The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically affected our world and our way of living, with the loss of thousands of lives and unprecedented consequences for every aspect of our daily existence. The Commission for Social Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC) at the European Committee of the Regions is preparing regular bulletins on the policy fields within its remits, reflecting recent research, articles and discussions on the socio-economic impact of the pandemic in Europe and on the different actions and response measures being planned and implemented at EU, national, regional and local level.

Anne Karjalainen (FI/PES), Chair of the SEDEC commission

Social policy and employment

Commissioner Schmit has confirmed that he will attend the upcoming SEDEC Commission meeting on 9 July. He will talk about the EU's response to the pandemic, the communication on a strong social Europe for just transitions, and the Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights.

In June, Commissioner Schmit participated in online consultations with national governments and social partners on the Commission's 2021 Action Plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights. It was stressed that the COVID-19 pandemic had made it more crucial than ever to continue dialogue and gather key input for an inclusive recovery that leaves no one behind. The next consultations will be with Greece on 26/6 and Hungary on 7/7. Online contributions should be submitted by 30/11/20.

On 17 June the European Commission adopted a Report on the Impact of Demographic Change; it is accompanied with a factsheet and a staff working paper that provide a wealth of statistical information. The report was initially set for release in April, but was delayed due to the pandemic; it includes a lot of references to the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects.

On 15 June the European Parliament's Employment and Social Affairs Committee held an exchange of views with the director-general of DG EMPL, Joost Korte, concerning the use of digital tools for the coordination of social security systems.

Cedefop is predicting major changes in the composition of the workforce in the decade ahead as coronavirus affects retirement decisions.

On 11 June, OECD issued its policy brief on "Youth and COVID-19: Response, Recovery and Resilience" [link], which examines the risks the pandemic poses in the fields of education, employment, mental health and disposable income for young people.

On 10 June the EPRS published its briefing on "Mitigating the employment and social effects of the COVID-19 pandemic". The review reveals a widely shared consensus on key components of social
policy strategies such as social protection systems, short-term work and frontline/cross-border workers.

On 9 June Eurofound also published a report on the involvement of national social partners in policymaking in 2019.

On 8 June the Council adopted conclusions on well-being at work, upskilling and reskilling and demographic challenges.

According to recent reports, the EU’s SURE instrument for temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency could be operational by early or mid-July, instead of 1 June as initially planned. Indeed, not all Member States have yet completed their national approval procedures in order to be able to release the national guarantee necessary to activate the European instrument. Once all the procedures have been completed, the European Commission will be able to proceed simultaneously with the approval of the 27 bilateral guarantee agreements, enabling the activation of the instrument. As a result, implementation is slightly behind schedule.

On 4 June the Commission published its report on "Making socially responsible public procurement work", which focuses on achieving positive social outcomes in public contracts and could be a strategic tool to support social policy objectives.

On 4 June Eurofound published a report on "Minimum Wages in 2020: annual review", showing that 7 out of 10 minimum wage workers in the EU report difficulties in making ends meet, compared to less than half of other workers.

On 5 June the EPRS published its briefing on the "Impact of coronavirus on EU aid to the most deprived", using statistics to identify the most deprived in the EU and to analyse EU aid to the most deprived and Commission/European Parliament's response to the coronavirus crisis.

In March 2020 the Commission launched the first European "EU4FairWork" campaign for declared work. It will work hand in hand with the European Platform tackling undeclared work and the European Labour Authority. A competition is being launched for businesses encouraging them to showcase themselves as trusted employers and raising awareness of the benefits of declared work.

**Research and innovation policy**

**EIC Accelerator pilot to award €166 million to COVID-19 projects**
The European Commission has announced a total of €314 million in grants: almost €166 million to support 36 small companies working on projects directly addressing the control of COVID-19, as well as more than €148 million to another 36 companies set to contribute to the recovery plan for Europe. The European Innovation Council is awarding €166 million from its SME funding instrument for projects
including expanding the production of bio-decontamination wipes, developing monitoring systems to give healthcare workers feedback on the quality of ventilation they are administering to COVID-19 patients, and developing antibodies to treat cases of severe infection. Furthermore, 139 companies tackling the coronavirus that could not receive funding in this round due to budget limitations have received the newly introduced COVID-19 Seal of Excellence.

