

**Labor Unions' Initiatives to narrow the Gender Pay Gap in
Austria, Germany, Hungary and the Visegrád Countries – A
Comparison**

Judith Langowski
Student at Sciences Po Paris (3rd year, Political and Social Sciences)
MONA Foundation for the Women of Hungary

Conference

“Gender pay equality – who cares?”

Closing the gender pay gap in the
Visegrád countries

European Youth Centre Budapest
October 9, 2012.

Austria

Since the end of the 1990s different labor unions (e.g. the Union of Private Sector Employees, Graphical Workers and Journalists (GPA) or the Metalworking and Textiles Union (GMT)) have worked out plans to bring forward gender mainstreaming or adopted collective bargaining guidelines. These referred both to the results of the bargaining as well as to the collective bargaining process itself. The GPA has committed itself to examining all collective agreements within their respective domain in terms of (implicit) gender-related discriminatory provisions and eventually to eliminate them in the course of the next years' bargaining. In addition, in the early 2000's a working group was set up within GMT, which jointly examined the possibilities of gender mainstreaming in collective bargaining in cooperation with the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson (Anwaltschaft für Gleichbehandlungsfrage).¹

The Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB) played an important role in enshrining the transparency of the wage conditions in law. This is displayed for the first time by the amended law on equal treatment (Gleichbehandlungsgesetz – GIBG), which is in force since March 1st, 2011. Important innovations of the amendment are the creation of wage records by firms and the duty to present the minimum expected pay in job advertisements. Furthermore, it strengthens anti-discrimination lawyers, who have access to the wage statistics in case of wage discrimination. In this sense, the new law protects and is beneficial for employees. The ÖGB is aware of the role of the work councils' and employers' role in implementing equal pay measures and is continually supporting these.²

Job advertisements (GIBG sect. 9 para. 2)	Wage records (GIBG sect. 11a)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legal regulation requiring all firms to display the minimum payment and eventual overpay both in internal and external advertisements; - Concerns employers as well as private placement officers; - Sanctions (in effect since Jan. 1st, 2012): inobservance of the regulation results in a first warning, at the next violation a fine up to 360 € has to be payed; - According to the ÖGB the practical realization of this regulation is working well, the Federation plans to expand and strengthen the regulation in the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gradually implemented legal regulation which requires firms of a specific size to create internal anonymized wage records every two years, for more transparency while protecting workers' anonymity; - Specifically contains the number of male/female employees and their average wage; - Records have to be submitted to the firm's work council or to the firm if a work council does not exist; - July 31st, 2011: deadline for firms with more than 1,000 employees to submit the wage record; - January 1st, 2012: regulation applies to firms with over 500 employees (deadline: July 31st, 2012); - January 1st, 2013: will apply to firms with over 250 employees (deadline: July 31st, 2013); - January 1st 2014: regulation extended to firms with over 150 employees (deadline: July 31st, 2014)

1 cf. Plantega, Janneke & Remery, Chantal (Coordinators): The gender pay gap. Origins and policy responses. A comparative review of thirty European countries. Final report, July 2006, pp. 35, 38.

2 Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund, Bundesfrauenabteilung: Gleichbehandlungsgesetz – Die wichtigsten Änderungen. March 2011.

Hungary

In Hungary, the National Confederation of Hungarian Trade Unions (MSZOSZ), namely its Women's Representation has been active in different projects to assess the gender pay gap in the country and promote equal pay measures.

Beginning in 2006, the **Wage Barometer** (Bérbarométer) was established, an interactive database conceived after the Dutch “Wage indicator” (Loonwijzer) project. It analyzes the national wage situation and allows users to filter the dataset according to age, gender, educational level, occupation and regions and to check and compare wages. It is both a database for gender pay gaps and a monitoring mechanism.³ Since then the interactive content of the website www.berbarometer.hu has been used widely (60.000 users between 2006 and 2008⁴).

The project is part of Equal Hungary, the Community Initiative Program initiated by the European Union.

Further initiatives of the MSZOSZ Women's Representation:

- ♣ Since 1999: Development of so-called “suggestions” to the MSZOSZ's sub-organizations' collective bargaining or their modification, which frequently call upon the practical implementation of the “Equal pay for equal work” principle.
- ♣ Since 2000: Supported by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), organization of the **National Conference of Women Employees** (*Munkavállaló Nők Országos Konferenciái*) together with the other unions' women's representations. These mostly accentuated the question of the gender pay gap (e.g. the 2008 conference's theme of “Equal pay for equal work”).
- ♣ Yearly training of the female activists and office-holders that regularly discuss the gender pay gap question.
- ♣ February 2009: Join the EU campaign on Women's wage inequality, together with the MSZP's (Hungarian Socialist Party) Women division and the “Nők a Holnapért” (Women for the Future) Foundation. Organization of a conference on the wage inequalities between men and women on February 20th, 2009.
- ♣ August 2011: Before the new Labour Code enters into force, organization of a conference supported by the FES on how the new laws will affect women and their wage situation.
- ♣ March 13th, 2012: With support of the FES, conference organized with six confederations on the situation and sources of the gender pay gap and the possible solutions to narrow it.

³ Plantega & Remery: The gender pay gap, p. 38.

⁴ <http://www.berbarometer.hu/main/about-the-program>

Germany

According to the 2006 comparison on the gender pay gap in 30 European countries, trade unions in Germany “have not been very active on the issue of equal pay. Collective agreements do not usually contain any specific clause on equal pay either, although some trade unions have developed their own codes of practice for the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women.”⁵

Nevertheless the Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB) points out the wage inequalities in Germany. It calls upon the German government to present a new nationwide income report, to analyze existing collective agreements on hidden wage discrimination and to create new, non-discriminatory agreements. It also emphasizes the need for reform of collective actions, so that work councils or trade unions can file claims in case of discrimination, where individuals often shy away.

The DGB's Vice President, Ingrid Sehrbock, often comments on problems concerning the equal treatment and equal pay of women. She has criticized the consequences of so-called “Mini-jobs” which help firms reduce their labor costs, but mainly employ women, who then suffer from insufficient retirement pension. Both the DGB and the United Services Union (Vereinigte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft, ver.di) have issued material on the inequalities concerning atypical employment relationships, like the “Mini-jobs”, that mostly employ women and both broaden the gender pay gap and create precarious working conditions for women.

Ver.di has committed to work towards narrowing the gender pay gap. This includes organizing conferences, as the 4-yearly **National Women's Conference** and the yearly **Conference on Women's Old-Age Pension Security** (organized since 2004). On August 14th, 2006, the new **General Equal Treatment Code** has entered into force, which satisfied the EU's demand for anti-discriminatory laws. Ver.di issued different material helping both work councils and employees to understand the new regulations.

Women's Wage Indicator (*Frauenlohnspiegel*): Just as in Hungary, the Wage Indicator serves as a basis to assess and monitor gender pay gaps nationwide according to criteria such as age, occupation and educational level.

⁵ Plantega & Remery: The gender pay gap, p. 34.