Coalition to Make Whistleblowing Safe During Covid-19



(6 April 2020 - last updated version 4 May) Today, more than 40 NGOs and trade unions including EPSU, ETUC, Eurocadres, EFJ and Euromil have issued a joint statement calling upon on public authorities to protect citizens and workers who report or expose abuses or wrongdoings that arise during this period of COVID-19 pandemic, not the least regarding health and safety and public health.

The COVID-19 pandemic brings into sharp relief the importance of accountability and the need for regular, reliable information in order to respond to the outbreak effectively and to help protect workers who are on the frontline.

EPSU highlights the fact that the concentration of power in emergencies should under no circumstances be used to quash fundamental freedoms such as the rights of the press and those such as workers' rights to health and safety and trade union rights.

It should also be pointed out that in times of war or life threatening public emergencies, special emergency powers must be exercised only for the purposes for which they were granted, be limited in duration, circumstance and scope, and duly notified to the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe also states that essential protections to the “rule of law, parliamentary oversight, independent judicial control, and effective domestic remedies, must be maintained even during a state of emergency.”

The risk of corruption in public services and administrations not the least regarding public procurement can be exacerbated by dramatically increased pressure on public healthcare system and employees. The uncertainty and shortages of personal protective equipment and medical devices contribute to an environment in which corrupt individuals or companies can take advantage of it for their own benefit.

Fairness, transparency and cooperation are vital, and never more so than during a pandemic. The statement underlines the fact that workers are taking risks daily to maintain the many essential services which we rely upon, especially health services, elderly and child care and other social and public services, as well as food supply and logistics, just to name a few.

The importance of these workers, their right to a safe workplace and to speak up about threats to public health and safety, corruption, and other abuses must be recognized and protected.

Statement is HERE (EN) - (FR) (last updated version 24 April 2020)

EPSU General Secretary Jan Willem Goudriaan stated "Emergency powers must never be used to stifle workers’ rights to health and safety not the least personal protective equipment such as masks which remains in short supply in many workplaces."

He continued: "As part of our immediate focus to ensure millions of public services workers are protected so that everyone can be safe, we remain extremely vigilant against threats to freedoms, justice and fundamental workers’ and trade union rights in our societies during these extraordinary times."

Further information:

EPSU, alongside sister trade union federations, is currently advocating a broad and effective implementation of the EU directive that provides common minimum standards on protection of workers who blow the whistle at work, due to be transposed into all EU member states' domestic law by 17 December 2021

Council of Europe resolution 2209 " State of emergency: proportionality issues concerning derogations under Article 15 of the European Convention on Human Rights", 2018, see here in EN.

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Last updated version 24 April 2020:

Coalition Statement to Make Whistleblowing Safe During COVID-19 and Beyond

Coalition pour protéger les lanceurs d'alerte en temps de pandémie - déclaration

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