



Galerie Agora,
Rue du Marché aux Herbes 105, Bte 11
B-1000 Brussels
Telephone +32 2 285 46 60
Fax +32 2 280 08 17
Email: etf@etf-europe.org
www.etf-europe.org

European Transport Workers' Federation
Fédération Européenne des Travailleurs des Transports
Europäische Transportarbeiter-Föderation
Federación Europea de los Trabajadores del Transporte

Brussels, 13 March 2020

Mrs. Adina-Ioana Vălean
Commissioner for Transport
European Commission

Dear Commissioner Vălean,

As we have detailed in our previous letters on [6 March](#) and [11 March](#), the crisis caused by COVID-19 is having catastrophic effects on transport workers of Europe.

In addition to the elements that we have flagged up in our previous letters, I would like draw your attention to the fact that we are getting reports from around Europe that some employers are not taking the situation seriously and are putting workers in danger with their inaction. In many workplaces personal protective equipments are not being distributed to the workers. Employers are the ones that need to ensure that the workplaces are safe and that workers are not exposed to any dangers to their health that can be avoided. Unfortunately, the reality does not reflect that.

We are proud of our transport workers who keep guaranteeing essential services during these difficult times. At the same time, we believe that transport services should be kept to what is strictly needed for supplying essential goods and to ensure essential passenger transport. What is not needed should be put on hold, and compensation measures should be implemented.

Please find below an overview of the situation as reported by our members. We kindly ask you to take these elements into account in the framework of the meeting with the Transport Ministers that is scheduled for next week.

Road transport

In road transport, driving in affected areas must be totally banned by operators, rather than encouraged by financial incentives. We appeal to you to formally remind the operators that rest in the vehicle at week-ends is banned by EU law. Illegal rest in lorries, in parking areas, in the context of this pandemic, will be putting transport workers at risk, together with all those they come in contact with! With regard to daily and reduced weekly rest, we would like to point out that the absolute minimum conditions for taking these rest periods in the vehicle are no longer met. **In Italy bars and restaurants in rest areas are only opened for limited hours, professional drivers often lack access to facilities. This aggravates a situation that is already difficult outside crisis periods.**

Many truck drivers are already paying the price for the unpredictable situation at borders. Some countries are preventing those coming from Italy from entering their country. Because of long waiting times at borders, they end up spending a lot of time in the vehicle and getting fined for violating the driving times limitations.



President Frank Moreels

Acting General Secretary Livia Spera

Vice Presidents Alexander Kirchner
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**SYNDICAT
EUROPEEN
TRADE UNION**



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On the other hand, some Member States are considering adopting a relaxation of driving and rest time rules in order for the industry to meet the delivery demands caused by the pandemic. This in our view is unacceptable. The levels of fatigue among drivers are high already. **Prolonged working hours and working in an ever-changing environment specific to delivery situations will increase the vulnerability of employees in a sector where there is already a chronic labour shortage.** As for the Bus and coach sector, it is essential for operators to provide drivers with equipment that ensures full protection against contamination. Bus and coach passengers must undergo the same health check regime as passengers using any other mode of transport.

Railways and Urban Public Transport

Public transport workers on trains, in the railway stations and in urban public transport are front line workers, **meeting hundreds and thousands of passengers every day and are thus directly exposed to the risks of getting infected by COVID-19 during their daily work.** Public transport workers have a strong self-understanding of delivering a public service to people and society and take professional pride in serving society, and they have the right to be protected against health hazards at their work place.

Competent authorities in charge of public transport services and employers have to ensure that public transport workers who are in direct contact with passengers are protected and can protect themselves. The use of protective barriers like masks and protective clothes as well as keeping a distance offers only limited protection in public transport, but **employers must take full responsibility and still inform workers, allow and advise such measures.**

More crucially, it is vital to reduce the number of situations in which public transport workers are exposed to dangerous situations to a minimum. It is important to continue offering public transport services but in this current situation, and **when requested by the representatives of public transport workers, services should be reduced.** This should only last for a clearly defined limited period of time and should be regularly assessed. **The conditions of any such measure must be negotiated with the trade unions and employees' full salaries must be guaranteed.**

Maritime

In maritime transport sectors, workers are experiencing issues at-sea and on-shore. The **various travel restrictions and quarantine measures being put in place around the world are impacting repatriation home of seafarers at the end of their services.** Due to these measures, we hear of cases where seafarers cannot disembark when planned, or cannot join a ship at a foreign port. While protection of public health is paramount, **seafarers' rights to annual leave must be protected, and seafarers must be paid for the extension of their service periods on board.**

Traffic by sea between specific locations has now been stopped completely (e.g. between Spain and Italy/Morocco). **Our affiliates have reported to us that in some cases, this meant that the crew could not leave the ship. When this happens, both competent authorities and shipowners need to take a**



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responsible, pragmatic approach upholding the basic rights to decent working and living conditions and do everything in their power to ensure that the seafarers can return home as soon as possible and that special measures are taken to protect their health and safety.

In ports, **we are receiving reports from around Europe that workers are not provided with the protective equipment that is required in such circumstances, and safety procedures are not put in place.** At the same time, as global shipping is in decline in response to the crisis, the fall in export and imports are affecting the amount of work there is for dock workers. As with all the other transport workers, wherever they do not exist, special measures need to be put in place where workers are provided with social protection measures that allow them the means to get through this difficult and uncertain time.

Logistics

While several EU Member States are closing down shops that provide anything but food and medicine, production and logistics are still working as usual. In countries where the situation is particularly critical, more needs to be done to protect logistic workers. They are currently put under enormous amounts of pressure and expected to work long hours, while an emergency is declared around them.

In such a situation, it's highly irresponsible to continue with logistics as if nothing has changed and to put workers under high health risk to deliver goods that are not essential. E-commerce **companies should stop delivery of anything but essential goods. They should also ensure that their workers are given paid leave while the emergency situation lasts.**

As you can see from what detailed above, all transport sectors are affected. Regarding civil aviation, the information and demands stated in our previous [letter](#) remain valid and the need for implementing them is even more urgent.

Given the gravity of the situation, I would like to ask for an urgent meeting with you, to directly discuss what action shall be taken at EU level.

Yours sincerely,

Livia Spera

ETF General Secretary

CC:



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