



Mr Thierry Breton
Commissioner for the Internal Market

Mr Nicolas Schmit
Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights

European Commission
Rue de la Loi 170
1049 Brussels

Brussels, 20 March 2020

COVID-19 – URGENT - Difficulties for cross-border workers in food retail and wholesale

Dear Commissioner Breton, Dear Commissioner Schmit,

I am attaching a statement which we made earlier this week which stresses our support for the important measures being taken to address the massive challenges Europe faces with the coronavirus pandemic. This sets out the issues which are hitting our sector particularly hard and threaten to put a large number of businesses in our sector out of business.

I would, however, like urgently to draw your attention to a pressing problem for a number of food retailers and wholesalers, mentioned in that statement. This is the treatment of cross-border workers (*'travailleurs transfrontaliers'*) in our sector. While we fully understand the concern of member state governments to control the movement of people in these difficult times, this is leading to countries closing the border, or making its crossing very difficult, for people who need to cross it to go to work. At present, most countries allow people to get to their workplace within their country, but some seem to take a disproportionate approach to people who need to get to their workplace the other side of an internal EU border.

We have had problems with the borders into Luxembourg earlier this week, where the vast majority of retail workers live in a neighbouring member state. Whilst these seem to be being resolved, we have since heard that the Czech authorities are stopping workers crossing the border to Austria and Germany without a special pass issued by them, and similar issues may arise at other borders.

These measures are causing very significant problems for food retailers in these countries who need their full workforce to keep up with unusually large demand from consumers.

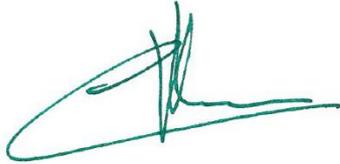
We would ask that your services contact all member states urgently and remind them of the guidelines agreed by heads of government this week, which underlined the obligation to guarantee the free passage of workers across borders. I should add that the same issues

.....

arise with the passage of seasonal workers, who are being held up at borders, preventing them help farmers whose fresh produce also needs to be harvested and delivered to consumers in a reliable manner.

We thank you in anticipation for your support in this matter and stay at your disposal for any further information you would need.

Yours sincerely,



Christian Verschueren
Director-General

Attachment – EuroCommerce statement on COVID 19 (March 16)



Coronavirus - Statement

The following statement was issued today on behalf of the European retail and wholesale sector by Christian Verschuere, Director-General of EuroCommerce:

*First, I want to **pay tribute to the 29 million people working in our sector**, who have been working extra hours and giving up holidays to make sure that customers receive the service they need in these exceptional times. Retailers and wholesalers have been working with all parts of the supply chain to ensure that there are adequate supplies of the things European citizens need every day.*

*Second, coming into contact daily with millions of customers, we have taken a wide range of steps to support public authorities in seeking to **minimise the risk of infection to customers and to our own staff**. We are cooperating with and supporting all public authorities – at European, national and local level, in the measures they are taking to limit the spread of the virus. We are calling on our social partners to cooperate with us in protecting our employees.*

*Third, we support and reiterate recent calls from European Commission President von der Leyen and Commissioner Breton to governments and customs authorities **to keep borders open for lorries carrying the goods that people need on a daily basis**. We ask that governments follow the Commission guidelines issued today calling on member states to ensure the free circulation of food, including livestock, medical supplies and protective equipment. All our members have been clear that we have enough supplies ready to meet demand for food and daily essentials, but this **could be compromised if disproportionate measures are taken at country borders** to make it impossible for deliveries from one member state to another. Also, in some border regions, vital workers in retail and wholesale live in one member state and work in another: we ask that national authorities allow these employees to get to work and carry on serving customers.*

*Fourth, our supply chains depend on regular and smooth, on-time deliveries, and these need to be maintained unless there are real risks involved. In a number of member states, retailers, manufacturers and farmers have joined together publicly to underline their commitment to these initiatives. Retailers have been clear that they will show **flexibility and understanding if suppliers are delayed in delivering to them**.*

*Fifth, retailers have also been cooperating to share information on supplies and arranging deliveries to the homes of people who cannot get out. We are pleased that governments and competition authorities have indicated that, under these very special circumstances, they **might waive normal competition rules to allow such exchanges in order to save lives**, and keep supplies flowing. We ask that they indeed allow such cooperation to take place while the coronavirus crisis continues.*

*Finally, we wish to reinforce the message from governments to all Europeans that **it is not necessary to buy large amounts of daily necessities**. Food retail shops remain open everywhere, albeit with some restrictions in some countries. Emptying the shelves of a product creates a vicious circle of panic buying, and that is a pattern of demand that makes replenishment more difficult. We appeal to consumers to act with restraint and solidarity - and leave some products for others who need them as well."*

---ENDS---

Contact:

Neil McMillan - +32 2 737 05 99 - mcmillan@eurocommerce.eu

Vincent Yhuello - +32 2 738 06 48 - yhuello@eurocommerce.eu

www.eurocommerce.eu

.....
EuroCommerce is the principal European organisation representing the retail and wholesale sector. It embraces national associations in 31 countries and 5.4 million companies, both leading global players such as Carrefour, Ikea, Metro and Tesco, and many small businesses. Retail and wholesale provide a link between producers and 500 million European consumers over a billion times a day. It generates 1 in 7 jobs, providing a varied career for 29 million Europeans, many of them young people. It also supports millions of further jobs throughout the supply chain, from small local suppliers to international businesses. EuroCommerce is the recognised European social partner for the retail and wholesale sector.