



WHEN IS THE END?

#COVID-19

Recommendations
and solutions for European Works Councils

Introduction

People and organisations are faced with truly unprecedented circumstances. They might be facing the **worst crisis in their entire existence**. Workers all over the world are in the middle of this maelstrom and if ever there was a time to put to work the advantages of the EU in terms of collective bargaining and social dialogue, then the time is now. What is at stake is nothing less than the future of the European model.

Studies show that, where workers have a voice, emergency measures are implemented more swiftly compared to where this is not the case. The reason for this is that measures which are endorsed by the representative bodies are reaching every level in the organisation in a much more effective way because of the fact that there is trust between all the stakeholders.

When trying to impose unilateral measures – however efficient – this is not the case as they are more often than not met with a wall of resistance.

European Works Councils have a very important role to play in this as, in order to be efficient, measures that are implemented must be global and concern the whole workforce wherever they may be in the EU and beyond.

Indeed, EWCs even can play a very important role to reach beyond their legal scope and help with coordinating activities between workers beyond the borders of Europe.

Management teams who understand that it is a good idea to involve their EWC in the handling of COVID-19 both during the lockdown and when business is starting up again will face a smoother transition to normality compared to managers who ignore the value of social dialogue.

The key differentiator is indeed **dialogue** which means informing the EWC continuously of the evolution of the situation in the organisation and showing that measures are implemented to protect the health of the workers, to safeguard employment and to secure income levels.

In order to be efficient, that dialogue should take place **at every level inside the organisation** but also with **governments** and **European Union institutions**.

The EWC can play a pivotal role in coordinating approaches when it comes to informing the workforce in the different locations and to make sure that measures are endorsed and implemented quickly.

Since face-to-face meetings are not possible in these times, European Works Councils need to find **online ways to organise their meetings**, both **with and without management**.

That means nothing less than that EWCs, like the rest of us, **need to rethink the way they interact, communicate and meet** and this raises practical and legal problems:

- which online solution(s) to use for which type of meeting?
- how to prepare EWC members and other participants to this whole new way of interacting?
- are decisions taken during online meetings valid?
- is confidentiality guaranteed also when EWC representatives meet in private?
- can the online meeting platform be hacked?
- can we trust the interpreters (who are invisible unlike during a live meeting)?
- ...

As a communications agency for European Works Councils, Presence wants to offer advice to address these potential issues and to enable companies and workers to involve their EWC in the COVID-19 crisis and beyond.

The recommendations below are based on our expertise in organising works councils for companies, trade union experts and workers representatives.

Presence aims to be the partner of choice to all EWC stakeholders.

Contents

Introduction	2
Contents	4
If you need to postpone your physical or live meeting, get the dates NOW	5
Inform your EWC about your (existing) COVID-19 plans	6
Develop a crisis strategy for your EWC	8
Update your EWC on your COVID-19 plans in writing	9
Allow your EWC representatives to discuss COVID-19 developments in each country amongst themselves	10
Contact your trade union federation or another expert	11
Translate all relevant documents on your COVID-19 plans	12
Make minutes of online EWC meetings during COVID-19	13
Build your EWC roadmap during the COVID-19 crisis	14
Provide EWC training during the COVID-19 crisis	15
About us	16
About Peter Van Den Steene	16

If you need to postpone your physical or live meeting, get the dates NOW

During the period where we can't leave our homes to protect the safety of all, EWC meetings cannot be organised in a face-to-face setting. Most organisations decide to move the meeting to a later date, to September or afterwards.

What most do not realise, however, is that prices for accommodation, interpreters and audiovisual equipment will rise rapidly as the meeting market will literally be flooded with demands.

The obverse to this is that there will be a real scarcity of all of the above when Europe comes out of confinement.

Our tips

1) Pick new meeting dates and venue as soon as possible

- Get better prices by booking now
- Negotiate better cancellation conditions enabling you to cancel free of charge
- Monitor the situation and consider the possible financial impact should you need to cancel the new dates
- Presence makes sure that you incur no cancellation fees

2) Book interpreters, AV equipment and important logistics

- Make sure that "your" team of interpreters is secured
- Block the necessary technical equipment for your EWC meeting before prices soar
- Arrange crew travel and accommodation (as soon as available and before prices soar)
- Get interesting deals on annexed services (buses, restaurants, city tours, ...)

Inform your EWC about your (existing) COVID-19 plans

In these times as before, multinational organisations cannot implement decisions that impact the workforce without respecting the information and consultation right of EWCs.

The current crisis already has important consequences for employment in terms of restructuring, redundancies and this is expected to go on well after the lockdown period.

Updating the European Works Council on the situation in the different countries is extremely important.

Extraordinary EWC meetings will need to be convened and the only solution will be to do so online.

Our tips

1) Agree on the procedure and take care of security and confidentiality issues

- All parties should agree on a procedure for online meetings
- EWC representatives should be given the guarantee that this is only a temporary solution and that online meetings will not replace LIVE meetings.
- Have your communications agency sign an NDA with your organisation.
- Have all stakeholders (interpreters, technicians, moderators...) sign individual NDAs.

