



ESC - SI response to the crisis relating to covid-19 in the socio-economic and labor sectors through social dialogue

SURVEY

This questionnaire is structured in 5 sections (for national institutions), with examples of the points to be taken into account in their responses, if relevant.

A) Measures with regard to workers in the formal and informal economy

Have specific measures been discussed and taken, inside or outside your institution, to protect workers' health (new regulations, preventive guides, control and surveillance procedures, etc.)? Have practical problems arisen for their application (lack of adequate technical advice, difficulties in providing protective equipment, etc.)? Have measures been taken to strengthen the reconciliation of work and family life, such as the care of minors or dependents? What is / was the specific role and responsibilities of your CES / SI?

The state of emergency in the Republic of Serbia, caused by the pandemic of the COVID 19 virus, was introduced on 15 March 2020, by the decision signed by the President of the Republic, the Speaker of the National Assembly, and by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Serbia. On 16 March 2020, the Government of the RoS passed the Decree on the organization of work by the employers during the state of emergency by which the employers were obliged to enable their employees to do their jobs outside their respective premises by teleworking and working from home, to wit at all the workplaces at which it was possible to organize such work in compliance with the company bylaw and the employment contracts.

The employers, the nature of the activity of whom does not enable organization of the work from home, needed to harmonize their respective business operations with the requirements of the state of emergency, to supplement and/or amend their respective risk assessment documents, and to undertake adequate measures for the purpose of the protection of lives and health of their employees, to wit by way of the organization of work in shifts (due to a smaller number of people in a room), organization of meetings electronically, and postponement of business trips. If it was not possible to organize the work in such a way, for the purpose of the protection of the insurance and health of their employees, they were to undertake adequate measures, which would enable their employees to spend their annual leaves or paid leaves up to 45 days, and even longer with the approval of the ministry in charge of labour.

Since the Social and Economic Council of the Republic of Serbia did not meet during the state of emergency, it neither considered nor assessed the individual adopted measures, and the social partners, among themselves and with the Government of the Republic of Serbia, exchanged their respective views and information, attempting to find solutions for the problems and dilemmas that arose in the implementation of the measures. Promptly after the lifting of the state of emergency (on 6 May 2020), on 22 May 2020, the Council held its session, at which the ministries and other government bodies submitted their respective reports on the activities and the measures undertaken during the pandemic and the measures to be undertaken in the forthcoming period for the purpose of the prevention of negative health and economic effects.

During the first two weeks of the epidemic, there were problems with the protective equipment and, after that, the situation was considerably improved. Also, there are dilemmas and problems in the interpretation and application of the regulations passed at the time of the state of emergency.

It was recommended that those over 60 years of age, chronic patients, and parents of children below 12 years of age do not go to work and work from home. Experiences in the application thereof are different, because the employees from these groups in the government administration and public companies mainly worked from home while, in the real sector, the recommendation was applied in line with its abilities.

B) Measures with regard to companies, in particular micro, small and medium-sized enterprises as the engine of employment

Has aid been discussed and developed within or outside your institution, to compensate for losses, and / or to improve financing, corporate taxation (credit lines, etc.) or reduce their costs (postponement or exemption from social or tax charges...)? Have specific measures been taken for SMEs, self-employed people or the social economy? What is / was the specific role and responsibilities of your ESC-SI?

The Social and Economic Council did not consider the undertaken economic measures because it did not meet at the time of the state of emergency.

The Government of the Republic of Serbia passed a number of decrees that were to do with the incentive measures for entrepreneurs, micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, in order to maintain their liquidity and prevent the dismissal of employees. We are talking about the measures focused on the direct payments as three-month grants for the salaries of the employees, deferral of payment of certain liabilities, such as: taxes, contributions on wages and salaries, profit tax, and favourable loans. Those measures were conditioned by the obligation that an employer, in the course of the state of emergency and three months after its lifting, did not dismiss more than 10% of its employees. Also, the National Bank of Serbia adopted a number of decisions, such as: the Decision on Moratorium on Loans and Financial Lease Repayments and the Decision on the Deduction of Benchmark Interest Rate, etc.

C) Measures with regard to the economy to mitigate the bad impacts on employment

Have measures been discussed and taken to protect employment inside or outside your institution (incentives to use measures to suspend contracts instead of dismissals, limitations on the possibility of dismissing?) Has teleworking been extended? Did any difficulties arise in its implementation? Have specific measures been taken for particularly disadvantaged groups in areas such as housing, health care, social benefits...? Have debates been opened in the political or scientific field on measures to revive the economy? What is / was the specific role and responsibilities of your ESC-SI?

