



**Sixth quarterly report on
Covid-19 impact on industrial relations**

Preliminary results

January 2023

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 and the methodology

This report adds to previous reports (see References) new preliminary results from 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, particularly WageIndicator¹(20%), ETUI (12%), BusinessEurope (10%), UniEurope (5%), country-level newsletters letters (40%), and others (12%), between March 2020 and March 2022 based on the selected list of keywords (see Annex). As already explained in the First Quarterly Report, the methodology consists of the text mining techniques (using Python), supported by qualitative and quantitative text analysis of the newsletter outputs.

While in the previous report, we focused on 2020, the analysis illustrated in this report presents **a qualitative analysis of the newsletter outputs that were published in 2021, thus, during the second year of the pandemic.** The data extractions were examined using the Dedoose software and, based on the coding of the key themes, 427 text items were selected and analysed. In this report, the focus is not only on the policy measures that were discussed during the designated time, but also on the whole discourse between social partners, including the channels of communications and the different key issues discussed.

The analysis also proposes a comparison of the findings observed at country level, within the theoretical framework of the welfare regimes. The countries in the sample were categorised according to the **welfare regimes classification** (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Ferrera, 1996; Adascalitei, 2012) as follows: Conservative regimes (Austria, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands), Liberal regimes (Ireland and United Kingdom), Mediterranean countries (Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Cyprus), Social Democratic Regimes (Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Iceland) and Central and Eastern Europe (Czechia, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia).

Preliminary results

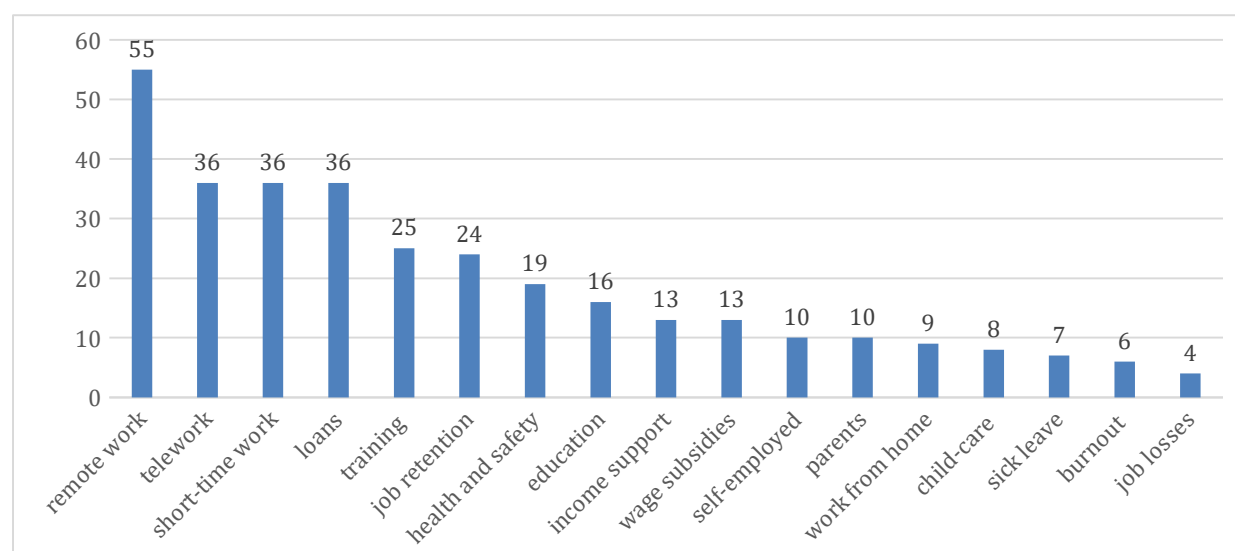
¹ The WageIndicator Foundations collects the news about collective bargaining and social dialogue in the EU Member countries and the Candidate countries. The newsletters include news about the collective bargaining on the national and EU level, relating also to policy measures that are being discussed in relation to the pandemic.

