

# Fighting the COVID-19 Crisis



[www.uniglobalunion.org/sectors/media-entertainment-arts](http://www.uniglobalunion.org/sectors/media-entertainment-arts)

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## Report on Response to COVID-19

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### Introduction

As hundreds of thousands of colleagues are facing lay-offs or have no job opportunities in the freelance labour markets of our industries, unions and guilds across the globe are working hard to support media entertainment workers during this crisis.

Unions and guilds affiliated to UNI Global Union are responding to the crisis by setting-up of solidarity funds and support measures for members, negotiating agreements with companies and employers' associations. They are lobbying governments and film funding agencies to put in place measures that bring rapid financial aid and better protection to the entire workforce of the industry.

Media workers are an essential part of the global fight against the pandemic, keeping the media system running and making programmes to inform, educate and entertain citizens. Unions are giving advice and support to workers to ensure their health and safety on the job. Special agreements with employers have been negotiated to respond to the extraordinary situation media workers are facing.

Some governments are acting or have announced specific measures (cross-sector and sector-specific) in support of businesses, workers including freelance and self-employed workers.

This is a first report to UNI MEI affiliates providing an overview on union action and support measures that are being put in place by governments, funding agencies and the European Union in response to the COVID-19 crisis. We want to contribute to the exchange of information between affiliates to reinforce each other's actions.

This is not an exhaustive report and contains an overview of key actions in ten selected countries as well as measures taken by the European Union. The information collected is based on reports that we have received and on the monitoring websites, social media etc. up until 24 March. Links in the text give you access to more information.

We kindly ask all affiliates to share information with us and sister unions and guilds. You can send us information by email at [uni-mei@uniglobalunion.org](mailto:uni-mei@uniglobalunion.org). We will update this report regularly, extend to more countries and make it available via this [online folder](#).

At the same time, we are providing links to news and information on the latest developments within the global media and entertainment industry and its response to the COVID-19 crisis. The page is updated daily at:

[Fighting the COVID-19 Crisis](#)

Latest news on unions' response from across all UNI Global Union is posted at:

[www.uniglobalunion.org/unions-global-response-covid19](http://www.uniglobalunion.org/unions-global-response-covid19)

### Country Reports

#### Argentina

##### Financial support scheme

The government of Argentina unveiled last week a 700 billion Pesos stimulus package to try to sustain economic activity, avert shortages of food and medical supplies, help companies and protect workers and vulnerable groups affected by the worsening Covid 19 pandemic. Self-employed workers are not covered by the announced benefits.

The government will make 350 billion Pesos in direct payments to help unemployed workers, pensioners, family allowance beneficiaries and those on welfare. The measures also include suspending social security payments for companies in the most affected sectors, including movie theatres.

##### Union actions to defend health and job security of workers

Affiliates are negotiating with employers over measures that protect workers in this urgency while maintaining service in the broadcasting sector. [SATSAID](#) has negotiated a collective agreement with the association of cable TV employers in response to the COVID-19 that provides for security measures for workers. [SUTEP](#) is fighting to prevent that workers in cinema theatres are being laid-off. The dialogue with one important chain, Cinemark-Hoyts is in a critical stage. [SICA-APMA](#) is in dialogue with producers over the impact of the crisis. As most production have shut down, the financing of health and unemployment benefits that are provided by the union and are financed through contributions by productions is breaking away. The union is lobbying the government, film fund to obtain financial support for the its social benefits scheme and is carrying out a survey among its members to assess the situation of film and TV production workers amid the crisis.

#### Australia

##### The Federal Government's support package and response of the MEAA

The Federal government announced several support measures and an economic rescue package. The latest measure is important for entertainment workers who are unemployed due to the crisis including sole traders and self-employed.

Under scheme the government will pay from 31 March and during the next six month fortnightly \$550 Coronavirus Supplement to workers. This support will also be available to permanent employees who are stood down or lose their jobs; sole traders; the self-employed; casual workers and contract workers. Further support payments can be claimed, for example by persons who need to self-isolate. The package also includes grants to businesses that should also aim at retaining workers. [The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance](#), MEAA is fighting to make sure that these \$20,000 and \$100,000 grants to small and medium sized businesses are devoted to keeping workers employed. There is no requirement at the moment.

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The MEAA has been campaigning to secure specific support for the arts and entertainment industries, and for special consideration to be given to extending a temporary 50% wage subsidy for employers of apprentices to help keep people employed in sector.

Further the Alliance is lobbying the federal government to look urgently at providing further support for the live performance and entertainment industries as the economic stimulus package announced by the government provides untargeted support for households and businesses.

