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## HOW THE PANDEMIC AFFECTS THE SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM ESPECIALLY THE UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE IMMIGRATION DATA

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### Abstract

*In the light of the current pandemic, the labour market has suffered many changes: from the typical 9 to 5 job done from the office, to the accommodation to a work from home type of job. Even if we speak about the employer or the employee, the situation brought many difficulties regarding how the social security system can help each one.*

*In this paper the main focus will be on the impact of the pandemic regarding the labour market with a strong accent on the unemployment benefits and the statistics regarding the immigrants. We tend to see an increase of the number of unemployed people and a tendency for the immigrants to move back to their home countries. This is a natural response of the labour market regarding the pandemic. The paper aims to investigate the unemployment rate-unemployment benefits-immigration flows in the EU countries in 2020 when the pandemic erupted compared to the previous periods. Therefore, we aim to emphasize the main changes that took place because of the pandemic crisis.*

*Keywords: Pandemic, labour market, unemployment, social security system, statistics, data.*

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### 1. Introduction

In this research it is very important to look in detail at every aspect that leads to the social security of the remaining unemployed workers and immigrants, but also how they have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the 2000s, migration took on a very large scale at European and international level with the creation of the European Union and the abolition of the movement limitation between Member States. These advantages at European level have led to an analysis of the socio-economic contexts relating to the interaction and contact points between the protection of workers and the free movement of goods and services. The relationship between these issues has grown unprecedentedly and the European Union has had to

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regulate the special situations of workers who work outside their mother country in order to avoid any kind of discrimination and exploitation against workers.

With this paper we aim to analyse the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market, but especially on the unemployed people, migrants and especially how the mentality of the people who have been employed and left without a job and those who have migrated to different countries has evolved and are now returning home.

I believe that this pandemic has a major impact on unemployment, which has recently reached its highest rates, even higher than those experienced during the 2008 economic crisis.

The aim of this work is to make a sharp distinction between unemployment and inactive people, to see the effects of unemployment in the short and long term. We will present the sectors of activity most impacted by the pandemic and those that are least impacted.

Another very important analysis will be made on the trend towards retraining that unemployed or inactive people have in relation to the work they did before.

However, there is also the disappearance of certain types of jobs, and after reprofiling unemployed people, the increase in demand for other jobs in other sectors of activity that we will analyse below.

In the same context, we will also discuss how the restrictions imposed by the state during the pandemic have played a crucial role in the mentality of the unemployed and inactive, so as to reach decisions to re-profile themselves, live on unemployment benefits or stop working in any field.

A thorough analysis will also be made of the hours that are currently being worked after the outbreak of the pandemic, compared to the same period in 2019 when we can say that life was normal. We also need to see how the Work Programme was impacted with the coming of the pandemic, with the employee wanting more flexible hours than a fixed schedule as it was before. We will analyse the concept of “zero hours worked” of those who remain employed.

Another very important thing that will be found in the content of the paper will be the analysis of the types of people most impacted by the pandemic on the labour market compared to previous years, but also how these people we will discuss are divided into inactive and unemployed.

The conclusions of this work will be drawn on the basis of the above elements, focusing on the changes in jobs today compared to pre-pandemic periods.

## **2. Literature review**

Since the beginning of the pandemic period, it has been the International Labour Organisation that has kept track of unemployment and migration in the pandemic

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context through several working papers and analyses that have been carried out since the beginning of 2020 to date (ILO, 2021).

Regulation 883/2004 on the coordination of social security systems also enshrines several principles underpinning the rules for the coordination of social security systems, so that there is a uniformity of cross-border work carried out by each worker.

However, it is also important how the social and tax contributions are divided, so that a worker who has performed an activity, either in his own name or as a posted worker, has economic stability at the end of the work performed. That is why we are interested in analysing the legal and economic aspects underlying the provision of allowances, allowances and deductions.

In order to remove barriers to fair labour mobility within the Union, the European Union is making considerable efforts to regulate and harmonise its legislation in such a way that it disappears and workers have an easy and accessible system (Paragon relocation, 2020).

Thus, such promotion of the transnational provision of services requires conditions of fair competition and anti-cartel, as well as measures to ensure that workers' rights are respected both at national and Union level (European Commission, 2016).

