

The European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI) is a confederation of more than 40 national and European trade union organisations from more than 20 European countries, with a total of more than 5 million individual members. Founded in 1990, CESI advocates improved employment conditions for workers in Europe and a strong social dimension in the EU. CESI's particular strength lies in the public sector, with most of CESI's affiliates employed in the different fields of the European, national, regional and local administrative bodies and public services. CESI also represents unions of nurses, doctors, hospital staff and further public healthcare personnel across Europe. This paper presents CESI's priorities to make Europe more resilient and better equipped to face future virus pandemics than was the case during the SARS-CoV-2 Coronavirus breakout that led to the start of COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020.

- In view of the unfolding Corona crisis and the numerous and diverse challenges that our societies, economies and labour markets, that all citizens and workers have already been and will continue to be confronted with;
- In due appreciation of the great efforts and commitment of public services and the sacrifice shown by their staff throughout Europe to keep up the public administration and the provision of essential goods and services in these difficult times, especially in the frontline defense against the virus;
- In the memory of all the victims of the Corona virus, -both patients and treating health professionals-, and particularly those who have passed away in this pandemic in Europe and beyond;
- Based on the experiences made so far with the spread of and the fight against the COVID-19 virus in Europe and worldwide;
- Stressing the importance to continue to address short-term relief and aid measures to manage the acute symptoms of the Corona crisis on workers, business, citizens and public services;¹
- Feeling the need and urgency for many governments and the European institutions to take broad, swift and bold long-term socio-economic countermeasures against the Corona fallout;
- Calling on actors at all levels -political decision-takers and authorities, social partners and trade unions as well as civil society organisations- to engage, support each other and join forces in a common effort to overcome the current crisis;

we, the Presidium of the European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI), declare the following:

¹ CESI's initial reaction paper of April 3 2020 with short-term priorities to address the acute fallout of the Corona crisis for workers and jobs and for businesses, public services and the economy at large: <https://www.cesi.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/CESI-Corona-virus-response-25032020-EN-final.pdf>

I. More accountability and capacity for EU-level crisis management

The European Commission, its European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) as well as the Member States were technically ill-prepared and surprised by the Corona pandemic in Europe. At the same time, the EU became a crisis management side player with every Member State, region and even commune taking their own, uncoordinated steps in attempts to fight off the spread of the virus and leaving more hard-hit countries alone. Just like Asian countries learned from the SARS outbreak a decade ago, the EU and its Member States need to become better prepared in a concerted virus crisis management.

The European Commission should further review its crisis response mechanisms also in areas beyond health, with a view to become resilient in crises in areas including, but not limited to, energy security, cyber security and climate change.

1. We call for more reliable and complete statistics and minimum testing capacities

Reliable and complete statistics related to the virus are vital for politicians and authorities to make the right decisions in crisis management. Without reliable and real data on the extent of a pandemic especially in terms of infected and deceased persons, it is impossible to make right decisions based on scientific evidence and facts. To this end, Member States must fulfil a minimum level of testing capacity in their laboratories that can be quickly booted when needed for a particular virus or other biological agent. This ‘minimum’ capacity level must be considerably higher than is currently the case, ensuring that everyone that should be tested will be tested without delay, even if this represents large parts of the populations. In testing, staff and personnel that performs essential services for the society needs to be treated with priority.

Moreover, the case reporting mechanisms from laboratories to communes and then regions, the Member States and the EU/ECDC need to be revised to make sure that they do functioning in stress situations and will not fail in the future again.

2. We call for sufficient levels of personal protective equipment

The acquisition and distribution of sufficient levels of protective equipment, especially for the health sector, is a matter of necessary European autonomy and thus needs to be organised and managed at the EU level. Within the EU there uncoordinated national actions endangering the security of supply and the flow of goods must be avoided. Access to sufficient levels of stocks of equipment and their distribution to where they are needed the most must be guaranteed by common rules for stockpiling. These ‘sufficient’ levels must obviously be significantly higher than is currently the case.

3. We call for a functioning early warning system in cases of pandemics

In the future, there must be an early warning system that works for the EU in the event of pandemics. An effective and efficient early warning mechanism needs to be established in the face of evidence that this pandemic situation may recur.

To this end it is necessary to investigate and review the responses and decisions taken in some countries since the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the international health emergency on January 30 2020. In this context it is also necessary to assess the performance of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) since the epidemic was notified in China as well.

II. More and targeted financial assistance for hard-hit Member States, sectors, companies and workers

Temporary more flexible state aid rules, the temporary activation of the escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact, the European Central Bank's Pandemic Emergency Purchase Programme (PEPP), the reallocation of parts of the EU budget to Corona-related measures and the European Investment Bank's creation of a pan-European guarantee fund have been important steps to protect the economy and ensure the liquidity of affected business in the context of the acute severity of the Corona crisis.

The temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE), directed by the EU towards the Member States in the form of loans granted on favourable terms to support employment, is an important tool to safeguard jobs.

Given the scope of the experienced and expected Corona fallout and the expected need to repair the European economies, industries and employment, further financial assistance is however necessary in the private sector and public services.

4. We call for a solidarity-based financial system to rebuild EU economy in the context of the single market

The EU and its Member States must urgently find sustainable solutions to overcome the negative effects of the crisis on the EU's economy and its social cohesion. A new solidarity-based system for the EU will be necessary, for the Corona fallout will profoundly hit all Member States economically and the EU risk losing economic and political power in the international context. A lack of solidarity puts in danger the future of the entire EU.

