



EN



**EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT
IN DECISION-MAKING**

EUROPEAN REPORT
“EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT
IN DECISION-MAKING
IN TIMES OF CRISIS AS
A KEY TO THE EFFECTIVE
ORGANIZATION OF
THE COMPANY’S WORK.”



Co-funded by
the European Union



**EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT
IN DECISION-MAKING**

EUROPEAN REPORT

“EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT
IN DECISION-MAKING
IN TIMES OF CRISIS AS
A KEY TO THE EFFECTIVE
ORGANIZATION OF
THE COMPANY’S WORK.”



Co-funded by
the European Union

Introduction

This document is the result of the Project “Employee involvement in decision-making in times of crisis as a key to the effective organization of the company’s work.” funded by European Commission’s Directorate General of Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion under the call for proposals “Information, consultation, and participation of representatives of undertakings”.

The project contributes to:

- Support employee participation in anticipating and managing change, and preventing and resolving disputes in the case of various forms of restructuring of enterprises and groups of enterprises on an EU scale.
- Support employee involvement in the design and implementation of measures to address the impact of the coronavirus crisis on the workforce.
- Strengthen cooperation countries’ representatives of Member States (Spain, Italy, Poland, Germany, and Portugal) and Candidate Countries (Montenegro, Serbia) and between representatives of employees from trade and service sector from different organizations.
- Prepare tools and solutions leading to increase employee’s involvement in companies from the trade and service sector.

This comparative report is based on the seven countries’ National Reports that include the analysis on the online survey carried out with the employees and the semi-structured interviews to the employers.

The document is structured as such:

- Methodology debriefs the approach and techniques used for analysing the data for the report.
- A Summary on the Countries’ Contexts includes the most outstanding information on the countries’ legislative frameworks (if any) used during the pandemic and what effects this has had (such as known in the countries).

- A Comparative Analysis on Employees' Opinion is an extended analysis on the information retrieved from the online surveys carried out with workers from the project's participant countries during summer of 2021. An analysis of all the answers is included, i.e.:
 - » information that the workers received,
 - » the consultation process,
 - » the participation in the decision making,
 - » the atmosphere in which the changes were introduced,
 - » the opinion of the workers regarding the organisational changes,
 - » a valorisation of the employees own attitude,
 - » their awareness on legal rights,
 - » if the employees were offered choice or alternatives regarding the organisational changes introduced,
 - » to what extent they were asked to present ideas and give opinions on the organisational challenges introduced,
 - » how had the gender affected in the working conditions introduced,
 - » if the possibility to work from home was offered and if they were supported in the new conditions,
 - » if the workers felt safe to develop their professional activity, and
 - » in the hypothetical case of another crisis similar to the Covid-19 Pandemic how would they consider information, consultation and decision-making processes, and which would be their favourite mechanism for these processes.
 - » And finally the workers were asked in the hypothetical case what would they change in the future in relation to information and consultation regarding organisational changes in your company.

- A Comparative Analysis of the Employers' Opinion summarises the information retrieved as a result of the interviews to the employers in trade and services sector in seven European countries and it illustrates:
 - » The effects of the pandemic in their companies,
 - » The process of involving the employees in the changes introduced during the pandemic,
 - » The employers' opinion on the attitude of the employees,
 - » Identification of best practices,
 - » Improvement on the process of employee involvement, and
 - » In the hypothetical case of another crisis, what could be improved?
- Conclusions debriefs on the Report's final remarks, and
- Recommendations outlines the main lessons learnt and opinions for the future from the project coordinator and participants based on the information and analysis of this report.
- Annexes includes the seven National Reports, separate to this document.

Methodology

This is the European Report that collects, compares and summarises the information given in seven National Reports drafted by the project participants with the national results of the research carried out, following the projects objectives.

The methodology to carry out the research was discussed and recommended for use during the first project meeting. In spite of that, because of the fact that the reports are drafted by different national teams who have conducted the research (online survey analysis and semi-structured interviews) the heterogeneity of information is natural.

With that in mind, this document revises the national information and produces a unified piece where the analysis on the employees' involvement during the organisational changes introduced in the trade and services sector during the Covid-19 Pandemic can become clear and be illustrated with first hand information from the countries.

Regarding the illustrations, these are citations from the national reports, and are generally given summarised or literal to demonstrate the analysis at European level. Wherever a country citation is not mentioned, that means that the information did not appear in the National Report that was handed in.

The National Reports have been drafted between July-December 2021, and this document has come to light in January 2022.

A Summary on the Countries' Contexts

The National Reports from the seven teams in Germany, Italy, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Serbia and Spain start by briefing on the national context during the Covid-19 Pandemic and the legal frameworks that may have affected the employees' involvement in organisational changes in companies.

Such as the reports demonstrate normative and legislation has been used during the extraordinary times:

- In Germany through the "German Works Constitution Act" revised in 2001;
- In Poland through the "Act on Informing and Consulting Employees (AICE), the Act on Trade Unions, and the Labour Code";
- In Portugal through "The General Directorate of Health that released a guide of good practices and how to monitor the mental health risks to which the workers are subject, knowing that these risks were enhanced by teleworking as consequence of the Covid-19 Pandemic".
- In Serbia the Decree on measures during a state of emergency, Decree on organizing the work of employers during a state of emergency, Decree on organizing social protection for the provision of home accommodation services during a state of emergency, Decree on supplementing the basic salary of employees in health care institutions and certain employees areas of health, protection of public health, treatment and prevention of the spread of the epidemic of disease COVID-19, etc.
- In Spain the Royal Decree-Law 8/2020 of 17 March on urgent extraordinary measures to face the economic and social impact of COVID-19 and the use of the Temporary Employment Regulation File (ERTE).

As regards Italy, the Italian National Report indicates "In the Italian legal system, information and consultation procedures are not specifically regulated by law, but substantially left to collective bargaining."

No specific information is given regarding the legal framework operating in Montenegro.

As regards the effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic regarding workers and the most eminent changes in the businesses the countries representatives report the following, in a very summarised form:

- Germany: Staff councils and works councils made it their task to ensure the participation of employee representatives through the crisis. Many German companies have no interest representation, so that the co-determination of the employees is not guaranteed.
- Italy: The problem of having no legislative regulation was sensibly felt during the Covid-19 Pandemic, in which information and consultation were necessary tools for the management of the crisis and for the remote coordination of production realities, as well as for a more effective general alignment to the prevention measures for the spread of the contagion.
- Montenegro: The pandemic has further weakened the performance of Montenegrin industry, so when we compare 2019 and 2020, a decline of 3% to 34% was recorded in eight industries, with a decline of 9.7% in the metal industry.
- Poland: According to the data revealed by POHID, an organisation which brings together major retail chains in Poland, the member chains selling industrial goods noted the loss of 3 billion PLN as a result of the first Covid-19 Pandemic wave. Large non-food stores were locked down for 16 weeks. In the POHID member companies, which employ over 200,000 people, there were no noticeable layoffs, as the priority has been to keep full staffing in order to be able to serve the customers in the changing situation. However some workers – Ukrainian migrants – returned home to their families (even though the Act on special solutions... provided for extending the validity of all types of work permits for foreigners in Poland during the Covid-19 Pandemic).
- Portugal: The companies that benefited from the support measures adopted by the Government were the ones in a more unfavourable situation, having these measures played a very important role in safeguarding their financial sustainability and preserving employment.
- Serbia: Regulations were not applied. The covid crisis had an unfavorable impact on the economic position of workers in Serbia. It has intensified and deepened inequalities and poverty in society, endangered the physical and mental health of the nation. In many cases, the risk of injury at work is not regulated, the compensation for sick leave in case of infection was not 100% but 65% as ordinary sick leave, thus the recommendations of the Government of the Republic of Serbia were not respected. The number of informally employed people who worked without an employment contract has increased.

