



The impact of COVID-19 and response on the European Union Labour Market

Impact on demand
for SOCIEUX+ peer
to peer cooperation

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labour and employment

Technical Reports
Collection

06



PROGRAMME FUNDED BY
THE EUROPEAN UNION

Published by:

SOCIEUX+ Expertise on Social Protection,

Labour and Employment

FPS Social Security

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Graphic production:

Cyan, Proyectos Editoriales, S.A.

Madrid, August 2020



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Presentation



SOCIEUX+ Expertise on Social Protection, Labour and Employment is a technical assistance facility set-up co-funded by the European Union, France, Spain and Belgium and implemented by a partnership composed of four partners: Expertise France, leader of the partnership, Fundación Internacional y para Iberoamérica de Administración y Políticas Públicas (FIIAPP), Belgian International Cooperation on Social Protection (BELINCOSOC), and Belgian Technical Cooperation Agency (Enabel).

SOCIEUX+ aims to expand and improve access to better employment opportunities and inclusive social protection systems in EU partner countries by drawing expertise by EU Member States. It also works on enhancing the capacities of partner countries to better design, manage and monitor inclusive, effective, and sustainable employment strategies and social protection systems through peer-to-peer short-term technical assistance and knowledge development.

The present report is part of the technical series of SOCIEUX+. This research series showcase and analyse the work done by the SOCIEUX+ on key themes for the development of the debate on social protection and decent employment. The technical reports express in a simple and concise way complex information collected throughout the work of SOCIEUX+. They also seek to analyse the outcomes and impacts of the interventions to draw good practices and general knowledge on the theme.

The SOCIEUX+ Team is committed to facilitating peer-to-peer exchanges and cooperation among public practitioners and social partners. For more information on SOCIEUX+, please visit our website at www.socieux.eu or contact us at contact@socieux.eu



Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by Miguel Peromingo with the supervision and contributions of Adelio Fernandes Antunes, Team Leader of SOCIEUX+, Thierry Fiquet, Development and Technical Advisor of SOCIEUX+, and Adriana Detrell, Knowledge Development Officer of SOCIEUX+.

SOCIEUX+ and the author would like to thank the World Association of Public Employment Services (WAPES/AMSEP). WAPES and SOCIEUX+ collaborated on a survey to understand the response of public employment services to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the European Commission, the Inter-American Development Bank IDB, and the international labour Organisation ILO.

This report also builds on data shared and benchmarked with different networks and partners, in particular the European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), the European network of Public Employment Services (PES Network), the European and International Relations Department of Pôle emploi, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA).



Abstract

The current economic and labour market crisis following the outbreak of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the related global lockdown and quarantine measures will have long-term negative employment and social security effects on many employers and jobseekers worldwide, particularly those working in an informal environment, in vulnerable conditions, and/or with low employability.

European Union (EU) member states have taken a wide array of measures to respond to this mounting crisis and are focused on protecting workers, strengthening employer resilience, and fostering social dialogue and other labour market partnerships. While the crisis is not yet over and recovery is forecasted to be slow, short-term measures like benefit payments or allowances have provided instant economic relief for beneficiaries. Some countries have also opted for longer term approaches by tapping into markets that were on the innovation agenda before the crisis, such as digital technology or green jobs, and by rolling out frameworks for remote work and learning that are designed to become permanent ventures.

Other world regions could benefit from the European experience, and SOCIEUX+ is in a good position to help transfer knowledge from the EU to low- and

middle-income countries seeking an inclusive response to the impact of COVID-19 on their labour markets. SOCIEUX+ could provide targeted capacity building products such as specific assistance for vulnerable groups in crises, skills development for the future of work, new delivery models for employment services, and reform competence of labour markets and employment systems.

The present report reviews the key measures taken by EU member states in their early and medium-term response to the COVID-19 crisis. First, it briefly reviews the impact that the crisis is having on the labour market. It then gives examples of the primary support measures provided by governments and other labour market actors to businesses and workers. The examples focus on policies and practices to retain work and support business continuity, as well as steps that foster job innovation and protect worker health and safety. The report addresses governance changes in the delivery of employment services and the increasing importance of digitalisation on the labour markets. It also describes the role of social partnerships in the current crisis. The last chapter suggests adjustments to the SOCIEUX+ peer-to-peer portfolio in order to ensure relevant knowledge transfer to beneficiaries in crisis response measures for labour market and employment policy.

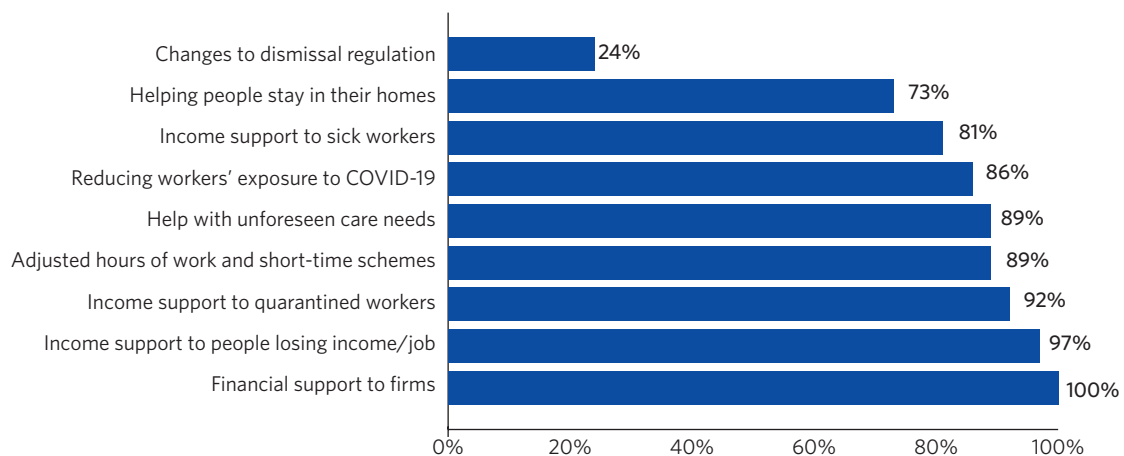
1. Introduction

The current global COVID-19 pandemic has shown that rapid responses in a stable social environment can ease economic downturns and help cushion the most vulnerable populations from its most harmful effects. However, this crisis has also shown that vulnerable people are more in danger of falling through the cracks in social protection systems that were weaker before COVID-19. Indeed, this pandemic has highlighted the importance of creating universal entitlements to health care and income support, in line with the 2030 Universal Social Protection goals. For emerging markets and developing countries, where informal labour markets and structural inequality prevails, large state reforms are needed to protect workers, and vulnerable groups need to be a major target of recovery efforts.

