

5. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migration in Europe



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Abstract

Purpose: The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented restrictions to travel and mobility at global level. Limitations of migration flows resulted in problems in countries with a large share of immigrants on the labor market. The aim of the chapter is to examine the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on migration flow in Europe. In addition, the impact of changes in migration flows during the COVID-19 pandemic on the labor market in Europe is also presented.

Design/methodology/approach: The following research methods were used in the work: cause and effect analysis, statistical analysis of quantitative data, descriptive statistics methods. The analysis used statistical data from Eurostat, Frontex, OECD and the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Findings: From the analysis, it can be concluded that restrictions on migration to Europe contributed to reducing the influx of migrants to EU countries, which was reflected in the situation on the labor market. Increasing labor shortages in critical sectors leads to a slowdown in the post-pandemic recovery of economies. The lifting of pandemic restrictions in 2021 made it possible to partially resume travel. Labor markets have recovered surprisingly rapidly, as vaccination levels have risen markedly and mobility has normalised.

Research limitations: The possibilities to determine the impact of restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic on migration flows are limited, as the timeliness and frequency of data collection are not sufficient to provide adequate information on this subject.

Practical implications: The European Union should support the opening of legal migration channels. Making legal migration more difficult for people in developing countries will encourage more people to attempt irregular migration. It is necessary to pursue an effective immigration policy tailored to the needs of the labor market of EU Member States in conjunction

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with development policy. During the pandemic, it was possible to observe how much some sectors of the economy are dependent on workers from other countries.

Originality and value: This chapter attempts to contribute to the literature on international migration delivering results of analysis of impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the migration flows in Europe.

Keywords: migration, labor market, COVID-19.

Introduction

The effects of COVID-19 are noticeable in many sectors of the economy. Restrictions related to preventing the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus caused difficulties in, among others, in international migrations. Restrictions in migration flows resulted in problems in countries with a large share of immigrants on the labor market. International migrations are becoming more and more important in the economies of countries that are struggling with a shortage of workers. The aim of this chapter is to determine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migration flows in Europe. The chapter consists of three main parts, preceded by an introduction and ended with conclusions. The first part of the chapter discussed restrictions on migration flows during the COVID-19 pandemic. The next part of the chapter presents the results of the analysis of migration flows in Europe during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the last main part of the chapter the impact of changes in migration flows during the COVID-19 pandemic on the labor market in Europe is presented. The chapter ends with a summary presenting conclusions. The analysis used statistical data from Eurostat, Frontex, OECD and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This chapter attempts to contribute to the literature on international migration delivering results of analysis of impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the migration flows in Europe.

5.1. Restrictions on migration flows during the COVID-19 pandemic

Due to the high rates of contagiousness and mortality of the coronavirus, state authorities decided to introduce a number restrictions to stop the development of the pandemic. The travel rules introduced by the authorities of many countries during the COVID-19 pandemic have limited international passenger traffic. According to the International Organization for Migration, by July 2021, a total of almost 110,000 various travel restrictions have been introduced in all countries. At the same time, 980 exceptions allowing limited movement have been

proposed in more than 200 countries and territories (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2022).

In the analysis of international mobility restrictions conducted by IOM, covering the first year of the pandemic, three phases of introducing restrictions were indicated: lockdowns, reopening, reaction to new mutations of the virus. The first phase included restrictions on movement between countries from January to May 2020. In the first three months of the year, many countries completely blocked entry to their territory or banned travel from countries with the highest number of infections. The scale of restrictions on movement was unprecedented—even in the countries of the Schengen area, i.e. an area without internal borders, temporary borders between countries were restored. The next stage of the response to the pandemic covered the period from June to September 2020. During this period, travel bans were replaced by the obligation to present certificates of negative test results for the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The last stage of introducing restrictions on movement in 2020 included actions in response to new mutations of the coronavirus. On the one hand, countries tried to replace travel restrictions with health certificates, on the other hand, they struggled with the next wave of the pandemic (Benton et al., 2021).

In 2021, as a result of the introduction of COVID-19 vaccines, mobility restrictions were gradually lifted. International travel has become available in many European countries upon presentation of the EU COVID Certificate (UCC).

5.2. Migration flows in Europe during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has stopped the upward trend of international migration. In 2020, the number of migrants in the world stopped at a similar level as in the previous year, 281 million, which, however, meant a decrease by 2 million compared to the pre-pandemic estimates. Although the pandemic was initially expected to be limited to 2020, the constantly emerging new strains of coronavirus have made COVID-19 a long-running global problem, testing the resilience of societies and economies (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2022).

The number of migrants in the world in 2020 stopped at a similar level as in the previous year: 281 million. However, Before the pandemic it was forecast that the number of migrants would increase by 2 million. Permanent migrations to highly developed countries, concentrated in the OECD, decreased by over 30% to 3.7 million in 2020. The restrictions affected the largest group of economic migrants to a lesser extent, and migrations due to combining families or international protection to a greater extent (Kugiel, 2021).

Europe has been a popular destination for migrants for many years. On 1 January 2022, 23.8 million citizens of non-member countries were residing in a EU Member State, representing 5.3 % of the EU population. In addition, 13.7 million persons living in one of the EU Member States on 1 January 2022 were citizens of another EU Member State. In absolute terms, the largest numbers of non-nationals living in the EU Member States on 1 January 2022 were found in Germany (10.9 million), Spain (5.4 million), France (5.3 million) and Italy (5 million). Non-nationals in these four Member States collectively represented 71 % of the total number of non-nationals living in the EU (Eurostat, 2023b).