Six countries call for better coordination of EU pandemic preparedness
Six Member States have sent a letter to the European Commission calling for improved pandemic response measures. In research and innovation, they want to see bigger investment and a more coordinated EU approach, including joint vaccine development. They call on the Commission to examine whether the EU should aim to scale up innovation capacity by strengthening Europe's clinical trials network, and consider how EU funds could be used to finance large-scale clinical studies.

Only a third of COVID-19 research authors are female
A study by researchers at Oxford University's George Institute for Global Health has found that only 34% of authors of COVID-19 journal papers are women, which they say suggests a significant gender bias in the research response to the pandemic. The study, which assessed 1,235 papers, shows that women are especially under-represented in the most senior positions, making up only 29% of first authors, who contribute most to the work, and 26% of last authors, who are usually the project leaders. The researchers say that the under-representation of women in COVID-19 research may result in an incomplete understanding of the sex and gender impacts of the pandemic, and that allowing voluntary disclosure of gender when submitting papers would help monitor gender inequalities and encourage teams to foster equality.

EU launches COVID-19 vaccines strategy
On the 17 June 2020, the European Commission presented a European strategy to accelerate the development, manufacturing and deployment of coronavirus vaccines. The aim is to support efforts to accelerate the development and availability of safe and effective vaccines within the next 12-18 months, "if not earlier". Delivering on this requires running clinical trials in parallel with investing in production capacity to be able to produce millions, or even billions, of doses of any successful vaccine. The development and distribution of an effective and safe vaccine represents a lasting solution to the pandemic and is thus a cornerstone of the European Commission's coronavirus response.

Education and Youth, Culture and Sport

Education and Youth
On 18 June, the European Commission launched an EU-wide open public consultation to ensure that its forthcoming new Digital Education Action Plan will reflect the EU's education and training experience during the coronavirus crisis. The consultation will help draw lessons from the experiences and inform the proposals of the Action Plan, which will be of key importance in the COVID-19 recovery period. The consultation will be available in all EU official languages as of 9 July and will run until 4 September. A series of online outreach events during the summer, to gather additional views on digital education and the COVID-19 crisis experience, will complement the process.
Also on 18 June, Cedefop published an analysis on "Skills developments and trends in the tourism sector", highlighting that tourism, especially in southern EU countries, is at highest risk of economic disruption and potential job losses. Tourism establishments are now hoping for recovery during the summer of 2020, as the pandemic abates in Europe and coronavirus countermeasures are gradually being lifted – a recovery crucial for the economic revival of several countries. Skilled human capital will be key in re-establishing Member States as competitive and sustainable touristic destinations.

Source: Automation risk in the EU labour market and EU jobs at highest risk of Covid-19 social distancing. Cedefop calculations. Note: Size of bubbles indicates employment levels.

On 16 June, the Council of the EU adopted conclusions on countering the COVID-19 crisis in education and training (by written procedure). The Council conclusions acknowledge the main challenges in the education and training systems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the immediate responses by the Member States. They invite Member States to examine possibilities for innovation and accelerated digital transformation, and for further development of teachers’ and trainers’ digital skills and competences. The conclusions recognise the need to ensure inclusion and equal opportunities as well as access to high-quality education and training for all.

On 15 June, Cedefop predicted major changes in the composition of the workforce in the decade ahead as coronavirus affects retirement decisions. The ageing of Europe’s working population, resulting in declining future participation rates, is accompanied by the end of the working life of the "baby
boomers” (born between 1946 and 1964), who are all expected to have retired by 2030. This brings about serious concerns as, in some industries where baby boomers thrived (such as manufacturing), millennials now struggle to engage. This situation is expected to create shortages of talent in the decade ahead, with employers finding it difficult to fill vacant posts.