In total 1,428 text data were extracted since July 2020. The average number of texts 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).

In 2021, as Figure 1 shows, the most frequently used keyword is *remote work*, followed by *telework* which are usually used interchangeably. The higher frequency of the term is associated with the wider spread of this new form of work adopted by companies to reduce workers' exposure to the COVID-19 virus and ensure, at the same time, the continuation of business operations.

Another frequently used concept during the designated period was *short-time work*. This term related mainly to the short-time work schemes (STWs) introduced by European governments to retain jobs and reduce the exposure of the virus at the workplace. At the same time, short-time work schemes presented a crucial agenda of social dialogue in most of the European countries. Short-time work schemes were also closely associated with the term *training*, since in case of some STWs a compulsory part of being granted this benefit by the employer consisted in following training courses. Besides job retention schemes, various job retention policies (wage subsidies) also appear to be a part of the discourse of social partners.

Figure 1: The most frequent keywords in the second year of the pandemic (January 2021 – December 2021)



Source: Authors, N=327

Analysis based on the welfare state typology

In addition to what has already been shown in the previous report published in July 2022, this section of the report informs about qualitative findings based on the welfare regime typology.

Conservative regimes²

Conservative regimes in this analysis include **Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands**. According to our dataset on newsletters, the core of the anti-pandemic policies discussed in the conservative regimes during 2021 are mainly³:

- i) **Regulation of teleworking;**
- ii) **Extension of the short-time work schemes;**
- iii) **New collective agreements at national and sectoral level;**
- iv) **Care-giver support.**

In all the countries, **the short-time or job retention schemes** remained salient anti-pandemic policies protecting jobs and, thus, were extended with certain modifications. For instance, the Austrian Government announced the increase in the public budget for the short-time work schemes. In the last quarter of 2021 in the Netherlands, the companies could no longer apply for 100% loss in turnover compensation, but only up to 80% compensation of turnover losses, since closure restrictions were partially lifted and a total loss in revenues was no longer expected and, therefore, worth to be compensated.

In most of the countries, some forms of **flexible work arrangements** were discussed or adopted as a legislative act or policy recommendation. The Austrian Government introduced a tax deduction to cover telework-related expenses (equipment, utilities, etc.) for both employers and employees. In Belgium, the nationwide collective agreement specified the conditions relating to teleworking for structural and occasional teleworking, which applied to the companies with any company-level teleworking policy. Employers' associations in France in pharmaceutical and banking sector also opened a discussion about teleworking and adopted the agreement providing a framework for negotiating conditions for teleworkers. Also, the French trade unions in the public sector (incl. municipalities, public hospitals) opened discussion about the conditions of teleworking, particularly in the context of gender equality, the right to disconnect and working time. In Luxembourg, the right to disconnect was introduced outside working hours by modifying the Labour Code. The Austrian union in the retail sector also raised the issue of four-day week to foster work-life balance and, at the same time, have a positive impact on the climate change thanks to the reduction of commuting.

In terms of vulnerable workers, the French authorities broadened the entitlement criteria for caregivers with a purpose to encompass the caregivers of people with disabilities and individuals facing a serious loss of their independence. At the same time, France introduced an extension of paternity leave (11 to 25 days in case of a single child). The Dutch Senate approved a legislative act introducing two-month paid parental leave as a response to the transposition of the EU Work-life Balance Directive, since the access to paid parental leave was considered restrictive and too reliant on the company or industry agreements. At the same time, in the Netherlands, a new collective agreement introducing the salary structure for people (incl. the minimum wage) with disabilities working in the sheltered employment was

² According to the Kammer, Neihues, and Peichl (2012), Belgium and the Netherlands are hybrid models having features of both Conservative and Social-democratic regimes.

³ These findings are based on 92 text extractions.

reached. Additionally, the Belgian Government introduced a bonus payment for workers playing a key role in mitigating the consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as essential workers. The Belgian government opened a platform for discussion about the **working conditions of the platform workers** and invited the employers and platform workers to bring up the issues to be discussed, especially in terms of improving social security for this type of workers. This initiative was undertaken to respond to the increasing number of platform workers in Belgium.

