



Industrial relations and social dialogue

**Greece: Working life in the
COVID-19 pandemic 2020**

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Introduction

Greece's labour market entered the COVID-19 pandemic having experienced several years of austerity measures followed by a gradual employment growth and a long-awaited increase in the minimum wage. Despite this, Greece emerged as a 'role model' case during the first wave of the pandemic; the low numbers in COVID-19 patients reflect the government's swift response, once the first case was confirmed on 26 February 2020, through a strict lockdown implemented on 23 March 2020 (lifted on 4 May 2020) followed by the opening of schools, commercial activities and workplaces (progressively from 11 May 2020, essentially completed by 1 June 2020). The government was also active in introducing a series of measures to help employers and employees weather the economic consequences of the lockdown. It was one, among other EU countries, adopting job-retention approaches to mitigate the costs of the lockdown and protect workers: various forms of tax and rent relief for businesses, financial support and social insurance coverage for employees whose contracts have been suspended, prohibitions on dismissals for businesses shut down by state order or severely affected as per their economic activity. Further measures included the mandatory introduction of telework; shift work; financial support for the self-employed; unemployment benefits extensions. Greece was less effective in dealing with the second wave although, one would expect improvements in terms of the support measures, their timing and especially their outcome. Significant issues have been detected regarding its management: lack of substantial support and empowerment of a 'kneeled' National Health System (ESY) and the weakened Intensive Care Units in Public Hospitals; non-timely intensification of primary care services to avoid overwhelming hospitals; non-improvement in protecting vulnerable populations, such as those residing in elderly care homes and institutionalized patients; delayed implementation of legislative regulations, to alleviate the effects of COVID-19 to businesses and workers. The second lockdown which took effect on 7 November 2020 continues until further notice (with some loosening intervals in between). Mitigation policies continue. The emergency job-protection measures put in place maintained, to an extent, employee retention and reduced job separations; but they were not sufficient to counter the dramatic slowdown in hiring that, as it happened, took place at a time when job creation typically peaks in normal years, mostly in tourism. In Q1 2020 employment rate decreased by 1.3% compared to the previous quarter; in Q2 by a further 0.2%, while in Q3 increased by 2.2%. The unemployment rate was 16.2% (Q1) compared to 16.8% in the previous quarter, 16.7% (Q2) and 16.2% (Q3). The pandemic halted, also, the recovery of economic activity. In Q1 2020 GDP, in volume terms, decreased by 1.6% compared to the previous quarter; in Q2 2020 GDP decreased by 14% compared to Q1 2020, whereas in Q3 2020 increased by 2.3% compared to Q2 2020 –although compared to Q3 2019, GDP decreased by 11.7%.

Impacts of the pandemic on working life

Although, it is difficult to examine the implications in such a short period of time since the pandemic, started nearly a year ago, is still fast-growing, with the issue of recent mutations being already here still, substantial surveys and policy papers have emerged quite fast given the circumstances.

According to a report (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, ERGANI National Employment Registry (2020)) cumulatively, for the period January–June 2020, recruitment announcements amounted to 850,401 jobs of which 426,847 were permanent contracts, 338,098 part-time and 85,456 shift work. The balance of employment flows in the first half of 2020 stands at 43,394 new jobs a number that, by far, exceeds the 296,000 new jobs (2019), 298,000 (2018), 255,000 (2017) and 234,000 (2016). The ‘loss’ of approximately 253,072 new job positions during the first half of 2020 reflects the extent to which the consequences of the pandemic have left their mark on the labour market.

Based on these figures, the analysis of Kyriakoulis (2020) shows that during the first wave of the pandemic: a) there was a large drop in the number of new hires; however, the measures taken (protection of labour and companies either closed by state order or classified as severely affected) acted, conjecturally, as a brake on the possibility of extensive mass redundancies due to the crisis; b) approximately 45% of private sector employees entered the status of employment suspension, receiving the relevant special purpose compensation (€800 from 15 March to 30 April 2020 and €534 as of 1 May 2020 and in proportion to non-working days); c) increase in employment contract conversions from full-time to part-time or shift work, suggesting a significant reduction in private sector working hours as a first response to the crisis; for the months March–April 2020, 6,369 permanent employment contracts changed to part-time ones and 10,118 to work rotation; d) this trend (c) is expected to be generalized by the legislation (June 2020) of the support mechanism ‘SYNERGASIA’ that is, the possibility of applying work rotation to 50% of employees in a company; the state will in turn cover up to 60% of their lost income, funded through the European SURE programme. It should be noted that companies making use of the tool cannot lay off any employees.

Vatavali et al (2020) conducted a survey based on 730 valid replies, just after the first lockdown, from 6 to 27 May 2020 in Greek cities. The results showed that the COVID-19 pandemic has created new conditions for the cities and everyday life and led to a widening of social inequalities. Working conditions have changed significantly for a large part of the population, mainly by expanding and deepening trends that existed before the COVID-19 crisis. The survey revealed that although 73% of the respondents did not have any change in their working position due to the pandemic, 9% of them lost their jobs and 19% were suspended. In total, 28% of the respondents were severely affected by the pandemic. Also, one third of them (34%) were teleworking with a statistically significant difference for gender, as women more often worked from home than men did (57% of women against 43% of men). The pandemic had also a serious impact on working hours and productivity. During the lockdown period 42% of the respondents worked fewer hours per day than before the pandemic, while 19% worked more. Women, also, worked more hours than men (54% for women and 46% for men). Of the respondents 36% replied that their productivity was lower than before the pandemic and only a 14% that they were more productive. The evaluation of location and time-schedule flexibility of teleworking was examined in the survey. Only 13% of respondents stated that they warmly accepted teleworking, 18% ‘moderately’ welcomed it, while almost seven out of ten (66%) refused teleworking as an alternative form of work. Women had more extreme reactions to