On 16 June, The EU Youth Strategy platform hosted the first of a series of live webinars to share experiences on the impact of COVID-19 on young people and the youth sector and how to address that impact. This stakeholders’ platform was created in 2019, and brings together representatives of various players working in the youth field (Youth Ministries, National Youth Councils, other youth NGOs, youth workers, youth researchers, etc.) with the aim of holding regular dialogues and exchanges of information and good practices, as well as sharing ideas between members in relation to the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy.

On 15 June, the Erasmus programme celebrated its 33rd birthday. Over 9 million young people have participated in the Erasmus programme since it was created, and more than 4 000 higher education institutions across 37 European countries are part of the scheme. To learn more about the impact of COVID-19 on Erasmus and find practical advice for participants, click here.

On 11 and 12 June, the European Committee of the Regions’ Yfactor project for this year was held online. The main focus of this year’s edition was local and regional authorities’ commitment to facilitating the digital transition and ensuring the continuity of services across the EU regions. The events comprised a two-day series of webinars and interactive workshops focused on the theme of inclusive access to education, culture, and civic participation engaging public administrators, citizens, practitioners, civil society groups and other stakeholders. The webinars are still accessible at the following links:

1. Civic participation
2. Culture
3. Education

On 8 June, the Council adopted conclusions on the role of youth in external action, in which it stressed the contribution of the younger generations to building stronger, more legitimate, peaceful and democratic societies, in which human rights and the rule of law are respected and no one is left behind. With a view to harnessing the creative and innovative potential and abilities of young people, the Council stresses the importance of investing in and working with, by and for youth; it also highlights the need to ensure the meaningful inclusion and active participation of youth at all levels of society, and in economic and political life. Active engagement should be promoted to strengthen business environments, promote social reconciliation and counter violent extremism. The Council also calls for the promotion of youth access to education, decent jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities, as well as health-care services.

On 5 June, the president of the CoR, Apostolos Tzitzikostas, the chair of the SEDEC Commission, Anna Karjalainen and the European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, Mariya Gabriel, had a fruitful discussion during which Ms Gabriel stressed that the efforts of youth organisations to cooperate across Europe in the context of COVID-19 had been supported through a
"European Youth Together" call for proposals. This call aims to create networks promoting regional partnerships, to be run in close cooperation with young people from across all the Erasmus+ programme countries. The networks would organise exchanges, promote training opportunities, for instance for youth leaders, and allow young people themselves to set up joint projects, all of which could be done through both physical and online activities. "European Youth Together" seeks to support initiatives from youth organisations, to share their ideas about the EU, encourage wider civic participation and help foster a sense of European citizenship.

Culture and Cultural Heritage
On 18 June, the European Commission launched a social media campaign (#EuropeForCulture) focusing on sustainable cultural tourism. With the slogan "Europe’s Culture – close to you", this campaign promotes the re-discovery of Europe’s diverse treasures, both natural and cultural. The aim is to encourage Europeans to discover the beauty and richness of destinations close to their homes, in a safe and sustainable way. The campaign is backed up by digital resources that will make European holiday-makers' lives easier, including the new Re-Open EU interactive map with detailed travel information about all EU Member States.

On 18 June, an online talk was organised by the new Art Across Europe network, in partnership with ENCATC, to shed light on how galleries, museums and art spaces reinvent themselves, focusing on the positive changes generated by the current situation and on specific initiatives that had emerged in cities as a result of the situation. The debate also examined how to communicate local art scenes and sustain interaction beyond borders.

On 17 June, 94 organisations representing the whole spectrum of Europe's cultural and creative sector issued a joint call for strong and systemic support measures at EU and national level to recover from the crisis: "Investing in Europe’s Next Generation by Investing in Culture". Together, they call on Member States and the European Parliament:

- to push for a substantial increase in the Creative Europe budget. The letters' signatories fully support the European Parliament’s proposal for a budget of €2.8 billion;
- to guarantee that the entire sector can benefit appropriately from the recovery plan’s various instruments.

