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Political context affecting working life aspects

2018 was Parliamentary election year in Hungary. Prior to the Parliamentary election in April 2018 neither the government nor social partners initiated significant actions and transformations in the legal framework affecting working life although partly due to the pressing labour shortage, and also to the election campaign, minimum wage has been increased considerably.

In April the governing right wing Fidesz-KDNP won the election, which led to the third four-year term of Fidesz-KDNP and the Prime Minister Viktor Orbán since 2010. In this regard the political change was not essential. Nevertheless, the election resulted in absolute majority and with the strong empowering of a majority of two thirds the new government initiated significant legal decisions that heavily affect democratic institutions, the freedom of the press, and the autonomy of various institutions. Some of the new measures have serious implications regarding working life.

Labour market reforms or major packages of working life regulations

Prior to the election not much changed, except for the impact of the six-year wage agreement concluded at the Permanent Consultative Forum of the Competitive Sector and the Government (Versenyszféra és a Kormány Állandó Konzultációs Fóruma, VKF) in November 2016. The agreement prescribed a two-digit increase of the minimum wage and guaranteed wage minimum (of skilled workers) for both 2017 and 2018, coinciding with a reduction of tax burden of employers. After the election the new government, having absolute majority, initiated some crucial changes, like eliminating essential elements of the ‘cafeteria package’ considered as non-wage subsidy of employees; initiating the amendment of the Labour Code as well as the Act on Legal Status of Public Servants regarding the working time and overtime regulations on the expense of the employees.

Social partners’ views and reactions on changes in governments and working life policies

Since the reshaping of the institutions of interest reconciliation in 2011, social dialogue forums are on the one hand fragmented and on the other hand social dialogue structures and processes are underdeveloped in Hungary. Government’s policy actions affecting working life are mostly outside the interest reconciliation forums, and in spite of sharp protest, consultations have little influence. The major changes initiated by the government were put on the agenda of the Permanent Consultative Forum of the Competitive Sector and the Government (Versenyszféra és a Kormány Állandó Konzultációs Fóruma, VKF) after the relevant bill had been introduced, or even passed, if at all. The growing lack of interest of the government in the social partners’ opinion, the content of the amendment of the Labour Code regarding overtime, and the way the laws were pushed through with no parliamentary debate and despite the trade unions’ readiness for consultation elicited vehement protest from the unions. The overtime law raised a stormy response from employees and led to mass demonstrations. Coinciding with several unilateral decisions of the Government affecting education, academia, university freedom and with the elimination of non-wage subsidy of the cafeteria package recurring demonstrations, political unrest and strike preparations followed which are still in progress.
Developments in industrial relations 2018

Changes affecting the national-level actors and institutions in 2018

**Actors**
There have been no relevant changes affecting the actors in 2018.

**Representativeness**
There have been no relevant changes affecting the representativeness in 2018.

**Institutions**
Social dialogue institutions are on the one hand fragmented and on the other hand social dialogue structures and processes are underdeveloped in Hungary. Since the reshaping of the institutions of interest reconciliation in 2011, the National Economic and Social Council (Nemzeti Gazdasági és Társadalmi Tanács, NGTT), set up by the new government, has been considered by the government as a sort of multipartite consultative body which covers a wide part of actors of society. Due to the deficiency of the NGTT as tripartite body, another forum came into being in 2012, the Permanent Consultation Forum of the Private Sector and the Government (Versenyszféra és a Kormány Állandó Konzultációs Fóruma, VKF) which is acting as a tripartite consultation body. In addition, the national level tripartite interest reconciliation body for public service: the National Public Service Interest Reconciliation Council (Országos Közszolgálati Érdekegyeztető Tanács, OKÉT) functions since 2002. In 2018 a new interest reconciliation forum has been introduced into the existing structure. The new interest reconciliation forum, the Public Utility Provider's Consultation Forum (Közszolgáltató Vállalkozások Konzultációs Fóruma, KVKF) has been established in February 2018. The new forum is a national tripartite forum contributing to the preparation of economic decisions directly affecting the state-owned public utility providers. The participants at KVKF are (1) government, (2) relevant employer organization (National Association of Strategic and Public Utility Companies – Stratégiai és Közszolgáltató Társaságok Országos Szövetsége, STRATOSZ) and (3) representatives of employees (a combination of three trade union confederations acting in the Permanent Consultation Forum of the Private Sector and the Government (Versenyszféra és a Kormány Állandó Konzultációs Fóruma, acronym: VKF): the Hungarian Trade Union Confederation (Magyar Szakszervezeti Szövetség, MASZSZ), the National Confederation of Workers’ Councils (Munkástanácsok Országos Szövetsége, MOSZ) and the Democratic League of Independent Trade Unions (Független Szakszervezetek Demokratikus Ligája, LIGA), as well as some sectoral trade unions particularly involved in public utility provision.

