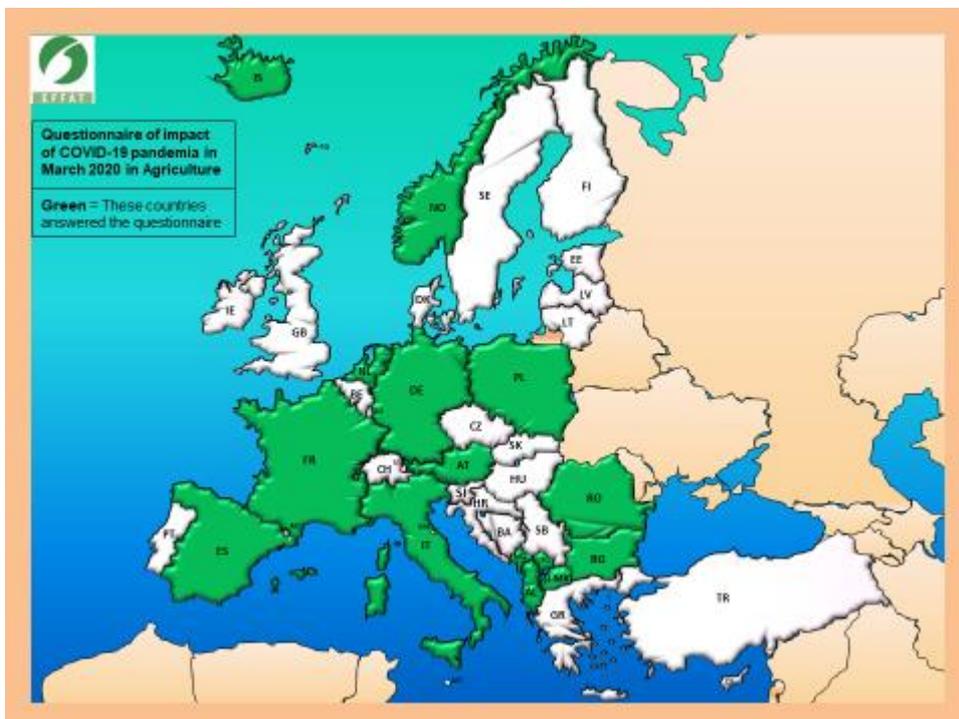


**RESULTS OF A SURVEY OF THE EFFAT AGRICULTURAL SECTOR  
ON THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC  
END OF MARCH 2020**

EFFAT surveyed its members the third week of March 2020 and received responses from the following 15 countries: Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Kosovo, Montenegro, Netherlands, Northern Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Romania and Spain.



These countries cover over 90% of seasonal workers in Europe and provide a representative cross-section for the survey.

## SUMMARY

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries have adopted measures which have a major impact on the agricultural labour market. A characteristic feature of this sector is that a large part (about 40%) of the approximately 10 million employees work across borders and seasonally. The most significant sectoral changes result mainly from the following:

- border regime (closures, controls, obstacles)
- amendment of labour laws and working time regulations
- closure of businesses
- encouraging workers to take up work in the agricultural sector as seasonal workers to replace foreign seasonal workers

Italy and Albania have been especially affected by these changes during the reporting period (March 2020), while in the Netherlands, the flower sector has already been severely impacted. In particular, the countries of origin of seasonal workers (Bulgaria, Poland and Romania) and the workers themselves are severely affected.

Attempts are being made to classify the agricultural sector as systemically important and to secure the supply of food to the population.

The number of seasonal workers from the main origin countries (Bulgaria, Poland and Romania) has fallen massively and in some cases has come to a standstill. The main reasons for this are the different border regimes of countries including transit countries, coupled with the understandable fear of seasonal workers over contracting the virus while working and perhaps not even being permitted to return to their home country.

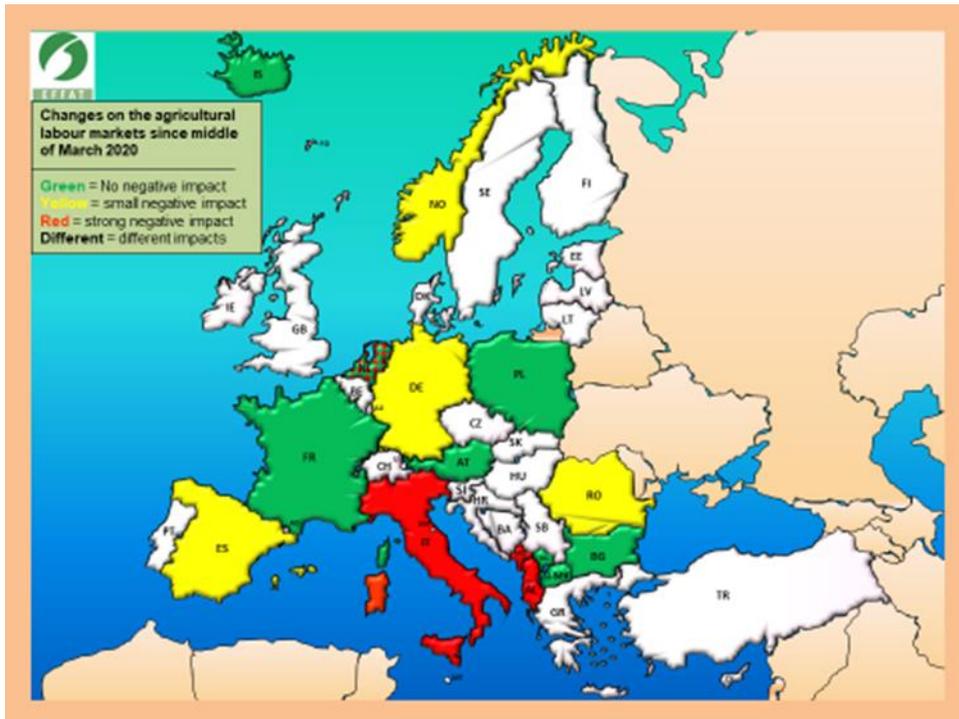
The absence of these seasonal workers has a significant impact on holdings and employment in the destination countries (mainly France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Norway). The harvest can only be partially carried out with non-sectoral replacement workers, resulting in considerable losses for the affected farms, which in turn has a negative impact on the employment of local workers, jeopardising the supply to the population of products to which they are accustomed.

This development is associated with the risk that the agricultural labour market will be negatively affected and downstream sectors (especially the food processing industry) will be disturbed as well. This development must therefore be the focus of further observations.