- Spain: As on end of August 2021, 272.190 people were protected by the ERTE in Spain, being this the lowest level since the start of the Covid-19 Pandemic. The ERTes designed to support companies and keep employment, managed to protect more than 3.6 million workers at their highest point in 2020. The ERTes became a real social shield for the employment in Spain during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Below some more detailed information on the countries' context such as in the National Reports.

GERMANY

According to the Hans Böckler Foundation (2021), the work of company interest groups in the company has an overall positive effect on coping with the Corona crisis. In order to cope with the Covid-19 Pandemic, some employers introduced further company regulations, whereby existing company agreements were adapted to protect the interests of the employees. The regulations relate to hygiene measures in order to maintain sales, working from home, offers for childcare when schools and daycare are closed, the design of short-time work, changes to the working time frame and working time accounts (Hans-Böckler-Stiftung 2010).

ITALY

In the Italian legal system, information and consultation procedures are not specifically regulated by law but substantially left to collective bargaining, which has the task of intervening to regulate these aspects relating to the relationship between employees and the company.

MONTENEGRO

The impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on a global level was particularly pronounced in economic activities related to travel, ie tourism, which in Montenegro generates a fifth of GDP. This caused it to fall by 15.2%, according to quarterly estimates by the Statistical Office of Montenegro. According to MONSTAT quarterly estimates, in 2020 a negative real GDP growth rate of -15.2% was recorded, which was a direct effect of measures to combat the Covid-19 Pandemic, both nationally and internationally.

POLAND

The key measures introduced under the shield (in the Act on special solutions related to preventing, counteracting and combating COVID-19, other infectious diseases and crisis situations caused by them and related directly to job preservation and work organization were: -subsidized employment (co-financing salaries of employees subject to economic downtime or reduced working hours) available to companies that experienced at least 30% decrease in economic turnover); -increased flexibility of working time (permitted at companies that experienced a decrease in economic turnover as a result of COVID-19 and did not have overdue payments of taxes and contributions by the end of the third quarter of 2019). -right to shorten the daily time of uninterrupted rest for an employee from the binding 11 hours to 8 (with a guarantee of giving the employee an equivalent rest within 8 weeks), and the weekly time of such rest – from 35 to 32 hours; and -right to, conclude agreements with trade unions or employee representatives where there are no such organisations on the introduction of an equivalent working time system, in which it is possible to extend the daily working time to a maximum of 12 hours (in a reference period not exceeding 12 months), while the extended daily working time is balanced by a shorter daily working time on certain days or by days off; on the application of less favorable employment conditions for employees than those resulting from employment contracts concluded with those employees, within the scope and for the period of time specified in the agreement.

PORTUGAL

DGERT (General Directorate Of Administration And Public Employment) concluded that the companies that benefited from the support measures adopted by the Government were the ones in a more unfavourable situation, having these measures played a very important role in safeguarding their financial sustainability and preserving employment.

The General Directorate of Health, in Portugal, released a guide of good practices and how to monitor the mental health risks to which the workers are subject, knowing that these risks were enhanced by teleworking as consequence of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

SERBIA

Before and after the declaration of the state of emergency, the Government of the Republic of Serbia adopted measures in response to the Covid-19 Pandemic. Regulations adopted during the state of emergency of special importance for labor law and employees: Decree on measures during a state of emergency, Decree on organizing the work of employers during a state of emergency, Decree on organizing social protection for the provision of home accommodation services during a state of emergency, Decree on supplementing the basic salary of employees in health care institutions and certain employees areas of health, protection of public health, treatment and prevention of the spread of the epidemic of disease COVID-19, Decree on the procedure for obtaining consent for new employment with users of public funds, Decree on fiscal benefits and direct benefits to businesses in the private sector and financial assistance to citizens consequences of the Covid-19 Pandemic, Conclusion on compliance with the continuation of work of employers in the field of construction, trade and green markets with the application of epidemiological measures, Conclusion recommending employers to allow employees who have a work obligation during a state of emergency and annual leave for 2019. As of December 31, 2020, the Conclusion on the recommendation to employers regarding the provision of the right to salary compensation in the amount of 100% of the salary base for employees who are temporarily absent from work due to confirmed COVID-19 disease or due to isolation and self-isolation measures related to the disease, Conclusion on suspension of work with parties through direct contact, Recommendation for organizing work in public administrations and state institutions issued by the Minister of State Administration and Local Self-Government, Recommendation sent to social protection institutions for accommodation of beneficiaries.

SPAIN

Firstly, the Royal Decree-Law 8/2020 of 17 March on urgent extraordinary measures to face the economic and social impact of COVID-19 determined the reduction of working hours for economic, technical, organizational and productive reasons whilst maintained intact the rights of consultation and negotiation. The deadlines for consultation were shortened to 7 days. All the suspensions of contracts and reductions in working that were caused by COVID-19 were considered as a result of force majeure, to be firstly communicated to the workers and to the workers' representatives. The union and employer representation activities were allowed to be carried out whilst the mobility restrictions. There was an active involvement of social partners in policymaking during the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Temporary Employment Regulation File (ERTE, for its abbreviation in Spanish) is a temporary suspension of contracts regulated by article 47 of the Workers' Statute that is put in place during the Covid-19 Pandemic and considered a force majeure, such as verified by the labour authority. No consultation period is necessary. The employees affected by an ERTE return to work once the stipulated time period expires. The employers continue to pay 100% of the Social Security contributions workers (with reductions in attention to the size of the companies), but they do not pay compensation to the employees. The employers are exempt from their obligation to pay the salary, since the workers begin to receive the unemployment benefit (for an amount of 70% of their gross salary).

A Comparative Analysis on Employees' Opinion

With the objective to have the employee's opinion the project launched an online survey that was filled on average by 50 trade and commerce employees in each of the seven participating countries. In some countries like Spain the number of employees doubled to 100. This target objective was of both genders and age groups, being the above 34 the most represented. Most of the respondents were male in the case of Germany, Italy, Serbia and Spain and female in the case of Montenegro, Poland and Portugal. Their professions and positions in the company varied from basic to medium or highly educated staff. The activity is very diverse among the respondents in the countries, being it: trade and services, transport and logistics, health mostly (case of Portugal) and hostelry. The companies they work are diverse in the countries. Poland has opted to conduct the study with the Auchan workers.

The employees were asked about the fact of having been informed, consulted and participated in the decision making about changes in their company during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The questions were asked separately regarding the information, consultation and participation in the decision making respectively.

As regards to the information that the workers received, directly or through the trade unions, there exists a common trend among the 7 countries where most of the workers have rated high the fact of being informed by their employers.

They feel their employer has given them good information. (Germany)

The majority of workers replied by stating that they consider themselves sufficiently informed and, among these, ten workers showed a high level of information. (Italy)

According to the answers, the respondents were significantly informed about the mentioned processes of change, directly or through a trade union organization. (Montenegro)

Most respondents reported that the workers were well informed and consulted in the company during the Covid-19 Pandemic (only 12 respondents declared weak information process and 16 respondents declared weak consultation process). (Poland)

9 people were not informed at all about the changes in their company due the Covid-19 Pandemic, only 3 considered they were well informed during this time, 22 participants consider they were informed but poorly and 23 assume they were being satisfactorily informed. (Portugal)

On a scale from 0 to 10, the largest number of respondents, 45 of them, gave an answer from 5 to 10, other respondents 11 of them, gave an answer from 0 to 4. Based on this, it can be concluded that employees were initially sufficiently informed about changes caused by a Covid-19 Pandemic. (Serbia)

A vast majority of the respondents agree that they were informed very well (85 of them scored 6-10 and only 15 scored 0-5) by their employers regarding the changes in the company during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The trend is similar in both female, male and the three age categories. (Spain)

As regards to the consultation process (directly or through the trade unions) the employers and employees had to introduce changes in the company during the Covid-19 Pandemic, the employees seem to declare they have been less involved than in the information, but yet, they seem to be moderately satisfied-to-well satisfied with the consultation process the employer has put in place. There is a general trend in all the countries, except for Serbia, where most of the respondents express they were not consulted sufficiently or satisfactorily.

