

"Immediate action required":

## EESC Workers' Group on Corona cases in the German meat industry

The alarming outbreaks of corona infections in the German meat industry discredit this sector and put the European food industry in a bad light.

The meat industry, especially in Germany, benefits from low-cost workforce from Eastern and South-Eastern Europe by employing non-transparent labour practices.

The term "modern slavery" is often used in this context. Due to the shocking spread of the corona virus among employees in various slaughterhouses in Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, North Rhine-Westphalia, Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony, their miserable working conditions have once again been brought to the fore.

Extremely long working hours, piecework in confined spaces, lack of breaks and unhygienic collective accommodation at inflated rents are unbearable under normal circumstances, but in pandemic times these conditions also facilitate the spread of the corona virus. Their working conditions are characterised by the use of precarious contracts and low wages.

The EESC already highlighted these issues in its [2018 Information Report on the meat industry in Europe](#), and pointing to the lack of legal regulations and controls. This is why the EESC's Workers' Group demands action on:

1. Clear European legal regulations that define the working conditions in this sector.
2. An end to the exploitative system of works contracts for workers from Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.
3. Equal pay for equal work in the same place throughout Europe.
4. Identification of a number of measure to urgently establish common definitions at European level: adoption of European minimum standards for monitoring services, a European compendium of fiscal and a social law terms and a European social security number.

"The abuses which have been identified contradict key principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights adopted in 2017 by the EU. The announced Action Plan for implementing the Pillar must, therefore, urgently address these challenges, in particular a swift improvement of the situation of seasonal workers, contract workers and fake self-employed persons" stressed Oliver Röpke, President of the EESC's Workers' Group and Peter Schmidt, President of the EESC's Sustainable Development Observatory.

Oliver Röpke and Peter Schmidt explicitly welcome the announcement by EU Social Affairs Commissioner Nicolas Schmit to react, if necessary, with a directive on the unacceptable conditions. The Workers' Group also places great expectations on the German Council Presidency to tackle these concrete problems without delay.

**Oliver Röpke**

President of the EESC's Workers' Group

**Peter Schmidt**

President of the EESC's Sustainable Development Observatory