According to Eurostat, in 2018 there were 8.3 million under-occupied part-time workers in the EU, 7.6 million people were able to work but were not looking for a job, and a further 2.2 million people were looking for a job, but were unable to start work immediately; whereas a total of 18.1 million people were in a similar situation to unemployment in the EU-28 in 2018 (European Parliament, 2020).

Diversity in labour markets among EU economies will continue to persist, as unemployment rates are expected to continue to differ considerably across all EU countries. Gräbner et al. (2020) showed that the differences between GDP and unemployment were the result of different growth patterns in the European Monetary Union (EMU). Members of the Southern EMU followed debt-led growth patterns, leading to increased private sector indebtedness and the accumulation of current account deficits.

However, evidence (Bosch, 2016) shows that important challenges remain in the introduction and expansion of unemployment insurance in developing countries. These challenges range from achieving coverage in countries with high informality, financing the scheme without distorting the labour market and ensuring progressive redistribution.

On the other hand, we are focused on studying unemployment that has shifted with a greater impact on Member States following the COVID-19 pandemic (ILO, 2020), but we also want to look at its impact on social and fiscal benefits from a statistical and economic point of view.

In the current context, in which migration and immigration phenomena are in bloom, great care must be taken for the part of social security and unemployment and the qualifications that will be made when concluding individual employment contracts. This aspect is a novelty in specialised practice and poses many problems, especially when establishing the social regime or defining the citizenship status (Eurostat, 2020).

Some important information is provided in the latest report of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs on the economic situation of Union workers and the economic situation of the Union. The EU has entered the deepest economic recession in its history, with economic activity falling in Europe at an unusually high speed; whereas, according to the summer 2020 economic forecast, EU GDP will fall by around 8.3 % and that of the euro area by 8.7 % in 2021 (Eurostat, 2020).

The persistent levels of unemployment achieved require structural labour market reforms to be accompanied by employment-friendly fiscal policies, with both short- and long-term effects (Campoy-Muñoz et al., 2016).

The COVID-19 crisis has produced a symmetrical shock affecting all Member States, even if its impact will not be uniform and is stronger for the more than 109 million citizens at risk of poverty even before the pandemic; whereas this crisis puts a heavy strain on social protection systems, which must mitigate the social effects of the crisis and provide all people with decent living conditions and access to essential services such as health, education and housing; whereas the COVID-19 crisis is likely to deepen existing inequalities and a coordinated response at European level is needed to ensure social and territorial cohesion (Suryahadi et al., 2020).

However, given the weak coverage patterns in highly developed countries, this redistribution may not always be desirable. Many workers contributing to the unemployment insurance scheme will not accumulate sufficient contributions to receive benefits, unemployment insurance if/when they lose their formal jobs (primarily low-income and low-skilled workers). Those contributing to the qualification for benefits are likely to come from the top of the spectrum income distribution. Therefore, in some cases (depending on coverage), unemployment insurance could actually redistribute income from low-income earners to unemployed middle- and high-income workers.

### **3. Evolution of unemployment rates and immigration in EU countries during the pandemic**

According to the accompanying Staff Working Document “Identifying Europe’s needs for recovery”, the most pressing social need is the fight against unemployment; whereas in this document the Commission estimates (European Commission, 2016) that EUR 192 billion of investment will be needed for social infrastructure.

In the first half of 2020, the euro area labour market suffered a massive deterioration due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken to halt it (Gräbner et al., 2020); as the decline in employment of around 4 % in 2020 hides a more substantial

deterioration in the number of hours worked, as employees in short-time work are actually unemployed and are still considered as employed only statistically.

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2021) it was noted that more and more unemployed people tend to become inactive. This document shows that the percentage of inactive people increased by 2.2 % in 2020 compared to the unemployment rate.

Because of the pandemic and changes in the labour market, people out of work tend to become inactive rather than receiving unemployment benefits and prefer to remain unemployed for a long time and then withdraw to inactivity.

Also, in the International Labour Organisation analysis of 21 January 2021 it is indicated that the sectors of activity are unevenly affected, as follows:

- The most affected sectors of activity are: food, art and culture, construction and retail;
- At the opposite pole, with a considerable increase lies: communications, IT, the financial sector and insurance.

