



Covid-19 crisis

The European construction sector calls for urgent measures to protect workers' health, support economic activity and accelerate the recovery

March 2020

Facing the Covid-19 outbreak, the world is fighting a pandemic of unprecedented proportions in modern times, currently causing a full-blown health emergency.

We, the undersigned European associations, represent the construction sector, an industry worth 9% of the EU GDP and employing more than 16 million Europeans. In light of these difficult times, we wish to reiterate our commitment to supporting public authorities as well as our dedication to our most fundamental asset, our workers' wellbeing.

From an economic and industrial point of view, the situation is unprecedented and could have extremely damaging and long-term effects. It has the potential of exhausting companies' cash flow and cripple the construction value-chain for years to come, crushing the millions of SMEs, the large businesses and industrial entities alike.

Member States are putting in place different measures to slow down and end the spread of Covid-19. In some countries, such measures allow the continuation of construction activities and ensure the health and safety of workers, whilst others are limiting economic activities to those considered as "essential".

Some of these essential services are provided by the construction sector, such as maintenance of critical infrastructure, proper functioning of water, electricity and gas supply systems for buildings and hospitals. Indeed, problems like water leak can worsen home confinement and need to be repaired promptly.

A performing construction supply chain is crucial for maintaining the activity, with proper health and safety conditions. It is therefore essential to guarantee the circulation of construction products; equipment and provision of services in full respect of the instructions delivered by public health authorities.

In this context, we call upon public authorities to take into account the scale of the disruptions to our sector and to prevent the foreseen economic downturn from becoming a meltdown of historic proportions with far-reaching social consequences.

Indeed, before thinking about medium- and long-term measures, short-term provisions are urgently required to protect Europe's most labour-intensive value-chains, thereby allowing for a rebound to happen as soon as the health crisis will be over.

We therefore urge the European institutions and the European Member States to act in full coordination to:

- Put in place required and tailor-made health and safety measures, protocols and guidelines with the active involvement of relevant stakeholders, allowing employers to guarantee the required level of workers' protection
- Support the construction supply chain by putting in place measures allowing the efficient functioning of the EU internal market. In this respect, we welcome the Communication of the European Commission on the implementation of the Green Lanes under the Guidelines for border management measures;
- Carry out massive support and stimulus programmes. These actions must not be limited to a few iconic sectors of strategic or political importance that may need full bailouts, but crucially to those job providers such as construction that must also receive the full attention of the authorities;
- Ease the administrative burden and the conditions for employers to implement temporary unemployment measures.

Finally, we ask the European Commission to open a dialogue as soon as the circumstances allow it, in order to jointly identify and implement appropriate measures to limit the downturn and facilitate a rapid recovery of all construction activities.