2. Labour market and social developments in the EU: crises and recovery

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> These crises occur against the backdrop of ongoing structural transitions and evolutions in the world of work

Introduction and outline

With one crisis following another at an increasing pace, the situation has reached a point where the labour market seems to be swinging from crisis to crisis (see p. 22). These multiple crises and the associated ongoing pressures pose a risk to us all: although, of course, they are generally worse for those who are more vulnerable – the young, migrants, the impoverished – there is profound uncertainty for everyone. This was illustrated very clearly by Covid-19, which affected everyone while, at the same time, entrenching certain inequalities between those who were harder hit and those who were less severely affected.

2022 was set to be a better year for Europe: the recovery was well under way with a rising demand for products and labour, and European labour markets had weathered the pandemic reasonably well thanks to national policies backed up by European SURE support (Eurofound 2022a). However, not only is the pandemic not yet over, with waves still occurring and likely to remain with us for the foreseeable future (Dorling 2022), but new crises are endangering European economies and labour markets. The recovery has boosted demand and exacerbated existing supply chain disruptions and labour shortages. Meanwhile, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has worsened the crisis in commodities prices, particularly in energy, which is causing a cost-of-living crisis in Europe as well as creating large flows of refugees from Ukraine.

These crises are occurring against the backdrop of ongoing structural transitions and evolutions in the world of work. In view of the many difficulties arising as a result, the ability of the European Union to address these challenges and transitions satisfactorily may be impaired. First, technological change and digitalisation continue to affect the labour market. The extent to which technological change and especially automation affect labour markets is, to some extent, still uncertain. It is clear, however, that they both generally lead to greater inequality on the labour market (e.g. Zwysen 2022). New technologies impact people in different ways as they are used to support certain tasks, in particular those that are more abstract and complex (and often better paid), while they may also be used to replace more routine and easily automatable jobs (usually with low or moderate pay) that do not involve interaction with other jobs (Autor, Goldin and Katz 2020). Recent evidence seems to suggest that, in general, greater automation and technological change may be associated with lower employment in specific tasks (Acemoglu and Restrepo 2020; Acemoglu, Lelarge and Restrepo 2020; de Vries et al. 2020), while there may be job creation in other sectors but not for the same workers (Dauth et al. 2021).

New technologies also offer new ways of working, and this shift has been accelerated by the pandemic. As it has become easier for people to work remotely for a variety of tasks and for managers to monitor and control work from a distance, it has been possible for large parts of the European workforce to switch to teleworking (Eurofound 2022b). In an extreme form, algorithms and new technologies also make it possible to split jobs into a series of smaller tasks that can each be outsourced independently through platforms. While still small in terms of employment levels, the prevalence of internet and platform work is significant on account of its impact on the traditional labour market (Piasna, Zwysen and Drahokoupil 2022).

Second, shifting patterns of globalisation and the spreading of value chains at both European and global level continue to affect the organisation of work and the division of tasks within Europe (Kordalska et al. 2022). Like technological change, an increasingly cross-national or even global division of tasks can limit the prospects of lower-skilled workers in the more advantaged, richer European countries, leading to greater

The need for a paradigm change to push back human activity within planetary boundaries becomes ever clearer

inequalities. The combination of the Covid-19 pandemic, the changing geopolitical landscape and the fragility of supply that is exposed when these value chains are constrained have also strongly re-established the ideas of reshoring certain activities and regaining or retaining strategic autonomy (Van den Abeele 2021).

Third, the need for a paradigm change to push back human activity within planetary boundaries (most notably decarbonisation and dematerialisation) becomes ever clearer. This involves a green transformation with a profound restructuring of the entire economy, which gives rise to sizable social costs and labour market effects. This is why a just transition, as described in more detail in Chapter 4 of this volume, is critical. In this process, hundreds of thousands of jobs in fossil-energy-dependent sectors will be lost (Alves Dias et al. 2021) and millions of European jobs will undergo a fundamental transformation with relocations and reskilling (Kuhlmann et al. 2021). While the green transition, like globalisation and digitalisation, offers great opportunities for the world of work and job quality, it also entails risks, as some of the growing number of jobs that are likely to provide support for the new green jobs will be of low quality (Eurofound 2022a). Furthermore, while new jobs are being created, it is not straightforward for workers from disappearing or declining sectors to take these up.

Finally, the current crises are also occurring against the backdrop of a fast-growing demand for labour, boosted by the pandemic. This has exacerbated existing labour shortages in certain sectors, which have been increasing since the Great Recession (Aeppli and Wilmers 2022; OECD 2022). While there are several possible reasons for this, including a temporary fall in migration during the pandemic and some mismatch in skills, the rising demand for labour also provides workers with the opportunity to avoid lower-quality jobs. It is precisely in sectors with low pay and poor working conditions that the shortages are highest and the recovery has been slower (OECD 2022). This growing demand for labour can help workers regain some ground in the ever worsening balance of power with employers (Ståhl 2022). In the United States, the shortage is strongly associated with higher wage growth at the bottom of the wage distribution (Aeppli and Wilmers 2022)

This chapter sets out to document patterns and trends in employment and types of work across Europe up to 2022. Section 1 describes trends in employment, unemployment and precarious work across the EU Member States. Particular attention is paid to sectoral patterns reflecting the uneven impact of digitalisation, the current energy crisis and labour shortages. Section 2 then addresses specific key aspects of the labour market and Social Europe: changes in mobility patterns with a focus on the current refugee streams following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the proposed Platform Directive and platform work and social protection across Europe serving as a safety net for the working age population.

Section 1 – Labour market developments

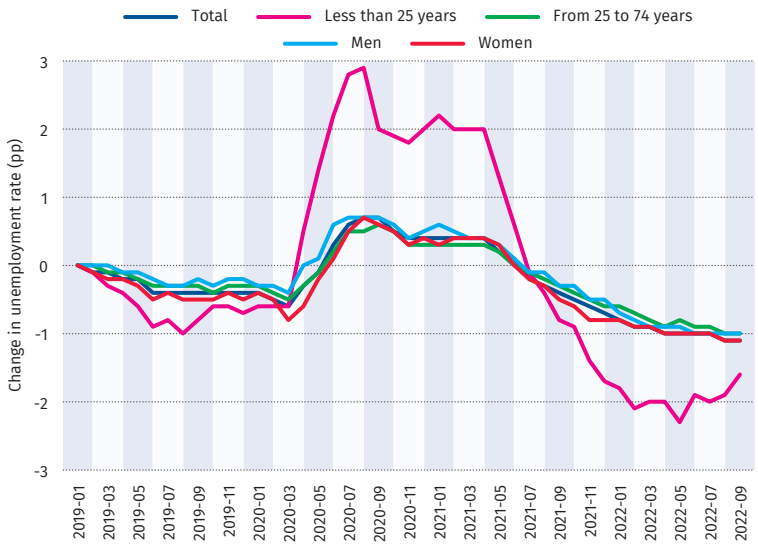
Unemployment trends

EU Member States made substantial and, on the whole, appropriate efforts to protect employment throughout the Covid-19 pandemic (Zwysen et al. 2021; OECD 2022). They did so through the extensive use of job retention schemes and support measures (Drahokoupil and Müller 2021). These efforts were backed up by SURE. Although, because of the urgency with which they had to be implemented, they were too undifferentiated in some cases, they did effectively minimise employment losses, especially compared with some other countries (ILO 2022; OECD 2022).

Figure 2.1 shows the evolution of unemployment across the EU27 over time during the Covid-19 pandemic and the recovery. From January 2019 until early 2020, the unemployment rate declined. From March 2020, the number of unemployed increased rapidly so that, by May/June 2020, overall unemployment was almost 1.5 percentage points higher than its level the previous year. This figure also clearly highlights the fact that young people were very heavily affected, as unemployment among that group increased far more than others, rising by up to 4 percentage points in this first period. Unemployment rates then remained fairly stable until 2021.

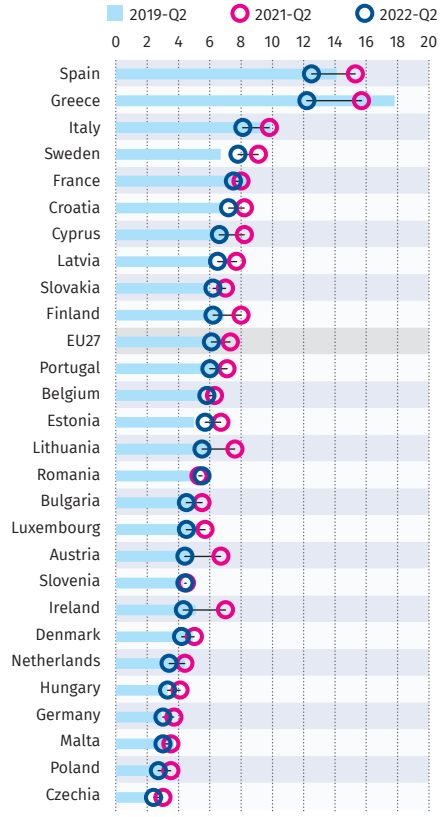
By spring 2021, the unemployment rate had recovered to January 2019 levels. As the recovery continued, unemployment rates dropped to 1 percentage point lower than in pre-Covid-19 times. Like the pandemic itself, the recovery affected young people the most, with unemployment rates in May 2020 dropping to 2 percentage points below January 2019 levels. However, in recent months, the unemployment rate has stopped falling and has even started to increase again a little among young people. This may reflect the fact that the current cost-of-living crisis, which is putting employment under pressure, is starting to blunt the recovery.

Figure 2.1 **Changes in unemployment rate by EU Member State**



Note: Unemployment rate (% of population in the labour force) for 15- to 74-year-olds (seasonally adjusted).
Source: Eurostat (une_rt_q).