Table 1 shows that the pandemic and the restrictions imposed during 2020 affected the unemployment rate, leading it to much higher rates than in the previous year. Each state experienced an increase in the number of unemployed persons, although each tried to adopt different methods of carrying out work, only in order not to dismiss workers, such as part-time work, known in Romanian law as short-time work. France was one of the first countries to have a clear regulation of the law of part-activity and the amount of the allowance.

Table 1. Unemployment rate

| <b>Country</b> | <b>2019</b> | <b>2020</b> |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|
| Belgium        | 5,4         | 5,6         |
| Bulgaria       | 4,2         | 5,1         |
| Czech Republic | 2,0         | 2,6         |
| Denmark        | 5,0         | 5,6         |
| Germany        | 3,1         | 3,8         |
| Estonia        | 4,4         | 6,8         |
| Ireland        | 5,0         | 5,7         |
| Greece         | 17,3        | 16,3        |
| Spain          | 14,1        | 15,5        |
| France         | 8,4         | 8,0         |
| Croatia        | 6,6         | 7,5         |
| Italy          | 10,0        | 9,2         |
| Cyprus         | 7,1         | 7,6         |
| Latvia         | 6,3         | 8,1         |
| Lithuania      | 6,3         | 8,5         |
| Luxembourg     | 5,6         | 6,8         |
| Hungary        | 3,4         | 4,3         |
| Malta          | 3,6         | 4,3         |

|                 |      |      |
|-----------------|------|------|
| Netherlands     | 3,4  | 3,8  |
| Austria         | 4,5  | 5,4  |
| Poland          | 3,3  | 3,2  |
| Portugal        | 6,5  | 6,9  |
| Romania         | 3,9  | 5,0  |
| Slovenia        | 4,5  | 5,0  |
| Slovakia        | 5,8  | 6,7  |
| Finland         | 6,7  | 7,8  |
| Sweden          | 6,8  | 8,3  |
| Iceland         | 3,5  | 5,5  |
| Norway          | 3,7  | 4,4  |
| Switzerland     | 4,4  | 4,8  |
| Montenegro      | 15,2 | 17,9 |
| North Macedonia | 17,3 | 16,4 |
| Serbia          | 10,5 | 9,1  |
| Turkey          | 13,7 | 13,2 |

Source: EUROSTAT, database 2019-2020

It is also apparent from the table above those smaller countries with lower economic power were among the most affected by the phenomenon of unemployment, because they did not have the power to support employers to cope with the pandemic crisis, as in contrast, countries such as Belgium, Denmark and Germany experienced an unemployment rate rising by less than 1 %.

Table 2. Number of immigrants in the EU

| Country        | Year | Number  |
|----------------|------|---------|
| Belgium        | 2019 | 150,006 |
| Bulgaria       | 2019 | 37,929  |
| Czech Republic | 2019 | 105,888 |
| Denmark        | 2019 | 61,384  |
| Germany        | 2019 | 886,341 |
| Estonia        | 2019 | 18,259  |
| Ireland        | 2019 | 85,630  |
| Greece         | 2019 | 129,459 |
| Spain          | 2019 | 750,480 |
| France         | 2019 | 385,591 |
| Croatia        | 2019 | 37,726  |
| Italy          | 2019 | 332,778 |
| Cyprus         | 2019 | 26,170  |
| Latvia         | 2019 | 11,223  |
| Lithuania      | 2019 | 40,067  |
| Luxembourg     | 2019 | 26,668  |

|                 |      |         |
|-----------------|------|---------|
| Hungary         | 2019 | 88,581  |
| Malta           | 2019 | 28,341  |
| Netherlands     | 2019 | 215,756 |
| Austria         | 2019 | 109,167 |
| Poland          | 2019 | 226,649 |
| Portugal        | 2019 | 72,725  |
| Romania         | 2019 | 202,422 |
| Slovenia        | 2019 | 31,319  |
| Slovakia        | 2019 | 7,016   |
| Finland         | 2019 | 32,758  |
| Sweden          | 2019 | 115,805 |
| Iceland         | 2019 | 9,872   |
| Norway          | 2019 | 48,680  |
| Switzerland     | 2019 | 145,129 |
| Montenegro      | 2019 | 10,737  |
| North Macedonia | 2019 | 2,118   |

Source: EUROSTAT, Total number of long-term immigrants arriving into the reporting country during the reference year, 2019

Table 3. Migration at EU level in 2019-2020 by sex category (million)

| Reference area | Sex | Year | Non-migrant Age 15+ | Migrants 15+ | Non-migrant workers | Migrant workers |
|----------------|-----|------|---------------------|--------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| UE             | M   | 2019 | 50                  | 52,1         | 74,1                | 77,5            |
| UE             | F   | 2019 | 50                  | 47,9         | 46,7                | 59,8            |
| UE             | M   | 2020 | 48,4                | 50,3         | 72,2                | 75              |
| UE             | F   | 2020 | 47,8                | 45,7         | 45,7                | 56,9            |

Source: ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers Results and Methodology, 2019.

