



COVID 19 and Occupational Healthy and Safety

Statement by the PERC SEE-NIS OHS Network

COVID-19 is threatening the health and the livelihoods of workers globally. COVID-19 will also have major economic and employment impacts. Millions of companies worldwide are in danger of being forced out of business with grave impacts on employment. It will push on liberalisation of workplace legislation and workers' rights.

Already before the crisis the PERC OHS Network had mentioned in its Memorandums (Tirana and Baku, 2016) that the deterioration of health and safety of workers ran parallel to changes in forms of employment and growth of precarious employment, while at the same time labour legislation had been amended in many countries, reducing workers' rights; still a high number of workers had been victims of work-related accidents and diseases, while the number of fatal accidents remains also high - bringing not only misery and pain to many families but also exacting a high price for society as a whole. OHS-related cutbacks made before the crisis are unacceptable; we consider more investment in prevention and the development of hazard-free workplaces is vital for all stakeholders.

The OHS Network of the Pan European Regional Council underline the critical need for social dialogue at national and multilateral levels to design measures to overcome this impact.

We stress in the strongest terms the important role that social dialogue and social partners play in the control of the virus at the workplace and beyond, but also to avoid massive job losses in the short and medium term. Joint responsibility is needed for dialogue to foster stability.

Strong and functioning health systems are key to combatting the pandemic. We urge governments to deploy all possible resources; support to Governments in their effective use of health facilities and resources, are urgently needed

Covid-19 must be beaten by prevention measures together with medical aid. Trade union should raise awareness, to fight for social rights of workers and negotiate with governments on social protection measures. Governments must fully and timely inform social partners and workers about the extend of COVID 19 in their countries.

We call for the political will to fully implement the articles of the ILO Conventions, namely Labour Inspection Convention No 81, Occupational Safety and Health Convention No 155 and Convention 129. We call for broader promotional role of trade unions in the area of safety and health of workers and prevention. We call for strict introduction of hygiene measures requested by national legislation at all workplaces.

Vigorous systems of different types of inspection and enforcement of legislation through the cooperation of authorities, employers and trade unions are crucial to any sustainable improvement. The potential for trade unions to promote workplace health and safety should be used at all levels, especially in times of shrinking resources and pandemic situation. We consider the strengthening of the institution of workers technical inspectors, to whom trade unions provide wide support, to be of key importance.

We consider it imperative that trade unions not only play a greater role as supervisors on OSH matters, but must also strengthen their monitoring and bargaining, educational and raising awareness role through appropriate legislation if progress is to be achieved.

Trade unions in the region see critical failures in risk assessment at many companies which lead to underestimating of hazards the workers are facing to. The exposure of workers to traditional hazards but also to new ones like COVID 19 pandemic psychosocial risks, dangerous substances with effects of work-related cancers and environmental hazards is enormous. Therefore, we call for action!

In short, all efforts need to be undertaken to help workers and companies to go through the crisis, to keep workers in their jobs, to protect from unemployment and loss of income, and to alleviate financial devastation.

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