



## **Statement of the Social Partners in the European Telecom Sector on the COVID-19 Emergency**

7 April 2020

The European social partners for the telecommunications sector – UNI Europa ICTS and ETNO, the European Telecommunication Network Operators' Association – are fully committed to sustaining and supporting the European society and economy during this global pandemic.

Many European telecommunications sector workers are on the frontline of the COVID-19 health emergency. We provide the vital national infrastructure that is the backbone of our communities and an essential part of the social and economic fabric of our countries. Our employees and our companies embraced the key role that the sector plays especially in the crisis, e.g. due to the increasing number of employees that are working remotely, education institutions focusing on online tools or the increased need for connectivity for leisure and entertainment to make isolation bearable.

### **Keeping telecom workers safe**

The health and safety of our workers and of the general public is paramount and, as social partners, we are working to ensure a continuous exchange of best practices in order to face this challenging and unprecedented situation. These include new ways of working to continue to offer assistance to the public but minimise the potential exposure to the virus by example via phone, app or online in the most affected countries, rather than in shops or other physical locations.

When telecom workers are required to intervene in person, we work to provide them with the best solutions and protection possible. We are also working with governments and health authorities to implement the WHO guidelines and preserve our critical workforce.

### **Supporting employees and their families in times of COVID**

In this context, especially in the most affected countries, telecom companies are making the “work-from-home” option largely available to their employees.



The social partners of the sector recognise that this new way of working requires a lot of learning and an open mind on both sides, and constructive social dialogue is essential to reach common goals in this sudden emergency.

Both social partners want to guarantee the best support to their employee especially if travel restrictions or work imperative are imposing a new burden on the families. Important lessons have been learned from this experience and the social partners will endeavour to make this new way of working available to maximise the positive environmental, business and work/life balance benefits that have been learned during the emergency.

Similarly, we call on governments and EU institutions to further work on the need to maintain wages and employment in the sector, given the large number of staff and contractors who are essential in supporting the telecommunications value-chain in Europe.

Collective bargaining provides both the inclusive and adaptable context for making these joint decisions. Furthermore, experience shows that measures that have been agreed upon together generate more buy-in for successful implementation.

Moreover, we support all government measures to ensure that all those in the value-chain, including SMEs and contractors, are able to sustain their business and employees despite the health crisis.

### **The criticality of the telecom sector**

Our technology allows the workers across sector and public to remain safe at home. The crisis has underlined just how important the telecom infrastructure across Europe really is, especially as physical distancing and home isolation become more and more a reality across the EU, increasing the traffic on existing networks.

Equally, we support any initiative of European and national authorities to continue promoting investment into the telecommunication networks.

Europe must show responsibility, solidarity and efficiency in facing this emergency, by protecting all its affected citizens, workers and businesses.