### **Austria**

#### **COVID19 crisis management fund**

The federal government decided on a package of measures to support those affected by the coronavirus crisis. Four billion euros will be made available in a newly established fund (so-called COVID-19 crisis management fund). The funds are to be used, among other things, to secure jobs, mitigate revenue losses as a result of the crisis and ensure the solvency of companies. For particularly affected companies - Chancellor Kurz explicitly named the cultural sector direct financial assistance will be made available.

The Ministry of Culture has given assurances that the measures should consider the precarious situation of art and culture professionals, regardless of whether they are non-profit, non-profit cultural associations or self-employed.

The Austrian film fund is to receive a special budget from the government to compensate the additional costs of postponed or interrupted productions and losses for distributors due to the closing of all cinemas.

#### **Short time working model for cultural institutions with employees**

All cultural institutions can apply without restrictions short-time work. In response to COVID-19, it possible to reduce working hours to 10% (sometimes zero hours possible) and keep workers in an upright employment relationship with almost full wage compensation covered by the unemployment scheme.

Unions' and employers' federation have agreed on a special package that consider the extraordinary circumstances of the situation. The key points of the accord are:

- Employees must consume the vacation credit of previous vacation. The current vacation does not have to be used in the first three months of short-time work.
- Normal working hours must be at least 10% of average.
- A net wage guarantee, additional costs are born by unemployment scheme.
- For vacation and sick leave during short-time work, the employee is entitled to the full remuneration as before short-time work.
- Short-time work can be completed for a maximum of 3 months. If necessary, an extension of a further 3 months after social partner discussions is possible.

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A more detailed overview of the situation in Austria is available in the briefing by UNI affiliate YOUNION in the [online folder](#).

### Canada

The Federal Government's recent spending initiative announcements is aimed at assisting all workers – employed or self-employed to deal with the financial hardships associated with the COVID-19 crisis.

[The Directors Guild of Canada, DGC](#) and [IATSE Canada](#) are advising members with respect to the eligibility requirements for the various income replacement supports and are lobbying Federal and Provincial government to ensuring no class of entertainment worker is denied some form of income replacement support.

The main points of the support announced by the government are as follows:

#### EI Sickness Benefits

Employees who have been diagnosed with the COVID-19 virus or are engaging in a public health authority directed self-isolation and/or quarantine may apply for Employment Insurance sickness benefits. Employees applying for EI sickness benefits must have:

- experienced a decrease in gross earnings of more than 40% for at least one week.
- accumulated 600 insurable work hours in the 52 weeks prior to the start of a claim; and
- been diagnosed with the COVID-19 virus or are engaging in a public health authority directed self-isolation and/or quarantine

EI sickness benefits provide an employee with up to 55% of their gross earnings, up to a maximum of \$573 per week for up to a maximum of 15 weeks. The Federal Government recently announced that it will be waiving the otherwise mandatory one-week waiting period for EI sickness benefits for those employees who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and/or those who are engaging public health authority directed self-isolation and/or quarantine. The Federal Government has also indicated that claimants will be eligible for EI sickness benefits without the usual requirement of a doctor's note or other medical certificate.

Employees who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or are engaging in a public health authority directed self-isolation and/or quarantine should file a claim for EI sickness benefits immediately. Any delay in filing a claim could give rise to a denial or reduction of EI sickness benefits.

#### EI Regular Benefits

Provided employees have the requisite number of insurable work hours in the qualifying period, employees who are otherwise healthy and capable of working may apply for

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Employment Insurance regular benefits arising from a loss of employment due to COVID-19. EI regular benefits provide an employee with up to 55% of their gross earnings, up to a maximum of \$573 per week.

### Emergency Care Benefit

The Federal Government recently announced the creation of an Emergency Care Benefit of up to \$900 bi-weekly for up to 15 weeks for those workers who don't otherwise qualify for EI sickness benefits and/or EI regular benefits.

The Federal Government has indicated the Emergency Care Benefit will be available to the following class of workers:

- Workers, including the self-employed, who are quarantined or sick with COVID-19 but do not qualify for EI sickness benefits.
- Workers, including the self-employed, who are taking care of a family member who is sick with COVID-19, such as an elderly parent, but do not qualify for EI sickness benefits; and
- Parents with children who require care or supervision due to school closures, and are unable to earn employment income, irrespective of whether they qualify for EI or not.