Widespread reduction of workers' rights has not been observed, although individual cases are being reported.

Overall, agricultural trade unions are in close dialogue with governments and employers to develop appropriate protection and adjustment rules for workers and the sector.

## 1. HOW HAVE JOBS IN THE NATIONAL ECONOMY CHANGED OVER THE LAST TWO WEEKS?



### **Albania**

In the national agricultural sector, many workers have lost their jobs. The spread of COVID-19 is causing drastic economic and social decline in all sectors, affecting workers and their rights. Some workers have been quarantined and jobs and working hours in the food industry have also been reduced.

### **Bulgaria**

No negative developments have been observed so far. Many of the national seasonal workers have not yet left the country this year. The food supply of the population is secured.

### **Germany**

Particularly dramatic is the shortage of seasonal workers, mainly from abroad, many of whom have not travelled to Germany amid the uncertainty and fear surrounding COVID-19.

The new hygiene requirements for employees must be implemented comprehensively and everywhere in order to protect employees and businesses.

The contact ban from 24 March 2020 onwards entails new restrictions, some of which are difficult to implement on agricultural holdings. Agricultural service companies (contractors, insemination stations, etc.) are also affected by these developments.

Protective regulations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic often encounter problems in complying with health and safety regulations (e.g. distance regulations when working with animals). For this reason, trade unions are advocating rapid clarification of conflicting standards.

The government is trying to replace seasonal workers with local workforce. It is also considering opening seasonal agricultural work to refugees. For trade unions,

compliance with the regulations on health and safety at work and full compliance with the collective agreements in agriculture are of paramount importance.

### **France**

The development of jobs in agriculture has been stable over the last two weeks.

### **Iceland**

Not in any substantial way.

### **Italy**

Although it is still too early for a precise assessment, agriculture is maintaining the supply of food to the population.

Given the existing problems arising from COVID-19, unions have promoted smart working, for office work and bureaucratic formalities, while for open and closed environments, unions and workers must follow the provisions of the protocol introduced by the Italian government on 14 March 2020.

### **Kosovo**

Workers in the Ministry are regularly paid by the Ministry. Farmers and agronomists continue to work, despite the danger posed by the virus.

### **Montenegro**

Jobs in agriculture are seriously threatened as a result of COVID-19. The reason for this is that the government passed a decree stating that all jobs will be cut and some terminated. Employees abroad received information as to whether they would like to be repatriated to Montenegro. They shall be subject upon return to the prescribed protective procedures against COVID-19 (15-day quarantine).

### **Netherlands**

Very different for each subsector. Flower growing and flower auctions have been hit particularly hard by the suspension of exports.

### **North Macedonia**

Agricultural workers, especially those in open fields, continue to work in accordance with the government's recommendations and measures for farmers in a state of emergency.

The biggest problem is the sale of lamb, and the Ministry of Agriculture is working hard to find a solution. Exports to Italy are impeded due to transport difficulties. The Ministry is in constant communication with buyers and, in addition to traditional markets such as Italy, Croatia and Greece, other alternative markets for lamb exports are being sought.

The transport of goods is not prohibited and is carried out under special security protocols. The Macedonian Foreign Ministry is currently working with the foreign ministries of other countries on a joint transport protocol that will allow for a smooth flow of goods.

The government has imposed an export ban on wheat and flour in order not to disrupt the country's market situation and to provide sufficient quantities of flour to the country given the growing market demand for these products.

Spring sowing of maize and sunflowers is underway and should continue without interruption. The government's recommendations during the state of emergency must also

be followed in this area. Agricultural pharmacies will not be closed. The procurement of animal feed by regulating transport protocols will proceed smoothly. The same applies to the supply of raw materials.

For security reasons, cattle markets are currently closed. Consignments of animals may be covered only if the animals are properly identified and accompanied by a valid animal health certificate.

Agricultural products can be sold on green markets, but it is of course important to comply with government recommendations regarding hygiene, respect for social distancing and reasonable prices.

### **Norway**

Due to the current situation, Norwegian agriculture is facing issues in recruiting enough workers for the agricultural sector.

### **Austria**

Discussions are underway to make it easier for foreign workers to cross the border. This especially concerns workers from Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia. Travel arrangements have already been made in the care sector to bring seasonal workers into the country (here with Romania). This is also an issue for the agricultural sector. At present, attempts are being made to mobilise temporary harvest workers from the unemployment sector, but these are only of limited use.

### **Poland**

The employment situation of agricultural workers has been stable over the last two weeks, although there have been significant deficiencies in agricultural employment following the announcement of the state of epidemic in Poland. Many workers have received a 14-day care allowance for the closure of kindergartens and crèches, which has now been extended for a further 14 days.

This is only the first phase of the epidemic in Poland. Changes will continue to be felt in April. Demand for food products is predicted to increase, as the population increases its stocks, which will likely lead to an increase in demand for related work, especially in agricultural and food processing.

### **Romania**

As in all sectors, suspected cases of COVID-19 are preventing some agricultural workers from carrying out their agricultural activities during this period.

### **Spain**

Activity in the agricultural sector has not come to a standstill but is declining. Protocols are being implemented, but there are issues regarding the ability of workers to travel from home to work. If the current situation continues, the fall in employment may be significant.

In addition, if the borders remain closed, there may be problems in the agricultural labour market in certain agricultural seasons starting in April.

In open-air holdings, there are fewer problems with safety measures, social distancing and masks, but in greenhouses, it is more complicated. In the transport sector, it is difficult to comply with all health and safety protocols, especially social distancing.

While in marketing and horticultural companies, special attention is paid due the particularly high concentration of employees. At these sites, masks, gloves, inter-shift disinfections and distancing, in addition to strict access controls are being observed.

