

COVID-19 Lockdowns

Lessons for European
Higher Education

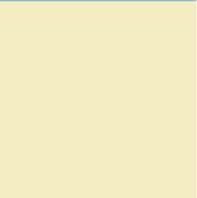
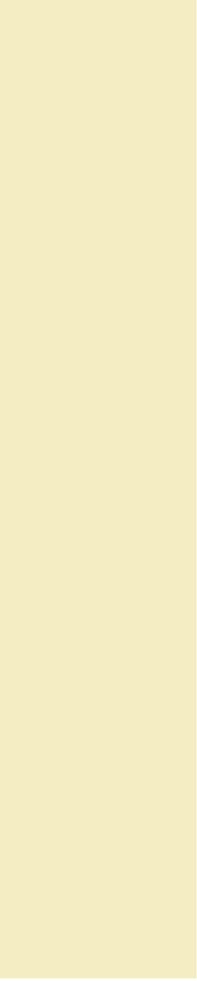
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COVID-19 Lockdowns: Lessons for European Higher Education
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Published by ToKnowPress
Bangkok · Celje · Lublin
www.toknowpress.net
2020

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ToKnowPress is a Joint Imprint of
Kasetsart University, 50 NgamWongWan Rd. Ladyao
Chatuchak Bangkok 10900, Thailand
International School for Social and Business Studies
Mariborska cesta 7, 3000 Celje, Slovenia
Maria Curie-Skłodowska University
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ISBN 978-83-65020-36-9 (pdf)

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Introduction

On the New Year's Eve, when the world was just about to enter the year 2020, arguing whether this will in fact be a new decade or not, the World Health Organisation (WHO) received first reports of a previously unknown virus detected in Wuhan, China. And in merely a couple of months the whole world was asking the year 2020 to reset. The COVID-19 virus spread from China, reached Europe, and continued its migration towards the USA and Latin America, India, and Africa. Everyday lives were interrupted, businesses were temporarily closed, and the world came to almost a stop for a while.

This book looks at how the COVID-19 lockdowns impacted higher education institutions in Europe. It starts with analysis of the general situation and response by the European Union (EU) Member States, followed by an overview of the role that the EU institutions took on during the pandemic. It continues towards understanding immediate consequences for higher education institutions, with the main obvious change being a swift turn towards digitalisation. Furthermore, the authors look into how internationalisation of higher education institutions was impacted. A separate chapter is dedicated to own research, based on the answers specifically tailored to questionnaires that were shared among European higher education institutions inquiring about their individual responses to the COVID-19 related lockdowns.

Finally, the book looks into the future and strives to forecast the new normal for the European Union as such, its policies, and relationships among Member States in the coming years. It furthermore recommends a new European financial system to mitigate future crises and suggests ways forward for higher education institutions in the post-COVID reality.

Chapter One

Response to COVID-19 in Europe

Background of the COVID-19 Spread in the EU

Following its rapid spread in China and a consequent declaration of the pandemic by the WHO on 11 March 2020, Europe became an active centre of the disease only a few days later. Cases by country started to grow rapidly, even doubling in periods of typically 3–4 days. Some countries experienced doubling of cases every 2 days. By 17 March, all European countries had confirmed cases of COVID-19 and at least one reported death associated with the virus. The following day, a quarter of a billion Europeans entered the continent lockdown.

By mid-May 2020, over 1,285,852 cases were reported in the European Union, the European Economic Area (EEA) and the United Kingdom (UK), with the UK topping the charts, closely followed by Spain and Italy. Over 153,361 deaths were reported in the same area (World Health Organization, 2020). The quickly evolving situation led individual EU Member States to take unprecedented measures. An understanding of the quick spread of the virus and the exponential growth in cases was understood to be more severe in areas that saw more interpersonal interactions, business, and travel hubs.

Europe became an active centre of COVID-19 pandemic in mid-March 2020, when the numbers of cases on the Old Continent outgrew those in China. At that point, cases by country across Europe had doubled over periods of typically 3 to 4 days, with some countries (mostly those at earlier stages of detection) showing doubling every 2 days. As of 18 March, more than 250 million people were in lockdown in Europe. Studies show that around 5% of population had been infected in France, Spain, and the UK. In those countries, about one out of ten cases had been detected as a confirmed case, and the death rate was 1% ('COVID-19 pandemic in Europe,' 2020).

Nevertheless, internal EU borders did not close until sometime later, despite the efforts of certain extreme right politicians, such as France's Marine Le Pen, to close down the borders and prevent the spread of pandemic. Around the same time, a silent agreement was reached in the EU that countries cannot prevent other EU citizens from entering,

but home governments could advise against it. Nevertheless, Slovakia, Denmark, the Czech Republic, and Poland announced complete border closure in mid-March 2020, a move that was criticised by the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. Though she expressed her understanding of certain measures to be taken at internal borders, she deemed travel bans unacceptable. Shortly afterwards, nevertheless, the travel ban for Europeans going to the USA was reciprocated by the European Union.

Different Member States reacted to the situation in a different manner. With Italy and Spain being the most affected and having to ask for financial and practical help from their fellow European nations, some others, namely Sweden and the Netherlands took on a different approach, allowing life to go on almost as usual, while ensuring that the health system could still support the incoming cases.

Response by EU Member States

The first confirmed COVID-19 case in Europe was identified in France on 24 January 2020. Germany followed soon afterwards and in a matter of days the WHO declared Europe as the new 'epicentre of the pandemic' (World Health Organization, 2020).

As Member States were preparing their measures, Italy was the first severely hit by the virus. The Italian Government imposed a lockdown on 9 March 2020, first in the Northern region of Lombardy and 14 other provinces. This left 16 million people quarantined in the North of the country, mostly around the big cities of Milan and Venice. Just a day later, the lockdown was extended to the rest of the country. The first EU market with over 60 million inhabitants and a GDP of EUR 1.861 trillion was down. Citizens were instructed to stay put, movement was strictly restricted to close proximity of home and outings were only allowed for the purposes of grocery shopping, medical emergencies, and care of relatives ('COVID-19 pandemic in Europe,' 2020).

Other Member States followed shortly, each of them examining their particular situation and specific measures to be taken. Ireland closed schools on 12 March 2020 and cancelled parades that were to be organised for the traditional St Patrick's Day. The Netherlands followed a couple of days later with announcement of school closure. And on 17 March 2020, France announced a nationwide lockdown that was expected to last for 7 weeks. At that point in time, Spain ordered all non-essential workers to stay home.

At first, lockdowns consisted of measures limiting opening times and group gatherings. In the UK, some of the first steps included limiting working hours of pubs, restaurants, theatres, cinemas, gyms, and night-clubs. In many countries this was often followed by instructions limiting movement to a city or region, or even restricting movements completely, except when dealing with essential matters.

A Member State that stands out in the whole pandemic situation is Sweden. There was no lockdown, no social distancing policies. Most businesses, as well as schools and kindergartens, remained open. Instead of trying to restrict the spread of the virus by restricting movement, Sweden asked its citizens to be responsible, suggested that citizens work from home whenever they could and that seniors avoid unnecessary social contact. Travel was also not prohibited, rather discouraged unless essential.

It seems like the overall goal was to avoid collapse of the healthcare systems. Some countries proved to be very poorly prepared for a national health emergency, and the majority of EU Member States lacked proper equipment needed to respond to a fully-fledged emergency.

By mid-May 2020, European countries seemed to be slowly getting the situation under control and many Member States started to reopen for business and announced reopening of internal and external Schengen borders. Certain types of businesses were allowed to start running, namely hairdressers, beauticians and cafes serving at outside terraces. Reopening of kindergartens and schools was expected to follow, even if some additional safety measures were being suggested in order to try to keep the health situation under control. Social distancing guidelines still remained in place in the majority of EU Member States, with recommendations to keep safety distance, regularly disinfect and clean hands, and use sanitary masks in closed spaces. Some countries, like Slovenia, have announced that gatherings of up to 50 people would be allowed in the beginning of June ('COVID-19 pandemic in Europe,' 2020).

Response by the European Union

The COVID-19 pandemic serves as a good example of the multifaceted nature of the European Union and its current institutional and political setup. It pointed out policy fields where the EU authority is sufficient to legislate more aggressively, such as taking care of migrant workers; but in most instances it proved that in public health, security and ex-

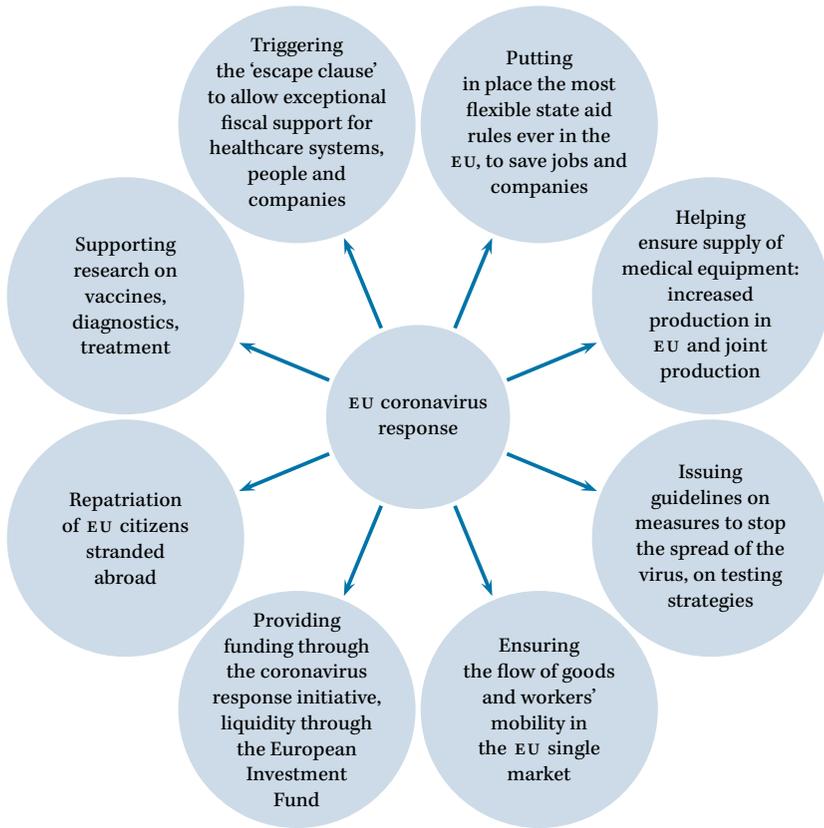


FIGURE 1.1 Overview of Some Key Actions in EU COVID-19 Response (adapted from European Commission, 2020i)

ternal affairs, the EU continues to serve as the coordinator, an entity that ensures that the countries of the continent communicate, coordinate efforts, help when needed and come up with a minimum of a coordinated response (European Commission, 2020i).

On all fronts, including the EU official communications during the COVID-19 situation, it is all about coordination, also through provision of objective information about the spread of COVID-10 and effective efforts that are being undertaken to contain it. Overall, the EU managed to have its Member States agree on a number of priorities where they are willing to coordinate efforts, such as limiting the spread of the virus, ensuring the provision of medical equipment, boosting research for treatments and vaccines, supporting jobs, businesses, and the econ-

omy. In concrete terms, the European Commission (2020b) reports solidarity during the COVID-19 is demonstrated by:

- France donating 1 million masks to Italy;
- Germany delivering 7 tons of medical equipment to Italy, including ventilators and anaesthetic masks, helping save lives;
- Czechia delivering 10 000 protective suits and 3D-printed respirators to Italy;
- Austria, Germany, and Luxembourg taking in patients from Italy and France;
- Poland, Romania, and Germany sending teams of doctors to Italy to help in hospitals;
- Half a million of European citizens having been helped to return home from abroad;
- The EU committing to a global response package of EUR 20 billion to support partner countries' efforts in fighting the pandemic.

A major area where the EU had been assuring a coordinated response was helping EU citizens stranded in third countries to come home. Smaller Member States often do not have the means at their disposal to fly a person from the other side of the world home. In this case, the coordinated EU response brought many citizens home through shared travel arrangements for various Member States.

Furthermore, the EU Member States agreed on a *coordinated temporary restriction on non-essential travel* to the EU. However, lifting travel restrictions remains one of the main areas where the EU is actively and successfully having Member States align on their strategies. This is particularly important when thinking about consequences for the EU tourism sector that are expected to be of great proportions this year.

The EU Centre for Disease Prevention and Control is continuously providing scientific basis for the EU recommendation to Member States when it comes to dealing with restrictions and the overall epidemiological situation. The European Commission set up an advisory panel of epidemiologists and virologists for this purpose.

Another interesting area of EU coordination in relation to the COVID-19 response was *coordinated provision of certain medical equipment*. The EU worked together with Member States and home-based industry to ensure that adequate protective equipment and medical supplies became available across all Member States. A COVID-19 Clearing House

was established at the EU level and four joint public procurement procedures for facemasks and other personal protective equipment were launched.

In line with ensuring required protective equipment and in parallel with strengthening the EU home industry, the Union and certain industries are discussing ways of *converting production lines* to supply more equipment. Furthermore, the EU looked at the area it can regulate exclusively – external trade – and regulated exports of personal protective equipment outside the Union to ensure that enough stays inside for the Member States.

The COVID-19 crisis opened up some new areas of cooperation among Member States. At the time of writing, the EU and Member States are setting up a *common EU reserve of medical equipment*, where masks and ventilators would be stocked for emergencies. The distribution would be managed by the Emergency Response Coordination Centre to ensure that it gets to the patients in need. In addition, the EU harmonised European standards for medical supplies and made them freely available to speed up an increase in production.

EU research and innovation policy also came in handy when managing the COVID-19 crisis. In order to fast track and promote research on COVID-19, according to the European Commission (2020d), the EU mobilised:

- EUR 140 million to develop vaccines, new treatments, diagnostic tests, and medical systems to prevent the spread of the coronavirus and to save lives.
- EUR 48.5 million that has at the time of writing been granted to 18 projects and 140 research teams via the EU Horizon 2020 research programme.
- EUR 164 million for SMEs and start-ups for innovative solutions in tackling the COVID-19 outbreak via the European Innovation Council accelerator programme.
- EUR 80 million through an EU guarantee of European Investment Bank (EIB) loan to an innovative European vaccine developer, CureVac, who was set to launch clinical testing of a vaccine by June 2020.

A European COVID-19 *data platform* for researchers was launched to enable rapid collection and sharing of data and a hackathon was or-

ganised together with online pledging event to raise funds for vaccine research.

The most visible of all efforts by the European Union was the *international pledging conference* that the Union organised, starting on 4 May 2020. At the time of writing, the Union managed to collect pledges of EUR 7.4 million with EUR 7.5 million target being almost achieved. This big public manoeuvre by the European Commission President Ursula Von Der Leyen and the institution as a whole undoubtedly points at the global leadership position that the EU is striving to achieve when it comes to response to COVID-19. So far, considering responses of other major world countries, it has certainly succeeded to stand out as the continent willing to support and stand in solidarity with everybody.

Furthermore, the EU has coordinated measures that could *minimise the inevitable socio-economic fallout* that will result from the COVID-19 outbreak, with the intention of getting back on a path of sustainable growth. In this context, the EU has done everything possible within its Treaty limits, and has constructed a package of EUR 540 billion to support Member States in their actions, consisting of three safety nets for three key target groups: workers, businesses, and countries (KPMG, 2020):

- EUR 37 billion from structural funds to support EU countries and their citizens in their fight against the outbreak,
- up to EUR 800 million through the EU Solidarity Fund, which has been amended to provide support to member states affected by public health crises like the one caused by COVID-19, and
- additional EUR 3.1 billion unlocked from the 2020 budget to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

In line with the emergency nature of the situation, the EU increased flexibility in the use of Structural funds, which now allows Member States to transfer money between different funds and regions to meet their needs and properly mitigate the damage caused by the pandemic in the social or economic aspect. Programmes dealing with COVID-19, where Member States request for EU funding, are eligible for up to 100% financing from the EU budget, which is also a novelty in this exceptional situation.

Additional areas of flexibility when it comes to EU funds relate to certain professions hit hard by the crisis, aiding the most deprived;

certain fiscal rules that help authorities in the Member States support healthcare systems and business and keep people employed during the crisis. In this relation, an important area that the EU revisited and adapted are EU state aid rules which allow governments to provide liquidity to the economy to support citizens and companies at the current times.

When it comes to *ensuring economic necessities* inside the Union, the EU is working with Member States to establish priority lanes for transport of goods. All this comes in times when Member States are encouraging their citizens to buy locally, so this is a good area for the EU to demonstrate the meaning of the common market in practice (European Commission, 2020g).

Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are likely to be hit hard by the lockdowns as many of them were prevented from carrying on their basic business activities and lost business over night. In this context, the *main banking authorities* in the European Union offered to lend a hand as well. The EIB decided to offer liquidity support to help them through the tough situation. The emergency support package is worth some EUR 40 billion. Similarly, the European Central Bank (ECB) announced a total of EUR 870 billion as Pandemic emergency programme for the purchase of private and public securities during the crisis.

The Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) is maybe the most powerful EU tool for managing everyday affairs, as well as the crisis. With the new MFF starting in 2021, the EU is preparing a special recovery plan and renegotiating the frameworks and the upcoming budgets for the period of the next seven years. The major idea behind the rethinking of the MFF, in addition to supporting the revival of the EU economy, is a clear path towards a greener and digital society. Decision-makers are promising to draw lessons from the COVID-19 crisis to strengthen the EU preparedness and resilience also through this key financial mechanism of the Union (European Commission, 2020k).

Finally, the EU is battling with another almost invisible enemy in the form of misinformation and disinformation. The EU spokespersons and official sources are committed to serve transparent, timely and fact-based communication from trusted scientific sources. While the internet, the social media in particular, is flooded with false claims, fear mongering and fake news, online platforms are strongly engaged in the process of reducing visibility of false or misleading content and removing the content that could cause physical harm or is ille-

gal. Disinformation narratives are exposed and published regularly at www.EUvsDisinfo.eu.

