

National Reports

Macedonia

(Annex VII)

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INTRODUCTION / PRESENTATION OF THE SITUATION AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL IN THE TRANSPORT SECTOR

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a serious impact on the global economy, and certainly in a country that has already a small economy and the effects of the crisis have been felt on a large scale.

It is quite understandable that there have been major disruptions in the transport sector, whether it is road, water or air traffic, regardless of whether it is the transport of goods or passengers. Chains for the supply of food, hygiene products, medicines and medical equipment faced particular difficulty.

Transportation is vital to the functioning of society and therefore, as the COVID crisis expands, it is one of the most endangered branches, taking into account supply and demand. On the one hand, the need for the transport of goods that are important during emergencies has increased, and on the other hand, there has been a decrease in the demand for transport.

All the changes in external factors due to the COVID-19 pandemic forced companies to look for specific solutions adapted to their needs to adapt to the new situation.

In some companies, this has resulted in employees being involved in managing the health and economic crisis caused by the pandemic, while in other companies this has not been the case.

Although the purpose of this report is to realize the level to which the company's employees are involved and consulted regarding the company's actions to get out of the crisis and implement measures to deal with it more easily, we still have to keep in mind that, as we mentioned, the companies only implemented the measures ordered by the Government and thus adapted to the new situation.

Changes in the transport of goods and passengers can be seen if the data of the State Bureau of Statistics* is compared for the years from 2020, when the pandemic was declared, until today.

The tables below refer to both transport within the country and international transport for the import and export of goods and the transport of passengers who in certain situations were trapped at the place where they found themselves at the moment due to protection measures relating to the closure of borders and airports.

Passenger transport:



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Year	road passenger transport	city - suburban transport	railway transport	air transport
2020	692 thousand	9,312 thousand	64 thousand	149 536
2021	778 thousand	10 922	64 thousand	396 130
2022	939 thousand	11,825 thousand	131 thousand	559 095

State Statistical Office

Amount of goods taken over compared to the previous year:

Year	freight road transport (%)	railway transport (%)	air transport (%)
2020	↑ 6,8	↓ 8,7	↓ 5,3
2021	↓ 6,5	↑ 0,9	↑ 6,8
2022	↑ 20,7	↓ 28.5	↓ 3,5

State Statistical Office

From the tables it can be seen what the change is during the pandemic and that the general activity depends on the type of transport and on the current conditions it changes and differs. The data shows that road traffic is the most used.

In order to get this data (which we already have in the tables), we need to see internally in the companies how they behaved in situations during the pandemic. For this purpose, questionnaires, an online survey, interviews and a focus group of employees in transport companies were conducted, as well as the Public Transport Company JSP Skopje, Airport Sv. Apostol Pavle Ohrid, Skopje International Airport, Macedonia road, MZ Transport and MZ Infrastructure and taxi transport in the city of Skopje.

DATA PROCESSING

Most of the measures refer to the installation of devices for personal disinfection of employees, they are allowed to have a sufficient number of medical gloves and disposable



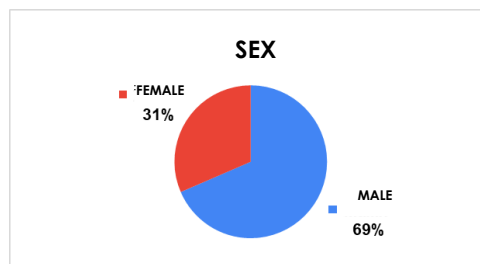
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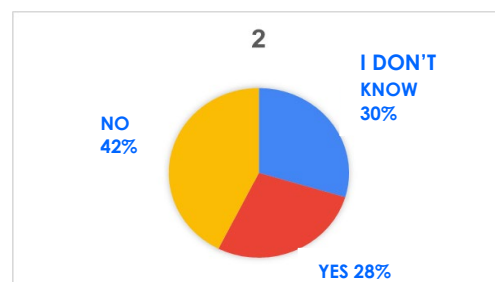
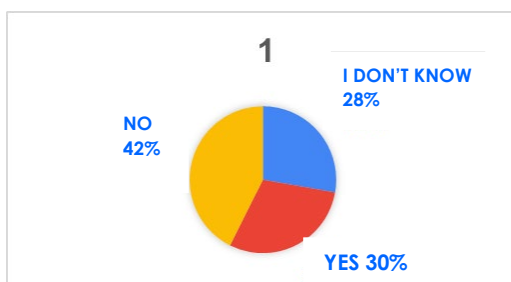
masks, as well as certain places for the storage of used protective equipment, access to other persons is limited, an isolated place for counter work is determined, sanitary facilities are determined, the gathering of a large group of drivers is limited, the reception of parties is limited, each employee should be informed about the situation, the measures taken at the level of the state/countries as well as in the company itself, as well as for the phone numbers intended for communication with the competent health authorities, and electronic tools should be used for communication as a measure to reduce direct contacts between employees. It is a general rule to introduce precautions, to carry out disinfection, to possess disinfectants.