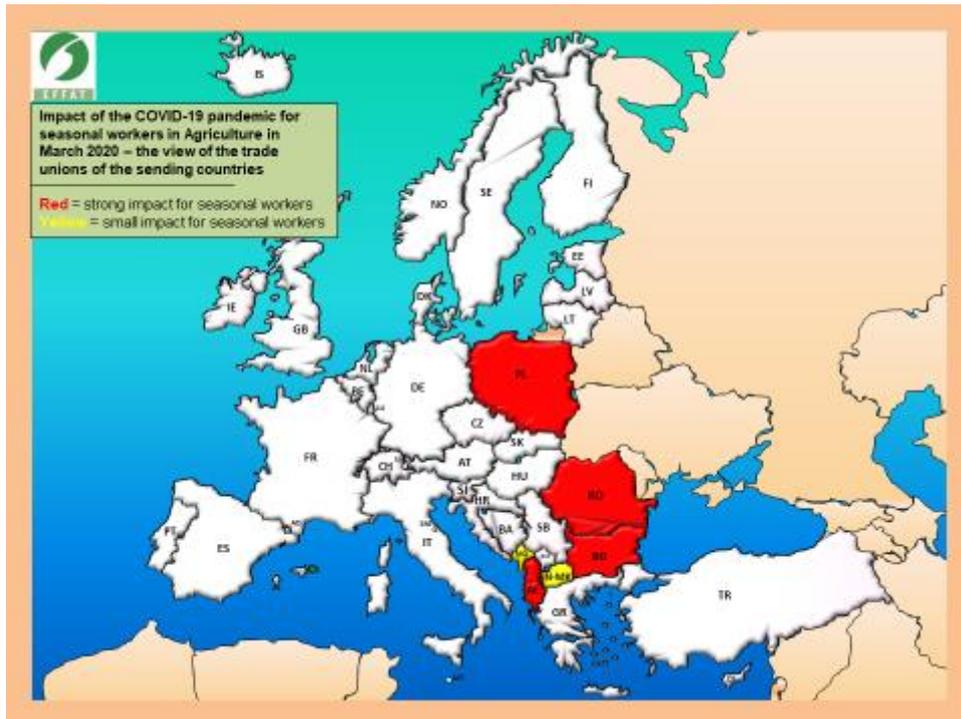
Various measures are proposed to halt the decline in employment:

- Record of Temporary Employment Regulation, reductions of working hours, measures to conciliate family life.
- There are companies in the forestry sector that are considering temporarily suspending their activities.
- Some companies have posted workers on compulsory leave.
- Other used formulas: flexible unemployment pockets.

Companies in the agricultural sector are currently operating with a certain degree of normality with security measures applied unevenly. The use of gloves and masks is not widespread because they are "in short supply".

According to the government decree, workers must travel from field to farm and/or production centre individually, which is a problematic requirement for largescale agricultural field work.

## 2. WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THE JOBS OF EMPLOYEES WHO TRADITIONALLY WORK IN OTHER COUNTRIES?



### **Albania**

Their number has fallen massively, for example in southern Italy and Greece.

### **Bulgaria**

Their numbers have dropped sharply. Many Bulgarian seasonal workers are "stuck" in the destination countries because various borders have been closed. Many seasonal workers have returned to Bulgaria to avoid getting stuck and/or infected. Overall, the market for seasonal work has been strongly hindered by the closed borders.

### **Germany**

In the German agricultural sector, only few employees work abroad.

### **France**

According to the FNSEA, border closures will lead to the loss of 10,000 seasonal jobs for workers from Poland, Romania and the Maghreb countries. The most affected sector is vegetable growing for radishes, cucumbers and asparagus.

### **Iceland**

There are no employees from Iceland who work in agriculture.

### **Italy**

Italy faces peculiar issues regarding cross-border trade with Switzerland and Austria, but these are currently guaranteed within the limits set by the prevention rules.

### **Kosovo**

Where no decision has yet been taken on the temporary closure of enterprises, workers are still working, albeit at risk.

## **Montenegro**

Not many employees traditionally work in other countries, so this problem is not manifest. In Montenegro, there are 40,000 foreign seasonal workers per year, of which 5,000-6,000 are in agriculture. At present, the problem has not arisen as seasonal work has not yet started, but the issue will surely appear in a few months.

## **Netherlands**

No reliable data is available yet.

## **North Macedonia**

Most of the seasonal workers from Macedonia who work in other countries - mainly in Northern Italy, Austria and Germany – began to return to Macedonia when the crisis broke out. The largest number of people affected by COVID-19 are seasonal workers who have returned from Italy. There is no exact number of seasonal workers from Macedonia in other countries, as most of them hold Bulgarian passports and register as Bulgarian nationals. We have no information on the jobs of these workers.

## **Norway**

Due to travel restrictions, it is not possible to rely on many migrant workers. Anyone entering from other countries will be quarantined for 14 days.

In this sector there is generally no migration of workers from Norway to other countries.

## **Austria**

In the Austrian agricultural sector, only few employees work abroad.

## **Poland**

Due to the corona virus pandemic, there is a decline in activity. The result is a reduction in the production activity of foreign businesses (e.g. in Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic in the case of workers from the Opole Region).

We have no information on the number of workers returning from other countries, but there is a significant return of emigrants to their permanent residence, causing great difficulties at the borders, as a 14-day quarantine has been introduced for these people.

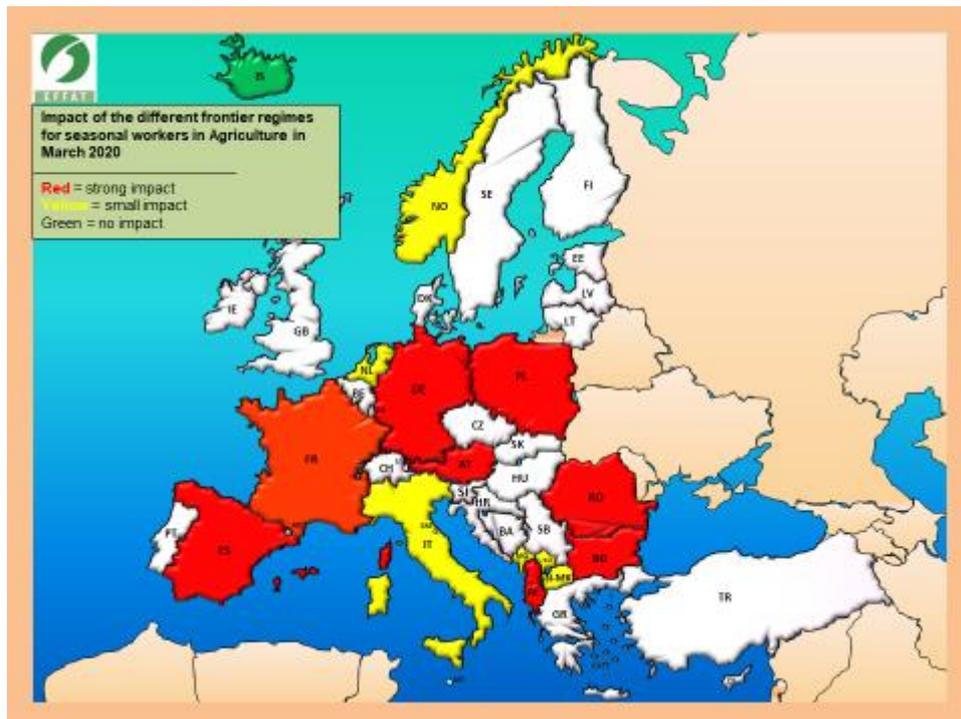
## **Romania**

A large number of employees working outside the country, particularly in countries such as Italy, Spain, France, Germany and the United Kingdom, had to return to Romania due to the widespread suspension of economic activity as a result of COVID-19. This has caused serious disruption to economic and social life.

