









# Social Dialogue in Defence of Vulnerable Groups in Post-COVID-19 Labour Markets (VS/2021/0196)



# **EU Level**

## **COVID-19 labour market developments**

- Restrictions on mobility, mass gatherings, and public interaction during spring 2020 – aimed at protecting public health – resulted in a significant increase in unemployment rates across EU27.
- Regulations to lessen socio-economic consequences such as the temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) loans provided to support job retention schemes in many EU countries, reduced further unemployment and protected labour markets.
- The Member State governments and national social partners
  played a vital role in protecting vulnerable groups, but the
  practices varied, depending on the aims of MS governments
  and the strong/weak role of national trade unions in social
  dialogue.

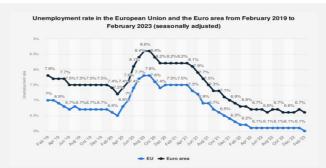


Figure 1: Unemployment rate in the Eu (and Euro area) from February 2019 to February 2023 Source: Eurostat (2023a)

# **COVID-19** and vulnerable groups

- Vulnerability is not only about being exposed to particular hazardous/risk situations or economic risks, but also shaped by a person's intersectionality, such as age, gender, ethnicity, social context. It is related to a person's own or collective ability or capacity or resilience to cope with these risks.
- Vulnerability is not static, rather it changes overtime. Thus, there is a need to take into account the temporal and spatial changes of social vulnerability.
- The vulnerable groups based on the results of DEFEN-CE research include, but are not limited to: women, the elderly, LGBTIQA+, lone parents (especially single mothers), low-income and minimum-income workers, low-skilled workers, persons with disabilities, care workers, migrant workers, non-standard workers, the self-employed, undocumented workers, seasonal workers, and ethnic minorities.

## Social dialogue in defence of vulnerable groups

- Most EU-level policy measures, considered as "top-down", focus on protecting the labour market and businesses in general; they were not tailored to safeguard vulnerable groups.
- The SURE instrument was an innovative attempt of the European Commission and the EU institutions' bodies that encompassed national unemployment insurance schemes in Member states.
- The influence of trade unions in the European Semester, regarding the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), decision-making was mixed, found to be low or absent at the MS level based on trade unions' historical legacies and power.
- Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) is conditional financing provided to Member States; it is neither linked to social dialogue nor to social partners, since the MS governments may have other focuses other than supporting vulnerable groups.

## **Policy relevance**

- The Covid-19 pandemic is a reminder of the necessity of social dialogue and the unsolved issues of working conditions.
- The pandemic revealed the limitations of some recently adopted measures; while highlighting the need for comprehensive discussions and negotiations between employers, employees, and relevant stakeholders.
- Precariousness of work links to vulnerabilities of workers, not only EU citizens but migrants from outside of the EU such as seasonal workers, domestic workers, and care workers.
- **Trade unions** played a crucial role in raising awareness and advocating for the rights of vulnerable workers.
- Knowledge institutions and non-governmental organizations are not social partners, but they were crucial players in advocating and creating "civil dialogue" during the pandemic.
- The pandemic had revealed a particular need for social dialogue that is associated with labour rights, i.e., occupational health assistance, the reconciliation between work and family, and telework and platform work.

Further information Project details: <a href="https://www.helsinki.fi/en/projects/social-dialogue-defence-vulnerable-groups/about">https://www.helsinki.fi/en/projects/social-dialogue-defence-vulnerable-groups/about</a>, contact: University of Helsinki (Chaitawat.Boonjubun@helisinki.fi).

