



Third quarterly report on Covid-19 impact on industrial relations

Preliminary results

March 2022

BARCOVID

The BARCOVID project aims to improve knowledge about the content of collective agreements in Europe and to undertake research activities to enhance the collection of comparative information on collective bargaining outcomes. The project takes in account the Covid-19 impact on industrial relations in Europe, which is approached from different angles, such as government measures and occupational health and safety. Lead partner is the University of Amsterdam/AIAS. The Central European Labour Studies Institute (CELSI), Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies and WageIndicator Foundation are the project's key actors.

University of Amsterdam/AIAS-HSI

AIAS-HSI is an institute for multidisciplinary research and teaching at the University of Amsterdam (UvA), the largest university in the Netherlands. AIAS-HSI has as its objective the coordination, implementation and stimulation of interdisciplinary research into the practice of labour law and social security law. Therefore it combines insights from the social sciences, legal dogmas and legal theories in its research.

Central European Labour Studies Institute (CELSI)

Central European Labour Studies Institute (CELSI) is a non-profit research institute based in Bratislava, Slovakia. It fosters multidisciplinary research about the functioning of labour markets and institutions, work and organizations, business and society, and ethnicity and migration in the economic, social, and political life of modern societies. CELSI strives to make a contribution to the cutting-edge international scientific discourse.

Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies

Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies is a public university institute - with special autonomy - working in the field of applied sciences: Economics and Management, Law, Political Sciences, Agricultural Sciences and Plant Biotechnology, Medicine, and Industrial and Information Engineering. The School promotes the internationalization of didactics and research with innovative paths in the fields of university education, scientific research and advanced training.

WageIndicator Foundation

WageIndicator Foundation collects, compares and shares labour market information through online and offline surveys and research. Its national websites serve as always up-to-date online libraries featuring (living) wage information, labour law and career advice, for employees, employers and social partners. In this way, WageIndicator is a life changer for millions of people around the world.



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Bibliographical information

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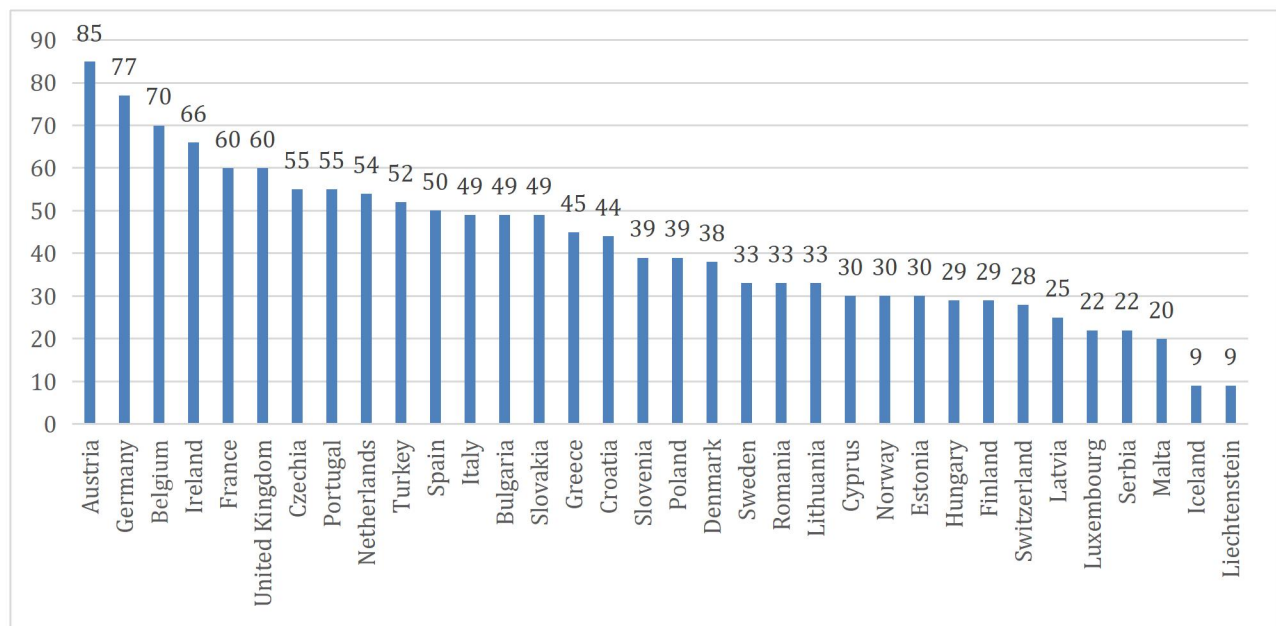
Introduction