teleworking than men (with 52% selecting 'not at all' reply against 48% for men). Moreover, married respondents preferred teleworking more than singles with 51% and 49% respectively. The pandemic has also affected educational systems worldwide, requiring educators to develop effective strategies for online courses and remote teaching. The survey revealed that 13% of respondents stated that they warmly wanted to attend online courses, 21% 'moderately', while a high percentage (66%) did not accept remote teaching and online courses. A further analysis indicated an association between the level of education and the acceptance of online courses; a higher level of education was more likely to be associated with the refusal of online courses (65% for higher level of education against 35% of lower one).

The second wave of the pandemic (mostly from October 2020 onwards) heightened uncertainty in all levels of economic and working life and delayed the recovery.

For the period July–December 2020 departures reached 930,191, both voluntary departures and termination of contracts or contract expiration; recruitment announcements were 1,136,041 of which 595,942 permanent contracts, 458,244 part-time and 81,855 shift work contracts (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, ERGANI National Employment Registry (2020)).

In a discussion paper Pouliakas (2020) studied the incidence of working from home in Greece in particular. Although the country has stayed relatively constant at around 4% over the past decade, with a significant fall in occasional remote work between 2008 and 2010, this was subsequently reversed with the onset of the COVID-19 confinement; a large part of the workforce was either made redundant, put on furlough or some form of short-time working arrangement or forced to work remotely from home. In fact, the increase in teleworkers was dizzying, with one in four being employed in telework and the percentages to rise from 5.3% in 2019 to 26% in 2020. While according to data provided by Money Review in Attica alone (1–22 December 2020) 309,254 teleworkers have been registered, with the total number of employees who have been covered since October reaching 1 million. In Attica Region, compulsory teleworking was in force for 40% of employees from 25 September, while from 3 November, the percentage of mandatory teleworking increased to 50%. In Central Macedonia the number of employees registered for teleworking in December was 22,700 while in Central Greece it was 5,757. However, the explosion of employment under the teleworking regime, as well as the emergence of problems such as wage inequalities and the need to regulate employment conditions are the issues that emerged during the pandemic in the country.

The main findings of a public opinion survey (Greek General Confederation of Labour (2021)) show that 56% of workers suffered salary cuts during the pandemic; of these, 22% report a loss of income of over 31%, while 14% report a loss of income between 21% and 30%. The 48% of workers reporting a fall in income are pessimistic about the evolution of their remuneration for the next six months. A 40% of workers declare that they have worked remotely during the pandemic with the majority speaking in negative terms about its uncontrolled growth. About two-thirds of them (65%) said that teleworking had resulted in an increase in working hours as well as it had an adverse impact in relation to their professional development (40% of the respondents); the development of their remuneration (40%); their working rights (54%); their personal lives (52%); and their mental balance (54% of the respondents). The survey reflects the intensity of economic and employment insecurity and precariousness as well as the growing concern among private sector employees about the changes bringing the pandemic period in relation to their wages and labour rights. The survey

took place from 8 to 12 January with a stratified random sample of 1,500 interviewees aged 17+, all over Greece.

The annual survey of the Small Enterprises' Institute (2020) reports that households' income, declared as derived mainly from business activities, decreased by an average of 27.2%. Also, the economic impact of the health crisis has widened inequalities between households themselves. In particular, on the one hand, the middle-income households decreased, while on the other hand, the gap between the number of the poorest and that of the richest households increased. The survey data reveal that both households with an annual income of up to €5,000 (6% in 2020, compared to 4.6% in 2019) and households with an annual income of over €30,000 increased in 2020 (6.7% compared to 5.8% in 2019). At the same time, the number of middle-income households decreased, especially for those classified in the category with an income from €18,001 to €25,000, by almost 5 percentage points (16% in 2020 compared to 20.9% in 2019). The survey took place from 5 to 10 December based on a representative sample of 804 households from all over Greece.

Finally, Brain (2020) reports that the results of a study on the impact of the economic crisis and austerity measures imposed in Greece can project insights in the current COVID-19 crisis. The 20 professional workers, doctors, teachers, solicitors and managers, five from each category, consulted then as 'survivors', experienced a diminished professional identity; the lowered sense of entitlement, negatively affected their perceived agency and capabilities while increased work-life conflict. Salary reductions contributed to decreasing quality of life, as these reduced the choices and opportunities available to workers. Participants were also less optimistic about their ability to progress and develop. In today's COVID-19 crisis with job losses, wage cuts, working hours and unpaid overtime increasing and productivity decaying these insights are more than valuable; as it was shown in the global financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic is also negatively impacting work-life balance and undermining the working structures which enable it. The research paper revealed that Greeks responded to the previous crisis 'by taking an increasingly individualised stance, limiting the well-known benefits that diversity and inclusion provide in modern workplaces.' If the crisis of today affects workers' individualism in a similar way the issue at stake will be curtailing of cooperation that is so essential to draw the socio-economic and policy routes post COVID-19 crisis.