A. Report on the conclusions of the "SURVEY":

The survey was conducted on 54 people, including 37 men and 17 women, in the road, road-rail and air transport sectors. Persons are employed in micro, small, medium and large companies, all are active workers in regular employment aged 18 - 65 years.

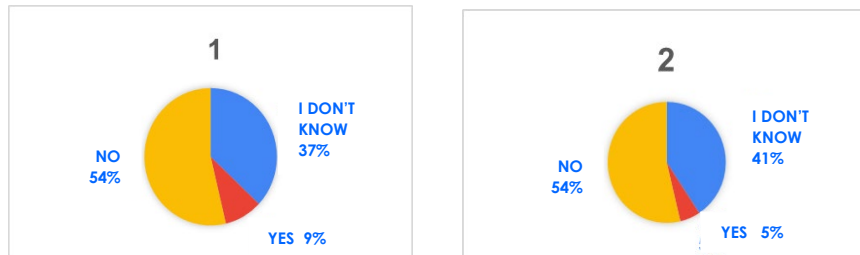


To the question: HAVE YOU OR YOUR REPRESENTATIVES, IF THERE ARE ANY IN YOUR COMPANY, BEEN CONSULTED PRIOR TO MAKING DECISIONS ON THE BEST WAY TO HANDLE INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19 AND INFORMATION ABOUT GOVERNMENT PROTECTION MEASURES OF THE POPULATION, the results are that the smallest percentage of employees was not consulted, which can be seen in the diagram below.



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Regarding consultations regarding the necessary training, how to convince the users of the means of transport to use protective equipment and to respect the mandatory/recommended hygiene standards and satisfaction with the organized training, the results are as follows:



From the first question according to the result of 54% (I DO NOT KNOW) it can be concluded that such trainings were not held (knowing the overall situation in the country and in other sectors) because, at the beginning, the whole situation with the coronavirus pandemic was not immediately taken seriously enough to react immediately.

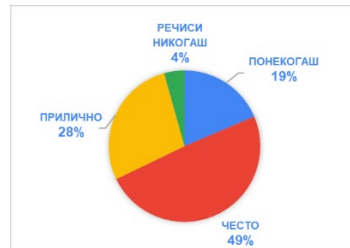
The drivers of the buses themselves had installed screens or a ban on front door entry or a ban on sitting in the front seats, there were screens behind the rear seats in the taxis and there was no contact between the driver and the passengers.

All measures in accordance with the government regulations were respected in air transport and they were shared in principle of hierarchy through official e-mail communication without any training for the employees. As for the citizens who used the land vehicles, 99% used the protective equipment in accordance with the government's measures and there were fines for their non-compliance.

At the beginning of 2020, it could not be assumed that the whole world would be affected by the way the pandemic works and ultimately survives. Given this, we expected the results we received in the survey regarding questions about possible changes in terms of working hours, free days, a lower salary, the possibility of losing work and difficulty of finding new employment in the sector and of course reconciliation of family and business life due to the introduction of remote work.



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It shows that people, i.e. employees, were afraid of how they would be able to maintain the balance in terms of work and whether they would be able to keep it at all.

It should be noted that in the period since the beginning of the coronavirus crisis, many companies have reduced the number of employees and even stopped working.