The rising workload suffered by the professionals in education and health care system during the pandemic resulted in several unions actions to call for improving the working conditions. The union strikes also took place in Austria, when the trade unions representing early schooling and after school professionals were not included in the Advisory Board for Elementary Education that played a key role in developing the education policy. Besides that, the Austrian trade unions in education joined forces and published an open letter to the Ministry of Education regarding the further steps to mitigate the impact of virus on the school professionals. These steps were related to the vaccination plans, anti-pandemic measures to protect workers in education, or bonus payments for educational professionals. Such a step was a result of a reportedly insufficient response of the employers' organisations. Similarly, in the Netherlands, the trade unions in education started a campaign against the excessive workload experienced by workers in the sector during the pandemic. The Dutch hospital workers also run a strike with the aim to reduce the workload at the workplace. In Belgium, the new collective agreements were discussed to improve conditions in the health care sector (including the introduction of a new salary structure, work schedule, training conditions), nevertheless, they were not signed by the representatives of the employers. The major Belgian trade union confederations FGTV/ABVV and CSC/ACV also organised a demonstration relating to the consequences of increasing inflation rates on the living standards and called for the implementation of anti-inflation measures.

In Austria, several health and safety measures were introduced relating to the campaign of vaccination, use of masks and use of tests in the workplace. In all the countries, the lockdown measures were discussed and extended, and in this respect, the adoption of telework was highly encouraged or even imposed, wherever it was possible. In late 2021, the Luxembourgish Government enacted a regulation according to which employers were allowed to require the health pass from workers entering the workplace. The goal was also to encourage citizens to get vaccinated.

Liberal regimes

The policy debate in 2021 regarding the anti-pandemic measures in the liberal welfare regimes, Ireland and United Kingdom, was shaped mainly by⁴:

- i) **Continuation of job support schemes;**
- ii) **Telework and remote work -related measures;**
- iii) **Measures improving working conditions for non-standard workers**

⁴ These findings are based on 65 text extractions.

Similarly to the Conservative regimes, the policy discussion in the UK and Ireland extensively included debates over the **continuation of the job retention schemes** (with no major modifications) and the **regulatory policies of remote and telework**. For instance, the Irish Government introduced the *National Remote Work Strategy* including a code of practice and the right of employees to request the remote work. This strategy was supposed to promote remote work and telework, make them more accessible to the workers with the aim to reduce the exposure of workers to the virus at the workplace. In the UK, the policy discussion was shaped by the recognition of **issues related to teleworking**, such as risk of burnout, issues linked to the right to disconnect, and related mental issues. As a result, in the third quarter of 2021, the UK government launched discussions about the employees' right to request flexible work right after starting a new job and not after six months of employment as initially. This governmental initiative resulted in the adoption of flexible working arrangements as a guaranteed right later in 2022.

The Irish Government also introduced the *Blended working Policy* statement to make remote work in the civil sector a long-term measure between September 2021 and March 2022. Such a measure was supported by the unions in the public sector, which at the same time, demand further measures to be implemented such as working time, the equal access to remote work, the right to disconnect, health and safety, and others.

The position of **non-standard workers** has been discussed in these two countries as well. In Ireland, the rights of workers in the gig economy, especially free-lancers, sub-contractors, and workers with short-term contracts in delivery and educational services were discussed between the representatives of the English Language Students Union and the Ministry of Trade. In this respect, the Irish public authorities also started an investigation to uncover the bogus self-employment among the workers in the delivery services. Later in 2021, the Irish delivery workers started a strike and demanded the right to sick leave and annual leave. At that time, they were not entitled to these benefits since they were deemed as subcontractors rather than employees

The second pandemic year brought changes in **sick leave** in Ireland as well. In 2021, the Irish authorities started a discussion about a statutory sick leave scheme which had not existed before. Thanks to the introduction of the *Sick Leave Bill* (approved later in 2022 and to be in force since January 2023), workers in Ireland were entitled to a minimum of three sick leave days. It was argued that this new scheme was designed to help mainly workers with low wage who usually do not covered by paid sick leave.