Sport
On 16 June, the European Cyclists’ Federation (ECF) launched a COVID-19 measures tracker, which gives an overview of the measures taken by local or national authorities in nearly 300 cities for the recovery after the lockdown, in collaboration with its member organisations across Europe. Many cities are showing strong leadership in reallocating public space to active mobility, and governments around Europe are offering financial incentives to encourage cycling. Having already delivered important sections of new infrastructure and traffic calming measures, the cities of Paris, Brussels and Barcelona are amongst the most commendable examples.
Information society, artificial intelligence and audiovisual/telecommunications technologies

Information society

The Finnish AIX Forum: AI and Data Science, against COVID-19
Over the past few months, the Finnish Center for Artificial Intelligence (FCAI) has dedicated a series of conferences to COVID-19. It has explored and discussed from a cross-disciplinary perspective issues such as collecting, storing and sharing biological data to help find a vaccine. Currently, biomedical data is regulated by different laws depending on the country where it was gathered. To deal with the need for access to large quantities of data, some authorities, such as FINDATA, are trying to merge datasets between countries.

Artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence tools to monitor news for policy-makers on COVID-19
The International Research Centre for Artificial Intelligence (IRCAI) in Slovenia, under the auspices of UNESCO, has launched a "smart" media tracker on coronavirus called Coronavirus Media Watch, which provides updates on global and national news based on a selection of media with open online information. The tool, also developed with the support of the OECD and the Event Registry information extraction technology, is presented as a useful source of information for policy-makers, the media and the public to observe emerging trends related to COVID-19 in their countries and around the world.

Audiovisual/telecommunications technologies

EDPB stresses legal aspects of contact-tracing application to ensure respect of privacy
According to the European Data Protection Board, location data thought to be anonymised may in fact not be. Mobility traces of individuals are inherently highly correlated and unique. Therefore, they can be vulnerable to re-identification attempts under certain circumstances. Depending on the uses made of them, the possession of personal datasets by third-party public and/or private companies affects our rights, and gives them extraordinary power over us. These considerations have been taken into account in the latest EU guidelines for contact-tracing applications. These guidelines were discussed with Marco Marsella, the official responsible for the matter at the European Commission's DG CNECT, during the extraordinary SEDEC coordinators' meeting on 3 June.

Smart specialisation

SEDEC members discuss post-COVID-19 recovery with stakeholders at a webinar on 22 June
At a webinar on 22 June involving more than 200 stakeholders, the chair of the SEDEC Commission, Anne Karjalainen, the CoR vice-president, Markku Markkula, and rapporteurs Mikel Irujo Amezaga and Christophe Clergeau discussed how to adapt regional smart specialisation strategies in the context of the EU’s post-COVID-19 recovery policy and funding. The webinar was co-organised by the SEDEC commission, ERRIN and Friends of Smart Specialisation, involving key experts from the European Commission’s DG REGIO and DG GROW, along with a number of networks and owners of best practices.
COVID-19 impact and response measures

25 June 2020

 Responses at regional and local level

Social policy and employment

Madrid
Madrid City Council has allocated €5 million to strengthen social services by bringing in 264 temporary staff. The Temporary Employment Plan (PET) includes 118 social workers (a 22% increase over the previous total) and 41 administrative assistants (33% more). PET will initially last six months, and can be extended to up to three years. In addition, the employment plan approved this week adds 20 vacancies for social services assistants, which have already been filled by new officials.

Madrid
Madrid City Council has opened 15 places in shared housing for victims of gender violence, expanding the city council’s capacity as a temporary measure in response to the current increase in cases of gender violence.

