



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

Preliminary results

March 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 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, **2, 084 texts** were extracted from the newsletters of organizations, particularly WageIndicator¹(15%), ETUI (12%), BusinessEurope (10%), UniEurope (8%), 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.²

The analysis in this report focuses on the quantitative analysis on the most frequent keywords discussed in the newsletters, distinguishing between **the first and the second year of the pandemic. 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). In this report, the focus is not only on the policy measures discussed during the designated time, but also on the whole discourse emerged among social partners, including the channels of communications and the different key issues under discussion.

The main novelty of this report is the significant enlargement of the database, which has now almost doubled with respect to previous reports. To both increase the amount of data and ensure a better representativeness of the whole dataset, its new composition accounts for the relative weight of countries’ GDP and employment level over the European GDP and workforce.

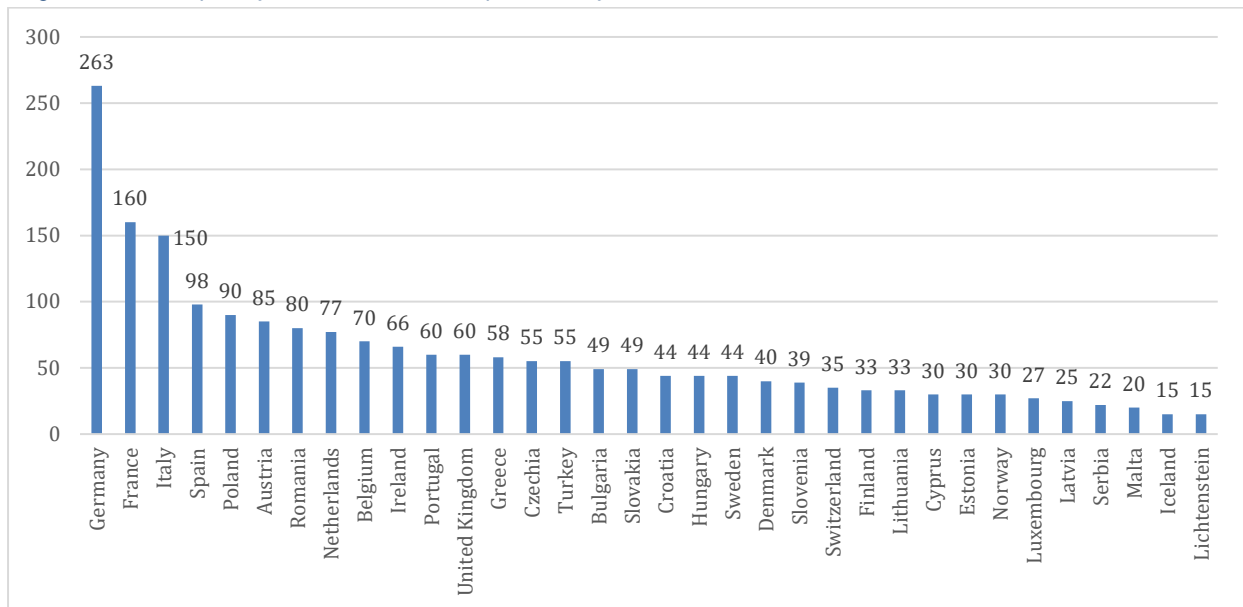
¹ The WageIndicator Foundations collects the news about collective bargaining and social dialogue in the EU Member countries and the Candidate countries. The newsletters include news about the collective bargaining on the national and EU level, relating also to policy measures that are being discussed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

² The sample of the text extractions is representative as for the country structure considering the portion of country's GDP in the GDP of the European Union and the portion of country's workforce in the workforce of the whole EU.

Results

In total 2,084 text data were extracted since July 2020. The average number of texts extractions per country is 60, with relevant differences between the most represented countries (i.e., Germany, France, and Italy) and the least represented ones (Malta, Iceland, and Liechtenstein).

