



# **Second quarterly report on Covid-19 impact on industrial relations**

*Preliminary results*

## 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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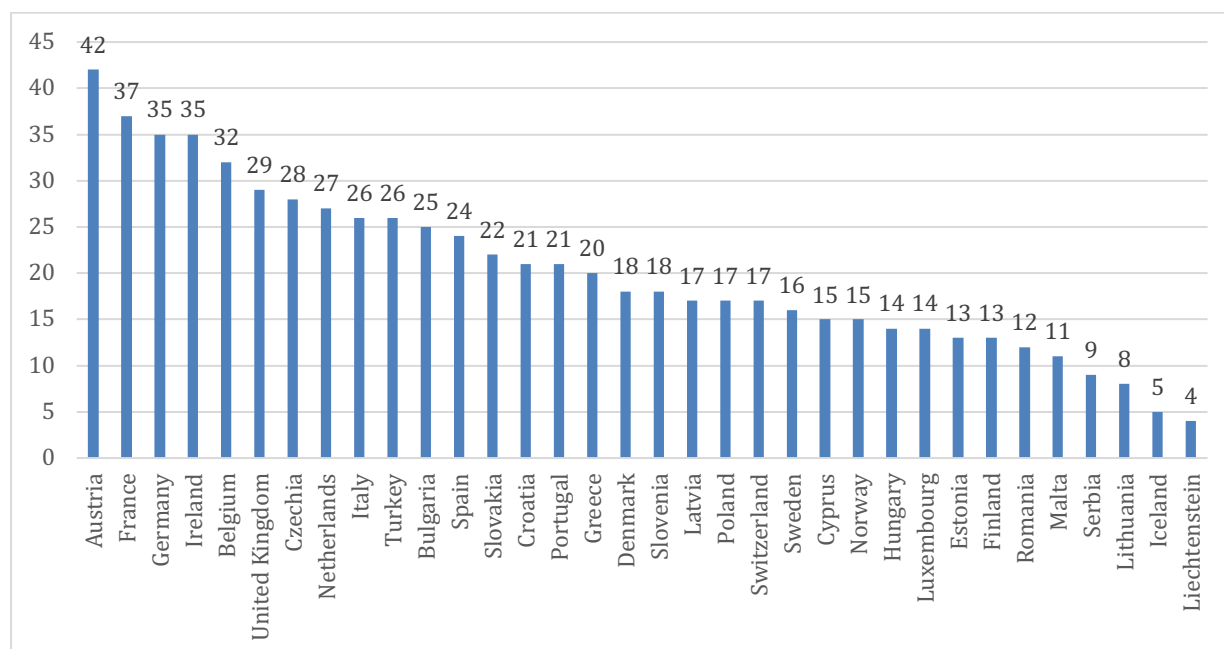
## Introduction

This report presents preliminary results of data mining analysis on the most frequent themes contained in the newsletter outputs published by the selected stakeholders at the EU-level. It aims 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 provide the answers, text data was collected from social partners’ press releases and newsletters at the EU level and further analyzed. In total, 688 texts were extracted from the newsletters of organizations such as WageIndicator, ETUI, Business Europe, EPSU, ETUCE and IndustriALL between March 2020 and November 2021 based on the selected list of keywords (see Annex). The ID of the item, name of the country, date and the source were assigned to each item. At this stage, descriptive analysis was conducted to illustrate the very first insights regarding the most frequent topics discussed in the newsletters during the pandemic, particularly for what concerns industrial relations. As already explained in the First Quarterly Report, the methodology mainly consists of text mining techniques (using Python), supported by qualitative and quantitative text analysis of the newsletter outputs.

## 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 around 20, with relevant differences between the most represented countries (i.e., Austria, France, Germany and Ireland) and the least represented ones (Lithuania, Iceland, Liechtenstein). Due to the current uneven distribution of the database, whose numerosity will be enriched to offer a more balanced distribution of documents by country, this preliminary analysis provides rather the very first insights about policy themes that are included in pandemic-related newsletter outputs.

Figure 1: The number of text extractions per country



Source: Authors; N=688.