From Tables 1 and 2 we conclude that the countries with the highest number of immigrants (more than 100,000 in 2019), in ascending order are: Czech Republic with 105.888 immigrants and 2.2 % unemployment, Austria with 109.167 immigrants and 4.9 % unemployment, Sweden with 115,805 and 6.4 % unemployment, Greece with 129.459 and 19.3 % unemployment, Montenegro with 145.129 and 15.2 %, Belgium with 150,006 and 6 %, Romania with 202,422 and 4.2 %, the Netherlands with 215,756 and 3.8 %, Poland with 226,649 and 3.9 %, Italy with 332, 778 and 10.6 %, France with 385,591 and 9 %, Spain with 750.480 and 15.3 % and Germany with 886,341 and 3.4 %. According to these data, we find that most European countries with a large number of immigrants also have low unemployment rates. Of course, there are also some notable exceptions, Greece, Italy, Spain and France. With regard to the first three countries, unfavourable macroeconomic developments since 2008 (Eurofund, 2008) explain these developments not in line with the rest of Europe, and France has problems with African immigrants from its former colonies, which cannot be integrated into the labour market.

A conclusion of the smallest number of immigrants according to the data outlined above, in ascending order (up to 100,000) are: Turkey with 2,118 immigrants and 10.9 % unemployment rate, Slovakia with 7.016 and 6.5 %, Ireland with 9.872 and 2.7 %, Serbia with 10.737 and 12.8 %, Latvia with 11,223 and 7.4 %, Estonia with 18,259 and 5.4 %, Cyprus with 26,170 and 8.4 %, Luxembourg with 26, 668 and 5.6 %, Malta with 28.341 and 3.7 %, Slovenia with 31.319 and 5.1 %, Finland with 32,758 and 7.4 %, Croatia with 37,726 and 8.5 %, Bulgaria with 37.929 and 5.2 %, Lithuania with 40,067 and 6.2 %, Switzerland with 48.680 and 4.7 %, Denmark with 61.384 and 5.1 %, Portugal with 72,725 and 7.1 %, Iceland with 85.630 and 5.8 % and, last but not least, Hungary with 88,581 and 3.7 %. Here too, we have exceptions to the reverse correlation between the number of immigrants in these countries and the unemployment rate, namely Ireland, Hungary, Malta and Switzerland. These countries have strong protectionism in the labour market vis-à-vis their own workers, the former being also small European economies, and therefore they also have a low number of unemployed and immigrants.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2021) noted that there is an upward trend for the disappearance of jobs in lower-wage sectors comprising uneducated workers. The people most affected by the disappearance of jobs after the pandemic period are: young people, women and unskilled workers.

Another very interesting concept that has been implemented since 2020 is the decrease of hours worked per week by 8.8 % compared to 2019. I believe that this has happened because with the onset of the pandemic, technical unemployment has been found predominantly in all sectors of activity. This has inevitably led to the very definition of shortfall in hours worked per week, as technical unemployment is not one of the most common legislative instruments in practice to date.

The International Labour Organisation, through its working document published on 21 January 2021, showed that the hours worked in 2020 were much more affected than in 2009 during the financial crisis, as follows:

- In 2020 the decrease was 2.5 hours
- In 2009 the decrease was just 0.6 hours.

In the next part, I would like to define the general concept of short-time work which represents the loss or reduction of working time, while retaining the status of employee, but with the suspended employment contract, which inevitably leads to a reduction in working time according to the employer's wishes and needs. Short-time work may be total when the employee no longer performs work for the employer or may be partial when the number of hours worked or even the working week is reduced.