Based on these initial eligibility requirements indicated by the Federal Government, the new Emergency Care Benefit appears to be available to freelancers and loan-outs and other workers, like part-time employees, who would otherwise not be eligible for EI sickness benefits and/or EI regular benefits.

### Emergency Support Benefit

The Federal Government also just announced the creation of an Emergency Support Benefit for Canadians who lose their jobs or face reduced hours as a result of COVID-19's impact. The Emergency Support Benefit will be delivered through the CRA to provide up to \$5.0 billion in support to workers who are not eligible for EI and who are facing unemployment. Details of the benefit amounts payable to individuals and eligibility requirements for this benefit have yet to be articulated by the Federal Government. When further details become available, we will provide them.

### IATSE Canada launches petition to increase support for entertainment workers

IATSE Canada has launched [a petition](#) asking that the federal government to consider an increase to these benefits, which in many cases, are not enough to live on. The union underlines that no matter how large or small a community, virtually all of them have at least one theatre. These smaller venues regularly operate on very tight budgets and a situation like the current one puts many at a high risk of closure. IATSE is urging the government to ensure that enough supports and protections are put in place so that no venue, theatre, or smaller company is forced to close its doors permanently.



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### **Denmark**

#### **Tripartite agreement plan secures economic support for businesses and workers**

The agreement by the government and the social partners ensure that companies that experience a decline in orders and fewer customers as a result of COVID-19 and therefore cannot employ their employees, can receive a partial reimbursement for wage costs incurred for three months. The companies undertake not to dismiss employees for financial reasons during the period in which they receive the compensation.

[The agreement](#) applies to employees of all private companies who are exceptionally hard financially affected by COVID-19 and therefore face having to notify redundancies for at least 30 per cent. or more than 50 employees. In that case, the company receives a state salary compensation of 75 per cent. of the salaries of the employees concerned, but a maximum of DKK 23,000 per employee. month if they fail to notify the layoffs. For hourly wage earners, state wage compensation amounts to 90 per cent, but a maximum of DKK 26,000 per hour. month.

Further, the government created a temporary compensation scheme that will apply also for three months. The scheme is aimed at the self-employed or small companies (< 10 employees) who experience a decline in turnover of over 30%. The state will compensate 75% of the turnover decline up to a maximum of 3000 euros per month. This corresponds to the amount of the tripartite agreement that applies to salaried employees. In addition, companies who are forced to close, will get 100% of their fixed costs covered. Companies will also have the possibility to take out loans via the state. Workers will also receive on occupational subsistence allowance of an extra 3 months of benefits.

Employers and unions in the different industries including in film and TV production have negotiated specific agreements to implement the tripartite agreement to production that have been stopped, suspended or postponed. The agreements aim at securing employment perspective for the period when production resumes and to implement the economic support measures as agreed by the government, employers and unions.

### **France**

#### **Government support for industries and the cultural sector**

The French Government has announced a set of transversal support measures for businesses which also cover the cultural sector: simplified and reinforced support for short-time contract, payment periods for social and / or tax payments or even direct tax rebate , solidarity funds for small businesses, the self-employed and micro-businesses, bank cash lines guaranteed by the central bank. In addition, the reimbursement of claims related to tax credits (cinema, audiovisual, international, live performance, phonographic production) can be accelerated by requesting the Directorate General of Public Finance.



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The Minister of Culture has directed the national sectoral centres of the media and entertainment sector such as the national film fund - CNC, to mobilise and respond to the difficulties encountered by all stakeholders due to COVID-19 and to ensure that emergency aid benefits all workers concerned. For the cinema and audiovisual sector, a set of measures has been put in place by the CNC, notably by suspending the payment of the March 2020 payment of tax levied on cinema tickets and by paying support in advance to art house and to the distribution sector.

Finally, the government announced adjustments to the unemployment insurance rules applicable to intermittent performing artists and technicians and for short-term contract workers to prevent that intermittent workers, who cannot work, are not penalized and acquire rights during the entire phase of the COVID-19 epidemic. Further, these arrangements seek to ensure that workers arriving at the end of entitlement of unemployment benefits during the phase of the epidemic can continue to be compensated.

### Unions secure benefits and employment guarantees for freelance workers

All unions affiliated to UNI in the media and entertainment sector, [F3C-CFDT](#), [FASAP-FO](#), [SNRT-CGT](#), [SPIAC-CGT](#), [SYNPTAC-CGT](#) and [SNTPCT](#) are negotiating with companies and employers' federations to secure employment for employees, fixed term and other freelance workers including those who have the status of "intermittent". For example, thanks to the pressure of the unions, Radio France has committed to keep all fixed term workers under contract. In the production sector, the unions focus to prevent employers to revert to layoffs or denial of contracts. As the provisions put in place by the government, the unions want employers to opt as minimum for the partial unemployment scheme that allows to retain workers and benefits from the economic support measure put in place by the government.