Figure 1: The frequency of data extractions per country for 2020-2022 (N=2084)



Source: Authors

Despite the significant enlargement of the database, the results already presented in previous reports are confirmed with some interesting new findings.

As can be seen in Figure 2, **job retention scheme** is the most frequent keyword in the first year of the pandemic, while the frequency remains very high also in the second year. The second most frequent theme is **remote work** and **telework**. The high occurrence of these terms is associated with the very first measures adopted by national governments to mitigate the exposure to the COVID-19, to ensure continuation of the business activities, and to prevent massive layoffs of the workforce.

Job retention schemes adopted across the EU countries were highly heterogenous for what concerns the forms of income support, and the financial schemes covering the social or health security contributions. Most of these schemes were adopted across industries, while some specific schemes were exclusively directed to those industries most severely affected by the pandemic, such as the hospitality, culture and retail sectors. At the same time, in several countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the pivotal topic of social discourse was the process of institutionalisation of job-retention schemes, integrated during the Covid-pandemic in the social security system. With respect to **remote work** and **telework**, the necessity of novel policies to regulate it penetrated the public discourse, concerning the

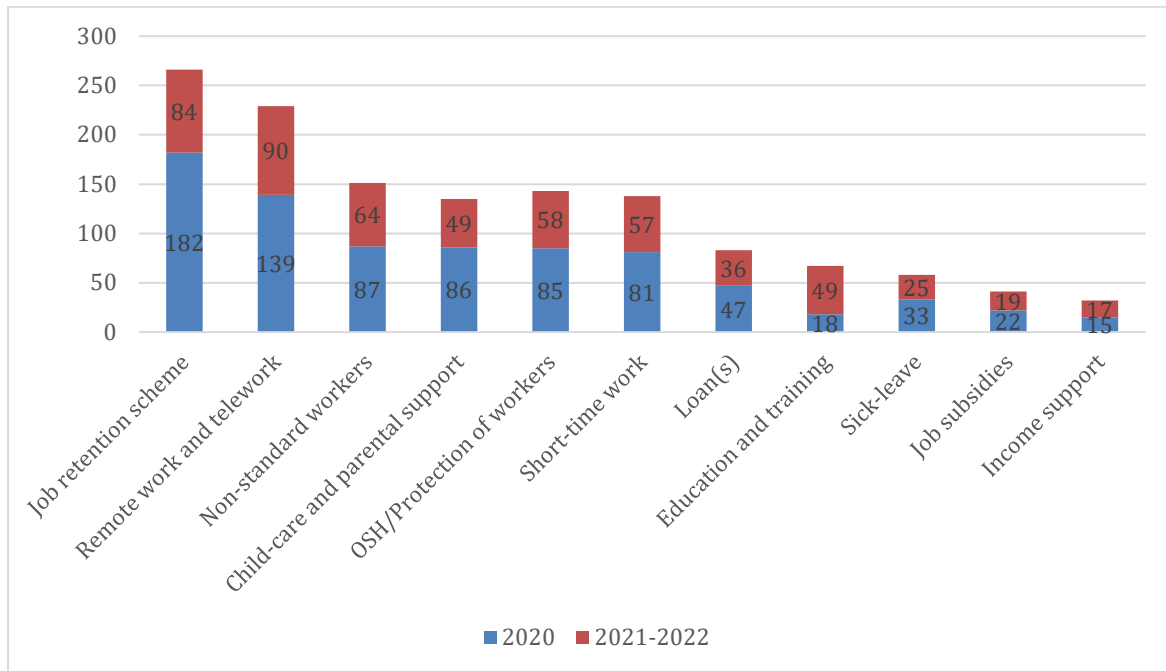
access to telework and the definition of working conditions (i.e., right to disconnect, coverage of costs, working hours and four day working week).