## **Spain**

If border closings continue, it will affect thousands of EEA and third country (sub-Saharan) workers who would normally take part in the agricultural campaigns for strawberries and red fruit, stone fruit, sweet fruit, asparagus, etc. from March onwards.

### 3. WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF THE CLOSURE OF BORDERS ON SEASONAL CROSS-BORDER WORKERS?



#### **Albania**

The border shutdown had negative repercussions and led to rising unemployment. Some seasonal workers returned before the closure, while others remained stranded at the borders.

#### **Bulgaria**

Many Bulgarian seasonal workers are "stuck" in destination countries as various borders have been closed. Many others returned to Bulgaria to avoid getting "stuck" and/or infected. Overall, the seasonal work market has been massively hindered by border closings.

#### **Germany**

The closing of borders is the second main hinderance to seasonal work in Germany, besides the fear of infection due to inadequate hygiene standards in companies. The increasing shortage of seasonal workers jeopardizes the economic basis of many agricultural holdings. The supplying of the population with enough food is not endangered.

#### **France**

Many have stayed at home.

#### **Iceland**

No impact so far. There are currently no seasonal workers. If border closures are still in force in late summer or autumn, some impact will be noticeable.

#### **Italy**

There is a risk that not enough workforce will be available for seasonal harvesting campaigns.

The border closures could hinder this kind of seasonal activity, which is currently carried out by foreign workers. It could lead to reduced harvesting activities in horticulture, floriculture and nurseries.

### **Kosovo**

Seasonal workers impacted by border closings run the risk of having no income for themselves and their families (perhaps the whole family relies on this income).

### **Montenegro**

The shortage of foreign labour is likely to require a greater commitment from existing local labour.

### **Netherlands**

Some seasonal workers have returned to their home countries. Consequently, seasonal work could possibly be carried out by non-sectoral replacement workers.

### **North Macedonia**

About 2,500 Macedonian citizens remained in other countries after the closure of not only the Macedonian border on 16 March 2020, but also that of various borders in the region and in Europe.

The government has given these citizens the opportunity to come back on humanitarian flights. They are legally obliged to accept a 15 day-quarantine upon their return. The flight ticket is borne by the traveller, while accommodation costs, the transport to/from the airport and food are covered by the state budget.

The government required the Ministry of the Interior to provide a personal statement to anyone leaving the country.

### **Norway**

Normally the supply of labour is sufficient, but this will not be the case with closed borders.

### **Austria**

The border regime is currently still very difficult. Some relief is expected though.

### **Poland**

As a result of stricter border crossing regulations for workers employed abroad, every worker crossing the Polish border (on entry or exit) is subject to a mandatory 14-day quarantine and will not work during this period. Terminations of employment contracts and dismissals of employees working abroad have been reported.

The border closures are a major obstacle to the workers' freedom of movement in neighbouring countries, i.e. Germany and Czech Republic. The situation is difficult for daily commuters (border crossers), if the Poles live in Germany and work in Poland or vice versa and commute to work every day.

The tightening of the provisions on freedom of movement has prompted some 20,000 agricultural workers from Ukraine and Belarus to return to their home countries.

### **Romania**

The situation is dramatic as people can no longer move freely. They must stay locked up at the border, suffering thus from a real physical and psychological trauma.

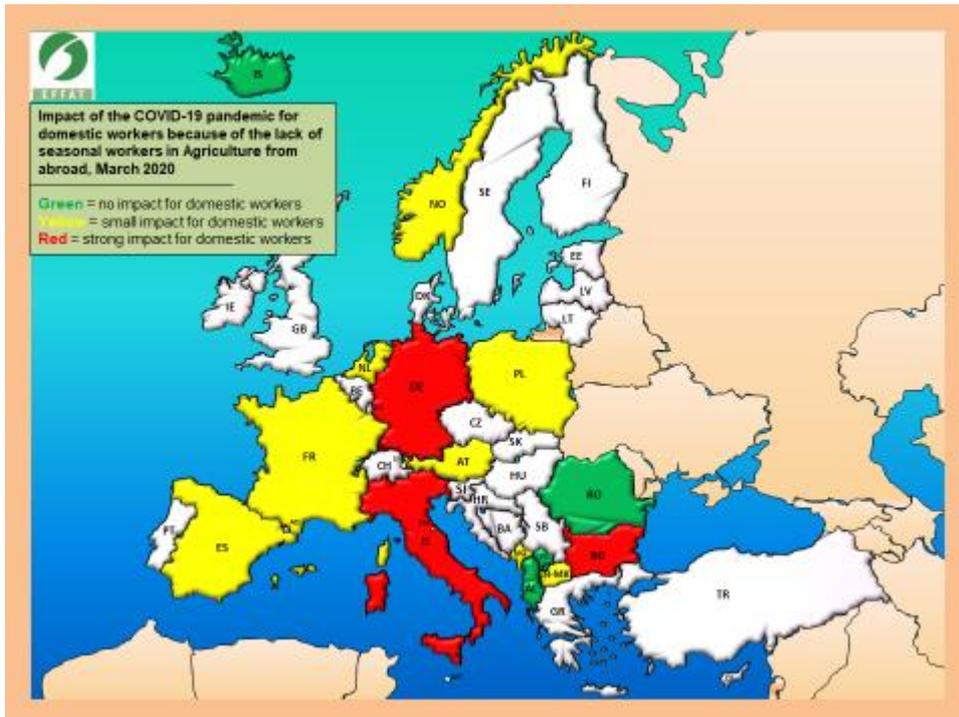
Moreover, in some situations, seasonal workers have been placed in quarantine by the authorities.