The social fund organisation for freelance workers in the entertainment sector, Audiens, provides exceptional support measures for workers that are facing job losses due to COVID-19. These demands are given priority to provide financial support rapidly.

### Germany

#### verd.di negotiates first collective agreement on short-time work in film & TV production

Following the new measures taken by the government to extend the possibilities for short-time work, [verd.di](#) brought the producer alliance (PA) to the (virtual) negotiating table to negotiate together with the actors' guild, BFFS a - for the industry completely new - collective agreement on short time work. The unions acted quickly because many workers had been asked by production companies to accept written offers for short time work, with the legally regulated 60 percent of your contractually guaranteed net salary.

The new collective agreement now specifies that signatory production companies will top-up the allowance of 60% (that is reimbursed to employers by the Employment

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Agency) so that workers receive full wages. The provisions of the agreement are mandatory for all short time work from March 25 and can be terminated by June 30, 2020 at the earliest.

The union is supporting self-employed workers across all sectors it represents including the media and entertainment sector. It has created a special [info-pool on COVID-19](#) that provides information and access to services and advice for self-employed members. ver.di is committed to providing affected self-employed people with emergency aid that is quickly and unbureaucratically non-repayable. The union is lobbying the government to adopt measures that include direct financial aid, suspension of tax payments, reduction of social security costs and provisions that make loans more readily available for self-employed.

### Federal government announces financial aid to small companies and self-employed

On 24 March, the Federal government announced the establishment of an immediate financial aid for small businesses as well as self-employed from all economic sectors. The aid is available for self-employed and companies with up to 10 employees. Up to € 9,000 one-time payment for 3 months is available for companies with up to 5 employees (Full-time equivalents). Up to € 15,000 one-time payment for 3 months is available for a company with up to 10 employees.

The objective of this non-repayable grant programme is to ensure the economic existence of small companies and self-employed workers to bridge acute liquidity bottlenecks, e.g. through ongoing operating costs such as rents, loans for business premises, leasing rates, etc. The programme is complementary to other measures.

In addition, several regional governments have announced specific economic support measure for artists and other cultural workers prioritising free-lance and self-employed workers.

### German Film fund adopts to support industry during crisis

The German Film Fund has adopted measures in support of the film sector during the COVID-19 crisis. These measures include:

- Loans and outstanding tax payments for cinemas from the cut-off date of 1 March 2020 are deferred
- For productions that abandoned projects due to the pandemic, the repayment of subsidies is waived; due repayments are to be deferred.
- In the areas of distribution and physical video sales, the repayment of subsidies is waived.
- The film fund is setting-up a special aid fund, in which the other film subsidies at federal and state level will participate as the urgently needed liquidity aid requires a joint approach by federal and state funding agencies.

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### Ireland

#### Industry Support measures

The Irish film funding agency, Screen Ireland has announced an initial range of measures to assist those working within the sector during the crisis. Screen Ireland will:

- provide 90% funding upfront on all development loans to Irish screenwriters and production companies through to 31st May 2020.
- extend existing development and production loan offers which are due to expire in the coming months to 31st May 2020.
- provide additional marketing and distribution support for upcoming Irish film and TV releases during this period.
- continue to provide skills development opportunities for industry practitioners, with Screen Skills Ireland delivering some of its planned activity for 2020 online free-of-charge over the next 6-10 weeks.

#### SIPTU demands introduction of wage subsidy scheme

[SIPTU](#) has called on the Government to introduce an extensive wage subsidy scheme to keep employees in work during the COVID-19 emergency. The union also called for an immediate increase in Jobseekers' Benefit and other payments such as the COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment, to €305 per week. SIPTU is advocating a moratorium on payments, rents and utility bills for three months and urged the government to bring together representatives of workers and employers to agree a temporary national emergency programme to protect jobs and incomes across the economy.

### United Kingdom

#### Covid-19 Film and TV Emergency Relief Fund

The British Film Fund, BFI and The Film and TV Charity have partnered to create the new fund, established with a £1m donation from Netflix, to help support the creative community, which has been devastated by the pandemic. The fund will provide emergency short-term relief to the many thousands of active workers and freelancers who have been directly affected by the closure of productions across the UK. The Film and TV Charity is currently working on the precise eligibility criteria and level of individual funding, but the fund will be open to those working in production, distribution and exhibition.

