

The European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI) is a confederation of more than 40 national and European trade union organisations from more than 20 European countries, with a total of more than 5 million individual members. Founded in 1990, CESI advocates improved employment conditions for workers in Europe and a strong social dimension in the EU. CESI's particular strength lies in the public sector, with most of CESI's affiliates employed in the different fields of the European, national, regional and local administrative bodies and public services. CESI also represents unions of nurses, doctors, hospital staff and further public healthcare personnel across Europe.

The current challenges

- As the number of persons infected with the Corona virus continues to rise and death tolls increase across Europe, the impact of restrictions imposed by public authorities to try to halt the virus are deeply impacting societal life.
- The first and most urgent objective is the containment of the further propagation of the virus. Measures –local, regional, national and European– to limit the further spreading are needed. Many have severe impacts on people's and workers' lives and fundamental rights, but they have to be adopted and respected – to prevent further escalations with unforeseeable social, economic and health impacts on our societies. Social distancing, travel bans and the closure of non-essential businesses and shops appear to be the only options to try to contain the virus as far as possible and prevent even further health risks and damages.
- The impacts on the economy are tremendous. Numerous SMEs, self-employed persons and even larger companies are experiencing severe demand and supply shocks, financial losses and liquidity problems, which acutely threaten their economic survival and have already led to dismissals of workers and employees. At this stage the macroeconomic impact that the Corona virus will lead to can only be guessed. But it is beyond doubt that it will lead to countless insolvencies and bankruptcies which may lead to a serious global economic recession.

Re-communalisation of any privatised core health services should hence be increasingly considered in the future.

4. More competence for the EU and solidarity among Member States in cases of pandemics.

While in several Member States decentralised structures have not prevented swift and concerted crisis management at national level, coordination and solidarity among Member States and at EU level has lacked.

Several hard-hit countries were long left alone with their calls to other Member States for help and personal protective equipment. It was only days after non-EU third countries sent face masks that EU countries offered help in the same way.

CESI acknowledges the tremendous efforts which have been undertaken since the beginning of the crisis, but crisis preparedness and management will have to be further improved.

In the future, the allocation of competences, finances and capabilities will have to ensure more solidarity among Member States and a crisis management that do not stop at borders.

A stronger role, more financial resources and enhanced capacities for the EU will be necessary. This concerns uniform and comprehensive containment measures, but also for instance the protection of the EU's external borders or the intra-EU transport of (essential) goods.

In other words: management, hence competence, capabilities and financing will be required at supranational level.

5. A strong public service for sustainable societies.

More public investments will be needed in the future also in other public services. Sustainable societies depend on strong and efficient public services.

It is not only the Corona crisis; other crises of the more recent past (9/11, the 2008 financial crisis, the 2010 European debt crisis, the 2015 refugee crisis, the 2015/2016 terrorist attacks etc.) have underpinned the necessity of states to be run by well-functioning and well-resourced public services and administrations that are sufficiently equipped.

It is the public sector which is 'essential'. It cares, protects and supports – the citizens, the society and the economy. It determines whether societies are sustainable or not.

And the need for strong public services is increasingly recognised among citizens, the media and politicians.

CESI has been underlining for many years, that expenditures in public services are not merely costs, but that they are investments in the future.¹

As a consequence, public ownership of (and significant public investment in) essential services may have to be increasingly reconsidered in the future - as the only sustainable way forward.

¹ <https://www.cesi.org/joint-press-release-by-cesi-social-platform-and-eurodiaconia-the-future-of-europe-needs-more-social-investment/>