### **Spain**

The closure of borders will strongly affect the strawberry and red fruit harvest campaigns. Nowadays, 60% of the expected workforce from Morocco is still lacking.

If border closings continue, it will affect thousands of EEA and third country (sub-Saharan) workers who would normally take part in the agricultural campaigns for strawberries and red fruit, stone fruit, sweet fruit, asparagus, etc. from March onwards.

#### 4. HOW DOES THE LACK OF FOREIGN SEASONAL WORKERS AFFECT THE LOCAL WORKFORCE?



##### **Albania**

The number of foreign workers in national agriculture is insignificant.

##### **Bulgaria**

No information on this matter yet; it will be available in the upcoming weeks.

##### **Germany**

Products (starting with asparagus in March) must not rot in the fields. The image of agricultural work will suffer even more as a result of this crisis and will discourage young people from taking up agricultural work. However, this crisis also brings out that agriculture must be developed sustainably and cannot be built on cheap labour.

##### **France**

The shortage of seasonal workers will affect agricultural holdings in the upcoming weeks. Employers hope to make up for this shortage with a larger French workforce.

##### **Iceland**

No.

##### **Italy**

Although it is still too early for a precise assessment, we see that Covid-19 and the resulting borders' closure jeopardise more than a quarter of the agri-foodstuffs collected in the countryside by some 370,000 regular workers who come from abroad every year. Further problems are expected.

##### **Kosovo**

There are not many foreign seasonal workers in Kosovo.

## **Montenegro**

In Montenegro, there are not many seasonal workers from other countries.

## **Netherlands**

The full scope of the impact is not clear at present. Therefore, attempts are being made to place workforce from a sector (without work) in sectors with few workers.

## **North Macedonia**

Most foreign seasonal workers in Macedonia come from Albania, especially in the southwest of the country, in the Ohrid, Struga and Prespa regions. Following the border closures of Macedonia and Albania, these seasonal workers returned to their home country. As these seasonal workers are mostly undeclared workers, their exact number as well as their impact on the local workforce remains unknown so far.

Foreign citizens from medium and high-risk countries (see WHO list) are denied entry into North Macedonian territory.

## **Norway**

The demand for workers in the green sector will be high in the upcoming 6-8 months. Recruiting Norwegians in this sector will prove difficult as wage levels are quite low, and work can be physically demanding.

## **Austria**

Companies are not at risk yet. Austria started negotiations on equal access for foreign seasonal workers at a very early stage. There are many initiatives to get Austrian workers into agriculture, but not all of them have proved successful so far.

## **Poland**

Employers offer higher wage rates for national seasonal workers. Without their work it is difficult for them to fulfil their contracts. Despite such financial incentives, there is a problem with the recruitment of employees who would like to take up seasonal work.

Seasonal workers compensated for the shortage of personnel in domestic enterprises, and currently we can observe a decline in production and its suspension due to the break in cooperative and financial relations both at home and in the foreign exchange markets, which leads to production stoppages, breaches of contracts and, consequently, a reduction in employment.

## **Romania**

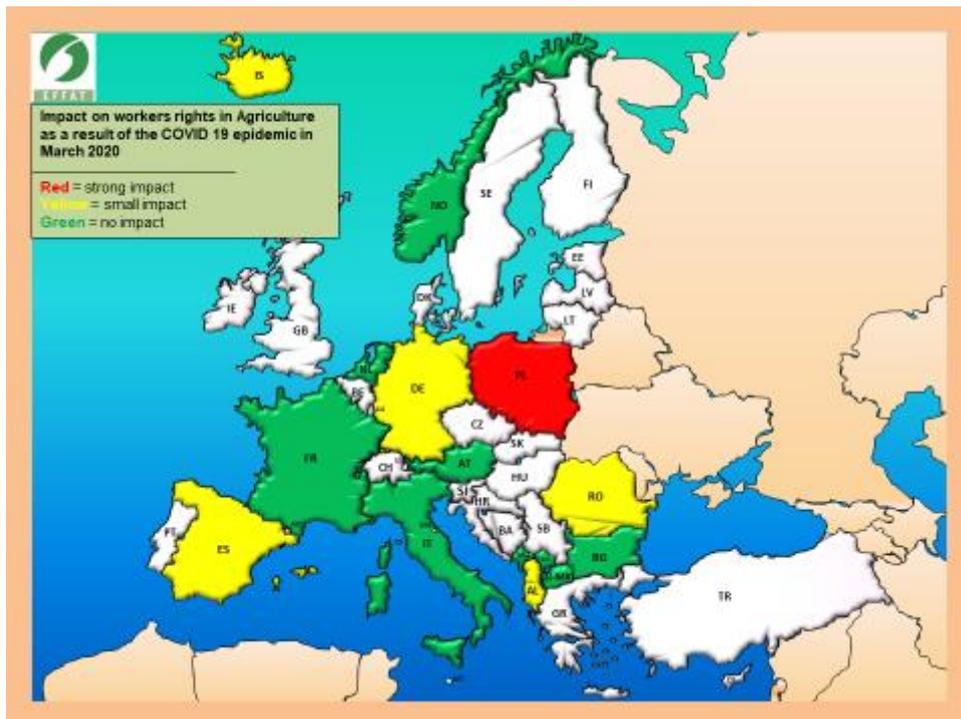
There are very few foreign seasonal workers in Romania, and they are slightly affected.

## **Spain**

The harvesting campaigns that require the most labour have not begun yet. Only in the case of the strawberries and red fruits campaign (raspberries, blackberries and blueberries) will the absence of the Moroccan workers be noticed.

If the situation continues over time, it will have an impact on the stone fruit, sweet fruit and asparagus harvest, which involves a large number of seasonal workers from EEA countries (Romanians, Bulgarians, Poles, etc.) and sub-Saharan workers (Senegal, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Morocco, Algeria, etc.).

## 5. ARE THERE ATTEMPTS TO CURTAIL WORKERS' RIGHTS?



### **Albania**

Minimizing the spread of COVID-19 is important to ensure the employees' safety. Measures have halved the number of employees. Many food processing companies have limited the number of employees to prevent the spread. They have now extended working hours.

Other measures have been taken by the government to ensure social distancing and to improve hygiene measures (use of protective equipment such as masks, gloves).

### **Bulgaria**

No.

### **Germany**

Working time regulations were changed. The enforcement of collective bargaining agreements is therefore of paramount importance.