Political context

The 2019 European Parliament election in Greece was held on 26 May 2019, in tandem with the first round of the local and regional elections, resulting in a defeat for the governing Coalition of the Radical Left–Progressive Alliance (SYRIZA) party and forcing Prime Minister to bring forward the scheduled legislative election for July 2019. As such, on 7 July 2019 voters elected 300 members of the Greek parliament. Of them, 250 were elected proportionally and 50-seat majority bonus for the party that wins a plurality of the vote. The centre-right liberal conservative New Democracy (ND) won the vote with a percentage of 39.85% and taking 158 seats in the Parliament. SYRIZA received 31.53% of the votes and was the second largest party in the Greek Parliament with 86 seats.

The President of the Hellenic Republic was elected by the Greek Parliament on 22 January 2020 supported by the votes of ND, SYRIZA and of the Movement for Change (KINAL). The outbreak of the pandemic found Greece under political stability.

Governments and social partners response to cushion the effects

The conditions prevailing since February 2020 have reasonably led to the issuing of legislation of unprecedented size and scope. The Greek government adopted policies to mitigate the effects of the first wave of COVID-19 with the majority of them, if not all, extended throughout 2020. Given the urgent nature of the need to address the pandemic, the role of social partners was limited to informative session(s); at the same time, government bypassed social dialogue mechanisms in the adoption of several regulations. For businesses that have been financially affected as per their Activity Code Numbers (ACN, a code issued by the Ministry of Finance indicating a company's sector of economic activity) or their operation had been suspended under a state order, legislation concerns policy measures such as suspension of employment contracts and granting of a special state benefit of €534;ⁱ eligibility for businesses with employees whose employment contracts have been suspended since March 2020 and continue to be suspended without interruption or intermittently until 31 December 2020, to transfer all or part of the respective employees' annual leave of 2020 until 30 June 2021;ⁱⁱ employers' ability to transfer staff to other companies within the same group, following a relevant intra-company agreement,ⁱⁱⁱ to designate unilaterally staff as safety personnel for the operation of their business^{iv} and to unilaterally decide in order for employees to work remotely at a rate of 50% of total personnel.^v The establishment of a special labour support mechanism named 'SYN-ERGASIA' enables employers to reduce up to 50% the weekly working hours of all or part of the employees without their employment contract being converted to a part-time one.^{vi} Dismissing employees' was prohibited with effect from 18 March 2020 and in case a dismissal takes place, it will be considered as null and void.^{vii} All parents working in private and public sector became eligible for a special purpose paid leave in case of suspension of operation of educational or child care units; additionally, public sector employees were provided with the option of part-time work without deduction from pay.^{viii} ix A special state benefit and/or exceptional financial support ranging from €534 to €800 was granted to the several groups:

- employees belonging to vulnerable groups;^x
- to seasonal employees;^{xi}
- freelancers, self-employed and individual business owners and legal entities (apart from S.A.s) employing 0–20 employees, under conditions;^{xii}
- to specific employees' categories (actors, singers), tourism and food industry employees, constructors, cargo handlers, guides and private nurses, tour escorts, employees in the area of Mount Athos and professionals such as economists/accountants, engineers, solicitors, doctors, teachers and researchers.^{xiii}

Additional measures include the extension of the unemployment benefit for unemployed and long-term unemployed people,^{xiv} the payment of social security contributions by the state for employees with suspended employment contracts, for businesses including the tertiary and the air transport sector (based on their ACN number, as listed in the Ministerial Decision)^{xv} and the suspension of deadlines for payment of social security contributions for freelancers, self-employed and individual business owners.^{xvi}

Social Partners criticize the measures adopted by the Greek government to mitigate the consequences of COVID-19 pandemic as insufficient to support the sustainability of enterprises (mainly of the small and micro-sized ones which constitute almost the 98% of Greek enterprises) and of employment in particular. The government's countervailing measures to prevent further injury caused by imposed lockdown(s), State's decision(s) on suspension of certain divisions of economic activity (such as the multi-months closure of food services sector) and on the extension of employment contract suspension period followed by respective remuneration are deemed as inadequate. The trade unions such as the Greek General Confederation of Labour and the Supreme Administration of Greek Civil Servants Trade Unions issued responses, via press releases (ADEDY, 2020) and national bodies (Hellenic Parliament, 2020), to a number of Government's measures as leading to a deregulation of industrial relations and a reversal in fundamental workers' rights. The Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEB) positively assessed the measures taken by the Greek government as safeguarding the economy, to some extent. In fact, 99.2% of large enterprises (≥ 100 employees) consider the measures taken from March to September 2020 to be effective; however, dissatisfaction is recorded for the measures implemented between October and November 2020 with one in four enterprises (representing all company sizes) being disappointed (SEB, 2020). Yet, besides criticism, the social partners engaged in initiatives in an attempt to reduce the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on businesses and workers. On 6 March 2020, the National social partners representing employers, the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEB), the Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen & Merchants (GSEVEE), the Hellenic Confederation of Commerce and Entrepreneurship (ESEE) and the Greek Tourism Confederation (SETE) issued a common declaration calling employers to make use of the extraordinary policy measures adopted to mitigate the consequences of COVID-19 and encouraging them to grant leave to employees facing extraordinary family obligations due to the closure of kindergartens, schools, etc.^{xvii} On 16 July 2020, a meeting was held between the presidents of the Greek General Confederation of Labour (GSEE) representing workers' organizations and the employers' associations representing the micro, small and medium-sized enterprises that is the Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen & Merchants (GSEVEE) and the Hellenic Confederation of Commerce and Entrepreneurship (ESEE); they agreed to explore the possibility of joint initiatives and actions in the near future, aimed at protecting work and developing small and medium-sized enterprises. They also agreed to continue and extend social dialogue with the other national social partners.^{xviii} As a first step towards protecting workers and jobs, GSEE established an ANTI-COVID-19 information and workers' support network with a special dedicated webpage, providing relevant information and guidance on employment rights and an online complaint form for working people, which has already been used to report a wide range of abusive behaviour from some employers. The GSEE complaints assessment team screens all complaints received, which are then forwarded to the competent public authorities and to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, to their supervisory bodies mainly, while protecting the anonymity of individuals who file the complaints.^{xix} SEB provides on its website relevant information and advice for member enterprises related to COVID-19. These include among others: a practical guide on how to continue work under the COVID-19 regime; Q&As and a guide on telework;^{xx} regular bulletins related to topical COVID-19 themes for instance 'Restarting the economy requires ground-breaking policies', 'Priority in supporting employees and businesses'. SEB also continues to organize seminars (via videoconference) on topics of interest to its members. GSEVEE reoriented the operation of the Small Enterprises' Institute (IME GSEVEE) as a quasi-observatory. It has been entrusted with monitoring the consequences, effects and needs arising from the development of the