Helsinki
Helsinki has offered operating support to 5 000 entrepreneurs. It comprises a lump-sum compensation of €2 000 for sole entrepreneurs to cover coronavirus-related costs in their business activities. Around 5 000 entrepreneurs have already received operating support from the city. This means that Helsinki has distributed around €10 million to sole entrepreneurs to cover damages caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

Research and innovation

Madrid – Hackathon for innovation
A call has gone out to Madrid’s startups and innovative SMEs to offer solutions that will allow, as far as possible, for the resumption of normality. The three challenges for those competing are: facing the economic reality after the pandemic; redefining the concept of cities to meet the need for new models of interpersonal relationships; and seeking solutions for those who have special needs or depend on third parties for the normal development of their lives.

Glasgow and iKEN platform – Innovation-led recovery for European cities
Following the initial Eurocities “online city dialogue on responses from cities to the coronavirus outbreak” in early April, Glasgow and Nantes Métropole, as European Commission Cities of Innovation 2019, identified an opportunity for further cooperation through Glasgow’s European Capital of Innovation (iCapital) Alumni Network collaboration platform – iKEN.

The iKEN platform is a spin-out programme from the European Commission’s annual iCapital competition which rewards cities that have built the most inclusive and dynamic innovation ecosystems, for the benefit of citizens and businesses. During a time of crisis, the need for innovation has never been greater.
A new narrative to rethink the Milan-Bologna urban area | ESPON IMAGINE Targeted Analysis

The Milan-Bologna urban region is experiencing significant changes in terms of economic development. The absence of a common narrative in policy design is seen as a serious challenge for territorial cohesion, presenting a risk of differentiated patterns of development that reinforce old territorial imbalances or generate new ones. Eight stakeholders asked for ESPON’s support to develop a common narrative as the basis for an integrated territorial strategy within the Milan-Bologna area, addressing recent trends and their territorial impacts.

German cities unite in using country’s coronavirus tracing app

Germany’s coronavirus tracing app was launched country-wide earlier this week and local, regional and federal authorities are all urging people to download it in order to prevent a second wave of COVID-19.

The Corona-Warn-App enables authorities to determine whether an infected person has been in contact with others and gives them an opportunity to react swiftly to disrupt the chain of contacts, thereby limiting the spread of the disease.

Cologne – Innovation database

The city of Cologne has created a database of best practices from local companies that have found innovative and creative solutions to deal with the present circumstances. This includes, for example, digital window-shopping or selling vouchers for favourite individual stores or pubs around the corner.

Bratislava begins preparations for second wave of pandemic

With life in Bratislava slowly returning to normal and with the authorities steadily relaxing more and more of the measures, most people are confident that the worst is now behind them, and that it will all be smooth sailing from here. Yet it’s the job of every responsible government official to always prepare for the worst-case scenario – and that’s precisely what the Slovak capital’s authorities are doing. By beginning their joint work now, authorities in the capital believe that they will be able to save many lives once the second wave of the disease hits in a few months’ time.

Alcoy to use intelligent solutions to fight COVID-19

The local government of the Spanish city of Alcoy is mobilising its smart city projects against the new coronavirus. Earlier this month, the city council announced its readiness to mobilise intelligent solutions against the spread of COVID-19 earlier this month: it will be using existing and future infrastructure and management systems developed under a comprehensive Smart City Strategy before the pandemic became a threat.

Education and Youth, Culture and Sport

Education and Youth

Aude, France

For students unable to go to class, the Department of Aude has made IT equipment available so they can do their schoolwork online at home. The department is lending IT equipment and 4G dongles to students and families who do not have access to adequate IT equipment or an internet connection.
Vienna, Austria
Vienna launched a new €17 million education and training package to help out the more than 16 000 young people currently out of work. The package includes intra-company vocational training, skills passports, assistance for catching up on missed education/training and offers to enter into professions in health, care and IT, dedicated to the younger generation.

Tampere, Finland
The city of Tampere delivered free school meals to pupils studying from home. Distribution to pre-school, primary and lower secondary school pupils was based on a questionnaire sent to parents or guardians. Families reported a need for food support for around 8 000 children. The meals could be collected from ten schools that remained open, and food could also be delivered.