### **France**

Not particularly. Our organisation, in conjunction with the MSA funds, the FNSEA and the Ministry of Agriculture, is very involved in the fight against illegal employment.

### **Iceland**

There is a trend towards dismissing people with a contractually agreed time frame.

### **Italy**

The agreement between the government, employers' organisations and trade unions provides that no worker may be dismissed based on COVID-19, for two months.

Workers' unions implement agreements or protocols with the employers' organisations on safety and the management of coronavirus crises; as freedom of movement is restricted, the instruments provided for in the agreement and the exceptional governmental measures can be used.

## **Kosovo**

It is still too early for a precise assessment, especially in the private sector, as workers no longer work as a result of COVID-19; this month's payments were offered to them though.

## **Montenegro**

At present, there is no information on the violation of employee rights as defined by law and the Statute.

## **Netherlands**

We are taking stock and have not received any reports yet.

## **North Macedonia**

The Government declared a national emergency for a period of 30 days from 18 March 2020 onwards ; a ban/special regulation on movement on the territory from 21.00 to 05.00 on the following day and on weekends from 16.00 to 05.00; a ban on gatherings of more than 5 people, in parks and other public areas. The government also implemented further measures.

Companies comply with all government measures and there is no report on curtailments of workers' rights.

## **Norway**

Agriculture is one of the few sectors in Norway where the state has made the collective agreement generally binding, so this should not be a problem.

## **Austria**

No.

## **Poland**

An anti-crisis package called "Anti-Crisis Shield" was introduced, which, among other things, was based on unfavorable solutions for the workers:

1. restrictions on uninterrupted daily and weekly rest periods,
2. the introduction of a system of equivalent working time, allowing an extension of daily and weekly working time,
3. the application of less favorable employment conditions to workers than those resulting from employment contracts
4. a provision that is unfavourable to trade unions, which allows employers (after only a two-day consultation period) to make arrangements for job protection benefits themselves.

The situation calls for vigorous measures to safeguard jobs. The is dramatic and the rapid rise in unemployment is increasing the misery of families. This can lead to the breaking of social ties, street demonstrations and so on.

## **Romania**

There have been several violations of workers' rights. Some employees were sent home even though they had a valid employment contract and pay taxes in the countries where they work. There are cases of workers deprived of their salaries due to the impact of COVID-19 on their employers. Moreover, workers have been abandoned by employers without the possibility of returning to the country immediately.

## **Spain**

Cases of violation of workers' rights will clearly occur, consequently the presence of organised class unions in the companies is essential.

In this situation, trade unions try to protect the most vulnerable groups, such as:

- national workers, who are unprotected both in terms of their health and in terms of termination of employment (without receiving any benefits).
- people of foreign nationality who may lose their residence permits as a result of the termination of their contracts; they must be protected, and the asylum and humanitarian aid system must be maintained without paralyzing them.
- workers whose contracts are terminated when companies cease their activities;
- workers employed through a temporary employment agency or a multiservice company; to provide them with unemployment benefits and employment once the crisis is over.

These measures should be applied to seasonal workers in the agri-food industry and to seasonal workers in the hotel and catering sector who will lose their jobs.

## **6. WHAT DEMANDS DO TRADE UNIONS HAVE?**

### **Albania**

Employees were urged to implement the measures taken by the government on occupational health and safety by resorting to social distancing, hygiene measures, gloves, masks, etc. Greenhouses should apply the rules strictly, given their important role in supplying the market with seasonal products. This is supported by the government, which obliges retail chains to buy local food and prohibits the import of food and live animals from contaminated areas.

The protection of workers' health and incomes as well as the preservation of jobs have priority. The government's financial support package provides for workers to receive social security benefits until the end of the crisis. Trade unions provide workers with information and advice through social media in order to protect them during the crisis.

### **Bulgaria**

Since 13 March 2020, Bulgaria has been in an exceptional situation and a state of emergency has been announced, with a 2-week quarantine. Nine measures have been put into practice, including the closure of schools, universities and public events; all other establishments except pharmacies and food markets were also closed for two weeks. Borders were shut down as well.

There was an immediate and intensive discussion between social partners and institutions regarding the matter. Trade unions took an active part in it and declared concrete measures that focus on workers' jobs and incomes. These included: giving priority to hospitals and medical staff, promoting teleworking and reorganising the work process in accordance with the current restrictive measures. Changes to the working framework have been proposed and are now being discussed, and our aim is to defend not only incomes but also jobs.

At the beginning of the crisis, FNSZ published a press release on its website, drawing attention to its vulnerable sectors and member organisations:

- 1) FNSZ declared its full support for the measures taken by the State/institutions.
- 2) It called on the government and the sectoral responsible employers' organisation to take joint action to protect the workers' health and safety and to ensure that labour rights are respected in every workplace.
- 3) It called on its activists and workers to cooperate in implementing health and safety measures and to report when basic hygienic measures, medical personnel, masks, instructions, etc. are lacking.

It is thus a first communication from FNSZ to its MO, showing solidarity and sharing information on the involved labour rights (according to legislation and collective agreements) as well as instructions on how to behave during the COVID-19 crisis.

FNSZ immediately urged occupational health and safety councils and groups to disseminate information and raise awareness about personal protective equipment.

Trade unions also have homework; they are on the spot to give regular information and answer questions on working rights.

So far, as officially stated by the government:

1. The state is ready to face the crisis - there are fiscal and financial buffers and enough resources to ensure the functioning of the society. The expected loss of revenues in the state budget is estimated at around BGN 3 billion (EU 1.5 billion). Priority will now be given to investments in medical equipment, sanitary materials and support for the people on the front lines - doctors, medical staff, police and control institutions' personnel.
2. The most affected sectors are tourism, restaurants & hotels (hospitality), transport and logistics. Around 200,000 employees in the hotel, restaurant and catering industry will lose their jobs (according to employers' statistics).

The Parliament adopted a special law on emergency measures, whereby the State budget supports employers who have ceased their activities during the emergency by paying 60% of the labour costs/wage of their employees for the emergency period. The support comes from the unemployment fund. This measure could apply to any company affected by the coronavirus.

According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Bulgaria can manage the national food supply with its resources for the next 24 months.

Of course, the situation could completely differ in 1-2 months.