Regarding the next block, the questions related to HOW would you evaluate the MANAGEMENT carried out by your working organization/enterprise during the pandemic and after the consultations and participation in TERMS of... Personal uncertainty, observance of the rules regarding safety and health, various measures including flexible working hours, the way in which the company took care of the health and safety of work during COVID-19, support received from supervisors and workers' representatives and measures adopted by the Government for this sector, we must note that in almost all companies consultations with trade unions or workers to further undertake activities or deal with the COVID crisis were not made, but it can still be distinguished after some good practice in the way of applying the measures that were adopted by the Government.

According to the survey, the answers to the above questions are in the direction of expressed dissatisfaction with how the company managed to deal with the crisis, but still, in terms of employee behavior, it can be said that from a personal point of view and from the point of view of the behavior of colleagues, superiors, and clients, the handling was guided by personal conscience, and everyone was aware that the protection from the coronavirus comes from themselves and that we should contribute to a safe environment in which we live, work, and spend most of the time.

Trade unions during the pandemic, with their analyses and recommendations, together with the Macedonian Association for Protection at Work, sent correspondence to the relevant institutions and the Government with recommendations on the measures to be taken to protect workers in relation to all sectors that are at greatest risk of infection.



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Positive practice is precisely the measure of assistance in the payment of salaries by the government. A big problem was the payment of salaries, and in that part, the subsidization of salaries was a good measure, but unfortunately, in certain companies (in general, from all sectors), abuse of the measure was observed, and the envisaged funds for the payment of salaries did not end with the employees.

Regarding the next two blocks of questions related to PERSONAL EXPERIENCE regarding the activities that your company has implemented and is implementing in order to overcome the health and economic CRISIS caused by COVID-19 according to the survey, the majority of answers indicate a low percentage of satisfaction with the measures taken during the pandemic and now. This is a result of the overall management of the crisis in the country and the delayed adoption of measures that were supposed to reduce the effect of the crisis that went from a health crisis to an economic and social crisis because the needs for a normal standard of living were not met for most of the employees, so we can say about those who managed to stay in their jobs.

A proposal from the trade unions was also to establish a solidarity fund from which a certain amount of money will be paid to the socially disadvantaged, pensioners and those most affected by the crisis, but as a late measure minimal funds were paid to the unemployed, students, pensioners and socially vulnerable categories, insufficient to cover even basic living needs. The measure was delayed as the number of unemployed rose dramatically. ¹According to the Employment Agency of Macedonia, unemployment continued to grow at a potentially accelerated pace in the period afterwards and that the number of net new unemployed persons in the period March-August 2020 is about 37 thousand people.

According to all of the above, the result of the next block of survey questions related to the activities carried out by the GOVERNMENT IN MANAGING THE economic and HEALTH CRISIS caused by COVID-19 is expected. The responses expressed dissatisfaction or little satisfaction with the measures taken by the government. They were conducted very little and belatedly and did not have the effect that was needed, that is, they created only additional dissatisfaction in the general population. As for the social dialogue, there were no attempts to establish or improve it in order to facilitate a quicker exit from the crisis and recovery from it. There were many demands from the trade unions, both from the transport sector and from

¹ <https://www.financethink.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/PB43.pdf>



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other sectors, certainly from the trade unions at the national level, which were included in documents proposing measures to help employees, companies and the population reduce the number of deaths first, and then to help overcome the whole crisis, but all this was not heard and left aside.

Regarding the trade unions (the last block of questions in the survey), the results are satisfactory given that the respondents expressed satisfaction with the work of the trade unions. It must be noted that in the periods when it was mandatory to wear masks, gloves, and disinfectants, the trade unions came forward and supplied the employees, i.e., their colleagues, with the necessary funds. This is the case with the Public Transport Company JSP Skopje, which carries out passenger transport by city bus in the city of Skopje. The president and trade union representatives helped protect employees, i.e., bus drivers, who were among the people every day, although the number of passengers was reduced. The purchase of the protective assets was made by the trade union with its own funds. Here we will point out that the trade unions during the Corona crisis stepped forward very strongly and steadily with their demands because they perceived the situation in time and foresaw the consequences that were much greater than the official data, especially in relation to the people who lost their jobs.

