

Annual wage negotiations (NAO):

SMIC +2.2%
AFP wages +2.2%!



Inflation has accelerated noticeably in France recently. Energy and fuel prices have jumped; Insee – which underestimates the impact of rent and basic necessities – put the increase in consumer prices at +2.2% between last November and August, triggering an automatic increase in the minimum monthly wage, the SMIC. But at AFP, our wages have been nearly frozen since November 2012! For *SUD*, **it is time for a general wage hike** in order to compensate for inflation and avoid a drop in our purchasing power!

Mind the gap between AFP wages and the SMIC

France's minimum monthly wage, the SMIC, is regularly adjusted to account for inflation, with automatic increases if consumer prices rise by more than 2%. The SMIC has risen from a gross value of €1,425.67 at the end of 2012 to €1,554.58 since the beginning of 2021. On October 1, it rose by 2.2% to €1,589.47. Between the end of 2012 and the end of 2021, the minimum wage in France has risen by 11.49%.

And AFP's wages? During the same period, the only general wage increases were the result of the legal victory by the CGT, FO and *SUD* trade unions in the SPQN¹ case: +0.7% at the start of 2020 and +0.7% at the start of 2021. Meanwhile the **Aims and Means Contract 2019-2023**² implicitly prolongs the wage freeze indefinitely, while our **Collective Bargaining Agreement of March 10, 2017**³ (which *SUD* didn't sign) definitively severed the link with the SPQN, the national press employer-labor grouping where wage hikes for the sector had been negotiated. This agreement lacks any binding mechanism for wage hikes while the SPQN had previously practiced cost of living adjustments due to inflation.

AFP's wage scales have thus lost some of their advantage over the SMIC over the past decade. Individual employees still benefit from wage increases as they benefit from guaranteed promotions and seniority bonuses. But those increases have been dented by inflation, and many staff members who have exhausted their automatic career plans have seen their purchasing power eroded.

Here is a **concrete example**: a journalist category RED5 no longer benefits from guaranteed promotion and if he or she worked for AFP for 20 years, no further seniority bonuses as well. Their gross monthly wage, excluding seniority bonuses, rose from €3,924.37 at the end of 2012 to €3,975.01 today, an increase of only 1.29%. That is only one-ninth this increase in the SMIC! At the end of 2012, the gross wage of a RED5 journalist was 2.75 times the SMIC. Today, it is only 2.5 times the SMIC.

AFP hires at just above the minimum wage!

The erosion of wages at AFP is especially striking for **new hires in the administrative and technical fields**. Wages for new recruits in these categories were revised sharply lower in the March 2017 collective bargaining agreement. AFP can now hire a

¹ See our statement following the end of the SPQN legal battle: <https://www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?article601>

² See our statement analyzing the 2019-2023 COM: <https://www.sud-afp.org/spip.php?article625>

³ See the collective bargaining agreement and its annexes: <http://u.afp.com/UFx>

technician (cadre technique or CT) at more than **a third less** than before the 2017 agreement!

For **lower-level administrative staff** (employé-e-s de presse or EP), the starting wage was cut by **14.28%**, for **laborers** (ouvriers or OT) by **9.69%**, and for **upper-level administrative staff** (cadres administratifs) by **4.70%**. These figures include the 2 x 0.7% wage increases in 2021-2021 thanks to the SPQN lawsuit. These exceptional increases explain why the starting wage for **journalists** (untouched in the 2017 agreement) rose by a modest 1.24% compared to the five years before 2017.

