

Brussels, 15th May 2020

**JOINT DECLARATION OF THE
EUROPEAN SOCIAL PARTNERS OF AGRICULTURE
– GEOPA-COPA and EFFAT –
on the
DEPLOYMENT OF SEASONAL WORKERS
FROM EUROPEAN COUNTRIES IN THE EU**

The spread of COVID-19 in 2020 all over Europe constitutes a public health threat to all economic sectors, most of which remain at a standstill. However, critical services continue to operate while Member States implement coordinated measures to mitigate the consequences of the pandemic.

The agricultural sector is one of these essential sectors for the economy. Farmers and farm workers are now more important than ever, as they are obliged to produce and deliver across vast areas to ensure that the European food chain functions correctly for the benefit of consumers.

However, the risks of being infected by the virus directly affect the availability of workers, notably seasonal workers. Agricultural production is subject to natural cycles. As such, its production rhythms are characterised by peaks in the workload during the harvesting period. These rhythms lead to an inherent need for a highly flexible labour force.

Agriculture remains a major employment sector in the EU. In 2016, the total European agricultural workforce was made up of approximately 20.5 million people working on 10.3 million farms. It employed approximately 9.5 million full-time workers and accounted for almost 4% of total employment in the European Union.

Measures have already been taken in many EU countries to increase the labour supply in the agricultural and horticultural sectors. Nevertheless, during and after lockdown there will be even more work to do in the various agricultural subsectors as demand tends to increase during the summer months.

It will therefore be necessary to ensure that healthy seasonal workers who wish to travel to another EU Member State can exercise the right to move freely between countries as is stated in the European Commission guidelines on the matter¹.

To this end, the Employers' Group of Professional Agricultural Organisations in the European Union, Geopa-Copa, and the European Federation of Trade Unions in the Food, Agriculture and Tourism sectors, EFFAT, who represent the interests of agricultural sector employers and employees, agree that seasonal workers from the EU must be able to cross borders to attend their workplaces in the EU's agricultural sectors.

¹ Guidelines concerning the exercise of the free movement of workers during COVID-19 outbreak. C(2020) 2051 final. Guidance on the implementation of the temporary restriction on non-essential travel to the EU, on the facilitation of transit arrangements for the repatriation of EU citizens, and on the effects on visa policy. C(2020) 2050 final.

In light of this, Geopa-Copa and EFFAT have drawn up the following concrete proposal:

ACTION PROPOSAL

Seasonal workers should have the possibility to come to work in other Members States, in which they do not reside, if the following prerequisites are met:

- There is a good exchange of information on the need for temporary labour, recognising that work in agricultural sectors should be regarded as an essential activity and that work-related transport to the Member State should be in place.
- Employers in agriculture and horticulture will contact the potential labour force by telephone or by email. An employee's certificate (COVID-19 – crucial sector) will be sent to workers in their home country by e-mail as well as a document from the employer stating that they will employ the persons in question. Upon submitting these documents, these workers will be guaranteed free access to the host country in accordance with the Communication of the European Commission (doc.2020/C 1021/02 – Official Journal of the European Union, deadline: 30th March 2020). This will also be communicated to the border authorities.
- Employers must guarantee that social distancing and health and safety measures determined by national authorities are applied both in the working environment and in relation to accommodation.
- When transportation from the accommodation to the workplace is provided by the employer, it is necessary to ensure that before boarding the means of transportation, the body temperature of all workers is taken and masks, gloves and other hygiene equipment are provided.
- Employers must inform the workers in a language that they understand of the existing protection provisions using material provided by the competent authorities.
- Employers must provide workers, free of charge, with protective equipment (masks, gloves, etc.) and hygiene products (water, soap, detergent and disinfectant) in accordance with existing rules.
- Where employers are responsible for housing seasonal workers, they must guarantee that social distancing and all other health and hygiene rules are applied in accordance with the national standards.
- Employers must guarantee that seasonal workers' wages are in line with applicable collective agreements or national legislation.
- Employers must guarantee that seasonal workers are registered and insured in accordance with local social protection legislation and collective agreements.
- If any employees are thought to be presenting symptoms of COVID-19, the competent medical authorities shall be contacted immediately.

For Geopa-Copa



Joseph Lechner
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For EFFAT



Valentina Vasilionova
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