► **Sharing knowledge and learning between European and developing country partners on labour markets challenges.**

Globally, many countries have already begun to understand the acute necessity of reforming labour market policies. According to a recent report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on the response of public employment services to the pandemic, a majority of their members have already introduced or expanded measures to ease the employment and social

Figure 1: Share of OECD countries introducing new measures in response to COVID-19





protection impact of COVID-19, or are planning to do so in the near future. Countries like Colombia or Chile, which might have been hesitant to reform their labour market policies before the pandemic, have now been spurred to action.

SOCIEUX+ can make a crucial contribution to this readiness for reform by transferring knowledge and

learning from European labour markets to developing country partners. Its peer-to-peer approach, global network of experts, and project-based approach can showcase some of the following examples of formal business assistance and worker protections, and foster partnerships for labour market reforms.



2. EU Labour Markets and COVID-19 crisis

Although less than a year old, the impact of COVID-19 on labour markets has already been severe, and job recovery is expected to be slow. Online services like e-commerce are forecasted to remain strong, but other services (such as tourism) may continue to struggle for a long time. Compared to the global financial crisis of the 2000s, where the most affected sectors were primarily male-dominated, such as manufacturing, the sectors most affected by COVID-19 closures have been female-dominated, as women are more likely to be working in jobs with high levels of social interaction. Another target group which has been disproportionately affected by this crisis are young people. Almost 180 million young workers around the world are working in hard-hit sectors, and 77% of young people work in informal settings. Before the outbreak of the pandemic, more than 267 million young people were not in employment, education or training (NEET), and these figures are expected to rise, creating a 'lockdown generation'.

2.1. Immediate response

In the EU, governments have dedicated significant resources to alleviating the pandemic's impact on labour markets. According to Eurofound's *COVID-19 Policy Responses across Europe* report, by May 2020 member states had initiated more than 300 new and 200 amended legislative and policy measures related to supporting labour markets and mitigating the social impact of the pandemic. Many of these

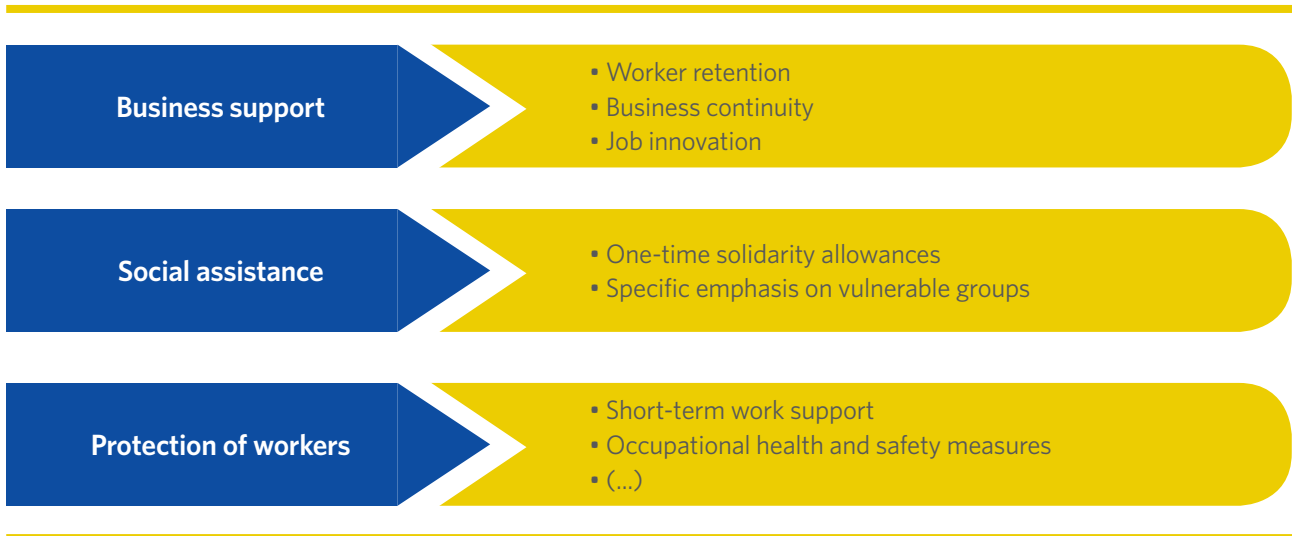
measures focused on protecting worker incomes during the lockdowns many countries imposed at the start of the pandemic. Other measures focused, in parallel, on securing employment and avoiding layoffs.

The most popular employment protection measure in the EU, which was applied during previous crises as well, was the short-term work support scheme known as partial unemployment; so-called because it allows workers to stay employed but with reduced working hours, and have the remainder of their salary provided by the state or municipality. Partial employment legislation was enacted in France, Luxembourg, Spain, and Ireland. The distribution of stakeholder roles (states, companies, social partners, social protection schemes and funds, etc.) and the amount of income supplemented (ranging from 50% to 100%) have considerable impact on the financial burden and the level of resilience (or stability) of the systems and social protection and security schemes.