There were no relevant changes except for the establishment of the new national tripartite forum, the Public Utility Provider's Consultation Forum (Közszolgáltató Vállalkozások Konzultációs Fóruma, KVKF, see above). The aim was to provide a forum for direct negotiations between the representatives of employees of state-owned enterprises, the representatives of the said enterprises, and the owner, i.e. the state. Following the establishment of the forum, no activity has been reported so far.

Changes affecting the sectoral and company level social dialogue 2018
Collective bargaining takes place mostly at company level - no major changes have occurred in this regard.

**Innovation in collective bargaining**
There were no major innovations made in collective bargaining.
National social dialogue in 2018 – Scope and Contribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Social dialogue interaction</th>
<th>Social dialogue outcome and/or output</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment - ALMP - Wage subsidies</td>
<td>The target groups of Workplace Protection Action Plan (Munkahelyvédelmi Ació Terv) - introduced in 2013 to provide a wage subsidy to employers employing people under 25, over 55 and some other hard-to-employ groups - will be changed in 2019. Those over 55 will not be beneficiaries of the program - with the hope to find a job on the overheated labour market. The long-term unemployed under the age of 25 will no longer automatically get the subsidy, while new labour market entrants and inactive persons returning to the labour market will be encouraged to be employed through wage subsidy.</td>
<td>The transformation of the Workplace Protection Action Plan is part of the tax-bill of 2019. The issue was put on the agenda of the Permanent Consultative Forum of the Competitive Sector and the Government (Versenyzsféra és a Kormány Állandó Konzultációs Fóruma, VKF) as part of the debate about the tax bill, but no substantive consultation took place. The government presented the changes, while trade unions argued that detailed analysis of the previous subsidy system should have been conducted and a more carefully differentiated change could have been elaborated on this basis, especially for those near to the retirement age. (Liganet 2018a)</td>
<td>In 2017, this form of wage subsidy supported the employment of nearly 900,000 employees. Due to the reshaping of the target groups, some of those under-25 and nearly 340,000 workers over the age of 55 will be excluded from the subsidised employment. Due to the changed labour market situation and strong labour shortage they are expected to find job easily. Government dropped the issue although evidence of finding job is vague for the time being.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taxation and non-wage related labour costs - Reforming the taxation of non-wage benefits</td>
<td>Most of the elements of the ‘cafeteria package’ - various kinds of non-wage benefits for employees - will cease to enjoy preferential taxation according to the 2019 tax bill. Elements with preferential taxation and elements with tax exemption will be eliminated in the previously attractive form and will be liable to full taxation as high as wages (Liganet 2018b).</td>
<td>The issue was repeatedly on the agenda of the Permanent Consultative Forum of the Competitive Sector and the Government (Versenyzsféra és a Kormány Állandó Konzultációs Fóruma, VKF) and also at the forum of National Public Service Interest Reconciliation Council (Országos Közszolgálati Erdekegyeztető Tanács, OKET), but no meaningful consultation took place (Szakszervezetek.hu 2018).</td>
<td>The new tax bill has been passed despite the disapproval of both employee and employer representatives. The unions pledged to raise the issue during the national-level wage negotiations. Employer organisations have made no public efforts to pursue the issue further.</td>
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### Themes

