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# Tarifvertrag — What It Regulates and Why It Matters

Learn what a tarifvertrag is, what benefits it brings to employees, and how to find out if one applies to your job.

**Deutsche Begriffe:** Tarifvertrag | Gewerkschaft | Tarifbindung | Tarifverhandlung | Manteltarifvertrag | Entgelttarifvertrag

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## What is a Tarifvertrag?

A **tarifvertrag** is a collective agreement between a **union** (workers' side) and an **employers' association** or individual employer (employers' side). It regulates working conditions for entire industries or companies.

Tarifverträge are the result of **collective bargaining** — if the sides cannot agree, the union can call for a **strike**.

### Why Do Tarifverträge Exist?

Individual employees have a **weak negotiating position** against employers. By joining a union, workers gain **negotiating power**. The tarifvertrag ensures all employees in an industry receive **fair minimum standards**.

## What Types of Tarifverträge Are There?

### 1. Manteltarifvertrag (MTV)

Regulates **general working conditions**:

- **Working hours** (e.g., 35 or 38 hours per week)
- **Vacation days** (e.g., 30 days instead of statutory 20)
- **Notice periods** (often longer than statutory)

- **Supplements** for overtime, night work, holidays
- **Christmas bonuses and vacation bonuses**

## 2. Entgelttarifvertrag (Wage Tarifvertrag)

Regulates **salaries and wages**:

- **Wage tables** based on qualifications and work experience
- **Wage groups** (e.g., EG 1-15)
- **Automatic salary increases** after X years
- Often valid for **1-2 years**, then renegotiated

## 3. Firmentarifvertrag (Company-Specific Tarifvertrag)

A tarifvertrag that applies only to **a specific company** (e.g., VW, Deutsche Post, Amazon). Often better than the industry-wide tarifvertrag.

## Tarifvertrag vs. Employment Contract

Aspect	Without Tarifvertrag	With Tarifvertrag
<b>Minimum Wage</b>	12.82 €/hour	Often significantly higher
<b>Vacation Days</b>	20 days (statutory)	25-30 days
<b>Christmas Bonus</b>	No entitlement	Often 50-100% of monthly salary
<b>Vacation Bonus</b>	No entitlement	Often 300-1,000 €
<b>Working Hours</b>	Up to 48 h/week possible	35-38 h/week
<b>Salary Increase</b>	Subject to negotiation	Automatic after collective agreement
<b>Job Protection</b>	Statutory notice periods	Often longer notice periods

## How Much More Do You Earn With a Tarifvertrag?

Studies show: employees with a tarifvertrag earn on average **10-15% more** than comparable employees without one.

Example: Metal and Electrical Industry (IG Metall, 2026)

Wage Group	Monthly Salary (35h/week)
<b>EG 1</b> (unskilled)	approx. 2,600 €
<b>EG 5</b> (skilled worker)	approx. 3,500 €
<b>EG 8</b> (technician)	approx. 4,200 €
<b>EG 11</b> (engineer)	approx. 5,200 €
<b>EG 15</b> (specialist)	approx. 6,500 €

+ **Vacation bonus:** approx. 1,000 € + **Christmas bonus:** 55% of monthly salary + **35-hour week + 30 days vacation**

## Does a Tarifvertrag Apply to Me?

When Does It Apply?

A tarifvertrag applies to you if:

**1. Your employer is covered by the tarifvertrag** (member of employers' association) AND

**2. You are a member of the relevant union**

OR:

**3. The tarifvertrag has been declared generally binding** (then applies to all employees in the industry, including non-union members)

OR:

**4. Your employment contract references a tarifvertrag** (e.g., "The IG Metall tarifvertrag applies") — then it applies by contract

How to Find Out if a Tarifvertrag Applies

**1. Read your employment contract** — does it reference a tarifvertrag?

**2. Ask the works council** — the works council knows if the company is covered

**3. Contact a union** — IG Metall, ver.di, IG BCE, etc.

**4. Ask your employer** — directly in the HR department

**5. Tarifvertrag register** — online at the Federal Labor Ministry (bmas.de)

## Unions in Germany

## Major Unions (DGB)

Union	Sector	Members (approx.)
<b>IG Metall</b>	Metal, electrical, automotive, IT	2.2 million
<b>ver.di</b>	Services, retail, care, public sector	1.9 million
<b>IG BCE</b>	Mining, chemicals, energy	580,000
<b>IG BAU</b>	Construction, agriculture, environment	240,000
<b>EVG</b>	Railways, transport	180,000
<b>GEW</b>	Education, science (teachers)	280,000
<b>NGG</b>	Food, catering	190,000
<b>GdP</b>	Police	200,000

### Membership Costs

- Usually **1% of gross salary** per month
- **Tax-deductible** (business expenses)
- In return: legal protection, strike pay, consultation, tarifvertrag increases

## Collective Bargaining and Strikes

### How Does Collective Bargaining Work?

- 1. Demands** — union presents demands (e.g., 6% wage increase)
- 2. Negotiations** — multiple negotiation rounds (weeks to months)
- 3. Warning strikes** — short work stoppages to apply pressure
- 4. Agreement** — compromise (e.g., 4% increase, 30-month term)
- 5. Mediation** — if no agreement: neutral mediator intervenes
- 6. Membership vote + full strike** — last resort, rare

### Do I Have the Right to Strike?

- **Yes**, if your union calls for a strike
- **Strike pay** — union pays during strike (approx. 60-70% of net salary)
- **No strike right** for civil servants (police, teachers in civil service, etc.)

- **No wildcat strikes** — strikes are only legal if organized by the union

## Tips for Foreign Workers

- 1. Join a union** — as a foreigner, you have full membership rights
- 2. Use legal protection** — the union helps free of charge with employer problems
- 3. Check the tarifvertrag** — when hired, ask if a tarifvertrag applies
- 4. Don't work below the tarifvertrag rate** — if a tarifvertrag applies, your employer cannot pay less
- 5. Run for the works council** — as a foreigner, you have active and passive voting rights

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