B. Report on the conclusions of the "INTERVIEW":

As part of the project, interviews were conducted with employees of the Public Transport Company JSP Skopje, Macedonia Road, MZ Transport and MZ Infrastructure and the two airports in the country, one in Skopje, and the other in Ohrid and taxi transport in the city of Skopje.

The first person interviewed was Afrim Mucha, who is employed as a bus driver in JSP Skopje. This company has over 1000 employees and is part of the group of a large company whose activity is the transportation of passengers on the territory of the city of Skopje.

It was reported from the interviewed person that consultations with the employees in the real sense in which it is required to be done have not been done and no training has been done in terms of protection and application of the measures for protection against COVID-19, but the measures that are mandatory to be taken in accordance with the government regulations have been taken. Some of the measures have reduced the capacity of passengers that can be transported in buses, mandatory wearing of a protective mask by drivers and passengers, seating was recommended at a distance, thorough disinfection of buses was done, night lines



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were abolished and the train line was reduced, which met with resistance from passengers because, on the contrary, crowds were created on buses.

In the period since the beginning of the pandemic, a positive procedure that we can say as a positive practice in this enterprise is the meeting of the trade union that consciously and with perceived real situation helped in supplying protective equipment for the entire period of time it was needed, given that masks, gloves and disinfectants are expendable material.

At the beginning of the pandemic, immediately after the declaration of a state of emergency in the country on 16.03.2020, as a medium for transferring the measures taken, the official websites were used, we will first mention the ²website of the Ministry of Transport and Communications where all measures should be taken by the persons involved in transport.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, measures for the prevention of the coronavirus have been published on the website ³ of JSP Skopje, and later, after the introduction of the state of emergency, the measures taken to protect the company were announced. Attached is a link from the official site where it can be seen that the company regularly informs users of public transport.

The internal information of the employees in the enterprise is carried out through the supervisors on the principle of hierarchy, and the members of the union could attend trainings organized by the union for safety and health at work, but those trainings were not direct protection against the coronavirus, but were to inform the members about the rights and obligations regarding safety and health at work and how the employees should act in case they are not provided with all protection measures in accordance with the law. After such trainings, it can be said that the communication/requirements of the employees with the responsible persons in order to provide the necessary protection measures ranging from risk assessment in the workplace to providing the necessary protective equipment.

From this interview, we can conclude that both the company and the employees through the union tried to deal with the situation, but in different ways according to their needs. It would be ideal if information and consultation would happen in the right way, but a certain way of cooperation has been achieved.

The second interview was made with Latko Jovanovski, an employee of the Railways of the Republic of Macedonia Transport AD-SKOPJE, which is a joint-stock company owned by the state and according to the number of employees belongs to the group of a large

² <http://www.mtc.gov.mk/Preporaki%20od%20Vlada/Doneseni-Uredbi-so-zakonska-sila-zavnatreshniot-i-megjunarodniot-transport>

³ <http://jsp.com.mk/vest.aspx?vest=1490>



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enterprise. The interviewee is employed as a machinist in this company and we learned from him during this interview that all measures for protection in accordance with the government regulations were applied in Macedonian railways, as well as regular disinfection of the wagons where passengers and freight trains for the transport of goods are transported. This was done in 2021⁴, although the official start of the coronavirus pandemic was in 2020. The company changed its timetable according to needs and according to the introduction of a curfew that restricted the freedom of movement of citizens. For the information of all users of railway traffic, the train order is published on the official page⁵, which also publishes other information from the work of the company. From this interview, we cannot conclude that there was a good social dialogue and that the employees were consulted in terms of making decisions, and we cannot boast of good practice that we would share in this report, but we can still say that the company behaved like a socially responsible company and implemented all the measures it was able to.

The third interview we did was with Ljiljana Korunoska – Poposka, who is employed at the airport of St. Apostol Pavle in Ohrid, which is a private company owned by TAV. She gave us information about the airport in Ohrid and the airport in Skopje.