pandemic, the government interventions, as well as with providing information and guidance on legislative support measures; interventions and positions concerning a series of measures to maintain market liquidity and professionals afloat; articles, studies, surveys providing data on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic to the economic viability of SMEs, the employment indicators and ultimately social cohesion;^{xxi} It has also set up a special section where entrepreneurs can submit complaints, inquiries and ask for guidance on various issues. ESEE was one of the first pointing out that the umbrella of state protection must include all those affected by the pandemic, open or closed businesses and regardless of their Activity Code Number (ACN), so that ‘the day after the crisis’ finds all businesses open and viable. Being fully aware of the need for information and communication, ESEE created the commerce-corona crisis website, where specialized partners provide a daily update of the government support measures and where visitors can ask questions and communicate their problems. The Greek Tourism Confederation (SETE) dedicated a special webpage from the first days of the COVID-19 pandemic with relevant information and advice for member enterprises; with practical guides on government package(s) to address the effects of coronavirus; Q & As with regular updates of the content in order to facilitate not only entrepreneurs but also workers and individuals at this difficult time; policy papers for the economic recovery of the Tourism sector and multiple interventions to national and European fora (unpublished national contribution for the forthcoming Eurofound report, 2021).

ⁱ Eurofound (2020), [Financial support for suspended and dismissed employees](#), case GR-2020-12/695 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

ⁱⁱ Eurofound (2020), [Transfer of annual leave 2020 for employees with suspended employment contracts](#), case GR-2020-48/1498 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

ⁱⁱⁱ Eurofound (2020), [Transfer of personnel to companies within the same group](#), case GR-2020-12/665 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^{iv} Eurofound (2020), [Operation of businesses with safe operation staff](#), case GR-2020-12/666 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^v Eurofound (2020), [Employers authorised to unilaterally switch to teleworking](#), case GR-2020-11/668 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^{vi} Eurofound (2020), [‘SYNERGASIA’: Income support for employees working fewer hours](#), case GR-2020-25/957 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^{vii} Eurofound (2020), [Prohibition of dismissal of employees](#), case GR-2020-12/696 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^{viii} Eurofound (2020), [Special purpose leave for working parents](#), case GR-2020-11/691 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^{ix} Eurofound (2020), [Organisation of work in the public sector](#), case GR-2020-12/690 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^x Eurofound (2020), [Renewal of the validity of the disability certificates and the payment of benefits](#), case GR-2020-11/1209 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^{xi} Eurofound (2020), [Support measures regarding seasonal employees](#), case GR-2020-23/959 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^{xii} Eurofound (2020), [State income benefit to support freelancers, self-employed and sole proprietors](#), case GR-2020-12/670 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^{xiii} Eurofound (2020), [Financial support for suspended and dismissed employees](#), case GR-2020-12/695 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^{xiv} Eurofound (2020), [Extension of expired or expiring unemployment benefit payments](#), case GR-2020-12/694 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^{xv} Eurofound (2020), [Financial support for suspended and dismissed employees](#), case GR-2020-12/695 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^{xvi} Eurofound (2020), [State income benefit to support freelancers, self-employed and sole proprietors](#), case GR-2020-12/670 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^{xvii} Eurofound (2020), [Joint statement of peak level employer's organizations for the support of businesses and workers](#), case GR-2020-10/1062 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^{xviii} Eurofound (2020), [Social partners explore possible joint initiatives for COVID-19 crisis "Support for SMEs and workers"](#), case GR-2020-29/1080 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^{xix} Eurofound (2020), [Information and support group 'ANTI-COVID-19' for workers by trade union GSEE](#), case GR-2020-12/1057 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^{xx} Eurofound (2020), [Practical guides of Hellenic Federation of Enterprises on telework and the continuation of business under the crisis of COVID-19](#), case GR-2020-12/1063 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^{xxi} Eurofound (2020), [SMEs memorandum on saving businesses, maintaining jobs and ensuring social cohesion](#), case GR-2020-22/1090 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

How COVID-19 accelerated and disrupted working life policies and impacted social dialogue

Accelerated developments

Neither accelerated nor disrupted.

Disrupted developments

According to the President of the Hellenic Parliament during 2020, the legislative work of the First Session of the Parliament was completed smoothly, and the Second Session began. By 22 December 2020, 144 bills had been passed. Parliamentary scrutiny was not affected by the pandemic. On the contrary, it was substantially strengthened as on 10 October 2020 it was enacted, for the first time, in the Rules of procedure the right of the Parliament to intervene in the annual program of audits of the Court of Auditors, prioritizing audits or proposing in addition to the planned ones (Kathimerini, 2021).