Specific measures mitigating the effect of the pandemic on ***non-standard workers***, identified as a vulnerable group of workers, were also a frequently discussed topic in both years of the pandemic, given their more limited access to some policy measures such as job retention schemes and short-time work. The measures concerned primarily income support of the self-employed, seasonal workers, and workers with temporary contracts. In the second year of the pandemic, platforms workers were also at the centre of the debate.

Childcare and ***parental support*** issues were discussed slightly more in the first year of the pandemic, probably because of the more frequent closure of schools in the initial phase of the pandemic. Within this topic, different policies appeared in the discourse, such as various types of childcare allowances, provisions about school closures, extra income support for the low-income families, extension of the maternity and parental leave, etc. ***Occupational health and safety (OSH)***, and the overall ***protection of the workers*** also appeared among the most often discussed topics among social partners. Within this category, different sub-themes were mentioned such as OSH guidelines adjusted for the COVID-19 specificities, recommendations on testing and vaccination procedures, recommendations on ventilation, distance policies at the workplace, as well as specific provisions for the protection of healthcare and other frontline workers. This topic was also slightly more frequent in the first year of the pandemic since OSH related measures were one of the first tools adopted to protect workers. Besides the OSH measures, in both years the problem of sick leave resonated in the discourse of social partners both in terms of reducing the bureaucratic burden on sick leave provisions and the necessity to lengthen its duration or modifying eligibility criteria to include a larger number of infected workers.

During the designated period, another frequently discussed term has been the proposal of ***short-time working hours***, which refers to the subsidized schemes introduced by some governments to retain jobs across sectors. Especially in CEE countries, short-time work schemes seem to be a leading topic, as they were introduced as a brand-new policy to preserve jobs. In the other countries, where the STWs had already been established, the social discourse was about changing the eligibility criteria, increasing the financial cap, and making other adjustments to the policy design. The analysis also showed that short-time works schemes were also closely associated with ***training***, since receiving the subsidy on the side of the employer was conditioned by offering trainings and courses to the employees benefiting from the STWs.

Figure 2: The most frequent keywords in the second year of the pandemic (January 2021 – March 2021) comparison between 2020 and 2021