The employees answered question 2 as follows: 20 of them rated 0-3, i.e.: they were “not to hardly” asked about changes. 19 of them voted with the values 5-7, i.e.: they were heard moderately and 8 of the respondents felt they were well consulted about the hearing (8-10 points) by the employer. (Germany)

On the other hand, the percentage of positive responses regarding the degree of consultation in relation to the changes that occurred in the company during the Covid-19 Pandemic was different. Regarding this aspect, the answers were heterogeneous: ten workers consider themselves to be poorly consulted (some note that they have not been consulted at all), sixteen workers say they have been consulted on average, while twelve workers have shown that the consultation by the company has had a high degree. (Italy)

According to the respondents, and when it comes to the process of introducing and implementing changes within companies, a significant number of them said that they were relatively much involved in the process, through consulting activities. Exactly 80% of respondents rated this process with a score of 5 or higher, which confirms the previous conclusion that employees in companies are satisfied with the way they were consulted, but also informed when it comes to the process of implementing changes and their communication during Covid-19 Pandemic COVID19. (Montenegro)

On the second question the graphic points out a big part of the respondents, 20 of them, were not consulted about the changes at all and 26 people were consulted, but not very often. Only a few, 11 from the total sample, state they were more frequently consulted. One person did not answer the question. (Portugal)

The largest number of respondents answered on a scale from 0 to 4, 48 of them, / and only 8 respondents answered on a scale from 5 to 10, which means that employees in lower positions were not consulted when introducing changes in the company. (Serbia)

As regards to the consultation this trend changes slightly, but still remains positive (74 of them scored 6-10 and 26 scored 0-5) with no triggers in either gender or age. (Spain)

The employees were asked about their participation to the decision making (directly or through your trade unions) when changes were introduced in their company during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The trend continues to decrease in this regards from the information to consultation and lastly to the decision making. Nevertheless, the responses across the seven countries show that the majority employees were not involved in the decision making process, except for Spain, where most of the employees (67%) respond positively to having been involved in the decision making process.

The majority of workers replied that they were not involved in decision-making processes, while a small part (about six workers) said the opposite. (Italy)

The decision-making process on introducing changes in the company does not have such a positive experience, with slightly less than half of the respondents (48%) leaving room for dilemma. Namely, all 48% of respondents rated this process with a score from 0 to 3, which is a really worrying result. However, a small majority of respondents rated this process with a score of 5 or higher, with 14% of them saying they were very satisfied with their participation in the decision-making process when introducing changes during the Covid-19 Pandemic. (Montenegro)

While the opportunity to take part in the decision making process was assessed slightly worse – average score was close to the middle of the scale, 18 respondents assessed this aspect negatively. (Poland)

To the third question [on decision making] more than half of the 58 people in the total sample claimed not to have participated at all, 24 respondents say they have participated a little, but not much and only 4 people state they were somehow or frequently participative. (Portugal)

The largest number of respondents, 53 of them, answered this question on a scale from 0 to 4, it is noticeable that the answer 0 was given by as many as 32 respondents, and only 4 respondents gave the answer from 5 to 10. This shows that employees did not have the opportunity to participate in decision-making during the Covid-19 Pandemic. (Serbia)

The third stage of employer-employee relations is that of participation in decision making. Here the trend keeps balancing on the positive side, but with less recurrence than in the information and consultation. 62 respondents have scored 6-10 and 37 have scored 0-5 with no changes in either gender or age. It is remarkable to see more 0 votes, i.e.: no participation whatsoever whilst the employer introduced the changes. (Spain)

As regards to the atmosphere in which the changes were introduced most of the employees responded that it was difficult in the case of Italy, and on the contrary, it was neutral/serene in the case of Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Serbia and Spain.

As regards the atmosphere in the company following the changes adopted, the majority of respondents (about 20) replied that the climate was difficult (Italy)

According to the respondents, the atmosphere during the introduction of changes in the business of companies during the Covid-19 Pandemic can be classified as relatively satisfactory, i.e.: quite relaxed, so we have a situation where 20% of them rated the atmosphere as 5. Only 2% of respondents gave the lowest grade, while 8% were very satisfied.

The atmosphere in which the changes related to introducing sanitary restrictions during the Covid-19 Pandemic were assessed in a rather positive way (only 7 negative responses), as well as the general assessment of the change is also positive (only 6 negative responses). The significant majority of the respondents declared acquaintance with their I&C rights, but there were as many as 12 respondents that did not answer this question. (Poland)

On the question four [atmosphere on introducing the changes], about the atmosphere where the changes were introduced, one person did not answer, 25 people said it was frustrative or generally frustrative, 21 people considered it average, neither very bad or very good and the other 11 stated the atmosphere was close to calm and serene. (Portugal)

On a scale of 5 to 7, the answer was given by only 5 respondents, the rest answered from 0 to 4, which indicates a very bad atmosphere among employees when introducing changes. (Serbia)

As regards the atmosphere where the changes were introduced this is seen as frustrating for 35 of the respondents, and easy-going for 64 of them with no changes in either gender or age. (Spain)

The questionnaire asked for the opinion of the workers regarding the organisational changes made in their company during the Covid-19 Pandemic, and the answers demonstrate that mainly the implementation of changes was carried out in a positive way such as in the case of Montenegro and Spain, and in a relatively unsatisfactory manner, such as in the case of Portugal and Serbia.

The process of implementing changes in companies was carried out in accordance with the interests of respondents, and according to the answers received, more than 70% of them rated this process with a score of 5 or more, which can be considered a relatively satisfactory result. Only 10% of respondents rated this process as rather poor, giving it scores ranging from 0 to 2, which unequivocally confirms that such activities were in a relatively satisfactory way in line with the interests of members of organizations. (Montenegro)

The fifth question had 57 answer, more than 31 people rated from up to 3, which means they believe the changes were made without regarding the interest of the employees and only 9 people rated above 7. (Portugal)

The largest number of respondents, 45 of them, answered on a scale from 0 to 4, the answer of 9 and 10 was not given by any respondent, which shows that there is great dissatisfaction with the organizational changes in the company. (Serbia)

When asked about how they consider the organisational changes of their company, a vast majority answers that these were done in harmony with their interests (70 score 6-10 and only 28 score 0-5) with some reticence from men when compared to women and of the age range of 35-54. (Spain)

Based on the projects objective to understand a valorisation of their own attitude of the employees during the structural changes of the company during the Covid-19 Pandemic, the survey asked the employees about their own attitude, which was considered as active and participatory in majority, such as in the case of Italy, Portugal and Spain.

The attitude towards these changes on the part of the workers was classified as on average active and participatory, while only four workers showed an indifferent attitude. (Italy)

They [the respondents] were active. Close to 70% of respondents gave this process a grade of 5 or more, of which every third respondent rated this process with the highest grades between 8 and 10. (Montenegro)

Regarding the attitude of the employees, reveals the majority was frequently active, 5 people rated 10, so they were always active and 17 people from the sample rated 4 or below, considering themselves more passive. (Portugal)

As regards to their own attitude towards the changes, a decided majority considers it active (87 respondents score 6-10, and only 12 score 0-5) with no variation of gender or age. (Spain)

Regarding the awareness on legal rights the workers on information and consultation with the company including in times of crisis such as the Covid-19 Pandemic, the data from the survey shows that the majority of the workers are aware of these rights in Germany, Italy, Montenegro and Spain; but it is not the case of Portugal and Serbia where most of the respondents say they are not aware of their legal rights.

