



Coronavirus: Commission presents practical guidance to ensure the free movement of critical workers

Brussels, 30 March 2020

Today, the Commission has issued new practical advice to ensure that mobile workers within the EU, in particular those in critical occupations to fight the coronavirus pandemic, can reach their workplace. This includes but is not limited to those working in the health care and food sectors, and other essential services like childcare, elderly care, and critical staff for utilities. Together with the [Guidance](#) on the implementation of the temporary restriction on non-essential travel to the EU also issued today, this responds to requests made by EU leaders on 26 March and seeks to address practical concerns of citizens and companies affected by the measures taken to limit the spread of the coronavirus, as well as of national authorities implementing the measures.

While it is understandable that Member States have introduced internal border controls to limit the spread of the coronavirus, it is imperative that critical workers are able to reach their destination without delay.

Nicolas **Schmit**, the Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, said: *"Thousands of women and men working hard to keep us safe, healthy and with food on the table need to cross EU borders to go to work. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that they are not hindered in their movement, while taking every precaution to avoid further spread of the pandemic."*

The [guidelines](#) published today identify a range of workers that exercise critical occupations, and for which continued free movement in the EU is deemed essential. The list provided in these guidelines is not exhaustive. Examples include health associate professionals, child and elderly care workers, scientists in health-related industries, those needed to install critical medical devices, firefighters and police officers, transport workers, as well as persons working in the food sector. The Commission urges Member States to establish specific burden free and fast procedures to ensure a smooth passage for such frontier workers, including proportionate health screening.

Beyond these specific categories of workers, the guidelines also clarify that Member States should allow frontier workers in general to continue crossing borders if work in the sector concerned is still allowed in the host Member State. Member States should treat cross border workers and national workers in the same manner.

As regards seasonal workers, particularly in the agricultural sector, Member States are asked to exchange information on their different needs at technical level and to establish specific procedures to ensure a smooth passage for such workers, in order to respond to labour shortages as a result of the crisis. Seasonal workers in agriculture perform in certain circumstances critical harvesting, planting and tending functions. In such a situation, Member States should treat those persons as critical workers and communicate to the employers the necessity to provide for adequate health and safety protection.

These guidelines complement the recently adopted [Guidelines for border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential services](#) as well as the [Guidance on the implementation of the temporary restriction on non-essential travel to the EU](#) which were also presented today.

The Commission will continue to identify the best practices with Member States which can be extended to all Member States for allowing workers to exercise their crucial occupations without undue hindrance.

Background

The coronavirus pandemic has led to the introduction of unprecedented measures across EU Member States, including reintroduced checks at the internal borders.

Frontier workers, posted workers as well as seasonal workers live in one EU country but work in another. Many of them are crucial for their host Member States, for instance for the health care system, the provision of other essential services including the setting up and maintenance of medical equipment and infrastructure, or ensuring the supply of necessity goods. A coordinated approach at EU level is therefore key.

On 26 March, the Heads of State or government stated: "We will urgently address, with the assistance of the Commission, the remaining problems concerning EU citizens blocked at internal EU borders and prevented from returning to their home countries and cross-border and seasonal workers who have to be able to continue essential activities while avoiding further spread of the virus." These guidelines presented today are the Commission's immediate response to this call, alongside the [Guidance on the implementation of the temporary restriction on non-essential travel to the EU](#) which include the repatriation of EU citizens.

For More Information

[Communication of 27 March presenting "Guidelines concerning the exercise of the free movement of workers"](#)

[Coronavirus website](#)

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