In this report, we present preliminary results of data mining and text analysis of the newsletter outputs published by the selected stakeholders at the EU level. The goal of these quarterly reports is to address the first research question of the BARCOVID project: *“How have the Covid-19 crisis, the state-imposed measures and their consequences affected the industrial relations landscape in EU27 and 5 candidate countries?”* To respond to this question, text data (text extractions) were collected from social partners’ press releases and newsletters at the EU level and then further analysed. In total, **1,428 texts** were extracted from the newsletters of organizations such as WageIndicator, ETUI, Business Europe, EPSU, ETUCE and IndustriALL between March 2020 and February 2022 based on the selected list of keywords (see [Annex](#)). As already explained in the First Quarterly Report, the methodology mainly consists of the text mining techniques (using Python), supported by qualitative and quantitative text analysis of the newsletter outputs. In this report, we focus mainly on: (1) the most frequent themes and policies discussed in the newsletters (including a comparison between the first and the second wave of the pandemic); (2) the keyword associations. While looking at the most frequent topics and policies allows us to identify which have been the most relevant measures discussed in the public and political debate, the analysis of the keyword associations can inform about broader policy agenda during the pandemic.

Preliminary results

Figure 1 shows the distribution of text data per country. At the current stage, the average number of text extractions per country is 42, with relevant differences between the most represented countries (i.e., Austria, Germany, Belgium, and Ireland) and the least represented ones (Malta, Iceland, and Liechtenstein). The distribution of the database almost doubled with respect to the previous report. Preliminary analyses are presented to offer additional insights on the main topics discussed in pandemic-related newsletter outputs.

Figure 1 Text data by country



Source: Authors, N=1,428

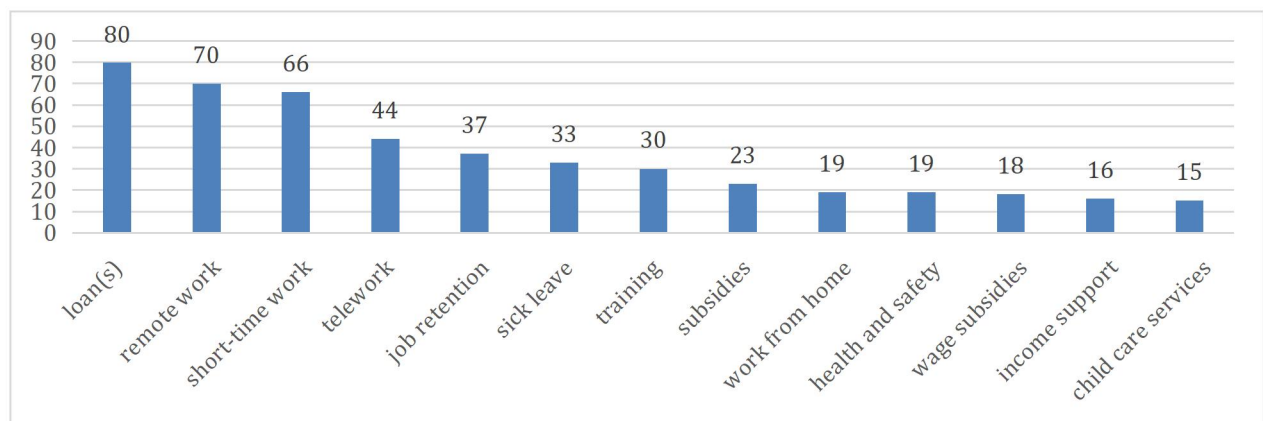
The frequency of keywords in the sample is explored with respect to the type of concrete policies discussed in the newsletters. As Figure 2 shows, the most frequent policies concern *loans*, *remote work* and *short-time work*, *telework*, and *job retention*. In many countries, these keywords correspond to the most relevant policies adopted by national governments to (1) prevent the rise of unemployment; (2) to slow down the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Among the most frequent words (policy measures) we also find financial support schemes, particularly *subsidy/subsidies* and *income support*. Indeed, they relate, within newsletters, to direct transfers and payments to companies and industries funded by regional and national central governments with national heterogeneities. Subsidies and income support measures are indeed related to the keywords *job retentions* or *short-time work schemes*.