First of all, we can say that the measures for wearing masks, gloves and the use of disinfectants are strictly observed. We can mention that the situation with the airports was slightly different because they had a period of interruption, i.e. from 18.03.2020 to 01.06.2020, the airports were closed and flights were not carried out due to the high coverage of the COVID 19 virus and in accordance with the situation with the pandemic worldwide. And here there were no trainings for preparing employees how to deal with the workplace pandemic and the entire process of information was conducted through official communication. But at the airports we can praise the way it was organized and operated during the pandemic. We will mention that at the airports, quick test points were set up, which greatly facilitated the process, considering that one of the important edges for travel

⁴ <https://mzt.mk/%D0%BF%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%87%BA%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5-%D0%B2%D0%BE%D0%B7%BE%D0%B2%D0%B8-%D1%81%D0%B5-%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%B7%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%84%D0%B5%BA%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B1%82/>

⁵ <https://mzt.mk/%d0%bf%d0%bb%d0%b0%d0%bd-%d0%b7%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%be%d0%be%d0%b1%d1%80%d%b0%9c%d0%b0%98-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%bf%d%b0%0%d1%82%d0%bd%d0%b8%d1%87%d0%ba%d0%b8-%d0%b2%d0%be%d0%b7%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%b8-%d0%b2/>



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was to possess a negative COVID test no older than 72 hours, and with this point it was possible to meet, reduce the time needed for testing and reduce the very tension that existed. I believe that due to the seriousness of the work and the manner of functioning of the airports and the general precautions that need to be observed constantly, not only those related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the airports had a far more serious approach to dealing with the pandemic, without violating the protection measures and imposing on all passengers to comply with them.

The fourth interview was conducted with Gjorgi Marinovski, a driver in a privately owned taxi company belonging to the small enterprise group.

The condition of the taxi service is the most specific of all because the drivers themselves have direct contact with the passengers they transport. We can say that they are the most positive example in terms of the creativity with which they protected themselves from the virus. In the period when a curfew was introduced as a measure, we can say that the workload of taxi transport has increased due to the reduced volume of bus transport and shortened lines that do not traffic at all. Apart from the permanent measures that applied to everyone in the country, taxi drivers put separate screens in their vehicles that could divide the space between the front and rear seats where passengers sit. With these screens, there was more protection and safety for the use of taxi transport. The general impression is that everyone's work in the transport sector was guided by their awareness and responsibility to deal with the pandemic.

In accordance with the above, we will say that in this report four interviews were conducted by companies where we can see that some measure of protection was implemented further than what was ordered by the Government, and it was valid for all companies and citizens in the country.

C. Report on the conclusions of the "FOCUS GROUP":

The focus group was held on Thursday, April 20, 2023, in the premises of the syndicate on 50 "Divizija" no. 25 Skopje, and employees of road, rail, and air transport companies attended. A total of 9 people attended the meeting, along with the project expert. The meeting was held according to the agenda below and lasted 2 hours and 15 minutes.

All participants presented the current situation in the companies in which they work, the way of functioning, and the opportunities and obstacles that they see, considering that all present



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are trade union representatives and that, with the help of the trade union, they are trying in some way to improve the working conditions for their members and employees in the companies.

Of all those present, the problem of trade unions was addressed, as they are not yet one of the pillars of consultation in decision-making as they are in more developed countries.

Considering the Corona crisis that has been going on for several years, it is expected that all companies have come to conclusions and have seen in which part they have failed and in which part they can improve their functioning, and consequently, to recognize the need for constant involvement of trade unions in the decision-making process and to use it in the direction of growth and development. The success of the consultation is first and foremost conditioned by goodwill on both sides. It requires a common goal and common interests that are aimed at improving the work. In the last part, ideas were discussed that could be applied to the financing of companies in order to strengthen the role of workers, but it was concluded that employers still learn from their mistakes instead of preventing them. All the attendees outlined the ways in which they tried to establish consultations, the ways in which they tried to influence employers, but the results are small, and more joint work is needed to improve the communication between the employer and the trade union in order to see and feel the benefits from it.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROMOTION OF PARTICIPATION AND CONSULTATION OF WORKERS

A. Recommendations for EMPLOYERS:

After conducting research in the transport sector in accordance with the requirements for this report, we can conclude that employers should be more open to cooperation. It is necessary to have frequent meetings with the trade unions in order to ask for their proposals for improving the work of the company, to provide them with all acquired rights in accordance with the labor law, and to provide them with better working conditions in accordance with the law on safety and health at work because it is clear that the provisions of the law are not sufficiently respected in practice and risk assessments have not been made for each job.