(The source of information is, among others, the IMF special site: <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19>)

The Social and Economic Council did not consider the undertaken measures because it did not meet at the time of the state of emergency. The implemented measures were discussed at its first session, which was held after the lifting of the state of emergency.

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<http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/fp/covid19>

The passing of the decrees was preceded by the appeals of the social partners that the Government should adopt a set of measures for the protection of functioning of the economy and employment.

Upon the proposal of the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted the conclusion, which enabled the employers to order their employees to spend paid leaves in excess of 45 days without obtaining the opinions from the trade unions. This measure could be used up to after the lifting of the state of emergency. Also, the Government adopted the conclusion on the spending of annual leaves in the course of the state of emergency.

In the course of the duration of the state of emergency, and on the occasion of the 1st of May – the International Labour Day, the Collegial Body of the Social and Economic Council, which is composed of the minister of labour and the presidents of the representative trade unions and organizations of the employers, issued the statement, a part of which we are quoting below:

„The Collegial Body of the Social and Economic Council of the Republic of Serbia, with the greetings for the Labour Day, is inviting all the citizens to make an additional effort and comply with the measures of the protection from the epidemic, social distancing, and social responsibility, which will help us to emerge from the epidemic as promptly as possible. During that time, let us show our solidarity and that we understand the problems and the needs of others. Let us do everything to preserve the workplaces and earnings of the employees because it is not sufficient just to protect ourselves from the virus. It is even more important that, after the epidemic, we continue to work, produce, and create. We invite the employers to keep their respective employees, because modern machines and equipment mean nothing to them without experienced and good workers. To keep them by preserving their workplaces and earnings, providing all the necessary protective means from the area of occupational safety and health, and protecting them from the epidemic of the virus. We are inviting all the employees and others recruited to work to conscientiously do their respective jobs and enable that their companies survive and thus preserve the income and subsistence for themselves and their families. We are also inviting all the government bodies and institutions to create the necessary preconditions for as prompt normalization of life and work as possible.“

D) Advocacy for the optimal use of social dialogue in response to the Covid-19 crisis: transparency, share information and data, inclusion, consultation, mutual trust

Is your ESC-SI working on the formulation of responses to the Covid-19 crisis? (analyzes, reports, declarations, dissemination of information on the measures being adopted, etc.)? What is / was the specific role and responsibilities of your ESC-SI?

Do the social partners participate in the procedures for developing the measures adopted with regard to Covid-19? How do they do it (social agreements, joint declarations, consultation of governments, dissemination of information to their members ...)? Does the role that social dialogue should play appear in the proposals for alternatives to economic recovery?

Is there particular attention paid to vulnerable and / or poorly organized groups, such as informal workers, precarious workers, self-employed workers, migrants, workers in gig economy...

What are the bipartite or tripartite collective agreements (company, sector, regional, etc.) concluded specifically to respond to the crisis relating to covid-19?

No special attention was devoted to the workers in the informal sector, at insecure jobs. Temporary workers and those at temporary and odd jobs were the first to lose their jobs. The only thing they could apply for was to get one-off aid from the state in the equivalent value of EUR 100. There were no special discussions about the workers in the GIG economy.

E) Ensure the continuity of the work of the ESC-SIs: planning and implementation of internal activities (health, safety at work, working conditions, IT services, teleworking, job protection, etc.) to covid-19 and its consequences.

Have measures been taken to continue the activity of the Council, in particular those on risk prevention but also in the field of formulating responses to the crisis, networking of different key players, and / or studies / the survey, the research?

In the forthcoming period, the Social and Economic Council will hold its sessions in compliance with and within the times stipulated in the provisions of the Law on the Social and Economic Council. At its sessions, the effects of the adopted measures will be actively considered and new health and economic measures will be proposed for the purpose of elimination of harmful consequences of the pandemic of the virus.

During the state of emergency, the Annex to the Special Collective Agreement for the employees in the healthcare institutions was concluded. In the real sector as well there were the Collective Agreements concluded with the employers, e.g. with Carnex Meat Processing Industry from Vrbas.

The trade unions and the employers to a great extent initiated the formation or a more intensive work of the Occupational Safety and Health Committee.

On 22 May 2020, the Council considered the proposed Decree on Preventive Measures for Safe and Healthy Work for the Prevention and Spreading of the Infectious Disease Covid-19 caused by the SARS-CoV-2 Virus, and failed to reach a consensus on the proposed text.

F) Initiatives at regional level (only for the attention of regional associations)

Please share regional initiatives such as information sharing, data collection, case study analysis, formulation of joint statements and / or recommendations, etc.