Figure 2.2 **Changes in unemployment rates by country in the EU27**

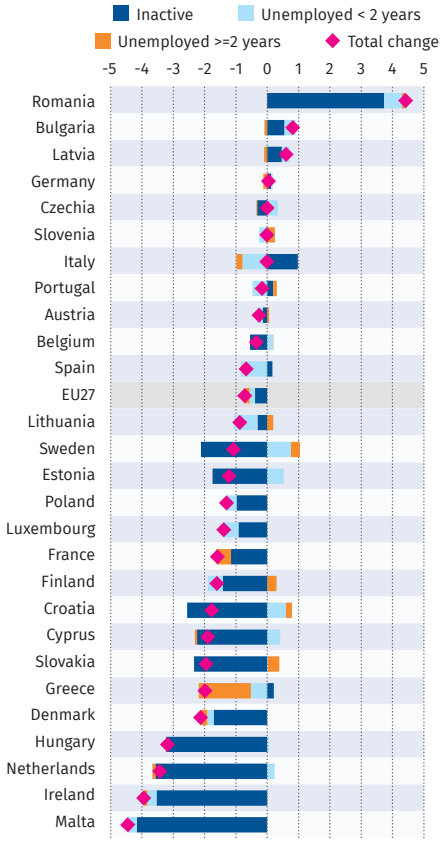


Note: Unemployment rate expressed as the difference in percentage points from January 2019 by demographic category for 15- to 74-year-olds in the EU27 (seasonally adjusted).
Source: Eurostat (une_rt_m).

Unemployment fell slightly more for women than for men throughout 2019 and then initially rose faster for men than for women. Since 2021, unemployment rates for men and women have followed the same pattern.

Figure 2.2 shows the evolution in labour markets by EU Member State. In almost all EU Member States, unemployment rates increased from 2019 to 2021 (Q2), with the exception of Greece, France and Malta, where unemployment was lower in 2021, and Italy and Netherlands, where it remained stable. In almost all countries, the unemployment rate in 2022 was close to or below its 2019 level, showing a strong recovery. There are, however, some exceptions, with unemployment rates still being more than half a percentage point higher than in 2019 in Sweden, Slovakia, Estonia and Romania.

Figure 2.3 **Change in shares of people aged 15-74 not working**



Note: Changes in the shares of 15- to 74-year-olds who are not working (inactive and unemployed for less than two years or more than two years from 2019 to 2022 (Q2).
Source: LFSQ_UGAD, LFSQ_IGACOB, LFSQ_AGAN.

There are variations between countries in terms of the breakdown of unemployment and the ease of escaping it. On average, in the second quarter of 2022, one quarter of unemployed people in the EU27 had been unemployed for two years or longer. This figure was much higher in some countries, particularly Slovakia, Italy and Greece, where it was over 40%, and Bulgaria and Portugal, where more than 30% of the unemployed were long-term unemployed. On the other hand, it was particularly low in Sweden, Poland, Czechia, France, Finland and the Netherlands, where fewer than 15% of all unemployed were long-term unemployed.

Changes in non-employment

Besides unemployment, some workers have also left the labour market and, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, may not have been actively looking for work. To chart this evolution, we must also consider changes in inactivity. Across the whole of the EU27, 34% of 15- to 74-year-olds were inactive in 2019, and, by 2022, this figure had dropped slightly to 33.8%. By comparison, in 2019, 4.1% of the population were unemployed, about one quarter (1.1%) of them for two years or more. Unemployment fell to 3.7% in 2022, with a proportionally greater decline among the long-term unemployed, who made up 0.9% of the overall population aged 15 74 in 2022.

Figure 2.3 shows this evolution by country. On average, the total number of people not working increased most substantially in Romania, followed by Bulgaria and Latvia. This trend was driven mainly by a growth in the share of inactive people – which may reflect an increase in those who are discouraged from working as well as demographic shifts with higher retirement levels.

Overall employment

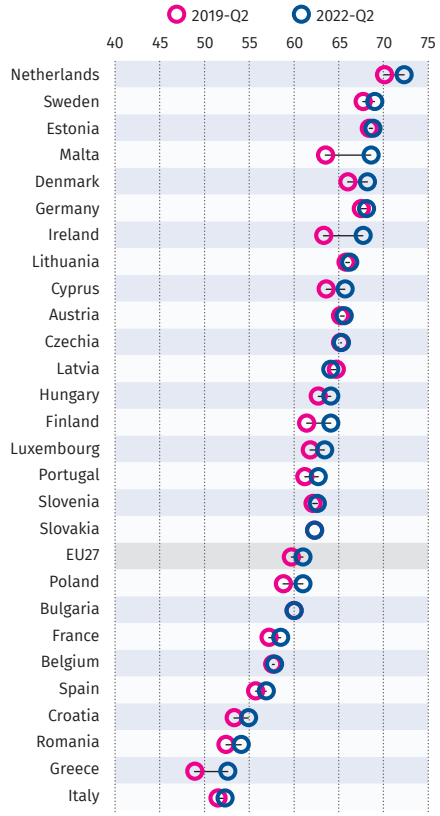
Throughout the Covid-19 crisis, employment in Europe remained largely protected as a result of the introduction of furlough, short-work and job-retention schemes (Drahokoupil and Müller 2021; Zwysen et al. 2021; OECD 2022). These measures ensured that employment did not drop too much, but hours worked did decline.

From around 2021, demand for labour surged, and, by the second quarter of 2022, overall employment had largely recovered. In 2019 (Q2), 59.7% of the population aged 15-74[1] in the EU27 were employed, dropping slightly to 59.3% in 2021 and then rising to 61% in 2022. However, this overall trend does hide some variation. First, employment rates among university-educated people rose from 78.3% to 78.9% from 2019 to 2022, while employment among people with upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary qualifications declined from 63.9% to 63.6%. The more highly educated then saw the quickest recovery. Second, while employment rates for men aged 15-74 rose by 0.6 percentage points up to 66.3% in 2022, they rose by 1.2 percentage points up to 55.9% for women. The recovery thus benefitted women more and enabled the gender employment gap to be closed to some degree (source: LFSQ_ERGAED). In terms of age, there was little difference with employment opportunities rising for young (15-24), slightly older (25-49) and older (50-74) people by between 1.1 and 1.5 percentage points.

There is also substantial variation across countries. In 2019, the employment rate was lowest in Greece (48.9%), followed by Italy (51.5%), Romania (52.4%) and Croatia (53.3%), while the highest employment was in the Netherlands (70.1%), followed at a distance by Estonia (68.4%). This range had reduced a little by 2022, when the difference between the highest and lowest employment rate dropped from 21.2 to 20 percentage points. The highest rate was still in the Netherlands (72%), followed by Sweden, Estonia and Malta (69%), while employment had increased moderately at the bottom, with 52% in Italy, 53% in Greece, 54% in Romania and 55% in Croatia.

Employment rates generally increased – by 1.3 percentage points on average – with the exception of Latvia, where they declined, and Slovakia and Bulgaria, where employment remained constant.

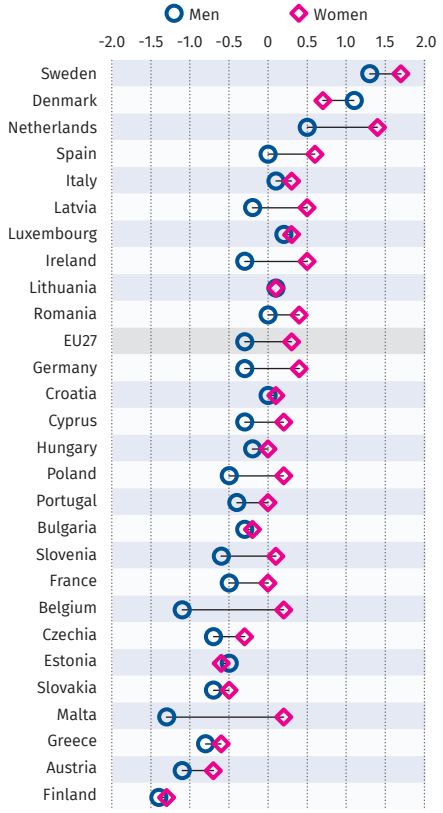
Figure 2.4 **Employment rate by country**



Note: Employment rate (% of total population) for 15- to 74-year-olds (seasonally adjusted).
Source: Eurostat (LFSI_EMP_Q).

1. We have opted to show employment for the 15-74 age category here, rather than the customary 15-64 range, in order to include older segments of the population still working in light of rising retirement ages and population ageing. When using a wider age range, the employment rate tends to be lower, but overall trends in this change from country to country are very similar, regardless of the age category used (correlation is 0.9). By way of comparison, the employment rate for the 15-74 category in the EU27 changed from 59.7% in 2019 to 61% in 2022 (Q2), while the rate for 15-64 year olds changed from 68.1% to 69.9%.

Figure 2.5 **Change in hours usually worked per week 2019-2022 (Q2)**



Note: Change in hours usually worked per week for employed persons aged 20-64 from 2019 Q2 to 2022 Q2 by gender.
Source: Eurostat (LFSQ_EWHUN2).

In addition to overall employment, it is also relevant to look at time spent working. In the longer run, the number of hours worked by an average worker is declining across the EU. While that figure was 38.4 hours per week in 2004, it had dropped to 37.4 hours on average by 2014, after which it remained relatively stable until the pandemic. On average, the number of hours usually worked per week per worker dropped slightly during the pandemic from 37.4 in the third quarter of 2019 to 37.1 at the start of 2021. However, by the second quarter of 2022, it had recovered to 37.3.

This number nevertheless hides variation by gender. Figure 2.5 shows that, on average, men worked a third of an hour less per week in 2022 (39.9 vs. 40.2) than in 2019, while women worked a third of an hour more (34.7 vs. 34.4). In the majority of Member States (17), women worked more hours on average in 2022 than in 2019, which was not the case for men. The highest increases in average hours spent working, by about an hour or more, were in Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands. The figure decreased most in Malta (but not among women), Greece, Austria and Finland.

