

**EPSU on strategies to gradually leave lockdown
and the new 1.5-2 meter society: not without the
workers and trade unions**



(29 April 2020) Some countries are getting a grip on the pandemic and the spread of COVID19. They are planning to leave the lockdown and relaxing the quarantine measures. This means workers going back to work and people coming more in contact with each other as they use transport and increase their use of products and services. The European Commission has published its proposals for the exit-strategy but these do not recognize that workers have concerns about their health and safety and that employers need to take all precautionary measures needed to prevent workers from being infected. This is also the consequence of the lack of consultation by the Commission of the proposals with social partners, whether at sector or confederal level.

Based on policies of unions which have already concluded agreements, EPSU has compiled a set of recommendations that are available [here](#). The main points:

- Public health advice should inform the decisions and be taken into account.
- Consultation of the social partners is crucial to ensure that the measures to return to work are in the interest of workers.
- Increased testing should be part of the relaxing of confinement measures.
- A return to work implies that personal protective equipment (PPE) must be available at the workplace and that social distancing is possible and respected.
- Workplace preparedness plans need to be discussed and agreed between the employer and workplace representatives.
- Unions will support workers that refuse to work when, despite repeated calls, the employer fails to provide a safe working environment.
- Labour and health and safety inspectorates need to play their role in monitoring, follow up and sanctioning of employers not respecting the rules.
- Covid-19 should be classified as an occupational disease for those workers for whom contact with other people such as children, the elderly, patients, passengers or prisoners is part of their daily work.
- Data protection and privacy provisions should be respected and ensure that workers can only be tracked on a voluntary basis to identify whether they have been in contact with a person carrying the virus.

We also address telework and public services, creating European companies for the production of Personal Protective Equipment and how funding that is made available to get companies through the crisis and safe jobs and the funding to stimulate the economy should be conditioned.

More detailed guidance is available from the [**European Occupational Safety and Health Agency \(OSHA\): COVID-19: back to the workplace - adapting workplaces and protecting workers**](#) including on specific occupations and sectors (see section 8 of the guidance). Workers who come into physical contact with many people are at the greatest risk of contracting COVID-19. These include but are not limited to workers in the healthcare, residential and home care, essential workers at increased risk include, for example, those involved in food supply and retail, waste collection, utilities, police and security, and public transport. More detailed information is available on the website of EU-OSHA or of your national OSH agency.

[Useful guidance is also available from the World Health Organisation](#)

And see the [joint position of the ILO and the WHO on protecting workers now the lock downs ease](#)

[Demand of EPSU, the European Trade Union Federations and ETUC to qualify COVID19 as an occupational disease](#)

[For more information on Corona pandemic and what trade unions do](#)

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