The employees answered question 7 as follows: 1 in 50 abstained as to whether he was aware of his rights to be heard and informed. 15 respondents answered the question with no and the majority, i.e. 34 participants, say that they are aware of their rights. (Germany)

More than 75% gave an affirmative answer, proving that they were informed about their sphere of information and consultation rights; on the contrary, 25% replied to the contrary. (Italy)

The legal procedure and rights that require members of the organization to have the right to information and consultation with the company in times of crisis such as a Covid-19 Pandemic, was respected in most cases, and according to respondents, 2 out of 3 respondents were aware of their rights to information and consultation. On the other hand, 1/3 of the respondents answered negatively to this question, indicating that they were not aware of the rights to information and consultation. (Montenegro)

The question seven revealed that most people, 57% of the respondents, is not aware of their legal rights to obtain information and consult the company and a minority of 43% of the sample is aware. (Portugal)

A large number of respondents, 45 of them answered negatively, positively answered them 11. Which means that employees are very little aware of their rights to information during the crisis. (Serbia)

Most of the employees have been aware of their legal rights for information and consultation during the Covid-19 Pandemic (88 answering positively and 12 answering negatively). Women seem to be more aware of these rights in comparison to men. (Spain)

As regards the fact if the employees were offered choice or alternatives regarding the organisational changes introduced in the companies during the Covid-19 Pandemic, it seems exist a difference between Montenegro and Poland where the majority have voted positively, and Portugal and Serbia, where the majority of answers have been negative.

When introducing changes in the organization, space is created for the creation of certain choices or alternatives, which can be offered to members of the organization. According to the answers of the respondents, this possibility was relatively common during the Covid-19 Pandemic, so we have a situation that 60% of respondents rated this possibility with a score of 5 or more, and even 20% with a score of 9 and 10. (Montenegro)

Almost all (48 out of 54) respondents declared that they were offered choice or alternatives regarding the organisational changes introduced during the Covid-19 Pandemic, but only 18 respondents said that they were asked to present ideas and give opinions on the organisational changes. (Poland)

The eight question made it clear that in general people were not offered with options, as 22 rated 0, so no choice at all, and only 2 rated 9 and 10. After 0, the most chosen level was 3 by 13 people. (Poland)

A very large number of respondents gave an answer 0 of them 18, and a total of 0 to 4, the answer was given by 52 respondents, only 4 gave an answer from 5 to 9. Employees had no choice or alternative by introducing organizational changes in the companies. (Serbia)

Nearly half of the respondents was not offered the possibility to choose on the organisational changes introduced in their company during the Covid-19 Pandemic. (46 score 0-5 and 54 score 6-10) No variation is noticed in gender or age. (Spain)

As a continuation, the workers were questioned to what extent they were asked to present ideas and give opinions on the organisational challenges introduced in the companies during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Here the replies seem to be unsatisfactory across the European countries participating in this project.

The employees answered as follows to question 9: 26 of them gave a 0-3 rating, i.e.: they were "not to hardly" asked to present their opinion. 13 of them voted with the values 5-7, i.e.: they were included moderately and 5 of the respondents felt that they were included well to very well (8-10 points) by the employer. (Germany)

The majority (about twenty-two workers) gave evidence that they had not been solicited by the employer to provide their own contribution in terms of ideas and projects on the changes to be made at the company level during the Covid-19 Pandemic period. (Italy)

The question 9 left no doubts, 24 people rated 0, which means they were never asked to give their opinion on organizational challenges. Only 5 people consider they were asked often. (Montenegro)

Out of 56 respondents, 31 gave the answer 0, the answer 1 gave 7, and the answer 3 was given by 15 respondents, only 3 respondents gave the answer from 5 to 10. Definitely, employees did not have the opportunity to give their views and ideas regarding the organization of work during the Covid-19 Pandemic. (Serbia)

A majority of respondents were never or little asked to present ideas regarding organisational changes in their company (54 scoring 0-5 and 44 scoring 6-10) with no variation in gender or age. (Spain)

As regards their opinion on how had the gender affected in the working conditions that they were offered as a consequence of the organisational changes introduced in the companies during the Covid-19 Pandemic, the most respondents in Italy say that gender have had an impact, whilst in the case of Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Serbia and Spain it has had no impact.

The answers have been varied and heterogeneous. About thirteen respondents represented the absence of such incidence with regard to the changes dictated by the Covid-19 Pandemic; fourteen workers felt that gender had an average impact; eleven workers, on the other hand, spoke of a strong and decisive impact. (Italy)

Only 4% of respondents are of the opinion that their gender has affected the working conditions offered as a result of organizational changes introduced in the company during the Covid-19 Pandemic. (Montenegro)

Vast majority of the respondents declared no impact of gender dimension in the process organizational change. Only 12 respondents pointed out some significance of this factor – equally men (6 resp.) and woman (6 resp.). (Poland)

The majority 36 people didn't feel that their gender affected them in the offered working conditions. However, between the 4 people who stated they felt affected, 3 are female and 1 is male. (Portugal)

Gender did not matter much when it came to organizational changes in the companies of this sector. (Serbia)

Gender has not affected the respondents in the working conditions offered as a consequence of the organisational changes (Spain)

In spite of the fact that working from home was common around the world, for the respondents of trade and services sector this opportunity was not given to all the workers, due to the nature of their work. For example, most of the employees in Italy, Poland, Portugal, and Spain did not have the opportunity to work from home. On the contrary, in Montenegro and Serbia workers could carry out their job activity from their homes.

Regarding forms of remote or agile work, workers were asked if they had been able to work from home during the Covid-19 Pandemic; 63% gave a negative answer, highlighting a low propensity on the part of the company to organize remote work, while about 37% answered yes. (Italy)

The results of the research show that more than $\frac{3}{4}$ respondents had the opportunity to do their business activities from home. Less than $\frac{1}{4}$ respondents did not have the opportunity to work from home, which is very likely to be related to the nature of work, i.e.: the activity to which these companies belong. (Montenegro)

Due to the fact that 52 out of 54 respondents were trade hall workers, their job could not be moved to home, which is reflected in the answers: 48 workers worked on site during the Covid-19 Pandemic, only one person could work from home (office worker), while 5 other respondents did not give an answer to this question. (Poland)

Only 24% of the sample was able to work from home and the remaining 76% always had to work presential. (Portugal)

The answer YES to this question was given by 56 respondents, while only 2 answered NO. Since these are employees in retail chains in operational positions, working from home was not a possible option, except for administrative positions in offices. (Serbia)

Nearly half of the employees answer that they had the chance to work from home (52 of them did not have the opportunity, and 47 of them yes) with women having missed the chance of telework more than men. (Spain)

From those respondents who had the chance to work from home, there exists an ease and satisfaction in the organisation of their work at home on such same conditions as in their regular workplace.

The majority (about ten workers) of those who answered gave evidence of an easy approach to this way of working and the absence of particular impediments. (Italy)

Of the respondents who had the opportunity to do their job "from home", most of them had no problems with the organization, so we have that close to 80% of them assessed this process as relatively easy for the organization, with as many as 52% the highest grade is from 9 to 10, when it comes to the degree of ease of adapting to new working conditions. (Montenegro)

In general, they reveal it was easy to manage good work conditions at home, only 3 people rated 3. (Portugal)

A vast majority of who worked from home found it easy (38 scoring 6-10 and 11 scoring 0-5) with no variation in gender or age. (Spain)

As regards the support received from the company to adapt to the new working conditions caused by the Covid-19 Pandemic, most of the workers in Italy, Montenegro, Poland and Spain seem to have received support, whilst most of the employees in Portugal and Serbia declare to have received no support.

