

5 October 2020

Dear Taoiseach,

These are exceptionally challenging times for our country. We, the undersigned, fully support the aims of you and your Government colleagues to help manage Covid-19, save lives, and protect the economy.

We are mindful of the profound impact of Covid-19 on the broader society and economy, and the wide-ranging efforts of Government in seeking to address this. Businesses across the country have worked hand in glove with Government to keep people safe, often at huge cost to themselves financially.

The hospitality and broader experience sector is a key element of our economic and social life, impacting each of the signatories below. It reaches well beyond those who are directly employed, and touches every city, town, village and rural community, with a far-reaching supply chain. It encompasses everything from the rich provenance of our food, sophisticated hotels that operate to the highest international standards, our pubs which are known and loved by national and international visitors alike, to unique experiences such as whiskey tasting in distilleries. All of this forms the fabric of our unique hospitality offering.

Underpinning all of this are the ancillary suppliers, contractors, and services to all those providers and a deep interdependency with Ireland's hospitality industry.

The sector contributes €4.5 billion in wages, salaries and employment taxes every year. More than 330,000 people are either employed directly or supported directly by demand from the sector.

We, businesses operating in this sector, have become increasingly concerned that the current Irish response is centred on restricting economic activity to a much greater extent than any other country in Europe, including full or partial closures of non food pubs, and much harsher international travel restrictions than our European neighbours.

Alongside the enormous impact for the businesses in question, the consequences of this ongoing focus will reach deep into the Irish economy. The current Irish approach risks not just short term, but long-lasting and irreparable damage to the economy and Irish society.

We are extremely concerned about the re-closure of hospitality venues and its emergence as a primary strategy to address the spread of the virus. Ireland already imposed one of the longest hospitality lockdowns in Europe, with non food pubs in Dublin never having opened. Many businesses operating in the experience economy are being constrained disproportionately. Other countries in Europe, many of whom are managing Covid effectively have not resorted to closing the hospitality sector.

The lesson of other countries is that a different approach is possible and should be considered – an approach which protects our health but also enables the hospitality and experience economy to operate. We believe a broader and more strategic approach towards supporting the hospitality sector is now essential.

Our first request is that the Government looks to best practice internationally and to countries that have managed to keep their hospitality sector open while at the same time taking clear and targeted approaches to controlling the spread of the disease in communities.

Our second request is for a much more targeted set of measures and supports for the sectors most impacted by COVID, and its restrictions. It is now clear that the measures announced in July are insufficient.

Finally, we urge for much greater engagement and coordination with the industries most impacted by the current restrictions. For example, the incredibly short notice given for the recent closures in Ireland caused unnecessary economic hardship to many businesses and could have been avoided, while consultation is also essential in the design and delivery of effective support measures.

The hospitality and experience sector are regulated environments and have proven to be responsible players throughout the crisis. The sector, which is vital to the Irish economy, can play a crucial role in the economic recovery which will follow this pandemic, as it did during the recovery of the last economic crisis, when it accounted for one in every seven jobs created. Regrettably, this recovery will not be the case if many of these businesses are forced to permanently shut their doors.

We hope that you will take these legitimate and urgent concerns on board. We are all ready and willing to take action to tackle this virus, something that is in everyone's best interests.

Yours