

Building a France-Bulgaria trade union information strategy

This action is in the launch and beginning implementation phase. Consequently, we cannot yet analyse results or make an assessment.

FGA CFDT in France / NFZGS Podkrepa in Bulgaria

http://www.cfdt.fr/jcms/recette_11468/agroalimentaire
http://www.podkrepa.org/content/menu_14.php?id=203&eyear=2010&emonth=5&estate=iaticbex

1. Observations and motivations

Bulgarian workers are coming to France in increasing numbers to work in agriculture.

The standard of living in Bulgaria is very low. The average salary of an agricultural worker is between €150 and €200.

Workers are therefore ready to emigrate under any conditions because they will be paid more than in Bulgaria in any case.

For this reason, these workers often do not care whether laws and legal provisions in the host country are complied with.

French employers rely more and more on service providers because of:

- recruitment facility
- turnkey service

Service providers have thoroughly understood the advantages for all sides and aim to take advantage of the situation.

As an employee trade union, we must take into account the issues facing these workers.

For a number of years, the topic of seasonal workers has been a major concern of the CFDT Confederation.

Every summer, we carry out an information campaign directed at the most vulnerable workers. In the summer of 2011, FGA-CFDT passed out leaflets to inform approximately 200 Bulgarian workers of their rights.

We were unable to communicate with them for two reasons: the language barrier and their obvious fear of being in contact with us.

These difficulties keep us from fully understanding the problems confronting them and building an action strategy.

2. Goals

1. Develop a joint strategy on both sides of the border to convey pertinent information and give an adequate and coherent message to these workers;
2. Inform them so that their rights will be respected;
3. Be able to contact and speak with them in France to better understand their working and employment conditions and act on the problems they encounter.

To ensure that the rights of these workers are respected, we are looking for a way to act upstream (inform employees before they leave their country of origin) and downstream (at the place where they work in France).

3. Partner

In early 2012, NFZGS-Podkrepa and FGA-CFDT decided to implement joint action.

In addition to cooperating on materials and techniques and organising discussions on trade union positions and practices, the question of information appeared as a major axis and an excellent lever to reinforce action toward seasonal migrants in agriculture.

In the context of our cooperation, we were fortunate to represent both a country supplying labour (Bulgaria) and a host country (France).

4. Actions

Step 1) An information action in Bulgaria (April 2013) directed at employees before leaving their country of origin:

- Organisation of a public meeting to provide information in the Montana region (northwest Bulgaria), a former industrial area which is now a very poor agricultural region from which many workers emigrate.

The Podkrepa union provided on-site support to distribute invitations in the towns and surrounding country to reach as many people as possible.

We also organised a press conference and invited the labour inspectorate.

Step 2) Creation of a guide or distribution of a slide show in the form of questions and answers on:

- the rights of employees who are bound by a working contract to a company,
- the rights of workers posted by a temporary work agency or a service provider;

- useful contact information for both Bulgaria and France, such as the labour inspectorate, national employment centre, the MSA agricultural mutual fund and the CLEISS international social security liaison office;
- contact information for our trade unions (in case of contact, we arrange links among our unions);
- a section describing what needs to be done before departure from the country: “Before Leaving Bulgaria”.

This guide aims to prevent and inform but also contributes to monitoring the working and employment conditions of posted workers.

Step 3) We plan to carry out another worker information operation for Bulgarian workers in France in 2013, this time with the assistance of our Bulgarian counterparts from Podkrepa.

In this way, we hope to be able to talk directly with the workers and successfully accomplish our information action.

During this operation, the guides will be distributed along with an invitation to an informational meeting the same evening.

5. Feedback

These actions are being carried out for the first time. Consequently, we do not yet know whether they will lead to success or failure.

Depending on our assessment of this operation, our idea is to continue developing and multiplying this type of initiative in coming years in one form or another.

In any case, the goal is to succeed in entering into contact with as many workers as possible and to continue informing them of their rights.