To some extent, this evolution reflects changes in the take-up of part-time work rather than an actual decline in working time. Indeed, while 15.3% of those in employment worked part-time in 2004, this had increased to 18.2% by 2020 and then declined slightly to 17.7% in 2021.

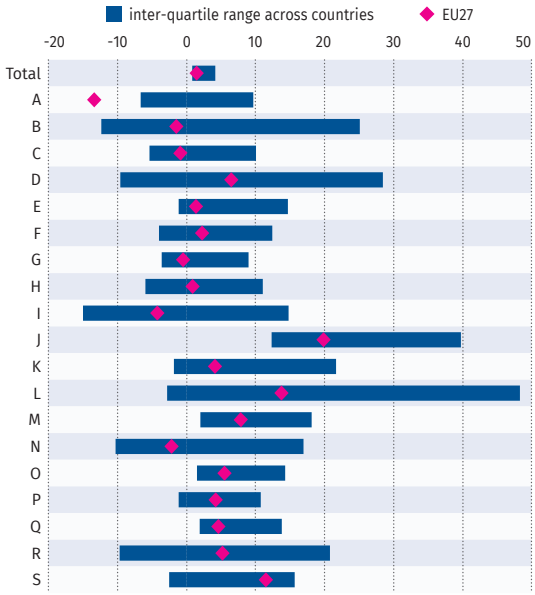
However, even full-time workers in 2021 worked on average more than an hour less per week than full-time workers in 2004 (40.5 vs. 41.7). This indicates that working time in Europe has reduced to some degree.

Labour shortages and industry patterns

The impact of the pandemic has been very unequally distributed over industries, and those that require personal contact, such as accommodation services and retail, were particularly heavily affected. The recovery is similarly unequal, with significant differences between industries.

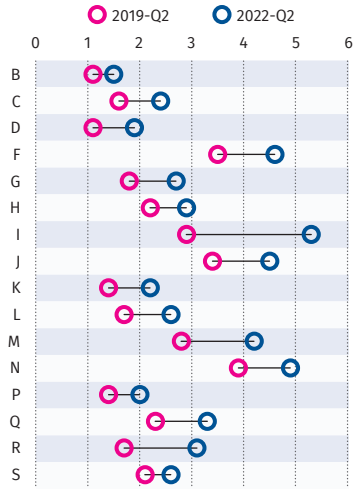
Over time, there have been substantial industrial shifts across Europe as the major structural digital and green transitions have increased demand in some sectors while reducing it elsewhere. In Europe as a whole, the employment shares in industry declined, with 7% fewer people employed in manufacturing in 2022 (Q2) than in 2008 (Q1), 13% fewer in construction and 24% fewer in mining and quarrying. This probably reflects the green transition, increased imports of goods rather than manufacturing, and a switch towards services. Compared to 2008, there were enormous increases in employment in the ICT sector (48%) and in the professional, scientific and technical activities sector (33%), which reflects the move to digitalisation. Over time, there has been a sizeable increase in the relative share of people employed in education and human health and social work, but the public administration itself remained fairly stable, possibly highlighting some restraint on the part of governments in providing public and common services.

Figure 2.6 **Distribution of changes across countries and average employment change by industry**



Note: The figure shows the relative change (%) from 2019 to 2022 (Q2) for workers aged 15-74 in employment by industry, showing the average over the EU27 and the range between the first and third quartile over all 27 Member States.
Source: LFSQ_EGAN2.

Figure 2.7 **Job vacancy rate 2019 to 2022**



Note: Job vacancy rate in 2019 and 2022 (Q2) in the euro area (19), not seasonally adjusted.
Source: JVS_q_nace2.

> Labour shortages can help rectify the growing imbalance in power between workers and employers

Figure 2.6 presents the evolution of employment in different industries[2] across the EU Member States in more recent years. This shows that employment grew most in the information and communication sector (J), followed by real estate activities (L), while employment declined most in agriculture (A), followed by accommodation and food services (I) and administrative and support services (N). While in some sectors the patterns for different countries are quite similar, there is a great spread between countries in prospects in mining and quarrying (B), electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning (D) and real estate (L).

The variations in speed of recovery partly reflect the differing appeal of these jobs, with sectors that offer lower-quality or lower-paid jobs with more difficult working conditions finding it hardest to fill vacancies (OECD 2022). This may be partly because Covid-19 has reshaped preferences and tolerance towards low-quality jobs (Causa et al. 2022).

Figure 2.7 shows how the job vacancy rate – the ratio of open vacancies to total jobs within a sector – changed from 2019 to 2022 by industry. This shows the highest proportion of outstanding vacancies in accommodation and food services (I), information and communication (J), construction (F) and administrative and support services (N), with by far the largest increase in vacancies in accommodation services. It is no coincidence that many of these sectors offer jobs with lower pay or conditions, although skills mismatches also pose issues in the ICT sector, for instance (Eurofound 2021; McGrath 2021). At the same time, there are far fewer open vacancies in the utilities sector (D), financial and insurance services (K) and real estate activities (L).

While labour shortages can potentially be damaging for productivity and growth, they can help rectify the growing imbalance in power between workers, particularly the more precarious, and employers. A tight labour market means workers have greater choice to reject certain jobs, and these outside options provide more bargaining power. In a recent study, Aeppli and Wilmers (2022) show that wage inequality has declined in the United States since the Great Recession due to a tight labour market, helping workers at the lower end of the wage distribution to realise larger real wage gains. Similarly, Paternesi Meloni and Stirati (2022) find a clear link between slack labour markets and the decoupling of wage growth from productivity growth. Accordingly, there are opportunities in a tight labour market for

2. Industries at NACE2 level. A Agriculture, forestry and fishing; B Mining and quarrying; C Manufacturing; D Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning; E Water supply, sewerage, waste management; F Construction; G Wholesale and retail trade, repair; H Transportation and storage; I Accommodation and food services; J Information and communication; K Financial and insurance; L Real estate activities; M Professional, scientific and technical; N Administrative and support services; O Public administration and defence; P Education; Q Human health and social work; R Arts, entertainment and recreation; S Other service activities.

workers and for trade unions (Stahl 2022). In Europe as well, there is a link between labour market tightness and declining wage inequality.

Non-standard work and precariousness

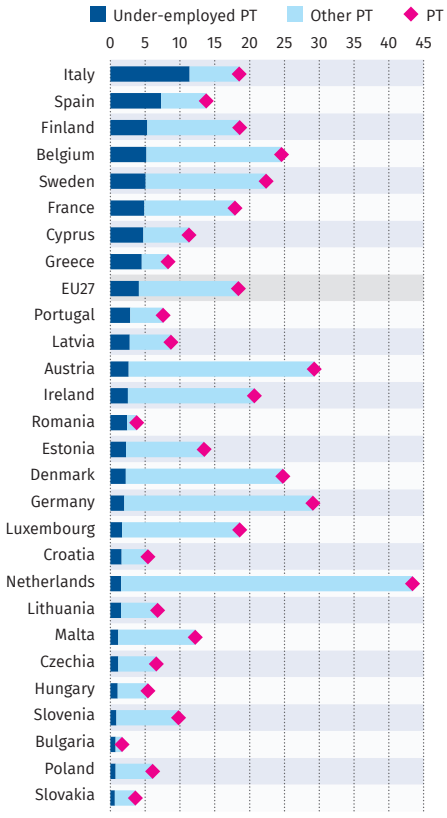
As not all jobs are equal, it is crucial to consider the quality of jobs to which people have access in the European Union. There is an increasing variety in types of employment, with growing numbers working on part-time or temporary contracts as well as other non-standard types of employment.

The extent to which part-time and temporary work are free choices rather than constraints because a full-time contract or a contract of indefinite duration is not available is an important aspect of the quality of work (Piasna 2017) and the strength of the labour market. In the EU as a whole in 2021, 22.3% of all employed people worked on part-time contracts, about one fifth of them because they could not find a full-time position (see Figure 2.8). Part-time work itself is highest by far in the Netherlands (43.4%), followed by Austria and Germany, at around 30%, and then Belgium and Denmark, at around 25%. It is much rarer in some of the central and eastern European Member States such as Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Czechia and Croatia. Part-time work is much more common among women (29.4% vs. 9.1% for men) in the EU as a whole. In the Netherlands, for instance, the part-time work rate for women is 65%, while it is 50% in Austria. Importantly, in countries with a higher share of part-time work, the gap in employment rates between men and women is smaller. There is a moderately strong positive correlation (rho coefficient = 0.34) between the share of part-time work and the employment rate gaps.

Involuntary part-time work follows a very different pattern, however, and is highest in southern European countries such as Italy, Spain, Cyprus, Greece and France, but also in Finland, Sweden and Belgium.

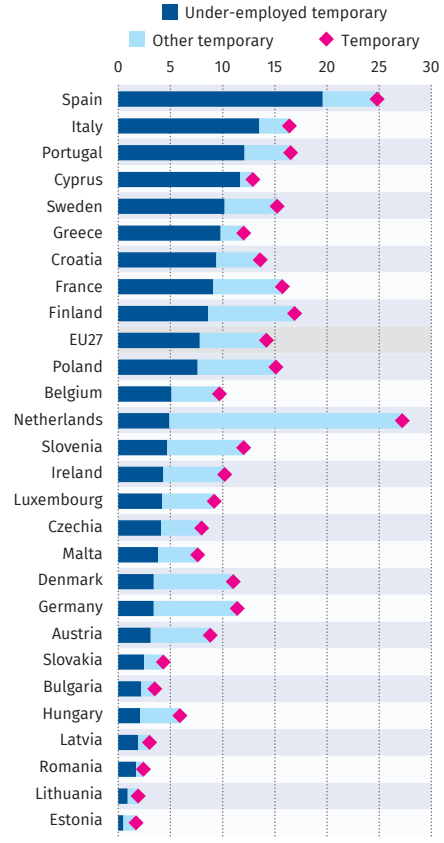
While a smaller share of workers (14.2%) worked on temporary contracts, just over half of them (7.8%) did so because they could not find an open-ended contract (see Figure 2.9). Temporary contracts are most common in the Netherlands

Figure 2.8 **Under-employed part-time work in the EU27**



Note: Share of part-time workers (%) – composed of involuntary (could not get full-time jobs) and other reasons – as a share of all employed people aged 15-74.
Source: lfsa_eppga and lfsa_eppgai.