#### Bectu's campaign to support freelancers during the coronavirus outbreak

[Bectu](#) welcomes the initiative but states that the fund, as it is structured now, is not enough. The union is campaigning for the government to step in and aid the many freelancers. More than 7,000 freelance workers in the creative industries have written to their member of Parliament asking them to back Bectu's campaign to support freelancers during the coronavirus outbreak. They are calling for substantial financial

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measures to protect their incomes following the government's announcement that it will protect up to 80% of employees' salaries. A [new Bectu survey](#) of more than 3,000 film and TV freelancers found that they face losing up to £33,000 unless the government extends its offer to top-up salaries to those who are freelance or self-employed.

### United States

#### IATSE Commits \$2.5 Million to Entertainment Charities amid COVID-19 Crisis

The IATSE General Executive Board approved \$2.5 million in donations to three entertainment charities Tuesday. The funding will go to the Actors Fund, the Motion Picture and Television Fund, and the Actors Fund of Canada. IATSE and UNI MEI President, Matthew D. Loeb said in a statement "*These charities have been assisting and supporting IATSE members and entertainment industry workers for a very long time. They understand the needs of these workers and are perfectly situated to act as our partners to help those experiencing hardship caused by the current health crisis.*"

#### Media & entertainment unions call for protection of workers in emergency relief packages

With hundreds of thousands of creative professionals out of work as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, arts, entertainment, and media unions affiliated with the Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO (DPE) are calling on the White House, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, and Congress to quickly pass emergency relief legislation that both enhances and expands state unemployment benefits and sends direct unrestrained cash to the impacted workers they represent. The unions committing to advocacy effort include (UNI MEI affiliates are underlined and linked to their homepage):

- Actors' Equity Association
- American Federation of Musicians
- American Guild of Musical Artists
- American Guild of Variety Artists
- [Directors Guild of America](#)
- Guild of Italian American Actors
- [International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts](#)
- International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers
- Office and Professional Employees International Union
- Screen Actors Guild – American Federation of Television and Radio Artists
- Stage Directors and Choreographers Society
- [Writers Guild of America, East](#)

IATSE announced that over 80,000 letters over two days to Congress urging lawmakers to include displaced entertainment workers in the federal aid package. A related [letter](#) drafted by Congressman Adam Schiff (CA-28) is being circulated on Capitol Hill and has an ever-growing list of Congressional supporters.

### The European Union

#### Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative

The Commission has proposed a [Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative](#) (CRII) to mobilise cohesion policy to flexibly respond to the rapidly emerging needs in the most exposed sectors and help the most affected territories in Member States and their citizens and allow Member States to benefit from more financial back-up and targeted assistance.

#### State aid and growth & stability pact

The new [Temporary Framework on state aid](#) the EU Commission adopted will enable Member States to (i) set up schemes direct grants (or tax advantages) up to €500,000 to a company, (ii) give subsidised State guarantees on bank loans, (iii) enable public and private loans with subsidised interest rates. Finally (iv), the new Temporary Framework will recognise the important role of the banking sector to deal with the economic effects of the COVID-19 outbreak, namely to channel aid to final customers, small and medium-sized enterprises. The Temporary Framework makes clear that such aid is direct aid to the banks' customers, not to the banks themselves. And it gives guidance on how to minimise any undue residual aid to the banks in line with EU rules.

On 20 March the European Commission has issued a communication to activate the [fiscal framework's general escape clause](#). The decision has yet to be endorsed by the Council of Ministers and would give EU member states the biggest possible flexibility in providing direct aid to all sectors including suspending restriction on deficits and other provisions of the growth and stability pact.

#### Creative Europe

The European Commission is currently preparing a set of measures as part of the implementation of the Creative Europe MEDIA programme. These measures will likely consist in the introduction of more flexibility within the framework of the implementation of actions and by granting notably, but not exclusively, time extensions when needed. Please also see [https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/content/coronavirus-consequences-creative-europe-programme-and-related-activities\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/content/coronavirus-consequences-creative-europe-programme-and-related-activities_en).

The European Commission has committed to make sure that creative industries can benefit from any horizontal cross-sectoral support set up by the Commission to soften the economic and employment consequences of the outbreak. It is in contact with the European Investment Fund to examine to what extent the existing guarantee mechanism for the cultural and creative industries could help to mitigate the negative effects of the crisis.

#### Information on the EU's coordinated response to COVID-19

For more information on the EU's coordinated response to COVID-19 go to the [dedicated website of the EU Commission](#).