2) Get the needed support for the practicalities of your online event

- Onboard your presenters and organise a speaker briefing
- Inform presenters that they will be interpreted and assist them in presenting their information in a clear and coherent way
- Translate the presentations into the different meeting languages to show on the meeting platform
- Prepare and send invitations to all participants in their own language

- Send instructions to the participants (how to test their connection, how to join the event, ...)
- Book the interpreters and send them all preparation materials
- Make sure participants and interpreters know what to do if they encounter a problem during the event

3) When you want to use **your interpreters**

- Make sure your interpreters can use the online platform(s) you need
- Onboard your interpreters and assist them in working on the platforms

4) When you want to use **our interpreters**

- You get peace of mind as we manage the process from A to Z
- From booking to briefing, performance and administration, we cover it all for you
- You save time, effort and money

Develop a crisis strategy for your EWC

During this crisis, it is essential to immediately share best practices between the different countries.

Whilst it is certainly the case that your management and your teams are interacting on a daily basis, don't forget to involve your EWC from the start.

If you decide to involve your European Works Council in your COVID-19 approach (which is very important) you should do so on the basis of a strategy or a crisis plan.

During the period of lockdown and when activity is starting up again, EWC members need to know what their tasks and priorities are so that they can very quickly implement measures and countermeasures.

Taking the time to define the plan together with the Select Committee or the full EWC (depending on the size the SC might be a faster track) will mean saving a lot of time afterwards.

If you decide to work with the Select Committee first, they can then onboard the rest of the European Works Council on their own so that the whole group is on the same page.

Our tips

- 1) Define the **key points** of the EWC crisis plan
- 2) **Brief and train** Select Committee and EWC members in crisis management skills
- 3) **Onboard** the Select Committee via online meetings with translations
- 4) **Write** the crisis plan and **translate** it into the different languages
- 5) Organise the **onboarding of the full EWC** via the Select Committee through online meetings with translations
- 6) Support and moderate **follow-up meetings** with the Select Committee and the full EWC
- 7) **Bundle the results of the work of the teams** and make them available in the different languages

Update your EWC on your COVID-19 plans in writing

Your EWC needs to be kept informed at the earliest occasion and before any decision is made on COVID-19 measures implemented by your organisation.

Here are some examples where reacting in writing is essential:

- negotiated agreements with trade unions
- implemented processes to protect workers health
- contingency plans
- compensatory measures
- temporary shutdowns of plants or production lines
- strategies to deal with supply chain disruption
- informing on trends in terms of employment levels
- financial and economic status
- ...

Our tips

- 1) Write a **daily or weekly communiqué** to your EWC in the different EWC languages
- 2) Create a **dedicated intranet page** where you post regular updates in the different EWC languages
- 3) Allow all EWC members to **send in questions** in their language on a regular basis
- 4) Send your **answers** within 3-5 days in the different EWC languages

Copywriters and translators can:

- ✓ Write the source texts for any of the above in your source language
- ✓ Set up validation procedures for input and approval of the source text by you
- ✓ Translate the texts in all your EWC languages within the shortest deadlines
- ✓ Work in the ways that best suit your needs: manage the whole process or integrate in your existing workflow

Allow your EWC representatives to discuss COVID-19 developments in each country amongst themselves

EWC meetings always involve an internal meeting without the presence of the management team.

Now more than ever, EWC members need some time to themselves to discuss the situation with their colleagues from the different countries.

By giving them this opportunity, you create trust and you save precious time as they can give you their joint feedback on any measures that you are implementing.

Our tips

- 1) Book **time slots** for EWC internal meetings on our interactive digital platforms
- 2) Hire a **moderator** to assist them and to make sure their meeting goes smoothly
- 3) Allow all EWC members to express themselves in their language by providing **interpretation** during their meeting
- 4) Let EWC members set the agenda and assist them with implementation

An agency can:

- ✓ Onboard the participants and assist with technical issues
- ✓ Set up the platform and send out the invitation to the participants
- ✓ Book the interpreters
- ✓ Provide the meeting moderator
- ✓ Translate the agenda and all useful meetings documents

Contact your trade union federation or another expert

If any problems arise in the process of the interaction between the EWC and management, you might want to contact the right expert to help you solve substantial issues related to the content of your social dialogue.

And / or you might need some other expertise from independent experts in various fields.

Our tips

- 1) Get the contact details of trade union officials and experts**
- 2) Organise online meetings or telephone conferences to discuss relevant issues**
- 3) Make minutes of these meetings and make them available in the different languages**
- 4) Translate any documents or presentation materials that are needed for these meetings or that you want to share with your EWC**

Translate all relevant documents on your COVID-19 plans

During the corona crisis many documents, guidelines and instructions need to be made available to your staff and teams in the different locations.