Figure 2.9 **Under-employed temporary work in the EU27**



Note: Share of employees on a temporary contract (%) –involuntary (could not find a permanent position or job exists only as a temporary position) and other – for 15- to 74-year-olds.
Source: LFSA_ETGAR.

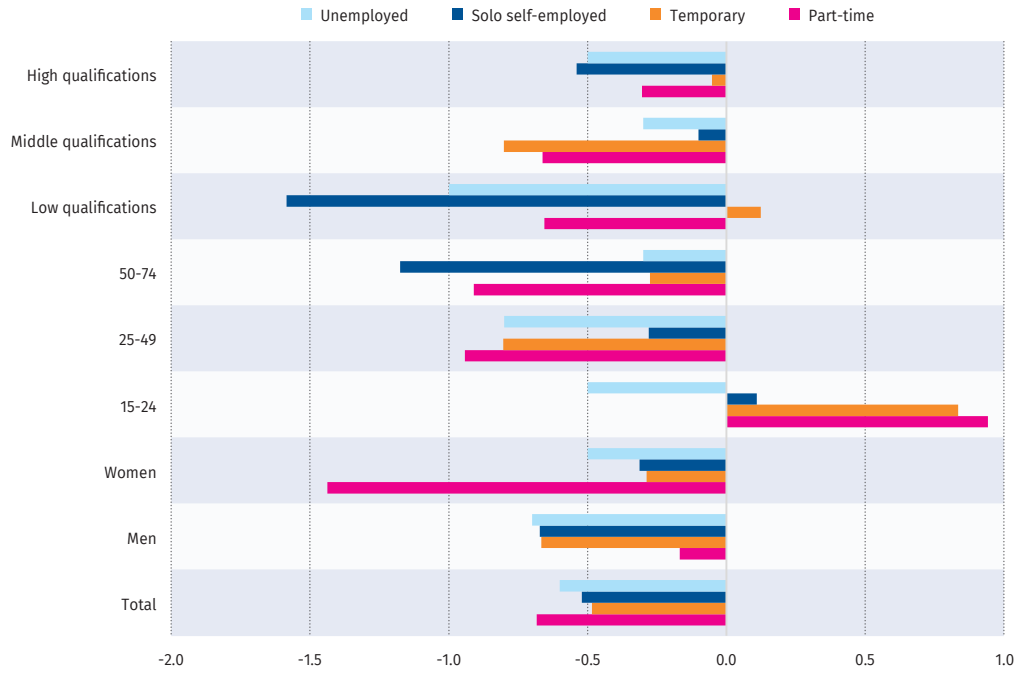
and Spain, but, while 80% of those working on temporary contracts in Spain do so because there is no permanent position, that category is only 18% in the Netherlands. Involuntary temporary work is most common in southern European countries – between 9% and 20% of employees in Spain, Cyprus, Portugal, Croatia, Italy, France and Greece work on an involuntary temporary contract. The figure is also fairly high in Sweden (10%) and Finland (9%).

Temporary and part-time work are two types of non-standard work, but it is important also to consider other variability in the labour market. Figure 2.10 shows changes in different types of vulnerabilities on the labour market – the percentage of workers who are unemployed, who are solo self-employed, who work on temporary contracts or who work part-time – from 2019 to 2022 across the EU by demographic. Overall, all these employment statuses became less common from 2019 to 2022, showing a recovery not only in employment but also in standard, more secure employment. Women in particular saw a decline in part-time work, while there was very little difference for men. By age, however, there are considerable differences, as young workers were much more likely to be part-time or temporary workers. This highlights their more precarious position. The lower qualified are also exposed to a greater risk of working on temporary contracts. While the recovery subsequently improved the quality of jobs overall, the young and the lower educated are still at greater risk of being left behind in the recovery, as they were also harder hit during the pandemic.

Employment should keep people out of poverty. However, across the EU in 2021, around 9% of workers lived in households with equivalised budgets under 60% of the median, meaning they are at risk of poverty. That risk was highest in Romania (15%), Luxembourg (14%), Spain (13%), Italy (12%), Portugal and Greece (11%), and Estonia, Bulgaria and Latvia (10%). The working poor are much rarer in Finland (3%), Belgium, Czechia, Ireland and Slovakia (4%), and Slovenia, Croatia and the Netherlands (5%). There is some disparity in these risks across Europe with southern Europe especially having more working poor. Of course, the risk of poverty also reflects the level of the median household income itself, which is probably why the risk is fairly high in Luxembourg.

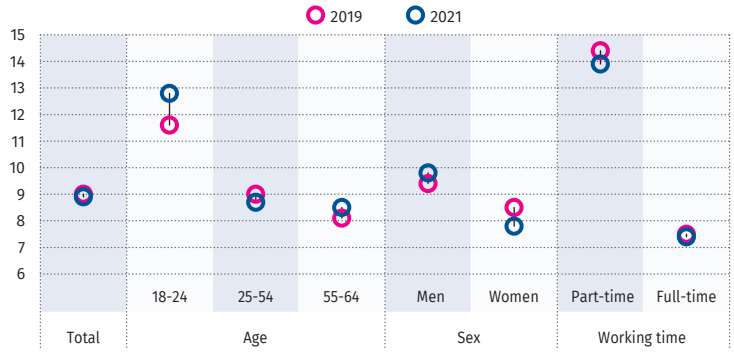
Figure 2.11 shows variation in the shares of working poor across the EU27. In 2021, around 13% of young people (18-24) were working poor, well above the risks for older workers. This difference widened from 2019 to 2021, showing the unequal impact of the pandemic. Men are a little more likely than women to be working poor, and this difference had doubled from 1 to 2 percentage points by 2021. Part-time workers

Figure 2.10 **Change in vulnerability on the labour market (2019-2022 Q2)**



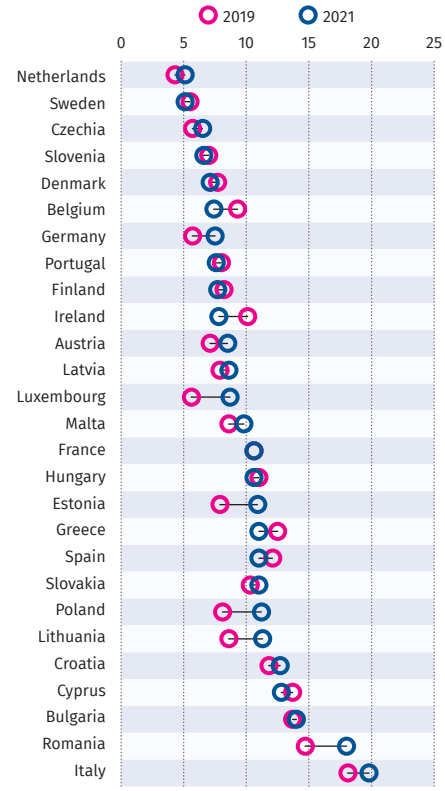
Note: Changes from 2019 to 2022 (Q2) expressed as shares (%) of all employed persons aged 15-74 for the EU27 by demographic characteristics. For temporary contracts, it is the share of employees.
Source: Eurostat (LFSQ_EPGAED for employed and part-time; LFSQ_ETGAED for temporary, LFSQ_ESGAED for solo self-employment; lfsq_urgaed for unemployment rates.

Figure 2.11 **In-work at-risk-of-poverty**



Note: In-work at-risk-of-poverty rate (%) by demographic and work characteristics from 2019 to 2021 across the EU27 for 18- to 64-year-olds.
Source: Eurostat (ILC_IW01; TESSI250).

Figure 2.12 **Share of 15- to 24-year-old NEETs**



Note: Share of 15- to 24-year-olds (%) who are not in employment, education or training.
Source: Eurostat (TIPSLM90).

are almost twice as likely to be working poor than full-time workers overall.

In the current cost-of-living crisis, these vulnerable positions are likely to be further exacerbated.

Youth outcomes

The Covid-19 pandemic hit young people very hard (Zwysen et al. 2021), putting them at greater risk of precarious jobs and unemployment. However, the recovery is well under way for the young, with employment rates for those aged 15-24 years up from 33% in 2019 to 35% in 2022. Nevertheless, in 12 European countries, employment rates for the young were still below their 2019 levels in the second quarter of 2022. These are predominantly in central and eastern Europe (Estonia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Poland, Hungary, Czechia, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria), but it is also the case in Portugal, Luxembourg and Belgium (source: LFSQ_ERGAN).

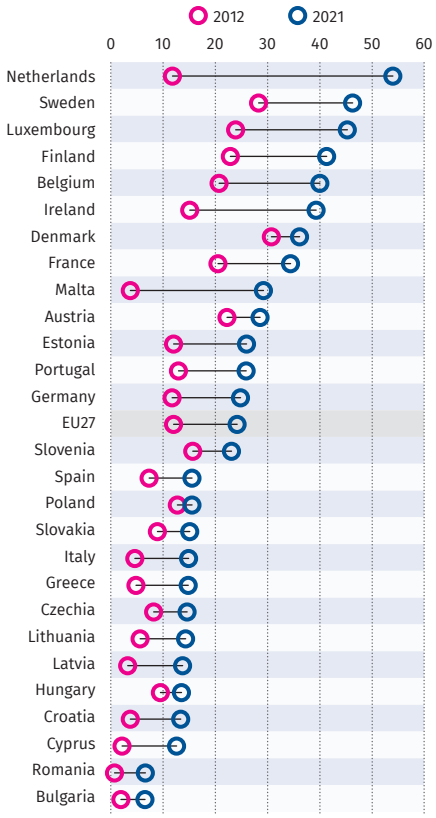
With regard to young people, however, it may be more important to consider the rate of those who are not in employment, education or training. Figure 2.12 shows the rates of such NEETs in 2019 and 2021. Young people face the greatest difficulties in Italy, Romania, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Croatia, where, in 2021, 13% or more of the young were neither employed nor in training. Italy and Romania also experienced a sharp rise in NEETs. NEET rates are much lower in the Netherlands, Sweden, Czechia, Slovenia, Denmark, Belgium, Germany, Portugal, Finland and Ireland. In these countries, with the exception of Germany, NEET rates actually declined from 2019 to 2021.