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<tr>
<td><strong>Wage setting - Minimum wage setting</strong></td>
<td>In 2017 the Minister of Employment, Troels Lund Poulsen, established an expert committee on working environment. The task for the committee was to rethink the working environment (occupational health and safety) system in Denmark. The committee consists of four researchers, four representatives of the social partners and a chairman appointed by the government. There is a long-standing tradition in Denmark to have a tripartite dialogue on working environment issues. In September 2018 the committee came up with 18 recommendations for an improved Occupational health and safety effort. The recommendations are backed by the social partners. The recommendations have not yet been followed by political action. References: Statement from LO (2018); Statement from DA (2018); Ministry of Employment (2018b); Ministry of Employment (2018c).</td>
<td>The negotiations about the minimum wage of 2019 were troubled with sharp disagreement between employer and employee representatives. There were consecutive consultations without success. The agreement would have been greatly enhanced if the government would have given date of the reduction of the social contribution tax (in short &quot;szocho&quot;), considering the fact that for the firms, the source of next year minimum wage increase is connected to the reduction of the social contribution tax. The tax package, however, adopted in summer 2018 had no indication about the exact date. Finally, the government convened a last session of the Permanent Consultative Forum of the Competitive Sector and the Government (Versenyszféra és a Kormány Állandó Konzultációs Fóruma, VKF) on 30th December and pushed the social partners to a decision.</td>
<td>The finally signed result was an agreement for a period of two years about raising both minimum wage and guaranteed wage minimum by 8% in 2019 and 2020, respectively. Two of the three participating trade union confederations - LIGA (Democratic League of Independent Trade Unions) and MOSZ (National Federation of Workers’ Councils) - signed, MASZSZ (Hungarian Trade Union Confederation) refused to sign the agreement while employer organisations agreed.</td>
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<td><strong>Working time - Working time duration - increase of maximum overtime</strong></td>
<td>The Labour Code has been amended, resulting in the increase of the maximum duration of working time banking fixed in the collective agreement from twelve to 36 months, and simultaneously the increase of the maximum overtime hours that can be ordered by the employer in a given calendar year from two hundred and fifty to four hundred hours. (Hungarian Parliament, 2018)</td>
<td>Neither parliamentary nor social dialogue has taken place on the issue. The trade unions initiated the convocation of the extraordinary meeting of the Permanent Consultative Forum of the Competitive Sector and the Government (VKF), nevertheless no meeting for consultation was convoked. (Szakszervezetek.hu 2018b) Trade unions arranged some informal consultations, with no success to influence the terms of the amendment of the Labour Code</td>
<td>The amendment was passed without meaningful debate and raised protest from trade union confederations and recurring demonstrations, political unrest and strike preparations took place. Final outcome of the protests and strikes is unknown at present.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Other aspects of working life - Labour Code amendment and law on strike</strong></td>
<td>Consultation on amending the Labour Code of 2012 and the Law on Strike has been a continuous issue to be discussed at Permanent Consultative Forum of the Competitive Sector and the Government (Versenyszféra és a Kormány Állandó Konzultációs Fóruma, VKF)</td>
<td>Consultations are in process, the issue is repeatedly on the agenda of the Permanent Consultative Forum of the Competitive Sector and the Government (Versenyszféra és a Kormány Állandó Konzultációs Fóruma, VKF) without any final outcome.</td>
<td>No outcome known by now.</td>
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No major social dialogue debates were held on the following themes: Benefits; Health, safety and well-being at work; Pension reforms; Skills, training and employability; Terms and conditions of employment and Work-life balance.

