European Parliament

Research for TRAN Committee – Relaunching transport and tourism in the EU after COVID-19
Part II: Transport workers

KEY FINDINGS

- COVID-19 has had a huge impact on the transport sector, putting an estimated 2.3 million workers in the European Union at risk of losing their job.

- Each transport labour market sub-sector is called to address the challenges that the pandemic has created and exacerbated; ranging from ensuring health and safety of workers whilst in operation, addressing employment protection issues, securing repatriation of stranded workers abroad such as seafarers, and ensuring that the travel industry recovers as quickly as possible.

- Measures taken at the EU level focus on ensuring the continuity of cross-border transport, while reducing the spread of the virus, primarily by providing guidelines, implementing Green Lanes, and facilitating frontier workers' border crossing.

- The national responses have predominantly aimed to support the workers and the industry financially, for example via temporary tax exemptions and loan guarantees, as well as by relieving the administrative burden of the transport sector.

- General recommendations aim to re-launch the transport sector and ensure its attractiveness by creating better working conditions and harmonizing rules across Member States.

The present document is the executive summary of the thematic briefing on Relaunching transport and tourism in the EU after COVID-19 - Transport workers. The full briefing, which is available in English can be downloaded at: https://bit.ly/2RMWAph

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The impacts of COVID-19 on transport workers

This thematic briefing is part of a set of briefings focusing on the challenges the transport and tourism sectors face as a consequence of the pandemic. It focuses on the topic of transport workers, who have been particularly affected by the repercussions of COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused major disruptions in the transport industry. Transport-related jobs often require workers to be physically present and to interact with colleagues or passengers. Such jobs cannot be carried out remotely, thus requiring additional measures to curb the spreading of the virus. It is estimated that 2.3 million transport and storage workers in the European Union are put at risk losing their jobs due to the pandemic.

Urban transport workers experience many risks. The increase in road traffic due to the rise in e- commerce means an increase in their work load, with consequences in terms of fatigue. Furthermore, many of the food home delivery and ride-hailing platforms' workers do not receive personal protective equipment from the platforms, and are instead pressured into working under unsafe conditions. The use of digital technology, for example in e-ticketing, has been implemented to replace contact with passengers, but may be a concern for those with insufficient technological access.

Road transport workers suffer from the impacts of trade restrictions and travel bans. Unpredictable and long waiting times at borders, due in part to the additional controls carried out at national borders, have led to drivers being fined for violating driving time limitations. The temporary relaxation of the regulations on driving times and resting period increased the workload of drivers and led to an increased risk of fatigue and accidents.

Rail transport workers meet with hundreds of passengers every day. Unless social distancing measures are enforced, it is hard to carry out controls at railway stations while protecting personnel and passengers. In this regard, the Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) has adopted guidelines recommending that states implement measures to track passengers after a COVID-19 case has been identified.

At the beginning of the pandemic and due to travel restrictions, workers abroad such as seafarers were unable to be repatriated and were stranded across the globe. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) called for designating seafarers as essential workers, to allow them to keep operating under acceptable conditions. The European Commission has also promoted guidelines to ensure the safe transit of staff and passengers. Workers in the cruise industry are experiencing a different kind of problem. The hospitality cruise workforce is often not included in governmental job retention schemes. This has created animosity and confusion among workers of this sector who, if unwilling to return to their jobs, will cause longer recovery times for the industry.

Aviation is one of the most precarious sectors. Globally, direct aviation jobs are forecasted to fall by 4.8 million by the beginning 2022, resulting in a contraction of 43% when compared to the pre-pandemic situation. Most airline groups have already planned major cuts in personnel, despite governments devising schemes for subsidies, cash injections and loans to protect the sector.

Measures carried out at the EU and national level

To support transport workers, the EU adopted guidelines to ensure the continuity of the flow of goods while facilitating the safe movement of workers. The guidelines covered border management measures, the communication on the implementation of Green Lanes, and communication to support border crossing of frontier workers. Furthermore, the Transport Support Package constituting four legislative proposals was adopted to provide relief to the transport industry and to ensure the safety of its workers.

National responses are mostly comprised of financial support, tax exemptions, special fiscal packages, loan guarantees and cash transfers to alleviate the burdens on the transport industry and revive the sector. A common approach has also been to temporarily suspend bureaucratic procedures for renewing licenses, in order to relax the enforcement of administrative rules and ease the responsibilities borne by workers.

Recommendations for EU policy-makers

The thematic briefing provides recommendations to ensure a safer working environment, guarantee better job protections for workers, support labour market challenges and promote social standards that reverse the lack of attractiveness of the transport sector. The briefing also advocates:

- A stronger social dialogue between stakeholders, to ensure that a better enforcement of EU rules is achieved throughout all Member States;

- Safer working conditions and higher social standards to reverse the sector's unattractiveness, especially for the younger generation and women;

- The endorsement and adoption of legislation guaranteeing that workers, especially platform workers, are socially protected better;

- Sector-wide associations and organisations to address the labour market challenge, by sharing good practices and promoting dialogue and research on skills shortages and recruitment.

Some sector-specific recommendations focus on:

- Integrating public transport offers with on-demand sharing services and implementing proper contractual frameworks for workers of the platform economy;

- Adopting better conditions for road transport workers, with enhanced facilities for long haul transport;

- Implementing easier contact tracing via apps to protect railway workers in train stations;

- Reviewing the compliance of all foreign ships calling at European ports with the Maritime Labour Convention related to the working and living conditions of seafarers;

- Maintaining governmental aid for aviation, harmonizing travel protocols and facilitating safe traveling to resume air-services demand.

Further information

This executive summary will be available in the following languages: English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. The briefing, which is available in English, and the summaries can be downloaded at: https://bit.ly/2RMWAph

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