Impacts on the social dialogue and collective bargaining

Industrial relations and employment law were at the centre of the economic adjustment programmes brought into operation after the debt crisis arose (2010). Following the reforms imposed by the Memoranda, collective bargaining and collective regulation of employment conditions have been radically restructured and dismantled. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, a wide range of exceptional measures both at EU and at national level have been taken and/or were/are in preparation and which touch upon workers' and trade union rights. There is a growing critical thought on that, the COVID-19 crisis may be used by policy makers as an alibi to 'temporarily' undermine and curtail human rights in general and workers and trade union rights in particular.

The President of the Greek General Confederation of Labour (GSEE) emphasizes in an article that, with a steadily increasing loss of life and a rapid population outbreak of the coronavirus, emergency measures to protect human life are being legislated, on a daily basis which, among other things, impose extensive restrictions on fundamental rights. As such, GSEE and the Consumer Workers' Union of Greece expressed their firm opposition to the abolition of the Sunday holiday, as it was launched by the government. Under the pretext of the pandemic, permanent measures are enacted, without expiration date, including other sectors and professions in Sunday work such as pharmacies and retail, through the ability to deliver goods to consumers who have placed telephone orders remotely and from retail stores. Also, according to GSEE the Draft Law on public outdoor assemblies which was voted in principle by the majority of the competent parliamentary committee was put to public consultation from 25 February to 10 March 2020, a period that all society's attention due to the COVID-19 outbreak was elsewhere. In principle for the Confederation, Draft Laws introducing large-scale restrictions related to constitutional rights and freedoms as well as corresponding measures securing socio-economic life, require timely and in-depth political and social dialogue, in order to find solutions. Solutions that will provide all those involved, with guarantees of rights-freedoms-security, which the constitution protects (GSEE, 2020).

The Greek Primary Teachers' Federation (DOE) and the Greek Federation of Secondary Education State Schools Teachers (OLME) reported that, on 8 May 2020 the Greek Parliament in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis adopted, through an amendment to another bill, a regulation on the obligatory live streaming delivery of lessons without prior warning and without any consultation or dialogue with the education trade unions. Synchronous distance learning, including its recording, raises important difficulties for teaching personnel regarding employment and working conditions on the one hand and professional issues on the other and, thus, involvement and consultation of education trade unions is central to the elaboration of the synchronous distance learning measure (ETUCE, 2020).

In addition, due to the extraordinary circumstances and the implementation of measures to protect against the coronavirus in 2020, the negotiation procedures for collective agreements have been 'frozen' with an immediate risk of cutting legal remuneration and benefits, which do not fall within the limited range of retroactive terms. It is pointed out that, with the expiration of the current collective agreements, of their three-month extension of terms and of the extension that has been given until 30 June 2020, the risk for the reduction of salaries and benefits to hundreds of thousands of employees is visible. As such, invitation to the Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEB), the Hellenic Confederation of Professionals, Craftsmen & Merchants (GSEVEE), the Hellenic Confederation of Commerce and Entrepreneurship (ESEE), the Greek Tourism Confederation (SETE) and the Federation of Industries of Greece (SBE) for starting negotiations for the preparation and signing of a new National General Collective Employment Agreement (EGSSE), was sent by GSEE on 29 December 2020. The negotiation process for the drafting of the new EGSSE begins in March 2021 and will end in July 2021, when the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs proposes to the Cabinet the amount of the increase of the new minimum wage (GSEE, 2020).

Other important policy developments

Independently from the COVID-19 pandemic the Greek government proceeded with its programme commitments with the legislation of social security contributions' reduction.

By virtue of article 48, Law 4670/27.02.2020 as of 1 June 2020, the social contribution rates for full-time employees was reduced by a total of 0.9 percentage points, consisting of a 0.42 and 0.48 percentage points reduction in the employees' and employers' contributions respectively (OECD, 2020). Law 4576/26.11.2020 entered into force on 1 January 2021 stipulates in article 31 a further reduction in social security contributions by 3 percentage points (that is 1.2 and 1.79 percentage points reduction in the employees' and employers' contributions, respectively). The reduction applies to employees who are insured with the e-EFKA (the Single Social Security Entity) with respect to the unemployment (Manpower Employment Organization), Workers' Health Organization (OEE) and Workers' Housing Organization (OEK) components of the social security scheme. The government has been committed to a total social contributions' reduction of 5 percentage points between 2020 and 2023. The envisaged reductions were for many years a stable and pressing proposal of employers' associations arguing that social contributions in Greece are very high, reduce competitiveness and keep wages at a low level.

Labour disputes in the context of the pandemic

Protests took place throughout 2020 and were increasing during the second wave of the pandemic. The majority of them was related to government's controversial bill(s) and demands of specific sectors of the economy on strengthening workplace protection mechanisms.

April–November 2020: Health-care workers and Hospital doctors held demonstrations protesting against their employment status, working conditions and the lack of manpower and equipment in public hospitals during the coronavirus pandemic. Some of the issues raised are the immediate payment of their accruals; single Branch of Nursing staff and not segmented as proposed by the government; integration in hazardous and arduous work; permanent employment contracts for doctors and/or nursing staff recruited due to the pandemic, under fixed-term contracts.

