

COVID-19: No free movement of critical workers without adequate protection

- Pandemic highlights precarious working conditions for hundreds of thousands of cross-border and seasonal workers in the EU
- Member states must immediately enforce EU laws to protect all workers
- Calls on European Labour Authority and member states to step up labour inspections
- Coordination of social security systems must be revised urgently to ensure social security for all EU citizens

Breaches of EU law on employment rights and health and safety of cross-border workers need to be addressed urgently, say MEPs in the Employment and Social Affairs Committee.

On Tuesday, MEPs debated how safe cross-border labour mobility should be ensured with Josip Aladrović, Croatian Minister of Labour and Pension Systems, Nicolas Schmit, Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, and Jordi Curell Gotor, Interim Executive Director of the European Labour Authority.

MEPs are deeply concerned by reports about the precarious working conditions and lack of safety measures for cross-border, frontier and seasonal workers. They provide a vital workforce on farms in Germany, France and other member states and ensure food security across Europe but their rights are often denied. Members gave examples of the problems that workers in slaughterhouses in the Netherlands and France, and health workers from Romania and Bulgaria who are brought to Austria, are facing.

Although the vulnerable position of Europe's 1.9 million posted workers and 1.5 million cross-border workers has been an issue for a long time, the COVID-19-crisis is highlighting these problems even further. MEPs underlined that according to EU law, mobile and posted workers have to be treated in the same way as domestic workers. They called on the member states to step up labour inspections, where relevant jointly with the European Labour Authority, and to fully implement EU legislation regulating different aspects of [mobility](#), including [free movement](#), [posting of workers](#) and [social security coordination](#).

Coordinating social security systems is a matter of urgency Members of the Employment Committee also stressed that digitalizing procedures and applications could help to coordinate the different social security systems of national authorities to ensure social protection for all employees in the EU.

The EP-negotiating team on the [revision of EU legislation on the coordination of social security systems](#) also called on all actors to urgently [find a balanced solution](#) as a top priority in the social area.

Some speakers pointed to the responsibility that the agencies who recruit the mobile workers have and asked if more stringent measures are needed to better protect mobile workers in order to avoid them losing their houses together with their jobs. Real free movement is only possible if the workplace is safe, they said.

A recording of the debate is available by clicking [here](#).

Background The European Commission issued [guidelines](#) to ensure that mobile workers within the EU who qualify as critical workers in the fight against COVID-19 can reach their workplace. The agri-food sector is a key sector included in these guidelines, especially regarding seasonal workers.

The European Labour Authority (ELA) ensures that EU rules on labour mobility and social security coordination are enforced in a fair and effective way. On 5 May, Committee Chair [Lucia Āuriš Nicholsonov](#) expressed her deep concern about the vulnerable situation of critical workers during the COVID-19 crisis in a [letter to the ELA](#).

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[EP infopage: Social inclusion and security - Strengthening the EU's social dimension](#)

[EU-OSHA Guidance: COVID-19: Back to the workplace - Adapting workplaces and protecting workers](#)

[Working in another country: information on the rights of workers moving within the EU \(European Commission\)](#)

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