



Initial EFBWW response to the COVID-19 crisis

Motion to the EFBWW Executive Committee

The COVID-19 crisis has turned into a European and global health crisis. Most countries are practicing some kind of “confinement” or are in a complete lockdown. The crisis risks to turn into a deep social and economic crisis and the debate on the (post) crisis measures becomes more and more political. The EFBWW calls for a paradigm shift based on a social Green Deal for the EU: we need more and steady investment in the European infrastructure and in the ecological and social transformation of the European economy. No worker should be left behind!

Health before profit!

The safety and health of workers and their families, of all citizens, have the greatest priority.

The EFBWW and its affiliates are very concerned about the fact that many workers in our sectors:

- cannot work from home;
- cannot fulfil the requirements related to social distancing;
- do not possess the necessary protective equipment, adequately designed uniforms or work on sites with very basic or no hygienic facilities, sanitary disposals, etc.
- are mothers and fathers and have to take care of children.
- are posted or migrant workers and quite often have to live together in groups in very basic accommodations.

Employers have the legal responsibility to guarantee compliance with health and safety rules. The EFBWW insists that all workplaces are subject to a detailed risk assessment with full involvement of trade unions, where measures, procedures and provision of Personal Protective Equipment required is agreed and implemented. Especially in construction sites, work may only continue if the hygiene and physical distancing rules in place can be strictly observed by all workers. This must be guaranteed and enforced by controls and sanctions. There is also a need for specific hygiene measures for women, starting with separated toilets.

In this unprecedented crisis, social partners have a key role to play. The EFBWW has issued joint statements with the European employer federations in the [construction](#) (FIEC) and in the [woodworking and furniture industries](#) (CEI-Bois, UEA, Efic, EPF and EOS) to call for adequate measures on national and European level.

Many of our affiliates have managed to conclude specific agreements in order to allow a continuation of industrial activities in a safe way, in strict compliance with the imposed measures. Or, if that was not possible, have jointly agreed on temporary unemployment measures in the case of a temporary, complete or partial shutdown of activities. An overview of the measures in our sectors is available on the [EFBWW website](#).

European institutions and individual countries are currently preparing their exit strategies. The EFBWW calls for a gradual, cautious, well-coordinated and forward-looking plan, which fully protects the health of workers and minimizes a further spreading of the virus as employees return to work. To make this successful we need a sectoral approach taking into account different realities and gender necessities. Trade unions must be actively involved in all discussions and in the implementation of any exit strategy.

Address urgent economic needs of workers and companies!

All over Europe, the construction, the building materials, and the wood and forestry industries are heavily impacted by the crisis. In some countries, our industries have come to a complete standstill. Figures concerning the particular situation of female workers are not available.

Together with the European employer federations in our industries, the EFBWW has requested that national and European authorities take all necessary measures to absorb and curb the negative social and economic consequences of this COVID-19 crisis.

The EFBWW demands:

- that national and European authorities shall guarantee a decent income to all workers who cannot continue to work because they are sick, because their company is closed for sanitary reasons or because they take care of their families or children.
- that all workers can have swift and unrestricted access to temporary unemployment measures.
- In order to avoid excessively negative consequences on income, the EFBWW also demands that national authorities strive to narrow the gap between workers' actual wages and temporary unemployment benefits. The new instrument for temporary [Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency \(SURE\)](#) is an important step in this regard. Together with the ETUC and its affiliates, the EFBWW lobbies EU institutions and national governments to support SURE and implement it as quickly as possible. Temporary unemployment measures supported by SURE should cover all categories of workers, including non-standard workers, self-employed and vulnerable categories, such as precarious, undeclared and migrant workers and ensure income compensation as close to 100 % as possible.

The EFBWW and its affiliates are particularly concerned about the fact that many workers in our sectors are quite often employed via precarious contracts such as posted workers, (bogus) self-employed, zero-hour contracts, temporary agency workers, mini-jobs or freelancers. Those workers who are not entitled to temporary unemployment benefits should have access to alternative measures. We cannot accept that any category of workers be excluded or fall in a poverty trap.

The EFBWW and the European employer federations in our industries have requested the European institutions to enter into an open dialogue in order to identify and implement appropriate measures allowing a quick recovery after the crisis. We need long-term investments into a sustainable and fair transformation of the economy, and green infrastructure to create and maintain jobs in our sectors in the long run.

Who will pay the bill?

The EFBWW welcomes the decision of the European Commission to adopt a more “relaxed” approach towards issues related to state aid and budgetary and fiscal measures. The EFBWW also welcomes the EU financial aid plan for European countries hit hard by the Covid-19 epidemic and the SURE crisis programme for national short-time work schemes. The EFBWW demands all this to be the prelude of a less ideological and a more social approach of economic and fiscal matters in the EU. In this context, the EFBWW demands a rapid agreement on a new multi-annual financial framework (MFF), including a European Recovery Fund, as discussed in the Eurogroup. The MFF should be raised at least to 2 % GDP in order to finance social inclusive and green investments throughout the internal market.

The collective response to the COVID-19 crisis has clearly shown the limits of market based solutions towards public health and social and economic needs. Countries with an elaborate public health system, well-functioning public services and robust social security and social protection schemes handle the COVID-19 crisis in a much better way. At the same time, the disastrous impact of austerity in countries such as Greece, Italy and Spain should be clear to everyone now.

The EFBWW calls for reinforced social security and social protection schemes in all Member States. Enterprises and shareholders must pay all due taxes and social security contributions needed to fund high-quality public services, which we need not only during times of crisis. The EFBWW continues to insist on a swift and ambitious revision of the EU social security regulation 883/2004 to provide decent social protection for posted workers and tackle the fraud of companies which do not pay (or pay less) social security contributions for their posted workers. The EFBWW demands the full implementation of the Council recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed (2019/C 387/01) with the aim to guarantee full social protection to all workers.