During the COVID-19 crisis, applications for short-term work compensation were higher than in past crises. Germany, the leading country for partial unemployment in number of beneficiaries, registered over 10 million employees in the scheme. This was three times the number of employees registered in 2009 at the peak of the global financial crisis. In France, 12.7 million employees, nearly half of the country's workforce, were receiving chomage partiel at the end of May 2020.



Figure 2: Examples of common labour market policy measures enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic



2.1.1. Business support

Companies and the jobs they offer are the drivers of economic recovery. It is therefore important to ensure that businesses, especially the micro, small and medium enterprises which make up a large proportion of employment markets, can survive a downturn and help labour markets recover quickly afterwards. Employer networks in hard-hit sectors and sectors with skills shortages are attempting to temporarily transfer employees to avoid unemployment and stalled production. For example, in some countries hotel and catering staff are sent to the food industry for temporary work assignments, in line with labour law provisions. In Germany, the local leadership for McDonald's restaurants and the supermarket chain Aldi have founded a common human resource entity that has been redeploying employees from the fast food giant to local Aldi branches. While large companies might be able to react using their own resources and networks, smaller companies are usually not as well equipped.

A number of countries have targeted solo entrepreneurs and freelancers, including those providing non-standard work and artists (in France the unemployment compensation system for intermittent entertainment workers has been extended for a year, called a 'white year' in the contribution-compensation scheme). These workers are especially vulnerable as they are less protected against the risk of job or income loss than corporate workers. Small entrepreneurs may be confronted with additional individual risks due to limited access to capital and social protections.

According to the OECD, small enterprises represent on average 14% of employment in affected sectors across European countries. They are often a much larger proportion of enterprises in construction, varying from less than 7% in Luxembourg to more than 25% in Greece. Non-standard employees in low-paid jobs represent on average 12% of dependent employment in affected sectors, with low-wage workers representing almost 25% of all employees in Italy and close to 20% in Germany and

Ireland. EU countries have provided a fragmented response to freelance groups, and are especially lacking in long-term solutions for non-standard workers that do not work enough hours to be eligible for benefits. Some member states have, however, taken action for immediate help.

In the Netherlands, for example, the government provides additional subsidies within existing art funds to the 70 cultural institutions which make up the foundation of Dutch cultural infrastructure. In

some regions of Germany with a high density of solo entrepreneurs and freelancers, such as Berlin and Bavaria, applicants received an allowance to compensate for the sudden loss of income, which could be used to cover living expenses and business costs.

In the EU, member states have taken into account that immediate, work-retention measures are necessary, and in some cases countries have taken longer term approaches to help employers and their workers become more resilient again future crises.

Table 1: Labour market measures taken to support businesses by EU member states

Type of measure	Description of measure	Member state, institution
Worker retention	The government covers the costs of health and pension benefits for employed workers and institutes full or partial exemptions from income tax and profit tax for all coronavirus-stricken enterprises; i.e. those experiencing a 20%-50% decrease in revenues. So far, the benefit has been requested by 66,000 businesses in the country.	Croatia, Ministry of Labour and Pension System
	The Temporary Emergency Measure for the Preservation of Jobs (NOW) scheme helps companies that expect to lose at least 20% of their revenue during the pandemic. It pays employee wages for three months, up to a maximum of 90% of the company's total wage costs depending on the loss of turnover. In addition to paying wages, the scheme also pays both the employer and employee retirement pension contributions.	Netherlands, Public Employment Service
	Businesses in the most affected sectors can temporarily suspend their social security contributions. Additionally, rent cannot be increased and rental contracts for business premises cannot be terminated. Eligible sectors include tourism, catering, entertainment, sports, cultural services, and taxi services.	Hungary, Labour Office
Business continuity	All eligible businesses (micro, small and medium enterprises) that have been subjected to administrative closure or have suffered a loss of turnover of more than 70% in 2020 can receive tax-free assistance of up to €1,500 per business.	France, Ministry of Labour
	The automotive industry is gradually returning workers to the factories and plants of leading automakers, with the support of epidemiologists and government specialists for health and work.	Slovakia, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family
	The chamber of commerce, in cooperation with online job-sharing platform WorkLinks.com, facilitates job rotation to help companies in need of staff to temporarily take on employees from other companies.	Czechia, Chamber of Commerce



Type of measure	Description of measure	Member state, institution
Business continuity	A reduced VAT rate of 5% is applied to the restaurant sector for 12 months (starting on 1 July 2020) to support the recovery in this sector. Small- and medium-sized companies are the targets of a stimulus package aimed to ensure that businesses are not interrupted.	Germany, Ministry for Economy and Energy
	The Ministry of Health has the capacity to mobilise volunteers and students from medical and nursing schools at all Cypriot universities, if and when the minister considers it necessary.	Cyprus, Ministry of Health
	Small- and medium-sized companies with at least 30% of their business from exports can have their insurance coverage increased to access funding and coverage for risks incurred during the COVID-19 crisis.	Spain, Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Tourism
Job innovation	The Business Process Improvement Grant, originally used to support short- to medium-term company projects, is now supporting marketing to develop and enhance companies' capabilities to use the internet as an effective channel for business development.	Ireland, Enterprise Ireland
	As part of the Restart Luxembourg holistic aid package, which includes recovery funding and sectoral grants, the government is creating investment incentives of up to 50% for projects focused on economic development, digitalisation, and environmental protection. Special focus is on efforts for a <i>green recovery</i> ; for example, retrofitting buildings for sustainable energy systems, promoting heating systems based on renewable energy sources, and the production of electric cars and vans.	Luxembourg, Ministry of Labour, Employment and the Social and Solidarity Economy

2.1.2. Social assistance

Special attention in securing incomes is being given to vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, and people threatened by poverty such as the long-term unemployed. In Slovenia, for example, the one-time solidarity allowance paid by the public employment service provided low-income retirees and unemployed people with disabilities with a single financial payment calculated on the basis of their monthly income. Some countries are designing special support measures around the fact that more work can be done remotely, and looking into work from home adjustments for people with disabilities and additional online job creation; i.e. the possibility of creating a job which fits the person's disability.