In addition, the keyword *training(s)* appears in the text with reference to in the context of the adverse impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups, such as young people (NEETs), people with disabilities, the elderly, and others. The provision of training courses is often associated with the adoption of job retention schemes, and in some countries, they represent an essential part of these schemes. Moreover, they are also associated with the possibility of re-qualify workers that experienced job loss during the pandemic.

The keyword *child-care services* is related to school closures and social-distancing measures. Nevertheless, this keyword is also associated with the discussion over the lack of adequate support for working parents facing job duties and care responsibilities.

Figure 2 The most frequent policies used in the text extractions



Source: Authors, N=456.

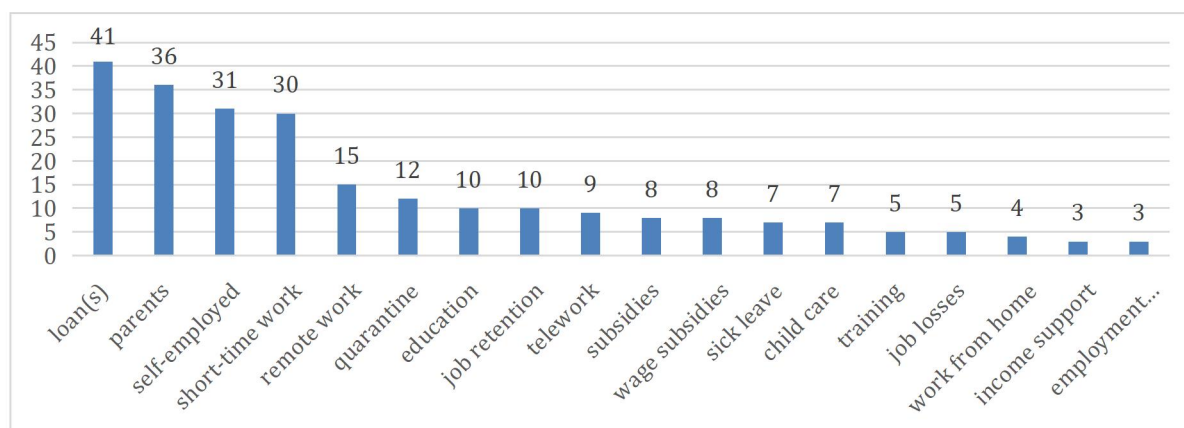
Comparison between the first and the second year of the pandemic

In the following text, we analyse discrepancies in the most frequent policy-related themes between the first (2020) and the second year (2021) of the pandemic, with the purpose to verify, as already done in the second report, whether the discourse has changed in a significant way between these two periods. In 2020, as Figure 3 shows, the most frequently used keyword is *loan(s)*. As mentioned above, this keyword is usually associated with governmental supports for companies to alleviate the adverse impact of the pandemic. In the context of school closures and distance learning policies, *parents* represents the second most frequently used word. This keyword is also associated with other measures related to workers with children, such as extended sick-leave and remote working (e.g., special measures that oblige employers to allow remote or teleworking).

