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# BOOK REVIEW

## “LIVING, WORKING AND COVID-19”

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Eurofound, European foundation for improvement of quality of living and working conditions, based in Dublin, Ireland prepared a new report which presents the results of the e-survey on the COVID-19 on living and working of citizens and in the EU. The survey was realised with the intention to provide insights of the impact of COVID-19 on life and work across Europe and to grasp possible economic and social consequences. 87,477 respondents participated in the survey across the EU. Two rounds of the e-survey were carried out: the first one in April, when the majority of EU Member States were in lockdown, and the second one in July, when society and economies slowly started to re-open. Therefore, it is the unique survey that enables a trend perspective of the situation during the crisis. In the mentioned short-term period, there was a slight improvement in Europe regarding the working hours and job security, but also very adverse cumulative social and economic impact of the pandemic on citizens' lives that weakens social cohesion in Europe.

Due to disturbing impact of COVID-19 across the EU, particularly negative consequences are increased inter-generational and gender inequalities. The survey's results show that despite improvements in some indicators between April and July, the position of young people on the labour market during the observed period has been marked by rising unemployment and lowering feeling of well-

being. Citizens in the age group of 18-34 years are particularly pessimistic and depressed, while just 56% of them have a positive self-perception.

Furthermore, the survey shows that women suffer greater job loss as a result of the COVID-19, but also for those who stayed employed there is strong and disproportionate decline in work-life balance. In many social and economic indicators young women have been most adversely influenced by COVID-19. Young women were the group most likely to experience job loss, so 11% of them became unemployed as a result of the pandemic, while the same was reported by 9% of young men. On the other side, the least likely to lose jobs were men in the prime or middle age group (35–49) (6% - compared to 9% of women in the same age group). Among those aged 50 years or over, 8% of both men and women lost their job.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many persons in employment were working fewer hours than usually. In the first round of the survey, almost a half of respondent (49%) reported a decrease in their working hours. This situation changed in July, when just 37% reported that their working hours had decreased. Working hours decreased significantly in Southern European countries - Cyprus, Malta, Greece, Italy and Spain, but not in Portugal. Regarding the sectors, decrease in working hours in EU27 was more pronounced in construction, commerce and hospitality, and least in public administration and healthcare.

The survey shows that self-employed respondents were more likely to be unemployed than employees, and that persons with secondary education or lower suffer much more from the probability of losing the job than respondents with tertiary education. While in April, 15% of employed respondents said they felt

they were likely to lose their jobs in the next three months, the situation improved, so the same opinion in July held 10% of respondents. Such fear was more prevalent in Bulgaria and Greece, where 20% and 15% of respondents, respectively, shared such attitude. The proportions were the lowest in Denmark, Austria and Hungary.

Regarding the self-assessment on their financial situation in three months' time, in April almost 40% respondents in EU27 deemed that it would deteriorated, but in July one quarter of interviewed persons shared such opinion. Respondents in Denmark and Luxembourg were not scared for their future financial situation, while the biggest pessimism was expressed by respondents in Croatia and Greece. Very low percentage of respondents (from 7-10%) in Bulgaria, Slovenia and Luxembourg expected an improvement in their financial situation in three months' time, while Estonian, Latvian and Hungarian were quite optimistic and expected better their financial situation in next three months.

Work-life balance remained stable over the observed period of the COVID-19 pandemic. In July, respondents from Austria, Germany, Hungary and Netherlands expressed the highest level of work-life balance, while respondents from Portugal recorded the lowest level. Work-life balance levels improved significantly in 15 of the EU 27 member states between the two survey rounds. Women with children under 12 expressed the highest levels of work-life stress, with 38% of them being upset about their job when not working, 36% reporting being too tired to do domestic obligations, and 35% expressing that their job prevents them from sharing time to their families. COVID-19 shifted employment into the private home for millions of people across Europe, leading to an interruption of work-life balance for many and an exacerbation of already existing domestic inequalities.

An adequate attention in the survey was dedicated to respondents' overall outlook on life satisfaction. On a scale of 1-10, it was relatively low (6.3) in April when Europe was in lockdown, but it increased to 6.7 in July, when respondents were beginning to experience greater freedom regarding mobility. Life satisfaction was the highest in Denmark and Austria, followed by Finland and Netherlands. The lowest life satisfaction was expressed by respondents in Bulgaria, followed by Portugal, Slovakia and Greece.

Croatian readers are normally the most interested in the situation and responses from Croatia. 8% of respondents from Croatia became unemployed since the onset of the pandemic, what is equal to the EU27 average. Croatian respondents deem that their likelihood of losing job in next three months was in both months slightly above the average for EU27, but significantly lower than in Bulgaria, Malta, Greece and Portugal. In April 2020, 47% of respondents at EU27 level stated that their household had difficulties making ends meet. In July, this figure has decreased to 44%. The proportion facing great difficulties in making ends meet in April ranged from 2% in Denmark to 23% in Greece. In July, Croatia was the country in EU27 where the statement on great difficulties making ends meet was most frequently reported (23%). Only 9% of respondents in Croatia expected their financial situation to be better in three months, while in Estonia and Latvia such feeling has 24% and 18% of respondents. Croatia follows Portugal and Greece, with the lowest level of optimism about one's future.

Besides in Denmark, Germany and Netherlands, respondents from Croatia do not feel emotionally drained by work. Political scientists believe that trust in the national government defines the extent to which societies can successfully respond to the COVID-19 crisis. Unfortunately, besides Poland, Croats have very low trust in the national government, while such trust is high in Luxembourg, Finland, Denmark and Germany. Regarding the trust in the European Union, the lowest level was recorded in Greece, followed by Croatia, while Ireland, Poland and Lithuania have a high level of trust in the European Union. Succinctly, Croats expressed serious problems in making ends meet, were very pessimistic about their future financial situation and have very low level of trust in the national government and in the European Union.

Eurofound's e-survey, provides an accurately informative picture of the deep adverse implications of COVID-19 on the living and working conditions of people across the EU27. The cumulative social and economic impacts of COVID-19 have been disturbing for people across Europe, most notably for women and young people. However, consequences of this crisis could be lessened by ambitious, targeted and cooperative policies that take into the account adequate economic and health priorities, which should be the basis for recovery and Europe's future economic and social development.