The European Union is committed to ensuring that young people are offered training or employment as part of the Youth Guarantee. This is important, as early negative experiences on the labour market can have long-lasting scarring effects on young people, negatively affecting their later labour market outcomes.

Home working

During the pandemic, many governments initiated lockdowns or limited mobility, and telework often became all but obligatory where it was possible (Samek Lodovici 2021; Zwysen et al. 2021). This shift was quickest and easiest for employers and employees that already had some experience with teleworking and tasks that could easily be done remotely (Adams-Prassl et al. 2022). The pandemic accelerated take-up of technological innovation that was already happening and sped up this process with new technologies, capabilities and management practices. These investments were mainly made by firms with a more highly skilled workforce and those that were already more technologically advanced (Valero et al. 2021). The pandemic widened this polarisation, but also added a problematic dimension, as those in jobs that could not be done from home – more often the lower paid, the lower educated, women, and those in smaller and less productive firms – were at greater risk of being laid off or of contracting

Figure 2.13 **Sometimes or usually working from home**



Note: Share (%) of employed people aged 15-74 who work from home at least sometimes.
Source: LFSA_EHOMP.

Covid (Criscuolo et al. 2021; Adams-Prassl et al. 2022; Felstead and Reuschke 2020).

Figure 2.13 shows that, on average, 24% of workers in the EU worked from home at least sometimes in 2021, compared to 12% in 2012. This represents a doubling over time. There is wide variation between countries, however, even though the share of teleworking increased everywhere. In the Netherlands, 54% of all workers teleworked in 2021, up from only 12% in 2012. Teleworking is still most common in northern and western countries like the Netherlands, Sweden, Luxembourg, Finland, Belgium, Ireland, Denmark and France, while it is least common in central and eastern European countries such as Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Czechia.

There is a high likelihood that home working will continue in some form at least after the pandemic. In surveys, both employees and employers report a desire to retain some home working, with a hybrid system probably the most favoured option (Barrero et al. 2021; Mizen et al. 2021; Criscuolo et al. 2021).

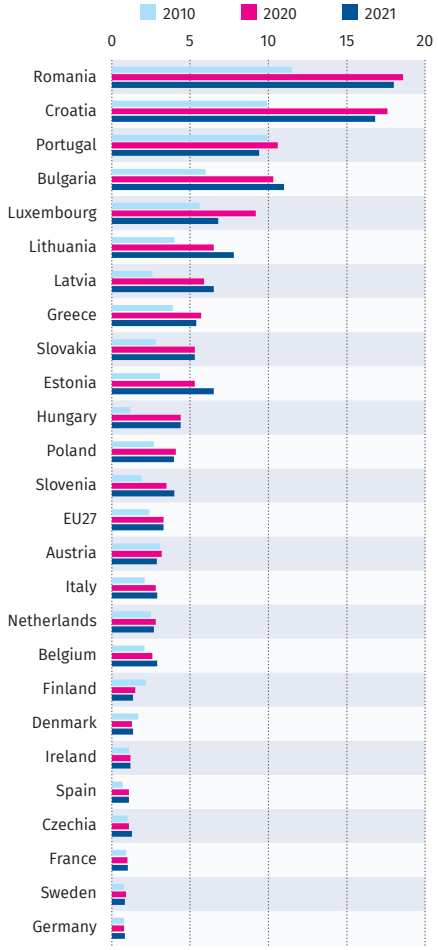
Generally, the move to the home office led to workers reporting that they got at least as much done as before, if not more, but they also spent more time working (Bolisani et al. 2020; Mizen et al. 2021; Giovanis and Ozdamar 2021; Lewis et al. 2021; Weitzer et al. 2021).

This higher average productivity, coupled with the stark differences in who is able to telework, has the potential to raise overall income inequality substantially (Davis, Ghent and Gregory 2022).

Trends in migration and mobility

As regards population movements in the EU, the most significant recent phenomenon has been the displacement of millions of people from Ukraine as a result of Russia's invasion. Intra-EU labour mobility remained fairly stable both during the pandemic and in its wake. Refugee flows from regions other than Ukraine showed no major trend shifts, apart from a dip during the pandemic and a rebound afterwards.

Figure 2.14 **EU27 citizens of working age residing in another Member State (as a % of their home country resident population)**



Source: Eurostat 2022 (LFST_LMBPCITA).

Intra-EU labour mobility

Labour mobility within the EU has remained relatively subdued, and the dynamism seen in the past decade is already a distant memory. In 2021, 10.6 million EU27 citizens – 3.3% - of working age were living in another Member State, up from 7.8 million in 2010 and unchanged from 2020 (a decrease of 5 000).

As Figure 2.14 shows, there are huge differences between Member States, with the share of mobile workers in the working age population ranging from 0.8% in Germany to 18% in Romania and 16.8% in Croatia, followed by Bulgaria (11%) and Portugal (9.4%). Intra-EU labour mobility has not been seriously affected by the pandemic, nor was a rebound observed. All major sending countries have seen decreases over the past couple of years. Aside from Bulgaria, only the Baltic states have showed an increase in the number of their working age citizens recently. Despite the stability of the past couple of years, when compared to 2010, the increase in intra-EU labour mobility is still significant, as is shown by Figure 2.14.

In absolute terms, in 2021, the most numerous national groups of mobile EU citizens aged 20-64 were those from Romania (2 280 000), Italy (1 310 000), Poland (1 077 000) and Portugal (848 000). It should be noted that these numbers do not include workers from those countries in the UK.

Refugees and asylum seekers in the EU

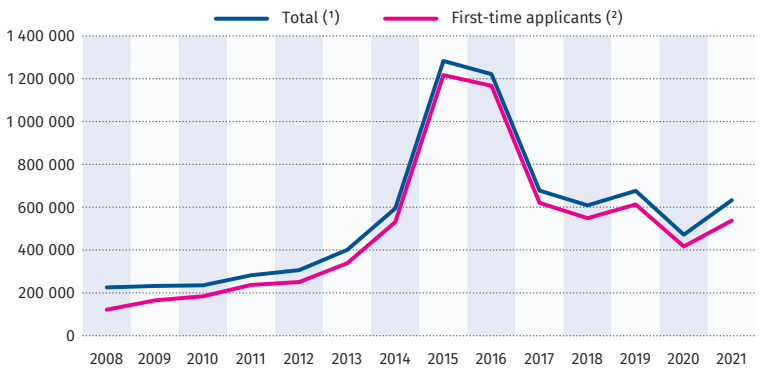
Since March 2020, the pandemic has suppressed irregular migrant arrivals to the EU and contributed to a temporary easing of the related political tensions. While a new European Pact on Immigration and Asylum was adopted in 2020, the EU is still far from having a common strategy. Although European states agreed on tighter controls of borders and deportation to countries of departure or transit, there is not a high degree of solidarity. As Figure 2.15 shows, while in 2021 asylum applications increased from 471 000 to 632 000, they remained below their 2019 level (676 000). Most asylum applications were submitted in Germany, France, Spain, Greece and Italy. As regards new arrivals, UNHCR (2022) reports that, in 2021, 123 000 migrants and refugees entered the EU, 29% more than in 2020. 2022 saw a further increase in refugee and migrant arrivals in Europe via the Mediterranean, totalling 110 000 by the end of September, a 31% increase compared with the same period in 2021 (UNHCR 2022b).

Temporary protection for people fleeing Ukraine

On 4 March 2022, the European Council (2022) unanimously adopted an implementing decision introducing temporary protection for people fleeing Ukraine as a consequence of Russia's invasion. Temporary protection is an exceptional measure to provide immediate interim protection to displaced persons from non-EU countries and those who are unable to return to their country of origin. It applies when there is a risk that the standard asylum system will struggle to cope with demands stemming from a mass inflow and a danger of a negative impact on the processing of applications.

By the end of October 2022, 3.7 million people (8.3 per 1 000 EU population) fled Ukraine and benefitted from temporary protection (Eurostat 2022). Among the EU Member States, the highest numbers of temporary protection beneficiaries relative to population were observed in Czechia (39.9 per 1 000 inhabitants), Estonia (27.1) and Poland (26.9). In absolute terms, the main countries hosting beneficiaries of temporary protection were Poland (1.02 million temporary protection beneficiaries) and Germany (873 860). These two EU Member States accounted for 50% of all beneficiaries of temporary protection in the EU and EFTA countries in October 2022 (Eurostat 2022).

Figure 2.15 **Number of asylum applicants (non-EU27 citizens), EU27, 2008-2021**



Source: Eurostat (2022).