It is still hard to grasp the scale and scope of COVID-19's global impact. A third of the world population was under some sort of 'lockdown' in spring 2020. Over 200 countries were affected, and the numbers of new cases and deaths in many places are still growing exponentially. All the while, a second crisis in the form of an economic recession is underway (Schwab & Vanham, 2020). During the recession, EU members did not use fiscal policies to ease it, while the reinsurance system in the case of unemployment would achieve exactly this, as it acts as an automatic stabiliser. We believe that the need for an automatic stabiliser, such as, for example, reinsurance in the case of unemployment, has been even more apparent precisely because of the recession (Trunk & Stubelj, 2020).

The European Union is not a federation of countries such as e.g., the USA (Dickson & Eleftheriadis, 2012). The EU is the culmination of a long process of economic and political integration between European countries. It started as a free trade and customs union area. Over time, it became a supranational entity reminiscent of a federation of states (Tupy, 2016). A successful example of a federation of countries is the United States, from which the EU is still quite different. The main weaknesses are the following (Dickson & Eleftheriadis, 2012): (i) not all policies are effective – a good example is the common agricultural policy, which has led to oversupply and higher commodity prices; (ii) The 'single currency' is a big problem – not all Member States use the euro, although the EU emphasises its use, in addition, Kovač (2017) believes that the EU is not an optimal monetary area, as labour mobility is insufficient, interest rates have national mark-ups, structural reforms and policies are divergent, so it can be concluded that we have European money and national political sovereignty, monetary centralisation and fiscal decentralisation. Therefore, the euro brings benefits but does not address political risks; (iii) difficulties in regulating immigration – citizens of Member States are free to move from one country to another, leading to overcrowding in larger countries, e.g., in the UK, and this has led to congestion on the roads and rising space prices, both commercial and residential. Immigration problems have been exacerbated by the refugee crisis; (iv) unclear external representation and visibility – when the rest of the world wants to know what the EU views are, it is still not clear who to ask and whether the person is actually represent-

ing the EU or their country. But before we blame the EU again, which happens way too often, let us try to understand what the EU as such is in fact able to do during a global pandemic. For this part, let us focus on the youth.

The European Union has just recently, in December 2018, adopted ‘The European Union Youth Strategy 2019–2027’ (Council of the European Union, 2018), which aims to engage, connect and empower European youth. The proposal is accompanied by the Staff working document (European Commission, 2018), including background information, data, public consultation outcomes and other facts and figures that support the contents of the new strategy. In this document, the European Commission notes that ‘significant improvements have been made in many aspects of young people’s lives in recent years, marking a turning point in many European countries.’

Key indicators that show a positive trend in this respect are the following:

- More young people are finding employment. Furthermore, those with tertiary education are much more likely to find a job, compared to those with the lowest levels of education. In 2018, there were 1.3 million fewer jobless young Europeans compared to the year 2013 and long-term youth unemployment has declined.
- Social inclusion of young Europeans has improved as a consequence of labour market improvements. Making it easier to find a job also allows the youth to become more independent and secure better social and living conditions for themselves. Furthermore, the proportion of young people not in employment, education, or training (NEETS) has fallen below the levels of 2010.
- Young people are now less prone to risky health behaviours as better economic and living conditions positively influence the general well-being and health of individuals. This goes in connection to smoking, alcohol abuse and intoxication.
- Interest of young Europeans in politics is growing. In addition, European youth is taking advantage of new methods of political participation, based on modern technology.
- Young people in Europe increasingly participate in voluntary activities.

However, the document follows up with several worrying challenges:

- Educational achievement remains a challenge for some youth groups.
- Poverty and social exclusion continue to affect youth population and a growing number of young Europeans experience poverty while in employment. This worrying trend leads to higher risks for social exclusion and deprivation.
- Health risks, such as obesity and insufficient physical activity are present among young people in Europe as well. In addition, participation of European youth in sports clubs has diminished over the past seven years.
- Young voters vote less and less, particularly at the occasion of EU elections.
- Both genders face disadvantages but in different areas. Young women continue to have less prominent participation in the labour market and attain higher levels of risk of social exclusion. On the other hand, young men are more at risk of leaving their education early, which might lead to more unemployment, and are more prone to risk behaviours and substance abuse.
- Education, employment, and inclusion are more challenging for young Europeans from Eastern and Southern Europe. This is mostly due to differences in education levels, levels of use of digital technologies, as well as outside factors such as the recent debt crisis.

‘The European Union Youth Strategy 2019–2027’ (Council of the European Union, 2018) itself sets several priorities to enable young people to manage and create their own lives, enable them to undergo personal development and growth towards autonomy by utilising skills that enable them to cope with a quickly changing environment. It also strives to encourage and equip them with resources to become active citizens inspired by EU values, and the EU identity. Furthermore, the idea is also to improve policy decisions related to youth and contribute to eradication of youth poverty and all forms of discrimination as well as promote social inclusion of young people.

To ensure that the Youth Strategy is in line with international system of human rights, the EU institutions and Member States pledge to apply the principles of equality of non-discrimination, inclusion and participation in all youth-related actions and policies. In addition, the

Strategy foresees an important role for ‘Global, European, national, regional and local dimension’ in youth policies. This approach assumes that the youth policies should be supported at grass-roots level, interlinking them with local and regional policy while never forgetting to consider the voice of youth when it comes to global issues. Finally, the Strategy also looks into the ‘Dual approach’ being key to creating successful youth policies. This approach claims that youth policies can never be successful on their own, and so the dimension of youth have to be included in all policy fields and all decisions across the spectrum.

To move forward, the Youth Strategy proposes to tackle core areas of the youth sector through three key titles:

- *Engage.* This is all about participation, in particular in relation to policymaking, active citizenship and debates. By achieving to activate youth and have them engaged in decisions being taken today, it could be made certain that those decisions will serve them well in the future. In this view, the Strategy calls on the European institutions and Member States to encourage and promote inclusive democratic participation of all young people, actively engage them and their organisations in policy processes, support the establishment and development of youth representations at all levels (local, regional, national, European), support the EU Youth Dialogue (see below), develop opportunities for ‘learning to participate’ and raise interest in participatory actions, as well as explore and promote the use of innovative and alternative forms of democratic participation.
- *Connect.* The Strategy notes that young people in Europe have never been as connected as they are today. This situation brings wonderful opportunities for exchanges, cooperation, cultural and civic action in the European context. Technology, and the opportunities it brings, can help them develop and strengthen personal, social, and civic competencies, develop critical thinking and creativity, and enhance employability. Exchanges such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, however, remain the key tools for young people with fewer opportunities in view of interconnectivity, as well as remain key instruments in bringing young Europeans together. In this view, the Strategy calls on the European Institutions and Member States to enable access for all youth to

cross-border mobility programmes, including volunteering and civil society, eliminate obstacles and support youth with fewer opportunities, encourage young people to engage in solidarity, organise and actively participate in EU funding programmes, and share best practices in effective systems for validation and recognition of skills and competencies gained through non-formal and informal learning.

- *Empower.* The Strategy looks at how young people could be encouraged to take charge of their own lives by helping them provide or find necessary resources and tools and create an environment that is willing to pay proper attention to the voice of youth. From difficulties in accessing their social rights, social exclusion and discrimination to fake news and propaganda, young people have to have the appropriate conditions that will help them face these challenges. The Strategy sees the role of the youth working as catalyst for empowerment, as it brings unique benefits in their transition to adulthood, provides a safe environment to gain self-confidence and learn in a non-formal way, and equips them with key personal, professional, and entrepreneurial competences and skills. In this view, the European institutions and Member States are called upon to closely cooperate on implementing ‘The European Union Youth Strategy 2019–2027’ (Council of the European Union, 2018).

The ‘The European Union Youth Strategy 2019–2027’ (Council of the European Union, 2018) also foresees a number of measures that are to be used on a local, regional, national, European, and global level:

- Evidence-based youth policymaking and knowledge building;
- Mutual learning and dissemination between Member States, the European Commission, and relevant stakeholders;
- Participatory governance to acknowledge young people as experts of their own lives, increase visibility for young people and their concerns and raise visibility of decision-makers in youth policy in the eyes of young people;
- Mobilising EU programmes and funds, in particular Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps, European Structural and Investment Funds, Horizon 2020, including the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, Creative Europe;

- Monitoring of EU funding;
- Communicating the EU Youth Strategy in a youth-friendly language;
- Future National Activities Planner intended to allow Member States to share their priorities on a voluntary basis, in line with the EU Youth Strategy;
- EU Youth Dialogue with the aim of including more decision-makers and young people, fostering their engagement and their political participation with the EU and society at large;
- The EU Youth Coordinator within the European Commission, with the objective of enhancing cross-sectorial cooperation, as well as knowledge development and exchange on youth issues within the European Commission services. The EU Youth Coordinator should work hand in hand with various stakeholders to ensure a coherent communication towards young people;
- Youth information and support;
- EU Work Plans for Youth spanning two Presidency Trios and drawing on the guiding principles and priorities of the Strategy, addressing youth issues in other Council configurations and their preparatory bodies in relevant policy areas; and
- Monitoring, reporting, evaluation.

The Strategy foresees the establishment of the EU Youth Dialogue,¹ intended to be a dialogue with young people and youth organisations, policy and decision-makers, experts, researchers and other civil society actors and stakeholders. The idea is to create a forum for continuous reflection and consultation on priorities, implementation, and follow-up in the field of cooperation in the field of youth in Europe.

Another initiative introduced by the new EU Youth Strategy is the Future National Activities Planners (FNAPS). Basic documents for youth policies at the national level are usually the national youth strategies. However, many times these documents fail to be shared among Member States. Such sharing could be useful to identify and learn about common challenges and find best practices that could be transferred from one to another Member State. In addition, synergies could be established among similar initiatives in various Member States,

1. See https://europa.eu/youth/strategy_en.

leading to an implicit European cooperation. Finally, the European Youth Goals present a vision for a Europe that enables young people to realise their full potential.²

Employment and social policy cooperation have been around since the 1950s and the ECSC, when workers whose jobs in the coal and steel sector were threatened by industrial restructuring were granted the ‘readaptation aid.’ In the 1960s, the European Social Fund (ESF) was created as a principal tool to combat unemployment and was subsequently renewed a number of times to better fit the developing priorities. But it was only in 1994 with the white paper on growth, competitiveness and employment (European Commission, 1994) that a debate was launched on creating a European Economic and Employment Strategy, and this brought employment to the top of the European agenda. In 1997, the European Employment Strategy was launched together with the Luxembourg process, which became the annual coordinating and monitoring cycle for national employment policies, following the commitment of Member States to establish a set of common objectives and targets in this area. Finally, the Europe 2020 Strategy embraced full employment as an overarching objective of employment and social policy and agreed on concrete targets to be attained by the year 2020.

In addition, a body of EU labour law exists in the area of employment. While discussions in this context tend to be very controversial with Member States jealously protecting their own labour rules, sets of minimum standards were adopted at the EU level in the following areas (European Commission, 2020h):

- Health and safety at work (general and specific rights and obligations, work equipment, specific risks);
- Equal opportunities for women and men (equal treatment at work, pregnancy, maternity leave, parental leave);
- Protection against discrimination based on sex, race, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation; and
- Part-time work, fixed-term contracts, working hours, employment of young people, informing and consulting employees.

Furthermore, the fundamental freedom of movement of workers

2. More on EU youth policy and actions can be found at https://europa.eu/youth/strategy/library_en.

should not be overlooked. This, in addition to rules related to posting of workers, represents one of the central elements of the Internal EU market, allowing EU citizens to move and work freely in all Member States. In this view, EU citizens are entitled to look for a job in another EU country, work there without needing a work permit, reside there for that purpose, stay even after employment had finished and enjoy equal treatment with nationals in access to employment, working conditions and all other social and tax advantages. When it comes to health and social security coverage, however, EU nationals do not necessarily have the right to the same services as nationals of the specific Member States. In addition, freedom of movement of workers extends to their family members with the only limitation for this fundamental freedom being considerations of public security, public policy, public health, and employment in public sector.³

The 21st century jobs are far from what the baby boomer generation knew. Nowadays, the so-called Generation Y possesses a wide knowledge and understanding of the world, with a set of specific modern skills, particularly digital, which need to be constantly upgraded. It is not true anymore that spending a whole career in the same company will bring you a nice consistent pay rise and professional satisfaction. The job market has changed dramatically with the spread of digital services and the young generation tends to favour more flexible employment opportunities, changes jobs for reasons of personal preferences and many consider work from home on projects their ultimate goal.

In the most recent years, conditions in the EU labour market have improved and the unemployment rate has steadily declined since 2013. According to the European Parliament think tank (2020b), in terms of unemployment, the EU was back to its pre-crisis level of 6.8% in July 2018. Nevertheless, differences between Member States, youth unemployment and long-term unemployment remain of concern to the EU. Citizens continue to demand more EU intervention in the fight against unemployment and further adjustment to digital world, support to sustainable transitions from unemployment to employment and between jobs as well as increase in labour mobility remain some areas that could see closer European coordination in the coming years.

3. Further information on freedom of movement for workers can be found at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=457> and at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=459&langId=en>. Further general information on EU cooperation in the area of employment can be found at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/54/employment-policy>.

While Eurostat (2020) data shows that the highest employment rates relate to those who had graduated with a tertiary education degree, lower employment rates were recorded for those with an upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education; education does not seem to be everything when it comes to your employability. For example, apprenticeships seem to increase the likelihood of being able to find a job. The same goes for other kinds of education programmes that equip students with knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences required for a particular occupation.

It is therefore important that we do not only talk about employment (i.e., getting a job), but also about employability. There are numerous definitions, but it is mostly about having a specific set of skills, attributes, and attitudes to function successfully in roles required at work. Employability is also about transcending disciplinary contexts and continuous education (or lifelong learning). In her study, Angela Baron (2011) underlines that nowadays, 'if individuals want to remain employable with the option of accessing interesting and stimulating work opportunities, they too, have to think about what skills they should be working to develop.' It seems to all be about figuring out what skills will be needed in the coming years. Good news is that individuals seem to value employability. They see it as personal development and motivation, as well as an opportunity for undertaking a variety of roles in different contexts. Finally, continuous development of relevant skills allows individuals to feel more secure in the job market. For these reasons, Baron (2011) suggests that rather than looking at the diminishing pool of 'job ready' talents, employers should look at the bigger picture and opt for hiring an adaptable workforce, 'which can grow with smart jobs and stimulate learning and growth for both the individual and their employer.'

European Employment Strategy (EES) is the key document adopted in 1997 when EU Member States decided to establish some common objectives and targets for employment policy with the aim of creating more and better jobs throughout the EU. The EES is now a part of the Europe 2020 Strategy and is implemented through the European Semester where policy coordination is closely monitored on the annual basis. The implementation of EES is supported by the Employment Committee and consists of four steps of the European Semester.⁴

4. Further information on the European Employment Strategy can be found at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=101&langId=en> and at <https://ec.europa>

In this regard, monitoring of employment policies is based on:

- *Employment guidelines* that are prepared by the European Commission and adopted by the Council of the EU. They contain strategic objectives for national employment policies and combine policy priorities with some on-going key elements. The latest revision of these guidelines was done in 2018 when they were aligned with the European Pillar of Social Rights. They target the following four domains:
 1. boosting demand for labour (job creation, labour taxation, wage setting),
 2. enhancing labour and skills supply (including youth and long-term unemployment),
 3. better functioning of labour markets (specific focus is on market segmentation), and
 4. fairness, combatting poverty and promoting equal opportunities for all.
- *Joint employment report*. This is an overarching report on the situation in the area of employment in Europe. It is based on assessment of the employment situation in Europe, implementation of the Employment guidelines and assessment of the Scoreboard of key employment and social indicators. The report is prepared by the European Commission and confirmed by the Council of the EU.
- *National Reform Programmes*. National governments submit their reform programmes for analysis to the European Commission as per rules set in the Europe 2020 Strategy.
- *Country reports* and *country-specific recommendations*. Once the European Commission analyses the National Reform Programmes, it publishes a series of country reports in the area of employment, as well as specific recommendations for each Member State.

Joint Financial Measures for the Future

One of the biggest challenges for the EU and the euro area is to further promote structural reforms for economic convergence. At the same

.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=101&intPageId=3427. More information on the New Skills Agenda for Europe can be found at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223> and at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1146&langId=en>.

time, the EU should seriously consider introducing a fiscal union. This could mean that the EU budget should be higher than it is today. After all, the main feature of any fiscal union is the ability to spend and consequently influence economic performance. Given that business cycles are not uniform in the case of the euro area, such a move will be an important step in the right direction. It is important to note that the EU budget today is around one per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) – in the US, the federal budget revolves around 37 per cent of GDP (Schelkle, 2017). The EU is a diverse region in terms of geography, political systems, national support, and economic foundations. Northern Europe is richer in capital and technologically and administratively more advanced than the peripheral countries in the south. Countries in the north would want a stronger currency, while countries in the south would want a weaker currency to be more competitive abroad. This diversity of the EU makes it difficult to work for political and fiscal union.

The EU needs mechanisms that act as automatic stabilisers. After 2008, there was an increase in differences in the unemployment rate between EU countries and by age groups. Boeri and Jimeno (2016) argue that the reason for these differences is related to labour market institutions, especially given their interactions with the scale and nature of the shocks of the Great Recession and the euro area debt crisis. They present macro and micro evidence highlighting the importance of these interactions in explaining the differences between countries in adapting the labour market to the aforementioned shocks. After identifying the labour market institutions responsible for this increase in the unemployment gap, they discuss what can be done at EU level to promote institutional convergence. In particular, they examined a ‘positive conditioning’ approach that could work even in good times, and not just in a period of recession when conditioning is strong. At the same time, they draw attention to the side effects that these reforms may have.

The existence of unemployment reinsurance is possible through the regular exchange of labour market information between the EMU members. The general problem of unemployment insurance is moral hazard – in the form of less intensive job search and receiving compensation for informal employment (Dolenc et al., 2012; Tatsiramos & van Ours, 2014). In addition, the functioning of the labour market and related institutions within the EU is remarkably diverse (heterogeneous). As a solution for the regular exchange of information between EMU

members, Boeri and Jimeno (2016) propose the introduction of reinsurance in the event of unemployment at the EU level and the introduction of individual accounts to transfer benefits within the EMU (aggregation of EMU periods) and to act as complement existing forms of unemployment insurance in individual countries. Unemployment reinsurance – to help the state’s unemployment insurance – would cover the costs associated with rising unemployment. This would leave more money in state budgets to stabilise state economies in recession. Buti et al. (2002), Dullien (2012), Epaulard (2014) and the European Commission (2014) note that it would be appropriate to introduce an unemployment reinsurance system in the EU as well. EU members did not use fiscal policy to mitigate the recession during the recession (Coenen et al., 2012), while the unemployment reinsurance system would achieve just that, as it acts as an automatic stabiliser. We believe that the need for an automatic stabiliser, such as e.g., unemployment reinsurance, all the more so precisely because of the recession. Existing unemployment insurance fails in bad times because there are not enough stocks accumulated to pay benefits. The reasons are mainly the following: (i) more recipients; (ii) lower percentage of covered unemployment period – the length of unemployment increases, only a small part is covered; (iii) large losses are generated.