Overall, the shift towards using more digital means to accomplish work tasks during the pandemic can serve as a bridge to a more accessible and agile labour market in the longer term. For example, women and young people are more likely to telework according to the recent EU labour force survey. However, the digital skills gap needs to be addressed, otherwise digital exclusion will reinforce income and social inequality in the future of work.

Governments and stakeholders are advised to invest in the digital upskilling of those most in need and most vulnerable. Public employment services, together with training providers, might be important education providers for digital skills ranging from digital access to benefits to managing labour market

transitions. For jobseekers, further lockdowns or periods of public inactivity can be used to create or update CVs, cover letters and profiles, train for job interviews, and receive online career guidance. A well curated and accessible e-learning platform can help develop the careers of those that have lost jobs or will soon have them transformed by digitalisation.

2.1.3. Protection of workers

The health implications and economic insecurity coming with the COVID-19 pandemic have brought concerns about worker well-being. The World Health Organization-5 Well-being Index (WHO-5) measures a person's state of mind over the previous two weeks based on responses to five statements of positive feelings. Recent surveys in Europe have shown that mental well-being was worst among the unemployed, as well as those unable to work due to disability or illness. While the proportions of people with low mental well-being were comparable to pre-pandemic levels, were people in total reported suffering from issues. Additionally, one aspect of poor well-being that has risen sharply during the pandemic is loneliness. In the EU, 16% of respondents stated that they were lonely all or most of the time over the previous two weeks, which is almost 10% higher than in pre-crisis surveys. Furthermore, young people are the most affected.

Asked about job security, almost 20% of workers in the EU think that they are likely to lose their jobs in the near future, with the numbers highest in Bulgaria and Greece. Self-employed and unemployed individuals are most worried about their cash flow; two out of three respondents say that their financial situation has worsened since the beginning of the lockdown.

Some countries have taken measures to address well-being directly, although without a dedicated link to employment. In Cyprus, for instance, the

government has launched case management services to deal with the needs of people infected with COVID-19 who have a history of mental health issues. They also support patients' relatives, individuals in self-isolation, and other psychologically vulnerable groups. In Portugal, the government initiated a psychological counselling line in partnership with the Shared Services of the Ministry of Health and the Order of Portuguese Psychologists. The line is staffed by 63 newly recruited psychologists who offer counselling to health professionals, civil protection and security forces, as well as the general public.

A main focus of the pandemic crisis response has been measures to secure workers' incomes. Public employment services have been quickly adjusting their work portfolio to provide short-term assistance for the large influx of workers in need. Some countries have granted automatic renewal of unemployment benefits during the confinement period and have eased the conditions for receiving benefits or proving job-search efforts. Some governments have decided to distribute financial assistance in different ways. For instance, in Bulgaria, Czechia, and Latvia working parents on unpaid leave are provided with additional child benefits. Norway has doubled the amount of available leave days for parents (which they can use when caring for a sick child or replacing a sick caregiver) for the duration of the 2020 calendar year.

2.2. Structural response

2.2.1. New governance for public employment services

Public employment services are the main agents overseeing job brokerage in crisis times. They are often managed by social dialogue, since they have trade union and employer representatives sitting on



Figure 3: Development of employment service delivery models



their managing boards. Over the years, however, they have shifted from an institution-centred enforcement approach to a more open partnership approach when delivering services.

Collaborations between government organisations and private partners are important methods for generating responses quickly and in agreement with multiple stakeholders. Given the challenges and opportunities that COVID-19 and its aftermath pose to labour markets, partnerships with educational institutions as well as digital content providers seem particularly relevant in order to meet new employability demands, with powerful connectivity for learners and institutions as well as tailor-made skills development solutions.

2.2.2. Digitalisation

Developing skills and recognising the importance of digitalisation are crucial measures to respond to this crisis. While short-term working schemes are effective tools, and have in some cases have been up-scaled during the pandemic to reach more groups and

lower their administrative burden, these schemes are unlikely to present a lasting solution to what seems like a long-term employment and labour market crisis. The relative high cost of the schemes reduces their sustainability and efficiency as solutions to both unemployment/underemployment in declining industries and skills shortage in essential and emerging sectors, which is basically an aggravated form of the global labour market challenge which already existed before the crisis. Skills strategies need to be envisaged from a longer perspective to meet these challenges.

Several EU reports, such as from Eurofound, agree that in the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2009, most EU member states missed the opportunity to effectively upskill their workforce and adjust skills to meet new labour market requirements when business activity was slowing down. The need for systematic planning around skills requirements, the availability of suitably tailored training, and the relative certainty of the time available to deliver such courses is crucial to tailoring a strategy which allows workers to change careers and improves

unemployment. Compared to 2009, there are now more digital learning opportunities which institutions can use to develop and deliver a wider array of skills trainings. Also, this crisis has shown that apart from essential workers, workers in jobs with a greater share of telework-compatible tasks; i.e. work that can be done remotely with digital support, are at less risk of job loss.

In the EU, almost 40% of the workforce were or are teleworking during the pandemic lockdowns and beyond, with the largest share in Sweden, Finland and Benelux. In countries where more people worked from home as a result of lockdowns, fewer workers reported that their working time decreased to part time. Even in public services, where the practice of working from home is less common than in other sectors, the telework rate has increased significantly. According to a recent survey by the World Association of Public Employment Services, all responding members increased the possibility of working from home for their public service employees and civil servants, with some members offering work from home options for 100% of their staff.

