WORKING PAPER

Industrial relations and social dialogue

Estonia: Working life in the COVID-19 pandemic 2021

Author: Ingel Kadarik (Praxis Centre for Policy Studies)

Research manager: Christine Aumayr-Pintar (Eurofound)

Eurofound reference number: WPEF22010

Research carried out prior to the UK's withdrawal from the European Union on 31 January 2020, and published subsequently, may include data relating to the 28 EU Member States. Following this date, research only takes into account the 27 EU Member States (EU28 minus the UK), unless specified otherwise.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite European Union Agency established in 1975. Its role is to provide knowledge in the area of social, employment and work-related policies according to Regulation (EU) 2019/127.

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

Telephone: (+353 1) 204 31 00

Email: information@eurofound.europa.eu

Web: www.eurofound.europa.eu

Contents

Introduction

The second wave of COVID-19 started in Estonia at the end of 2020 and peaked in March 2021, after a couple of easier months during summer, a third wave hit Estonia in Autumn with a peak in October, followed shortly by a fourth wave starting at the end of 2021. Public health and support measures have largely followed the waves of the pandemic. During higher infection rates, schools have been fully or partially closed, teleworking has been strongly advised, the use of non-essential services has been restricted. At the end of April 2021, COVID-19 vaccination certificate was introduced in Estonia, which was substituted with the EU COVID-19 certificate in June 2021. As of August 2021, the use of non-essential services (e.g., visiting restaurants, going to public events, or attending sports club) has been allowed only for the certificate holders. At the end of January 2022, during the fourth wave of the pandemic, schools have mostly been open and telework is not mandatory, but most of the services and public events are still restricted and accessible only if the person has a valid COVID-19 certificate.

The first vaccinations were given in Estonia at the end of December 2020 and the priority was to cover risk groups (including people over the age of 65) and healthcare and social field workers. During May, vaccinations were step by step made available to all people. Third doses were introduced in Estonia in October 2021. At the end of January 2022, 62.2% of the population in Estonia is vaccinated with two doses. The slow pace of vaccination has been one of the main concerns in the crisis management context in 2021.

While several sectors and businesses have suffered economic losses due to the restrictions and have expressed their dissatisfaction over insufficient support measures, the economy and working life in Estonia have not been affected as much as initially feared and the economy is recovering well. Initial forecasts in 2020 by the Estonian Bank regarding a smooth recovery in 2021 did not hold at first due to the second wave of the pandemic, but a rapid recovery was still expected in the second half of 2021 (Saarniit et al., 2021). This held true, as according to Statistics Estonia, in the third quarter of 2021, the annual GDP real growth was 8.6%. Estonian Bank elaborated in October that at constant prices, GDP was around 5% above its pre-crisis peak (close to 11% at current prices), which is one of the fastest recoveries in the EU (Kallas et al, 2021). Still, some sectors have a long way to go to fully recover, including Horeca and manufacturing. The unemployment rate in the third quarter of 2021 (5.7%) was still higher than in 2019 in the same period (3.9%) but has decreased steadily compared to the same period in 2020 (7.7%).

Political context

At the beginning of 2021, the Government changed. At first, the COVID-19 crisis was managed by the coalition formed in the second quarter of 2019 between the Estonian Centre Party (centrist party), the Estonian Conservative People's Party (far right party), and Isamaa (direct translation *fatherland*) (right party). In January 2021, due to increased frictions in the Government over mostly non-COVID related matters, the Government collapsed. A new Government was formed between the Reform Party and the Estonian Centre Party. The new Government did not make any substantial changes in crisis management. For example, they continued relying on the information and suggestions provided by the scientific council, although at the end of 2021 the members of the council were changed. In addition, the Minister of Health was not changed in the new coalition.

