

## COVID-19 and its impacts on the world of work

Although the summer months can feel like a carefree period for many, the rate of COVID-19 infections continues to increase in many European countries. In terms of policies concerning COVID-19, Europe seems to be in somewhat of a summer slump, as there is currently no sign of increased measures to combat the spread of the virus. In Belgium, for example, the requirement to wear a face mask on public transportation has been lifted, while in Germany many people now have to pay for COVID tests. Nevertheless, the health systems seem to be coping with the new waves of infections. What autumn will bring remains unclear.



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### New forms of work

Despite this uncertainty, the impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on the world of work and on policies in Brussels is gradually becoming clear. The European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) published a [research paper](#) that examines the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on demographic trends and the digital transformation. The paper explains how the pandemic

has led to an accelerated rate of digitalisation and the associated impacts this has had on the world of work. An example of this is the increase in digital services. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of employees working for digital platforms has increased. However, many platform workers are falling through the cracks of the current social security systems. The European Commission is aiming to change this with a [proposed directive](#).

## An additional challenge: Digital skills

As the world of work becomes increasingly digitalised, workers are having to expand their digital skills and knowledge. According to the research paper, digital natives, – i.e. people born after 1996 – have significant advantages over older generations in this regard. 80 percent of young people between 16 and 24 years of age in the EU have at least basic digital skills. The picture is quite different for older generations, with only 33 percent of EU citizens aged between 55 and 74 claiming to have basic digital skills. Against the background of demographic change, the current situation represents a problem. In its Green Paper on Ageing, the European Commission states that the participation of older people in the labour market needs to be increased. This will not be possible without concepts such as lifelong learning and the development of digital skills.

## Occupational diseases

The rate of teleworking has also witnessed unprecedented growth during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people have worked from home for several months. For many, the separation between work life and private life was non-existent. The European Parliament has now set its focus on mental health in the digital world of work and adopted a resolution on this topic. The resolution calls for the European Commission, in cooperation with the social partners, to update the 2003 recommendation on the European schedule of occupational diseases. Against the background of the changing digital world of work, the resolution calls for the recommendation to be updated to include work-related

mental health problems, especially forms of depression, work-related burn-out, anxiety and stress. MEPs are also calling for the recommendation to be transformed into a directive with a minimum list of occupational diseases as well as minimum requirements for the recognition of these occupational diseases and the compensation of those affected. Independently of this, the Advisory Committee for Safety and Health at Work (ACSH) reached an agreement on the need to recognise COVID-19 as an occupational disease in health and social care and in domiciliary care, as well as in sectors where there is a proven increased risk of infection. The European Commission will now update the European list of occupational diseases accordingly. Most Member States – including Germany – have reported to the Commission that they already recognise COVID-19 as an occupational disease or occupational accident, in line with their national rules. Nevertheless, this is an important step to promote the recognition of COVID-19 as an occupational disease by all Member States.

One thing is clear, despite the fact that COVID-19 seems to have become less of a focal issue in the public consciousness during the summer months, the EU is actively tackling the issue and planning political initiatives. This is an issue that needs to be tackled proactively and we must closely monitor and actively participate in the discussion on European politics. ●

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