With that in mind, digital tools are not only more common in the world of work than ever before, they can also serve as catalysts to create and adjust new tasks for vulnerable, low-skill and low-paid workers. For this, governments and stakeholders need to make sure that vulnerable groups are skilled accordingly and able to navigate in a digitalised labour market.

2.2.3. Vocational education and training

The pandemic is not only taking its toll on labour markets, but on education too. As rapid responses to the educational impact on employment, EU member states are mainly focusing on keeping young people in education, working out how to avoid losing

graduation years and how to continue dual education. According to Cedefop, these short-term efforts have shown that distance learning solutions are piecemeal and depend on vocational education and training (VET) providers' human and technological capacity, as well as the nature of the actual subjects or skills being taught. Teachers play a critical role in this system, and by collaboration at school/training institute-company level in ensuring training continuity. Countries with established collaborations between companies and schools had a better reaction to pandemic lockdowns than countries with weaker links between education and industry.

Therefore, the wider context of vocational education and training requires further considerations, beyond the obvious apprenticeships, since the ability to also offer e-learning on a larger, longer term scale for future skills and not only as a crisis response will partly determine the sector's success. The questions to ask are:

- a) How can technical and vocational education and training (TVET) curricula be adapted to online or blended learning?
- b) How can teachers be trained to switch to online instruction?
- c) How can access to equipment and bandwidth be assured, to carry out online teaching and learning?
- d) How can learners be engaged and motivated from afar?
- e) In emerging and developing countries the humanitarian contexts might pose additional challenges. How can these be met?
- f) Will skills assessments, exams, etc., also be performed online?
- g) Which digital avenues are open for collaborations between training institutions and employers?
- h) How will apprenticeship schemes be run in the different sectors?



2.2.4. Safe and healthy workplaces, online and onsite

The current increase in home-based work, as well as the return to workplaces after lockdown measures, casts a light on occupational health and safety measures. The physical workplaces of the future will have to include possibilities for social distancing and provide hand sanitising facilities among other safety measures. The service sector might need to regulate client and staff exposure and be clear on health symptoms and self-isolation requirements. Public services, for example employment services, have increased their share of staff working remotely in an effort to stop the spread of COVID-19, but had to maintain some physical services to support the most vulnerable and digitally illiterate clients, such as homeless people. In some German and Estonian employment offices, for example, staff are working

in shifts to ensure they are able to socially distance from each other. Other service providers do not yet have the necessary digital infrastructure to transition all of their staff to home-based work.

On the other hand, the increase in staff members working from home raises questions about how to ramp up, maintain, and secure digital infrastructure to allow a long-term shift to telework, including concerns about maintaining healthy working hours when digital availability merges work time with private time, and how to handle accidents that happen during working hours at an employee's home. At present only a few countries, including Belgium, France, Italy, and Spain have collective working agreements for home office use, such as the right to disconnect. Other countries are in the process of negotiating the terms of these agreements.

Table 2: Labour market measures to support workers in EU member states

Type of measure	Description of measure	Member state, institution
Income security	Employees infected with COVID-19 are offered a sick leave benefit of up to 100% of the net average wage. Sick leave benefits are also granted for caregivers of children, the elderly, and people with disabilities. It is also possible to apply for payment reimbursements for energy consumption.	Lithuania, Labour Exchange
	Essential workers key to overcoming the pandemic have their basic salary increased by between 10% and 200%, based on the decision of their superiors, in the form of hazard pay and increased workload bonuses.	Slovenia, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Family and Equal Opportunities
	Unemployed individuals are allowed to work in agriculture without losing unemployment benefits.	Bulgaria, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
	Self-employed people can apply for an inactivity allowance if they have voluntary social security contributions and lost earnings due to lockdowns. The benefit is 50%-75% of the contribution base in the last two quarters, but no more than €700 per month. The application can be renewed every month conditions persist, but no longer than the actual lockdown period.	Latvia, Ministry of Welfare
	If a parent is taking care of children less than 12 years old and their school is closed, they are granted paid leave at 75% of their salary (but not more than 75% of the national gross average salary) per working day.	Romania, Ministry of Family and Health Welfare

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Type of measure	Description of measure	Member state, institution
	Self-employed and freelance workers who have lost business can apply for income compensation of up to 80% of the national minimum wage. In the case of freelancers with a reported income below 50% of the minimum wage, they can request compensation of all their income. Self-employed people paying taxes on the basis of a tax card (simplified form of corporate income tax) may claim an allowance in a lump sum equivalent of €300.	Poland, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
Skills development and matching	Online <i>speed dating</i> – recruiting online using hashtags to match skills and vacancies in sectors with urgent needs – can be used on a regular basis.	Estonia, Ministry of Labour and Employment
	A considerable investment in online professional training courses (especially in soft skills) has been made available for job seekers, and these training courses are also widely open to workers in active confinement situations. This public employment service was requested by many more users than in the pre-pandemic period.	Belgium region, Public Employment Service
	Employability and activation programmes, co-financed by European funds that have already started or were about to start when the crisis began, are being delivered and certified fully online. This measure has been approved by the National Accreditation System.	Greece, Public Employment Service
	Increased development of remote training for job seekers through the Office 365 platform, which sets up professional trainings for workers selected by employers within the framework of the exceptional support currently provided, and for other trainees included in the training provided by the Employment and Vocational Training Centres of the Portuguese Public Employment Service (PES).	Portugal, Public Employment Service
	The French PES is offering more than 150 new professional training courses completely free to job seekers and available online. These courses prepare the unemployed to work in 20 professional sectors which are currently recruiting. This was set up and accelerated thanks to a long-standing partnership with a training organisation specialising in open and distance training, which has developed technical and educational tools, information technology (IT) platforms, and adapted educational paths for learning.	France, Public Employment Service & Open Classrooms
	To improve access to its phone services for individuals who have hearing loss or are deaf, PES used an app that creates subtitles for calls using automatic speech recognition. For deaf users communicating via French sign language (LSF), a video interface with an interpreter is also available. Both the app and the service are free of charge.	France, Public Employment Service
	Responding to the large influx of unemployed workers during lockdowns, the public employment service introduced a quick service for job seekers called Personal Distance Meetings (PDM). This format allows a brief, yet personalised profiling of candidates. In June more than 600 new job advisors were speed-trained in this method to serve clients.	Sweden, Public Employment Service
OSH and telework	Employers who invest in telework equipment can get 45% of the costs refunded. Families with children and two working parents who are unable to telework due to caring for their children are entitled to two months of additional leave.	Malta, Ministry of Labour and Employment



