

GREECE

GREEK GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF LABOUR (GSEE)

As the *COVID-19* pandemic is hitting working people hard, the GSEE established, as a first step towards protecting workers and jobs, an **ANTI-COVID-19** Information and Workers' Support Network with a special dedicated webpage providing all relevant information and guidance on employment rights and an online complaint form to the working people who have already been reporting a wide range of bad and abusive behaviour from some employers. The GSEE complaints assessment team screens all complaints received, which are then forwarded to the competent public authorities and to the Labour Ministry, to their supervisory bodies mainly, while protecting the anonymity of individuals who file the complaints. The GSEE ANTI-COVID-19 team is composed of experts committed to serve workers' interests with the participation and active involvement of all GSEE affiliated members, the first level labour unions included, in cases where further trade union intervention is required so as to be able to collectively support workers and their families.

Moreover, trade union units along with trade union officials, at sectoral/branch and regional level, have been mobilised and activated in order to intervene, offer expertise and assist us in this battle.

In addition, the Information Center for Workers and the Unemployed (KEPEA) of the GSEE and the Union of Working Consumers of Greece (EEKE) have joined forces with GSEE playing a significant role in this respect by providing guidance and advice to workers and the unemployed people. EEKE, in particular, provides guidance and protection for workers - consumers who have been affected during this time. It is worth noting that EEKE is

facing particular challenges due to this crisis since coronavirus-related complaints from consumers to EEKE involving fraud and scams have surged in recent weeks.

The GSEE Legal and Press departments are closely monitoring the complaints procedures while, together with branch federations, regional labour centres and enterprise unions, remaining vigilant in their action to cope with employers who respond badly to the needs of the workers by forcing workers to work in unsafe working conditions (e.g. call center staff in cramped workspaces) and by violating labour rights such as, changing from full-time to part-time employment or job rotation, exhausting underpaid work in supermarkets, companies asking people to go on unpaid leave, continuing to operate non essential businesses despite the suspension of business activity, loss of the right to the special purpose compensation for employees working for multiple employers.

Information to help workers demand their rights is regularly updated in the databases of the GSEE, INE, KEPEA and EEKE websites.

Types of affected workers and extent of impact

Large numbers of the workforce in the private sector whose employment contracts have been suspended due to shutdown of businesses, **self-employed people and freelancers** are struggling because work is being cancelled during the coronavirus outbreak.

The pressure on businesses has already started affecting people's jobs. Since the beginning of March when the government ordered the suspension of activity of a large variety of businesses, thousands of layoffs have been registered with thousands of workers and households experiencing loss of income, thus being unable to pay for housing or communal services.

Health care workers, transport workers (drivers for example) and workers in distribution services are also hard hit by the pandemic since they are placed at high risk of exposure and infection protesting also the lack of personal protective equipment.

Affected Industries and Sectors

The Greek tourism, hotel and catering industry as well as aviation are among the hardest hit (cancellations and low numbers of bookings amid coronavirus outbreak). The pandemic is expected to deliver a heavy blow to the country's tourism revenues with job losses while the catering sector is facing the postponement and cancellation of dozens of conference, exhibitions and corporate events.

Retail commerce - starting from Wednesday, March 18, all retail stores were compelled to close down (apart from supermarkets, bakeries, pharmacies and petrol stations) with these businesses experiencing an economic shock and the country's labour market a possible contraction....

The measures taken by the government to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on businesses and employees and buffer the country's economy from the national lockdown are as follows:

-- a 800-euro benefit (special purpose compensation) for 1.7 million private-sector employees (81 percent of the affected private-sector workforce) that have been suspended from their employment contracts and a freeze on their tax and debt payments to the state for four months. They will have full social security insurance calculated on their full salary and the social security contributions will be covered by the State.

The 800-euro stipend to support these workers was provided for April, however, the Government decided a few days ago to extend it through May.

-- A list of a) the businesses that have ceased their operations with a State decision and of b) the businesses that have been substantially affected by the situation (whose employees are entitled to a special purpose compensation of 800 euro paid by the State) has been created and then published by the Ministry of Finance based on their Business Activity Code (KAD). The

emergency tax measures will apply to enterprises having their KAD included in the list, which is subject to updates,

-- the support measures concern some 800.000 affected businesses on the condition that employers will maintain jobs. Any employer who makes **layoffs** will not be eligible for support. VAT and tax debt payments of businesses have been suspended for April. However, if payments are made on time, there will be a 25 percent discount,

-- Six scientific categories (economists and accountants, doctors, lawyers and notaries, education professionals, engineers, researchers, and freelance scientists) who are entitled to a 600-euro allowance (voucher) for training programs will also be able to apply for the 800-euro emergency stipend.

-- Other measures include the right of the employer to unilaterally enforce teleworking. Employees who work via teleworking, are excluded from the special purpose compensation,

-- Employers and businesses whose operations have been affected and suspended by a State order will pay to their employees an Easter bonus, which can be granted until 30th of June 2020. Under certain conditions, the Easter bonus will be paid partially by the employer while the rest will be covered by the State,

-- Those who work in companies that have stopped operating temporarily by a State order and whose employment contracts have been suspended can pay a reduced rent by 40% for March and April 2020. A basic precondition is that the rent reduction should only relate to their first residence,

-- The employer whose business operations have been seriously affected or suspended due to a State decision has the right to transfer his/her employees to other enterprises belonging to the same Group of Companies,

-- the measures also foresee the extension of financial aid for some 700,000 self-employed and small business owners,

-- the measures include a special purpose leave that is provided to working parents both in the public and the private sector. If both parents work, they decide who will be entitled to the special purpose leave and they submit a relevant declaration with the employer. The latter will cover 2/3 of the special leave with the State budget subsidizing 1/3 of this leave,

-- in case that the employee is affected by the virus, then the general provisions for sick leave are applicable,

Additional measures for the unemployed and the long-term unemployed

The Government has also announced an emergency allowance of 400 euros for the 155,000 long-term unemployed.

Nearly 200,000 unemployed people whose unemployment card expired during the first three months of the year were given an extension of their benefits through April and May.

Possible relaxation of lockdown

The existing restrictions and the lockdown measures expire on April 27 and are scheduled to be reviewed. Any decisions about lifting the lockdown will be taken before that date based on epidemiological data, feedback and instructions from scientists and experts, which the government will continue to follow up until the end. In all cases, the lifting of lockdown will be a gradual, controlled and strictly guided process.