May–October 2020: Greek teachers associations proceeded to demonstrations and strikes against a controversial bill on education presented by the government during the COVID-19 lockdown period. Protesters demanding that the proposed legislation is withdrawn on the grounds that it is “anti-education as it envisaged, among others, to merge classes, thereby increasing the number of pupils per class and reducing the number of teachers; increase the number of exams at the secondary education level, eliminate general education and make schools more competitive by focusing even more on exams for access to higher education; force young teachers to work far from their families under harsh conditions and with low wages. If they deny the positions offered to them, they are to be excluded from the system for two years; reinforce, once again, authoritarian education methods with penalties and notes of conduct as well as multi-day expulsions to ensure student discipline; heavily slash funds towards supporting schools. Educators have also opposed the additional measures proposed by the government for the operation of cameras inside classrooms.

July 2020: Lawmakers in Greece have approved a Law to curb public protests, prompting mass demonstrations. The legislation on regulation of demonstrations, which was approved by 187 of the 300 members of parliament mandates: the appointment of a liaison officer; restrictions on demonstrations or outright bans if authorities deem, they threaten public safety. It also holds organizers accountable for harm or damage caused by protesters. Reactions, objections and proposals were expressed by the trade unions and social organizations. Unionists and opposition parties accused the government of introducing the bill during lockdown period, ignoring the social and political dialogue while the provisions of the bill can be implemented by unions with large organizational capacity but there will be problems for smaller ones. For them, the government acted pre-emptively to quash any opposition to possible fallout from the coronavirus pandemic. As opposers to the bill add ‘the government ... dares boldly.....to promote new restrictions to quash and destroy a main democratic right’.

September–October 2020: Students protesting the education ministry's decision to allow classes of up to 30 participants at a time of increasing coronavirus infections. Pupil groups also reject Ministry's plans to apply distance learning in schools shut by sit-ins arguing that many schools lack the necessary infrastructure.

June–October–November 2020: Civil servants in Greece walked off the job in repeated strikes and on a variety of demands including opposition to the controversial bill on education; better workplace protections against the coronavirus; salary increases for civil servants and not the imposed during

COVID-19 cuts to benefits for hazardous and arduous work; requisition of the private Health and Welfare sector, with integration in state planning and not purchase of services; decongestion of public transport and health sectors via mass hiring of personnel. Public transport workers are also calling for workers to be allowed to undergo tests for COVID-19 at their companies' expense. Opposition to a Draft Law prepared by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which includes regulations on working hours, overtime, industrial action and trade unionism.

October–November 2020: The Greek Air Traffic Controllers Association (EEEKE) and the Union of Air Traffic Safety Electronics Mechanics (ENHMAEK) staged job walkouts and nationwide strike(s) to denounce the handling of COVID-19 pandemic; reacting to the sudden way, in the midst of lockdown, chosen by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport to submit for consultation the bill on establishment, operation and responsibilities of the Civil Aviation Authority, as well as the continuing problems in the payment of their accruals, which have created a climate of insecurity and mistrust among all employees.

There is no official recording of the working days lost due to a 24-hour strike(s) or work stoppages. Based on desk research most of them were three to four hours work stoppages.

Major developments in working time regulation as a result of the pandemic

Legislation on working time

In the context of exceptional and temporary measures in the labour market in order to counter and limit the spread of coronavirus, regulations concerning working time (but not exhausted to this) were legislated such as the right of the employer to unilaterally impose teleworking or a security staff system with a reduction in working time and a corresponding reduction in remuneration. A series of temporary measures adopted in the first wave of the pandemic and continued in the second one, in order to mitigate the consequences of COVID-19 crisis to businesses and employees.

The employers' unilateral decision, in order for employees to work remotely, at a rate of 50% of total employees.^{xxii}

The establishment of 'SYN-ERGASIA'^{xxiii} labour support mechanism aiming to support employers to maintain the same headcount of fulltime employees. Ability to reduce up to 50% of the weekly working hours of all or part of the employees, without their employment contract being converted to a part time one. The mechanism applies only to full time employees on the date of the law's publication. Employees included in the mechanism are entitled to receive an additional support from the Greek state on top of their wage amounting to 60% of their net salary corresponding to the time where they do not provide any work. In case the net earnings of the employees, after the above adjustment, are less than the minimum statutory salary or wage, the difference is covered by the state. The abovementioned employees are also entitled to receive annual leave and Christmas allowance proportion by the state referring to the year 2020, as well as Easter allowance proportion referring to the year 2021, calculated upon the 60% of the employee state aid and the corresponding to the non-working period. For the period from 1 July 2020 to 28 February 2021, the employers' insurance contributions corresponding to the time during which the employees are not employed, are paid by the state at a rate of 100%. Employers are not allowed to terminate the employment contracts of employees who joined the mechanism and if so, such termination shall be considered as null and void. Employers shall also maintain the same nominal salaries of the employees for as long as the employees participate in the mechanism.

The transfer of the annual regular leave of employees with businesses/employers employing employees whose employment contract has been suspended since March 2020 and continues to be suspended without interruption or at intervals until 31 December 2020, due to the extraordinary measures to mitigate COVID-19 consequences, may, by way of derogation from the relevant provisions on regular annual leave, to transfer all or the remaining eligible days of the annual regular leave of the year 2020 until 30 June 2021.^{xxiv}

The new forms of organizing the place and time of work, in order to prevent and limit the spread of the COVID-19 in Attica region: a) a system of distance working, taking advantage of all the available technological possibilities and digital applications, at a rate of 40% of the total number of employees who can work with this system; b) starting and ending working hours shall be adjusted in a way that the employees come and leave per half-hour and within two hours in relation to the start and end respectively of their working hours. During the implementation period hereof, the obligation of the

employer to register in the 'ERGANI' Information System of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs every change or amendment on the working hours or the organisation of employees' working time is suspended (Eurofound, 2020).