The EFBWW supports the demand for a large-scale and well-planned European investment strategy to relaunch the economy. We believe our industries will be crucial for a quick

economic recovery and can play a key role in the just transition towards a carbon neutral Europe in 2050. A well-financed COVID-19 recovery strategy should be designed as a just transition instrument to the benefit of the workers in all our industries, and especially the more energy-intensive sectors.

The EFBWW calls on the richest 1% to contribute, not through charity, but by paying their fair share. The EFBWW supports all initiatives towards fair progressive taxes and to end the current practices of mass tax evasion via offshore and other tax havens. Lux Leaks, Panama papers, offshore leaks and scandals have shown that each year billions of euros leave the EU without being taxed.

The EFBWW also calls on multinational companies to pay their fair share. The EFBWW strongly supports the demands of its affiliates and of European Works Council members towards shareholders to make an effort as well. As the EWC members of LafargeHolcim have stated in a letter to central management: *"Companies and especially large groups must participate fully in solidarity. It would be neither reasonable nor responsible for companies to pay dividends to their shareholders as if nothing had happened."*

Women risk to be more exposed to the socio-economic consequences of Covid-19. A strategy is needed to mitigate this gender impact.

A strong, responsible and social Europe to guide us out of the crisis!

The EFBWW and its affiliates strongly regret the initial lack of solidarity amongst EU member states in confronting a crisis of this magnitude. The COVID-19 crisis has drawn the attention to some specific weaknesses and flaws of our globalised economies and of the European project. We need a stronger, more democratic, more responsible and more social Europe. The EFBWW and its affiliates will contribute to such a reflection from a sectoral perspective.

At this moment, the EFBWW and its affiliates want to raise attention to the following points that are of particular importance for us:

- The need for a new ambitious European health and safety strategy that takes into account the lessons learned from the Covid-19 health crisis. The EFBWW calls for enforced common EU OSH standards with specific attention for sectoral and gender realities and their rigorous implementation, enforcement and sanctioning, including hygienic and physical distancing measures in times of a pandemic.
- The over-dependence on and the fragility of international, global value chains. The EFBWW calls for a more sustainable industrial policy for the future, especially taking into account the large number of workers in SME's in our sectors.
- As a reaction to the crisis, several EU Member States have taken the unilateral decision to close their borders. In practice, the free movement of persons and services between some Member States has been suspended. This shows how fragile the Internal Market really is. In this respect, the EFBWW and its affiliates call for a fair internal market based on equal treatment of all workers without any social dumping. This is even more important when we see the increased propaganda of xenophobic

movements and political parties against migration and international solidarity and for protectionism and isolation.

- Some EU Member States use the health crisis to establish authoritarian rule and abolish fundamental democratic principles in their countries. The EFBWW calls on the European institutions and the other Member States not to accept these developments in the centre of the EU and to take all necessary measures to defend democracy, citizens' democratic rights and workers' rights, including the right to collective action.
- The growing precarisation of the European labour markets, especially in our industries, and evident in the growing numbers of posted workers, bogus self-employed, zero-hour contracts, on-call contracts, temporary agency workers, mini-jobs or freelancers, shows its most ugly side in this crisis. In these difficult times, many of these workers have been treated as expendable goods and have lost their jobs and income from one day to the other without any –or very little– social or other protection. It is unacceptable that in our advanced economies a growing number of workers are completely left in the cold. The EFBWW calls for a new European framework for decent and high quality working conditions for all workers with special regard to the protection of migrant workers. A precondition for this is the lifting of all those “exceptional measures” taken at national level in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, which negatively affect workers and union rights, among others the extension of work duration, facilitation of dismissals, or restrictions on the right to strike.
- The persistent pay gap in our industries between various EU countries and the gender pay gap leads to the feeling that there are first class and second-class European workers. This also undermines the foundations of the Single Market. The EFBWW strongly supports the demand of its affiliates in Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe for decent wages and an upward convergence of wage levels.
- To underline the importance of social partners and social dialogue on company, sectoral and national level to find robust, sustainable solutions in dealing with crises (urgent and short term) and to accompany more profound, long term changes in the society (e.g. Industry 4.0, carbon neutral EU), we call on the European institutions and national governments to step up investments in capacity building of sectoral social partners on national and European level and in other support to social dialogue.

More trade union power!

To achieve all this we need more trade union power. The EFBWW will further develop strategies to assist its affiliates in increasing their collective bargaining power and mobilisation capacities. Membership stabilisation and membership growth are key in this regard. The EFBWW will continue to support and further enhance cooperation between its affiliates to increase trade union power in a cross-border and European wide context. Within multinational companies, European Works Councils are an important tool in this regard. Now is also the time to develop new ideas and ways to implement the principle of equal treatment of workers.

Conclusion : No more business as usual

The EFBWW appreciates all the efforts made to deal with this health crisis and to address the most urgent economic needs of workers and companies. No worker must be left behind! The EFBWW expects that national governments and European institutions will do everything to avoid that Europe and in particular the construction and woodworking sectors go into a deep recession. The European Green Deal should be the centrepiece of a large-scale and well-planned European investment strategy. We believe that our industries will be crucial to contribute to a just transition to a carbon neutral Europe in 2050. The EFBWW will take its responsibility, as European sectoral trade union federation and as a responsible social partner in these debates.

It must be clear to all that we cannot go back to business as usual after this crisis. It is time for a paradigm shift towards an economic rationality based on sustainable investment for economic stability, gender-equality and social cohesion.