

Belgium: measures taken against the spread of Coronavirus

By decision of the National Security Council, Belgium entered lockdown from noon on 18 March until 5 April.

This situation involves the following measures:

In order to avoid a maximum of contact outside their close family, citizens are required to stay at home except:

- to go to work
- for essential journeys such as going to the grocery store, doctor, pharmacy, post office, bank, etc.
- to help people who need it
- to refuel
- in case of emergency
- in the context of the movement of children within families in alternating/composite care

Gatherings are forbidden.

Companies - regardless of their size - are obliged to organise telework for any function where this is possible without exception.

Businesses must organise work from home for all functions where this is possible. Companies that cannot do so, will have to introduce social distancing measures in the workplace. If it is impossible to implement these obligations, companies will have to close down. Companies that cannot comply with these rules will face heavy fines. These measures are not applied to crucial sectors.

At the retail sector level: Grocery stores, pharmacies, bookstores and pet food stores remain open.

Public transport must be organised in such a way that social distancing can be guaranteed.

Non-essential travel outside Belgium is prohibited.

The police are responsible for strictly enforcing this confinement.

What are the implications for workers?

As a result of the Coronavirus outbreak, some workers are temporarily unemployed due to "force majeure" or for "economic reasons". In this case, they cannot go to work but their loss of income is partially compensated by an unemployment benefit (chomage partiel) of 70% of their salary. Both blue-collar and white-collar workers are entitled to this benefit.

Trade unions continue to call for stronger measures to protect workers' health and to guarantee their income to the maximum.

Trade unions in industrial sectors are extremely concerned. The call for health to take precedence and allow for temporary unemployment for all workers.

The social elections scheduled in May 2020 are temporarily suspended. They will resume in autumn.

Edited by industriAll Europe, 19/03/2020