In the public debate slow vaccination rate and unclear communication were seen as the weaknesses of the new Government. In July 2021 the National Auditor General sent a letter to the Prime Minister pointing out the concerns regarding the slow vaccination rate when enough doses were available, slow pace in updating the vaccination plans, unclear and unmeasurable objectives in the vaccination plans, no detailed explanation how to reach those goals, not duly updated official information channels (Holm, 2021a). In October, the Auditor General criticised the general crisis management, pointing out that the crisis communication overall was not clear enough, especially as the communication of proposals and decisions were scattered between different people, positions and media channels, the crisis management setup was unclear and the cooperation with local governments was chaotic as the full potential of all local governments was not used, while some were too strongly intertwined in the crisis management by conducting their own restrictions (Holm, 2021b).

Governments and social partners response to cushion the effects

In 2021, there were no entirely new measures introduced to cushion the effects of the crisis.

Some measures were designed from the start of the crisis with a specific end date, for example tax-related measures[i] and support for freelancers in the creative industries[ii] to end by 2022, shipping companies support measures to end by 2024.[iii] Social partners had no direct involvement in those measures.

Some measures were provided longer than first expected. The wage subsidy[iv] was prolonged once in 2020 and another round for March and April 2021 was prolonged to cover May 2021 as well. The changes in sickness leave compensation to reduce the employees' own contribution was initially designed to cover the period of January-April 2021 but was later prolonged to cover the entire 2021 and 2022.[v] These have been successful measures providing support during the peaks of the crisis. Being part of the councils of both the Unemployment Insurance Fund and the Health Insurance Fund, social partners have been engaged in the design of those measures and have had good cooperation and have given positive feedback on the measures.

Support packages designed for employers to keep their businesses afloat saw several amendments during 2021 following new restrictions or possibility to allocate additional finances. Regarding the provision of loans and loan guarantees,[vi] the conditions in terms of amounts and eligible companies were changed and additional resources were provided. In May 2021, the National Audit Office published an audit which concluded that there were some concerns with allocating the support to those who really need it in case of rural companies (Riigikontroll, 2021a) and elaborated in their June 2021 audit that the actual impact of COVID-19 was not taken into account sufficiently enough when assessing the applications and not enough information was collected for sufficient assessment when making decisions (Riigikontroll, 2021b). Employer's organisations took part of the consultation processes and have later stated that the measure had too restricting terms and conditions hindering the accessibility of the support.

Support packages were also available based on the field of activity. Several new application rounds were opened during the year and additional finances were allocated in those measures, following new restrictions or needs. These include support packages for education and youth[vii] which included budget to prevent knowledge gaps of students due to distant learning; tourism, accommodation, and service sector[viii] to help them stay afloat as well as to develop new products and services; and culture field.[ix] In May 2021, the National Audit Office concluded that the support was allocated properly (Riigikontroll, 2021a). The measures have been consulted with sector-level social partners, who have raised concerns that the allocated budgets were too small. In addition,, the companies' associations have argued that the Government has not been cooperative (Nakurt-Murumaa, 2022).

In addition to COVID-19 crisis management, a couple of other important developments took place during 2021.

Firstly, one of the most influencing changes in terms of collective bargaining over a long time occurred in 2021 setting binding representative criteria for extending collective agreements. This was a response to a court resolution from 2020, stating that the current law does not allow for signatory parties to extend a collective agreement to the entire sector (Riigikohus, 2020). According to the criteria, the collective agreement can be extended in terms of pay and working and rest time if it has been signed by employers who employ at least 40% of the workforce in the sector concerned and by a sectoral trade union or a trade union association representing 15% of the workforce of the sector or has at least 500 members. Initially, in the proposal state, no threshold for trade unions was foreseen, which was not accepted by employers. Association of SMEs expressed their strong disapproval of the change, stating that larger employers could have a competitive advantage by agreeing on wage levels not bearable for SMEs. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry in principle supported the changes but would have hoped for even higher thresholds. Trade unions find the criterion too high and it should consider differences in sector sizes (Riigikogu, 2021).