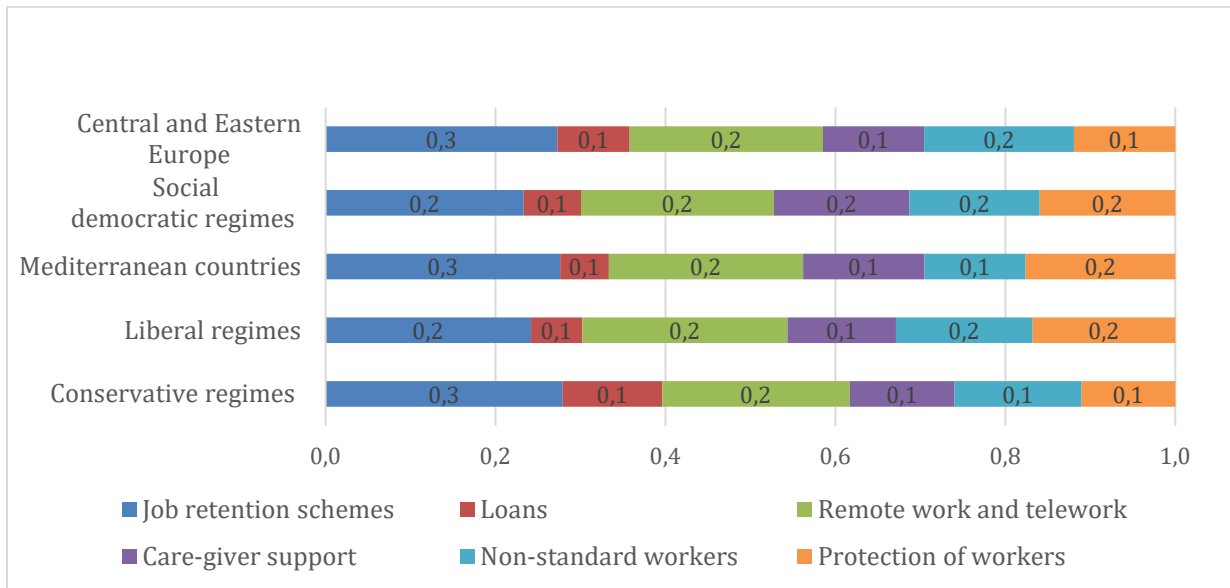


Source: Authors

Analysis based on the welfare state typology

Based on Figure 3, a convergence in policy themes during the pandemic can be observed between the countries across the welfare regimes mainly regarding job retention schemes and flexibilization of work arrangements (remote working, teleworking) which might be explained by possible policy transfers that occur across countries. The emergence of such policy transfers seems to be supported by the fact that resembling measures were adopted in EU countries to mitigate the effect of the pandemic. Among the most common policies, we can list temporary or permanent short-time work schemes, wage subsidies for the most affected industries and companies, but also new provisions on teleworking to improve and better define working conditions for remote workers. At the same time, the adopted measures significantly vary across countries with respect to policy design, eligibility criteria, duration, level of support and so on.

Figure 3: Differences in the policies across welfare regimes (2020-2021)



Source: Authors

The analysis also shows differences across the welfare regimes in several categories of policies that could be further analysed through a more in-depth study of our data.

Social democratic regimes put more emphasis on the *support for the caregivers* in the form of sickness leaves, extension of parental and maternity leaves to enable workers to take care of their children during school closures compared to other welfare regime types.

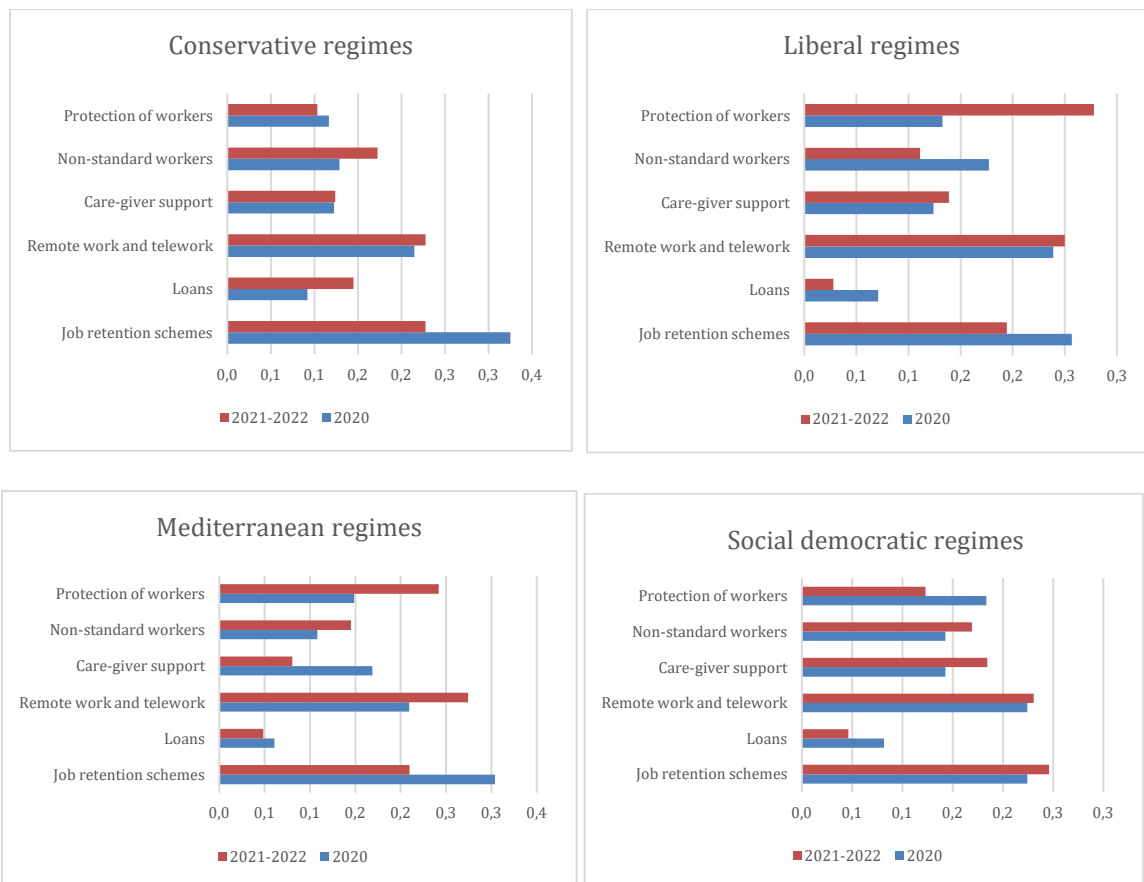
On the contrary, the *Mediterranean* countries focused mainly on the *protection of workers*, amendments of flexible work arrangements and different kind of support for *non-standard workers* (mainly self-employed or seasonal workers). These countries introduced different restrictions on health and safety regulations both at the national and company level. These amendments mainly related to the treatment of the sick workers, the adoption of testing procedures, or measures introduced in the workplace to prevent the spread of the virus. Specific support provided to non-standard workers consisted in new forms of income losses compensation, sickness leaves for sick or in quarantine self-employed workers.

