



2020 SPC annual review of the Social Protection Performance Monitor (SPPM) and developments in social protection policies

Annex 2. Responses and reactions of the European Social Partners and of European Civil Society Organisations to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Annex 2

Responses and reactions of the European Social Partners and of European Civil Society Organisations to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic

The attached reactions have been collected in the course of the summer of 2020 and reflect some of actions taken by European level organizations and their national Members in the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Activities of European social NGOs and their national member organisations to tackle the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The measures taken by the public authorities to help the most vulnerable have been complemented by actions taken by the European social NGOs, whose national and local members have been at the frontline of fighting socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. European social NGOs and their national members have been undertaking various activities to raise awareness of its socio-economic impact on various population groups. This is a non-exhaustive snapshot of some of the actions [Social Platform](#)'s members at European level and their national members have been taking.

[AGE Platform Europe](#) has released a publication on “COVID-19 and human rights concerns for older persons”, explaining why older persons need particular attention to ensure that their rights are equally protected during the pandemic as well as a working paper with recommendations for a recovery based on Solidarity between Generations. [ATD Quart Monde](#) has been highlighting the impact of the pandemic on the poorest people across the world and the need for solidarity to ensure that no one is left behind due to this crisis. In response to the crisis, [Autism Europe](#) created a survey on the situation of autistic people and their families during this crisis, which will be used to elaborate policy recommendations.

[Caritas Europa](#) members have been working to limit the negative impact of the pandemic on their ability to deliver essential services to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Italy and Greece, including unaccompanied children. [CECOP](#) has written a policy paper about the situation of non-standard and platform workers during COVID-19, shedding light on the opportunities and challenges of worker cooperatives affiliating non-standard workers. [COFACE Families Europe](#) has been showcasing the work of its members providing support to families during the pandemic, including resources on online relationship counselling, dealing with anxiety, and a mental health guide for single parents.

In its work, [EAEA](#) has been drawing attention to the impact of the pandemic on adult education and training, including the consequences for many vulnerable groups whose education opportunities have either ceased or have moved online where they are not accessible for all, further leaving people behind. [EAPN](#) has published a statement, open letters to the Council and the European Commission and assessments of the country-specific recommendations based on the input of members, sharing its concerns about the particular impact of the crisis on the poorest and most vulnerable people as well as making recommendations for short, medium, and long-term actions to EU institutions and national governments to prevent millions more people throughout Europe from falling into poverty,

based on a study presented at EAPN's Policy Conference on 14 July 2020. [EASPD](#) has published an open letter stressing the threats to the provision of essential social care and support services to millions of older persons, persons with disabilities, children and other vulnerable persons in Europe and is holding weekly seminars to discuss the key issues affecting the sector during the COVID-19 outbreak. [ECDN](#) is collecting and disseminating information on the impact of the pandemic on over-indebtedness across Europe. [ECRE](#) has published information sheets with non-exhaustive lists of measures related to asylum and migration introduced in response to the crisis in Europe. [EDF](#) members have been working to promote the rights of people with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, including access to information in Germany, access to transport in the Netherlands, creating security and decreasing loneliness in Denmark, and providing resources for deaf and hard of hearing people. [EFOMW](#) has been underlining the multidimensional and compounding impact of the crisis on Muslim women, who are, similarly to other women facing increased burdens to balance home and work responsibilities, surges in domestic violence, limited access to health and social services, employment issues, many of which are exacerbated due to Islamophobia and structural racism, making Muslim women even more likely to experience inequalities. [ENAR](#) has been collecting testimonies from their members to give a voice to the experiences of racialised communities during the COVID-19 pandemic and has released an interactive map to show where violations of the rights of these communities are occurring. Together with other EU partners, [ENSIE](#) published a "Call for specific support measures for inclusive and integrated forms of employment during the Coronavirus crisis" and produced a report on the impact of COVID-19 on Work Integration Social Enterprises, including good innovating practices from such enterprises all over Europe during the crisis. [EPA](#) has been collecting various materials on the impact of the pandemic on parents and families, looking at issues related to education and the protection of vulnerable families. In its statement addressing the public health, social and economic impact on the most vulnerable, [EPHA](#) has called on the European institutions and national governments to take immediate measures to mitigate the pandemic's disproportionate effects on vulnerable groups, including Roma and prevent further increase of health inequalities between population groups and has been promoting the establishment of the Roma health network - a public health community aiming to tackle the pandemic's consequences on Roma communities and more widely, reduce health inequalities affecting Roma people across Europe. [EPR](#) has been highlighting the consequences of the pandemic on people with disabilities in vulnerable situations, as services addressed to them such as care and/or medical attention are not easily provided and service providers can face challenges in the running of their activities under confinement rules. [ERGO Network](#) has been working with its members and conducting a study to showcase the extreme hardships Roma have been experiencing during the pandemic related to lack/loss of employment, lack of social protection, lack of access to virtual education, living in poor segregated housing, compounded by widespread antigypsyism which has been leading to lack of or even counterproductive and racist policy measures. [ESAN](#) has been drawing attention to the impact of the pandemic on various disadvantaged groups and has called for European solidarity. [EURAG](#) organised a couple of Zoom conferences related to the rights of older persons in the framework of COVID-19,