A quick analysis shows that the agricultural and food sectors as well as the processing industry could be the most important and fastest growing sectors in this crisis. The reasons for this are more than clear:

1. The nutrition of society is inevitable. Moreover, during the period of restriction measures, only food markets and pharmacies remain open. These are the only source of turnover.
2. Seasonal workers who traditionally migrate to other EU countries remain available on the local labour market. Big groups of seasonal workers are also coming back from the severely affected countries (Italy, France, Spain). They are put under specific quarantine out of precaution. In such cases, "Health Mediators" are very important in rising awareness among these communities. Those who remain in the countries with difficulties in the sector – are at highest risk of poverty and virus as well.
3. Workers who have left other sectors will be able to orient themselves to agriculture and to food related sectors and activities. There are already serious requests and proposals from employers in some branches which are characterised by manual labour - fruit and vegetables, food processing - to provide jobs to people from other sectors.

The opportunity to work in the sector - self-employment, family work, seasonal and temporary work - as well as to live in a non-urban environment - healthier, greener, less socially-connected and food-dependent - will finally open our eyes to the advantages/possibilities of working in the countryside and rural areas and doing both traditional and modern business.

4. In order to increase the attractiveness of agricultural jobs as an opportunity for employment and incomes, trade unions and employers' organizations must join forces to improve working conditions.

The dialogue between the social partners in the sector is very active. The exchange of information between the unions is also of paramount importance.

## Germany

The trade union pushed for the creation of comprehensive instruments to protect workers from dismissals and income cuts. This has largely been achieved.

The union informs workers about their rights and obligations and the new requirements due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It defended workers' rights against the government's plans to overextend the working time laws. The union is working to improve access for foreign seasonal workers and is pushing for clear compliance with the law and collective agreements. It also informs workers who take up temporary work in agriculture about their rights and obligations.

It pushes for a sharp adjustment of accommodation conditions (single rooms instead of collective accommodation) and transport for workers (private use of cars instead of small buses).

It is undisputed that the food supply must be guaranteed despite the corona pandemic. Almost 300,000 seasonal workers from Eastern Europe are deployed every year, at least 150,000 of them in the upcoming asparagus and strawberry season, and more than 200,000 people are also permanently employed in the agricultural sector. This means that half of the "farmers" in Germany are employees. Therefore, the value of agriculture in society must also be reflected in an appreciation of all workers: the reduction of labor rights in the course of the Corona pandemic is incompatible with this.

Trade unions demand measures and minimum standards in order to do justice to the systemically important employment in agriculture:

### *Occupational health and safety protection*

In order to prevent infection, it is imperative to respect social distancing as well as several hygiene requirements, such as regular hand washing and disinfection. Collective accommodations for harvest workers are unacceptable. Single rooms should be standard and should be used by a maximum of two people (for example, in the case of a couple).

Employers are responsible for ensuring that their seasonal workers are always able to comply with the required social distancing and hygiene rules. This also applies to accommodation with third parties.

Excessive working hours (more than ten hours) weaken the immune system and should not be allowed given the threat posed by the coronavirus, as demanded by the Farmers' Union and the Ministry.

Safety instructions and risk assessments must be carried out in the holdings while handling the coronavirus, and namely by health authorities or social security. Employees should also report any non-compliance to the authorities and inform the trade unions.

### *Appreciation and remuneration*

The current statutory minimum wage of 9.35 euros per hour for seasonal employment is the minimum. In addition, the union demands a noticeable hardship allowance for seasonal workers and the permanent staff in agricultural holdings, as workers are exposed to considerable health risks in view of the coronavirus.

The union also demands continued payment of wages in case of illness from the first day, even for short-term employment!

Work in agriculture must be upgraded by employers and governments for workers in all employment relationships.

Recruitment agencies are certainly helpful given the current labour shortage, but they should seriously consider wage and hygiene issues. The Ministry should be a role model here and supplement the site [www.daslandhilft.de](http://www.daslandhilft.de) with concrete references to applicable labour laws.

The extension of work permits for asylum seekers should be implemented for all sectors and on a permanent basis. A long-term perspective should be opened beyond the emergency aid demanded by asylum seekers in times of the corona pandemic.

All groups of workers in agriculture need a living wage and the prospect of a decent pension. Even before the pandemic outbreak, employers' associations sent the wrong signal to their employees by terminating the supplementary collective agreement on company pension schemes on 31 December 2020. The union demands the continuation of the generally binding collective agreement with significant improvements. The unreasonable demands made on employees by parts of the government and employers' associations during the corona pandemic show all too clearly how important it is for the active and systemically relevant dependent employees, whether seasonal or permanent employees, to organise themselves in trade unions. For their own health protection and for their financial security!

## **France**

Our trade union has informed its members about the impact of COVID-19 on the agricultural sector. Agricultural holdings and workers are encouraged by the authorities to maintain their activities in order to meet the food needs of the French population. Communication was also carried out to transmit travel certificates so that agricultural workers can maintain their activity in the French countryside.

## **Iceland**

We have demanded a comprehensive package from the government that will immediately pay unemployment benefits to everyone. A bill to this effect shall be presented to Parliament this week.

## **Italy**

In this time of crisis, the following is required:

- Support for employment as well as extraordinary redundancy provisions
- Increased vocational training to protect the health of managers, executives, staff, workers and to ensure that they all have a job that recognises their dignity
- Suspension of mortgage payments
- Extending the duration of the financing
- Supporting Italian excellence on the European market
- Advancing the payment of CAP premiums
- Activation of credit lines to support companies during this period of crisis, both in Italy and in Europe
- Contributing at European level to the assertion: "there is no food without soil".
- Unions have asked for a deferral of financial deadlines and for additional rules on social security, as well as support for permanent employees and especially for

seasonal workers. The government will issue a decree containing all these extraordinary measures.

- Unions have a protocol with employers on health and safety and health surveillance.

Attention is also needed at European level to achieve greater flexibility and focus on training, information and innovation in agriculture, including for management.

In line with EFFAT's suggestion, unions believe it would be useful to set up a monitoring unit at European level to simplify procedures, facilitate comparisons between countries that need to recruit seasonal workers for agricultural needs, and allow them to move around, their rights, health and dignity guaranteed.

Given the lack of respect for preventive measures to protect workers in the services which did not cease production, trade unions called on the government to take urgent action. On 14 March, social dialogue between the government, employers and workers' organisations led to the signing of a joint protocol setting out measures to combat, contain and minimise the spread of the Covid-19 virus in the workplace. These measures include:

- Maximising the use of smart working for activities that can be carried out at home or remotely
- Encouraging the use of paid leave, also through collective agreements
- Suspending the activities of company departments not indispensable to production
- Adopting security protocols against infection and, wherever this is not possible, respecting social distancing guidelines alongside the provision and use of personal protective equipment
- Thorough cleansing of workplaces and common rooms
- Restricting on-site staff movement to the necessary minimum
- Encouraging the signing of specific collective agreements for companies that are still operating.