Type of measure	Description of measure	Member state, institution
OSH and telework	COVID-19 task forces have been established at the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, and there is regular cooperation with the KELA Centre for Finnish Social Insurance, as well as public employment service offices. The task forces gather measures and activities responding to COVID-19, especially those aimed at strengthening worker well-being and equality in the aftermath of the coronavirus epidemic. The aim is to produce proposals on how to prevent social exclusion and inequality during the pandemic recovery.	Finland, Public Employment Service
	The insurance sector and employers are working jointly on adjusting conditions for accident provision in home offices.	Austria, Ministry for Labour, Family and Youth
	The Smart Worker Law, extant since 2017, which commits employers to acknowledging the priorities of parents of young or disabled children, has been expanded in the crisis. Now, the individual agreements signed by employers and smart workers defining work performance, rest periods, and the technical and organisational measures that ensure the worker can disconnect from work devices is used universally without employers and employees reaching individual agreements, as previously required.	Italy, Smart Working Observatory
	Teleworking is mandatory for all non-essential companies, regardless of their size, and for all staff whose tasks allow them to work remotely. For staff working entirely at home because of COVID-19, employers can provide an office allowance of up to €127 per month which covers heating, electricity, and small office equipment.	Belgium, Synerjob
	The Ministry of Employment and the Labour Inspectorate have adopted occupational health and safety regulations on rest periods, making a minimum of 11 consecutive hours of rest per day compulsory for teleworkers and essential workers with high strain. A weekly day off can be waived as necessary in companies that face an extraordinary workload due to pandemic conditions.	Denmark, Public Employment Service
OSH on site work	Social partners have developed a dedicated safety protocol for safe housing, transportation, work, and care of migrant workers.	Netherlands, Temporary Employment Agency Association Algemene Bond Uitzendondernemingen (ABU)
	Organisations in charge of working conditions and health and safety at work have produced specific toolkits and technical guidelines for each branch and professional sector, and in some cases for very specific professions. These tools and guidelines have been made available. They were sometimes carried out with social partners, the companies themselves, the professional branches and/or the national agencies for occupational safety and health (OSH). Those tools are to be used in labour inspection counsellor services during the pandemic period, by employer networks, social partners, chambers of commerce, craft guilds, etc.	Different EU member states (see Annex B), OSH organisations and national focal points

2.3. Cross-sectoral responses

Institutionalised communication between trade unions and employer associations, sometimes complemented by the government in a tripartite setting, based on respect for the freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining is one of the main assets of labour markets in democracies. Social dialogue produces policies to promote social justice and is a long-standing agent for resilience, recovery, and stability. Social dialogue has been driving coordinated global responses to crises for many decades, most recently in the adaptation of the ILO Global Jobs Pact to promote a productive recovery centred on investment, employment, and social protection after the global financial crisis of the 2000s.

The current COVID-19 crisis highlights the continued need to link employment with social protections, and shows that basic levels of protection need to be available to all workers irrespective of how they are engaged with work and how employable they are when the crisis hits. Schemes for unemployment, sick leave, and reducing working time need to be accessible without red tape and siloed management structures. During this crisis, social dialogue plays a major role in balancing immediate welfare assistance for the most vulnerable and post-crisis activation policies. These discussions also have to consider the gig economy, which represents a modest but growing share of youth employment and remote work worldwide.

In the EU, social partners have taken several initiatives during the pandemic. The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) has set up COVID-19 Watch, an information hub which provides briefing notes on relevant policy topics including short-term work schemes, sick leave rights, and measures to protect the self-employed. The European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized

Enterprises (SMEUnited) has published guides on the availability of EU support instruments, and BusinessEurope and other employer associations have adopted a number of dedicated position papers looking into measures to ensure a swift economic recovery, and are engaging in social dialogues for worker and employment protections and preservation measures.

► Social partnership and tripartite communication for labour markets is a crucial long-term system

At the country level, Italy has set up a tripartite 'Joint protocol for the regulation of measures to combat and contain the spread of COVID-19 at the workplace' between the government and social partners, mainly the national employers association Assolavoro and the trade union FeLSA CISL, which will be implemented in all companies and workplaces and includes the participation of workers' representatives. The protocol details 13 action points for social safety nets, smart working arrangements, and overall measures aimed at maintaining economic activity while ensuring safe working environments. It also identifies measures that need to be detailed through collective bargaining at the company level, such as the exact conditions of paid leave, and the share of customer-facing work hours in relevant sectors.

In the UK, the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) is encouraging companies to keep their apprentices so that they can complete apprenticeships in between any lockdown periods. In France, major companies like Renault and Danone have signed collective bargaining agreements on social protection and income savings for all employees. The German public service union Ver.di and the care sector employer organisation BVAP have agreed to a COVID-19



bonus of €1,500 for staff working in long-term and home care. In Spain, social partners met at the national level to draft joint recommendations for how the government should respond to the pandemic crisis. Among these recommendations were the immediate prioritisation of measures to support small- and medium-sized enterprises, especially in the severely affected tourism sector, and the full payment of sick leave benefits throughout the lockdown period.