EU unemployment reinsurance system would act as an automatic stabiliser, helping to reduce the inflation gap in a recession. The inflation gap is the distance between the current level of real GDP and the level of GDP at full and long-term equilibrium employment. The inflation gap is so named because an increase in the consumption of the economy leads to an increase in real GDP, and this has a long-term impact on price increases (Cogley et al., 2010). An unemployment reinsurance system would help to better protect income and thus maintain the level of consumption of the unemployed, which helps countries in recession, as the system would contribute to the financing of unemployment benefits during a period of sudden and deep recession. In periods of weak economic activity, the benefits of the reinsurance system in the event of unemployment decrease as the number of employees and thus the contributions paid decrease, while on the other hand expenditure increases without the need for a new government measure. On the contrary, it works in the case of increased economic activity, when expenditure decreases, and receipts increase (Dullien, 2012). Automatically, as economic activity increases, the reinsurance system’s expenditure in

the event of unemployment (e.g., the amount and number of recipients of benefits, the period of receipt of benefits) automatically decreases, while benefits increase. Such a movement helps to stabilise economic activity in the future. In the US, such a system has been in place for a long time and works well in times of recession, acting as an automatic stabiliser (Chimerine et al., 1999; Asdrubali et al., 1996; US Department of Labor, 2012).

Therefore, we can take the reinsurance system in case of unemployment in the USA as an example for Europe. In a study, Vroman (2010) examined the role of the unemployment reinsurance system as an automatic stabiliser during the US recession between 2008 and 2010 and concluded that the stabilising effect in a regular unemployment insurance programme reduces approximately one tenth of the inflation gap, caused by the recession. The extension of the compensation period has contributed to stabilisation. Unemployment insurance contributions increased in 2009 and 2010. For the three separate components of the unemployment reinsurance system (regular programme, extension of the benefit period and contributions) between 2008 and 2010, Vroman (2010) came to the following conclusions: (i) increased regular benefits reduced the inflation gap by 10.5 per cent; (ii) extending the compensation period reduced the inflation gap by 8.5 per cent; (iii) the increase in contributions led to an increase in the inflation gap by 0.7 per cent. On average, the unemployment reinsurance programme reduced the inflation gap caused by the recession by 18.3 per cent, which certainly contributes to a more stable and competitive economy.

Reinsurance is most simply interpreted as 'insurance of insurance companies.' It allows the primary or direct insurer to reduce the risk assumed in order to reduce volatility and increase the size of the risk portfolio, thus increasing profitability. Reinsurance becomes particularly important when the spread of risk (in the primary portfolio) exceeds critical sizes and when insurance companies are no longer able to cope with the accepted risk (The International Credit Insurance & Surety Association, 2015).

Reinsurance is typical of most insurance systems and provides insurance for unforeseen and exceptional events (Brahin et al., 2013). Each group of insurers contributes to a common fund used to support a member of the group who experiences an extremely unfavourable or catastrophic event. Due to the existence of a common fund, insurers do not have to accumulate excessive reserves for contingencies.

In a period of recession, the labour market is facing an elevated unemployment rate. Typical situations in which the unemployment reinsurance system plays an important role are wars, recessions, political interventions such as the oil embargo, and the collapse or closure of large industries (US National Commission, 1979). Unemployment reinsurance is generally considered to be useful for protection against cyclical unemployment – cyclical unemployment is low in times of boom and high in times of recession.

The unemployment reinsurance system is designed to protect against cases of above-average unemployment, which are occasional and unpredictable. Due to the existence of a reinsurance system in the event of unemployment, insurers do not have to accumulate excessive reserves in order to cope with an occasional, unforeseen event, while at the same time acting as an automatic stabiliser. In a period of recession, expenditure increases and receipts from unemployment contributions decrease, while in a boom period, the automatic stabiliser works in the opposite direction, thus maintaining the level of consumption. The principle of operation of the reinsurance system is based on collecting contributions from all involved in the reinsurance system in good times and drawing funds to maintain the percentage of protection (share of coverage) in bad times, without simultaneously increasing the contribution rate. As noted by Andor (2014), there are reasons to introduce a reinsurance system, as the value of one per cent of contributions is higher in a recession than in a boom. Countries are facing a shortage of compensation during the recession, which could lead to an increase in the contribution rate, which would have the opposite effect, as increasing the contribution rate during the recession would further burden the already weakened economy. In the event of unemployment reinsurance, countries would receive aid from the reinsurance system during the recession and repay the aid only during the boom period, which would be much easier and at the same time contribute to the cooling of the economy.

Chapter Two

Effects on Internationalisation of Higher Education

Immediate Consequences of Lockdowns for Higher Education Institutions

The emergency situation described in Chapter 1 had immediate consequences for a number of sectors, including the higher education institution. Following the initial lockdowns, campuses had to close, with a number of international students wondering about the next steps. Some decided to go back home, some decided to stay. Either way, the academic year ended in a different way than it usually does and at the time of writing it is still unclear how the end of the year and graduation ceremonies are to take place for the 2020 generation.

According to UNESCO (2020), nationwide closures impacted almost 70% of world's student population (from primary to tertiary education), with 1,213,390,181 affected learners, which is 69.3% of total enrolled learners under 158 countrywide closures (data for 16 May 2020).

Overnight, many higher education institutions had to close their doors and cancel traditional lectures, seminars, and other face-to-face activities, as well as postpone implementation of educational and research projects that involved travel and in-person meetings. This represented a big and immediate change for a sector that in Europe still heavily relies on tradition.

As an immediate mitigating measure, many higher education institutions transferred their teaching activities online, while enabling professors and students to gain access to the necessary virtual tools and mechanisms to access remote learning. In a way, this was perceived as a positive step towards strengthening the flexibility of the higher education institutions as virtual environment allows them to carry out lectures anytime and anywhere. However, switching to this new reality represented a challenge and proved to put a certain strain on the proper online education infrastructure, which also requires technical support and forces teaching staff to have extra computer skills in order to effectively use the online tools, including the ones specifically

tailored for evaluation purposes. This one-off change and switch to on-line teaching, however, represented much more than just a new *modus operandi*. It meant that the whole higher education institution way of functioning had to adapt; interactions between students and teachers, as well as with and among administrative staff had changed radically. It is no longer about moving lectures online, but creating, developing, and implementing a whole new virtual ecosystem in higher education. In some countries, this is expected to take at least 6 months, considering that proper financial and human resources are available for this task.

Some might believe that most of the higher education institutions that have switched to online teaching during the COVID-19 lockdowns shall return to the traditional ways after the emergency. The context is therefore very unpredictable and with EU Member States lifting restrictions at the time of writing, going back to university classrooms might not take place at the same time for all European students.

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, some national education agencies, issued a number of recommendations for higher education institutions, including the following (NAKVIS, 2020):

- While implementing online courses, higher education institutions are advised to maintain good overview of planning, follow up and implementation of their programmes and ensure that proper technical support can be acquired by academic staff at any moment. Academic staff is encouraged to take part in trainings related to the use of technology for remote teaching.
- Higher education institutions are encouraged to set up mechanisms for continuous checks so that adaptations and improvement of online teaching can be implemented easily. The focus has to be clearly set on achieving the key competences and knowledge as per national curricula.
- Higher education institutions are to ensure that students are able to access all sources and all activities that they need in order to complete courses.
- Higher education institutions are encouraged to look into alternative ways for assessing knowledge, such as exchanging written exams with projects, oral exams, assignments, etc.
- As traineeships are currently impossible, higher education insti-

tutions are encouraged to postpone these activities and requirements until further notice or encourage students to opt for alternatives to traineeships, such as research assignments, individual projects etc.

If the effect of lockdowns on higher education institutions in Europe was indeed overnight, coming back to classrooms might take more time. The new normal for European higher education might be quite different from what we have known in the past and it could just as well be that COVID-19 was the necessary disruptor for modernisation of the European higher education as such.

Higher Education Institutions Responses to Lockdowns

Moving all educational activities online did not happen overnight for all higher education institutions in the EU. Some had more advanced online teaching platforms, some did not have them at all. But it seems like the majority identified moving activities online as a new opportunity, if harnessed in a good way.

Some educators looked at the bright side of this (forced) digitalisation. They mentioned that implementation of workshops would become more efficient when moved online. They claimed that focus and presentations were better received by the audience who actually scheduled time to be there, online, even if this meant connecting through a smartphone. Providing that all technical aspects (video, audio, presentations) work well, the outcome could be even more impressive than if these presentations were delivered offline.

In addition, some educators find advantages in the fact that their lectures are being recorded and made available at a later time for students or interested individuals. Even though missing the actual lecture time means that students cannot submit their questions and get answers in real time, it still does not mean that they have actually missed the lecture. They can always review it at a later stage.

Finally, online courses have proven to be more comfortable as they do not require all the students and staff to commute to the classroom. Time and money are being saved by both the academic staff and the students.

Digitalisation seems to have been the one and only solution for the majority of European higher education institutions and has enabled thousands of students to continue their studies even among lockdowns

and confinements. In this aspect, Europe is the lucky continent, as an extremely high proportion of Europeans are connected to the Internet, with some countries reaching up to 98% connectivity (European Commission, 2020a). This allowed for a relatively quick switch to online teaching as well as learning, as almost every European student has a computer and an active home internet connection. When compared to other world countries, this is a privilege and an advantage.

On the other side of the spectrum, some higher education institutions that had already been implementing their courses online, focused on responding to the COVID-19 situation through recommendations based on their own experience. Being one of them, the Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI) held a session of the Senate to discuss how the University should respond to the crisis, as well as what the institution could advise fellow colleagues in the wider Euro-Mediterranean region, inducing for the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Advice and measures mainly focus on strengthening the existing e-learning infrastructure as well as reinvigorating webinars for a wider audience.

A new norm with regard to how higher education institutions in the Euro-Mediterranean region work is about to take place, with challenges and opportunities expected in the areas of education, research, and international cooperation.

Finally, some other higher education institutions got together to create ad hoc groups, such as the University eLearning and eEducation Group, coordinated by the University of Maribor (Slovenia). This group supports people of different age and different disciplines who use eTechnologies to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of learning and education. The group is expected to include professors already teaching through the intensive use of eTechnologies, as well as representatives of organisational units of higher education institutions that organise education of employed and retired associates. The initiative is expected to spread abroad, including higher education institutions from neighbouring countries and the wider region.

Covid-19 certainly threw universities and colleges into a very uncertain position. They were forced to go online overnight. Those implementing such courses previously had a bit of a head start, but with long-term outlooks, they also had to find new ways to make this work better. The biggest impact was probably on courses having a strong practical component, such as medicine, physical therapy, manual therapy,

sports. DePietro (2020) reports that ‘effects of Covid-19 on colleges and universities are multifaceted and quite complex. Whether it is in the area of applications and admissions, tuition, student loans or teaching, COVID-19 is making a substantial, and perhaps, lasting impression on colleges and universities.’

Covid-19 has forced lecturers and teachers reimagine how they deliver an engaging and holistic learning experience for students. Some of the teaching staff, however, decided to look over the challenges part and focus on the opportunities that this new reality brings. As it turned out, this became a massive opportunity to break out of old habits and create new, impactful, relevant modes of learning that take advantage of technology and this very moment. As such, higher education is expected to become significantly more accessible as universities think about how to move all of their programming online, including counselling, student life, and career development, among other things.

In addition, remote learning might alleviate some costs for those struggling to make ends meet when moving to a different town or campus or save time for those that have previously had to commute. Living at home while attending schools with limited-sized classes may become a much more palatable option for parents afraid to send their children to live in densely populated campus dorms.

Another thing to bear in mind are new admissions. Certainly, the first year at university will not be as exciting as students might have imagined if they are locked in with their computers and listening to lectures. Being denied the social element, American researchers forecast that many would opt for a gap year.

And what about international students? It is hard to imagine that somebody would travel to another country to study from a dorm this year. Even if international students were able to participate in fall classes remotely, there would be technological access issues as well as freedom of speech and thought concerns for those citizens of more austere governments, warn some American researchers.

So, what have higher education institution learned about online teaching in this first COVID-19 crisis? Anna Maria Volpe and David Crosier (2020) define the main challenge for higher education institutions, namely how could they continue to offer instructions if face-to-face classes and lectures were closed. Online classes seemed like a short-term solution. Students want to be actively engaged in their own learning, and universities are proposing new forms of teaching

and learning. Distance education and MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) using pre-recorded material have been an exceedingly popular solution to this challenge. And then another idea came up: synchronous courses, in which face-to-face and remote students receive instruction together in real time.

Eurydice interviewed a Senior Lecturer Sophie Queuniet from Columbia University, who now uses a 100% online synchronous approach. She started this practice on 9 March when Columbia University closed down because of the pandemic (Volpe & Crosier, 2020).

Sophie claims that this kind of teaching keeps the contact with students and motivates them. Students get immediate feedback, answers to questions, and keep the learning momentum. When a student needs further examples, the teacher is there to provide them. The motivation therefore remains, and curiosity is generated and kept. Of course, this approach is not always possible, for material, connection, or other reasons. Medical reasons can also play a part in this. But it would still allow the student to learn at one's own pace, when possible. A question remains, however, whether students can develop a sense of community through synchronous communication. While this cannot yet be well answered due to limited amount of time spending in such environment, Yale scholars recommend work with group projects, use of breakout rooms of 2–3 people in Zoom, always give time for students to speak alone before the teacher joins, use the current situation and relate to students when teaching, make sure that everybody knows everybody, designate a 'captain,' who would report questions or problems of the whole class, and use a live Google doc during class so that every student can post something – a question, a concern, a suggestion, a comment.

In the synchronous teaching model students are kept motivated, in addition to grades also by having a teacher who is fully dedicated, prepares interactive classes, and makes sure that activities use all kinds of technologies and tools to keep them on their toes.

In practical terms, to conduct a successful online or synchronous class, Sophie recommends to mute audio for better sound quality and use the speaker's view on Zoom, to share screen, both the teacher's and the students' screen, to use breakout rooms, share video clips, use the Annotate or Whiteboard functions on Zoom, use the Pear Deck app – a tool you can add on to Google slides. It makes the class very interactive, and students are called one at a time by name instead of the teacher

waiting for them to participate. That helps to minimize awkward moments of silence.

Online teachers have to be open-minded vis-à-vis new technology and flexible to try out new things. They have to post their materials on the course repository and send emails. And finally, they have to be aware of cyber security risks that many higher education institutions have so far been preventing successfully, recommending passwords to Zoom sessions, and recommending additional safety measures.

Implications for Internationalisation

While academic staff and higher education institutions management may see the forced digitalisation and a swift shift to online learning as a temporary measure, students might never consider education the same again. Having been thrown into the situation where they can do their courses and assignments from home, many young Europeans might take a different stance to having to sit in a lecture room and listening to ex-cathedra lecture. They might also start evaluating professors on different points than before, putting more emphasis on the content rather than form.

In general, the COVID-19 situation is expected to represent a big shift in higher education, also in relation to internationalisation. While it is possible to argue that, on the one hand, internationalisation at home is now happening quicker than ever and foreign professors are brought into our homes with a click of a button, it is clear that by being unable to travel to another country, the number of foreign exchanges becomes extremely limited, and many students are reconsidering their studies abroad.

Nick Mitchell (2020) described some findings by the Dutch-based global study choice platform, Studyportals, reporting that a growing number of students reconsidered their studies abroad as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemics. 40% of potential international students were changing their plans and staying in home countries in mid-May 2020. The number has been growing quickly on a weekly basis. This means that only 60% of students were sticking with their original plans of studying abroad during the upcoming academic year, with numbers quickly plummeting when new cases of COVID-19 were being detected in Europe and the USA. Among reasons for changing their international study plans, the most frequently cited was belief that travel would continue to be restricted, closely followed by the fear

that family savings would decrease because of the COVID-19 effect on the economy. Prospective international students further mentioned that universities should ensure better hygiene around campuses, numerous students would be happy to see more counselling and support. Over half of the respondents said that application periods should be extended.

Kerry Kennedy (2020) cited a British council survey of Chinese students that showed comparable results, with over a third of students who had already applied to study internationally now undecided about cancelling their plans for the upcoming study year, with 22% saying they were very likely to cancel them.

Decisions and future international study plans, however, seem to have a strong country note. In the already mentioned poll by Studyportals (Mitchell, 2020), 72% of international students said they would carry out their plan to study in Germany, 65% would not refrain from going to the UK for courses, followed by 63% for the USA and 61% for the Netherlands.

Logically, interest in studying closer to home is on the rise, and it shows that students from Europe are increasingly searching for study options in Spain, UK, and Germany, while searches by students from Asia and Africa to study in Europe are declining.

Some experts predict that it could be five years before the global student mobility recovers.

In its special way, the EU's most successful policy, Erasmus exchange programme, was also interrupted due to the COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions of movement. The whole concept of Erasmus exchanges relies on physical movement of students around Europe, youth that wants to undergo a traineeship in another country, teachers who are looking for new knowledge and skills, young Europeans who join the European Solidarity Corps to help those in need.

For all these aspects of the now Erasmus+ Programme, including thousands of small and medium sized projects that the programme finances in many areas, lockdowns represented an interruption of activities that in their majority cannot be implemented at all in the current situation.

For this reason, the European Commission came up with a response to the unprecedented situation, which it hopes will allow the majority of participants retake the opportunity as soon as possible. On the institutional battlefield, the Commission is trying hard to maintain and

safeguard the Erasmus+ budget and implement it as soon as travel and movement are allowed again.