It is essential that these materials are translated into all your languages quickly all the while being mindful of the best quality.

European Works Councils may want to make some vital information available to their constituents on issues like: health and safety, new working procedures, new shift organisation, teleworking, communications between teams, ...

Our tips

- 1) Whatever you need: look for efficiency and fast delivery times.
- 2) Look for an agency to which you can send your documents 24h/24h
- 3) Set up an express workflow for all corona-related content with your agency
- 4) Request translators in different time zones so you can work around the clock
- 5) Check whether your agency has IT systems that use COVID-19 ready translation memories (TMs)

Make minutes of online EWC meetings during COVID-19

When you organise update meetings with your EWC, it is essential to make sure that they lead to value in terms of immediate and concrete actions.

This is not the moment to lose precious time so it is in everybody's interest that all stakeholders know what to and what is expected of them.

Minutes provide a structure to your proceedings, drive action and enable to keep track of progress.

Our tips

- 1) Look for notetakers who can work in all source languages
- 2) Translate your minutes into all languages within maximum 3 days
- 3) Request for notetakers to either attend the meeting or to work from a recording
- 4) Produce full transcripts, executive summaries and communiqués
- 5) Look for fast turnaround times and very short deadlines

Build your EWC roadmap during the COVID-19 crisis

European Works Councils with a full roadmap in place are simply better equipped in times of crisis.

Whilst having a crisis plan (cfr recommendation 3) certainly is essential, it is infinitely more efficient to have a full EWC Roadmap

- Information is structured better and passed on more quickly
- All EWC members know what they can and cannot do
- Improved information flows between the EWC and management
- The Select Committee has received a clear mandate from the group
- The cascade of communications between the European, national and the local levels is functioning well.
- ...

So, if you do not yet have an EWC Roadmap, why not build it during the COVID-19 crisis?

Doing so will lead to increased trust between all stakeholders and this is a value that is direly needed now and will be at least as important to come out of the crisis with as little damage and disruption as possible.

Our tips

- 1)** An expert can assist you to fast-start the process
- 2)** Organise online workshops with the Select Committee to build an emergency EWC Roadmap
- 3)** Set immediate tasks and priorities
- 4)** Develop a crisis communications plan usable now and update it progressively later

Provide EWC training during the COVID-19 crisis

In order to play a valuable role in the handling of this crisis, EWC members need to develop some essential skills.

They need to be able to analyse the situation, to provide quality feedback to colleagues and to management and they need to be able to do so under increased stress and pressure.

In other words, if ever there was a time to train your EWC, it is now.

With most (or all) of your EWC representatives in lockdown and working from home, it is essential to invest some hours in increasing their skills.

The results obtained as a consequence of this will be monumental and the time invested will repay itself manifold.

And these skills will sorely be needed when things start to go back to normal once again.

A well-trained European Works Council will help your company to be fully operational on the basis of efficient social dialogue.

Our tips

- 1) **Analyse the training needs** of the EWC to get operational fast
- 2) Plan online trainings and workshops to **upgrade skills** (crash course)
- 3) **Concentrate on key skills** needed in corona-times
 - time management and priority setting
 - presentation skills
 - negotiation skills
 - asking questions
 - conflict resolution
 - ...
- 4) **Coach trainees** for immediate and tangible results

About us

For over twenty years Presence has been providing businesses with a **translating and interpreting service** – along with the supply of all the associated **audio-visual equipment** needed for conferences and meetings (large or small). We specialise in multilingual events (live, online or hybrid) and tailor our services to ensure you obtain exactly what you want.

We are active in **more than 30 countries** and we have a **database of more than 3000 translators and interpreters** covering all main languages. All our translators and interpreters are fully qualified and have years of experience with multilingual, corporate and public events.

At Presence we aim to be your **strategic ally**, whether you are a conference organiser, a communications manager or a marketing professional. We do more than just translate and interpret – we ensure that your voice is heard clearly and that your **international communications** are faultless, efficient and effective.

Over the years, Presence has become the **expert of choice throughout the EU** in terms of **European Works Councils**. We organise more than 150 EWC meetings per year and we assist our clients with everything they might require to make their EWC run smoothly and efficiently.

Presence will provide you with 1 account manager to assist you with all your EWC needs

- Conference interpreters
- Audiovisual equipment and support
- Written translations
- Note taking
- On-site coordination
- Virtual and hybrid meetings
- Training and advise
- Budget management and optimization

About Peter Van Den Steene



Peter Van Den Steene is a communications expert and philosopher with a passion for making European Works Councils matter and for giving all perspectives a voice by linking translations to technology. Since 1992, he has assisted hundreds of EWCs.

In 2000, he created **Presence** a full-service communications agency for European Works Councils Peter is also the founder of the strategic consulting agency **Paradigma**, which specialises in changing the way EWC members look at themselves, their organisation and the way they operate their EWC.

Has this white paper sparked questions
or do you want to know more about our solutions?



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