including on access to and use of ICTs. [Eurocarers](#) has been emphasising the impact of the crisis on people who provide unpaid informal care to relatives with only minimal support and who have become more isolated, vulnerable and invisible with the pandemic and have been calling for action to address their needs. Through various activities, [Eurochild](#) has been advocating for the protection and rights of children during the pandemic, highlighting its impact on education, childcare and social services for children and their families, child poverty, and the particular impact on vulnerable children, such as Roma children, child refugees or children in residential care. [Eurodiaconia](#) has been working to ensure the recognition of and support for the superb work social service providers have continued to do during the pandemic, as well as holding subject-specific online meetings with its members to share best practice and experience amongst the network. [EURORDIS](#) is conducting a survey (through the Rare Barometer Voices initiative) for patients affected by a rare disease or caregivers, collecting experiences on how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting them. In its work, [EWL](#) is highlighting the gendered impact of the pandemic and is advocating for ensuring gender equality in the EU's response to the crisis.

Through various activities, [FEANTSA](#) has been underlining the severe impact of COVID-19 on homeless people, who have been unable to comply with social distancing rules which increases their risk of infection, combined with often pre-existing health conditions, and lost access to crucial social services during the lockdown.

[Housing Europe](#) has been underlining the shortcomings in housing policies across the EU that are being magnified by the pandemic and has been advocating for ensuring better housing policies during the EU's response to the crisis.

[ICSW](#) has been emphasising the importance of social protection and solidarity across the world to face this pandemic. In its work, [IFSW](#) has been drawing attention to the impact of the pandemic on social service provision and the workers providing social services across the world. [ILGA Europe](#) has been highlighting the diverse impacts of the pandemic on LGBTI people, for example with regards to access to health care, hate speech, domestic violence, access to public relief programmes, access to justice, registration and other legal processes. [IUT](#) has been warning about the financial impact of the pandemic on tenants and the risk many face of falling into rent arrears and being at risk of eviction, worsening the existing homelessness crisis.

[MHE](#) has been raising awareness of the pandemic's impact on people's mental health, especially those of vulnerable groups, and people with psychosocial disabilities. [Make Mothers Matter](#) has been underlining the impact of COVID-19 on mothers and families, especially those in vulnerable situations who have been experiencing increased inequalities and unprecedented economic, health and educative challenges and has been advocating for policy measures that support and protect them in this crisis.

The [Red Cross EU Office](#) has been raising awareness of the impact of the pandemic on the most vulnerable populations across the world as well as on the people who have been on the frontline of the response providing social and health services. As most social economy enterprises were limited in the provision of the environmental services they normally deliver and as many of them adjusted their activities or started anew to keep fulfilling their social mission, despite suffering from grave economic consequences, [RREUSE](#) has been calling for specific measures to support these enterprises.

Through its work, [PICUM](#) has been highlighting the need for urgent measures to protect migrants, including undocumented migrants and refugees, and to mend the cracks in our health, social protection and migration systems.

The [Salvation Army EU Office](#) has been emphasising how the Salvation Army has been mobilising to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable people continue to be met during this pandemic in Europe and globally. [Save the Children International](#) has been warning about the threats to children's rights to survival, development, learning, protection and to be heard posed by the pandemic and has been advocating for recovery measures that ensure that children and their families have access to the support they need. Through various activities, [SOLIDAR](#) has been calling for international solidarity with vulnerable groups who are especially impacted by the pandemic, ensuring that no one is left behind and has been publishing briefing notes analysing the impact of the pandemic on various areas of life, such as access to education and social services and support for migrants. [SOS Children's Villages International](#) has been advocating for better protecting children in general and children in vulnerable situations in particular across the world from the health and socio-economic impacts of the pandemic.

[TGEU](#) has been highlighting the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on transgender communities, which is especially felt by trans people who are in otherwise vulnerable situations, such as being homeless, working in the informal economy or having precarious jobs, relying on sex work, being disabled, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, poor, with pre-existing health conditions, and/or elderly.

[Volonteurope](#) has been collecting and showcasing the work done by its member organisations and the volunteers they support during the pandemic to assist persons who have been especially hit by the crisis in different ways.

Through various activities, [YFJ](#) has been shedding light on the impact and long-term consequences of the pandemic on young people, making policy recommendations to the EU institutions and advocating for ensuring investment in young generations and a commitment from Member States to build back better.

More information about the reactions and responses of Social Platform's members in the form of statements & resources, projects & national reactions and policy-recommendations to decision-makers can be found on Social Platform's website [here](#).



Activities of European Social Partners and their national member organisations in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic

Joint employers' contribution to the SPC 2020 Annual Report

21 September 2020

European Social Partners and their member organisations across Europe have been actively involved in creating and implementing measures to soften the economic and social impact of the Covid crisis and the lockdown. They were also active in preparing economies to gradually open up and businesses to restart activities in a secure way.

1.1. European Social Partners

Over the last months, the European cross-industry social partners have contributed regularly to the EU response to the crisis from dealing with the emergency, exiting the lockdown, and more recently, the recovery plan.

European cross-industry employers – BusinessEurope, CEEP and SMEUnited - have engaged in a variety of initiatives and activities in the last months, with their respective trade union counterparts, aiming to inform the European response to the crisis based on their real time analysis of economic and social trends deriving from the Covid-19 crisis.

A key priority for cooperation between the European Commission, the cross-industry social partners and national governments in the coming months is to ensure that short-time work schemes are well coordinated at European level and well performing in all EU Member States. They should be lifted in a flexible manner, adapted to the changing reality of containment and other sanitary measures impacting on the functioning of the labour markets. The social protection committee has a particular role to monitor the situation at the national level from the perspective of the functioning of social protection systems.

More info:

- Social Partners' input ahead of the videoconference of the members of the European Council on 23 April 2020: <https://www.buinesseurope.eu/publications/video-conference-members-european-council-23-april-2020-input-european-social-partners>

- BusinessEurope proposals for a European Economic Recovery Plan of 30 April 2020: <https://www.buinesseurope.eu/publications/buinesseurope-proposals-european-economic-recovery-plan>
- CEEP relevant papers on Covid: <https://www.ceep.eu/ceep-response-to-the-covid-19/>
- SMEunited website – the Covid dedicated part: <https://smeunited.eu/news/updates-on-covid-19>

1.2. National member organisations

National social partners were very active both during the lockdown (mid-March-May) as well as in the re-opening phase (May-June).

Activities in the lockdown phase:

- providing **information services** for their members (“hot lines”, some of them accessible 24/24, call centres, internal task-force), usually on-line, to explain introduced measures as well as practical aspects of implementing them - Cyprus, Greece, Poland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, France, Austria, Estonia, Bulgaria
- elaborating a **joint Common Regulatory Protocol for measures to combat and contain the spread of the Covid-19 virus at the workplace** and assistance to members in its implementation – Italy
- concluding **agreement** with the Extraordinary Commissioner for the Emergency to **facilitate the supply of face-masks** to industrial companies – Italy
- **promoting smart working** to prevent the widespread of Covid -19 at the workplaces - Italy
- organising **on-line meetings with policy-makers** from relevant ministries to facilitate understanding of the introduced measures - Luxembourg, Poland, Italy, Portugal, Cyprus, Estonia, Bulgaria
- providing **trainings and webinars** to discuss available support measures, for example suspension or reduction of social security contribution in case of short-time work schemes – the Netherlands, Cyprus, Poland, France, Italy, Estonia
- conducting **surveys** addressed to companies to help them to analyse the situation and plan the relevant measures - Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Austria
- setting up **dedicated sections on their websites** to provide members regularly with information from relevant ministries (i.e. health), institutions (i.e. national institute of social security) or international institutions (WHO) – Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, Cyprus, Portugal, Austria, Estonia
- maintaining **regular contact with relevant ministries** to ensure that employers’ voice is heard in designing emergency measures (Italy, Austria, Bulgaria); specific measures: delaying, reducing or completely suspending social security contributions

- in case of short-time work schemes (France, Poland, Belgium, Estonia), activating and adjusting special Covid- related safety nets – Italy, or changing rules for employer contribution to financing short-term work schemes (Poland, Norway)
- **designing changes** in the occupation pension schemes so employees do not lose their accumulated rights during furlough schemes - UK, or short-term schemes - Norway
 - **temporary exoneration of the employer social security:** for enterprises over 250 employees and from sectors the most impacted by the crisis (tourism, HORECA, sport, culture) – France; for employers from certain regions and hiring workers with open-ended contracts - Southern Italy
 - **tweaking rules for acquiring pension rights** to ensure that periods of short-term work are taken into consideration as well as maintaining for such workers the social benefits foreseen in case of invalidity or death (*prévoyance*) - France
 - **re-directing funds from bipartite social funds** to implement immediate social relief measures based on social partners' agreement - Italy
 - contributing to **simplify procedure and entry conditions for economic unemployment** (*chômage économique*) for workers - Belgium
 - introducing **special childcare allowance** for parents taking care of kinds aged 8 and younger when nurseries, kindergartens and schools were closed - Poland, extending the eligibility for paid leave from 10 to 20 days – Norway, or extending the scope of parental leave – Belgium
 - **changing conditions to qualify for sick leave** – UK, or tweaking sickness allowance to enable paying out special “social allowance” for parents taking care of their children - France
 - providing **a medical tele-consultation service for workers** by the bipartite organisms - France
 - organising **donations** to purchase necessary material and protection equipment for healthcare sector – Greece, or donating **materials** - Bulgaria
 - employers' **legislative initiative** to increase financing of occupational medicine – Poland
 - discussing possible measures for **social security protection for the self-employed** – France.

Activities in the “re-opening phase”:

- drafting **practical guides on returning to work in a safe and healthy way**, often with some sections dedicated for specific sectors, for example transport, commerce, office work - Belgium, Bulgaria, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Greece, Poland, Norway, Spain, updating existing Common Regulatory Protocol – Italy, or separate documents for specific regions or even areas - France

- providing **on-going advisory services** related to the health and safety rules and protection measures for employees, i.e. social distancing, wearing masks in the workplace, installing plastic shields - Luxembourg, UK, Poland, Portugal, Belgium, Italy, Austria, Norway
- developing a **guidance for completing mandatory risk assessment and evaluation** (in cooperation with Labour Inspectorate and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment) – the Netherlands, Cyprus, Norway
- organising **webinars on Covid-19 and health and safety protection measures** and issues related to employers' liability in a “new normal” - the Netherlands, Italy
- on-going **monitoring of the governmental decisions** that impact business and preparing relevant communication and/or activities – Estonia, “duty officer” in Cyprus
- establishing and promoting **rules to facilitate leave of workers in case of extraordinary family obligations** resulting from closing kindergartens and schools - Greece
- **discussing internal sick pay policies** – the budgets were planned for a “normal” year, but the sick pay cost has increased significantly – UK, Estonia
- **discussing consequences of short-term work schemes to the defined-contribution pension schemes** (no work means no contribution) and designing “lifeboat schemes” to sponsor employers to close the gap in contributions – UK
- on-going discussion on **financing of the quarantine periods or testing of employees** who are Covid-negative, but are in a risk group (i.e. have travelled to red zone or were in contact with the Covid-positive person) – UK
- cooperation with a test laboratory for Covid-19 tests - Austria
- submitting **proposals for a structural reform of the national system of social safety nets**, aimed namely at introducing a fairer and more consistent system of protection in case of loss and/or suspension of employment, based on active labour market policies – approach – Italy.

In conclusion, from the beginning of the pandemics in Europe employer organisations in all member states have been in regular contacts with respective governments and social security institutions. They have been contributing to/or co-designing emergency measures. They have been disseminating information about the adopted measures among businesses - often also non-members - as well as have been guiding them in implementation. They have become “focal points” for businesses and a go-between in their contacts with national administration, which facilitated implementation of the emergency measures and their optimal design. Last but not least, they have largely contributed to drafting national recovery plans and exit strategies.

ETUC action in the Covid-19 pandemic crisis

The [Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences](#) have put the European project and democracy at risk. The lockdown and the measures adopted by European governments to face the emergency have generated terrible consequences in terms of economic recession, massive unemployment, obstacles to the freedom of movement, deterioration of working conditions and rights, increased inequality and social exclusion.

Workers are at the forefront of the battle against coronavirus, and millions of workers are experiencing many difficulties in their lives and in making a living caused by measures to tackle the pandemic.

National trade unions across Europe have been working hard to achieve agreements between unions and employers (and governments) to deal with the serious economic impacts on workers and enterprises.

The ETUC has supported the efforts of the European Trade Union Federations and the national TU members and has been delivering a series of coordinated actions to convey [the social concerns and demands in a number of areas](#) to the EU decision-making arena, in the view to contribute to the plans for facing the emergencies and planning the recovery in an anticipatory, effective and socially sustainable manner. In several areas, the ETUC has acted jointly with the European Social Partners representing employer organisations in order to strengthen the coordinated demands of the world of work.

The ETUC has launched a series of '[COVID-19 Watch](#)' briefing notes. They focus on developments providing critical information on the impacts of COVID-19 on labour markets, workers and citizens across Europe. These Briefing Notes are still being produced by the ETUC with the support of the ETUI and ETUC affiliated organisations.

For the ETUC, the health of citizens and workers and the protection of jobs and rights have been the priority when the institutions were taking lockdown measures. In particular, a specific Covid-19 Watch briefing note (amongst others) has been dedicated to [sick pay and social](#)

[protection-related interventions as extraordinary measures to protect workers in times of Covid19](#). The ETUC has also strongly criticised the economic and social policies that for years have focused excessively on the fiscal discipline rather than on the actual needs in health and social care, which has had dramatic consequences on the capacity of healthcare systems to cope with the impact of the pandemic. The analysis paper [COVID19: the impact of health care cuts](#) has been developed and widely circulated in coordination with EPSU. It shows how the long-standing need for more and better public funding and investment in health and social care should have been addressed in due time.