To everyone involved in the Erasmus+ programmes, the Commission (European Commission, 2020c) advises to keep an open line of communication, even if premises are closed. National Erasmus+ agencies are given a special and responsible role, answering questions by citizens of individual Member states when it comes to technical questions around the implementation of Erasmus+ projects and mobilities, while the Education, Audiovisual, and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) is tasked to be the source of information for centralised actions, such as Erasmus Mundus Joint degrees, Jean Monnet, and others.

The Commission is engaging in real crisis management and allowing prolongations to Erasmus+ projects, which might include mobilities abroad for multiple participants or the European Solidarity Corps project for up to 12 months. Temporary interruption of the activity is in this context considered a good reason to resume activities when possible. Similarly, recent higher education or vocational education and training graduates postponing their placements abroad can do so within 18 months of their graduation instead of the regular 12-months timeframe.

Furthermore, students or volunteers that are still incurring expenses directly and exclusively linked to their stay in the destination country and are taking part in virtual learning or other virtual activities can keep their grants. They may also be able to obtain refunds of any relevant additional travel costs. This is valid for situations when an exchange student decides to return to home country or remain in the host country during the lockdowns. In latter case, they can be eligible for an additional grant to cover the extra period of time, beyond what had initially been planned, as they had to stay abroad due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

At the level of recognition of qualifications, the European Commission is asking higher education institutions to be as flexible and pragmatic as possible to help students achieve the outcomes indicated in their learning agreements, regardless of the students' geographical location. This flexibility would, in particular, help students who have returned to their home countries to finish their courses at their host institution, and to have European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits obtained through remote studying arrangements fully recognised.

Furthermore, the Commission has decided to extend deadlines for applications for a number of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps calls for proposals. They also allowed retention of the individual support grant to receive Erasmus+ or European Solidarity Corps organisational support, including the cases where the Erasmus+ or European Solidarity Corps activities are cancelled. This approach considers the rent of premises, costs of preparation and follow up of participants prior to the departure as well as the tasks carried out to support the participants in managing the exceptional nature of the COVID-19 pandemic (cancellations, contacts with host partners, counselling, etc.).

Similarly, beneficiaries of strategic partnerships or solidarity projects can opt to temporarily suspend their project, ask for an extension of the project duration and carry out the planned activities once the restrictions in place in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic are lifted. In this case, the project management grant is calculated on the basis of the new project duration, excluding the suspension, but cannot exceed the total amount of grant agreed.

Finally, not only student exchange but also research collaboration in relation to COVID-19 could be hindered. While the EU is encouraging collaborative research to understand the new virus and find a vaccine as soon as possible, Chinese authorities have been trying to control their researchers in what they find, publish, and share with their Western counterparts. Over the course of the pandemics, Chinese government has proven to spare no effort in controlling the narrative on the origins of COVID-19 and such vetting could have an impact on research collaborations worldwide. Imposing restrictions on academics is considered a dangerous move as it not only slows down the world in understanding the new threat, but also puts into question the very origins of research cooperation with China. Not only do Chinese researchers lose the opportunity to exchange knowledge with their international counterparts, but also doubts are raised in relation to any future medical or scientific information that comes from China, particularly if related to COVID-19.

Chapter Three

What Competences Matter in a Lockdown

Pre-COVID Competencies for the Job Market

In the rapidly changing world, even before the COVID-19 created a global panic and confusion, skills for work were a topic often discussed. Observing rapid changes in behaviours, led by technological advances, youth of today needs to have a different set of knowledge and skills in order to succeed in their future careers. While we might not know for sure what these skills are exactly, there used to be a kind of an understanding at the EU level that certain skills matter more than others.

Talking about in-demand skills in the European markets, the authors point at a combination of sector-specific hard skills, and those soft skills that are indicative of an ability to grow as a successful professional and leader. In late 2018 and 2019, the EU job market grew significantly with simultaneous increase in competitiveness and innovation based on the role of information technology and European, as well as global opportunities.

From the list of key skills, it is likely that they will remain crucial even in the post-COVID new reality (European Data Portal, 2020):

- Hard skills: advanced ICT skills, such as coding, statistical analysis and data mining, network, and information security.
- Hard skills: technical skills, such as Python programming language, machine learning, DevOps engineering, Java programming language and mobile development skills.
- Soft skills: problem solving, and the ability to optimise regular business processes as well as navigate complex situations, is required from professionals.
- Soft skills: communication skills, communicating efficiently with various teams and carrying out business functions smoothly.
- Soft skills: leadership, especially for businesses that have a lean organisational culture and want leaders to both manage teams and guide business processes, as well as provide subject matter expertise.

You might now be asking yourself which skills constitute your employability portfolio. Which ones should you have given up learning five years ago and what knowledge will help you get a raise or a better job in 2025? While there is probably no uniform answer to these questions, and no one has a crystal ball that could tell us the exact future, the best we can do is take an informed guess – a prediction.

The European Commission did so in the *European Skills Agenda* (European Commission, 2020f), which is meant to improve skills level, relevance and transparency as well as predict in the best possible way which skills will be needed in the future. The New Skills Agenda is also one of the seven flagship initiatives of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

According to the European Commission (2020f) ‘about 70 million Europeans lack sufficient reading, writing and numeracy skills and 45% of the EU population lack a sufficient level of digital skills.’ While young people find it difficult to find jobs, 40% of employers say they cannot find people with the right skills. For this reason, the New Skills Agenda is meant to represent a framework for activities aimed at increasing skills levels, improving understanding of skills needs and help people have their skills recognised. Some tools are already in place, such as the Europass CV and some others are being developed. Building relevance of skills is to be achieved by building stronger cooperation between education and training providers and the labour market. Special attention should be put on the development of digital skills as cornerstones of the new age.

The New Skills Agenda for Europe launched 10 actions to make the right training, skills and support available to people in the EU. They are intended to improve the quality and relevance of training and other ways of acquiring skills, make skills more visible and comparable and improve information and understanding of trends and patterns in demands for skills and jobs (skills intelligence) to enable people make better career choices, find quality jobs, and improve their life chances. The first eight actions are already underway, with the actions 9 and 10 being in the pipeline. Actions are listed and explained in some detail in Table 3.1.¹

There is one set of skills that pops up regularly in the context of 21st

1. More information on the New Skills Agenda for Europe can be found at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1223> and at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1146&langId=en>.

TABLE 3.1 Overview of the 10 Actions of the New Skills Agenda for Europe

Action	Short description
1 Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults	Recommendations on this action were adopted by the Council of the EU in December 2016. The Commission and the Member States are collaborating with interested stakeholders to help low-skilled adults acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy, and digital skills and/or acquire a broader set of skills by progressing towards an upper secondary qualification or equivalent.
2 European Qualifications Framework	The revised European Qualifications Framework was adopted by the Council of the EU in May 2017. New Recommendations are being implemented by the European Commission and the Member States with the view of supporting better understanding of qualifications and making better use of all available skills in the European labour market.
3 Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition	This action aims to support cooperation among education, employment, and industry stakeholders. It was launched in December 2016 and works towards improving the digital skills of the wider population.
4 Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills	This is about improving skills intelligence and addressing skills shortages in specific economic sectors: automotive; defence; maritime technology; space/geo information; textile, leather clothing & footwear; and tourism. The first call under this action was launched in January 2017 and project started in December 2017. Six additional sectors were subsequently selected for a second round. These are: additive manufacturing, construction, maritime shipping, paper-based value chain, renewable energy & green technologies, steel industry.
5 EU Skills Profile Tool Kit for Third-Country Nationals	This tool kit is supposed to support early identification of skills of asylum seekers, refugees, and other migrants. It was launched in June 2017 and is now available in all EU languages (except Irish) as well as in Arabic, Farsi, Pashto, Sorani, Somali, Tigrinya and Turkish.

Continued on the next page

century requirements in the labour market and does not necessarily relate to the digital area. It is financial literacy. How many youngsters really pay their bills or pay attention on their spending limits until it is too late? Lack of these skills might represent a doomsday for them once they find themselves alone in the job market, working for a starting salary and living in an expensive city.

According to Beth Braverman (2015), students of all ages lack knowledge in the field of financial literacy. This is the area where many will fail and subsequently end up being less capable of taking care of themselves

TABLE 3.1 *Continued from the previous page*

Action	Short description
6 Vocational education and training	In the framework of this action, on-going work is focused on a set of measures to support the modernisation of VET.
7 Key competences	A review of the Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning was undertaken to help more people acquire the core set of skills necessary to work and live in the 21st century. The review included a strong focus on entrepreneurial and innovation-oriented mind-sets and skills and served as basis for the Commission's proposal for a new Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning in January 2018.
8 Europass	The Europass framework is to be revised so as to offer people better and easier-to-use tools to present their skills and obtain useful real-time information on skills needs and trends, which can help with career and learning choices.
9 Graduate Tracking	A proposal for a Recommendation on Graduate Tracking is under discussion with EU Member States. The goal is to improve understanding of graduates' performance after their education and training experiences.
10 Analysing and sharing of best practice on brain flows	This work is currently in progress. Policies and measures to better manage the brain flow phenomenon are being discussed and assessed.

and therefore less capable of 'adulthood.' Among the countries included in the *Forbes* analysis, only 17 required high school students to take a course in financial literacy, and those same countries have proven 'to have a direct impact on student ability to make wise financial decisions.' These students were also more likely to successfully save money, budget wisely and make smarter investments. In this respect, Elisabeth Hoyt (2020) suggests five steps towards enhancing our financial literacy:

1. *Learn budgeting basics.* This should be quite easy, considering the range of modern apps helping us track our expenses and revenues. You should know where your money is actually going and help you hold yourself accountable on where your revenue is from and what you are using it towards.
2. *Consider the impact of interest.* Understanding interest or understand the difference between various loan offers in different banks

can help you save a lot of money. Understanding how interest can impact your finances can therefore significantly help you upscale your finances.

3. *Do not forget to save.* Saving is considered an important aspect in maintaining a healthy financial situation, but many students tend to neglect it. Learning to save early will create a habit that will stick with you for life. You can start by saving for an expensive item you wish to buy and incrementally reach that peace of mind where you will always have some money on the side.
4. *Manage the credit-debt rollercoaster.* This relates to being aware how easy it is to lose credit. While credit can be a useful tool, rash decisions at young age can lead to devastating consequences. Therefore, Hoyt (2020) concludes that it is important to learn and grasp concepts and tools behind responsible credit practices as soon as possible.
5. *Understand the perils of identity theft and safety.* Considering that most financial services nowadays are digital, understanding the concept of identity theft along with preventive measures is crucial.

While all professions are evolving and require addition and new skills, researchers represent a curious example. Those professionals already develop a unique set of skills during their education and training as they fight their way through the labyrinths of academia, and a web of relationships that will ultimately, along with their hard work, lead to acquiring a PhD. Researchers usually learn how to plan and manage their work and have a strong work ethic and personal effectiveness. This allows them to be extraordinarily successful in their careers as well as in looking for jobs.

However, researchers too must follow labour market trends and develop some skills that allow them to be more successful in applying for grants, looking for new opportunities and, finally, for collaborating internationally. The UK Institute of Physics, for example, suggests on their website² that the following skills are beneficial to researchers looking to boost their employability:

- Independence in terms of being able to work without close supervision and manage your own time and projects;

2. See <https://www.iop.org/careers-physics>.

- Critical thinking as in being able to evaluate your work and that of others, making judgments about the value of information and drawing conclusions from data;
- Problem solving, meaning working on and devising strategies to work towards a solution;
- Contributing as a professional in terms of presenting work to your peers, managing discussions and defending your position, having the confidence to forward ideas to senior staff; and
- Initiative, especially in relation to having the confidence to make decisions and act on them, not waiting for approval to do basic tasks, but reporting back responsibly at appropriate times.

Finally, the modern era is all about communications. The world wants to know about a breakthrough discovery. The financing authority wants to tell the world that they supported this breakthrough. When making a name for themselves, researchers might be more successful in acquiring further support and forge additional alliances in their fields. In this respect, the ERC strongly supports their grantees to develop communication skills and successfully communicate their research findings to the general public.³

What Competencies Can Save Businesses in a Contactless World

Digital skills, mainly – would have been a simple answer. However, the world is never that simple. UNESCO reiterates the EU position of the global lockdown as an unprecedented challenge for education and skills development systems. UNESCO warns that challenges for professions that mostly rely on skills learning are disproportionately big, and those that already possess certain skills are in an advantageous position right now.

On the business end, the LinkedIn (2020) *2020 Workplace Learning Report* looked at over 660 million professionals and over 20 million jobs to come up with 15 most in-demand skills. Then they looked at the skills gap. Considering that the COVID-19 situation has not changed the direction into which the labour market is going, namely towards digitalisation, we can safely claim that these skills remain on the top of the list even in the post-COVID reality.

3. More information on the ERC's advice on communicating research can be found at <https://erc.europa.eu/managing-your-project/communicating-your-research>.

The top soft skills identified were (LinkedIn, 2020):

- *Creativity*: how to generate original ideas and solutions.
- *Persuasion*: convincing others to support your ideas, buy your solutions, or to act.
- *Collaboration*: ability to work in a team and unlock synergies towards a common goal.
- *Adaptability*: thriving in change and uncertainty.
- *Emotional intelligence*: ability to perceive and understand the emotions of yourself and others and to modulate your own natural emotions.

The top hard skills are (LinkedIn, 2020):

- *Blockchain*: a novel way to securely store, validate, authorise, and move digital assets across the internet.
- *Cloud computing*: design, delivery, and maintenance of cloud architecture on platforms like AWS and Azure.
- *Analytical reasoning*: ability to understand data and generate conclusions based on analysis.
- *Artificial intelligence*: embodying AI, machine learning and natural language processing.
- *UX design*: conducting research and designing software and other products to maximize the ‘user experience.’
- *Business analysis*: able to work with data for analysis, problem solving, and presentations.
- *Affiliate marketing*: the hottest new hard skill is about marketing through others’ trusted channels.
- *Sales*: perhaps both a hard and a soft skill, as it involves persuasion, but with a specific commercial end in mind.
- *Scientific computing*: able to apply statistical and analytical approaches to large data sets using programs like Python and MATLAB.
- *Video production*: mobile video is quickly becoming the dominant form of all communication and companies are fighting to create effective digital video assets.

In the current context, when the majority of activities were moved online if possible, the role of the Chief digital officers became appar-

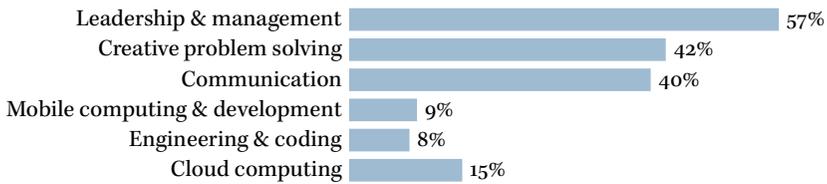


FIGURE 3.1 Key soft skills according to LinkedIn *2020 Workplace Learning Report* (2020)

ent and needed, not only in companies, but also in higher education institutions (Alatovic et al., 2020). The situation has clearly shown that those who have possessed good digital skills prior to lockdowns made it through better than the rest.

In parallel and as a logical consequence, demand for digital services and products is growing both from customers and employees stuck at home. Internet usage, social media usage, videoconferencing tools and video games saw unprecedented spikes.

It is reasonable to expect that new digital activities, from ordering groceries online to telemedicine, might become standard behaviour after the lockdowns end. McKinsey claims that the new digital reality presents unique challenge for chief digital officers. They are the ones that can lead their companies' digital response across four dimensions: resilient leadership; re-crafting the digital strategy and rebalancing the product road map; engaging with customers; and updating agile practices to accelerate remote delivery. The same could be applied to higher education institutions, with the tweak that the Chief Digital Officer would in many cases first have to be established in the higher education context. Nevertheless, it is clear that higher education institutions shall be able to continue to exist, operate, and survive in the post-COVID reality only by harnessing the digitalisation wave.

So, which are the key skills that can sail you through social distancing? European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop, 2020) skills database contains information about skills requirements in more than 67 million online job advertisements across Europe. By using the ESCO skills database, it has classified a list of 292 aggregated skills that are requested in European online job ads, using a similar methodology as with the Cov19R index.

Out of these 292 skills, 60 were labelled as highly dependent on personal social interaction, mostly in areas of 'communication, collaboration and creativity,' 'assisting and caring for others,' 'providing personal

TABLE 3.2 Skills at Social Distancing Risk

Covid-19 risk skills	Covid-19 resilient skills
Communication and collaboration	Working with ICT
Assisting and caring	Health and welfare
Personal services	Safety and protection
Arts and media	Specialised technology

NOTES Adapted from Cedefop (2020).

services' or 'performing arts and media content production.' 44 skills were considered as mostly resilient to social distancing, as they have either high potential to be done remotely, namely in areas like 'working with ICT,' 'working with special technology' (such as medical or audio-visual equipment) or are necessary for provision of basic services in areas like 'provision of health and welfare services,' 'provision of safety and protection services,' 'provision of food supply services,' or 'packaging and delivery' (Cedefop, 2020).

Importance of Soft Skills for Managing the Crisis

The COVID-19 crisis will certainly flag out the things that really matter in an emergency when the world closes in and digital becomes the new social. The importance of hiring for the right skills was particularly underlined, according to some analysts.

In the crisis situation, crisis management skills become crucial for employers. By now, most of them only hope to have hired the right workers having the right soft skills for crisis management and being up to the task of working within an emergency situation. Calm thinking must prevail, creative problem-solving strategies are a must, and health and safety protocols have to be strictly followed.

Skill survey (<https://www.skillsurvey.com>) suggest that three areas are of utmost importance when considering candidates' soft skills and abilities:

- *Emotional maturity.* This encompasses strong self-control even in the midst of crisis, makes an individual more capable of making rational decisions, communicating clearly, and working to effectively solve the problem.
- *Professionalism.* This competence is about assessing how they manage themselves, and more importantly, how they treat others when the pressure climbs. Professionalism is something you

demonstrate day in and day out on the job. Three behaviours can describe professionalism in almost any situation: being dependable, following instructions and having a strong work ethic.

- *Adaptability.* This shows whether your candidate can adapt to a changing environment and crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

While technical skills may get one's foot in the door, it is people skills that will open most of the doors to come. One's work ethic, attitude, communication skills, emotional intelligence, and a whole host of other personal attributes are the soft skills that are crucial for career success.