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Disclaimer: This working paper has not been subject to the full Eurofound evaluation, editorial and publication process.
Selected major social dialogue debates

Discontent about reshaping the ‘cafeteria package’

Cafeteria package is considered a sort of non-wage benefit of employees. During wage negotiations the trade unions argued for higher wages and for higher level and wider range of elements of the cafeteria package. In January 2018 student loan and easier sublease support were introduced as new elements of the cafeteria package. (Liganet 2018c) According to the tax bill of 2019, however, most of the elements of this cafeteria package are ceased in the previous form and are liable to full taxation as high as wages. Elements with preferential taxation were: meal vouchers, pension and health fund contributions or school-start support for families whilst the elements with tax exemption were: housing, sublease or student loan support. Only few elements will remain in the previous form: the nursery and crèche compensation with exemption from tax and leisure and holiday accommodation elements with preferential taxation. (Liganet 2018b)

After the announcement of the 2019 tax bill in June 2018, it became clear that the government intends to eliminate the preferential tax or tax exemption of most elements of the cafeteria package. Following the government decision, the issue has been repeatedly on the agenda of the Permanent Consultative Forum of the Competitive Sector and the Government (Versenypszféra és a Kormány Állandó Konzultációs Fóruma, VKF) and also at the forum of National Public Service Interest Reconciliation Council (Országos Közszolgálati Érdekegyeztető Tanács, OKÉT) but in spite of the social partners’ arguments influence on the government decision was not successful.

Following the unsuccessful dialogues at the relevant forums, the employee representatives of the VKF and OKÉT wrote an open letter to the members of parliament imploring them to reconsider the tax bill, as they estimated it would decrease the overall net income of roughly two million employees, nevertheless the additional effort had no success (Szakszervezetek.hu 2018c). Later, they asked the parliamentary legislative committee for a hearing, but the motion was voted down by committee members. (Szakszervezetek.hu 2018d)

The new tax bill passed on 20th July, despite the protests. In response, the unions pledged to raise the issue during the national-level wage negotiations due to start in November. They intended launching the agenda at the plenary session of VKF and OKÉT and suggested to establish a new multi-annual wage agreement, according to the new conditions among the government, the employers and the trade unions (to adjust the previously concluded six-year agreement in the end of 2016). Since the bill was passed, employer organisations have made no public efforts to pursue the issue further. Demonstrations or strikes were foreseen but no real protest occurred (Szakszervezetek.hu 2018).

The government’s recent argument points to the fact that cafeteria package should be simplified and stated that employees would better be paid wages. In this regard the government contradicted to its previous stated goal to provide support to various groups and targets by the selected elements of cafeteria package. The various benefits have so far had social policy objectives, such as facilitating self-care or labour market mobility, which will be lost now.

Trade union confederations argued that the adopted law is against the employees’ interest with the consequence of significant net loss of income and makes the terms of a multi-annual wage agreement less favourable for both employers and employees. They recommended the preservation of school start support for families, mobility-related housing and sublease support, as well as tax deductions for employer contributions for saving into voluntary pension fund or health fund.

Employer organisations argued that on the one hand they would lose a low-cost motivational tool, and on the other hand some categories of benefits should get preferential tax treatment, like assistance for mobility and housing, and contributions to savings in pension and health fund (Varga 2018).

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Controversial outcome at national-level wage negotiations

A six-year wage agreement of the Permanent Consultative Forum of the Competitive Sector and the Government (Versenyszféra és a Kormány Allandó Konzultációs Fóruma, VKF) signed by the government, the employer and the employee representatives in November 2016 prescribed substantial increase of the minimum wage and guaranteed wage minimum (of skilled workers), and a reduction of tax burden of employers, correspondingly. The agreement has resulted in outstanding wage increase in Hungary, yet the allegedly six-year deal on wages was just about 2017-18 whilst for 2019 neither fixed minimum wage nor reduction of social contribution tax has been agreed. After 2018 the minimum wage and guaranteed wage minimum has been foreseen to be renegotiated at the VKF, and reduction of social contribution tax has also been envisaged. The latter depended, however, on the real wage increase – according to fixed methodology agreed by the six-year wage agreement. (cf. SZEF 2016)

The negotiations about the 2019 minimum wage were fraught with sharp disagreement between employer and employee representatives. Consecutive consultations had no success. Finally, the government convened another session of the VKF on 30th December – instead of making a unilateral decision to get out of the standoff – and finally the social partners were pushed to decision. Two of the three participating trade union confederations – LIGA (Democratic League of Independent Trade Unions) and MOSZ (National Federation of Workers’ Councils) – signed, MASZSZ (Hungarian Trade Union Confederation) refused to sign the agreement. Employer organisations agreed.