The replacement of the employee's absence time from work, as part of the preventive control measures to limit the spread of coronavirus COVID-19, according to the official guidelines of the National Public Health Organization (EODY) with the employer a) determine by its decision, that the work provided by this employee, will be carried out by the system remote working of case or b) if remote working is not possible to employ the employee, according to the company's needs, beyond his contractual daily working hours, by one hour per day, in other working days, from the end of the employee's restriction until the completion of half of the hours corresponding to the working days of staying at home. The replacement time shall not be considered as overwork or overtime in case of full-time work, neither as additional work in case of part-time work. The employee is not entitled, during the replacement of half of the working hours corresponding to the period of staying at home, to any increase or remuneration for additional work.^{xxv}

The employers' unilateral designation of staff as safety personnel for the operation of their business. Each employee may work for a minimum of two weeks within a reference period of one month, continuously or intermittently. The measure applies to at least 50% of staff and the employer is obliged to maintain the same headcount at the time of entering such operation.^{xxvi}

The suspension of employer's obligation to register in the 'ERGANI' Digital System of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs any amendment or modification of the working time or of the organization of working time of employees, as well as overwork and legal, in accordance with the legislation in force, overtime working.^{xxvii}

^{xxii} Eurofound (2020), [Employers authorised to unilaterally switch to teleworking](#), case GR-2020-11/668 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^{xxiii} Eurofound (2020), ['SYNERGASIA': Income support for employees working fewer hours](#), case GR-2020-25/957 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^{xxiv} Eurofound (2020), [Transfer of annual leave 2020 for employees with suspended employment contracts](#), case GR-2020-48/1498 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^{xxv} Eurofound (2020), [Replacing the house quarantine period with overtime work](#), case GR-2020-36/1592 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^{xxvi} Eurofound (2020), [Operation of businesses with safe operation staff](#), case GR-2020-12/666 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

^{xxvii} Eurofound (2020), [Employers authorised to unilaterally switch to teleworking](#), case GR-2020-11/668 (measures in Greece), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin.

Collective bargaining on working time

No such development.

Ongoing debates on working time

The adoption of shift work by employers' unilateral decision entails risks and raises social debate among the interesting parties. As it is considered, by many, as a possible step towards a working model with no agreed full-time hours where the scale of employees' employment will depend on the needs of the company and on the economic situation. Introducing the obligation of unpaid overtime for those employees who are forced to be absent from work – not because they want to – but because they follow state orders forces them to bear the cost of dealing with the pandemic. Hours and overtime statements have been suspended for a long time leaving workers exposed to any arbitrary mood of the employer; the field of teleworking has remained unregulated; and the release of annual overtime limit is felt as a turn to precarious flexibility (TA NEA, 2020).

Impacts of the crisis on wages and wage setting

The role of the national general collective employment agreement (EGSSE) has been restricted during the Memoranda and it no longer sets the minimum wage (set by the State since 2012). By the end of the Third Economic Adjustment Programme for Greece (20 August 2018) the extension of sectoral collective agreements and the favourability principle were reinstated. However, the mechanism of setting minimum wages by the government and not by the social partners through the EGSSE was not abolished.

The annual report on Greek economy and employment (INE/GSEE, 2020) records the dramatic wage developments in Q2 2020, when the lockdown was in full swing. As such, the average monthly salary decreased, from €885 in Q2 2019, to €802 in Q2 2020 that is, a decrease of, approximately, 10%. Even more worrying was the excessive increase in the number of people who received less than €200 per month. Specifically, in Q2 2019, 1% of employees had a net salary of less than €200. This percentage increased in Q2 2020 by 11.2 percentage points marginally exceeding 12% of total employees, while earners from €200 to €1,200 per month decreased by 11.3 percentage points. The largest decrease was recorded in employees with a net salary between €400 and €600 per month from 16.3% in Q2 2019 to 12.3% in the same quarter of 2020. The percentage of people who received from €601 to €800 per month decreased from 24.8% (Q2 2019) to 23.5% (Q2 2020), while those receiving between €801 and €1,000 per month decreased from 21.8% (Q2 2019) to 18.3% respectively (Q2 2020).

Recent Law 4764/23.12.2020 amended the procedure for determining statutory monthly and daily wage for 2021. Due to the extraordinary and necessary measures to limit the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus the law foreseen an invitation to be send, within the last ten days of March 2021, by the Consultation Coordination Committee; the drafting and submission of the report take place no later than 31st April 2021; the documentation of each of those participating in the consultation will be forward to the other representatives of the social partners, with an invitation for oral consultation no later than 15 May 2021; documentation of the consultants as well as the Report of the Centre for Planning and Economic Research (KEPE) for the preparation of a Plan takes place no later than 31st May 2021; a Draft Plan is completed on 30 June 2021; the recommendation of the Minister of Employment and Social Affairs to the Council of Ministers, for the determination of the statutory monthly wage of white-collar employees and the statutory daily wage of blue-collar employees takes place within the last fifteen days of July 2021.

What is new in working life in the country?

