

Charles Michel
President of the European Council

Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European
Commission

Mario Centeno
President of the Eurogroup

[Letter sent by e-mail]

ec.secretariat@european-council.europa.eu;

ec-president-vdl@ec.europa.eu;

hugo.coelho@mf.gov.pt

Dear Presidents,

The COVID-19 emergency is hitting working people in Europe hard. Those who work in activities of general interest, such as health care, transportation, agriculture, food production, and many other services are exposed to contagion and are poorly protected. In many cases their working conditions have been worsened. Those who lost their jobs because of the economic lockdown. Those who are suspended from their jobs and can't get income compensation. Those who are sick, quarantined or have to assist sick relatives, and are not sufficiently protected in terms of sick pay coverage.

This situation is even more serious for non-standard and precarious workers, platform and self-employed workers, not to mention undeclared workers and undocumented migrants, who do not enjoy the same rights and protection as the other working people.

The European trade unions are working hard to protect workers, jobs and companies during this emergency.

We are negotiating extraordinary measures for workers' protection with all EU governments, we support those who are obliged to go to work, we provide our joint input together with the other social partners to shape the initiatives needed to face the crisis. Our priority at the moment is to save the enterprises, making sure that they can survive the lockdown and come back to the markets when it will be finished. And to protect the jobs of our members, making sure that those who are suspended from work do not become unemployed, but can keep their job and receive decent income compensation. We are fully aware that an extraordinary plan for recovery will have to be designed during the crisis, so it can be implemented in the immediate aftermath. And we are convinced that this plan will have to be based on a more sustainable economic model, without dropping but rather reinforcing the crucial initiatives launched by President von der Leyen in her first 100 days.

We have welcomed the announced Commission's extraordinary measures to address the COVID-emergency, particularly the idea of testing a scheme for unemployment reinsurance at the European level.

This scheme will be effective particularly if it focuses on preserving people's jobs, by providing support to short time working arrangements and income compensation for workers suspended from their job. Keeping people in their job should also be a condition for enterprises to receive financial support. And of course, unemployed people and non-standard and self-employed workers should also receive appropriate income compensation.

Such a European scheme should provide financial support to Member States on top of the national systems, but should also help Member States to develop national schemes, since they are not in place in all countries. We are at the full disposal of the Commission's services to provide all technical advice needed to shape such measures, since we are in permanent contact with our affiliates on the ground.

The reason I am writing to you with a matter of urgency is that the money the Commission has decided to mobilise for the setting of this European scheme – the unspent EU budget's resources – is not sufficient to deliver an efficient measure, which can benefit all Member States and all categories of workers in need.

This is the reason why we strongly supported the idea of issuing a European common debt instrument, such as corona bonds, to support the scheme for unemployment reinsurance at European level. To be very clear, there is no other option to finance such a scheme and to raise enough money to make it effectively operational.

We were really disappointed to see that the Eurogroup's meeting yesterday did not consider this option. I therefore ask you, in the name of the 45 million workers we represent in Europe, to take action at the videoconference of the European Council tomorrow to convince the Member States to take this decision.

The crisis is escalating and there is no time to wait. We have to take responsibility to put in place extraordinary measures able to prevent a massive recession and stop millions of jobs being destroyed. If this is not avoided by urgent action now, it will take decades to Europe to recover.

I thank you for your kind attention.

Best regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Luca Visentini', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Luca Visentini,
General Secretary ETUC