats them in their own way ... or they are given ... The most important thing is to realize that we are all one. It is easier to support each other than to separate. To love is more beautiful than to hate! Because of that I express my deep admiration for the whole Bulgarian people, who in these difficult times show determination, courage and hope.

There is also hope in our sector. Before the pandemic, there was a huge lack of qualified staff in our country. But now, many Bulgarians employed in the industry in other countries remain unemployed. Some of them are already returning to Bulgaria

looking for work. These are workers with experience in construction. Now is the time to offer them employment so they stay here!

And because the pandemic started from China, I will end with a Chinese wisdom "When the storm approaches, some build walls, others build windmills." And what we will build depends on each of us!