Increase in work from home

One stark impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and its associated confinement measures, has been the growing numbers of individuals forced to work from home. Greek economy has traditionally been more heavily reliant, than other EU countries, on economic activities that entail interactive service provision. Over the period 2008-2018 about 3.9% of Greek adult employees engaged in some work from home. In 2018, this share was 4.4% accounting for about 110k employees. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the increase in teleworkers is dizzying, with one in four being employed in telework and the percentages to rise from 5.3% in 2019 to 26% in 2020. Also, the rise in 'working from home' highlighted the blurring of lines between work and private life. For SPs and trade unions in particular, a new, serious legal framework for teleworking, should be set up. Teleworking is crucial to be institutionalised, following consultation and legislation, with the aim of protecting workers. Of similar importance is the introduction of 'right to disconnect' initiatives in order to prevent large segments of workers becoming at risk of physical and emotional exhaustion. If teleworking is to continue, perhaps the competent actors (Ministries, Tripartite Bodies, and Social Partners) should seek to include provisions protective to workers such as, i.e., the voluntary nature of telework or the suitability of specific tasks to teleworking in any agreements. Clarification about how employers can contribute to expenses linked to working from home, as well as guarantees of equal pay and access to training for those working remotely, will also be critical.

Rise in job insecurity

As it is well established in a recent Working Paper (Bulman, 2020) the shock of the pandemic led to a sharp fall in workforce activity and stalled new hiring. Temporary support measures have helped, to some extent, to support households' incomes and protect jobs during the COVID-19 crisis. However, with the pandemic being in development, these measures prove to be inadequate. Even more, exclusion of many workers from activation policies or social and employment protection, heightens insecurity and weakens productivity; endangering the homogenization of private sector employees' employment and working conditions with these of the lower strata of the self-employed. The long-lasting consequences of the pandemic and of the measures adopted 'temporarily' almost a year ago deregulate industrial relations and downgrade the quality of work and workers life in particular. As such, it is important to strengthen the institutional framework for labour market regulation, in order to protect employment and workers' income, following a meaningful social dialogue. Press releases on the upcoming institutionalization of alterations in statutory working hours, to the detriment of the employee's remuneration and for the benefit of further flexibility of working time, lead most people to uncertainty regarding the future of their working life, and will be a serious development of social backwardness.

Public health system

The coronavirus pandemic has come to challenge the prevailing public health policies. For example, prior to the outspread of COVID-19, the Greek government expressed its intention for: privately managed public hospitals; entry of private insurance companies in public healthcare infrastructure; and Public & Private Partnerships Schemes^{xxviii} in the Sector. The reality proved to be somewhat

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different. Public health services and state hospitals bear the main burden of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic internationally and in Greece; with no, or very limited voluntary participation of private hospitals especially during the first wave of the pandemic; the Ministry of Health proceeded (November 2020) to forcibly appropriating two clinics and their staff in Northern Greece, where the outbreak was severe. However, public spending on health remains low, with the country ranking one position before the last in the EU-27 (with Latvia being in the last place) concerning extra expenditure for the health system since the outbreak of the pandemic (OECD and European Union, 2020). Recruitment of medical staff -doctors and caretakers- were not made or were very limited with precarious employment rights, low wages and/or benefits compared to the unprecedented conditions facing, and insufficient health care equipment for their protection.

Risk of individualization of industrial relations

As it was highlighted in a paper presentation during the lock down period and due to the extraordinary circumstances, the Greek government enhanced the Managerial Right (Karamesini, 2020). Via temporary measures, employers allowed to unilaterally decide on the suspension of employment contracts and rotating work (and hence on the reduction of remuneration) in the sectors affected, without any obligation to consult employees' representatives and making Labour Inspectorate's control, difficult. For example, the state subsidy mechanism 'SYN-ERGASIA' (for maintaining jobs in private sector companies with losses in turnover in previous months) allows employers to reduce, unilaterally, working hours on their employees. In contrast, the 'similar' German model (Kurzarbeit), where reduction is subject to mandatory negotiation and agreement with the employees' representatives in the company, as is the distribution of the reduction in working time among staff. The difference between the 'SYN-ERGASIA' mechanism (that is the SURE Programme 'à la' style of Greece) and other similar European mechanisms lies here. Its rationale seems as, a 'Memoranda' type of measure, giving employers the right to impose, sometimes, unfavourable changes in the working conditions of employees, in the name of employment protection. In practice, it seems to maintain the individualization of industrial relations as a 'new normality'.

Reduction in workers' incomes

The INE/GSEE annual report on Greek economy & employment, illustrates that in Q2 2020, private consumption was equal to €28.8 billion, while it stood at €32.6 billion in the same quarter of 2019. Managing the pandemic crisis through interventions that reduce employment and wages is expected to aggravate further the already fragile situation and living standards of Greek households. According to INE/GSEE, the short to medium term prospects for the economy to emerge from the crisis and transit to sustainable dynamics, depend on protecting the volume and quality of employment and increasing disposable income of the middle and lower ends in the income distribution scale. Thousands of people are in suspension of employment from the onset of the pandemic; the majority of them for more than three months; receiving an income of less than 50% of their salary. The risk of pauperization among these people is exceptionally high. In Q2 2020, the average monthly salary decreased by approximately 10% compared to the same quarter of 2019 with 31% of employees receiving earnings below the minimum wage. A way to overcome this, as it is stated in the report might be the adjustment of the minimum wage to 60% of the median wage, based on a specified timetable to be agreed by the social partners. Such institutional intervention

will be instrumental in the country's transition to a new model of sustainable and equitable development.

^{xxviii} PPP are long term contracts between private and public sector entities, aiming at implementing projects and delivering services; the *Inter-Ministerial Committee for Public-Private Partnerships (ICPPP)* is the collective governmental body in Greece which set the general policy for PPPs and approve projects that should proceed to implementation through the PPP framework, available at: <http://www.sdit.mnec.gr/en/information/PPP/what-is-PPP>.

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All cases related to Eurofound's COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch database can be found at

<https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/data/covid-19-eu-policywatch>

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