Monthly salary	End 2012	Oct. 2021	2012→2021	End 2012	Oct. 2021
SMIC	1,425.67	1,589.47	+11.49%		
Starting wage J	2,718.78	2,752.48	+1.24%	=1.91 SMIC	=1.73 SMIC
Starting wage CA	2,779.15	2,648.59	-4.70%	=1.95 SMIC	=1.67 SMIC
Starting wage CT	4,184.96	2,776.98	-33.64%	=2.94 SMIC	=1.75 SMIC
Starting wage EP	1,914.58	1,641.16	-14.28%	=1.34 SMIC	=1.03 SMIC
Starting wage OT	1,857.05	1,677.19	-9.69%	=1.30 SMIC	=1.06 SMIC

AFP starting wages are sliding towards the minimum wage under the combined effect of the 2017 collective bargaining agreement and the wage freeze:

- The **starting wage of journalists** (RED0) was 1.91 SMIC in 2012. With the latest rise in the minimum wage it is now 1.73 SMIC.
- The **starting wage of upper-level administrative staff** was 1.95 SMIC in 2012 (coefficient 214). It is now 1.67 SMIC (coef. 200).
- The **starting wage of technicians** was 2.94 SMIC in 2012 (coef. 115). It is now 1.75 SMIC (coef. 75).
- The **starting wage of lower-level administrative staff** was 1.34 SMIC in 2012 (coef. 130). It is now **1.03 SMIC** (coef. 110)!
- The **starting wage of laborers** was 1.30 SMIC in 2012 (coef. 86). It is now **1.06 SMIC** (coef. 45)!

Compensating inflation is the minimum!

The **constant degradation** of AFP's wages versus the minimum wage is nothing short of **disrespect** for the agency's staff, whose training and professional experience merit better treatment. But that is the consequence of the financial policy imposed on AFP, whose main target is reducing the wage bill by **cutting HQ jobs** and **holding down wages** both in France and elsewhere.

As *SUD* has demonstrated repeatedly, the financial logic wielded by the French government and Brussels is a **political and ideological choice**; a choice that is neither in the interest of staff nor the agency's public interest mission!

That is why *SUD* opposed the wage freeze in place since 2013, the undermining of the agency's statute in 2015, the collective bargaining agreement of 2017, the voluntary departure plan of 2018/2019, the 2019-2023 Aims and Means Contract ...

And when AFP earned a **"historic" net profit of €5.3 million⁴** in 2020, there is no excuse for demanding employees make further sacrifices as inflation accelerates. We need a **wage hike for everyone and longer career plans**, not bonuses for a select few chosen by management.

(/...)

⁴ See the AFP press release: <https://www.afp.com/en/agency/press-releases-newsletter/afp-posts-slight-growth-commercial-revenues-2020-achieves-historic-net-income>

SUD's demands in the wage talks

Management has just delayed until November the opening of the **mandatory annual wage talks** (NAO), no doubt to advance on the elaboration of its 2022 budget. And no doubt it will say there is no room in that budget for a cost of living adjustment. We should have no illusions: **management will concede nothing if staff remain passive**. Trade unions also need to feel a groundswell of support from staff to have any chance of obtaining any wage hike.

SUD will do everything it can to mobilize staff and build momentum that could push management to make concessions. We hope that the trade unions can join together in the wage talks and to launch the debate we are announcing **our main demands**:

- **General wage hike (including for stringers) of at least 2.2%.**
- **Creation of new seniority bonus levels.** 45% of journalists have more than 20 years of service in AFP and no longer benefit from further automatic seniority bonuses. The same is true for 33% of upper-level administrative staff, 66% of technicians, 29% of lower-level administrative staff and 52% of laborers⁵. Let's set a precedent for new bonus levels by starting modestly: **a seniority bonus of 21% after 25 years, and then 22% after 30 years.** We can negotiate increases in later years.
- **Expatriation in local status:** SUD wants journalists who accept such *low-cost expatriation* are guaranteed a HQ contract after 3 years.
- **Management posts:** the category levels of these posts should be shifted a level higher than fixed under the 2017 collective bargaining agreement. Employees who do not have that level should be promoted immediately to that level upon their nomination.
- **Valuation of skills:** SUD calls for the video bonus to become permanent after two years of service. Graphic designers should also finally see their career plan harmonized with those of journalists.

Do you agree we should all get a cost of living adjustment? Let your union representative know!

Comments or suggestions? Don't hesitate to write us at:
contact@sud-afp.org

Paris, October 1, 2021
SUD-AFP (Solidarity-Unity-Democracy)



⁵ Our calculations based on the Bilan social unique 2020