Another important development is related to flexible working time. In April 2021 the Ministry of Social Affairs and the peak-level social partners signed an agreement to carry out a pilot project in commerce sector allowing flexible use of working time for 2.5 years (Sotsiaalministeerium, 2021). Changes in the Employment Contract Act entered into force in December 2021. This allows employers and employees to agree on the use of variable working hours based on the actual need. It can be concluded with a worker who works part-time for a period of 12 hours or more in a seven-day period and whose hourly rate is at least 1.2 times the minimum hourly rate and with up to 17.5% of employees in a company, which means that the agreement can be concluded by an employer with at least six employees. The wish to work under such agreement must come from employee and the variable hours must be offered at least 24 hours in advance. The results of the arrangement will be assessed in the end of the project period giving the social partners a basis for deciding whether it would be feasible to use such arrangement in other sectors as well.

[i] Eurofound (2020), Interests on tax arrears suspended/reduced, case EE-2020-10/341 (measures in Estonia), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

[ii] Eurofound (2020), Subsistence support for freelancers in creative industries, case EE-2020-17/355 (measures in Estonia), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

[iii] Eurofound (2020), Measures to support shipping companies, case EE-2020-1/384 (measures in Estonia), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

[iv] Eurofound (2020), Temporary subsidy programme, case EE-2020-10/325 (measures in Estonia), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

[v] Eurofound (2020), Sick leave amendments, case EE-2020-11/375 (measures in Estonia), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

[vi] Eurofound (2020), Emergency loan and loan guarantee, case EE-2020-13/347 (measures in Estonia), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

[vii] Eurofound (2020), Support in the field of education and youth, case EE-2020-18/977 (measures in Estonia), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

[viii] Eurofound (2020), Grants for SMEs and entrepreneurs in tourism, accommodation, catering, travel and commerce sectors, case EE-2020-20/962 (measures in Estonia), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

[ix] Eurofound (2020), Support package for culture field, case EE-2020-17/362 (measures in Estonia), COVID-19 EU PolicyWatch, Dublin

Adapting to the pandemic and the return to work: Policies and debates

New occupational health and safety rules

Vaccination in Estonia is voluntary. Social distancing and wearing personal protective equipment (masks) in public indoors and in public transport have been mandatory during the waves of higher infection rates. However, this does not directly apply to workplaces. The Labour Inspectorate emphasises that the Occupational Health and Safety Act applies when managing the COVID-19 risks in companies.

According to the Act, employers must carry out risk assessment of the working environment, which has been a standard obligation to employers since 1999. This includes assessing biological risks under which the COVID-19 virus belongs to. The risk assessment must include an action plan designating the measures applied to prevent or reduce employees' health risks. Regulation 'Occupational health and safety requirements for the working environment affected by biological hazards' lists ten possible actions employers can take to minimise the risks caused by biological hazards, which include using personal protective equipment but also other measures like distancing or rearrangement of work processes. Thus, employers have an opportunity to choose from a variety of measures to prevent or minimise employees' health risks during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In August 2021, the regulation of the biological hazards was updated, and COVID-19 specific measures were added. It states that in the event of the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the safety of the workers exposed to other people in the work environment must be ensured, by ensuring that workers are vaccinated against COVID-19, by checking the COVID-19 certificate or by testing workers.

This raised concerns of employers being able to dismiss un-vaccinated employees. However, the Labour Inspectorate emphasised that this is one possibility of several to manage the COVID-19 risks, it is not mandatory and measures such as vaccination, masks, and tests can be required by the employer only based on the risk assessment and must be proportionate. This could be the case of fields where there is close contact with other people, like medicine or beauty services. However, if the risk assessment foresees the need for facemasks or vaccination, it is indeed obligatory for the employees in this workplace. In case the employee does not adhere to this requirement, then according to the Employment Contract Act, the employer must first find ways to reorganise the work of the employee (e.g., find other tasks, change the work location). If this is not possible, then the employer has the right to dismiss the employee after a notification.

The peak-level employers' organisation supports an employer's ability to choose needed measures and if vaccination is deemed necessary, since constant testing and treatment is much more costly to tax-payers than vaccination (Aas, 2021). The peak-level trade union pointed out that the risk assessment tool has been in place for years and it should not come as a surprise to employers, and if customers must ensure they are free from virus, it would be logical to employees to prove the same (Postimees, 2021).