About twelve workers stated that they received little or no support; about seventeen provided placed in a mid-range, claiming to have received mid-range support; while ten workers highlighted relevant and adequate company support during the Covid-19 Pandemic. (Italy)

Slightly more than 1/5 of the respondents (21%) did not have the open support of their company in the process of getting used to the new business conditions. (Montenegro)

The workers participating in the survey assessed in a positive way the support received from the company during the Covid-19 Pandemic (only 6 negative assessments). (Poland)

Most respondents point out lack of support from the company, 18 people rated 0, which means no support at all, 17 rated between 1 and 3, indicating weak support and only 4 people consider there was a very good support. (Portugal)

The largest number of respondents gave a grade of 2, 15 of them, a grade of 3 of them 14 / a grade higher than 5, gave only 10 respondents. In this case, it can be concluded that the support of the company and management was lacking, employees were generally required to perform work tasks according to the already defined position by managers. (Serbia)

A majority of the respondents indicate that they received support to adapt to the new working conditions (69 scored 6-10 and 29 scored 0-5) with no variation on gender or age. (Spain)

In spite of the uncertain times during the Covid-19 Pandemic most of the workers in Italy, Montenegro, Poland and Spain felt safe to develop their activity after the introduction of changes in their companies, on the contrary to the workers in Serbia. The answers of Portugal were quite heterogeneous with no indicative pattern.

The answers were heterogeneous. Eleven workers showed that they experienced an extremely low level of safety tending to zero; thirteen workers reported a low to medium level of safety, while fourteen workers said they felt quite safe from a health point of view. Note that none of the respondents stated that they felt absolutely safe performing the performance during the Covid-19 Pandemic period. (Italy)

More than ¾ respondents rated their position on health in the new business conditions as relatively safe, giving ratings from 5 to 10, of which 20% rated the business conditions on health as Very Safe. Slightly more than 1/5 of the respondents rated working conditions as unsafe, when it comes to health after the introduction of innovations in organizations, giving them a rating ranging from 0 to 4. (Montenegro)

The respondents declared feeling safe in terms of health after introducing the sanitary regime (only 4 negative assessments). (Poland)

14 people rated 0 and 1, meaning they didn't feel safe and 12 people rated 9 and 10, meaning they felt very safe and the most common rating was 5, so 10 people felt neither totally safe nor at high risk. (Portugal)

Most respondents responded on a scale of 0 to 4, 49 of them, indicating a high risk of infecting employees in the trade and services sector during a Covid-19 Pandemic. (Serbia)

When asked about the health safety after having introduced the organisational changes caused by the Covid-19 Pandemic, a vast majority have responded positively – feeling safe (74 scored 6-10 and 25 scored 0-5) with no variation on age or gender. (Spain)

In the hypothetical case of another crisis similar to the pandemic the employees see as important is for them to receive from the company information, consultation, participation in the decision making, as well as they consider that their attitude is key to participating especially in the case of the Polish respondents.

The employees answered question 15 as follows: 3 of them gave a rating of 0-3, i.e.: they would hardly want to be taught should another Covid-19 Pandemic-like crisis occur. 15 of them voted with the values 5-7, i.e.: they would like to receive moderate instruction from the employer and the majority of the respondents (30) would like very strong involvement (8-10 points) and instruction from the employer. (Germany)

Most workers consider information a central element; in fact, over eighteen workers frame this aspect as absolutely necessary, while about eight workers as on average important. It should be noted that none of the interviewees replied that employee information is of little importance or, in an absolute sense, unnecessary; – consultation: with regard to consultation, the employees highlighted how to a large extent they also consider this aspect to be important in the context of crisis situations. In fact, over 80% replied considering the consultation as a central element. Only one worker pointed out that this element is not considered important; – participation in the decision-making process: also with regard to participation in the decision-making process there are similar percentages: twenty-one workers place this aspect among the fundamental ones with reference to the phases of corporate crisis, while fourteen workers report that participation is an element that is on average important. Two workers, on the other hand, consider it scarcely relevant; – attitude towards participation: workers gave homogeneous answers. Twenty-six respondents stated that this aspect is absolutely relevant. Ten workers, on the other hand, show that this element is on average important. (Italy)

In the case of new developments and the emergence of a "new" crisis similar to the existing Covid-19 Pandemic, respondents are of the primary opinion that it is important that the company first of all provide adequate information, which is the position of every other respondent. When it comes to consulting activities, slightly more than 45% of respondents believe that this is an important and necessary activity in order to implement the process of introducing innovations and changes in business organization adequately and efficiently. Participation in decision-making and respect for individual attitudes / opinions of individuals are activities that need to be implemented in more than 1/3 of respondents, in case a new crisis, similar to this, initiates processes of change in the organization of work and business within organizations / companies. (Montenegro)

The personal attitude is the most important factor (only 4 persons declared that this is not an important factor). The respondents expected mostly information from the company (11 persons reported small importance of this dimension). Meanwhile taking part in consultation and

participation in the decision-making process had a moderate significance to the respondents. However, it is to be highlighted that the answers to the latter two questions are polarised: as many workers would want more involvement in consultation and taking part in the decision-making process as those not interested in this. (Poland)

Information, consultation, participation and attitude are considered highly important, being rated with 10 by 33, 24, 22 and 20 people, respectively. (Portugal)

When it comes to information, consultation and participation in decision-making, the majority of respondents, 90% of them gave an answer on a scale of 5 to 10, which shows that employees want greater involvement in decision-making, giving suggestions and suggestions. (Serbia)

Receiving information seems to be the most important aspect for the respondents (98 scored 7-10 – table 15) followed by consultation (91 scored 6-10 – table 16) and participation in decision making (84 scored 6-10 – table 17). Again a vast majority would be involved with a proactive attitude in case of a hypothetical crisis. (95 scored 6-10 – table 18). (Spain)

When asked which mechanism of information and consultation would they prefer in the hypothetical case of another crisis similar to the Covid-19 Pandemic, the replies were diverse. Regarding information, the majority of the Italians and Portuguese would like it written, the Montenegrins, Polish and Spanish would prefer it orally through digital means,

Regarding consultation the Italians have no highlighted opinion of a majority, the Montenegrins and Polish would prefer it in person at the company's premises, whilst the Spanish would prefer it digitally.

With regard to information, over 60% would like written information by email or letter, over 26% orally by telephone or other digital tool, while over 10% would prefer oral information in person. Regarding the consultation procedures, 43% said they preferred the meeting in person (with the provision of adequate security measures), 29% through meetings in company places, while 27% through remote meetings or via telephone. (Italy)

Respondents are of the primary opinion that the information mechanism should be targeted at oral, telephone or some other digital form of communication, which is the view of 40% of respondents. 1/3 of the respondents are of the opinion that this mechanism should be in written form, while slightly less than ¼ respondents prefer oral, i.e.: personal communication. The consultation mechanism, 60% of respondents believe that it should be realized in person, through meetings at the company's premises. On the other hand, 14% of respondents would like these meetings and the consultation process to take place in another "safer" place, while they believe that the best model for consultation is meetings with digital and audio tools. (Montenegro)

Most of the workers would prefer to be informed orally in person (44 respondents) and only 7 respondents preferred written form, and 3 respondents via phone or a digital tool. While most

respondents preferred the consultation processes in the form of physical meetings at the company's office (25 respondents) or in any other safe place (23 respondents). Only 6 respondents preferred remote meetings using digital tools. (Poland)

People showed their will of being informed by letter or email (60%) and of being consulted by video-calls (48%) or in presential meetings at the office (26%) or at a secure location (26%). (Portugal)

The majority of respondents, 37 of them, answered that they wanted information in writing or by e-mail, and most respondents also wanted to be consulted at meetings in the company's office. (Serbia)

The employees prefer to receive the information orally through digital means/ phone (47 respondents), followed by in a written form (32), and orally in person (21) with no variation in gender or age. They prefer to be consulted digitally (respondents 55), in physical safe places (35) and lastly in their office (10). (Spain)

And finally the workers were asked in the hypothetical case what would they change in the future in relation to information and consultation regarding organisational changes in your company. This was an open ended question.