Section 2 – Specific topics

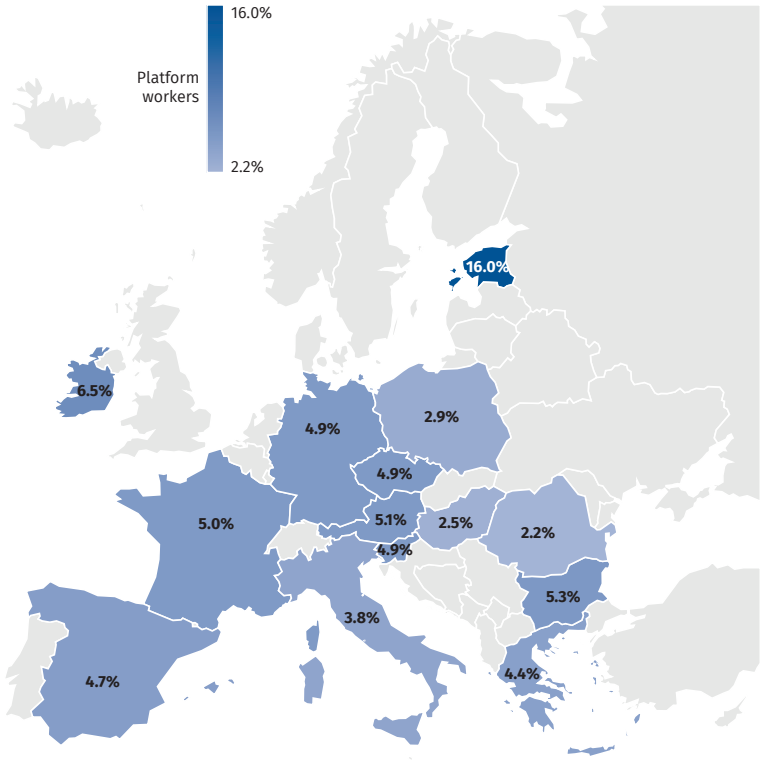
Platform work

How widespread is platform work?

One of the key debates on the future of work concerns digital labour platforms. These can be seen as an extreme use of new digital technologies to mediate and organise work by automating certain organisational functions and labour intermediation. Crucially, platforms make heavy use of, and can be seen as a training ground for, forms of algorithmic management, digital surveillance, remote work and cross-border outsourcing, which are also finding their way into the traditional offline economy (Piasna and Zwysen 2022).

While the novelty of these technological solutions and their impact on working conditions have generated a wide policy debate and much research, the actual share of platform workers is still relatively small. The ETUI Internet and Platform Work Survey (IPWS) is a large, cross-nationally representative survey conducted in 14 EU Member States in spring and autumn 2021 (Piasna et al. 2022). The survey estimates that about 17% of the working age population (18-65) in Europe earned money via the internet in the previous 12 months. A slightly smaller group of 12% had carried out internet-based work in the year prior to the survey, defined as any of the following: short remote clickwork tasks, remote creative work such as translation or IT work, on-location work such as handyman or babysitting work, delivery or transport work. A subset of about half of these (6%) performed these sorts of tasks through labour platforms – apps or websites that match service providers to clients, handle payment and include some form of rating system. The others often worked through websites that had some but not all of these elements; they are, however, a group that may easily turn to platform work. While for most platform workers this is a supplemental form of income on top of offline work, there is a group of 1.6% of working-age Europeans who are classified as main platform workers – they work at least 20 hours per week on labour platforms or earn 50% of their income through them. While these numbers are relatively modest, they correspond to 15.5 million platform workers and 4.5 million main platform workers across Europe.

Figure 2.16 **Distribution of platform work across countries**



Note: Share (%) of respondents having carried out work through labour platforms in the previous 12 months.
Source: ETUI IPWS spring and autumn 2021.

Figure 2.16 shows the distribution of platform work across countries. It is relatively low in Romania, Poland and Hungary at 2 to 3%, followed by Italy at 4%, with most other countries at 4 to 5% and the highest levels in Ireland and Estonia.

One of the key findings of the ETUI IPWS is that, while platform workers are generally younger, more highly educated and a little more likely to be migrants than the population at large, the differences are not so marked. This is significant, as platform workers are sometimes characterised as being only young students who may not need the same protection against exploitation at work as others do. Importantly, platform work does not seem to replace offline work or to activate the unemployed. It generally provides supplemental income and is taken up by workers when local labour market conditions are less favourable (Zwysen and Piasna 2023). In addition, the IPWS points to platform work as a lower-quality type of employment, with low median earnings that are often below the minimum wage, which is taken up as a last resort (Piasna et al. 2022). This points to the need for protection and regulation.

Regulating platform work

Some Member States have already taken action in this regard, adapting existing legislation or introducing new regulations to protect platform workers. The most significant example is Spain, where the 'Ley Rider' (Rider Law) created a broad presumption of employment which applies to all delivery platforms that exercise powers of organisation, direction and control, even indirectly and implicitly (Baylos 2022). In Italy, platform workers can access many of the protections available to employees when work performance is organised by their principal (Aloisi 2022). France and Italy have also introduced special provisions for self-employed workers in certain sectors (mobility and delivery respectively) (Rainone 2022b). Finally, the Belgian government presented a legislative proposal supplementing the existing rules on presumption of employment with provisions specifically addressed to platform workers with a view to better capturing the features of subordinate labour in the platform economy (Raucent 2022). These initiatives have the merit of addressing a regulatory vacuum, but the overall result is uneven and loose protection. The existing measures either only cover specific sectors (in Spain and for the self-employed in France and Italy) or have only mediated effectiveness, as they require the intervention of a judicial authority, with uncertain outcomes (in Belgium and Italy).

Prompted by these legislative developments and the emergence of incoherent jurisprudence at European level, the European Commission decided, in December 2021, to take action with a twofold initiative to promote decent working conditions for platform work (European Commission 2021c): a proposal for a directive and a set of guidelines on collective bargaining.

As far as the proposal for a directive is concerned, legislative work is still in progress. The initiative, as presented by the Commission, introduces several innovative elements. First, standards on algorithmic management are established (Aloisi and Potocka-Sionek 2022). These include transparency obligations in relation to the use of automated monitoring and decision-making systems in favour of all digital labour platform workers (Article 6). Moreover, decisions taken or supported by automated decision-making systems that significantly affect platform workers' working conditions are to be subject to human review (Article 8). But perhaps the most incisive provision concerns the introduction of a presumption of subordination (Article 4). The presumption is triggered where there is platform control of work performance. To this end, the proposal identifies five conditions characteristic of the exercise of control and stipulates that, if two of them are fulfilled, the relationship between the worker and the platform must be considered to be an employment relationship. The platform can always rebut the presumption if it proves that the worker is, in fact, self-employed (Article 5).

According to the Commission's estimates, the proposed rule would address the risk of misclassification for between 1.72 million and 4.1 million platform workers (European Commission 2021d).

Nevertheless, a significant weakness of the Commission's initiative is the creation of a barrier to accessing the presumption, as the worker must first prove that he or she is subject to at least two criteria inherent in control (Kullmann 2022). Rather than an actual presumption, the proposal for a directive thus establishes a reversal of the burden of proof, which requires the initiation of legal action in order to be activated.

The text presented by the Commission is, however, merely the initial stage in the legislative process. Before it is (eventually) approved and transposed into legislation, the proposal has to pass the scrutiny of the European Parliament and the Council, and it might come out heavily modified. In December 2022, Parliament voted to expand the protective scope of the directive through a broader definition of digital labour platform and to strengthen the presumption by removing the obligation of the worker to fulfil criteria indicating control (European Parliament 2022). The Council, on the other hand, favours a much more restrictive position, closer to the demands of the platforms (Bourgery-Gonse 2022). So far, however, the Czech Presidency has struggled to obtain a sufficient majority to formalise a negotiating position.

The second initiative adopted by the Commission concerns a set of guidelines to resolve the protracted conflict between collective bargaining and competition law, which could potentially have a favourable effect on platform workers' collective bargaining (European Commission 2022a). The rationale of this initiative is to prevent collective agreements covering certain categories of solo self-employed workers from being considered as anti-competitive agreements from an EU competition law perspective (Lianos et al. 2019). More precisely, under the guidelines, self-employed individuals who are in a comparable situation to workers in an employment relationship can enter into collective agreements without infringing EU competition law. Rather interestingly, among

those individuals who are comparable to employees, the Commission identified 'solo self-employed persons performing services through a digital platform'. In so doing, the guidelines removed the regulatory limitations that had inhibited collective bargaining initiatives in some jurisdictions (Rainone 2022b). However, the guidelines refer only to solo self-employed working for digital platforms that *organise* work, which might have the effect of excluding some workers. The scope of the initiative may depend largely on how the organisational power of the platform is interpreted. A narrow reading could, in fact, lead to the exclusion of most online platform work, such as on-demand tasks performed through the digital infrastructure of Amazon Mechanical Turk or PeoplePerHour, where the platform's intervention is more subtle than in offline platform work (for instance, food delivery).

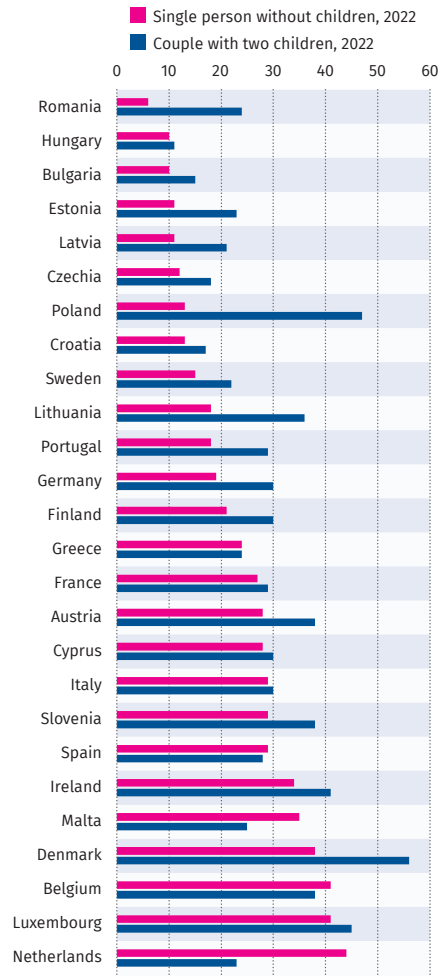
Social protection: changes across Europe

Over the past year, it had been possible to identify three macrotrends in the development of social protection measures: greater emphasis on minimum income schemes (MIS), the adoption of emergency policy measures aimed at mitigating the cost-of-living crisis, even though the majority of such measures were aimed at the broad population rather than assisting those most in need, and support measures for Ukrainian refugees. All in all, the war, coupled with bottlenecks in supply chains, rising energy costs and record-high levels of inflation, has put further pressure on those most exposed to social risks (Sgaravatti et al. 2022; ILO 2022).

