

## Massive protest on May 1<sup>st</sup>

Albanian workers demand dignity, fair wages and safe working conditions



Tirana, May 1<sup>st</sup> 2025 — On International Workers' Day, the Union of Trade Unions of Albania and the Albanian Coalition for Labour Rights organized a large civic and trade union demonstration in "Mother Teresa" Square in Tirana. Under the slogan ***"We live on Albanian wages, we pay at European prices!"***, hundreds of workers from different sectors joined together to demand dignity for Albanian workers and to raise their voices against the social and economic injustices that force many of them to emigrate every day.

*"Wages in Albania are as low as in Africa and prices as high as in Western Europe. Workers can no longer afford to live, so they are leaving en masse. We want dignified wages here, not forced emigration!"* – emphasized the organizers.

The protesters came from different sectors – tailoring, construction, healthcare, call centers, oil, cleaning and greening – united in their demand for decent wages, safe working conditions and respect for basic workers' rights. *"The cost of living has increased alarmingly, while wages*

remain the same. We are living on Albanian wages, but we are paying European prices. This is not justice,” declared Gertjana Hasalla from the Center for Labour Rights.

Meanwhile, Gent Stroni from the Healthcare Workers’ Union demanded that the country seriously invest in decent work and job security: “We cannot talk about public health when healthcare workers themselves are exposed to insecurities and are paid miserably.”

On the same day, Bankers Petroleum workers in the Marinza (Fier) oilfield protested for wage increases, well-deserved bonuses and better working conditions, in an action organized by the Hydrocarbon Sector Union. “The company spends on publicity, but forgets that the greatest asset is the workers themselves,” stressed Dritan Shahu, head of the union, denouncing the lack of media attention for this protest.

The demonstration took place in the context of a difficult socio-economic climate, where mass emigration, informality, lack of social security and exploitation of women and young people’s labor remain deep wounds in the Albanian labor market. Meanwhile, the electoral campaign for the parliamentary elections has not offered any serious proposals for improving the lives of workers.



The protest addressed a number of urgent issues, including:

► Main demands of the demonstration:

- ✓ Real wage and pension increases, in line with price increases.
- ✓ Fight against informality at work, especially in the private sector, construction and tailoring.

- ✓ Strengthening unions and collective contracts, not marginalizing them; inclusion in social dialogue and the policy-making process.
- ✓ Creating new jobs, especially for young people and supporting jobs in agriculture & livestock.
- ✓ Subsidies for farmers and guaranteeing the sale of agricultural products.
- ✓ Immediate and fair pension increases, not just for propaganda purposes.
- ✓ Serious measures for occupational safety, especially in construction and mining, where the number of accidents is increasing every year.

According to data reported at the rally, in 2024 alone, 33 workers lost their lives in the workplace, an alarming figure for a country with a small labor market. The main causes are the failure to comply with obligations for training on occupational hazards, the lack of accident declarations by employers, and weak control by institutions.

*“The government only seeks to collect taxes, but does not control working conditions or the implementation of the law. Employers often hide accidents, openly violating the law and endangering the lives of workers. This is a crime!”* – emphasized Kondi Ilia, National Coordinator of the Union of Trade Unions.

In his speech, Mr. Ilia also condemned the pressures and policies against new businesses: *“The government sanctions them from the very first days with fines and arbitrary controls, discouraging any economic initiative and sustainable employment.”*

#### ►Call for UNITY and ACTION

The organizers called for unity of workers, unions and citizens, calling for more activism and courage to demand rights. *“Workers should no longer be afraid to protest. If they feel unrepresented, join the unions! Together, we can win the rights that belong to us.”*

In conclusion, the Union of Trade Unions of Albania called on the prime minister and the government to urgently initiate a sincere and inclusive dialogue with the unions, because *“there is no democracy without the involvement of workers and unions in decision-making.”*