Organisations such as hospitals, medical emergency services and Defence Forces, theatres have announced the dismissals of unvaccinated employees, reasoning that on the basis of their risk assessment such measures are proportional. Some workers have turned to court, for example, the medical emergency service workers with the help of their trade union. Some decisions by court have already been made, taking a supportive position towards companies. For example, in case of Defence Forces, both the second instance court (Tallinna Ringkonnakohus, 2021b) as well as the Supreme Court (Riigikohus, 2021) have found that releasing unvaccinated employees from the service has been proportional and acceptable, stating that the defence and public health interests have at the moment more weight than personal interests and that possibilities exist to avoid release from service. A similar conclusion was made by the second instance court in case of police officers, stating that to operate in certain fields of activity, not only personal but also public interests must be considered and, consequently, public interests must be given priority over personal interests (Tallinna Ringkonnakohus, 2021a).

New working arrangement policies

No legislation in relation to telework or the right to disconnect has been established nor updated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Telework and its characteristics are regulated by the Employment Contracts Act (the universal right to agree to perform telework) and the Occupational Health and Safety Act (obligation of the employers to ensure healthy workplace in every working environment, including in case of telework). At national level, there are no binding agreements made between the social partners. Instead, in May 2017 the peak-level social partners concluded a non-binding joint agreement on teleworking, giving suggestions on the organisation, rights, and obligation in relation to telework, with the aim of supplementing the rather brief provision in legislation. The aim was also to implement the European level social partners' framework agreement on telework from July 2002 and thus follows largely the EU level agreement. This was followed by the Ministry of Finance and Trade Unions of State and Municipal Agencies Employees (ROTAL) in 2018 concluding similar agreement for public sector. In addition, in 2019 the Ministry of Social Affairs developed a non-binding guideline for the Occupational Health and Safety Act providing guidance to employees and employers using telework on how to ensure healthy workplaces.

Prior to the crisis, telework was not that common. In 2019, around 17% of employees have performed telework, while in 2020 it raised to 24%, according to Statistics Estonia. The national COVID-19 survey shows that in the beginning of 2021, 33% of respondents had the possibility to perform telework. It was higher among higher educated people (59% had the possibility compared to 24% of people with secondary education), in the capital (44%) and in the Northern region of Estonia (38%) compared to other regions (between 20%-29%). Middle age groups reported less possibility (31% of 35-49-year-olds and 25% of 50-64-year-olds had the possibility, compared to 35% of 15-24-year-olds, 41% of 25-34-year-olds, and 40% of 65-74-year-olds) (Turu-uuringute AS, 2021a). In October 2021, the data showed a decline – 27% of all respondents had the possibility to perform telework. In the capital, the share was 30% and in Norther region 40%, while in other regions 14-26% of people reported the possibility. The possibility was the highest among 35-49-year-olds (31%) and the lowest among 50-64-year-olds (20%), the rest of the age groups lied between 23-29% (Turu-uuringute AS, 2021b).

Overall, the social partners have expressed that the legislative regulations should not be too detailed, and they would both prefer a soft-law approach. For trade unions, this includes collective agreements and ideally at sectoral level. For trade unions the main concern regarding telework is the risk of isolation and overworking – however, this should be managed via good practices, awareness raising, etc. For employers the main issue has been the obligation to follow the Occupational Health and Safety Act similarly in case of teleworkers as in case of regular workers – in their view it puts too much pressure on employers, and it is not possible to ensure OSH rules are followed outside the employers' premises.

In November 2021, a draft legislation was proposed by the Ministry of Social Affairs. The new regulation would specify the rights and obligations of employers and employees in case of telework. It largely follows the non-binding guidelines. The changes consider the employer's limited ability to ensure a safe working environment in the case of telework, as the employee works outside the employer's premises. While the employer still must assess risks to the work environment, it can be done by talking to the employee, using risk assessment questionnaires, or assessing the risks using photographic or video material. In addition to assessing the risks, the employer must also instruct the employee on how to manage the risks and create a safe working environment. The employee would have an additional obligation to ensure the safety of their work environment, based on the instructions given by the employer.

