

Larsen | Kipper | Schmid | Panzaru [eds.]

Transformations of Regional and Local Labour Markets Across Europe in Pandemic and Post-Pandemic Times

Challenges for Regional and Local Observatories



Nomos

Edition
Rainer
Hampp

Forschung und deren Anwendung im Bereich des
regionalen und lokalen Arbeitsmarktmonitorings im
transnationalen Vergleich
(Veröffentlichungen des IWAK)

Herausgegeben von

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Foreword

Dear readers, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused an exceptional shock to our economies, societies, and lives, taking the heaviest toll on the most vulnerable groups – such as women, young NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, and Training), adults with low levels of education, migrants, Roma, people with disabilities, “low-skilled” adults and unemployed people. It has caused havoc on Europe’s labour markets, hitting hardest low-paid sectors and sectors involving a high level of human interaction: accommodation and travel sectors, as well as domestic services.

The full impact of the crisis has not yet revealed itself. But it has made it even more complicated to master the multiple challenges the EU was facing already before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic: technological changes, including digitalisation and its consequences for the future of work, the need to master the green transition, ageing societies, and social inclusion.

The possibility of working remotely and the government measures taken across Europe have managed to cushion the heaviest blows by keeping people employed and businesses running. However, the EU and the Member States will have to take action to curb inequalities once the support policies are withdrawn. The COVID-19 pandemic is going to change the way we work. We cannot turn back the clock – the effects on the way we work will continue even after its end. Telework has proved to be an important job saver during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, only a minority of jobs can be done through telework and most work is place-dependent. In addition, teleworking tends to be skewed towards people in high paid jobs.

There is an urgent need to develop strategies for how to tackle the inequalities that have emerged in the crisis. This requires not only political will and investment, but also cooperation across all parties.

The challenge ahead is also to address possible future inequalities: excessive job losses have been avoided but we are just starting to feel the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. We need to try to see the bigger picture from the labour market perspective in order to better understand trends and improve the level of predictability. This will enable employers, employees, and social partners to better adapt to the unknown future that awaits us.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced us to change our ways of working very fast. We needed to make sure that many people had an adequate level of digital skills and competences so that they could continue working in an almost fully virtual environment. Digital technologies are now fully part of our daily lives. People who have not mastered basic skills and have not gained a qualification need to be upskilled to maintain their employability.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a new challenge, as training and consultation activities cannot take place in person and people who do not have sufficient digital skills or access to high-speed internet are in an even more disadvantaged situation. We have to find ways to turn this challenge into an opportunity so it can become part of upskilling measures for digital skills.

To support the European recovery from the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and protect and create jobs, the European Union has made billions of euros available through many different instruments. It must be ensured that these funds are spent on the right measures, for example upskilling and reskilling, developing necessary digital infrastructure in rural areas, and enabling the access of socially disadvantaged populations to such infrastructure.

The National Recovery Plans, currently under development, must offer appropriate and targeted measures adapted to the specific circumstances of each Member State and help repair the economic and social damage brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. No one should be left behind.

The European Union must rise from the ashes of the COVID-19 pandemic. We should take this crisis as an opportunity to build a more resilient and sustainable Europe, both economically and socially. This is our chance to design a more inclusive, just, and equal society, in which the most vulnerable can also take part and make their voices heard. We must not abandon but find ways to accompany vulnerable people and help them adapt to the changes and growing demands of labour markets.

To be able to develop efficient and targeted recovery strategies, it is very important to have a clear and adequate picture of the actual situation and specific circumstances in different Member States, regions, and localities, as well as across different sectors and population groups. Therefore, the scientific and statistical expertise and experiences of practitioners, researchers, and experts are crucial.

The current anthology is an excellent example of such valuable action. It includes contributions from scientists and experts across Europe and presents a variety of different approaches, methods, and data, providing very useful knowledge of the impact of the crisis on labour markets.

I trust you will find the following articles insightful and a crucial contribution to overcoming the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and post-pandemic times.

Laurențiu Plosceanu

President of the Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship of the European Economic and Social Committee
Brussels (Belgium)

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