Cultural and Creative Sectors

Vilnius, Lithuania
In a bid to support struggling artists, Vilnius is launching "Art without a roof" turning its Old Town into a large open-air gallery exhibiting 100 printed works by 100 artists. The exhibition will open on 7 July for a period of three weeks.

Valletta Cultural Agency -KulturaMalta
The InnovAiR 2020 Artist@Home programme aims to explore the impact that the global COVID-19 pandemic is having on how we create, access and experience the arts generally and specifically in Valletta. Outcomes from the residency will be shared through online channels as part of the VCA 2020 programme. The call will be open until 21 August and selections will be made on a monthly basis with evaluations set for 18 June, 20 July and 21 August, until all the residencies are assigned.

Vienna, Austria
Vienna has drawn up a "Guide for the Cultural Industries" in cooperation with medical experts and cultural practitioners. The rules set out in the guidelines could already apply from June, but in order for them to be implemented and for theatres or concert halls to be able to re-open, a federal ordinance or amendment to the law is needed.

Madrid, Spain
Madrid's "Applaud Madrid" plan will augment the city’s cultural budget with a further €7.5 million to avoid the closure of cultural spaces and institutions. Theatres will receive €1.9 million, cinemas €1.2 million, live music venues €1.3 million and theatre, dance and circus companies €530 000. These grants will cover the costs of supplies and rent from March to September. All beneficiaries of these grants must undertake not to close these spaces for at least one year after the end of the pandemic.

Sport
Espoo, Finland
The City of Espoo has prepared a 25-point package of measures to support companies and the sports and cultural sectors. Moreover, Espoo's swimming halls reopened on Monday 1 June 2020. Safety is ensured by limiting the number of customers, with safety distances and hygiene guidelines.
Malta
During COVID-19, virtual training has been organised by Malta Football Association (MFA) – the oldest sports organisation on the islands, dating back to 1900. Launched in early April, these programmes are aimed at encouraging children and young people to keep exercising at home during the COVID-19 pandemic by promoting physical activity and football skills exercises that can be performed indoors. The exercises were conducted by male and female players – 14 in all – under the guidance of qualified football and fitness and performance coaches who form part of the Malta FA’s technical sector.

Pays de la Loire, France
The regional council of Pays de la Loire has invested €4.3 million to support cultural and sports organisations that had events cancelled. The region has also put training videos on its website, featuring competitors selected for the next Olympic Games.

Paris, France
Since the beginning of the lockdown the city bike sharing system has been free of charge or reimbursed when used for journeys of under an hour. The city is also planning on adding another 50 km of temporary bicycle lanes as it emerges from lockdown.

Information society

Copernicus hackathon in Bari, Italy, focusing on COVID-19 related challenges
The European Copernicus earth observation programme hosted a hackathon for start-ups from 5 to 7 June, with Bari in Italy as its focal point. It was a non-stop event where developers, web interface and mobile app designers, and young innovators passionate about data analysis met to create innovative mobile applications based on Copernicus data and services. The thematic focus included water management, post-COVID-19 challenges and solutions and other promising areas of technology applications.

Additional useful links

European Institute of Innovation & Technology: https://eit.europa.eu/our-activities/covid-19-response
UNESCO: https://en.unesco.org/covid19
Association of European Regions: https://aer.eu/covid19/
European Research Council:
EU support for the cultural and creative sectors:
EU Learning Corner: https://europa.eu/learning-corner/home_en
EU local news: https://www.themayor.eu/en
Eurocities: https://covidnews.eurocities.eu/
CEMR: https://www.ccre.org/en/actualites/view/3994
ERRIN news: https://errin.eu/news (primarily R&I/regional focus)
EARTO news: https://www.earto.eu/news/ (primarily R&I)
Vanguard Initiative: https://www.s3vanguardinitiative.eu/news
Lisbon Council: https://lisboncouncil.net/news-a-events.html (Digital/Al/Social/R&I)
Bruegel: The latest on COVID-19
CEPS: Research on COVID-19
WHO: Coronavirus Dashboard