Social partnership and tripartite communication for labour markets is a long-term system, which might be challenging to reproduce in environments where worker representation and employers do not have a long history. While collective bargaining and further social dialogue is crucial for functioning labour markets and social cohesion, and should therefore

be an aim for all labour markets, other forms of partnership are also conducive to decent work and future-proof employment and skills development.

In the Flemish Region of Belgium, the Minister of Education has gone beyond social dialogue and is in close contact with a working group of education providers and experts which has been discussing apprentice evaluations and graduations in the pandemic. In Finland, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Agency for Education are co-producing webinars to support exceptional teaching arrangements for vulnerable groups. And in Ireland, a central working group of key employment stakeholders has been established, led by the Department of Education and Skills, to support skills development, especially for young people.

3. Some perspectives on demand for peer exchanges with EU partner countries

The current crisis is providing an opportunity for partner countries of SOCIEUX+ to implement key reforms based on the experience of the EU Member States. The following sections will outline possible ways forward to shape requests and demand for peer-to-peer cooperation with the facilitation of SOCIEUX+.

3.1. Peer-to-peer activities: Key Recommendations and ways forward

3.1.1. Reach out to the most vulnerable

The COVID-19 crisis is further exposing the vulnerability of specific groups in the labour market and their needs for protection. Equally important, labour market policies should not only consist of welfare support, but improve employability and activate the often high potential of groups most affected by the crisis.

Learning activities could be designed around specific target groups and describe how labour market policies can help them enter (or re-enter) employment. Given the specificity of this crisis and the diverse response within the EU, initial activities could include holistic employment services for women, young people, and people with disabilities. These activities could contain address the following issues for each target group:

- ▶ Accessibility of employment and social protection information;
- ▶ Case management strategies for well-being and employment;
- ▶ Work from home adjustments and specific support needs in crisis;
- ▶ Identifying remote tasks within online job creation;
- ▶ Supporting target groups such as solo entrepreneurs and those that work in the informal economy;
- ▶ Making 'invisible' tasks tangible (i.e. domestic work);
- ▶ Large scale labour market programmes, such as cash transfers, including post-crisis conclusions and health implications.

Possible member states to contact or include in this module are Italy, Poland, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Denmark.

3.1.2. Support skills development plans

Arising from the conclusion that the new world of work will require a new set of skills, and that the digital share of learning and working is likely to grow even more after lockdowns, SOCIEUX+ beneficiaries could develop their domestic use and training of digital skills for their clients and staff. These activities could address:

- ▶ Current skills compositions in the labour market and projections for future needs;



- ▶ The shift to blended and online training;
- ▶ Partnering with training institutes and infrastructure providers;
- ▶ Upskilling the workforce for continued employability;
- ▶ Data protection.

Possible member states to contact or include in this module are Czechia, Ireland, Luxembourg, Belgium, France and Estonia.

3.1.3. Transfer knowledge on new delivery of employment services

Employment service providers in the EU have been run as single institutions with occasional external contracts for the greater part of their existence, and are now being reformed into more open provider ecosystems. The pandemic has further emphasised the need for partnerships and the inclusion of diverse programmes. This updated knowledge about how to build, conduct, and monitor employment provider ecosystems to ensure efficient and effective employment services is highly valuable to countries where state-led job offices might not have high coverage rates with target groups, but have been thrust into a more exposed position by the COVID-19 crisis. These activities could address:

- ▶ Mixed systems of service delivery and governance;
- ▶ Reaching out to target groups with common programmes;
- ▶ Balancing the roles of partners and supervisors;
- ▶ Rebranding employment services in crisis times and beyond;
- ▶ Digital partnership strategies.

Possible member states to contact or include in this theme are Sweden, France and Belgium.

3.1.4. Map crisis response and reform competencies

Emerging and developing countries are very experienced in going through crises, often with limited resources. This learning module could help partners make systematic conclusions about the competence of public services or third sector providers in facing and overcoming periods of societal or systemic challenges. These activities could address:

- ▶ Collecting and evaluating crisis experience in networks;
- ▶ Extrapolating on crisis response mechanisms;
- ▶ Managing resources in low-resource environments;
- ▶ Turning short-term response measures into long-term changes.

Possible member states to contact or include in this theme are Bulgaria, Spain, and Croatia.

3.2. Capacity building activities: Further considerations

3.2.1. Bearing in mind the informality of labour markets

Many of the target countries of SOCIEUX+ struggle with some degree of informality in their labour markets. When designing activities, it is important to recognise the enhanced role of informal work in crisis times and its contribution to essential jobs and livelihood provision. Stigmatising informality in areas where it is the major or only form of work is not a helpful start to peer-based capacity building activities. Activities on informality could instead focus on promoting public policies that protect informal workers and reduce social costs. They could also work towards improving the overall data situation by



encouraging data mining, storing, and sharing of information.

3.2.2. Capitalising on labour market opportunities

The COVID-19 crisis is highlighting areas for opportunity and innovation within labour markets.

Beyond crisis management, it seems advantageous to identify and profile the strengths of each target labour market and build activities with a clear focus on these sectors. Demand for SOCIEUX+ support could thus include a cross-cutting discussion of the political, social, technological, economic and environmental strengths.



4. Conclusions

SOCIEUX+ can adapt its peer-to-peer activities for labour markets by clustering the COVID-19 responses from EU member states into modules that address the most vulnerable, skills development strategies for future-proof labour markets, and delivery and crisis response models for employment services.

The COVID-19 crisis has shown the need for quick reactions and long-term planning to secure business activity, especially for micro, small and medium enterprises as well as solo entrepreneurs and freelancers, to protect workers and act in partnership with representatives of social rights to positively impact the future of work. The last few months have also

revealed the potential for developing vocational skills, remote work, and taking further advantage of digital possibilities.

Demand for peer-to-peer cooperation through SOCIEUX+ is likely to emphasise the need to exchange on best practices to respond to this crisis, considering the advantages of today's world of work within the post-pandemic new normal and alongside the needs of developing countries and emerging labour markets, which often carry local specificities regarding informal conditions, a lack of data, and a variety of opportunities for innovation.