With these soft skills one is able to excel as a leader. Problem solving, delegating, motivating, and team building are all much easier with good soft skills. Knowing how to get along with people – and displaying a positive attitude – is crucial for success.

And it is even more so in the time of pandemic, when everybody is under severe stress and no one can focus properly, being stuck at home with children and work at the same time. Soft skills are what keeps you going or leaving in the job you are undertaking in these tough times. And your soft skills are what makes you shine out from the competition.

In fact, a Cedefop study described by Meta Šlander and Špela Pogačnik Nose (2020) shows that by 2030, the most important skills to have will be adaptability, communication, cooperation and creativity. These are all soft skills. Lifelong learning also falls into this group, as well as being ready and able to understand and take on new technologies, new organisational models, and new opportunities. Creativity and problem solving, thinking out of the box and being proactive are also expected to be among the skills that will land you an exciting job in 2030.

A harder skill for the future is expected to be the 'data management' skill. It will be required at all levels and in all industries, including the ones that we cannot imagine needing data managers at this moment.

As we know, digitalisation will be the main factor of change in what employers will be looking for in the next decade. Robots seem to be the future of work, and this is why having soft skills will become top of mind for those wishing to attain a certain level of professional career development.

On the other hand, 2 million new jobs that currently do not exist

are expected to pop up during this decade, mostly connected to ICT, robotics, mathematics, and data management. Some of them might be described as: urban farmers, data scientists, cyber security specialists, 3D web designers, VR developers, privacy managers, caretakers for the elderly, healthcare specialists and independent professors.

Administration, sales, research, and health are expected to be among the most sought-after professions during this decade, in addition to transport and civil engineering.

Chapter Four

Research

Data and Methods

For the empirical research, we self-constructed the questionnaire in which we included scales measuring the importance and integration of selected soft skills in job markets and in teaching in higher education institutions all over the world as well as the expected changes due to the COVID-19 pandemics in higher education and European Union. With the research, we wanted to ask competent people about their vision of the possible future, expected after the end of COVID-19 pandemics.

We constructed an electronic questionnaire and disseminated it by following the snowball approach. In the period from the end of April 2020 until the beginning of June 2020 we collected 384 valid completed questionnaires. The electronic questionnaire was opened by approximately 2,100 persons, which means roughly 18% response rate.

The data was analysed with SPSS software. Some basic calculations and tests that were done are presented in the continuation of the chapter. The analysis is based on descriptive statistics supported by statistical tests such as *t*-test.

As presented in Figure 4.1, one third of respondents came from academic environment, i.e., teachers and researchers from higher education institutions, and approximately 40% were either university students or graduates. In the sample, respondents from the business sector were included, representing 22% of the sample.

From the aspect of gender, the respondents were balanced – half of the sample were female and the other half male. Average age of the respondent was approximately 41 years.

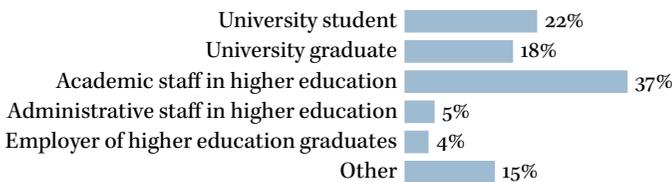


FIGURE 4.1 Types of Respondents

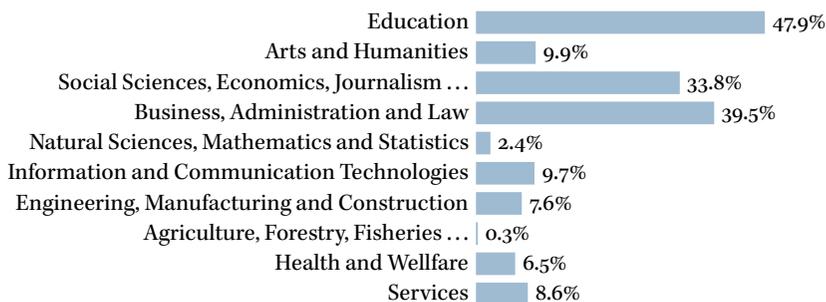


FIGURE 4.2 Respondents' Disciplines of Teaching/Studying

Respondents were asked also to list one or two fields or disciplines that best describe the nature of their work – teaching or studying. As we can see from Figure 4.2, nearly a half of them were involved in the field of education, approximately 40% in the discipline of business, administration, and law, and one third of them in the disciplines of social sciences and economics.

Table 4.1 shows countries of residence of the respondents. The largest groups of respondents come from Italy (126), Slovenia (54), Croatia (27), Kosovo (17) and Poland (14).

Analysis and Results

Importance of Soft Skills in the Job Market and Higher Education before COVID-19

We asked the respondents about the importance of a set of soft skills for success in the job market. The whole set of 14 soft skills which were recognised as important for the success in a profession in various literature showed up as highly rated by the respondents.

As we can see from Figure 4.3, all of the soft skills listed were rated as important (rates among 2.28 and 2.58). The most important soft skills seem to be:

- *Communication* (defined as the ability to adjust to the audience, comprehend and act efficiently on instructions, and explain complex issues to colleagues and clients alike);
- *Problem solving* (defined as the ability to know who can help to reach a solution, and how they can do it);
- *Time management* (defined as the ability to work under pressure, as well as within tight deadlines); and

TABLE 4.1 Respondents' Countries of Residence

Country	<i>n</i>	%	Country	<i>n</i>	%
Albania	14	3.7	Lebanon	1	0.3
Algeria	1	0.3	North Macedonia	3	0.8
Argentina	1	0.3	Malaysia	1	0.3
Armenia	1	0.3	Moldova	4	1.0
Austria	1	0.3	Montenegro	1	0.3
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2	0.5	Morocco	1	0.3
Bulgaria	2	0.5	Pakistan	2	0.5
Canada	4	1.0	Palestine	1	0.3
Chile	1	0.3	Poland	14	3.7
China	3	0.8	Romania	8	2.1
Croatia	27	7.0	Russia	1	0.3
Czech Republic	9	2.3	Saudi Arabia	1	0.3
Egypt	1	0.3	Serbia	4	1.0
Estonia	1	0.3	Slovakia	1	0.3
Finland	6	1.6	Slovenia	54	14.1
Germany	7	1.8	Spain	4	1.0
Greece	3	0.8	Sweden	1	0.3
Hungary	5	1.3	Switzerland	4	1.0
India	1	0.3	Taiwan	1	0.3
Iran	1	0.3	Thailand	1	0.3
Israel	1	0.3	Tunisia	1	0.3
Italy	126	32.9	Turkey	3	0.8
Japan	1	0.3	Ukraine	2	0.5
Jordan	4	1.0	United Arab Emirates	1	0.3
Kosovo	17	4.4	United Kingdom	5	1.3
Kuwait	2	0.5	United States of America	6	1.6

- *Collaboration* (defined as ability to work on a team and unlock synergies towards a common goal).

Respondents believe that the least important soft skill among the 14 listed seemed to be *emotional intelligence* (defined as the ability to perceive and understand the emotions of yourself and others and to modulate own natural emotions), *adaptability* (defines as thriving in change and uncertainty), as well as *negotiation and conflict resolution* (defined as ability to be persuasive and exert influence, while sensitively seeking a solution which will benefit all parties). Other soft skills do not sig-



FIGURE 4.3 Importance of Soft Skills for Job Market before COVID-19



FIGURE 4.4 Integration of Soft Skills in Teaching at Higher Education Institutions before COVID-19

nificantly differ from the common mean value of the whole soft skills measurement scale.

Figure 4.4 presents responses to the question asking about the integration of soft skills into teaching practices at higher education institutions before COVID-19 pandemics. Also, in this case all the skills are rated quite high by the respondents. The highly rated soft skill is more or less the same, compared to the highest rated skills that may be important for the job market, just the order is slightly different. The most integrated soft skills taught in higher education seem to be:

- communication,

TABLE 4.2 Comparison of the Importance of Soft Skills and Their Integration in Teaching at Higher Education Institutions before COVID-19

Skills	(1)	(2)
Collaboration	2.52	2.41
Communication	2.58	2.46
Adaptability	2.38	2.23
Responsibility	2.46	2.31
Emotional intelligence	2.28	2.12
Problem solving	2.55	2.39
Self-Motivation	2.47	2.31
Flexibility	2.44	2.27
Creativity	2.49	2.30
Time Management	2.52	2.32
Leadership	2.40	2.16
Persuasion	2.42	2.17
Negotiation and Conflict Resolution	2.38	2.12
Decisiveness	2.43	2.17

NOTES Column headings are as follows: (1) importance of soft skills for job market, (2) integration of soft skills in teaching at higher education institutions.

- collaboration and
- problem solving.

Time management is also one of the four most strongly integrated soft skills, which is consistent with the expectations of the employers. On the other hand, emotional intelligence skills seem to be less strongly integrated in the instruction activities, as well as the *skills of negotiation and conflict resolution, leadership, persuasion, and decisiveness*.

In Table 4.2, we compare the expressed importance of soft skills for the job market and their integration into higher education teaching. We can confirm statistically significant difference between all the paired items of the measurement scales, which means that there may be a relevant gap between the needs of the job market and the teaching performance at higher education institutions. We can see that in all cases the expectations of job market exceed the integration level at higher education institutions. The biggest differences are found with the following soft skills:

- decisiveness,
- negotiation and conflict resolution,
- persuasion,

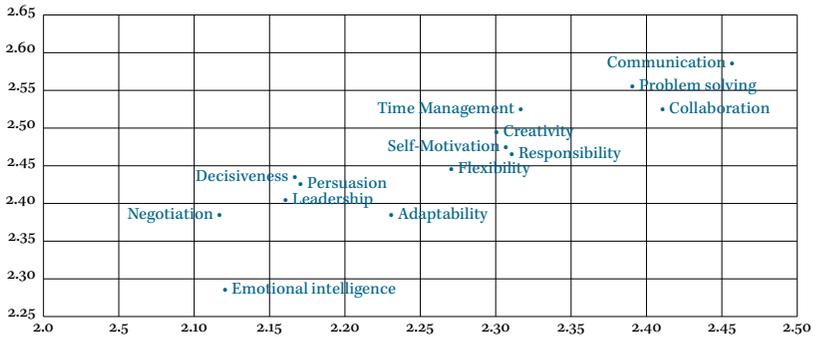


FIGURE 4.5 Importance-Performance Graph of Soft Skills in Higher Education

- leadership,
- time management and
- creativity, defined as the skill of generating original ideas and solutions.

Creativity was also one of the five most important skills needed in the job market; however, teaching creativity seems to be relatively underperformed in higher education. The biggest gaps in skills recognised as the most important for the employment relate to *problem solving*, however, the gaps in collaboration and communication skills seem to be the smallest.

In Figure 4.5 we can see once again that in the quadrant labelled as high-performance-high-importance, 3 skills can be particularly recognised:

- communication skills,
- collaboration skills and
- problem solving skills.

On the other hand, *emotional intelligence*, *negotiation and conflict resolution skills*, *leadership*, *persuasion*, and *decisiveness skills* are located in the low-performance-low-importance quadrant. Other soft skills could be recognised as some kind of a question mark items.

Importance of Soft Skills in the Job Market and Higher Education after COVID-19

Figure 4.6 and Figure 4.7 present the subjective expectations of the respondents about what is going to change in job markets and in higher



FIGURE 4.6 Anticipated Changes in the Importance of Soft Skills for Job Markets after COVID-19 (1 – less importance, 2 – no changes, 3 – more importance)



FIGURE 4.7 Anticipated Changes in the Integration of Soft Skills into Teaching in Higher Education after COVID-19 (1 – less importance, 2 – no changes, 3 – more importance)

education regarding the use of soft skills and soft skills teaching after the end of COVID-19 crisis. We asked the respondents to indicate whether an item’s importance or its integration in teaching is going to change – either decrease or increase.

We can see from the figures that the respondents assume the importance of soft skills in the job market as well as their integration into teaching at higher education institutions is going to increase after the

COVID-19 crisis. As it can be seen from Figure 4.6, the biggest change in the importance in job market is expected for:

- *adaptability*, i.e., thriving in change and uncertainty,
- *flexibility* as the ability and willingness to embrace new tasks and new challenges calmly and without fuss,
- *creativity*,
- *problem solving skills* and also
- *communication* and
- *collaboration skills*.

Skills which importance may be increased, but with lesser strength, are especially *leadership skills, persuasion, negotiation, and conflict resolution*.

The order of soft skills listed in Figure 4.6 is consistent with the one on Figure 4.7. From this point of view, the needs in the job market are forecasted to be consistent with the offer at the side of higher education. In the analysis, we also conducted a paired *t*-test comparing the importance in the job market and integration of soft skills into teaching at higher education institutions. The test gave us the results presented in Table 4.3. We can see that the level in importance exceeds the level of integration at all the soft skills included in the survey; however, only 5 of them are statistically significant. Integration of soft skills into teaching at higher education institutions does not meet their importance given by the job market in case of collaboration skills, self-management, flexibility, decisiveness, and responsibility.

We can conclude our brief analysis with a thought that despite more intensive integration of soft skills into the teaching at higher education institutions that might be implemented in the future, there might still be a gap between the teaching practice and the job market needs. However, the gap seems to be smaller with the soft skills that can be recognised as the most crucial for the success on labour market.

In the future we can expect that besides the soft skills that are already recognised as crucial for the success on labour market and are relatively well integrated into higher education curricula, soft skills of adaptability, flexibility and creativity are gaining importance. Considering the opinion of our respondents, the gap between the needs and the level of integration, a special effort of higher education institutions should be put into teaching of collaboration, and flexibility.

TABLE 4.3 Comparison between the Anticipated Changes of the Soft Skills Importance for the Job Market and their Integration into Higher Education Teaching after COVID-19

Skills	(1)	(2)
Creativity	2.63	2.61
Adaptability	2.70	2.67
Leadership	2.37	2.36
Emotional intelligence	2.45	2.42
Communication	2.60	2.57
Negotiation and Conflict Resolution	2.42	2.38
Persuasion	2.40	2.34
Problem solving	2.61	2.56
Time Management	2.51	2.46
Responsibility*	2.56	2.52
Decisiveness*	2.50	2.43
Flexibility*	2.67	2.62
Self-Motivation*	2.51	2.44
Collaboration*	2.59	2.52

NOTES Column headings are as follows: (1) importance of soft skills for job market, (2) integration of soft skills in teaching at higher education institutions. * Statistically significant.

Expected Changes in Higher Education after COVID-19

Table 4.4 presents key changes that might be expected in higher education after the COVID-19 crisis. As we can see from the figure, some changes may be positive with increase of importance or frequency and some negative with a decrease.

As can be expected on the basis of responses, the importance of social media will significantly increase in the future, either as communication media, networking technique or promotion tool. Higher education teachers and researchers might expect that visibility and attendance of virtual or online conferences, or professional gatherings will significantly increase. The same goes for the international projects implementation that will probably be based on more intensive use of virtual platforms and virtual collaboration and communication tools. This way, the intensity of international scientific collaboration may even increase. On the other hand, virtual collaborative learning and the offer of online study programmes might increase in the future; still, the extent of the increase may be smaller than the increase of virtual

TABLE 4.4 Expected Changes in Higher Education after COVID-19

Number of students attending mobility	1.67
Number of teachers attending mobility	1.70
Establishing branch HE campuses in other countries	1.75
Internationalisation of HE at home	1.89
The offer of on-line study	2.17
Virtual collaborative learning	2.43
The intensity of cooperation in joint international R&D projects	2.60
The use of virtual collaboration tools in international projects	2.66
Attendance of international events such as scientific conferences	2.69
Visibility of virtual or online conferences	2.78
Importance of social media in personal and organisational life	2.83

NOTES 1 – less, 2 – no changes, 3 – more.

TABLE 4.5 Expected Changes in EU after COVID-19

Trust in EU as a political alliance of countries	1.65
Migration and integration in EU countries	1.76
Trust in Euro	1.83
Solidarity among EU countries*	1.93
The importance of EU as a common market*	1.99
Perception of solidarity among people all over EU*	2.05
Solidarity among people all over EU	2.10
Establishment of permanent financial assistance mechanisms between Member States	2.23
Possibilities of raising nationalist political elites in EU Member States	2.28
Flexibility of labor legislation in the Member States with regard to teleworking and working time	2.58
Work from home	2.81

NOTES 1 – less, 2 – no changes, 3 – more.

research related activities. Besides, internationalisation of study and higher education might suffer, and a certain decrease may be expected in internationalisation at home, setting up university branches in foreign countries as well as the extent of student and staff mobility.

Expected Changes in the EU after COVID-19

The survey shows that significant changes might be expected especially in the area of work and employment. The respondents expect rather big changes in the direction of increase of work from home as well as the

changes of labour legislation in member states allowing for more teleworking and flexible working time. Positive changes might be expected also in the area of introduction of financial assistance mechanisms for the events of financial or other crises, which is a logical consequence of the COVID-19 crisis. On the other hand, several negative effects can be expected, especially in direction of decrease of trust in EU as a political alliance, as well as trust in its currency. Another consequence of the COVID-19 crisis might also be further problematisation regarding the attitudes towards migrations and integration attempts in the EU.

Predictions of the increases or the decreases of solidarity among people in the EU and among the member countries as well as the awareness of common market importance are somehow unclear. The data did not show statistically significant probabilities of neither increase nor decrease.

Summary and Conclusions

From the results of the study, we can expect a few positive changes but also a few negative ones.

Among the positive ones, the skills gap between higher education teaching on one side and business sector, as well as the needs of soft skills in employees might be increased. Results of the study make us suppose that some kind of better synchronisation could be expected between the higher education and business sector regarding the skills development. Due to increased uncertainty brought by the COVID-19, the skills of adaptability, flexibility, creativity, communication, and problem solving will gain importance - in both higher education, and business sector.

Development of all these soft skills might obviously be intricately linked to the increase in the use of information communication technology. In both sectors, higher education and business sector, COVID-19 seems to be some kind of a push towards virtual future. In higher education, development equals the spread of online study, virtual collaboration learning as well as increase of international collaboration conducted via virtual environment such as virtual project collaboration, the use of virtual online conferencing, etc. In the job market, COVID-19 strengthens the needs for work flexibility, work from home, which is enabled by the online virtual solutions such as videoconferencing, document sharing, cloud solutions, etc.