As for the **occupational health and safety policies**, the Irish and British authorities published a modified guidance on protection of workers against the coronavirus relating to vaccination, ventilation, antigen testing, after consultations with the trade unions and employers' associations. Public sector trade union UNISON in the United Kingdom demanded the government to implement more effective compensation measures for civil servants to mitigate the consequences of increasing inflation rates and the increased efforts

during the pandemic times. The health care and municipal workers experienced only small increases in their wages in the first half of 2021 (3% and 1.75% respectively).

Social Democratic Regimes

In **Denmark, Finland, Sweden, and Iceland**, the policy discussion in 2021 was shaped by topics like⁵:

- i) **Continuation with the existing job retention schemes;**
- ii) **Flexible work arrangements;**
- iii) **Measures supporting the labour market position of vulnerable groups.**

Short-time work schemes were extended in all the countries of this cohort to retain jobs that could have been cancelled due to the impact of the corona crisis on business activities. In Sweden, the temporary short-time work scheme was replaced by permanent scheme through the legislative act enacted in September 2021 that changed the eligibility criteria and reduced the level of financial support. As a result, only companies facing severe aftermaths were entitled to receive support. With respect to short-time working schemes, the Swedish trade unions of civil and municipal servants engaged in negotiation with the employers' associations. The focus was the *crisis agreement* that should have been activated temporarily by increasing the working hours and paying off the financial contribution for this additional workload caused by the exceptional situation of crisis.

The establishment of **different flexible work arrangements** was discussed in all the Social Democratic Regimes as a response to the pandemic and the long-lasting trends in fostering work-life balance and improving working conditions. As the analysis of the newsletters showed, the adoption of the flexible work settings was accelerated not only by the pandemic but also because of the transposition of the Directive on Work-life Balance. This included mainly measures supporting flexible work schedules and making remote working more accessible. More specifically, the Danish trade unions welcomed the idea of introducing the four-day week for the local government employees.

Besides existing schemes supporting the **vulnerable cohorts** analysed in the Fifth report, Finland introduced a new grant scheme supporting companies and the self-employed in the culture that had to cease or reduce their business activities during the pandemic. The Finnish government also introduced a loan deduction scheme for students and graduates via direct deduction or taxes. Such a measure reportedly responded to the increase in mental health issues among the students. The Swedish government also introduced the special pregnancy allowance; a pregnant person was entitled to this allowance if the tasks to be performed at the workplace were physically demanding or if there was a risk of exposure to the virus at the workplace. **Light modifications of the parental leaves** are also recorded in two of the countries belonging to this group. In fact, the Finnish Government announced a modification

⁵ These findings are based on 70 text extractions.

of the income-related parental leave with an extension of one month. In early 2021, the Danish Government extended the maternity benefits to parents staying at home (up to ten working days) if workers' children were found infected by COVID-19 or at high risk of having been infected.

Some **health and safety regulations** were introduced and modified as vaccination progressed. For instance, the Danish and Swedish Governments imposed a requirement to show green passes when entering the workplaces with the final aim of reducing the infection rates and the risks of contagion at work. They also issued guidance and rules on self-testing and other prevention measures to reduce the spread of the virus at the workplaces.

Also in this cohort of countries, the pressure on the health care professionals resulted in strikes and trade unions actions. The strikes of the Danish health care workers continued in September 2021 and followed up on the negotiations for increasing wages and improving working conditions in the first quarter of 2021. Despite an agreement between the Government and the trade unions was reached, the dissatisfaction continued to grow among health care workers regarding the wage levels and the overall working conditions.