As regards to Portugal "talking with the employees, trying to get them involved in the process and to understand their needs, making sure they are taken in consideration in the implemented changes" was highlighted.

In the case of Serbia "as critical points and thus suggestions for improvement, employees mentioned the lack of protective equipment during the Covid-19 Pandemic, insufficient care for employees, poor organization of transportation for employees during curfew when public transport did not function at full capacity, more detailed analysis of the situation that will affect to make better decisions when it comes to the organization of the process, there was no incentive in financial terms for employees on the first line when it comes to supplying the population."

And finally, in the case of Spain "some of the most frequent ones are: rapidity of the processes, the consultation of all the personnel not only a selected one, the implementation of measures such as planned, more transparency, better coordination, more detailed information, etc."

A Comparative Analysis of the Employers' Opinion

These research results gather information from employers in the seven countries participating in the project in the trade and services sector regarding how they involved their employees in the organisation changes introduced in their companies during the Covid-19 pandemic. Methodologically, the interviews were semi-structured, held in the mother tongue of the countries, done either physically, on the phone or through digital means during the autumn of 2021.

Three-to-five interviews¹ were carried out in each country, such as mentioned in the National Reports in the Annex, except for Montenegro and Poland that do not mention any specific information on the number of the interviewees. The employers were representatives of the trade and services sector of a variety of activities, such as advertising and social relations, care consulting, education and training, engineering, hospitality and hotels, industrial operations, retail and transport. The post of the interviewees is either directive, HR staff or owners of the companies that are mostly SMEs. Responsible people from mid-cap and large companies have been interviewed, too.

Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic in the companies

The Covid-19 Pandemic has affected all of the companies in Europe, but due to their different nature, the consequences have been different. Below are given some of the most highlighted effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic such as noted by the personnel interviewed in the seven countries.

Unfortunately, the research shows that some companies have had to reduce their staff, such as in has happened in Spain, Italy and Serbia.

At the beginning our activity was completely paralysed and the workers went to ERTE6. We reopened as soon as we were allowed but, but the sales have fallen nearly 40%, therefore we had to let two people off. We were five before the Covid-19 Pandemic. (Manager, clothes store, Spain)

- *During the lockdown we resorted to layoffs. (Employer 3, Italy)*
- *For employees who had a fixed-term contract [a contract with an end], the contract was not extended. (Serbia)*

1. Four in Germany, three in Italy, five in Portugal, six in Serbia and five in Spain.

Another unfortunate consequence has been the loss of the company's activity during the period, such as in Spain, Italy, Portugal and Serbia.

Orders were reduced, contracts were paralyzed, deliveries of works were delayed, thus also billing. (Director, engineering SME, Spain)

- *We had to suspend the activity for a period of a few months and subsequently, despite having resumed, we had the need to review certain processes for carrying out the work. (Employer 2, Italy)*
- *Most of the interviewees stated that they had a reduction on the invoice, as there was a closure of presential services, and they could only work online and some of them had to stop the activity because the type of business didn't allow them to continue to work online. (Portugal)*
- *As far as business is concerned, a number of employers complain about the oscillating impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic during closure, in another case the turnover was above expectations. (Serbia)*

In general, work was made more difficult during the Covid-19 Pandemic, explicitly cited by the German representative.

The supply of protective equipment for employees (protective gloves and hygiene supplies) was not always guaranteed across the board during the Covid-19 Pandemic. This hindered the guarantee of occupational health and safety for employees. In the catering sector, most of the restaurants remained closed during the lockdown, which led to high sales losses for the restaurant operators. (Germany)

On the opposite, there have been employers who have stated that the Covid-19 Pandemic has shifted the activity towards the positive side, like two employers indicate.

The Covid-19 Pandemic positively affected the business, since most of the training actions we provide are online and the demand for them increased notably. (HR director, training consultancy, Spain) It [the Covid-19 Pandemic] entailed a notable increase in workload, an adaptation in record time to teleworking, an adaptation to a new way of working, with a more "horizontal" work configuration to achieve the necessary agility in decision-making and execution. (Representative of HR department, consulting company, Spain)

Another evident change has been the recognition on the use of digital tools, and more specifically teleworking, in the working process. This is noted from the services and trade sector companies, and it is mentioned in all the countries' interviews, although in different sections of the dialogue.

In terms of HR management the Covid-19 Pandemic has brought about great changes, especially related to digitization. The most decisive change has been the introduction of teleworking. (Business director, training consulting company) Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic we have accelerated the digitalisation process, and that is what is allowing us to stay in the market. (Manager, clothes store, Spain)

Another employer affirmed that this time was good to empower the digital platforms. (Portugal)

And finally, a recognised change has been that of the need for restructuring the company.

- *On a positive side one employer saw the Covid-19 Pandemic crises as an opportunity to rethink its business and its structure while being closed, something he couldn't have done if it was continuously actively working. (Portugal)*

Process of involving the employees

When asked about the process of involving employees, the employers highlight different mechanisms that were put in place to involve the employees.

Changes in the organisation of the companies have happened and are mentioned in the research carried out in Serbia and Spain.

The people who make up the organization have played a key role in the decision-making and reorganization processes. As already mentioned, it has evolved towards a more horizontal organizational structure, with fewer middle managers and more participation of teams in the development of projects, new work processes, design of new tools, etc., even creating teams multi-departmental if necessary. The improvements come from the people who carry out the activity, since there is the freedom to propose ideas in any forum. (HR director, training and employment consultancy, Spain)

- *Large systems have well-developed and organized HR sectors that provide great support to employees during the crisis. It was necessary to introduce a new plan and work schedule, simplify many tasks, introduce rapid automation of some business segments. (Serbia)*

The digital tools rank high among the mechanism used to involve the employees and keep the work going around the countries.

- *The employers have introduced online platforms (e.g. Microsoft Teams) for this purpose. Virtual coffee breaks and team meetings were offered on team channels. (Germany)*

- *Some employers also provided tele-assistance where specific advice from doctors could be obtained, they also provided a lot of written materials, manuals, work instructions, in which case the managers were available and provided direct support. (Poland)*
- *Through the devices connected to the Internet. Virtual meetings and work at home. (Representative of the HR department, consulting company for leadership, Spain)*

The training and reskilling of staff was another mechanism used during the period.

- *Due to the shortage of staff, the existing staff was trained and further qualified for further areas. Thus, they could also be used in new areas. This measure was also perceived and supported positively by the employees. (Germany)*

Regular information and update on the Covid-19 Pandemic and the current state of the company was used to inform the workers:

- *To preserve the group feeling of the workforce and to ensure transparency of the management's measures in the Covid-19 Pandemic. One employer also reported that she informed her employees about new regulations and the general situation during the Covid-19 Pandemic by email once a week for a whole year (Germany)*
- *We have forwarded news relating to safety measures and informed staff of the precautions to be taken in the workplace. Through our consultants we have given news and information about access to social safety nets (Italy)*
- *Companies can use various types of internal messaging, communication platforms, newsletters, webinars and other means for this purpose; they can organize regular meetings of staff with management, as well as ensure that employees stay in touch, for instance, in small teams, so as to ensure that the connectivity is maintained and the feeling of alienation is prevented. (Poland)*

The flexibility in the working hours was introduced, including the teleworking, such as stated by different countries reports.