Labour shortages

Overall, the crisis did not create many new shortages, rather the same concerns continued or were somewhat exacerbated due to the crisis.

The Estonian Qualifications Authority evaluated the changes caused by COVID-19 pandemic that will affect the labour market in the short-term (1-2 years) and long-term (10 years) and to which extent the societal and economic changes affect the need for labour force and skills in different sectors in Estonia They concluded that the volume and structure of the labour force need was not affected, but the need for specific skills and knowledge like ICT, risk management, teamwork, automation and green economy, was accelerated. (Rosenblad et al., 2020). The Unemployment Insurance Fund confirmed in early Autumn 2021 that changes in the labour shortages are similar to pre-pandemic period. The largest shortages are among audiologist, speech therapists and ICT top-specialist. The health sector has suffered from shortages for years and this made the management of the COVID-19 crisis more difficult. Similarly, there is a lack of carers, which has also made it problematic to keep care facilities functioning during COVID-19. Lack of workforce in construction sector has also been noticed. This might be mainly related to restrictions to use foreign labour force during COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, the shortages have increased among skilled workers (Töötukassa, 2021). Estonian bank also saw increasing labour shortage in industry and service sector, but not higher than the pre-crisis level (Matsulevitš, Soosaar, 2021).

In the end of 2021, recruiters and employers have started to report shortages in service as well in manufacturing via public media. Tourism and Horeca sectors are now in a situation where their employees have found other jobs and it hinders the reopening and normal functioning of the sector. Estonian Bank elaborated in October that the vacancy rate in accommodation and food services increased sharply both quarter-on-quarter and year-on-year, but in the context of lower employment level and growing labour demand, the vacancy rate will remain higher for some time to come (Kallas et al, 2021).

The main measures to relieve the labour shortage have been increased opportunities for re-training which is mostly lobbied by the trade unions and the changes in foreign workforce law mostly lobbied by employers. No specific measures in relation to COVID-19 have been established. The employers' side has actively turned attention to the labour shortages for years, and while they agree with the need to look for long-term solutions, improve life-long learning opportunities, increase birth rate, increase the labour market participation of older or disabled persons etc), they strongly emphasise the need to let foreign workforce into the Estonian labour market (short term as well as long term, low-qualified work force (e.g. seasonal workers) as well as highly qualified (e.g. ICT specialists). Trade unions emphasised the need to improve skills and qualifications of local workers and find ways to include less active groups in the labour market (e.g. those with decreased work capacity, older people). They see the foreign workforce as a last resort, and they do not support the inflow of low and medium qualified labour force from third countries.

Regarding lifelong learning opportunities, as of 1 May 2017, the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund offers services to prevent unemployment, to facilitate life-long learning and to address the skills mismatch and thus labour shortage. The services for employees include degree study allowance, labour market training and support for obtaining qualifications. These are meant for unemployed as well as employed persons whose skills and qualifications are outdated or who have no qualifications, or whose health condition restricts them to continue their occupation.

Regarding the foreign workforce, changes to the Aliens Act have been gradually introduced since 2016. With these changes, salary criterion to hire third country nationals have been reduced and some groups have been excluded (e.g., seasonal workers). Some groups have also been excluded from the immigration quota, like ICT workers, start-up employees and top specialists. Also, start-up employees and digital nomads have simplified visa procedures. In December 2021, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communication said they plan additional changes in the Aliens Act, which would further ease the salary criterion and would provide a two-year residence permit after one year of short time working in Estonia (ERR, 2021).

Another measure to somewhat relieve the labour shortage was established as of September 2020. Unemployment Insurance Fund also allows temporary working during unemployment, however only in a small scale – maximum 8 days per month and maximum pay €261 per month (40% of the minimum wage) during a total period of 12 months of 24 months.

Wages and wage-setting

According to Statistics Estonia, the national quarterly wage growth compared to previous year's same quarter has been between 6.3% and 8.9% during the past couple of years prior to the COVID-19 crisis. In 2020, the wage growth rate decreased to 1-3% per quarter, while in 2021, the wage growth was between 5-8%.

