
EUROFEDOP SEMINAR

The impact of the Corona crisis on working life in the public sector

26.11.2020
Vienna (Austria)

Seminar via videoconference

Short Report



The effects of the Corona crisis on the workforce in the public sector were most strongly experienced in the healthcare sector by doctors and nurses who had been massively mobilised during the first wave – but of course it had an impact on other sectors of the public service, too. The current seminar discussed these and the current situation from the point of view of different sectors of the public service. Workers had to face multiple challenges, but a team spirit of working together for the same goal emerged.

Restrictions of workers' rights in essential occupations, as for example a ban on leave, were introduced during the first wave in most countries across Europe, and even though they have been lifted by now in Austria in the police force for example, they still remain valid in some countries for a couple of months and the enforcement of these restrictions and their justification should be monitored closely by workers' organisations. On the positive side, the speaker from the Austrian police union reported that the shortages of protective equipment do not persist during the second wave and a nation-wide coordination system has been established.



The following aspects that were discussed affect all public service sectors: the question came up if the coronavirus disease can be considered as an occupational illness in the future – prospects and views differ across the different sectors. All representatives agreed that with regards to special allowances and hazard bonuses, trade unions should put pressure on Ministries, as it seems obvious that enough money is available for less affected sectors. In addition, particularly in occupations struggling with long-term labour shortage, one-time payments are not enough and there is a clear need for structural

changes. During the Corona crisis when governments have to act rapidly, social partners are often not consulted on decisions that clearly affect them and hence these had to be revoked and reconsidered – better ways of adopting such decisions should be determined.



In the healthcare sector, the Corona crisis is bringing structural problems and shortcomings to the forefront which have existed before all over Europe but are aggravated now. How can we tackle the severe labour shortages in this sector? It seems worthwhile to discuss the 6-point-action plan, a concrete programme putting forward 6 issues as proposed by the Austrian healthcare workers, on the European level. Research and analysis, but also protest activities by Romanian healthcare workers provide an example how the crisis can be used as a chance for trade union activists to fight for their rights more vigorously and attain better visibility.

Finally, telework continues to be a much-debated topic, where numerous political discussions on hitherto unregulated workers' rights are ongoing and more to be expected. Regarding the future, a question arose regarding the potential unpopularity of professions that cannot be carried out through teleworking.



The successful online seminar consisted of presentations providing detailed and profound information, followed by vivid discussions. All topics discussed should be further worked on in the future, potentially also focusing on the challenges in each sector separately.



This Seminar has been chiefly financed thanks to European Union Funds