From the study we can also recognise possibilities of some negative

changes. In higher education, a decrease in the extent of international mobility of students and teachers, as well as decrease of so-called internationalisation at home are possible. In business sector and society at large the decrease of trust in the currency, i.e., the EURO is expected, as well as the trust in common EU market; besides, migration flows might also be heavily affected and reduced which will for sure have some negative effects in the labour market.

Chapter Five

What to Expect from the ‘New Normal’

More (or Less) Solidarity, More (or Less) EU Policies

COVID-19 shook the world, and consequently Europe, in many areas, from health to economy and society. During the two or more-month lockdowns, certain parts of the economy have had to shut down and are unlikely to recover overnight. The weakest were probably hit the most and are looking for help. The EU Member States that are able to help are likely to experience a recession, but they do have the financial means to overcome the crisis through assistance to the unemployed and to businesses. Moreover, they would be able to assist those Member States in need for support in helping their own citizens weather the storm as best as possible.

This crisis showed that Europe is, and continues to be built on solidarity. Sometimes it is not obvious, sometimes the institutions have to push it, but at the end of the day it is always there. Even though EU leaders argue about bonds, budgets, and political matters, in the end they are ready and willing to compromise for a common future.

EU leaders, especially those of the so-called locomotive of EU integration, France, and Germany, have been continuously calling for solidarity actions and a pan-EU approach to addressing the COVID-19 crisis. Even though the ideas on the meaning of solidarity actions and best approaches to crisis might differ, from the very start the bottom-line agreement seems to have been that the EU is in charge of coordination as an efficient management approach to a pandemic.

The previous economic crisis can serve as a model for what changes could be expected at the EU level following the COVID-19 situation. Riddervold et al. (2020) from the London School of Economics (LSE) claim in their blog that ‘the current situation represents a “perfect storm” of conditions that make this historical moment in European integration so crucial to understand. Since its inception, the EU integration project has been characterised by a mix of incremental change and integration spurts that have usually followed major crises.’ Understanding EU crises and the EU response is thus key to also understand-

ing the EU more generally. Overall, they found that the EU has been surprisingly resilient in the face of crises owing to its ability to adapt and absorb, and – if necessary, change. This in turn suggests that the EU has reached a stage in its development where it seems sufficiently consolidated to adapt to and cope with multiple and simultaneous crisis situations.

The LSE researchers claim that the EU has reacted slowly to COVID-19, particularly when looking at lockdowns and individual responses by Member States. However, based on historic evidence, they forecast that the EU would probably muddle through this crisis just as it has in the past. They offer three scenarios (Riddervold et al., 2020):

- *Scenario 1.* Breaking down in COVID-19 response. This scenario assumes that the Member States are unwilling to deal collectively with this major risk and the EU therefore becomes super fragile. Member States are more concerned with own security risks than collective wellbeing, making the EU role obsolete.
- *Scenario 2.* Heading forward. Here, the COVID-19 crisis is likely to trigger more integration to address common challenges, leading to policy innovations and delegation of new capacities to the EU institutions in new policy fields. This scenario builds on the idea that crisis may function as a ‘window of opportunity’ in unsettled situations and for under-institutionalised organisations. Crisis may thus spur the emergence of entirely new policies and institutions. Recent examples include the rise of EU financial surveillance agencies, the structuring of the EU banking union, and the emergent European energy union.
- *Scenario 3.* Muddling through. A final and most likely scenario, according to LSE researchers, suggests that the EU is likely to muddle through COVID-19 through path-dependent and incremental responses that build on pre-existing solutions. The COVID-19 crisis response is to rely on well-known organisational solutions and governing arrangements. This scenario assumes that when time is scarce, decision-makers tend to replicate solutions that were perceived as successful in the past. It also emphasises the ability of the EU to combine existing institutions and new institutional innovations in a creative or improvisational way, building pragmatic compromises on the way.

Good news is that the EU institutions have proven to be relatively resilient and able to deal with crises by drawing on their already established tools and structures, or by developing new tools. If anything, crises tend to strengthen expert governance and 'rule by the knowers' in the EU. Even though some uncertainties could prove to become hurdles in the future, the overall projections seem to remain in favour of the EU getting out of this storm stronger and with additional competencies.

Despite serious initial hesitations, the European Central Bank (ECB) has shown aggressive creativity in leading the immediate crisis response. Nevertheless, disagreement has emerged over the most suitable instruments to address the post-crisis economic recovery, with some countries pushing for the issuance of so called 'corona-bonds,' a proposed Eurobond that would provide liquidity to countries whose economies are most in need of post-pandemic support, while mutualizing risk across all eurozone members (Riddervold et al., 2020).

Under the leadership of Christine Lagarde, the ECB adopted a 'no-limits' policy, building upon the 'whatever it takes' policy of her predecessor, Mario Draghi. This time, the ECB established a new 750-billion-euro Pandemic Emergency Purchase Program (PEPP), allowing the ECB to purchase massive amounts of private and public sector securities to ensure that weaker countries' costs of borrowing remain low and stable. The European Commission also triggered the 'general escape clause' in the European Treaty, allowing individual governments to increase emergency spending without regard to limits imposed by the Stability and Growth Pact. But those initiatives, though crucial, effectively allow countries to borrow and spend more on their own, potentially adding to their individual country debt burdens, without providing a sustainable option for recovery in the longer term.

The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (European Union, 2012) now allows the Union to adopt legislative acts in the field of health on the strength of two legal bases. An explicit basis, with Article 168, specifies the Union's competence in the field of public health. An indirect basis, with Article 114, empowers it to harmonise national legislations with a view to the completion of the internal market, in particular in the field of health, specifically referred to in that Article. This competence does not call the primary role of States in this area into question. The Union 'shall complement the action of the Member States (and) shall encourage cooperation between Member States,' but 'the

Union's action shall be conducted with due regard for the responsibilities of the Member States'[10]. 'Member States coordinate their policies and programmes [...]. The Commission may take any useful initiative to promote such coordination.' Health care falls within the competence of the Member States. It is they who finance, manage, and organise the provision of health services and care. Any action taken by the Union is intended to complement national policies, not to replace them.

Supporting competence is a difficult exercise. The Union is always caught between doing too much and/or not enough, even more so since these two opposing forces are exerted simultaneously (Riddervold et al., 2020):

- *Integrational force.* The European Court of Justice, making the link between health, improvement of the internal market and the principle of free movement, has developed case law favourable to Community intervention and patients' rights.
- *Regulating forces.* The principle of subsidiarity applies to areas of non-exclusive competence, shared between the Union and the Member States. The Union can only intervene if its actions are more effective than those carried out at national level. In theory, the Union intervention is essentially limited to facilitating cooperation between Member States and coordinating their action. In practice, the Commission has an extremely broad view of its competence, often justifying its proposals by deepening the internal market or the cross-border dimension of a subject. However, the national parliaments ensure that the principles are respected.

Therefore, there still are ways for the EU to support and coordinate during the COVID-19 pandemic and do what it can for those in need (European Medicines Agency, 2020).

- *The patients.* The Community's intrusions into the health field began as early as the 1970s, even before an indisputable legal basis. They were mainly inspired by the internal market and the free movement of workers, in this case – patients. The aim was to ensure access to care and its reimbursement, regardless of the Member State in which it takes place. The first regulations concerned the coordination of social security systems. In 2003, creation of the European Health Insurance Card facilitated this mobility. Patient mobility remains a marginal phenomenon. The care provided to

European patients outside their country of affiliation represents 1% of public health expenditure, or around EUR 10 billion per year.

- *Health care professionals and services.* Health services are subject to the principle of free movement of services and professionals enjoy freedom of establishment, two founding freedoms of the single market. Mutual recognition of diplomas required for access to regulated professions facilitates this mobility. It is in the health sector that this mutual recognition was the earliest (as early as 1975 for doctors) since training and conditions of practice vary little from one country to another. This recognition was finalised in 2005. Conditions for the establishment of health professionals in the Union are relatively straightforward. This mobility is extremely useful for the host countries but is often extremely detrimental for the countries of origin since it increases medical shortages.

So, who decides on the legislation related to health? DG Health proposes and implements the EU health legislation. Since 1998, it has relied on an epidemiological surveillance network based on permanent communication between national health authorities. The case of 'serious cross-border threats' has been under consideration since 2013. Within the Directorate, the Operational Centre for Health Crisis Management provides the Commission with an overview of epidemic phenomena and has the mission to 'build and share knowledge of health emergency management across Europe (European Commission, 2017).

Health agencies complement this commitment. This is the case of the European Medicines Agency responsible for evaluating applications for marketing authorisations for medicinal products and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. Its regulations specify: 'The Community shall set as a priority the protection of human health by preventing human illness (and) countering threats to health. The mission of the Centre is [...] to assess current and emerging threats to health from transmissible diseases [...]. An effective response to epidemics requires a coherent approach across Member States' (European Commission, 2017).

In addition to health issues, the Union disposes with European civil protection mechanism to protect European citizens in the event of man-made or natural disasters and to organise international solidarity. The Emergency Response Coordination Centre is the heart of the mechanism. It coordinates the delivery of aid (relief items, specialised

equipment, teams, etc.) and can activate a ‘European medical corps.’

And who pays for it? Action on health at EU level is an integral part of the overall Europe 2020 strategy. Since 2003, ‘health programmes’ have been defining priority objectives and structure European intervention. 2020 is the final year of the EU’s third health programme (European Commission, 2017). Health emergencies are changing. The Union provides budgetary support for cooperation through co-financing. The health programme has mobilised EUR 450 million over the period 2014–2020. The funding applicable in the event of a crisis is that of the European Agency ECDC and the Civil Protection Mechanism.

Finally, one of the key things expected from the EU is raising awareness and keeping the moral ground. The EU is usually the moral compass that the world is looking out to. The health crisis, staggering for Europeans, is not unbelievable for all those scientists or politicians who have ever worked on these issues. It is always easy to find traces of gloomy forecasts afterwards. In 2006, Michel Barnier, following the 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean, called for the creation of European civil protection force. Pandemics are among the ‘most serious transnational crises that could affect the Union, even though there are no scenarios or action protocols at European level to respond to them.’ In 2012, for example, the French Senate Delegation dedicated to forecasting published a premonitory report on emerging diseases. For its part, the strategic plan presented by the Commission in 2016 referred to ‘new global threats’ for the first time. With the fluidity of trade and travel, diseases can spread rapidly and have catastrophic economic and health consequences. In all these areas, the EU has to make a major contribution. Within this limited framework, the Union could only be a secondary player in the health crisis. However, this did not prevent it from taking initiatives.

Robert Schuman Foundation experts explain EU engagement on various fronts since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis (Foundation Robert Schuman, 2020):

- *Mobilization of services.* The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control is on the front line. All European documentation is gathered there. The Centre prepares day-to-day data on the disease and disseminates recommendations for good practice. Likewise, the Commission is being advised by a new expert group dedicated to COVID-19.

- *Financial support* for research and the pharmaceutical industry, either through the Horizon 2020 research programme or in the form of loan guarantees.
- *Logistical support.* The Union is financing repatriation of European citizens via the civil protection mechanism. The flights are organised by the Member States and co-financed by the Union.
- *Equipment.* Creation of a Strategic Medical Equipment Reserve – SEMER – (19 March), joint call for tender launched by the Commission to purchase personal protective equipment (24 March).
- *International action.* Medical assistance to China in the form of 30 tons of personal protective equipment, support for testing centres in Africa (EUR 15 million, 24 February), financial support to WHO (EUR 114 million, 24 February).
- *Important economic aspect with support for national economies* in the form of an investment plan – ‘an investment initiative in response to the coronavirus’ – and the suspension of some of the rules on which European integration has been built: State aid, budgetary rules, etc.

Nevertheless, the researchers of the Foundation Robert Schuman (2020) claim that EU reaction did leave a feeling of unease and a certain amount of disappointment. Considering that the lack of public awareness of European issues is obvious among EU citizens, the challenge of informing people has not yet been won. The Union can only give what it has, can only intervene within the limits of its competences. The desired profile for an ideal Europe disregards the Union competences and reveals the social expectations of the moment. There will always be a gap between what the Union does and what citizens would like it to do.

This is all the more so since the Union decision-making mechanisms are complex. The citizen does not know who does what. This is particularly true when competences are shared. Accusing the Union of shortcomings is a way of bypassing one's own inadequacies. Of course, the States are the first to be blamed for the health tragedy, but in the current context, the argument about the limits of the Union powers is inaudible. Criticism wins everyone over.

Nevertheless, the EU institutions need to be cautious in dealing with this question as the Union becomes more and more fragmented, eventually becoming a collateral victim of the COVID-19 crisis. The eco-

conomic earthquake that could go with it would require adjustments and sometimes upheaval. The crisis is undermining the integration that Europeans have taken so long to build. Worse still, it is affecting the very meaning of European integration.

Some of the historical foundations of the Union are being affected directly, such as free movement, the practice of competition, management of public finances, to mention a few. On the other hand, solidarity among Member States proved to be flawed and can carry immense political consequences, as nationalisms rise, and Prime Ministers start spending more time on Twitter than on their work e-mails.

Whatever happens, there is usually something that comes out of a crisis in the EU – a new policy or a new set of policies. In this case, the European Commission would hope for a treaty change with more say on health. The new European Health Union is yet undefined, but the project seems to be well on the table, supported by the relentless Franco-German locomotive. The COVID-19 pandemic showed that member states were unprepared. Some shut down borders, all scrambled for medical supplies, and some even hoarded equipment meant for other EU states. The lack of solidarity alarmed the critics, among them the former European Commission president Jaques Delors.

And the first step in closer integration of a policy is usually a catchy action plan, put forward by the Commission. In this case, it is called the EU4Health. As a part of the new EUR 750 bn recovery package in the hopes of kick-starting battered economies, a new stand-alone EUR 9.4 bn programme would be dedicated to health. The figure is 23 times higher than current EU budget lines dedicated to health. EU4Health would run until 2027 and aims to create long-term stockpiles and reserves for medical equipment. It also wants to create a pool of ‘flying’ doctors that can be sent to areas of need. The European Medicines Agency and the European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC) would also benefit. Both agencies would have more powers when it comes to vaccines and surveillance (European Commission, 2017).

EU Institution for the ‘New Economy,’ for all Member States

The Great Recession and the consequent European debt crisis have revived the debate on stronger fiscal integration in the euro area. Dolls et al. (2014) discuss various options for how to design an unemployment reinsurance system, which could contribute to stronger fiscal integration in the euro area. To this end, they represent three versions

of euro area unemployment reinsurance schemes, namely basic unemployment reinsurance which partially replaces public unemployment reinsurance schemes, a supplementary benefit scheme that complements public unemployment reinsurance schemes, and a fully centralised system. All three options would establish automatic stabilisers at euro area level, but would have quite different consequences for stabilisation, distributions, and moral hazard options. A basic reinsurance system in the event of unemployment in the euro area can provide a basic level of reinsurance, even if a member state loses access to private capital markets and its national automatic stabilisers do not work satisfactorily. The stabilisation effect of the basic system decreases as the share of the long-term unemployed increases. Euro area-based supplementary benefit scheme, with aid disbursed only in conjunction with certain triggers, would not provide stabilisation under normal circumstances, but could increase the efficiency of national unemployment reinsurance systems in the event of severe economic crises. A fully centralised unemployment reinsurance system would lead to full harmonisation of unemployment reinsurance so that the differences between national unemployment reinsurance systems would be unified (Lelouch & Sode, 2014).

EU countries have not applied fiscal policy effectively to stabilise the economic cycle, while unemployment reinsurance would act as an automatic stabiliser, thus contributing to a faster exit from the recession. Moreover, the fiscal policy of the EU countries operated cyclically (instead of counter cyclically) at best. As an elegant solution to achieve greater economic stability in the EU, Dullien (2013) proposes a more centralised management of fiscal policy and the introduction of unemployment reinsurance.

With the onset of the recession in 2008, the EU has taken important steps to prevent and manage macroeconomic imbalances, but nothing to do with strengthening the European unemployment insurance system. During the recession, it took certain measures with a view to stabilising the economic cycle (preventing and managing macroeconomic imbalances). Among the measures, it mentions in particular the following: (i) closer monitoring of member states' budgets; (ii) stricter rules/measures in the event of treasury deficits; (iii) the long-term sustainability of public finances; (iv) management of state-owned enterprises and privatisation; (v) greater labour market flexibility and reduction of undeclared work and employment. These measures, in his view,

are going in the right direction, but the EUSR would be much more effective in contributing to a faster exit from the recession (Dullien, 2013).

Unemployment insurance at EU level can be introduced without causing large and permanent transfers between countries and in such a way that any stabilisation would benefit all countries. The authors note that the reinsurance system for unemployment in the euro area could be implemented with a relatively small budget and, on the other hand, with a relatively large stabilising power (from two to sixteen per cent reduction of the production gap).

Unemployment benefits are primarily intended for the income security of unemployed persons and their families (Dolenc et al., 2012). In times of recession and in the early stages of economic recovery, compensations provide an additional advantage: they stimulate economic activity and job creation. Among the main reasons that the US Congress created a regular unemployment reinsurance program during a period of great recession were stimulating the economy and creating new jobs (Chimerine et al., 1999).

The problem for most companies in times of economic crisis is not a lack of capacity to meet existing demand, but a lack of demand, which prevents them from making full use of existing capacity. Stimulating demand is key to stopping unemployment and starting to re-employ people. One of the best ways to do this is to target financial assistance to the unemployed who need compensation for lost income (Auerbach & Feenberg, 2000; Baunsgaard & Symansky, 2009). People whose income is interrupted in a recession and who have no savings are the ones who are most likely to quickly spend any extra income they receive. A policy that enables customers to consume effectively reduces the output gap and creates new jobs (Chimerine et al., 1999).

