

Austria flies in care workers to prevent gaps due to virus

March 30 2020

Chartered flights brought more than 200 workers to Austria on Monday to ensure that the provision of care to the elderly and vulnerable was not disrupted by coronavirus-related travel restrictions, a regional official said.

Austria's social care sector is heavily dependent on staff from eastern Europe, many of whom shuttle back and forth, staying in Austria for weeks at a time.

On Monday, 231 workers were flown in to provide round-the-clock care in the region of Lower Austria, which organised flights from the Bulgarian capital Sofia and the Romanian city of Timisoara.

Regional social affairs official Christiane Teschl-Hofmeister told public radio station Oe1: "I can't tell you now whether this will be a one-off action or not.

"If the need presents itself again we will try to do everything we can to fulfil it," she said.

Since several neighbouring countries shut their borders in response to the pandemic, fears have grown in Austria that the crucial flow of care workers could be threatened.

The regional chamber of commerce is paying for foreign staff to stay in a hotel and complete a 14-day quarantine before they begin work, Oe1

reported.

They are then expected to stay longer than the usual period of three to four weeks.

Teschl-Hofmeister said only 70 workers were needed immediately, but more than 200 were recruited as a "security" measure.

The European Commission has issued guidance for member states to ensure that workers in key fields—including the care sector—can cross borders to work despite the new restrictions.

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