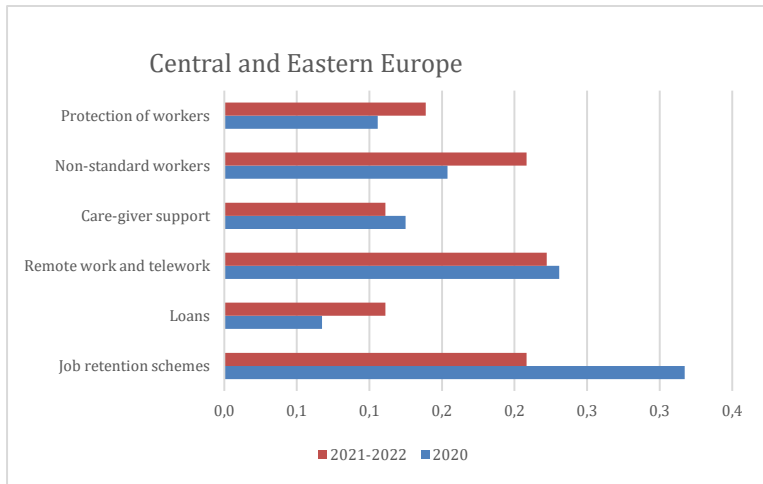
During the pandemic, the focal point of the policy discourse among *Central and Eastern European* social partners was the *job retention policies*, particularly *short-time work schemes* adopted as a temporary measure to prevent job losses. Later on, these measures were discussed as a permanent policy tool to mitigate the impact not only of the current crisis, but also of future ones. On the contrary, less attention in the discourse was paid to the support of the caregivers.

The *Conservative regimes* paid more attention, as well, to the various types of *job retention schemes* (including short-time and furlough measures) and to the provisions on remote work.

The discourse about policy measures evolved in a heterogenous way in the welfare regimes between 2020 and 2021/early 2022. As Figure 4 illustrates, the *job retention schemes* were more dominant in social partners' discourse across all the welfare regimes in 2020. While less frequent in 2021-2022, different types of job retention schemes have been an essential part of the public discourse in Europe. On the contrary, the discourse about *loans* evolved differently across EU countries and remained more marginal: while in the Conservative regimes and Central Europe, loans were more present in the discourse in 2021 rather than in 2020, in the Liberal regimes, Social democratic and Mediterranean countries the opposite is true. *Remote work* and *telework*-related measures were largely discussed in all the different welfare regimes, to the greatest extent in the Mediterranean countries and Liberal regimes. Remote work and telework recorded higher attention in 2021 with respect to the previous year across all the welfare regimes, except for the Central and Eastern Europe. The *caregiver support* was slightly more prevailing in 2020 in all regime types, except for the Social democratic regimes. The policy measures for *non-standard workers* were more discussed in 2021 in Central and Eastern Europe and Social democratic regimes. *The protection of workers* was particularly in the spotlight in 2021 in Liberal regimes, Mediterranean countries and only slightly in Conservative regimes and Central and Eastern Europe.