Estonian Bank elaborated in their October 2021 overview that the wage growth has accelerated and there are several factors that promise further increase in wage pressures: a 12% increase in the minimum wage, accelerating increases in consumer prices that could lead to workers asking for more wages, a shrinking labour force in the labour market and different growth rates across sectors. However, the wage growth is still slower compared to the pre-crisis level (Kallas et al., 2021).

Estonian Bank also explained that according to the declared wages data, wage inequality increased in the first eight months of 2021: higher wages grew faster than lower ones. They explained it by the fact that the minimum wage remained the same, and on the other hand by the relatively good performance of high-wage industries. During 2021, the ratio of median to average wage decreased, which had increased since the previous economic crisis in 2009 (Kallas et al. 2021).

Regarding the collectively agreed pay, there is no information available about single employer agreements. There are a couple of sector level agreements signed in Estonia regularly. In 2021, a new agreement with pay rise was signed in healthcare for two years. In the transport sector, collective agreements were signed in 2019 and 2020, ensuring pay rises until 2025 (passenger transport) and 2022 (freight transport). Pay rises were also agreed for teachers and culture workers, which are set by the government, but are consulted with trade unions.

Impacts on the social dialogue and collective bargaining

As in 2020, there were no substantial changes in social dialogue and collective bargaining in 2021. Despite some general disagreements or dissatisfactions, the cooperation between the social partners as well as in tripartite forms has been overall constructive and efficient. The tripartite meetings between the government and social partners continued as usual, discussing the crisis management, Recovery and Resilience Plan, foreign labour force and other work and social policy related matters. Social partners have also been active in discussing relevant matters with ministries in the social and economic matters and have held regular meetings on COVID-19 topics. Social partners are also members of the councils of the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund and the Estonian Health Insurance Fund, and via those councils the cooperation was very strong in relation to maintaining and developing support measures and managing the crisis. All in all, the social partners have expressed their satisfaction with their involvement in policy formation during 2021. Already planned sectoral collective bargaining took place as usual, for instance, in healthcare an agreement was signed in 2021.

Labour disputes in the context of the pandemic

Industrial action is not common in Estonia. There were no strikes or lockdowns during 2021 and no collective labour disputes were reported in media.

Regarding individual labour disputes, there is no data available for 2021. According to the Labour Inspectorate data, in 2020, however, the number of applications submitted to the labour disputes committees increased by 15% compared to 2019 (from 2,942 to 3,378). The number of employees' applications increased by 25% (from 313 to 391) and employer's applications by 14% (from 2,629 to 2,987). Changes were seen in relation to the extraordinary termination of employment contracts and sickness leave benefits and other benefits left unpaid by employers – there were considerably more applications than in previous years.

Commentary and outlook

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has not been as bad as initially feared and the economy saw a steady recovery in 2021. In the third quarter, the annual real growth of GDP was 8.6% and in constant prices the GDP was around 5% above its pre-crisis peak. The unemployment rate reached 7.7% in 2020 and reduced to 6.2% in 2021. While the unemployment rate is yet to reach the pre-crisis level (4.4%) the overall situation shows positive signs. It is expected that the economic growth will slow down to 2.8% in 2022.

There are still restrictions in place in the entertainment sector at the beginning of 2022. The companies have asked for additional support measures, but to no avail. The main measures continued in 2022 are the reduction of sick leave own contribution of employees and new products and innovation support measure for companies. The focus will be on implementing the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). The emphasis will be put on green economy, digital solutions, and automation to facilitate the recovery and on healthcare and long-term care sectors to develop more sustainable service models, digital solutions, and efficiency.

There are no strict restrictions concerning workplaces. Based on the law, the employer must assess the health risks related to the pandemic and choose suitable risk mitigation measures. These could include the obligation to wear facemasks or vaccination. In some organisations, vaccination has been made mandatory and court cases have followed, but the Court has taken the employer side on those cases.

