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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
Minimum Wage	13.90 €/hour	Often significantly higher
Vacation Days	20 days (statutory)	25–30 days
Christmas Bonus	No entitlement	Often 50–100% of monthly salary
Vacation Bonus	No entitlement	Often 300–1,000 €
Working Hours	Up to 48 h/week possible	35–38 h/week
Salary Increase	Subject to negotiation	Automatic after collective agreement
Job Protection	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)
EG 1 (unskilled)	approx. 2,600 €
EG 5 (skilled worker)	approx. 3,500 €
EG 8 (technician)	approx. 4,200 €
EG 11 (engineer)	approx. 5,200 €
EG 15 (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.)
IG Metall	Metal, electrical, automotive, IT	2.2 million
ver.di	Services, retail, care, public sector	1.9 million
IG BCE	Mining, chemicals, energy	580,000
IG BAU	Construction, agriculture, environment	240,000
EVG	Railways, transport	180,000
GEW	Education, science (teachers)	280,000
NGG	Food, catering	190,000
GdP	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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