- *Employers also acted flexibly and openly with regard to the working time accounts of employees and released them for the corona vaccination during working hours or guaranteed flexible working hours. Employers also responded to daycare and school closings and offered employees home office solutions. (Germany)*
- *The most endangered employees, as far as their health condition is concerned, received paid leave or were enabled to work from home. (Serbia)*

Teams to manage the exceptional situation were created inside the company:

- *Crisis management teams have been formed and clear rules and procedures on behavior in all sectors have been defined. (Serbia)*

A group was created for discussion of situations and resolutions. (Portugal)

Wage changes and holidays were induced during the period.

Wage supplementation and brought about an alignment with regard to security measures. (Italy)

Many facilities were closed, in which case they tried to reorient themselves to online shopping and home delivery of ready meals. This was reflected in jobs, there was a surplus of employees who were sent on collective vacations, and then on paid leave. (Serbia)

And finally, some singular mechanisms were used.

- The “Corona bonuses” with the objective to motivate the employees and the “local work councils” in the education sector that have negotiated the agreement on telework in Germany.
- “The Heros of Everyday Life” organised by Eurocash in Poland is an initiative that praises the people who showed exceptional responsibility in a crisis situation and were involved in helping others.

Employers’ opinion on the attitude of employees

Across the countries under this project the attitude of the employees by the interviewed employers is judged as proactive and positive.

The five employees see the attitude of their employees as “exemplary” (engineering SME director), “very positive” (HR director, store manager). No negative issues or complains were raised as a consequence of the changes either at the beginning or later during the Covid-19 Pandemic. (Spain)

Most of the employees were cooperative and team-oriented. With most employ-ers, they had few options: these were layoffs or short-time work. Nevertheless, the employees were interested and sought to talk to the employers. (Germany)

They [workers] frequently requested information on the processes for sanitizing the company’s premises. ... There was a fair amount of participation from the staff... Employees have been interested in the aspects of work related to the Covid-19 Pandemic. (Italy)

In general, on the employer’s perspective, the employees had a participative attitude during the times of crises, keeping themselves informed about health measures to perform their functions in safety. The employer of a catering and events company stated the employees were eager to cooperate, they presented good ideas and methods that the company ended up adopting due the Covid-19 Pandemic, but that will be remain in the future. Another employer on the restaurants sector said the pandemic translated in and increase of interest for its employees, they started to show a constant will to keep up with the changes and to keep themselves updated on the current issues. (Portugal)

At the beginning, the employees were scared, but over time they got used to the situation and started to participate more actively in the organization of work, giving suggestions for improvement. (Serbia)

Identification of Best Practices

The identified best practices during the interviews had to do mainly with the use of digitalisation and training and reskilling.

Use of digitalisation

If the Covid-19 Pandemic has taught us anything, it is that digitization is essential to stay in the market, both in sales and in the internal management of the company. (Manager, clothes store, Spain)

Communications by email are identified as best practices. (Italy)

The best practices focused on complying with legal requirements, ensuring safety for the employees in their workspace. For those who were working remotely for a certain period, when it was time to go back to the company the method was common to all the interviewees, they have opted for a gradual and alternated come back, reducing the risk of infection. (Poland)

The installations were adapted and prepared to receive the staff in the safest way. The frequent testing and mandatory use of the mask were also measures that helped to prevent mass infections. During the mandatory remote work period, a software company allowed their staff to manage each one workload, so they could adapt their schedule with their own conditions at home. In the particular case of a transportation company one of their good practices was the comprise of keeping the employees constantly updated about international requirements and legislation, as during the Covid-19 Pandemic they still had to work and cross many countries. (Portugal)

As examples of good practice, employers cite an uninterrupted / constantly open channel of two-way communication with employees in all positions. Some of them connected through various applications, which, in addition to forming different communication groups, offer various possibilities for posting news, scheduling online meetings, exchanging materials, reporting, monitoring results. All information is then sent to retail outlets via internal communication channels. In the catering and tourism sector, they tried to save employees and, with the reopening of the facilities, hire those who lost their jobs due to the closure. (Serbia)

Training to all the staff or specific categories.

Specific training in subjects such as equality, telework, COVID, and teamwork carried out to the entire staff of the organization in a transversal manner. Specific training for leaders to face the situation and continue developing their teams. (HR director, training and employment consultancy, Spain)

Some employers have organized accelerated trainings, in order to be able to apply technologies that enable daily contact with all colleagues. (Serbia)

Another best practice identified has been the “shared space” the employees have to discuss issues of concern and reach solutions, the so-called “Athenaeum”:

Every now and then we hold an Athenaeum, it is a meeting where problems, difficulties, ideas are discussed, and opinion and solutions are generated. Meetings do not last more than 1h15min. The method becomes effective after 3-5 meetings. (Director, engineering SME, Spain)

Improvement on the process of employee involvement

Regarding the process of employee involvement in the organisational changes during the Covid-19 Pandemic, the interviewees recognise that they would improve the following:

Offer more and better communication

Keep working on internal and informal communication to eliminate the feeling of isolation and increase participation. (Representative HR department, training and consulting company for leadership) ...More communication, more interaction with them to get their opinion and involve them in the necessary changes. (Manager, clothes store, Spain.)

Transparency: providing the access to all information and data about the Covid-19 Pandemic, aid instruments and their financing. Since the decisions taken are not economically neutral, it is crucial to make sure that the losses generated by the restrictions are not disproportionate to the risks avoided. (Poland)

Offer more space for understanding and predictability

We need to have a better understanding of the values, experiences and wishes of the staff. (HR director, training and employment consultancy, Spain)

Predictability: introducing decisions in a way that allows time for preparation and preventing avoidable losses; development of appropriate scenarios in advance. (Poland)

Build trust

We must overcome the mutual distrust that exists between the company and the workers. (Business director, consultancy for training, Spain)

Social dialogue: decisions should be made in dialogue with social partners (Poland)

Offer more and better training

Offer more training. (Director, engineering SME) ... A lot of pedagogy is required (Business director, consultancy for training, Spain)

Make work more simple

The employers were interested in continuing and securing the work of the employees. However, there is a desire on the part of employers to simplify the work of their employees and to improve home office solutions, for example by investing in new cloud solutions. (Germany)

In the hypothetical case of another crisis...

The employers were asked if in the hypothetical case of another crisis, what would help to better involve employees in the reorganization processes that they could introduce in their company and their business. The respondents answer:

Use of digitalisation

Innovation tasks can be carried out remotely or locally at least in part. For the next one we will be prepared. (Director, engineering SME, Spain)

In the retail sector, the recommendation is to reinforce the staff working on the online service. (Portugal)

The improvement of the company's digital transformation and adaptation to new operational business conditions, sending employees to trainings in order to acquire new knowledge and skills, in order to be ready to respond to new challenges in the future, will thus contribute to higher productivity and better business results. (Serbia)

Use of better communication

Better work internal communication so that no one feels displaced or relegated in any change that occurs. (HR director, training and employment consultancy) We must improve the protocols and the transmission of messages. (Representative HR department, consultancy for leadership, Spain)

The key thing when introducing anti-crisis solutions has proved to be and should remain regular internal communication with employees. Those companies where communication was good, succeeded to alleviate employee feelings of insecurity and fears involved in the Covid-19 Pandemic situation. (Poland)

Use of training

Promote training on certain issues such as teleworking and time management and work stress. Pedagogy is needed to create a more positive and favourable mentality for changes. (Business director, consultancy for training, Spain)

Better involvement in decision making

I hope next time we are more prepared, with more time to react, to plan and organise changes and thus be able to involve more staff. (Manager, clothes store) As conclusive final remarks from the interview the employers say that it may be important "to have an analysis of possible risks for the business and a contingency plan to possible future crisis". The investment in digitalisation and skills is key. (Manager, clothes store, Spain).

