

# Dignity, Health, and a Union: Essential Rights for Essential Workers



The coronavirus pandemic has forced us to reevaluate what it means to be an “essential worker.” We did not rely on CEOs during lockdowns, but the frontline workers who provide care to the sick and elderly; who ensure that our communities stay fed; who make sure that our hospitals, transit, and public spaces stay safe and clean. Just as the crisis has exposed how indispensable these jobs are, and our societies can no longer undervalue and ignore the needs of the people doing them. Building a fair economy in the aftermath of Covid-19, requires all of us to revalue their work.

To do that, these are global **essential rights for essential workers:**

## ▶ a wage with dignity.

If work is essential enough to risk exposure to a deadly virus, it should at least pay living wage. Temporary “hero pay” measures are not a substitute for wages on which families can live in dignity.



## ▶ collective bargaining and union representation.

During the pandemic, union representation has often meant the difference between having workplace protections and not. Worker representatives are vital to enforcing health and safety rules. Through the crisis and beyond, essential workers should have the standards and protections gained through collective bargaining.



## ▶ paid sick leave.

Guaranteed paid sick leave is critical to protecting workers and slowing the virus’ spread. Essential workers should not have to choose between losing income and infecting others on the job.



## ▶ workplace safety.

Whether or not the worst has already passed, workers should have access to personal protective equipment, the ability to maintain social distancing, and other necessary safety measures.



## ▶ special status during a crisis.

Essential workers should have access to additional provisions including: emergency childcare, enhanced occupational safety protections and training, access to testing, and secure transportation.