The use of telework increased during the pandemic. The regulation of telework has largely relied on non-binding guidelines and no legislative changes nor measures to regulate it legally have been adopted so far. However, it is planned to specify the legislation in 2022 which would reduce the burden of the employer to be responsible for the teleworker's healthy work environment.

The Government will continue to focus on keeping society and the economy open. The main measure for this in 2022 is vaccination, which has not been as quick as hoped for. New goals were set in the beginning of 2022: reaching full vaccination coverage among 80% of the population aged 12 and over by the end of the year. To support the decision to vaccinate, the Government proposed to establish vaccine insurance, it is expected to enter into force in May 2022 and damage caused by COVID-19 vaccines will be compensated retrospectively. From 2023, the system will be extended to other vaccines.

The cooperation between the social partners (bipartite) and the government (tripartite) has not seen any major changes during 2021. While there are dissatisfactions by the social partners sometimes, communication has been good overall. Especially important is that tripartite cooperation was improved since 2018 when regular tripartite meetings were re-established, and these have continued despite the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, important crisis management measures were established in tripartite cooperation and in 2021 additional developments have been agreed on (e.g., working time flexibility measures and developments regarding collective agreements' extension mechanisms). It is expected that the cooperation will continue on a positive and constructive note.

In the end of 2021, in addition to the pandemic, the energy crisis hit Estonia, which has put additional pressure on the Government and the society. The Government has worked on finding ways to support individuals and businesses in the context of extremely high energy prices. The energy prices have worsened the situation of the businesses in sectors already suffered due to the pandemic (e.g., hotels and water centres) and has caused frictions in the Government.

References

All Eurofound publications are available at www.eurofound.europa.eu

Aas, A., *Eesti Päevaleht* (2021), 'Arto Aas sundvaktsineerimisest: haigete ravi läheb meile maksumaksjatena sadu kordi kallimaks maksma', 3 September, available at: https://epl.delfi.ee/artikkel/94494811/paeva-teema-arto-aas-sundvaktsineerimisest-haigete-ravi-laheb-meile-maksumaksjatena-sadu-kordi-kallimaks-maksma

ERR (2021), 'Kavandatav eelnõu võib lihtsustada välistööjõu kasutamist', 16 December, available at: https://www.err.ee/1608437801/kavandatav-eelnou-voib-lihtsustada-valistoojou-kasutamist

Holm, J., *Riigikontroll* (2021a), 'Riigikontrolöri tähelepanekud ja ettepanekud vaktsineerimise korralduse kohta', available at: https://www.riigikontroll.ee/Suhtedavalikkusega/Riigikontrolliblogi/tabid/310/ItemId/1327/amid/920/language/et-EE/Default.aspx

Holm, J., *Riigikontroll* (2021b), 'Koroonaviiruse teise laine õppetundidest. Riigikontrolöri kiri peaministrile', available at: https://www.riigikontroll.ee/Suhtedavalikkusega/Riigikontrolliblogi/tabid/310/ItemId/1338/amid/920/language/et-EE/Default.aspx

Kallas, R., Kattai, R., Kirpson, G., Klettenberg, T., Ljadov, H., Matsulevitš, L., Oja, K. et al (2021), *Rahapoliitika ja majandus 4/2021,* Eesti Pank, available at: https://haldus.eestipank.ee/sites/default/files/2021-12/RPM_4_2021_0.pdf

Matsulevitš, L, Soosaar, O. (2021), *Tööturu ülevaade 2/2021*, Eesti Pank, available at: https://haldus.eestipank.ee/sites/default/files/2021-10/TTY2_2021_est.pdf

Nakurt-Murumaa, I. *Delfi* (2022), 'EVEA asepresident Ille Nakurt-Murumaa: ettevõtjate koostööettepanekud valitsusele on nagu kurtidele kõrvadele', 26 January, available at: https://epl.delfi.ee/artikkel/95740035/evea-asepresident-ille-nakurt-murumaa-ettevotjate-koostooettepanekud-valitsusele-on-nagu-kurtidele-korvadele