The Protocol also contains measures on:

1. Information for employees;
2. Modes of access to the workplace for workers and contractors;
3. Cleaning and disinfection of work areas, personal hygiene arrangements, personal protective equipment, use of common areas (canteens, smoking areas, changing rooms, etc.);
4. Work organisation (shifts, smart working, business trips);
5. Managing the arrival and departure of workers; internal movements, meetings, internal events and training;
6. Handling a symptomatic person at work; health surveillance and the role of health and safety representatives;
7. Workplace committees for the implementation and monitoring of compliance with the Protocol.

Finally, in view of the urgent need to bolster the health care system and increase the number of intensive care facilities, trade unions have decided to donate some of their

own resources to the cause. They will also launch a call for donations so that all workers, pensioners and individuals will be able to contribute to their fund.

Trade unions have decided to ensure the availability of their services by keeping local offices open, but with restrictions on access and by individual appointment only. All offices have been rearranged and/or equipped to respect government measures and protect the health and safety of employees and all those visiting the premises.

On 16th March, the government approved the "Cura Italia" decree that invested 25 billion euros and mobilised 350 billion euros of funds. The measures include the deferral of the main financial deadlines, as well as support for the sectors most affected by the crisis (tourism, transport, sport, cinema and performing arts, press). Funds have also been mobilised to increase hospital capacity, recruit new medical staff and secure PPE (such as face masks).

Employment measures include:

- Postponement of most tax payment deadlines;
- Increasing the guarantee fund for SMEs to ensure access to loans;
- Further 5 billion Euro to extend the state-backed furlough scheme (cassa integrazione) to all companies (including companies with 1 employee);
- Exceptional one-off compensation of 600€ for self-employed, independent persons working in the performing arts and agriculture
- Up to 600€ childcare bonus and extraordinary paid parental leave;
- 100€ one-off extraordinary compensation for those working at their work place;
- 12 additional days of paid leave;
- Inclusion of quarantine days in the sick leave;
- A 60-day suspension of collective and individual dismissals for economic reasons.

## **Kosovo**

It is still too early for an accurate assessment.

## **Montenegro**

The trade union made a unique decision at the Confederation level that workers should abide strictly by the government's decision in order to protect their health and that of their families.

## **Netherlands**

Together with the employers' associations and the government, a package of measures is being worked on to ease the financial burden on companies and obtain liquidity so that jobs can be preserved. The measures will be announced this week.

## **North Macedonia**

In the absence so far of a substantive economic rescue package, Agro-Sindikato, as part of SSM, is demanding the government take all necessary measures to protect incomes, jobs and businesses, including:

- A moratorium on employment contract termination by employers on economic, organisational, technological, structural or similar grounds for a period of 60 days (a measure already taken by the Italian authorities to protect workers and insure against any potential abuses by businesses facing extraordinary pressures.)
- Full payment of wages facilitated by deferring compulsory social security contributions for up to six months.
- The deferral of loan instalments and reprogramming for six months for all employees, citizens and private sector companies.
- A guarantee that, in the public sector, all measures are in line with relevant provisions of the Labour Code and the sectoral collective agreement.
- The sectoral trade unions affiliated to the Macedonian Confederation of Trade Unions refuse to take any action outside of the framework of the Labour Code and public and private sectoral collective agreements that would result in lower wages for workers.

### **Norway**

Trade unions encourage employers to hire unemployed people, students and young people to do the necessary work in agriculture. Employment laws and regulations shall be respected. This is necessary for recruitments and to avoid social dumping.

### **Austria**

Information on occupational health and safety shall be provided, also for the new employees in the agricultural labour market.

### **Poland**

The union supports all efforts to contain the pandemic. The main objective is to minimise its spread in order to maintain the efficiency and effectiveness of the health care system.

Together with other institutions and associations, it is conducting an awareness and information campaign to reduce the risk of infection, by providing information in its IT network.

The union has drawn up an extensive list of demands:

- Full payment of wages; the employees' income shall remain unchanged.
- The need to increase public participation in financing the economic downturn and the reduction of working hours.
- Guaranteed Workers' Benefits Fund and the Labour Fund, previously established by the government for purposes other than their intended use, are considered important sources of financial support for many groups - the union highlights that this is clearly not the case.
- The union proposed to introduce provisions within the so-called "anti-crisis shield" that would allow taxpayers to deduct the contribution paid to the union in their annual tax return or find another solution to achieve a similar effect.

The union gave its opinion on the legislative acts adopted by the Sejm on 27 March 2020 (the introduction of measures to reduce the impact of the epidemic; measures to preserve jobs).

## **Romania**

There have been requests for support for the repatriation of seasonal workers, particularly those in Spain and Italy. The union has informed the competent authorities in Romania of their situation.

## **Spain**

To trade unions, the decline in economic activity is unprecedented, but its duration and intensity will depend on whether the contagion process of COVID-19 can be contained. In this area, both trade unions wish to express their support to the government and institutions for any action they may take to contain this pandemic.

At national level, a package of social and economic measures to preserve employment has been agreed between the representative trade unions, CC.OO. and UGT, and the employers' organisations CEOE (Spanish Confederation of Employers).

Trade unions have asked the government to couple the aid to businesses with the maintenance of jobs and to act against those who take advantage to lay off workers, which is clearly illegal.

The union provided for a system that simplified the suspension or reduction of working hours through the Temporary Employment Regulation Files (ERTE) to avoid redundancies. These measures, which were to apply retroactively, had to include the most vulnerable people, such as those who did not have sufficient contribution periods to receive unemployment benefits, and ensure the future recovery of the right to unemployment benefits for the workers affected by these files.

- In the case of ERTE, companies will not pay social security contributions.
- Flexibility in the ERES and ERTES files (Temporary Employment Regulation Files)
- That the award of unemployment benefits is not counted.
- Implementing the planned protocols in order to preserve the health, employment and rights of workers
- In addition to respecting social distancing and good hygiene practices, further measures were taken:
  - Shift-work with time intervals in-between to avoid overlaps,
  - ERTES in some cases, including people with pathologies, pregnant women and people with conciliation problems,
  - Distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE).