



EPSU-CEMR JOINT STATEMENT ON COVID-19

Adopted by the EU social dialogue committee of LRGs on 23 June 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic hit Europe hard. Now it seems that many European countries can begin to open up again. COVID-19 is still among us and it is not clear for how long the current health and economic crisis will last. Therefore, it is essential that the re-opening is done in a slow and controlled manner, ensuring minimisation of risks to citizens and workers.

During the re-opening, there has to be a strong focus on occupational health and safety. Personal protective equipment must be ensured in a full and prompt fashion, and access to public institutions and workplaces must be organised in a way that contains the spread of the virus. The best way to deal with the re-opening is through social dialogue, information and consultation and agreements at all levels including workplace social dialogue.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a health crisis. However, the tough but needed measures to contain the virus have led to an economic crisis and without the appropriate measures we risk exacerbating the emerging social crisis.

Municipalities and regions are at the forefront of this crisis, whether in enforcing lockdowns, continuing to provide essential public services – above all healthcare and support for the most vulnerable – or in handling the gradual relaxation of containment measures. At the same time, many of their sources of revenue are falling due to the closure of public facilities and the general economic slowdown.

During the COVID-19 pandemic the importance of well-functioning public services has once again been made very clear. Municipalities and regions are at the centre of the response to the crisis and many of the essential services are provided by municipalities and regions.

For many years, local and regional government in Europe have been operating in a very difficult economic and financial context. Structural reforms and austerity policies carried out in the years after the financial crisis have had a negative impact on the quality of public services. In some countries local and regional government was more heavily affected by cuts than the public sector as a whole and austerity measures have had a particularly negative impact on women. All measures taken in the post-COVID-19 pandemic would need to have a gender sensitive approach and promote gender equality and the eradication of gender pay gap.

EPSU and CEMR strongly warn against repeating such austerity measures in order to recover from the economic crisis after COVID-19 and to avoid a social crisis.

Instead, allocation of economic resources to municipalities and regions are needed to further develop sustainable, inclusive, socially just and well-funded public services that respond to the needs of citizens, workers, communities and businesses. Municipalities and regions are suffering great economic losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic, without a consistent allocation of economic resources, there is a risk of being unable to continue to provide quality services to their communities. Allocation of economic resources to municipalities and regions will also have a positive impact on job retention and job creation. Municipalities and regions are large employers and of great importance to the local economy and to the local community, and the major part of public procurement of goods and services is carried out at local level.

The crisis has shown the value of social dialogue including collective bargaining in finding solutions to many of the concerns and problems raised by the pandemic. In this difficult moment, we should be able to build on solidarity and cooperation between European regions. Therefore,

EPSU and CEMR are fully committed to

- promote the ILO decent work agenda that includes job creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue, with gender equality as a crosscutting objective,
- keep monitoring and providing inputs to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights,
- call on our affiliates to engage in social dialogue and collective bargaining on the national level as well as the workplace level to ensure safe working conditions and prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus during the re-opening process,
- explore and discuss the consequences prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, in terms of work organisation, working time, telework and work-life balance, and consider its impact on local and regional government and potential sectoral initiatives to be taken within the EU Social Dialogue Committee for Local and Regional Governments.

EPSU and CEMR calls on the European Commission and the Council to

- promote the ILO decent work agenda and the ratification of relevant ILO conventions¹ and ILO recommendation 202 on social protection floors,
- promote funding and investment in essential public services including health care and social services,
- explore additional possibilities to support municipalities and regions and consider extraordinary measures in order to ensure continuity of the response to the economic and social challenges that are only beginning to emerge,

¹ ILO core conventions, ILO Convention 144, ILO Convention 151, ILO Convention 155 and ILO Convention 187.

- give special attention to SDG 3 “Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages”, especially 3.d.², to strengthen the capacity of all countries for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks, to reduce the impact of an eventual second wave of COVID-19,
- engage with the European sectoral employers and trade unions to consider the sectoral impacts of this crisis and the specific measures needed to assist municipalities and regions,

EPSU and CEMR calls on national governments to

- promote the ILO decent work agenda and to ratify relevant ILO conventions³ and ILO recommendation 202 on social protection floors,
- fully involve the national social partners including sectoral social partners in the re-opening process,
- ensure the full and prompt availability of personal protective equipment to all workers with priority given to frontline workers in the public sector to ensure safe working conditions and avoid spread of the virus to the most vulnerable,
- to fully compensate municipalities and regions for additional expenditure and loss of revenue caused by the COVID-19 crisis,
- invest in job creation and quality public services and allocate economic resources to local and regional government,
- according to different investment needs in member states, increase funding for childcare facilities, long-term care, i.e. raise the support ratio for long-term care.

² “**3.d** Strengthen the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks”.

³ ILO core conventions, ILO Convention 144, ILO Convention 151, ILO Convention 155 and ILO Convention 187.