In other news, we have the concept of unemployment, which is temporary out of work. As I said above, there are two types of unemployed in recent times, those who are actively looking for a new job to resume their employment title, and the inactive people who are trying to escape from the labour market by looking for a job or are no longer willing to work at all.

On the other hand, with the reduction of working time, a new concept on the labour market is emerging, namely the concept of Zero hours worked by the employee. Why is this concept interesting? Because the person who no longer performs work is considered to be unemployed or inactive, but in this situation, there are persons who no longer perform work and still retain their status as an employee, which is a novelty in European law.

Another key issue to be raised and raised by the International Labour Organisation in its document of January 2021 is that Covid restrictions have played an important role in the mentality of the unemployed and inactive, as unemployed people prefer to receive the allowance for as long as possible, and inactive prefer to stop working at all and rely on state support even if it is at the limit of the subsistence and is for a fixed period.

It was statistically noted (Halaskova, 2018) a change in the behaviour of unemployed people who receive social benefits by increasingly defective job search if the benefits received are from good up. The motivation to look for a good job decreases compared to a situation where it would not receive any benefits at all or would receive rather few short-term benefits.

On the other hand, it was noted (Hassett, 2014) that people who are less unemployed have more chances at a new and good job than those who are unemployed for a longer period.

Another remark made over time showed that unemployed people usually wait until the deadline for granting unemployment benefits to start looking for another job (Dolenc et al., 2012). We can conclude from this that a good package of unemployment benefits also has a negative impact on the labour market, namely that it does not stimulate active job search.

So, by increasing the unemployment rate (Panzaru, 2013), the booking salary is also increased, and this will reduce the motivation to look for a new job, especially if the duration of this period of benefits is longer.

We will see in Table 3 the status of migration figures in the period 2019-2020 at Union level, in order to be able to capture the evolution generated by the pandemic in terms of migration phenomenon.

From the above data, we conclude that the proportion of people left unemployed in 2020, when it hit the COVID-19 pandemic, has increased in most Member States and the migration phenomenon has slowed slightly since 2019.

Another point highlighted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2021) is that female workers were much more affected by unemployment compared to male workers in 2020:

- 5 % of women remained unemployed — 4.3 % inactive and 0.7 % unemployed
- 3.9 % of men remained unemployed — 2.8 % inactive and 1.1 % unemployed.

In other news, it is very interesting to see that labour income decreased by 8.3 % in 2020 compared to 2019.

What is income from work? Income from work includes any income related to formal or informal work for salary or profit, but excludes any other types of transfers or benefits. Salaries subsidised by government-funded leave schemes are not taken into account in the above estimates of loss of income from work; it would actually reduce income loss for households benefiting from them. As for income from work, it takes into account income support measures, which are referred to as 'post support income' (Technical Annex 3 in ILO, ILO Monitor: COVID 19 and the World of Work — Sixth Edition, 23 September 2020).

## **5. Discussion, and Conclusions**

Following all of the above we can come to a simple conclusion that the social security system faces problems when it comes to supporting people who turn to it, that it is difficult to standardise all the rules at European level, that is why all the aspects outlined above must be seen as a package of technology, globalisation and education aimed at reducing unemployment and preventing it, as well as better regulation and adaptation for migrant workers.

In recent times, especially since the European Union has expanded its borders, the whole concept of freedom of movement for workers in the context of the transnational provision of services has come under the magnification of the Union institutions, the Member States and the social partners, and has been widely analysed, debated and criticised, even contested, by the states which are located in western Europe and towards which workers from Eastern Europe tend to be posted.

At the same time, fiscal consolidation is needed in many European economies to reduce debt damage or to rebuild the fiscal buffers used during the crisis. The effects of both fiscal policies and fiscal consolidation on labour market outcomes vary across countries and therefore their implementation needs to take into account certain aspects of the country's characteristics as well as its cyclical position.

I think it would be of great interest to focus on improving the quality of life of unemployed people, encouraging them to find a new job in a shorter time, not to wait until the end of the period in which they receive unemployment benefits.

As recommendations, concrete policies to help unemployed people and people who are immigrant in a country and need assistance would be welcome, and one of these policies would be, I believe, the active involvement of specialists in labour law by providing advice to people in need, so that they know the directions currently being pursued on the labour market and know how to act in the future to lead a better life, and not to live at the limit of subsistence from benefits or state aids.

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