Postimees (2021), 'Väikeettevõtjad kardavad, et valitsus paneb and vaktsineerimisrindel tanki', 13 August, available at: https://www.postimees.ee/7314392/vaikeettevotjad-kardavad-et-valitsus-paneb-nad-vaktsineerimisrindel-tanki

Riigikogu (2021*), Kollektiivlepingu seaduse ja teiste seaduste muutmise seadus 383 UA*, available at: https://www.riigikogu.ee/tegevus/eelnoud/eelnou/0e19aa2d-8d3a-4825-9b89-f120f328b5f5/Kollektiivlepingu%20seaduse%20ja%20teiste%20seaduste%20muutmise%20seadus

Riigikohus (2020), *Riigikohtu 15. juuni 2021 otsus nr 2-18-7821*, available at: https://www.riigikohus.ee/et/lahendid/?asjaNr=2-18-7821/71

Riigikohus (2021), *25. novembri 2021 kohtumäärus asjas nr 3-21-2241*, available at: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/kohtulahendid/fail.html?id=303506084&RIIGITEATAJA_AADRESS=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.riigiteataja.ee&RIIGITEATAJA_AADRESS_HALDUS=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.riigiteataja.ee

Riigikontroll (2021a), *Ülevaade ettevõtete toetamisest COVID-19-kriisi ajal,* available at: https://www.riigikontroll.ee/tabid/206/Audit/2528/language/et-EE/Default.aspx

Riigikontroll (2021b), *Kriisilaenude menetlus Maaelu Edendamise Sihtasutuses* available at:, https://www.riigikontroll.ee/tabid/206/Audit/2530/language/et-EE/Default.aspx

Rosenblad, Y., Tilk, R., Mets, U., Pihl, K., Ungro, A., Uiboupin, M., Lepik, I., Leemet, A., Kaelep, T., Krusell, S., Viia, A., Leoma, R. (2020), *COVID-19 põhjustatud majanduskriisi mõju tööjõu- ja oskuste vajaduse muutusele,* SA Kutsekoda, Tööjõuvajaduse seire- ja prognoosisüsteem OSKA, Tallinn, available at: https://oska.kutsekoda.ee/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/OSKA_COVID-19_eriuuring_11.01.2021_loplik.pdf

Saarniit, A., Strikholm, B., Kirpson, G., Ljadov, H., Oja, K., Urke, K., Matsulevitš, L. et al (2021), *Rahapoliitika ja majandus 1/2021,* Eesti Pank, available at: https://haldus.eestipank.ee/sites/default/files/2021-05/rpm_1_2021_est.pdf

Sotsiaalministeerium (2021), 'Hea tahte kokkuleppega tehakse ettepanek piloteerida jaekaubandussektoris paindlikumaid töölepinguid', available at: https://www.sm.ee/et/uudised/hea-tahte-kokkuleppega-tehakse-ettepanek-piloteerida-jaekaubandussektoris-paindlikumaid

Tallinna Ringkonnakohus (2021a), *23. detsembri 2021 kohtumäärus asjas nr 3-21-2583, 3-21-2605,* available at: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/kohtulahendid/fail.html?id=305443512&RIIGITEATAJA_AADRESS=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.riigiteataja.ee&RIIGITEATAJA_AADRESS_HALDUS=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.riigiteataja.ee

Tallinna Ringkonnakohus (2021b), *27. detsembri 2021 kohtumäärus asjas nr 3-21-2440*, available at: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/kohtulahendid/fail.html?id=30554875

Turu-uuringute AS (2021a), *COVID-19 teemaline küsitlus, 21. küsitluslaine*, available at: https://riigikantselei.ee/uuringud

Turu-uuringute AS (2021b), *COVID-19 teemaline küsitlus, 33. küsitluslaine,* available at: https://riigikantselei.ee/uuringud

Töötukassa (2021), 'Värske tööjõuvajaduse uuring näitab oskustööliste põuda', 6 December, available at: https://www.tootukassa.ee/uudised/varske-toojouvajaduse-uuring-naitab-oskustooliste-pouda

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite European Union Agency established in 1975. Its role is to provide knowledge in the area of social, employment and work-related policies according to Regulation (EU) 2019/127.