The word *self-employed* is also very frequent in our newsletter sample. In fact, self-employed workers are frequently mentioned in two specific contexts: (1) as a specifically vulnerable group that has been adversely affected by the pandemic without appropriate social safety nets, and (2) with respect to specific policy measures tailored to the needs and interests of the self-employed workforce. These policies mainly consist in

direct financial support, tax relief, loan, or short-time work schemes. Moreover, given the over-representation of precarious and vulnerable workers in tourism, agriculture, and care sectors, the “self-employed” keyword is also associated with these specific economic activities.

Figure 3 The most frequent keywords in the first year of the pandemic (March – December 2020)



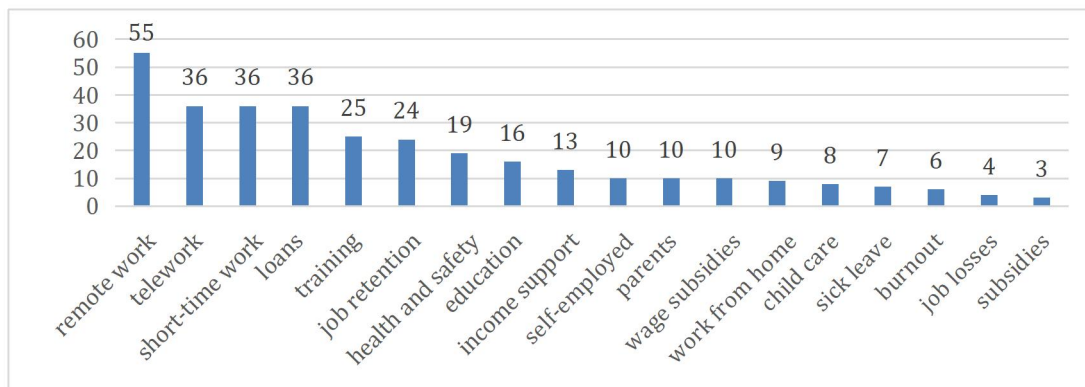
Source: Authors, N=244.

As illustrated in Figure 4, the ranking of the most frequent policy themes slightly changes in the second wave of the pandemic (January 2021 – February 2022). While *loan(s)*, as an immediate support for the companies, was the most frequent keyword used in policy discussion at the beginning of the pandemic, *remote work*, *telework*, *short-time work* appear to be the most utilized policy related themes in the second phase of the pandemic. At the same time, these keywords are also discussed in the context of the social dialogue as the frequent use of remote working encouraged the bargaining on working conditions (i.e., right to disconnect), costs coverage (electricity, technological and ergonomic equipment) and workers' entitlement to telework.

In the second wave of the pandemic, the keywords related to *remote working* and *job retention schemes* are also used with respect to *self-employed* and *non-standard workers*. The focus of the policy discussion seems to be oriented, especially during the second phase of the pandemic, on the introduction of more effective measures to support non-standard workers, self-employed and platform workers.

Similarly, the keywords *education* and *training* are more discussed during the second wave. They are related either to the short-time work schemes (since in some cases training and re-qualification programmes are an essential part of some short-time work measures), or to support the integration of the most vulnerable workers. Interestingly, some keywords related to childcare such as *parents* or *sick leave* (for parents with care-taking responsibilities at home) are less frequent in the second wave. This result might be related to the reduced intensity and duration of school closures during the second wave, essentially because of higher vaccination rates.

Figure 4 The most frequent keywords in the second year of the pandemic (January 2021-February 2022)



Source: Authors, N=327

Keyword associations of the pandemic-related policy keywords

In this section, we analyse the keyword associations, namely we test which keywords are mutually associated in the text extractions in our sample (N=1,428) in both pandemic waves.¹ The analysis shows that *short-time work schemes* are significantly associated with a set of keywords, particularly (1) *subsidies*; (2) *income support*; (3) *job retention schemes*; (4) *job perseverance*; (5) *wages*; (6) *training(s)*; (6) *companies* and (7) *social partners and tripartite dialogue*. As it emerges from the analysis, these associations mainly refer to the components of the short-time work schemes, such as trainings or re-qualification. Also, support to the adoption of short-time work schemes by subsidizing wages and companies were meant to preserve jobs and prevent job losses. In fact, these schemes are also significantly related to social dialogue, suggesting that they were in the spotlight of the collective bargaining and discussion between social partners.²

The keyword *parents* also exhibits several associations with other keywords, mostly related to the specific measures adopted to face school closure and ensure the continuation of working activities: (1) *child-care*; (2) *school closures*; (3) *remote working or teleworking*; and (4) *sick leave*; (5) *job retention schemes*.

