



IUF : UNITING FOOD, FARM & HOTEL WORKERS WORLDWIDE

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IUF COVID-19 DEMANDS : FOOD AND BEVERAGE

As COVID-19 spreads around the world, one of the key questions confronting governments and the public is – do we have enough food? In many countries, food and beverage (F&B) workers have been designated as essential. Food factories remain open and are working around the clock to maintain supply.

Strict protocols should be in place to protect workers and to ensure food safety. Many companies, especially transnational companies, have issued COVID-19 protocols. Workers in small and medium size enterprises also have to be protected.

This document provides a set of trade union demands for protecting food and beverage workers and saving lives in the fight to contain the spread of COVID-19.



EMPLOYERS

All F&B workplaces need a plan on how to deal with COVID-19. These plans must be negotiated between the management and the union.

Employers must:

- 1.** Ensure that workers are able to work 2 meters (6.5 feet) apart from each other throughout their working day. This is possible through modification to work organization, work scheduling and rest breaks. There may need to be changes to the design of the work stations such as the installation of Perspex, Plexiglas or similar material to shield workers from potentially infecting each other. Reducing the speed and amount of product on the line will help ensure 2 meter spacing between workers.
- 2.** Provide adequate hand washing and sanitizer stations and increase the number of breaks so that hand-washing may become a routine part of the work.
- 3.** Negotiate shifts and overtime with the union. The pandemic is not an excuse to use forced labour or to risk workers' health through excessive hours.
- 4.** Ensure regular, thorough cleaning and sanitation of the workplace, including restrooms and lunch rooms. All shared surfaces (e.g. workbenches, door handles, handrails, and keyboards) must be cleaned regularly.
- 5.** Provide appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) – although this cannot substitute for appropriate spacing between workers. In some cases it may be necessary to wear PPE for short periods when close contact is unavoidable, for example maintenance workers assisting each other with a piece of machinery. In such cases PPE training must be provided and the equipment must be worn properly. Masks must be regularly replaced.
- 6.** Post the agreed workplace protocols on noticeboards in languages that all workers can understand and maintain regular communication.
- 7.** Make arrangements for safe travel to and from the workplace to minimize the risk of exposure to COVID-19.
- 8.** Negotiate child care allowances to ensure workers required to work through the pandemic can have access to adequate child care facilities.
- 9.** Employ directly rather than through agencies temporary workers required to cover for sick workers and/or increased demand. These temporary workers must be appropriately trained including specific training in relation to COVID-19 measures.

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GOVERNMENTS

1. Because ensuring adequate food supplies is an obligation of governments, governments must work with trade unions and employers to ensure that the food and beverage sector can maintain supply without putting the health and safety of its workforce at risk.
2. Governments should recognize the employment risks and the potential extreme economic hardship facing workers. Governments should collaborate with unions and employers to introduce employment and income support measures to mitigate these risks.



Dealing with **sickness**

Testing regimes for COVID-19 are inadequate in most countries. Everyone who has coronavirus symptoms should be able to be tested and to stay away from work until testing negative. If testing is possible, it should be negotiated as part of workplace protocols. Although testing helps prevent the spread of the disease it does not guarantee workplace safety. Where there is widespread community transmission the best approach is for everyone to consider themselves potentially infectious.

People should not go to work if they feel unwell. This is more important in a pandemic than during normal conditions. Working when unwell threatens the lives of others. Even if the sickness is not COVID-19, spreading illness at this time weakens others' immune systems and places extra pressure on health services.

Workers who are over 65 years of age or who have underlying health conditions such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes or respiratory illness, or who have lowered immunity, are most at risk of becoming critically ill or dying from contracting COVID19. If these workers cannot be completely physically isolated, they should be placed on leave. The negotiation of paid leave for these workers is a priority.

UN AGENCIES

1. The FAO, ILO and WHO, the UN agencies responsible for food, employment conditions and health must work together to ensure workers in the food and beverage sector who are classed as essential have decent working conditions.
2. The FAO, ILO and WHO must include trade unions in the development and implementation of global guidelines to ensure global food security.