In view of this, CESI supports the European Commission's proposal of May 27 2020 for a Recovery Plan. It is a compromise between Member States in need of solidarity and those that have the means to contribute financially. CESI supports in particular the following mechanisms and principles proposed by the Commission:

- The EU issuing bonds on its relatively good credit rating terms: although guaranteed in the end by low-debt Member States, in particular low-debt Member states, loans taken by the EU would not constitute any direct burden for them; the EU would pay back bonds by means of new own resources that it would be entitled to collect directly;
- Member States with relatively unfavourable own credit ratings benefitting from direct EU grants or relatively favourable EU loans: this would financially mitigate a crisis (COVID-19) for which these countries are not responsible for themselves;
- The funds being limited to a stated volume (€750bn), being restricted to a stated period of time (2021-2024), and being explicitly purpose-specific (to alleviate hardship caused by the Corona virus): this does not represent a permanent mechanism for unconditional bonds to communalise on a large scale long-standing debts of individual Member States.
- EU institutions (the European Commission and the European Parliament) being given the authority and control over these grants and loans, since these are embedded in the MFF: in this way support will only be allocated conditional on specific purposes; the alleviation of the COVID-19 fallout and the social and climate/ environmental targets of the EU.

The European Stability Mechanism (ESM) can serve as an additional tool. It was originally created to fight off asymmetric economic shocks in individual Member States, but it could be used in the symmetric Corona crisis for medical acquisitions. However, attention should be paid to not deplete the ESM in order to keep its potency to fight off non-Corona-related asymmetric economic shocks in the future.

III. Ensuring continuity of production, services and work during crises

The Corona crisis has shown how dependent the economies and industries still are on on-site work and how little advanced digital working mechanisms often remain, having led to inefficient telework or even a disruption of service provision and manufacturing chains, and having led to the internet capacity reaching its limits. The effect of GDP has already been severe.

5. We call for reinforced telework and distant working

Through appropriate tools, digitalisation, telework and distant working in public administrations as well as in the private sector should be further promoted in those professions and jobs functions that allow for this. The possibilities of telework and distant working as massively used in the Corona crisis should be further explored between the social partners, always taking the fact that there are many professions that are incompatible or difficult develop with the 'home-office' such as in police forces, teaching, and nursing. In this process, a right to disconnect must be ensured and permanent availability requirements and unpaid overtime for employees ruled out. Moreover, other worker rights, including the right to participate in trade union activities, health and safety provisions, accident insurance and the provision of suitable work equipment, must be maintained.

6. We call for a boosted digitalisation of public administrations and online availability of essential services of general interest

The digitalisation of public administrations and the online availability of their services must be significantly and swiftly improved. The online availability of services for citizens and customers was in fact already desirable needed before the Corona crisis - even if the current situation highlights dramatically that online services are not just convenient by themselves but in certain emergency situations indeed vital.

At the same time, the inherently 'human' nature of the public services must not be compromised: Especially in the context of possible discretions within the laws, personnel should ultimately decide and control the delivery of quality services – and not artificial intelligence and algorithms. Moreover, citizens should also be able to access public services also 'in person' – which includes physically and disabled-accessible facilities.

7. We call for performing and functioning internet networks throughout Europe

The EU should ensure that the European internet network is equipped to process seamlessly the large data quantities that a stepped-up digitalisation and more online work will bring. The current situation with online conferences and meetings often not functioning properly due to lacking internet speed and capacity in many regions, communities and neighbourhoods is not acceptable.

8. We call for a reinforcement of reliable production chains

Manufacturing industries should be encouraged and helped to develop plans to ensure the continuity of production chains as much as possible even in times of crisis, e.g. though mandatory face masks for all and reinforced hygienic concepts and precautions.

In order to reinforce production chains, European manufacturing industries should be encouraged to develop strategies for the new green economy. Production systems that aim at decarbonisation and ecologically sustainable products as well as methods should be supported. Overall, the EU and its Member States should make additional efforts to increase investments in the green economy in order to become a stronger, more ecological competitor on the international market. By doing so, Europe would be able to develop and support those excellences in the sectors which are particularly exposed to global competition.

IV. More financial capacities to finance crisis preparedness

Supporting employment and workers and making the EU, the Member States and its authorities as well as companies and businesses better prepared for the crisis will not come without costs – Costs, which are in fact investments that will more than pay off in the case of a crisis.

9. We call for an adequate next MFF for the EU

As proposed by the European Commission, the volume of the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) must reflect the EU's expected enhanced role in the medium- and long-term management and mitigation of the impacts of the Corona crisis. In order to not increase the budgetary contributions of the Member States unnecessarily, there should be a mechanism for new targeted and earmarked financial instrument backed by the EU budget.

10. We call for substantial new public investment in reinvented public services

The example given by thousands of public sector personnel that continue the operation of administrations despite this crisis shows that strong public services must have adequate staff levels. The cuts suffered in recent years in some countries are taking their toll now, especially in the health sector. In view of this, at the national, regional and communal levels in many Member States, more substantial public investments will be required to make the public services, above all healthcare systems, more resilient and performing during crises.

This applies to higher staff levels and better employment and work conditions (including higher pay for many underpaid jobs) as well as to up-to-speed equipment and modern facilities. Many healthcare systems as well as further services have been overwhelmed by the Corona crisis and partially even dysfunctional, but are obviously of systemic relevance for societies and economies.

In this context the previous privatisation of certain healthcare and further public services in many Member States should be reconsidered. Even expensive re-communalisations should be no taboo where it is found that private services with profit orientation have not delivered sufficient quality or have not protected adequately their employees and patient- and customer-citizens.

It is the public sector which is 'essential'. Sustainable societies depend on strong and efficient public services. Expenditures in public services are not merely costs, they are investments in the future.