Mediterranean countries

The governments of Mediterranean countries, **Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Cyprus**, continued in 2021 with the implementation of the already existing job retention measures and support of non-standard workers. At the same time, they also introduced several novelties concerning in particular flexible work arrangements and direct subsidies for particular industries. To be more specific, we can identify the following measures as the most dominant in the discourse in this cohort of countries ⁶:

- 1) **Extension of the existing job retention schemes;**
- 2) **Flexible work arrangements;**
- 3) **Direct industry-specific support;**

In all Mediterranean countries, the extension of the anti-pandemic measures was discussed in in the policy discourse, especially the adoption of different **job retention schemes** was seen as an important tool for preventing massive layoffs due to the pandemic. For example, “ERTE”, the largest scheme covering in Spain the social insurance companies to retain jobs across sectors was further extended in the first quarter of 2021. Similar measures can be observed in all the countries in this group.

Nevertheless, several **new schemes retaining jobs in the most affected sectors and protecting the income** of workers were adopted in early 2021. In Spain, the exceptional unemployment benefit scheme was extended to self-employed who had to cease their business activities due to the pandemic. Similarly, the Greek government also approved a

⁶ These findings are based on 98 text extractions.

scheme fostering creation of new jobs (in total 100,000) across sectors by covering social security contributions to boost the business in the country. In Italy, a scheme covering social security insurance for self-employed was introduced to address the losses in revenues of freelancers and self-employed among the people with disabilities arguing that they might have been more affected by the pandemic due to barriers they encounter. The Greek and Italian Government announced support targeting specific sectors, such as catering, retail, aquaculture, agriculture, and fishery.

Among the **flexible work arrangement measures**, the regulation of remote work was the most discussed topic in all five countries. These measures differed also depending on the intensity of the health crisis in these countries. For instance, the Portuguese authorities imposed a compulsory adoption of remote work in case job tasks could be performed remotely, to reduce the circulation of the corona virus during the most critical months (first two quarters of 2021). Moreover, several regulations on remote working were introduced to improve working conditions. For instance, the Portuguese lawmakers approved a legislation establishing the right to disconnect and a penalization system for contacting employees outside the working hours. At the same time, Portuguese companies were required to cover the expenses for the necessary tools used by employees working remotely. In mid-2021, the Greek authorities also introduced a reform of the Labour Code regarding teleworking: the amendment of the Code introduced more flexibility for the workers to plan their work schedule and provided with the right to disconnect outside the working hours. At the beginning of 2021, the Spanish Ministry of Labour introduced financial incentives to support four-day week for companies with the aim to improve the work-life balance and, at the same time, to assess the impact of the reduction of working hours on the productivity.

The countries from this cohort introduced also different **health and safety measures and guidance at the workplace** (Greece, Italy, and Portugal). As the vaccination progressed, the social dialogue focused on mandatory vaccination and the adoption of vaccination passes when entering the workplaces. This led to heated debates among the health care professionals mainly in Italy and Greece. Moreover, the Greek trade unions representing health care workers' rights raised attention on the necessity of fostering psychological support for those employed in the health care industry.

Regarding the protection of **the most vulnerable groups** in the labour market during the COVID-19 pandemic, Greece, Italy, Spain, and Portugal continued providing financial support for non-standard workers, as described in the Fifth quarterly report. For example, in the first quarter of 2021, the Greek government launched a support for SMEs in the retail and catering sector financially compensating fixed costs incurred by the companies adversely affected by the pandemic. Improving working conditions of gig-economy workers was also a substantial part of the policy discourse. Particularly in Spain where the weak status of these workers made of low salaries, social insecurity, long working hours and lack of working rights was clearly acknowledged.

In the policy discussion in Cyprus, the strikes of medical staff dominated in mid-2021. Nurses and other employees working mainly in vaccination centers went on strike because of unpaid overtime work. On the other hand, Cypriot teachers' union also launched a strike and claimed to extend employment contracts to teachers working in the afternoon and evening school activities, considered at that moment as self-employed by the Ministry of Education and thus deprived of part of their labour rights. Similarly, health care professionals in Greece went on strike at the eve of 2021 to emphasize the problem of labour shortages in the health care sector.