B. Recommendations for WORKERS:



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From the report we come to the conclusion that there is good will on the part of workers to cooperate with employers and that they want to contribute to the development and progress of companies. They have a problem in communicating with managers in situations where the workers or the union wants to make their own proposals for better functioning and solving certain problems.

Workers need to be more active in trade union activities, that is, to be members of a trade union organization, given that achieving goals is easier when it is collective rather than individual.

C. Recommendations for the sector on the participation of workers in decision-making and on SUSTAINABILITY and responsible ENERGY CONSUMPTION in line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda:

Macedonia follows the guidelines given by the United Nations at the world level through the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

The state should make greater efforts to be able to approach the requirements of the United Nations Agenda, that is, to work rationally and economically in order to allow the rational use of resources.

One of the benefits of involving workers in the consultations is the fulfilment of the Agenda, in all sectors and, of course, in the transport sector.

Everything that is stated in the UN 2030 Agenda in terms of improving energy efficiency, increased sustainability, and accountability can be achieved initially if joint action is done at company level, then at sector level, and all with the help of state mechanisms.

ANALYSIS OF THE INVESTIGATOR 'S CONCLUSIONS

A. Conclusions on transfer of good practice in terms of participation and consultation of workers when it comes to managing other types of crises from the perspective of trade unions and business organizations



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From today's perspective, after a pandemic, we can say that companies saw certain failures in operations that occurred during the special regime of work during the pandemic. I believe that companies have come to the conclusion that in every crisis they should be able to rely on themselves, that is, on their resources and human resources, in order to reduce the expected consequences.

Consulting workers was not a tool that companies used or kept in mind when making important decisions for the further operation of the company, but in the future, along with the efforts made by unions, this will change.

B. Conclusions on the development of the social dialogue on crisis management COVID 19 when dealing with the transport sector

The conclusion regarding the social dialogue is not positive, and the same can be said for the social dialogue at the national level. The conclusion we got from the conducted interviews and the focus group is that the social dialogue can be improved and that a little more good will on the part of the employers is needed. Most often, the unions are those who want to have better communication with the management of the companies.

C. Conclusions on the importance of the different types of support provided to the sector by the central government

As mentioned in this report, the Government implemented aid measures to relieve the COVID crisis, but they were not to the extent that would meet the needs of the economy, that is, to the extent that would reduce the consequences faced by companies. However, any help is significant and I believe that this is another thing that the COVID pandemic has taught us regarding the critical points where support should first be given so that the subsequent measures that will be implemented can have an effect.

D. Conclusions on good practices implemented by employers and employees to improve worker participation and consultation in managing the COVID-19 crisis in the transport sector

Macedonia is a small country and an aspirant for joining the European Union, and with the very fact that a country has the opportunity to see good examples from other countries that it can implement in order to improve the functioning of companies and a real way of perceiving



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the causal relationship of various measures in terms of dealing with crises that are of a large scale, such as the COVID-19 pandemic that has happened to us.

There are good practices in the transport sector that have been applied, and we have mentioned them in this report, but I still believe that this level of consultation is not satisfactory.

SUMMARY OF THE FINAL REPORT

The transport sector was one of the most affected in the country during the COVID-19 crisis and is still recovering from its effects. In the transport sector, there were a large number of lost jobs, whose real number is greater than the official statistics, given that there is still a small proportion of workers who are contracted or do not have any contract.

The need for workers in the transport sector exists, but work should still be done to improve the working conditions, for which the trade unions are constantly reacting and have their own requirements for compliance with the labor law, the law on safety and health at work, collective agreements, and all other laws and by-laws of importance to the sector.

Consulting workers in the decision-making process during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic has not been satisfactorily practiced, but needs have been seen, and I believe that it will improve in the future. However, the conclusion is general in view of the fact that there are still many companies in the transport sector in Macedonia that are not covered in this report. I suppose that there are real cases where good practices are applied in companies, especially those that cooperate with the countries of the European Union, but in order to cover all companies, greater resources and a larger time frame are needed to collect and summarize the results obtained.



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