Figure 4: Evolution of the public discourse over time in the welfare regimes (2020 and 2021)





Source: Authors

Conclusion

The seventh quarterly report presents new results of the quantitative analysis performed on an enlarged database made of 2,084 text extractions. Particular attention is dedicated to the evolution of the discourse over time and the differences across European welfare regimes.

The comparison between the first and the second pandemic year shows that *job retention schemes*, *short-time work schemes* and *telework* became the more dominating topics, as the pandemic progressed. *Childcare* and *parental support* together with the OSH and protection of workers issues were discussed slightly more during the first year of the pandemic, also because these were more directly related to the very first measures adopted as a national response to the pandemic. In general, two mainly novel policies discussed among all social partners during the pandemic are the regulation of the remote working/teleworking and the institutionalization of more inclusive job retention schemes.

Looking at the welfare regime classification, we find evidence of some convergence of the policy discourse on specific policies related to job retention schemes, short-time work schemes, and remote work. In fact, as shown in this report, these measures were in the across all the welfare regime types. More diverse is the discussion over policy measures related to caregivers, non-standard-workers and general measures of workers' protection.

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ANNEX

Table 1: Main policies based on the text analysis of the newsletter outputs (data for 2020)

Conservative regimes	Liberal regimes	Mediterranean countries	Social democratic regimes	Central and Eastern Europe
<p>Salary support schemes</p> <p>Amendments of short-time work schemes (cap of support, eligibility criteria, inclusion of self-employed and SMEs)</p> <p>Support of parents in case of school closures</p> <p>Support for civil servants (specific payments for remote working)</p> <p>Emergency plans for SMEs and self-employed</p> <p>Pay rises for health care workers</p>	<p>Job retention schemes (introduction of temporary wage compensation schemes)</p> <p>Sick pay for sick or quarantined workers at the company level</p>	<p>Job perseverance schemes mainly short-time work schemes and temporary layoffs schemes (including regional level ones)</p> <p>Reduction of social contributions</p> <p>Support for sick and quarantined workers</p> <p>Health and safety regulations (both national and company level; industry specific – health care sector, transport)</p> <p>Flexibilization of teleworking; regulation and tax incentives for remote working</p>	<p>Payment for quarantined workers including freelancers and self-employed</p> <p>Parental allowances or extension of maternity leave</p> <p>Enhanced unemployment benefit scheme</p> <p>Compensation scheme for the self-employed</p> <p>Job retention schemes – wage compensation, short-time work schemes, temporary layoffs</p> <p>Attention on the long-lasting issues such as reform of sickness leave</p>	<p>Job preservation policies: subsidy programmes to preserve jobs</p> <p>Tax deferrals or deferrals of health and pension contributions for businesses and self-employed</p> <p>Sickness benefits for parents and sick workers</p> <p>Financial support for the self-employed</p>

Source: Authors

Table 2: 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>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</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>Amendments of the short time work – extension (cap of support, eligibility of criteria)</p> <p>Flexible work arrangements (the right to teleworking)</p>

Amendments of the short-time work schemes (increased budget, duration extension)		support, eligibility criteria)	Special provision for the public servants (crisis plan, overtime work)	
Caregiver support			Flexible working arrangements (introduction of four-day week in combination with remote working arrangements at the local level)	
Introduction of four day working week				
Tax deferrals, tax bonus related to covid impact for businesses				

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, healthcare workers, essential workers, female workers, education, quarantine workers.