Central and Eastern Europe

The last cohort of countries includes the Member States of Central and Eastern Europe, particularly **Czechia, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia**⁷. The main themes that dominated the public discourse appear to be:

- 1) **Extension of the existing job retention schemes;**
- 2) **Flexible work arrangements**

In the first and the second quarter of 2021, some of the governments introduced **guidance and rules regarding the testing** and vaccination in the companies, the public institutions, or schools. As the vaccination in these countries progressed, most of them adopted measures to increase the number of vaccinated individuals. For instance, in Croatia, the authorities introduced mandatory COVID certificates for users and employees of public and state services. In Slovakia, the modification of the Labour Code allowed employers to financially reward the employees who got vaccinated and approved a financial compensation for the elderly who got vaccinated.

In all the countries in this cohort, **temporary job retention schemes** (for all workers or workers in specific industries) were extended with minor modifications (changes were made mainly in the level of support). As was analysed in the Fifth report, during the first year of the pandemic, in Slovakia and Czechia, the pandemic accelerated the discussion about institutionalisation of the short-time work scheme (substantially inspired by the German model of *Kurzarbeit*) as a permanent scheme to be activated during the economic crises. Consequently, the adoption of the permanent short-time work scheme was a substantial part of the social dialogue during 2021. In Slovakia, it resulted into the adoption of the permanent short-time working scheme in mid-2021, to come into force from 2023. In the Czechia, the policy discourse and the whole legislative process lasted by the end of 2021.

The workload in the health care system resulted in the shortages of medical staff (mainly nurses) in Slovakia as emphasized by the Chamber of Nurses. The trade unions representing health care workers in Czechia also pointed out that shortages of medical staff was going to jeopardize the functioning of the regional hospitals and demanded the Government to pay off

⁷ These findings are based on 102 text extractions.

bonus payments for the overtime work carried out by the health care workers as a result of the health crisis. The chamber of health care professionals in Hungary signalled that working conditions, deteriorated by the pandemic crisis, could also result in a staff shortage. In Poland, problems with working conditions and wage levels led to several demonstrations launched by nurses and mid-wives in forty hospitals: major demands included a guaranteed stable framework for raising the basic remuneration of nurses. Medical staff shortages were announced also in Croatia due to refusal of a part of the medical professionals to be tested or vaccinated, thus opposing to the obligation imposed by the government

In the last quarter of 2021, **the increased workload in the school system** and the refusals of some workers to get vaccinated resulted in the strikes of teachers, particularly in Hungary and Croatia. Due to the worsening working conditions, the major Hungarian trade unions demanded a pay increase for teachers, an increase of the guaranteed pay for the non-teaching staff and a limit of 22 hours per week dedicated to education and teaching. In Croatia, the trade unions pointed out that the dismissal of teachers due to their refusal to be vaccinated could lead to shortages. In Slovenia, simplified telework procedures were approved in 2021 to make the telework more accessible. In fact, before this amendment, employers were obliged to report the use of telework to the Labour Inspectorate under administratively demanding rules and procedures.

In **flexible working arrangements**, several changes were made during the second year of the pandemic. In Czechia, the amendment of the Labour Code in early 2021 introduced shared workplace measures allowing the employer to employ two or multiple part-time employees to fulfil the role of one full-time job. The right to telework was introduced in Slovakia making remote work and telework more accessible for the workers provided that there were no relevant barriers in performing the work tasks outside the regular employers' premises. Similar changes in the regulation of telework were discussed among the social partners in Poland, without, nevertheless, resulting in any amendment of the labour code in 2021.

As was analysed in the Fifth report, one of the features of the policy discussion in the second year of the pandemic was **a lack of presence or, even, the exclusion of social partners from policy-making** over the anti-pandemic interventions, mainly justified by a need of national governments to adopt policies promptly to prevent job losses (e.g., Lukáčová, Kováčová, and Kahanec, 2022). The newsletter analysis showed that in 2021, the involvement of social partners in decision-making over the anti-pandemic measures slightly improved and the trade unions utilised new channels of communications such as campaigns, higher level of the media presences, and strikes. For instance, the tripartite regular meetings were revoked in Slovakia and trade unions were involved in the negotiations over the permanent short-time work schemes.