Employees should also be more involved in terms of practical organization and division of work, providing points of view and insights. ...A more constructive confrontation with the workers. [..An involvement that can lead workers to provide ideas for implementing certain company processes would be desirable. (Italy)

More support from the Government

Employers would like to continue to want financial support from the state, for example to invest in technical equipment for their employees. (Germany)

The employer of a transportation company noted the importance of better information by the governmental entities. The guarantee of conditions for remote work was also a point considered important to be stressed in the future. (Portugal)

It is also emphasized that it is important for public representatives to send clear messages related to vaccination and the fight against diseases. (Serbia)

Conclusions

The European Report of the project “Employee Involvement in Decision-Making in Times of Crisis as a Key to the Effective Organization of the Company’s Work” informs on the process of employee involvement during the changes introduced during the Covid-19 Pandemic in the trade and services sector in seven European countries: Germany, Italy, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Serbia and Spain.

As regards the context since the Covid-19 Pandemic, some legal framework were relevant and some norms came to place especially in Germany, Poland, Portugal, Serbia and Spain.

The Covid-19 Pandemic affected severely the trade and services sector around the world, including the countries under study. Nevertheless, the changes introduced aimed at bringing alleviation and resilience by placing the health of the workers at the forefront of the matter, especially during the first months since March 2020, onwards. In some countries the legislative framework served as a “social shield” to protect employment, such as in the case of Spain.

With the objective to have the employees’ opinion the project launched an online survey that was responded by circa 400 employees in the trade and services sector in seven European countries (EU and non-EU ones) and enabled a good understanding of the workers opinion on the changes carried out during the Covid-19 Pandemic to restructure the companies’ activities.

The results at European level show similarity among the seven countries where the workers have rated high the fact of being informed by their employers, and to a lesser degree the process of consultation, maintaining the satisfaction with the process. And regarding the participation in the decision making, the responses across the seven countries show that the majority of the employees were not involved in the decision making process, with the exception of Spain where most of the respondents have answered positively. The workers in different countries see their attitude as proactive and positive when the changes came to place. In the same line, there is a common trend on the answer that most of the workers among seem unsatisfied with the fact that they have not been asked to present ideas and given opinions on the organisational changes introduced. A similar opinion exists among countries on the ease of working from home. All the respondents show a similar opinion regarding the importance of information, consultation, decision making and their own attitude in the hypothetical case of another crisis similar to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Differences of opinion exist among countries’ respondents regarding the atmosphere where the changes were introduced or the implementation of the changes. In the same line there exist differences on the awareness on legal rights across the countries, on the offer of choices or alternatives regarding the organisational changes introduced, on how had the gender affected in the working conditions that you were offered as a consequence of the organisational changes introduced, on the opportunity to work from home and on the support received from the company to adapt to the new working conditions, on the perception of safety when developing their activity after the changes occurred, and on the mechanisms they would prefer to use for information and consultation.

The report concludes on information from employers in the seven countries participating in the project in the trade and services sector regarding how they involved their employees in the organisation changes introduced in their companies during the Covid-19 pandemic with the following:

The Covid-19 Pandemic has affected all of the companies in Europe, but due to their different nature, the consequences have been somehow different. The recognition of the intense use of digital tools is highlighted as the biggest change occurring during the Covid-19 Pandemic, and this has influenced the process of involving the employees. Some other mechanisms have been the training and reskilling of staff, regular information on the current state-of-the-art, flexibility in the working hours, teleworking, creation of specific teams to manage the situation, etc. As regards the attitude of the workers, this is seen positively by the employers across the seven countries.

Two best practices were repeatedly identified: the use of digitalisation, and training. Among the improvements the employers across Europe recognise the need to communicate more effectively and timely, to offer more space for understanding and predictability, to build trust, to offer better training opportunities and to make work simpler.

In case of future crisis, the employers across Europe understand the need to increase the digitalisation skills and capacities, the communication effectiveness, training and a better involvement in decision making.

The next section focuses on the recommendations for a model of communication for employers and employees based on the above results.

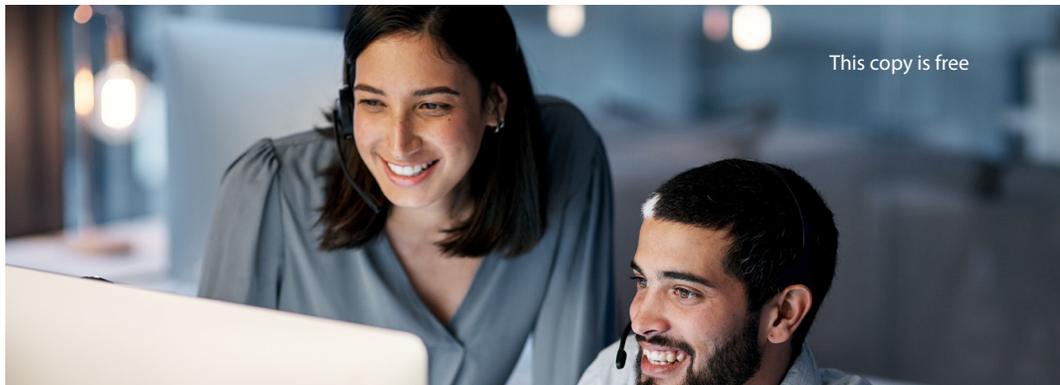
Recommendations

Succeeding the results of the European Report of the project “Employee Involvement in Decision-Making in Times of Crisis as a Key to the Effective Organization of the Company’s Work” in seven European countries: Germany, Italy, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Serbia and Spain, the following is recommended in case of a hypothetical other similar crisis.

- Whilst exceptional crisis such as the Covid-19 Pandemic are hard to be foreseen, it is recommended the trade and services sector stakeholders in Europe have a contingency plan with recommendations agreed at European level that addresses the main issues to face such challenges.
- In the meanwhile, structural and sustainable changes need to be introduced gradually in Europe to make the involvement in decision making of the employees more effective.
- For the above, there is need of convincement and creation of a joint space of decision making where the employers and employees are not only linked at a unidirectional level – to only inform – but as well to consult and create space for joint decision making.
- This requires training of the employers – or recommendations that are enforced with the social responsibility scheme. It requires as well training of the employees that would need to feel more comfortable with participating in decision making.
- Digitalisation of our work processes and beyond will be intensified in the future and by its use the trade and services sector can become more resilient in hypothetical future crisis. It is necessary to upgrade in digital working skills all the employees of these sectors around Europe, and to make more versatile the work-life-balance processes through digitalisation.

Based on the evidence from the research above, these recommendations may feed into a future “model of communication for employees and employers” to be used during the “Information Campaign” planned during the European project, following the release of this report.

This copy is free



Sole responsibility lies within autor. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.



Co-funded by
the European Union



Confederación Sindical
Independiente



Bildungswerk der Sächsischen
Wirtschaft gGmbH



Associação Sindical
Independente



Confederazione dei Sindacati
Autonomi dei Lavorator



Unija poslodavaca Srbije



Instytut Spraw publicznych



Associação Sindical do Pessoal
Administrativo da Saúde



Unija poslodavaca
Crne Gore