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EFBWW and FIEC joint recommendations to counteract the negative impact and consequences of the current COVID-19 crisis for the construction industry

EFBWW and FIEC underline that the focus of the national, regional and local social partners of construction should be on ensuring a safe and healthy work environment for contractors, workers and society, in accordance with national health, safety and hygienic recommendations.

EFBWW and FIEC welcome the Guidelines published by the European Commission, aiming at ensuring the free mobility of goods, services and workers, which are needed to ensure continuity of production within the construction industry, while ensuring the application of the exceptional, higher health, safety and hygienic requirements. Keeping borders open within the European Union for construction companies and workers, would allow the construction sector to keep functioning while respecting high health, safety and hygienic standards and thereby playing its important role in the EU economy. In our industry, it is possible to maintain the activity while protecting workers' health and complying with the enhanced sanitary emergency requirements.

EFBWW and FIEC underline the necessity to discuss the current COVID-19 situation in good faith and trust between workers and management in each construction company, with the aim of finding the best possible solution for all, allowing activity to continue without jeopardizing workers' health and safety.

EFBWW and FIEC urge all employers' and workers' organisations of the construction industry to work together with the national, regional and local governments in order to do everything possible:

- to absorb and curb the negative social and economic consequences of this COVID-19 crisis and its possibly longer-term impact, in order to avoid job losses;
- to keep construction companies viable and functioning where possible, fully respecting the health, safety and hygienic measures in place;
- to ensure that specific measures are put in place so that all contractors and construction workers are adequately protected against all health, safety and hygienic hazards at the workplace.

Therefore, the EFBWW and FIEC strongly urge the national employers' and workers' organizations of the construction industry to negotiate jointly and with the national/regional/local authorities swift practical solutions in order to allow a continuation of construction activities, in strict compliance with the national

restrictive measures, during the current exceptional circumstances. Where needed, these measures will have to be defined in the strictest and most precise way by the social partners (e.g. through a concerted risk analysis prior to the restart of activities) always keeping the health and safety of workers, and therefore of society as a whole, as the highest priority.

EFBWW and FIEC strongly encourage that all public authorities:

- Immediately pay any outstanding invoices to contractors;
- Take prompt actions to temporarily suspend the recovery of debts of construction companies, which have a direct link with the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, and transform these debts in debt restructuring programs, while also accepting that the suspension and transformation requests are not automatic and need to be duly motivated;
- Provide financial support to construction companies, that are obliged to stop their commercial activities (i.e. allow an extended recourse to temporary unemployment, without penalizing companies and workers, as it has always been the case in some EU countries);
- Evaluate feasible solutions for temporary unemployment in order to prevent negative consequences on income (i.e. narrowing the gap with workers' actual wages);
- Provide and monitor clear individual and collective Safety and Health instructions to ensure that those companies who are allowed to continue to work, can do so under correct conditions;
- Provide an exceptional legal, financial and administrative framework, which enables construction companies to ensure their economic survival during this exceptional crisis period;
- Limit administrative delays and provide swift procedures to support construction companies and workers;
- Follow the Commission's guidelines to allow frontier and posted workers to continue crossing their borders to their workplace if work in the sector concerned is still allowed in the host Member State and waive travel restrictions and mandatory quarantine for construction workers not having any symptoms or indications, in particular for those working on critical infrastructure projects, while properly respecting and monitoring high health, safety and hygienic standards;
- To maximize the use of existing funds and regulations to ensure the sustainability of construction companies which enables to preserve income for construction workers.

In case construction activities continue to take place, according to national rules in place, EFBWW and FIEC ask that the national social partners of the construction industry take the following recommendations into account:

- That social partners agree on appropriate health, safety and hygienic protocols and specific working arrangements, which should be complemented at company level, wherever needed, by specific corresponding agreements;
- Where needed, jointly agree on temporary unemployment measures or alternative measures for those workers who are not entitled to temporary unemployment benefits, so that workers do not fall in a poverty trap;
- Provide clear Safety and Health information, instruction, guidance and training to all construction workers according to international, EU and national specific recommendations;
- Guarantee to all construction workers the necessary preventive and protective measures in compliance with the specific requirements introduced at the national/regional/local level;
- Ensure a safe distance between workers at the workplaces, in all (common) accommodations during working time and all breaks – in accordance with agreed and approved (national) protocols;
- In case posted or migrant workers are employed (throughout the whole supply chain), specific information and guidance measures should be put in place regarding their common accommodation, transportation and working environment so that these workers receive protection equal to that of the local construction workers;

- Where needed ensure, in an open and constructive dialogue, that appropriate measures are taken by their employer so that posted workers can safely return to their home country;
- Ensure that transportation of all workers is done in compliance with the specific requirements introduced at the national level, in particular as regards social distancing.

For EFBWW and FIEC the first priority is that work can continue in a safe way. Therefore, we urgently ask all our affiliated organisations to take the current COVID-19 threat very seriously and take all precautions needed which simultaneously guarantee the sustainability and viability of the construction companies, while securing income, social protection, well-being and health of their construction workers.

Towards a coordinated resumption of the construction activities

When implementing strategies for exiting the COVID-19 crisis, the highest standards of occupational safety and health need to be guaranteed. For this the EU health and safety Directives (amongst them the 89/391 Directive on health and safety), need to be respected. In this respect, the European social partners of the construction industry ask the European Commission to issue guidelines on preventive measures, e.g. risk assessments and prevention plans.

EFBWW and FIEC ask for an open dialogue with the European Institutions and between the national social partners of the construction industry in order to identify and implement appropriate measures allowing a quick recovery after the crisis.

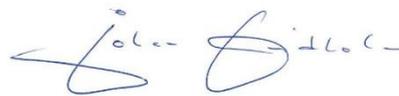
We invite our national affiliates to do the same at their level.

The construction sector remains committed to effectively play its key role in the long-term sustainability of the European economy and in the achievement of the goals of the Green Deal.

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