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Annex – Specific occupational safety and health toolkits and technical guidelines

Construction

Austria – construction (DE)	Italy – building & construction (IT)
Belgium – motorway construction sites (FR)	Netherlands – construction (NL, EN)
Cyprus – construction (EN)	Netherlands – construction & infrastructure (NL)
Denmark – building & construction (EN)	Netherlands – construction toolbox (NL)
France – construction (FR)	Netherlands – metal (NL)
Germany – building & construction (DE)	Netherlands – technology (NL)
Germany – craftsmen (DE)	Spain – ceramic (ES)

Retail

Austria – trading (DE)	Greece – kiosks / pavilion stores (EL)
Austria – commerce & craft (DE)	Greece – retail food sales (EL)
Austria – commercial service provider (DE)	Greece – florists (EL)
Austria – gardeners & florists (DE)	Ireland – businesses & retail sectors (EN)
Austria – market, street & hiking trade (DE)	Netherlands – retail (NL, EN)
Belgium – public markets (FR)	Portugal – retail (PT)
Cyprus – retail MSEs (EL)	Spain – face to face activities (ES)

Denmark - food retail, supermarkets & production (DA)	Spain - food, beverage & first need products trade (ES)
France - cashier (FR)	Spain - supermarkets (ES)
France - retail shop (FR)	Spain - retail stores (ES)
Germany - food retail & hospitality (DE)	Spain - pharmacy (ES)
Greece - food sector (EL)	Spain - dry cleaners (ES)
Greece - retail sector (EL)	

Food

Austria - food industry (DE)	France - agricultural worksites (FR)
Austria - agriculture - workers from abroad (DE)	France - direct sale at farms (FR)
Belgium - food chain (FR)	Germany - agriculture (DE, multilingual)
Denmark - abattoir / slaughterhouses (EN)	Germany - food & objects (DE)
Denmark - green spaces (EN)	Germany - food retail & hospitality (DE)
Denmark - kitchens (institutions & schools) (DA)	Germany - meat sector (DE)
Denmark - food retail, supermarkets & production (DA)	Germany - bakery (DE)
France - bakery (FR)	Germany - meat industry (DE)
France - crop farming (FR, ES)	Netherlands - agriculture (NL)
France - animal farming (FR)	Spain - Fisheries (ES)
France - seasonal workers (FR, ES, AR)	Spain - agriculture, farming & fishery (ES)
France - catering & takeaway food (FR)	Spain - food industry (ES)



France - butchers, delicatessens, caterers (FR)

Spain - food, beverage & first need products trade (ES)

France - abattoir work (FR)

Maintenance and domestic services

Austria - electrical, building, alarm & communication technicians (DE)

France - service provider premises (FR)

Austria - waste management (DE)

France - home intervention (FR)

Belgium - household waste collection (FR)

France - plumber - sanitary installation (FR)

Belgium - waste collection (FR)

Germany - pest control (DE)

Denmark - urban water (DK)

Germany - craftsmen (DE)

France - home help (FR)

Germany - waste collection (DE)

France - gardening (FR)

Germany - waste collection from health care facilities (DE)

France - market gardening (FR)

Ireland - return to work safely protocol (EN)

France - maintenance agent (FR)

Netherlands - wastewater (NL)

France - household waste (FR)

Netherlands - sewage (NL)

France - waste sorting & incineration (FR)

Spain - waste management (ES)

Education:

Belgium - schools & nurseries (FR)

Greece - Educational institutions (EL)

Denmark - schools & educational institutions (DA)

Greece - nursery schools (EL)

Denmark - kitchens (institutions & schools) (DA)

Greece - nursery schools - video (EL)

Germany - daycare & school walk (DE)

Netherlands - education (NL)

Germany - child & day care (DE)

Netherlands - childcare (NL)

Transportation

Austria - taxi & passenger cars (DE)

France - taxi or driver of VTC (FR)

Belgium - aviation (FR)

Germany - transport (DE)

Belgium - navigation (FR)

Germany - mail & parcel delivery (DE)

Denmark - transporting goods (DK)

Italy - transport (IT)

Denmark - transport of animals (DA)

Netherlands - transport & logistics (NL)

Finland - public transport drivers (FI, SV, EN)

Portugal - transport (PT)

Finland - cargo ships (EN)

Spain - transport & mobility (ES)

France - delivery driver (FR)

Spain - fishery (ES)

France - freight transport & logistics services (FR)

Spain - transport, delivery, loading & unloading (ES)

Health care services:

Austria - mental health for general population (DE)

Netherlands - nursing homes, home & primary care (NL)

Austria - health professions (DE)

Spain - social services (ES)

Germany - ambulance & non-medical emergency services (DE)

Spain - care homes (ES)

Germany - clinics, nursing & practices (DE)

Spain - children & youth care (ES)



Germany - workshops for disabled people (DE)

Spain - home care (ES)

Greece - rehabilitation centres (EL)

Spain - protection measures by type of activity (ES)

Italy - healthcare workers (IT)

Source : European Agency for Safety and Health at work (EU-OSHA). William Cockburn (2020). *COVID-19 - Back to the workplace - Adapting workplaces and protecting workers*

Other

- ▶ Greece - teleworking from Home (EL)
- ▶ Spain - general guidance for enterprises (ES)
- ▶ Spain - teleworking (ES)
- ▶ Spain - industry (ES)
- ▶ Spain - mining (ES)
- ▶ Spain - good practices at the workplace level (ES)
- ▶ Poland - ventilation systems (PL)
- ▶ France - seasonal workers (FR, ES, AR)

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Impact on demand for SOCIEUX+ peer to peer cooperation

SOCIEUX+ is implemented by

Partnership led by:

Co-financed by the European Union