Atypical, self-employed and young workers still remain the categories most excluded from contribution-based social protection schemes, particularly unemployment insurance (Spasova et al. 2022; Fabris and Nardo 2023). Although ad hoc policy instruments to ease access to social protection were put in place throughout the pandemic, formal access to such schemes has not been fundamentally improved for atypical and self-employed workers (Spasova et al. 2022). Those with limited access to social insurance (due to age, patchy employment history or contract type) can rely on non-contributory safety nets, such as unemployment assistance (UA) and social assistance schemes. While UA is available in only a handful of Member States, social assistance schemes are more widely available, particularly in the form of means-tested cash transfers known as minimum income schemes (MIS). Over the past two decades, MISs have undergone major transformations. From being residual instruments to prevent extreme poverty, they now have the dual function of providing income support and promoting social and labour market inclusion. Uncertainty in the labour market will most likely increase, particularly due to the digital and green transitions. As such transitions highlight the vulnerability to upheaval of all workers, there is a greater need for support that goes beyond merely addressing extreme poverty.

In this regard, the European Commission has recently put forward a (non-binding) recommendation on adequate minimum income, placing great emphasis on the role of active inclusion in lifting individuals out of poverty. Adequacy levels of MISs remain low (see Figure 2.17), and non-take-up of benefits is exceedingly high, ranging from 30 to 40% (European Commission 2022c, 52). Moreover,

Figure 2.17 **Adequacy of minimum income schemes (%)**



Note: Adequacy refers to the income of individuals or households relying on MISs as a percentage of the median disposable income. Values are expressed as a percentage of the median disposable income in the country. Single person without children – data for Greece, the Netherlands, Poland and Portugal unavailable for 2022, and data is from 2021. Couple with two children – data for Greece, the Netherlands, Poland and Portugal unavailable for 2022, and data is from 2021.
Source: OECD (2022).

MISs often impose overtly stringent eligibility requirements based on age (ES, DK, CY, FR, LU), long-term residency/citizenship or activity status and therefore exclude entire segments of the population (Natili 2020). Poverty remains a pressing issue, and, in 2021, one in five (21.7%) individuals living in the EU (source: Eurostat ILC_PEPS) was at risk of poverty and social exclusion. As discussed above, while employment is certainly a way out of the worst poverty, around one in 10 workers in Europe are still at risk of poverty.

In order to mitigate the cost-of-living crisis, several Member States have put in place (temporary) support measures to cushion the effects of soaring prices and rising inflation. Most of the reported measures were aimed at the overall population and consisted in non-targeted one-off payments to alleviate the cost of energy bills (electricity, gas and oil) and fuel. However, some Member States, such as BE, CZ, DK, DE, EE, EL, ES, FR, IT, LT, MT, NL, AT, PL and RO, have put in place general financial support measures for vulnerable groups (EU PolicyWatch – Responses to Inflation; further details available in Chapters 1 and 4). What remains a pressing issue is the non-indexation of social protection benefits. Social assistance and social insurance beneficiaries, such as those receiving unemployment insurance, a minimum pension and MIS benefits, have been plunged deeper into poverty by a collapse in the real value of their benefits due to non-indexation.

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, several policy instruments were adopted to support Ukrainian refugees. According to Eurofound's EU PolicyWatch database, 166 policies were implemented across the EU to support refugees fleeing Ukraine and to implement their rights to housing (19%), general access to social protection (19%) and access to active labour market policies (14%), among other measures.

Country-specific recommendations, recovery plans and the European Pillar of Social Rights

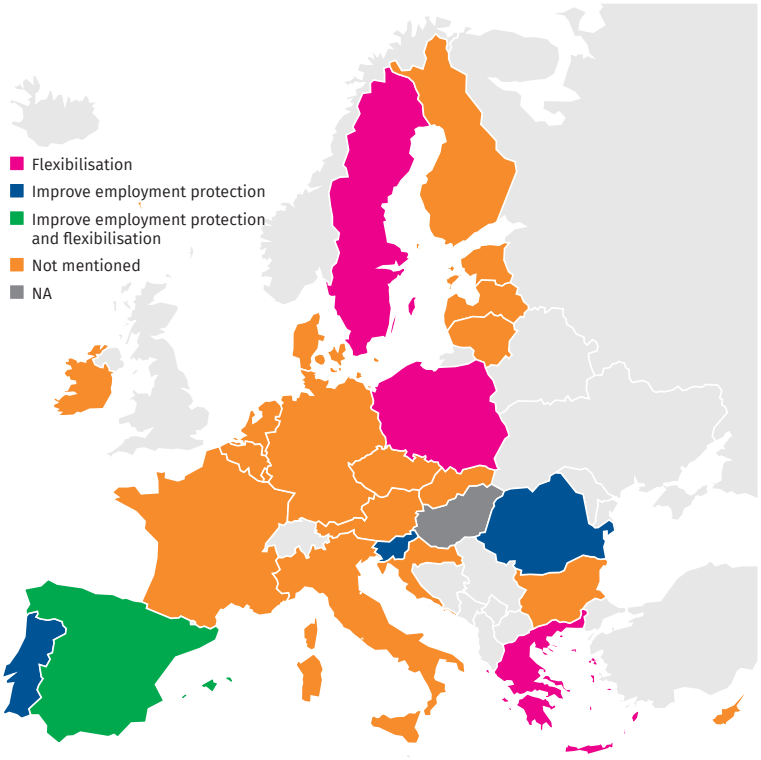
After a period of radical adjustment to accommodate the institutional innovations brought by the EU recovery strategy, the European Semester resumed fully in 2022 (Vanhercke and Verdun 2022). The European Semester can be described as an institutionalised dialogue between the EU executive bodies (the Commission and the Council) and national governments through which the former monitor the economic, fiscal, labour and social policy-making of the Member States (Zeitlin and Vanhercke 2018). Among the aspects that fall under the scrutiny of the Commission and the Council are a number of growth-enabling factors, including possible macroeconomic imbalances and sustainability of public debt and deficits, in accordance with the criteria laid down in the Stability and Growth Pact (Degryse 2012). Other relevant factors are the employment situation and the inclusiveness of the labour market (European Commission 2022b). As from 2017, the assessment of the national situations also had to take into account the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) and the accompanying benchmarking instrument, the Social Scoreboard (Rasnača 2017). The Semester concludes with country-specific recommendations (CSRs) by which, on the proposal of the Commission, the Council requests national governments to implement reforms and investments in particular policy areas. For about 10 years, the ETUI has carried out an annual mapping exercise of CSRs in the labour and social sphere (the first was Clauwaert 2013).

Historically – and markedly so in the years following the euro crisis of 2011 – CSRs have been predominantly oriented towards promoting the sustainability of public finances and job creation, including through commodifying intervention on labour protection and cuts in social public investments (Pecinovsky 2019; Maccarrone, Erne and Golden 2022). The EPSR seems to have played only a marginal role, as its adoption did not lead to a noticeable socialisation of governance processes and CSRs (Rainone and Aloisi 2021).

The composition of the CSRs underwent a major transformation in 2020 when, in the midst of the pandemic and lockdowns, the EU institutions requested Member States to prepare an unprecedented set of measures on social protection and assistance (Rainone 2020). Even the previously fairly frequent CSRs that usually required national governments to reform their pension systems with a view to pursuing fiscal stability essentially disappeared.

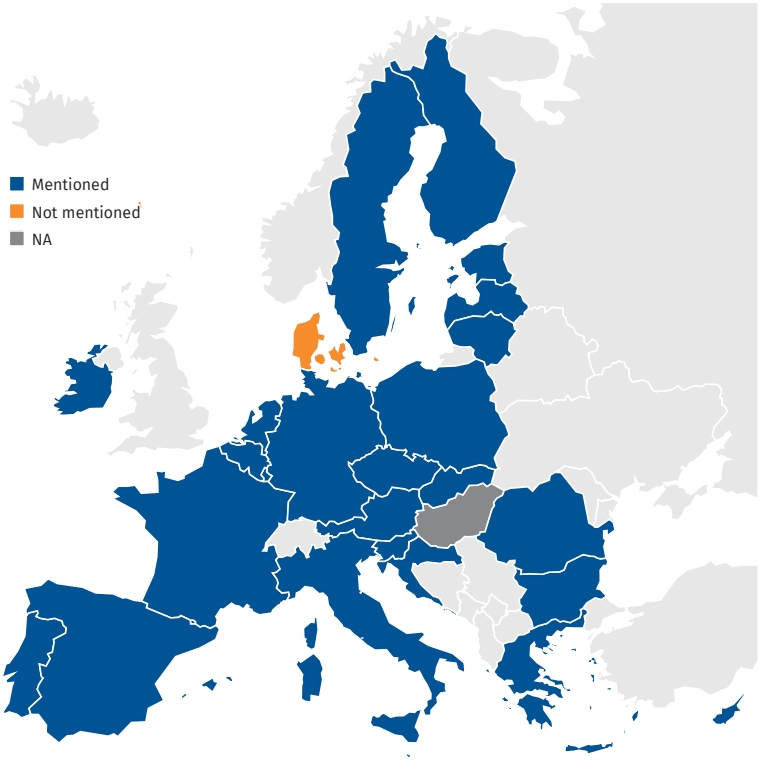
In 2021, no CSRs were adopted, as the overall governance system was radically reformed to integrate the launch of the Next Generation EU recovery strategy (Bekker 2022). At that time, national governments were busy submitting national recovery and resilience plans (NRRPs) to the Commission. Those plans outlined the reforms and investments that the Member States committed to carry out with European financial

Figure 2.18a **Labour dimension in NRRPs: employment protection**



Note: Panel shows mentions of initiatives and reforms which have an impact on the level of employment protection.
Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 2.18b **Labour dimension in NRRPs: active labour market policy**



Note: Panel shows mentions of active labour market policies.
Source: Own elaboration.

assistance (European Commission 2021b). In drafting their plans, national governments were required to consider the principles of the EPSR alongside a much more stringent set of requirements on digital transformation and ecological transition.