During a recession, unemployment rises and GDP falls. Unemployment benefit (or extending coverage/benefit period), which the unemployed usually spend in the home environment for basic needs, maintains the level of consumption, which contributes to an increase in unemployment benefits and thus to an increase in aggregate demand, which leads to a halt or slowdown of further redundancies and reducing GDP. The role of macroeconomic and structural policies is important in the recovery of the labour market. The unemployment rate in the OECD has approached pre-crisis levels (2008–2009), but the unemployment costs of the Great Recession are nevertheless remarkably

high and long-lasting in many countries. In addition, as the recovery in production has been weak in the face of the recovery in employment, labour productivity and wage growth remain low. Labour market resilience depends on macroeconomic policy and labour market settings. Macroeconomic policy is effective in limiting employment decline in times of slower economic growth and preventing the cyclical rise in unemployment from becoming structural. Spending on active labour market policies needs to respond strongly to the cyclical rise in unemployment in order to encourage a rapid return to work in the recovery. Too strict employment protection for regular workers reduces flexibility and encourages the use of temporary contracts and slows down job creation in recovery (OECD, 2017).

An unemployment reinsurance system would contribute to stability and efficiency of the EU member states and thus of the EU as a whole, as it would emphasize the role of the automatic stabiliser inherent in unemployment insurance. The EU reinsurance for the case of unemployment would complement public unemployment insurance schemes and contribute to increasing their efficiency. Public systems contribute to the protection of income and thus to the maintenance of the level of consumption of the unemployed, and they also act as automatic stabilisers at the aggregate level. With the additional funds that the reinsurance system would contribute to the state systems during the recession, the reinsurance system would strengthen the effects of the state systems and eliminate their shortcomings, as they often face deficits during the recession and thus the inability to increase unemployment benefits.

Unemployment insurance is an effective automatic stabiliser for the whole economy. The Congressional Budget Office consistently ranks unemployment benefits as one of the most effective policies for achieving economic growth and job creation (based on quantitative impact assessments, especially on GDP) – even ranked first among the 11 spending measures and taxes in the 2011 Annual Report (Congressional Budget Office, 2012). As the jobs maintained or created by higher consumption of benefits are so dispersed throughout the economy, statistical analysis should be used to estimate their number, not direct counting. Nevertheless, most economists believe that unemployment insurance policy is extremely effective, as every dollar of unemployment benefits in a new economic activity generates \$ 1.55 in the first year (Zandi, 2008). The Congressional Budget Office explained that un-

employment insurance increases general demand and creates jobs in times of economic weakness. Unemployment benefits are targeted at the involuntarily unemployed whose income has fallen. It is these unemployed people who form the larger groups, which are concentrated in the areas and activities most affected by the weak economy. Supporting the consumption of unemployed people in severely affected communities helps to prevent the spread of redundancies and job losses in these communities. The US Department of Labour report, commissioned during the George W. Bush administration and released in 2010, further reinforced the Congressional Budget Office decision. It found that in the Great Recession, additional unemployment benefits funded by the federation increased employment by approximately 750,000 jobs. Regular state unemployment benefits, however, have increased employment by an additional million jobs (US Department of Labour, 2015; Vroman, 2010).

The response to unemployment in the Great Recession and subsequent events related to the European debt crisis has been very heterogeneous across Europe and population groups. The dispersion of unemployment rates across countries in the EU reached a historical high in 2014.

The unemployment rate across countries varied according to three patterns (Boeri & Bruecker, 2011). One sample represents a group of countries where unemployment in the rate and distribution among socio-demographic groups remained relatively stable throughout the period, e.g., Austria, Belgium, Germany, and Sweden. The second sample is a group of countries with a slight increase in unemployment. The latter was fairly unevenly distributed across socio-demographic groups. The third sample is represented by countries where unemployment has risen sharply and affected young workers the most, e.g., Cyprus, Portugal, and Spain. Asymmetric shocks, both in size and nature (financial or real) and often combined with institutional differences between countries, have been the reasons for the very heterogeneous responses of national labour markets to the Great Recession. It is difficult to predict a united Europe and the proper functioning of economic and monetary union with so much divergence in labour markets between countries and with extremely limited instruments to insure the risk of unemployment between countries. Knowing the causes of these heterogeneous unemployment responses is especially important for a better understanding of labour market dynamics. Experience is

also important for assessing a coherent EU policy approach to macroeconomic stabilisation and microeconomic conditionality (Boeri & Jimeno, 2016).

Institutional reforms are needed especially in the euro area, as monetary union reduces macroeconomic stabilisation policies at national level. At the same time, the optimal design of institutions is not independent of the basic cyclical conditions (Gnocchi et al., 2015). Policies aimed at reducing unemployment should address the institutional shortcomings that emerged during the crisis and learn from the best (and worst) performers. Boeri and Jimeno (2016) find that some very urgent institutional reforms aimed at restoring competitiveness can cause side effects in severe recessions. If a stabilisation policy to reduce the risk of side effects of these reforms is not feasible in the context of monetary union, they believe that there are only two other solutions. On the one hand, institutional reforms need to be implemented as much as possible in better macroeconomic environments. This requires that EU conditionality be strengthened in cyclical periods of growth. On the other hand, labour market institutions should be based on counter-cyclical characteristics, which means that countries affected by asymmetric shocks would have considerable fiscal room for manoeuvre in monetary union.

Boeri and Jimeno (2016), in anticipation of the strengthened role of European transnational institutions in improving the functioning of labour markets, offered some proposals for changing the functioning of labour markets. In order to strengthen the role of the European transnational institutions, they propose greater coherence between the main guidelines for employment policy in the European institutions and the introduction of certain programmes at European level. In this context, they suggest that European employment policy complements and does not replace national employment and unemployment insurance policy. The proposals should be introduced in the context of positive conditionality, which provides different and probably more effective incentives for national governments to introduce the necessary structural reforms. Finally, we would focus on EU citizens and, if possible, monitor their access to these systems using the EU Social Security Number, which means that the system would be more transparent and socially acceptable.

We believe that the EU unemployment reinsurance system would represent a possible solution to the problems outlined in the previous

paragraphs. Even before the design of the model, we wanted and expected that the EU unemployment reinsurance system would act as an automatic stabiliser and contribute to maintaining the level of consumption. Other authors have come to similar conclusions, e.g., Dullien (2007) shows how strongly fiscal policy works as an optimal stabilisation tool in EMU and how it can be improved. In his research, he showed econometrically that although there are many automatic stabilisers in EMU, discretionary fiscal policy has neutralised these institutions by making the general stance of fiscal policy cyclical. As a solution, the author proposes an unemployment case system for the whole of EMU.

It would be useful to introduce an unemployment reinsurance system in the EU. The EU unemployment reinsurance system – to help the state's unemployment insurance – would cover expenditure related to rising unemployment, while on the other hand, there would be more money left in state budgets to stabilise state economies in recession. The authors of research already conducted (Buti et al., 2002; Dullien, 2012; Epaulard, 2014) find that the reinsurance system in the event of unemployment directly affects the level of consumption, as it increases the income of the unemployed and mitigates the fall in production. Institutional reforms are needed in the euro area, as monetary union reduces macroeconomic stabilisation policies at national level. EU members have not used fiscal policy to alleviate the recession, and the unemployment reinsurance system, which acts as an automatic stabiliser, would achieve just that. We believe that the recession is increasing the need for an automatic stabiliser.

The EU needs mechanisms that act as automatic stabilisers, especially in times of recession. Given the many agreements and treaties within the EU that emphasize solidarity and social and economic cohesion, the EUSR would be a good solution to reduce asymmetric financial and economic shocks as well as economic integration between members. After 2008, there was an increase in the differences in the unemployment rate between EU countries and by age groups. Boeri and Jimeno (2016) argue that the reason for these differences is related to labour market institutions, especially if we consider the interactions of the latter with the scale and nature of shocks in the context of the great recession and debt crisis of the euro area. The authors also discuss that the introduction of such a reinsurance system in the event of unemployment would give the EU its first common institution. They argue

that the EU cannot be a federation of states without common institutions, such as e.g., USA.

Unemployment reinsurance contributes to the protection of income and thus to maintenance of the level of consumption of the unemployed. In periods of weak economic activity, the reinsurance system's unemployment benefits fall as the number of employees decreases and so do the contributions paid, while on the other hand, expenditure increases without the need for a new government measure. The system, on the contrary, works in the case of increased economic activity, when expenditure decreases, and receipts increase (Dullien, 2012). Automatically, as economic activity increases, the expenditure of the reinsurance system in the event of unemployment (e.g., the amount and number of recipients of benefits, the period of receipt of benefits) automatically decreases, while benefits increase. Cash assistance to the unemployed (by extending the coverage of the period of receiving the benefit) maintains the level of consumption, as the unemployed use the financial assistance in the domestic environment for the most urgent needs. Aid to the unemployed in the long run contributes to an increase in aggregate demand, which leads to a halt (slowdown) in further redundancies and the reduction in GDP.

European Higher Education in the Post-COVID World

Finally, what mark will the COVID-19 situation leave on the higher education institutions and the wider higher education area in Europe? Has the shift to online teaching come to stay? Will academic staff request students to return to classrooms as soon as lockdowns are over, or will the more digitally skilled professors continue to teach online?

While it might be completely true that students can acquire all necessary knowledge through virtual courses, in particular the ones they can follow in real-time, it might be more difficult to foster their sense of community and belonging to a certain higher education institution. Professors and study programme coordinators might wish to focus on more group projects, break-out sessions of 2–3 people, encourage the use of a live Google document, and make some time available to talk before and after the class.

Another challenge stemming from virtual teaching might be keeping the students motivated. The key to ensuring attention is similar to the tactics teachers usually use in classrooms. Topics and contents should be interesting, engaging, communication should be two-way, interac-

tions can be done through quizzes, discussions, and exchanges of opinions. Having students work on something that interests them or that they enjoy will help a lot.

In order to be successful, teachers will have to become flexible and open-minded vis-à-vis new technology and keep trying new things. Online courses have to be well prepared and planned, including the ways to hand out materials, share files and presentations and work on common projects.

Finally, let us not forget the economic impact that the COVID-19 crisis will most probably have on the higher education institutions in Europe. The economic crisis from 10 years ago showed that the university sector was hard hit in terms of funds during the recession. Therefore, European higher education institutions need to prepare for difficult times. This crisis, however, has given special attention to the importance of research and innovation, as well as education and talent. This might make it easier for the higher education and research sector to fight and acquire the much-needed finances.

In relation to digitalisation, some experts are recommending that higher education institutions avoid the hype to stay online only. Face-to-face classes are normally even preferred by students on many campuses, especially if the study programme is expensive to attend in the first place. Also, universities have already learned that having a fully online education is expensive and cannot be considered a shortcut to saving. Therefore, a combination of online and face-to-face lectures might become the new normal for implementing higher education study programmes in Europe.

Some authors suggest that the best way forward is the implementation of the hybrid teaching model, a combination of face-to-face lectures with online courses. The argument here is that this gives everybody a chance to properly learn how to implement or follow virtual classes. Huli Han (2020) in his article mentions a survey implemented in China, showing that 61% of students are satisfied or very satisfied with the effectiveness of online teaching and agree that online teaching can reach or exceed the effectiveness of in-class teaching. However, 39% of students are not satisfied or consider online teaching relatively poor. Among teachers, 68% are satisfied or very satisfied with the effectiveness of online teaching and agree that it is equally good or even better than in-class teaching. However, 32% of teachers are not satisfied and think it is relatively poor.

Various reasons lie behind the dissatisfaction of students and teachers with online learning. Among others, key reasons identified include disturbances on the teaching network, unstable online teaching platforms or software, adverse effects of excessive use of mobile phones or computers on people's health. However, the main reason seems to be that both students and teachers are unfamiliar with online teaching, so they cannot use the platform and software easily.

While these insights might not be completely relevant for the European context, they give us an insight into the fact that technology failure makes online courses simply uninteresting. Possible future Internet disturbances could represent an important set back to virtual learning.

On the other hand, Brent White and Jenny J. Lee (2020) in their article argue that COVID-19 has only sped up the dawn of a new post-mobility world, where physical travel is unnecessary for the creation and transmission of knowledge across borders. They propose alternative models to physical mobility in the post-COVID world.

With the sudden closure of physical facilities, both faculty and students are exposed to online learning, regardless of their past training and experience. With this mass pivot, it has been predicted that higher education professionals will get used to working remotely and thereby online learning, recruitment, and meetings will take on a much wider role. This shift towards online will be a natural step for some generations. For the most part, Generation Z does not know a world without the Internet. They are highly tech-savvy, big consumers of social media where they averagely spend almost three hours each day. In our current post-mobility world, the Internet, the social media included, are powerful communication channels and educational technology has made huge advances, making better-than-classroom distance learning a present-day reality.

Despite lingering detractors, technology-enhanced online learning holds a real promise in offering high-quality, individualised, and low-cost education at scale. The supposed trade-off between quality and scale is now mostly a defensive argument against change rather than an accurate reflection of current technological possibilities. Virtual and augmented reality can give students the feel of being together in a classroom or a learning centre or even at the same table in the campus cafeteria. Virtual mobility furthermore serves the environment as it cuts carbon emissions and importantly fences brain drain from certain regions of the world.

Yojana Sharma (2020) writes that the upcoming economic recession triggered by coronavirus shutdowns around the world, together with tighter budgets for institutions and research and in some countries the loss of fee-paying students, may challenge Europe's competitive edge over China in an unbalanced relationship. Before the pandemic, it was clear that global flows had been shifting eastwards, and China was gaining influence as a global scientific power, especially in the so-called STEM fields, now enhanced due to the coronavirus crisis. International mobility of Chinese students to Western countries is in decline and the return of Chinese scholars to China is expected to rise further. Academics predict an intensified China pivot towards Europe in research and higher education collaborations, but at times when European higher education and science are reeling from the after-effects of the pandemic, and also within increasingly politicised environment, European and other universities will have to navigate carefully (Sharma, 2020).

Simon Marginson, director of the Centre for Global Higher Education at the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom, pointed to recent scrutiny of US-based researchers working with China; a situation has arisen, where previously collaborative researchers who were encouraged to work together are now seen to be security risks. There have been pressures recently within Europe and the UK to treat these academic and research and science links with China with more caution than before.

There are signs that Chinese universities, science, and humanities will recover more quickly in comparison with the United States and the United Kingdom. But Chinese students coming into English-speaking countries in Western Europe will be slow to recover. Chinese international education will recover faster and be active, particularly in East Asia.

Nevertheless, if compared to the USA, Chinese universities are more interested in European partnerships now as US-China relations are worsening. European academics still defend continuing scientific cooperation with China and underline the importance of science diplomacy, especially in times of political tension, she said. The turn to Europe had already become evident in China's increased collaborations with universities in Central and South Eastern Europe.

The number of Chinese students in those countries has been rising in the wake of new cooperation opportunities under the umbrella of

the 17+1 platform promoted by China foreign ministry and shaping relations between China and the 17 countries in Central and Eastern Europe as part of China Belt and Road or New Silk Road initiative.

But regardless of what future collaborations would be like, global cooperation shall remain important in the post-pandemic world, if only to tackle global challenges such as poverty, climate change and other health issues.

John K. Hudzik (2020) argues that long-term internationalisation of higher education is still on the horizon. He claims that a failure to integrate international activity into core teaching, research/scholarship, and community engagement missions is a fundamental error, which seriously weakens the future position of internationalisation within institutions. While some in higher education oppose allocating scarce resources to international activity, many more are merely tolerant of it, seeing it as something nice, but not essential, and therefore low priority and a target to defund when money gets scarce.

And so, he offers two strategies for what integration should include (Hudzik, 2020):

- developing an institutional culture for internationalisation and including it into policy, priority setting and budget processes; and
- forming partnerships by dual-purposing resources. The first creates the environment for the second.

The second helps to diversify resources available to international activity.

An interesting concept that he puts forward is 'Mutual enrichment,' supposing that a faculty having its expertise valued at home is highly likely to have it valued abroad. In turn, applying that expertise in other countries and cultures will further enrich the expertise for home. Faculties want research, funding, and publication opportunities; a well-designed effort to internationalise the research activity of an existing faculty can produce desired benefits all around.

And so, the question should not be whether to internationalise at all, but how soon.

Kalyani Unkule (2020), on the other hand, challenges the idea of internationalisation, claiming that it distances higher education institutions from their local environments, and even diminishes their perception as a public good. She argues that the way in which we have come to

define the ‘world-class research university’ and make it a model exemplifying aspirational excellence puts such institutions, and many others coveting that status, at odds with the mission of being locally grounded and catering to under-served regions and causes. She further argues that the COVID-19 pandemic and its fallout have brought home the realisation that education and social outcomes are intimately linked, and that care is inseparable from learning and work. As a result, nurturing an ethic of social responsibility has risen up the sectoral agenda. And from this angle, Europeanisation and internationalisation do not look that bad.

The 2019 Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study () measures the impact of Erasmus+ mobility on students and faculty along the following indices: perceived personality development index, social engagement impact index, employability skills impact index and intercultural openness impact index. Of these four, the strongest correlation in the case of students is found between social engagement impact and intercultural openness.

Employability skills impact and perceived personality development also show a high correlation with the social engagement index. This suggests that opportunities for social engagement as part of the study abroad experience clearly have a positive influence on holistic personality development, while simultaneously better preparing students for the world of work.

Finally, another notable finding of the Erasmus+ report is that, compared with other areas of attitudinal development, such as considering different cultural perspectives and critically analysing media representations, a smaller percentage of respondents reported an enhancement in ‘engagement in social activities that contribute to the interest of the community or society.’

She concludes that this could be indicative of the fact that social engagement needs to be more intentionally built into study abroad programme design. Given its more ambiguous and context-dependent nature than some of the other more measurable outcome variables, at the conceptual level, frameworks should be designed to effectively enable students to independently pursue and reflexively assess learning outcomes.

Having looked into so many aspects of COVID-19 lockdowns and its impact on higher education institutions in Europe and beyond, let us come to a conclusion with a quick overview of what the UNESCO

(2020) did during these trying times. As the global organisation joining Educators from all around the world – except those from countries that have left recently or withdrew funds, like the USA – UNESCO still remains a moral compass for world educators when it comes to solving global challenges.

What UNESCO (2020) advocated during the times of online learning, when practically the entire world went online, was this: reminding us that the entire world cannot go to online schooling, at least not overnight. And that is not because they would not want to but because they simply do not have the means.