The keyword *loan(s)* is (1) significantly associated with the keywords *company/companies* (as a main recipient of this type of support) and (2) slightly associated with other policy measures such as *tax relief* and *grace period* (and their different synonyms). These associations suggest that the keywords *loan(s)* was discussed in the context of a broader set of policies aimed at supporting companies through different fiscal and monetary measures.

The analysis shows that *self-employed* is significantly associated with the following keywords: (1) *wage subsidies*; (2) *sick leave*; (3) *quarantine*; and (4) *short-time work scheme*. This finding indicates that the category of self-employed workers was at the centre of specific and new policy measures, such as the entitlement to the different allowances such as sick-leave. Interestingly, it emerges a strong association of the keywords *short-time work scheme* and *self-employed*, although these workers were not usually eligible recipients of short-time work subsidies. Nevertheless, it may suggest that this policy was more discussed in the context of eligibility criteria for self-employed or non-standard workers.³

¹ If the association strength is close to the word pairs value 1 (≥ 0.8), we consider the two keywords as strongly mutually associated. This means that the proximity of word pairs was close in the analysed text and that they were discussed in the same context.

² Kahanec, Kováčová, Lichá (2021). ETUI-CELSI COVID-19 Observatory. National fiscal responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe., p.

11.

³ Ibid.

Conclusions

The third quarterly report presents the result of the text analysis performed on 1,428 newsletters. Despite the dataset has doubled with respect to the previous report, the main outcomes are confirmed. Among the most frequent policies used in the text extraction, we find *loans*, *remote working*, *short-time work*, *telework*, *job retention scheme*, *sick leave* and *training*. The differences envisaged between the first and the second wave of the pandemic are also confirmed. In addition, the report investigates the degree of association across keywords, identifying four main domains of interest: (i) *short-time work scheme* that relates to labour market policy; (ii) *parents* that relates to care and remote work, (iii) *loans* that relates to government's subsidies and (iv) *self-employed* that relates to income support schemes.

References

Kahanec, M., Kováčová, L. and Lichá, M. (2021). *ETUI-CELSI COVID-19 Observatory. National fiscal responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe*. CELSI Policy Brief 2021. Central European Labour Studies Institute and European Trade Union Institute.

Annex

List of keywords

1. **Covid-19:** pandemic, corona, COVID-19, COVID, vaccine, vaccine refusal, vaccination, virus, syndemic, patent waiver, green pass.
2. **Policy responses (mitigating exposure to the virus):** masks, sanitisers, closure, distance measures, protective clothes, protective equipment, disinfectant, antibacterial, thermometer, test, testing.
3. **Policy measures (labour market):** green pass, kurzarbeit, short-time work, remote work, telework, work from home, flexible work arrangements, online work, hybrid work, sick leave, ergonomic tools, training, liquidity loan(s), loan(s), stimulus package, income support, income maintenance, wage subsidies, subsidies, employment protection, job retention, occupational health, health and safety, childcare, grace period, tax break, tax exemption, tax deferral, helicopter money, emergency payment/one-off payment, self-isolation, coronacheck, 3G, QR code.
4. **Impact of the pandemic:** bankruptcy, job losses, quarantine, understaffed, burnout/burned out;
5. **Industrial relations:** trade unions, employers, employer's association, social partners, industrial relations, collective bargaining, wage bargaining, salary bargaining, tripartite, social dialogue, labour union, social impact;
6. **Other:** self-employed, parents, sick workers, health care workers, essential workers, female workers, education, quarantine workers.