Supposedly meant to provide a stronger social dimension to the recovery strategy, it is worth recalling that the EPSR has a twofold objective vis-à-vis labour policies: promoting equal opportunities and access to the labour market (principles 1 to 4) and ensuring fair working conditions (principles 5 to 10), while principles 11 to 20 are dedicated to social protection and inclusion. However, a review of the measures that national governments have included in their NRRPs suggests that the labour market dimension has prevailed over working conditions, as is shown in Figure 2.18 (Petmesidou et al. 2022; Rainone 2022a).

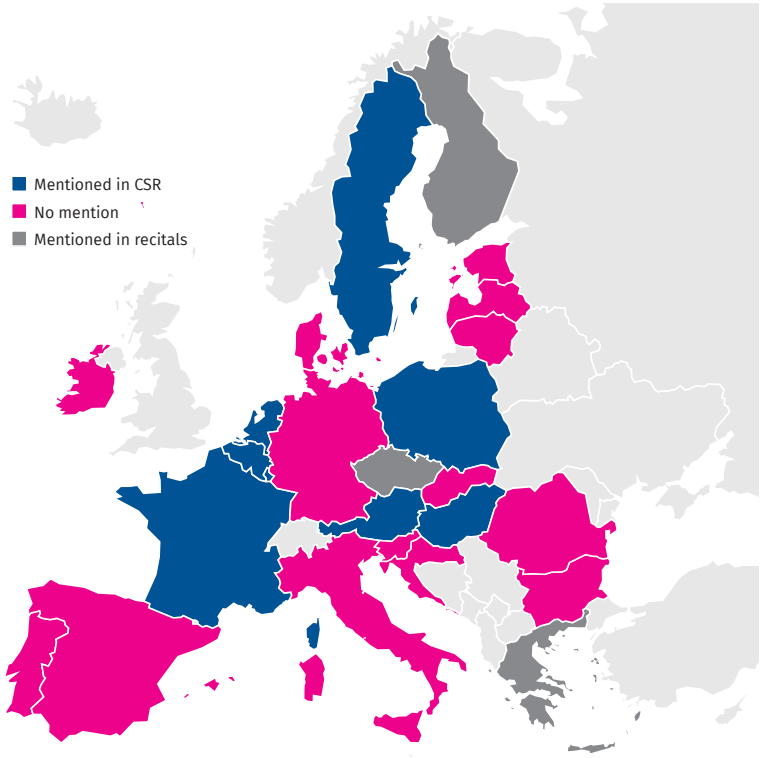
In essence, all countries introduced reforms to strengthen active labour market policies, while only four raised employment protection. This appears to be a serious shortcoming, especially in view of the large investments in the green and digital transitions that could also have been redirected to introduce enhanced labour protection in such fields (with regard to the opportunity missed in relation to health and safety standards in the context of the green transition, see Chapter 5). In some cases, the NRRPs included measures to 'modernise' labour protection (by making it more flexible). Curiously, Spain appears in both categories (Rainone 2022a).

A similar trend emerges from the 2022 CSRs, which were formulated in the light of the NRRPs. Focusing again on labour market aspects, there is an imbalance between the calls for measures to activate labour market participation and those to improve working conditions (Rainone 2022a).

Most notably, national governments have not been asked to increase wage levels to combat the increased cost of living due to inflation. While other EU policy instruments have provided guidance to national governments on how to mitigate higher energy costs (see Chapters 1 and 4), the lack of recommendations explicitly aimed at promoting purchasing power in relation to inflation is an indication that the scope of the CSRs is not yet holistic and that they are still stronger on fiscal and macroeconomic aspects. (Maccarrone et al. 2022).

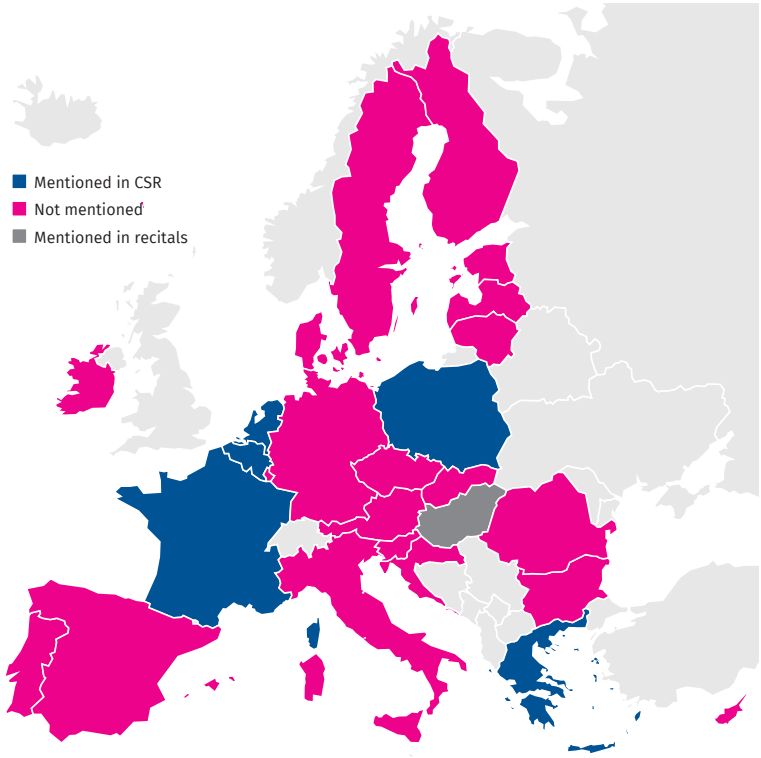
Furthermore, in comparison with 2020, growth and public finance concerns are reappearing, bringing with them a new-found emphasis on

Figure 2.19a **Labour dimension in CSRs: active labour market policy**



Note: Panel shows mentions of active labour market policies.
Source: Own elaboration, differentiates between mentions in recitals and explicit mentions in CSRs.

Figure 2.19b **Labour dimension in CSRs: working conditions**



Note: Panel shows mentions of working conditions and social dialogue.
Source: Own elaboration, differentiates between mentions in recitals and explicit mentions in CSRs.

restraining public social spending (especially pensions) (European Commission 2021a).

The 2022 CSRs therefore confirm that the influence of the principles of the EPSR on EU governance processes appears different depending on where one looks. The EPSR seems to be carefully considered and effective with respect to labour market policies. The impact on employment protection, with regard to which there are few and contradictory measures across the Member States, is a different matter.

Conclusion

> The current crises pose severe risks in terms of cost of living and inclusivity of the labour market

The aim of this chapter has been to describe the major labour market trends and evolutions in Europe in 2021 and the first half of 2022. In 2020, the labour market was heavily impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the extensive government measures introduced to tackle this challenge. The impact of the pandemic and these government measures was very uneven, with workers in more precarious positions on the labour market – those on temporary contracts, the lower-educated, young people and especially those in frontline jobs requiring face-to-face contact with customers – being particularly hard hit (Zwysen et al. 2021; Eurofound 2022a; OECD 2022).

European labour markets weathered the Covid-19 pandemic fairly well in terms of employment. While inequality increased rapidly in the initial stages of the pandemic, gaps by education, age and gender seem to be closing again to some degree, although young people continue to be particularly vulnerable.

In the first half of 2022 at least, the rising demand for labour served to increase employment levels in most countries above pre-pandemic levels, with a greater recovery in higher-than-average paying and more attractive sectors. Accordingly, the Covid-19 crisis may have a silver lining if it improves conditions for some more deprived workers and leads to a greater push for job quality and wages.

However, the current crises pose severe risks in terms of cost of living and inclusivity of the labour market. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has also created a new refugee crisis in many European countries, particularly in the neighbouring region which has seen a large inflow of people seeking protection.

While these crises are ongoing, the labour market also faces structural changes due to the digital and green transitions, ever more intertwined global value chains, which also create some strategic weaknesses, and institutional shifts that generally weaken workers' rights. In that vein, the proposal by the European Commission to push for adequate minimum wages and a relatively high coverage rate of collective agreements may be particularly timely.

This chapter has also discussed new forms of work, particularly with regard to the prevalence and regulation of platform work. While these are important on account of the longer-term influence that the organisation of labour platforms can have on the traditional labour market, the work of the ETUI has shown that reliance on platforms for labour is still relatively low across Europe. However, those who work on platforms generally endure worse working conditions and receive low pay. The European proposals on platform work are therefore significant in that they seek to address some of these disadvantages, particularly as regards the misclassification of workers.

Finally, this chapter has considered social policies and Member States' positions. While the European Pillar of Social Rights is, to some extent, well integrated into the recovery plans and the country-specific recommendations in respect of active labour market policies, this is far less the case in terms of support for working conditions, where they even sometimes go in the opposite direction. Although we have seen a shift across Europe towards greater support through minimum income schemes, the adequacy with which these measures protect the most vulnerable, particularly during the current cost-of-living crisis, is still at a rather low level.

There is a systematic issue that needs to be addressed however, as the European labour markets hop from crisis to crisis, with uncertainty rising for all workers and citizens. Consequently, there is a need to rethink and reimagine a 'Social Europe' that tackles the structural challenges facing the Member States and engenders greater equality.

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