UNESCO sees the digital divide as the first obstacle. According to the International Telecommunications Union (2019), only 47% of the population of developing countries used the Internet before the COVID-19 outbreak – compared to 86% of the population of developed countries. As pointed out by the Chair in Culture of Peace and Education at the Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja (Ecuador) 'at least 60% of the student population has been affected by the pandemic, as many do not have the means or the instruments to access online teaching. Given that COVID-19 is having a vast impact on students, timely responses are needed' (UNESCO, 2020)

Although primary and secondary students seem to be the most affected, the digital divide can also be observed at the university level, even in developed countries. In the words of the Chair in Philosophy for Peace in the University Jaume I (Spain) 'as far as education is concerned, COVID-19 is highlighting the great digital divide that still exists today, in the 21st century. At the Universitat Jaume I, according to the students, there are people who are suffering from this situation' (UNESCO, 2020).

When it comes to the digital divide, 'the socio-economic situation of the students and their families is an aggravating factor,' observes the Chair in Democratic Citizenship and Cultural Freedom in the University La Rioja (Spain). Indeed, students in economic distress are more likely to have poor or no Internet access – because they cannot afford the cost of a laptop/computer or the Internet connection, or because they live in regions or neighbourhoods with low connectivity. For instance, according to the UNESCO Chair in Population, Migrations and Development at the Sapienza University of Rome, in Italy about 25% of families do not have a broadband connection and among them 20.6% are in Trentino – in the north – and 35.7% in Calabria – in the south of

Italy. These digital and economic divides, combined with a protracted lockdown, will result in affected students lagging further behind (UNESCO, 2020).

Aware of the existing digital divide, the University La Rioja has taken into account the instructions for adapting teaching activities to the non-attendance mode in the 2019/2020 academic year. According to the UNESCO Chair 'on one hand, it was made clear that the modifications introduced should take into consideration the technological capacity available in the homes of the students [...] On the other hand, if students encounter problems of a technological nature, it is recommended that they inform the teaching staff or the directorate of studies of their degree' (UNESCO, 2020).

The UNESCO Chairs in the University of Cordoba (Spain) and the University Jaume I (Spain) report that their host universities, in a bid to allow students in economic distress to access online teaching, offered these students the possibility to borrow laptops and 4G USB drives (UNESCO, 2020).

Students with disabilities are among the most affected, as they require specific support and teaching tools that are not always available in distance learning. The UNESCO Chairs at the University of Zagreb (Croatia) and the University of Padua (Italy) report the specific actions taken by their host institutions.

Since the Rector's announcement on distance learning, the Centre for e-learning at the computing centre of the University of Zagreb has been monitoring and supporting lecturers in the implementation of online teaching. In order to ensure inclusive distance learning, lecturers were called upon to apply specific instructions and recommendations, such as the Guidelines developed by the Office for Students with Disabilities. The Office was established in 2007, with the aim of giving equal opportunities to students who, due to illness, impairment, or disability, had difficulty in fulfilling their daily academic obligations (UNESCO, 2020).

The Inclusion Office of the University of Padua sensitised all lecturers offering online classes to the needs of students with hearing disabilities, who normally benefit from stenotype services. Furthermore, it published specific guidelines on how to make teaching tools on its website, namely videos and PowerPoint presentations, accessible to students with hearing and visual disabilities.

Another vulnerability caused by the crisis with potential indirect im-

impact on learning is the increased economic distress of students due to income loss. For instance, the Chair at the University of Maastricht (the Netherlands) reports that 'many of the off-campus and foreign students who usually rely on part-time jobs to cover university tuition, lost their income due to the closure of non-essential economic activities.' In response, the University launched a crowdfunding campaign and offers students the opportunity to get an interest-free loan for a couple of months. The Chair at the University Jaume I reports the latter's decision to postpone the payment of April tuition fees to more than 5,200 Bachelor and Master students to mitigate the economic impact of COVID-19 (UNESCO, 2020).

In addition to monitoring school closures and their impact on learners around the world, the UNESCO focused on strengthening capacities of distance learning systems to overcome the digital divide through resources providing support to teachers, parents and caregivers, a curated list of distance learning management solutions and an evolving repository of national responses collected from countries. In parallel, the Organisation is strengthening its cooperation with the OER (open educational resource) Community to: support openly licensed teaching and learning materials in the framework of the 2019 UNESCO OER Recommendation; identify MOOCs and OERs which can provide online courses and self-directed learning content through both mobile and desktop platforms; support, through the OER4Covid initiative, transition to online learning using OER during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

In May 2020, two months after declaration of the pandemic by the WHO, Europe was ready to get back to school and back to work. The Member States re-opened all businesses and re-started schools. After the summer, the COVID-19 and lockdown came back. The experts then said that the impact of a new COVID-19 vaccine would kick in significantly over summer (2021) and life should be back to normal by next winter. Nevertheless, a new reality is to be much different from what we have known.

Many areas of cooperation at the EU level could be further strengthened if the institutions and pro-European politicians manage to maintain the momentum. A new balance will have to be found in the post-COVID world and the EU will have to rethink its institutional and ideological basis.

All that time the universities are empty, but not closed, is the message of the European University Association (2020). Learning and teaching are highly active online, and universities remain central in the research of new treatments and possible vaccines. The crisis has opened a window of opportunity for universities to engage even more with society, to support governments through research and innovation and to help prepare a more resilient society. The coronavirus crisis has challenged higher education institutions in many new and unexpected ways. Universities face both challenges and opportunities, mainly concerning digitalisation and digitally enhanced learning and teaching, Open Science, research, quality assurance, university autonomy, funding, and civic engagement.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has put the world of higher education, in Europe and worldwide, under great pressure. This crisis has forced Higher Education Institutions to swiftly change their status quo, their ways of working and their environments, dramatically shaking up our communities, Gomez Recio and Colella (2020) argued that a lot has been written and said about how the lockdown has forced universities to swiftly change their way of teaching, and how students and staff have been adapting to the new situation imposed by the pandemic.

The most important topics to rethink HE and require immediate action are:

- education,
- research,
- internationalisation,
- student wellbeing and societal engagement, and
- university governance.

Opportunities are as numerous as challenges, as discussed by Michaela Martin and Uliana Furiv (2020). The crisis has revealed the fragilities in our higher education systems, but it has also illuminated numerous opportunities. In the view of the panellists, these are important constituents of resilience. Indeed, very few higher education institutions had pre-existing capacities to launch a crisis response immediately – these capacities needed to be developed:

- Higher education institutions had to invest heavily in the develop-

ment of digital infrastructure, teacher training, student services and robust IT support.

- Higher education institutions incorporated more flexible methods of designing and delivering content that increased access to higher education for many students. Now more learners can benefit from open online learning opportunities. Learners, educators, and researchers are connecting through these platforms more frequently and are finding new ways of interacting.

There is a lot of concern about the experience that online learning provides for students and staff. As Michaela Martin and Uliana Furiv (2020) concluded: 'Online education cannot be reduced to a mere digital transaction of the curriculum. That misses the learning experience based on social interaction.'

The pandemic has also brought about change and opportunities that led to management and leadership transformation and a change in research practice, the challenged areas are:

- Inclusive learning and teaching in a digital world.
- Inclusive and flexible lifelong learning pathways.
- Inclusive international mobility of people and knowledge.
- Equitable access and success in higher education.

On 10 December 2020 European Commission organised the *Third European Education Summit: Digital Education Transformation* (European Commission, 2020l) In the panel *European Universities: Paving the Way for Higher Education Transformation Post-COVID-19* EU ministers and experts discussed the post-COVID-19 universities (European Commission, 2020j). We summarize and highlight the main points on ideas on the University of the future, from the panellists' discussions, below:

Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner, Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth (European Commission, 2020j):

- The higher education sector is key for the recovery of Europe and the digital and green transitions – universities will need to help find solutions to the big challenges of our time and prepare future generations to face them.
- We want to foster better connections between the universities and their partners in knowledge ecosystems. Seamless mobility of stu-

dent researchers and staff is key to triggering creativity and creating value for society.

- We need to make lifelong learning a reality for all the European approach. This is key to meet labour market demands.
- The student body should reflect Europeans diversity forth.
- It is important to foster the digital transformation of higher education.
- Access to excellent education and research infrastructures should be optimised, including e-infrastructures and open access to Education and Research data.
- We want to strengthen global competitiveness and attractiveness of the HE, but in terms of talent development and knowledge, and for investment in technological breakthroughs; that is why the commission is really to support higher education.
- Higher education in Europe has to accelerate its transformation to train future generations to co-create knowledge and build a more resilient inclusive and sustainable society. We want to ensure that all students, staff, and researchers in the EU, regardless of their geographical location, can produce and have access to excellent results and have attractive careers because of attracting and retaining the talented.

Frédérique Vidal, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, France (European Commission, 2020j):

- A key element for the future of higher education in Europe is that we have to exploit the potential of innovation and digital technologies. One of the fundamental lessons learned from the crisis is the need to accelerate the digital transformation of higher education institutions that have be able to have digital infrastructures enabling simple distance training while guaranteeing the quality of the content. It is also about strengthening the digital skills of students and academic staff, fighting with the digital divide, and supporting students in this extremely specific context.
- Excellence in developing access to higher education for the widest range of audiences; life training courses should be made more flexible and adaptable.
- The connected campuses initiative that we launched last year in

France, which gives access to training to learners in landlocked territories.

- Let us embrace policies from other European Higher Education and Research areas together to enable institutions to equip learners with the skills and knowledge necessary for the green and digital transitions.

Simon Harris, Minister of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Ireland (European Commission, 2020j):

- The higher education system in Europe has to be responsive and dynamic, outward-looking, and collaborative, and one that is crucially truly inclusive. All citizens of the European Union, wherever they origin, regardless of what their parents did, what their gender is or where they live should be able to reach their full potential. We need a system that is responsive to the needs of learners. However, at the same time, it has to be one that is responsive to the needs of our economy and to the big societal challenges that we face, the key to this dynamic.
- Cooperation between our universities and higher education institutions on the one hand and research industry science and innovation on the other. The key building block in the delivery of a successful EU must be E+ and the European universities initiative for greater internationalisation.
- The ambition of the European universities initiative is to bring together a new generation of creative Europeans with the ability to cooperate across languages and borders and disciplines to address societal challenges and to ensure the continued competitiveness of the European Union.
- Diversity of our learners in a modern Europe is something that we need to reflect upon. The principle of lifelong learning is at the heart of inclusion, and it is crucial on so many fronts, not only for the well-being of our citizens, but also for sustainability of our economies, the jobs now and the jobs of the future.
- The industry and higher education work together to identify and address the current workplace requirements, but more importantly to help prepare individuals to succeed in the future labour market. I do believe that the concept of micro-credentials, for example, is a highly effective way for all our citizens at different

stages of their career and different stages of their life to develop their knowledge and their skills – our education systems need to have a better understanding of that education.

- On entrepreneurial skills, very briefly: this has to be about developing skills, but not just skills. It has to be about developing a mind-set in all students and all future graduates, regardless of the discipline. In the study, we need to embed that mind-set of entrepreneurial skills flexibility creativity. We need to produce graduates who are experts in their field and at the same time graduates in innovation and whatever the discipline they study.

Manuel Castells Oliván, Minister of Universities, Spain (European Commission, 2020j):

- One of the only positive aspects of the pandemics is that universities have been pushed into a fast transition into virtual learning and collaboration, which opens up possibilities, not only replacing face-to-face teaching and learning. We would like to introduce a hybrid system in which we combine different methodology of teaching and learning.
- We supported the transformation of the universities in digital terms, but also in pedagogic terms. We support European initiatives on digital university and programmes to advance sustainability as a norm, as a culture and as a practice. We are launching an initiative of sustainable campus with sustainable communities in every University campus in order to articulate the vaults of agenda 2030 into the university practice.
- The digital transition can be fully developed and fully accepted only by citizens with the possibility of mobilizing. Civic engagement in and around the university makes the entire society a partner of this transformation.

Vasileios Digalakis, Deputy Minister of Education and Religious Affairs, Greece (European Commission, 2020j):

- We do share a common Vision to envision higher education area, as it promotes excellence, is innovative, and inclusive. Students seamlessly follow curricula in multiple modes. Research and innovation areas deliver results beneficial to society. Structure of funds to ensure cooperation and social inclusion has to be sufficient.

Professor Antony Galabov, Associate Professor, New Bulgarian University, ERUA European University (European Commission, 2020j):

- New knowledge creation upskills citizens for jobs that had not even been imagined. The focus is on critical analysis of new technologies, namely by sectors, on ethical innovation and on informing democratic debate and civil dialogue. Those efforts will continue in terms of what needs to be done in order to address these challenges.
- Deeply networked transnational system of strong European universities, diversity, and mission, both critically embedded in regional societies and economies are particularly important for sharing and collaborating among themselves and the Society.
- Efficient and sustainable funding is a particularly important investment in this new digital age. E+ promotes collaboration more than competition, and in digital Europe this is important.
- Preserving diversity shapes the frameworks for collaboration. This is the aim of frameworks for partnership outside the EU, especially in new regions and across the globe.

Professor Michael Murphy, President, European University Association (European Commission, 2020j):

- Being partner and stakeholder in university development the future, the University passes through its new role of a generator and keynote of new types of networks. We have to learn to connect existing networks to the Network. This type of networking will be different from the current practice of cooperation and will build a new road map, not only for the development of research and education, but also for socialization of our students and youth.
- Stone objective academic credit area, our cultural diversity and mutual understanding should overcome existing inequalities in access to and dissemination of scientific information, building a flexible, dynamic, and inclusive European economy.
- Community is my vision for the future of higher education in the European Union.

Flora, a student at European study at the University of Amsterdam and a member of The Epicure student board (European Commission, 2020j):

- The future is of course one that builds and involves through collaboration of all involved actors. Those are the deans, the presidents, the teachers, the course coordinators. Besides, of course, the students as well, for a long time. We have to keep in mind the crucial role those students have in these decision-making processes and in the shaping and creating the involvement of European universities.
- An important element for the University of the Future is the concept of both adaptability and flexibility. We all know that students are individuals. They are all unique and different and we need to embrace the diversity of students by offering them a more personalized approach where students can thrive and find their individuality and stand out later on in the work-life and society in general.

It was concluded that universities, communities and also policymakers and policy structures still need to put effort in building the European education area and a higher education transformation agenda, which will be just one small leap in our time but will make us better prepared for the future.

Closing Words

Two months after the declaration of the pandemic by the WHO, Europe was ready to get back to school and back to work. Most of the Member States were re-opening all businesses and re-starting schools. Nevertheless, a new reality was to be much different from what we had known before.

While people started going out again, they were reluctant to travel. Internal Schengen borders had not yet been open. Citizens from non-EU countries faced additional scrutiny if (when) entering the Union.

Many areas of cooperation at the EU level could be further strengthened if the institutions and pro-European politicians manage to maintain the momentum. However, certain Member States are showing signs of increasing nationalisms and disrespect for democracy and human rights. A new balance will have to be found in the post-COVID world and the EU will have to rethink its institutional and ideological basis.

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Reviews

This monograph studies the effects that the COVID-19 related measures had on higher education institutions in the European Union (EU) Member States. It looks at official measures taken by the Member States as well as analyses individual reactions by higher education institutions concerning lockdowns and shifts to online teaching. The monograph relies on results obtained from a questionnaire which was distributed among higher education institutions in Europe, and analyses responses. As such, the book focuses on the EU higher education cooperation, youth and skills policies and cooperation in the context of the spread of COVID-19, and subsequent restrictions to movement which resulted in bringing the majority of activities online.

The book concludes with a series of forecast assumptions about Europe post-COVID and estimates how the switch to online teaching and assessments could influence higher education institutions of tomorrow. It also comments on possible scenarios for the European Union as such, discussing a shift towards more solidarity and strengthening (or weakening) of certain concrete policy fields.

According to my knowledge, the present monograph is a unique text that looks at the impact of COVID-19 related measures in the Member States on higher education institutions and flags out those soft skills that are deemed crucial for the survival of next generations in the labour market of tomorrow. In my opinion, this book will specifically contribute to the understanding of the situation we are exiting from as a family of European nations and prove to be an important reference for future research.

Eva Klemenčič Mirazchiyski

This monograph is undoubtedly one of the first text and research data that looks at the impact of COVID-19. The focus is on higher education institutions, internationalisation approaches now and after Covid-19, and about soft skills, namely how much are they presented in HE curricula, as they are crucial for young (all) generations at the labour market in the new economy.

The monograph is structured in seven chapters and systematically elaborate three 'content' topics: (1) response by EU to COVID-19 in gen-

eral, and elaborate joint financial measures for the future – towards stronger EU, (2) effects on internationalisation of higher education, (3) soft skills or what competencies matter in a lockdown.

The research is based on a survey with a snowball sampling approach. The questionnaire was distributed among higher education institutions in Europe and beyond.

The conclusions are a set of forecast assumptions about Europe post-COVID, such as: (1) more (or less) solidarity, (2) stronger and weaker EU policies, (3) EU institution for the ‘new economy’ for all Member States, (4) what future for the Erasmus+ programme during lockdowns, (5) projections for the future of HE in the post-COVID world.

I support the publication of this book, it will contribute to the understanding of specific aspects of HE, and EU in general.

Katarina Babnik



In the New Year's Eve, when the world was just about to enter the year 2020, the World Health Organisation received first reports of a previously unknown virus. The COVID-19 virus spread from China, reached Europe, and continued its migration towards the USA and Latin America, India, and Africa. Everyday lives were interrupted, businesses were temporarily closed, and the world came to almost a stop for a while. This book looks at how the COVID-19 lockdowns impacted higher education institutions in Europe. It starts with analysis of the general situation and response by the European Union Member States, followed by an overview of the role that the European Union institutions took on during the pandemic. It continues towards understanding immediate consequences for higher education institutions, with the main obvious change being a swift turn towards digitalisation. Furthermore, the authors look into how internationalisation of higher education institutions was impacted. A separate chapter is dedicated to own research, based on the answers specifically tailored to questionnaires that were shared among European higher education institutions inquiring about their individual responses to the COVID-19 related lockdowns. Finally, the book looks into the future and strives to forecast the new normal for the European Union as such, its policies, and relationships among Member States in the coming years. It furthermore recommends a new European financial system to mitigate future crises and suggests ways forward for higher education institutions in the post-COVID-19 reality.

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