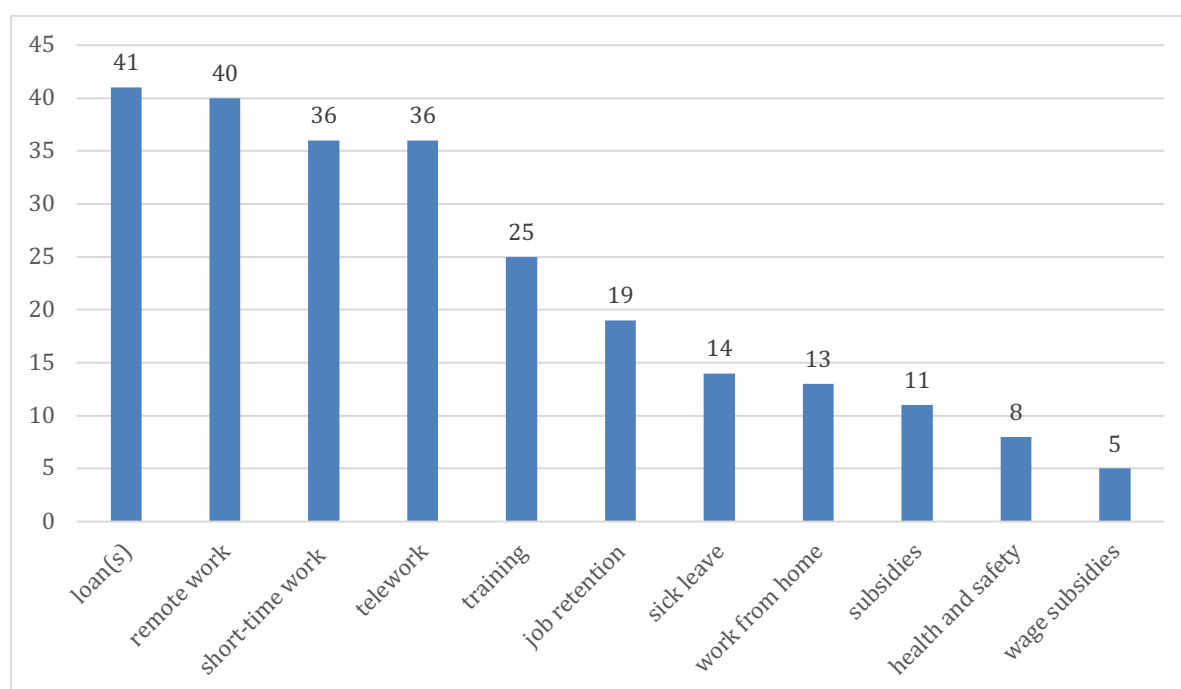
As for the **policy responses**, the analysis shows that the most frequent keywords in the sample are represented by *loan(s)*, *remote work*, *short-time work* (or *Kurzarbeit*), *telework* and *training*. Indeed, the adoption of *remote work*, *telework* and *work from home* was imposed by national governments and especially larger companies to prevent the outbreak of the virus and to respect social distancing measures.

Another set of related **policy measures** consists of the keywords *subsidy/subsidies* and *job retention scheme*. On the one hand companies and sectors adversely affected by the pandemic received subsidies (either in the form of direct payments or other forms of financial aid) funded by national governments. On the other hand, job retention schemes (including furlough, short-time work scheme and other country-specific policies) were introduced to lower the risk of unemployment for millions of workers.

The *health care sector* also emerges as a very frequent keyword, usually linked to discussion over *financial support measures*.

Interestingly, the keyword *training* is also amongst the most frequently mentioned keywords associated with the job retention schemes, but also with other issues such as integration of vulnerable groups (e.g., young people, ethnic minorities, the low-skilled, non-standard workers). Reference is made to *sick leave*, mainly with respect to measures imposed at the national level in favor of infected patients as well as caregivers that stayed at home due to the school closures.