As compromise, the finally signed result was a two-year agreement about raising both minimum wage and guaranteed wage minimum by 8% in 2019 and 2020, respectively.

Views of the stakeholders on the social dialogue process and outcomes

Initially the trade union confederations argued to increase the minimum wage level close to the average of the other Visegrad countries, which would imply a double-digit raise. Employer organisations, on the other hand, cited the burden on smaller firms to keep pace with the rapid increase of obligatory minimum wage level. Government opinion has not been presented during the consultation, affirming that employer and employees themselves should reach agreement.

The Minister of Finance declared at the beginning of the consultation that wage negotiations will likely be long since other issues like the reconsideration of the cafeteria package and the reduction of the social contribution tax were put on the agenda as well. The agreement would have been greatly enhanced, however, if the government would have given the date of reduction of the social contribution tax (in short ‘szocho’), considering the fact that source of next year minimal wage increase is connected to the reduction of the social contribution tax. The tax package, however, adopted in summer 2018, had no indication about the exact date. Government declarations so far indicated, however, that social contribution tax will be decrease from the second half of 2019 only. The uncertainty about the date is due to the fact that the tax cut depends on sufficient real wage growth that should be 6 percent, according to the six-year wage agreement concluded two years ago. But inflation rate data will not be available before spring 2019 (Szakszervezetek.hu 2018e, Varga 2018b). In spite of the previous expectations the issue of the eliminated elements of cafeteria has not been reconsidered during the wage debate (cf. the section above).
Unilateral government actions – without social dialogue

Overtime bill elicits stormy response from employees

In November 2018 a modification of the Labour Code has been introduced to the Parliament. The proposed amendment was far-reaching regarding the maximum duration of working time banking fixed in the collective agreement – it raised the maximum duration from twelve to 36 months, provided that trade unions agree to change the collective agreement. Simultaneously, the two hundred and fifty hours of overtime work which could be ordered by the employer in a given calendar year was to be increased to a maximum of four hundred hours per year. However, the latter change could be implemented by the employer without the consent of any employee representation body (Parliament 2018).

The amendment proposal was introduced without prior consultations or impact study as individual Parliamentary motion by two (FIDESZ) MPs (rather than a government proposal). In the case of individual motions, no prior discussion is legally needed before the introduction of the bill. The trade unions initiated the convocation of the extraordinary meeting of the Permanent Consultative Forum of the Competitive Sector and the Government (VKF), nevertheless no meeting for consultation was established. (Szakszervezetek.hu 2018b) Neither parliamentary nor social dialogue has taken place on the issue. Trade unions also arranged informal consultations, with no success to influence the terms of the amendment of the Labour Code. In early December the overtime bill was passed without meaningful debate and raised stormy protest from trade union confederations followed by recurring demonstrations, political unrest and strike preparations.

The overtime bill responded to the general labour shortage. The amendment made the already flexible working time regulations of the Labour Code even more flexible on the expense of the workers, enabling employers to request more overtime and more flexible work schedule from the employees. In case of taking full advantage of the new working time regulations, the possible 400 hours overtime would result in extremely long working days or working weeks and supposing the continuous working time whilst the maximum duration of working time banking of 36 months will cause postponed payment of overtime, if at all.

The bill was passed without any change. The content of the amendment and the way of pushing the law through without parliamentary debate and while ignoring the trade unions’ readiness for consultation elicited vehement protest from the unions. The overtime law raised stormy response from employees and led to mass demonstrations, roadblocks and strike preparations throughout the country, coinciding with general political disagreement and protest. The final outcome of the protest and strikes is unknown at present.

Collective labour disputes in 2018

Changes in the regulation of collective labour disputes

There were no relevant modifications in the regulation of collective disputes in 2018

Selected major labour disputes of national significance

In the business sector, strike and other industrial action activity was moderate in most of the year. A number of token strikes took place or strike committees were formed – mostly in response to below-average wage offers – but these occurrences remained localised.