The pandemic has worsened the living and working conditions of some of the most vulnerable in the society, and has magnified the social inequalities that we have been urging to be tackled since a long time. It is the case of elderly people, whose situation has emerged as severely concerning during the Covid-19, and the ETUC has backed [FERPA](#) in addressing its concerns to the [Presidents of the European Parliament and of the Commission](#) as well as to the EU institutions in general for addressing them in the [design of the Recovery and Resilience Plan](#). The ETUC women's Committee has also issued the paper [Covid-19 is not gender neutral: a gender strategy is needed](#) tackling the dramatic situation of women in the frontline sectors of the crisis and demanding urgent measures for the recovery to be a forward-looking opportunity to finally tackle the gender-based discriminations and inequalities.

However, the end of the pandemic emergency will not solve the problems that are long-standing and have resulted as magnified by the Covid-19. In the aftermath of the crisis, it will be crucial to avoid making the mistakes of the past. After a decade of austerity and cuts, in the name of fiscal consolidation, with the result of exacerbating inequalities in society and at work, it is time now for a recovery strategy based on an ambitious, fair and inclusive approach. We need a new EU economic and social governance, with new parameters and rules, with a more people-centred agenda, aiming at increasing public expenditure and investment to support the green and digital transition, as well as the industrial base and the related value chains.

The ETUC proposals advocate for a fairer Europe, well anchored to the EU fundamental values but with renewed treaties which better serve mainstream policies with high social potential, such as the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), the EU Green Deal and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the UN2030 Agenda.

When implementing the EPSR, the EU governance should ensure that workers' rights to collective bargaining and fair remuneration are fully respected in all Member States.

[Our proposals](#) aim at a prompt, strong and sustained recovery of a more integrated Europe with the primary objective to protect and empower people. We need a new EU economic and social governance, with new parameters and rules, with a more people-centred agenda, aiming at increasing public expenditure and investment. The new economic and social governance of the EU should be based on full employment with high quality jobs, an inclusive society, and increased public spending and investments, especially delivering quality public health, education and training and social protection for all and protecting vulnerable groups. The EU economic governance must ensure adequate protection to all people, including setting [EU minimum standards when needed to boost upward convergence of living and working conditions](#). As per the European Pillar of Social Rights, it is crucial in this historical period that the economic governance better promotes and enables social investment and investment in skills, education and training, quality healthcare and social care services, job-search assistance and social protection. Special attention be given to the fact that an increasing rate of population will be aged 65+ in the coming years. Our public health and social care and social protection systems must be strengthened to have the capacity to meet increased demand and to be prepared for new threats or a resurgence of COVID-19.

The emergency is not over, however, and the EU needs to bear this in mind when setting the financial priorities for the Recovery Plan and the MFF. The ETUC assessment so far is that the adoption of an ambitious EU Recovery Plan is essential for Europe to emerge from the COVID-19 outbreak and avoiding massive unemployment, a recession and a rise in inequality and social exclusion, while building a socially fair and inclusive recovery. The mistakes made in the past in addressing the financial crisis with austerity and neoliberal strategies based on cuts to wages, public services and social protection systems, had a tremendously adverse impact on European workers and their families. In order to avoid these mistakes, the ETUC demands, amongst other measures, that all national and EU emergency measures, particularly those connected to employment protection and income compensation and SURE, continue for the necessary duration and until the full recovery of the economy and the stabilisation of jobs; that all existing shortcomings of the emergency measures, particularly in terms of adequacy and universality of coverage and access, are fully resolved; that all necessary resources are made available to support public services, particularly health care, and social protection systems. Ensuring upward convergence in income support measures and adopt a legislative binding initiative setting common principles and standards to guarantee everyone in need [the right to a minimum income](#) is fundamental.

In this perspective, it is crucial to preserve social investment in the MFF, reinforce the ESF+, restore the European social model and social protection systems, fully implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Agenda 2030 of the UN.

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