Figure 2: The most frequent policies used in the text extractions



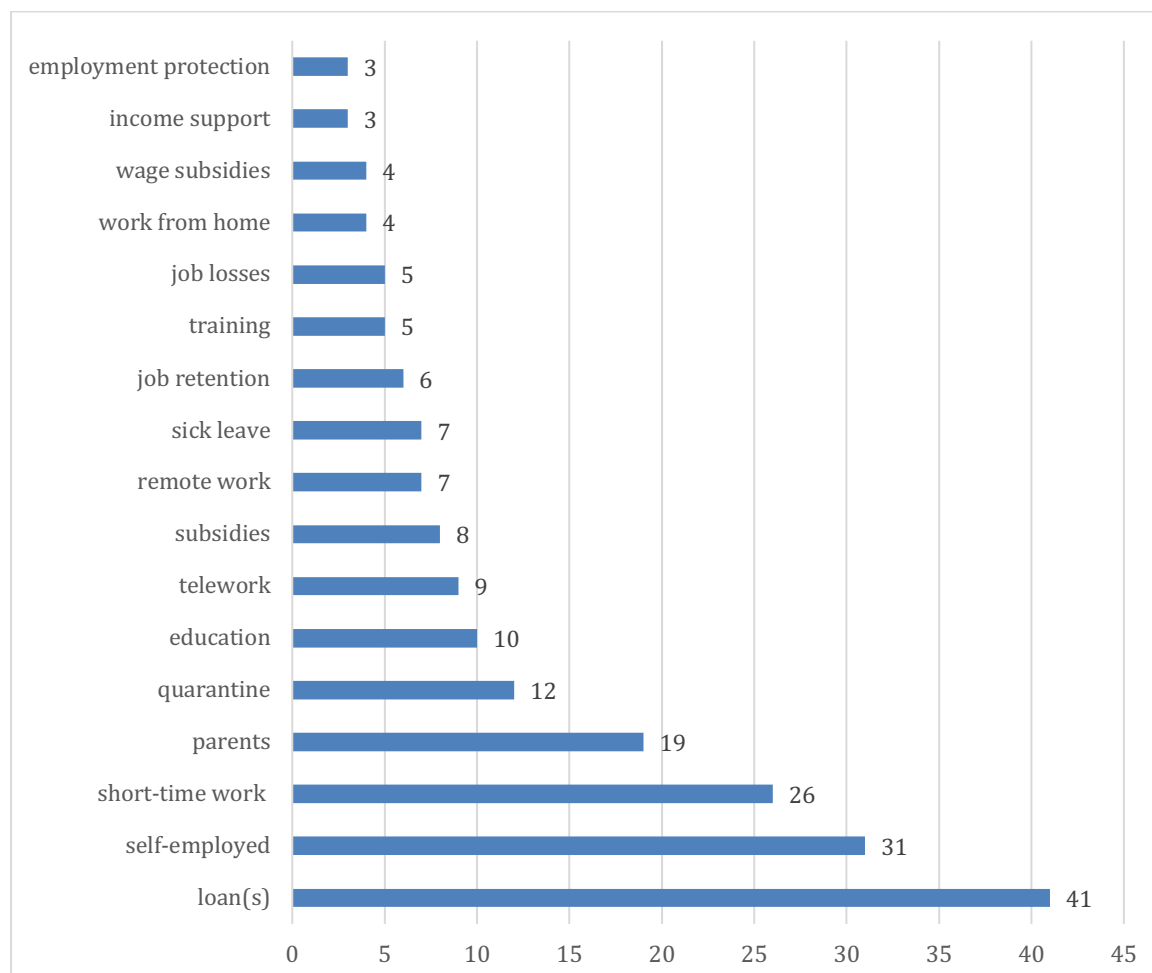
Source: Authors.

### Comparison between the first and the second year of the pandemic

In the following two figures, we explicitly distinguish the first (2020) and the second year (2021) of the pandemic to pinpoint the most frequent topics discussed in each year and verify whether the discourse has changed in a significant way. As can be seen in Figure 3, during 2020, the most frequently used keywords are *loan(s)* which were used primarily in the context of provision of immediate financial support for companies and industries. The presentation of this measure is often followed in the text by an explicit reference to the category of *self-employed workers*, identified as a vulnerable group particularly affected by the pandemic. Indeed, specific and unprecedented measures have been provided for self-employed and, more generally, for non-standard and precarious workers such as financial support, loans, tax deferrals or grace periods. *Short-time work schemes* (or *Kurzarbeit*) as a job retention scheme is associated in the texts with subsidies to either employers or employees but it is also described as a useful policy tool that can prevent layoffs across industries. The keyword *parents* is

mentioned in the context of more general policies to support households (e.g., the pandemic parental allowance, sick leave for caretakers) or to impose social distancing (e.g., school closures, lockdown). Additionally, different keywords related to the *work from home* (telework, remote work, etc.) are listed as measures needed to prevent social contacts.