Tensions lingered in the public sector, especially among health workers, social workers, and those public servants who have not benefited from earlier wage rises. Unions have adopted a wait-and-see position.

Trade Union of Hungarian Civil Servants and Public Employees (Magyar Közisztvivelők, Közalkalmazottak és Közszolgálati Dolgozók Szakszervezete, MKKSZ) has been working on a proposal to amend the public service wage scale, which includes adding a third-tier minimum wage for graduates to the existing two-tier system.
Hungary: Developments in working life 2018

Working time 2018

Changes in the regulation of working time 2018

Legislation on working time duration or organisation

From 1 January 2019, the regulation of working time will change considerably. In December 2018 the Labour Code (Act I of 2012) has been amended by the Act CXVI of 2018 resulting in the increase of the maximum duration of working time banking fixed in the collective agreement from 12 to 36 months – clearing can be made in the end of the 36th month duration – supposing the application of the total length is agreed. At the same time, the two hundred and fifty hours of overtime work which can be ordered in a given calendar year is increased to a maximum of four hundred hours. (Parliament 2018)

Another law re-regulates the working time of the government administration (employees who are not covered by the Labour Code) originally regulated by the Act XXXIII of 1992 on Legal Status of Public Servants. The new law – Act CXXV of 2018 on Government Administration – is effective from 1st January 2019. (Parts of the act will be effective from 1 March 2019) According to the new Act, which is detrimental to the majority of employees in government administration, the employer may legally require a maximum of 12 hours working day and a maximum of 48 hours working week. On this basis, considerable overtime will be possible – considering the elucidation of the Act saying that government officials are subject to a strict 'obedience obligation'. In addition, the government officials' special holiday will be abolished, lunch break will be excluded from working time and the government officials should be available at request during the break as well (Jogtar 2018, Ujhelyi 2019).

Collective bargaining outcomes on working time duration or organisation

Since both regulations will be effective in 2019, evidences of collective bargaining outcomes are unknown so far.

Major debates concerning working time duration or organisation

As discussed earlier (subsection main social dialogue topics No 7 and subsection Unilateral government actions: ‘Overtime bill elicits stormy response from employees’), the amending of the Labour Code has been initiated as an individual MP’s Parliamentary proposal. In this case, no prior consultation is needed. In spite of the trade union representatives’ request, no social dialogue has taken place on the issue. They initiated the convocation of the extraordinary meeting of the Permanent Consultative Forum of the Competitive Sector and the Government (VKF), but no meeting for consultation was established. (Szakszervezetek.hu 2018b) Trade unions arranged some informal consultations, nevertheless with no success to influence. The amendment of the Labour Code passed without meaningful debate. The amendment raised strong protest from trade union confederations. Perceived as a last straw following a string of unilateral decisions by the Government affecting – among others – education, academia, university freedom and the decision to eliminate the preferential taxation on non-wage subsidy elements of the cafeteria package (as discussed above), the new law provoked recurring demonstrations, political unrest and strike preparations which are still in progress. The final outcome of the protest and strike is unknown.

The amendments affecting public service laid out in the Act on Government Administration were not discussed meaningfully at the National Public Service Interest Reconciliation Council (Országos Közszolgálati Érdekegyeztető Tanács, OKET). During consultation with the trade unions, only slight concessions were made. In the shadow of the amendment of the Labour Code hardly any protest has been raised specifically by the changes of the Act on Government Administration.

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Health and well-being at work 2018

Physical working environment
No particular development in the regulation of physical risks at work in 2018

Psychosocial working environment
No particular development in the regulation of psychosocial risks at work in 2018

Employment status 2018
No major changes in 2018 for: ‘Standard’ employment contracts; Self-employed; Fixed term contracts; Temporary agency workers; Posted workers; Seasonal workers; Zero hour contracts.
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Also used: Hungary: Latest working life developments – Q1-Q4 of 2018
The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite European Union Agency established in 1975. Its role is to provide knowledge in the area of social, employment and work-related policies according to Regulation (EU) 2019/127.