Conclusions

The text analysis of the newsletter outputs revealed that the discourse in 2021 was dominated by two main themes: **(1) extension and modifications of existing job retention schemes** and **(2) flexible work arrangements mainly remote work and telework**.

The newsletter analysis showed that **job retention schemes** are considered as a major anti-pandemic policy measure in the countries across the regimes; thus, the analysis confirmed the convergence in utilising this measure in the EU countries with some modifications. In Central and Eastern Europe, a permanent short-time work scheme was adopted which presents a major breakthrough in the anti-crisis policies.

The adoption and implementation of **remote work and telework** seem to have been a response not only to the pandemic and health and safety measures, but also to the increasing demands coming from the EU Work-life Balance Directive. In fact, in some countries, the flexible work arrangements were adopted directly because of the transposition of the Directive, which was evident mainly in Social Democratic countries. The novel regulation is about rights and accessibility to telework, the right to disconnect outside regular working hours, or covering home-based work-related expenses.

Also, in some countries, the enormously increased workload of the medical and educational professionals substantially shaped the policy discussion among social partners. It also resulted in the action of trade unions (strikes, open letters) and claims to improve working conditions. In this respect, the newsletters informed about **strikes and protest actions of the trade unions in the medical sector, mainly in the Mediterranean, Central and Eastern Europe**.

Supporting **vulnerable groups** was part of the policy discussion also in 2021. Comparing to the first pandemic year, in 2021 less attention was given to parents, probably because of less frequent school closures. Reforms in parental leaves were introduced mainly in Social Democratic countries. Countries in Conservative and Social Democratic measures opened a discussion about improving working conditions of non-standard and gig workers, usually deprived of social security and labour rights, and mostly excluded from national support schemes. Nevertheless, it has not resulted in any relevant policy measure.

The policy discussion in **Central and Eastern Europe continued to be characterized by a turmoil in industrial relations**, since social partners, especially trade unions, were excluded or marginalised from the tripartite discussions about the anti-pandemic measures at the earliest stages of the pandemic. Nevertheless, in most of the countries, trade unions were able to find and create other channels of communication as the pandemic progressed. In particular, they actively participated in the discussions over the extension and institutionalisation of the short-time work schemes together with other anti-pandemic labour market measures.

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ANNEX

Table 1: Main policies based on the text analysis of the newsletter outputs (data for 2021)

Conservative regimes	Liberal regimes	Mediterranean countries	Social democratic regimes	Central and Eastern Europe
<p>Financial support for teleworking workers (e.g., tax deduction)</p> <p>New agreements on telework for public employees (voluntary nature of telework, health and safety, gender equality, data security and privacy, working time, and the right to disconnect),</p> <p>Amendments of the short-time work schemes (increased budget, duration extension)</p> <p>Care giver support</p> <p>Introduction of four day working week</p> <p>Tax deferrals, tax bonus related to covid impact for businesses</p>	<p>New regulation of remote working (introduction of the right to teleworking)</p> <p>Mandatory vaccinations for employment</p> <p>Health and safety regulation – guidance on ventilation testing, vaccination</p>	<p>New regulation of remote working – national-level and company level (the right to teleworking, right to disconnect support for teleworking expenses)</p> <p>Extension of job retention schemes (cap of support, eligibility criteria)</p>	<p>Amendment of short-time work schemes (e.g., extension of short-time lay-offs, amendment of short-time work schemes, new collective agreements on the company level)</p> <p>Extension of parental leave</p> <p>Special provision for the public servants (crisis plan, overtime work)</p> <p>Flexible working arrangements (introduction of four-day week in combination with remote working arrangements at the local level)</p>	<p>Amendments of the short time work – extension (cap of support, eligibility of criteria)</p> <p>Flexible work arrangements (the right to teleworking)</p>

Source: Authors

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.