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

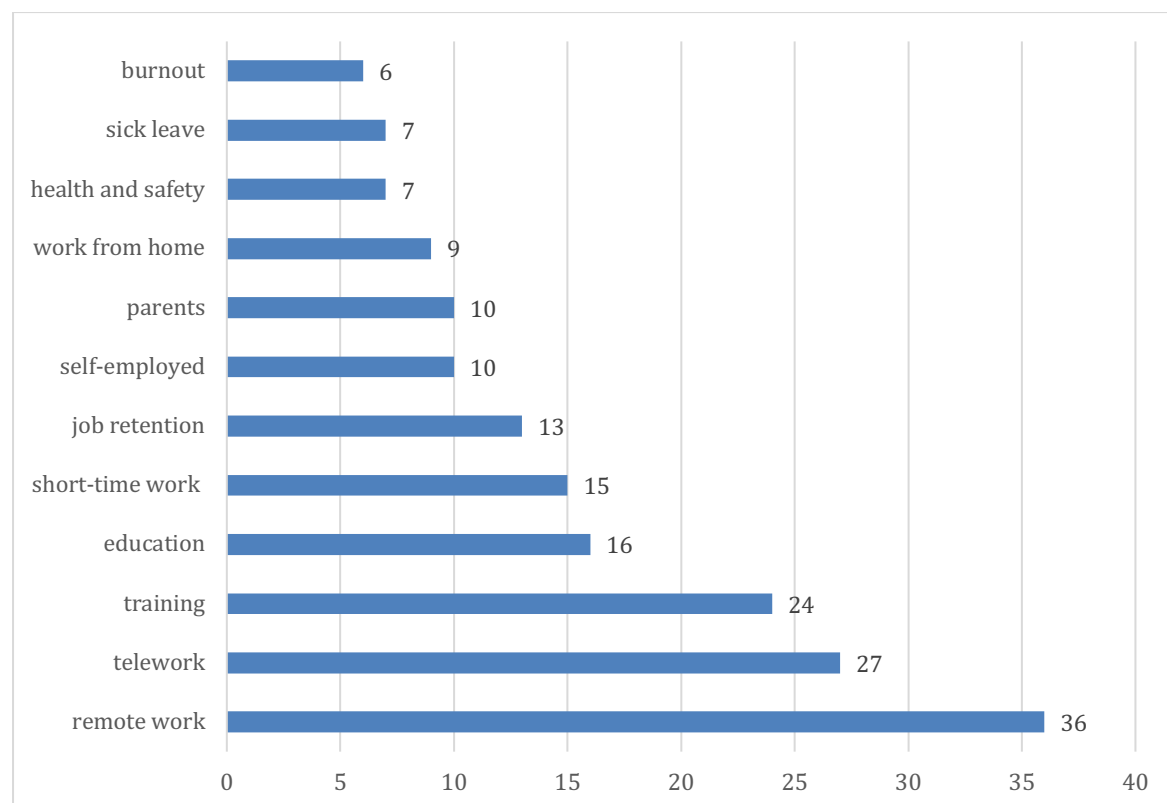


Source: Authors.

During the second year of the pandemic, *remote work* and *telework* represent the most frequent keywords, as shown in Figure 4. They are used mainly in the context of the national policy measures (e.g., regulations making telework more accessible to workers, imposing mandatory telework). This group of keywords is also discussed in the context of the social dialogue as the frequent use of remote working encouraged the bargaining on working conditions (i.e., the right to disconnect), costs coverage (electricity, technological and ergonomic equipment) and workers' entitlement to telework.

*Short-time work* and *job retention schemes* are repeatedly used words, again in the context of social dialogue, institutionalization of short-time work and enlargement of the target group (such as non-standard workers). Interestingly, *education and training* themes are discussed in the pandemic-related texts as well, mainly in association with *short-time work schemes* (e.g., in some countries retraining is an integral part of the scheme), school closures and the job placement of young people that suffered the most because of the pandemic and economic downturn. *Loans* are less recurrent than in the first year, suggesting that after the first period during which national governments' intervention was mainly focused on financial provisions and social support schemes, the attention was then devoted to the regulation of work arrangements to ensure the continuation of productive and service activities.

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



Source: Authors.

## Conclusions

The report of the preliminary results provides the first insights into the analysis of the most frequent policy themes discussed in 688 newsletters published during the pandemic by European trade unions and related institutions. The analysis shows that in the first year of the pandemic, financial measures, such as *loans* and *subsidies*, intended as immediate support for companies, are prevalent among the searched keywords. Conversely, in the second year of the crisis, work organization-related keywords, such as *telework* and *remote work* result to be the most frequent ones. Interestingly, *job retention schemes*, including mainly *short-time work schemes*, occur throughout the entire period of analysis, as they represent a popular policy measure that could at the same time increase the quality of jobs and reduce the risk of unemployment in European countries. The discussion on remote working grows in intensity and frequency over time, until it becomes a dominant theme during the second year of the pandemic. Relatedly, industrial relations and collective bargaining jump out, given the necessity of regulating a broad set of clauses such as working conditions, provision of technological tools, coverage of costs, health and safety and wellbeing of remote workers.

**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.