Analysing the impact of the pandemic on the size of migration flows in the EU, it should be noted, that in 2020, an estimated 1.9 million immigrants to the EU from non-EU countries and 1.2 million people previously residing in one EU Member State migrated to another Member State. About 956,000 people emigrated from the EU to a country outside the EU. To compare, in 2019 there were 2.7 million immigrants to the EU from non-EU countries and about 1.2 million emigrants from the EU to a country outside the EU. In 2021, 2.3 million immigrants came to the EU from non-EU countries and 1.4 million people previously residing in one EU Member State migrated to another Member State. On the other hand, about 1.1 million people emigrated from the EU to a country outside the EU and more than 1.2 million moved from an EU country to another EU country in 2021 (Figure 5.1)

Among non-EU nationals residing in the EU with a valid residence permit at the end of 2021, the majority had residence permits issued for family or professional

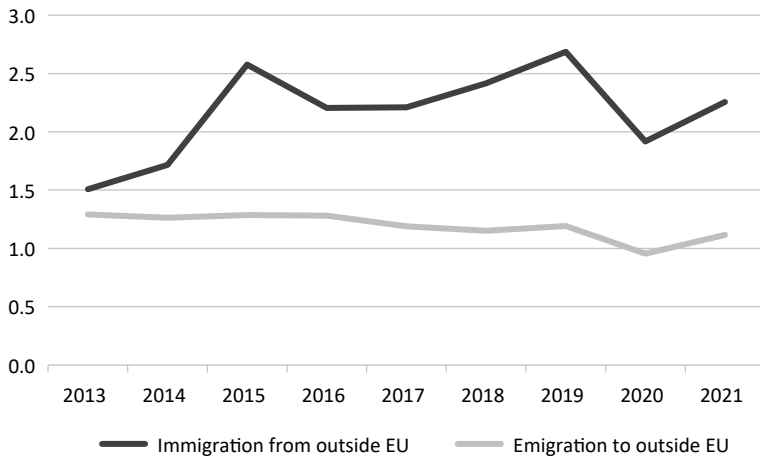


Figure 5.1. Immigrants from outside EU and emigrants to outside EU, EU, 2013–2021 (million)

Source: (Eurostat, 2023b).

reasons. Analysing the first residence permits issued in 2020, we can observe a decrease in their number to 2.25 million compared to 3 million issued in 2019. This decline is due to the travel restrictions put in place to limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus. In 2021, 2.95 million first residence permits were issued in the EU, which is almost the number before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic had a particularly negative impact on residence permits for educational reasons—their share decreased from 13% in 2019 to 11% in 2020. In 2021, there was a particularly large increase in the number of permits for professional reasons, the share of which increased from 39% in 2020 to 45% in 2021. The reasons for issuing the first residence permits in 2020 and 2021 are presented in Figure 5.2.

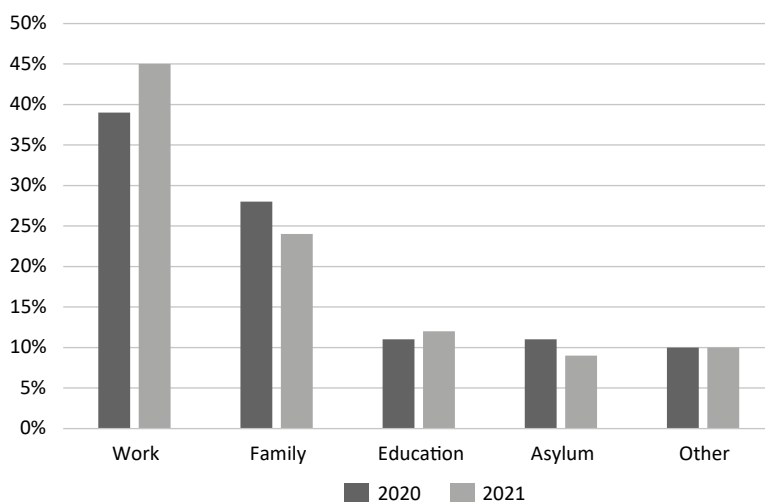


Figure 5.2. Reason for issuing the first residence permit in the EU in 2020 and 2021

Source: based on (European Commission, 2023).

The largest number of first residence permits in 2020 were issued to citizens of Ukraine—their number decreased compared to 2019: from 756,574 to 601,227. However, in 2021 the number of first residence permits exceeded the pre-pandemic number and reached 875,783.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a particularly significant impact on refugees. The number of new asylum applications submitted in 2020 in OECD countries decreased by 31%. It was the biggest drop since the beginning of the 1990s. In the case of the EU, this meant limiting new applications to 416.6 thousand. (214.7 thousand less than in 2019) and a return to the pre-2015 level (Kugiel, 2021). In 2021, 632.3 thousand applications were submitted in the EU. applications, of

which 537.3 thousand applications were submitted for the first time. This represents an increase of 34% compared to 2020, but a decrease of 10% compared to 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic (European Commission, 2023).

Moreover, pandemic restrictions prompted UNHCR to halt the resettlement of refugees from camps to safe third countries. As a result, in 2020 the least people were resettled in history: 34.4 thousand (down by 64% from 120,000 in 2019). At the same time, the pandemic has not reduced the number of forcibly displaced people. According to the UNHCR Office, the number of people forcibly displaced in 2020 has increased to 82.4 million, of which 26.4 million are refugees. At the end of 2020, 10% of the population lived in the EU. all refugees in the world. Due to less help from the countries involved in the fight against the pandemic, refugees felt the greatest health and economic effects of the pandemic (Torre, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic turned out to be a factor limiting irregular migrations. According to Frontex's data, the number of detected illegal attempts to cross the EU's external border in 2020 was 125.1 thousand. This represents a decrease of 12% compared to 2019 and the lowest percentage in seven years (Frontex, 2021). In April 2020, when the strictest restrictions were in force in the EU countries, less than 1.5 thousand were detected. border crossings, and in May 4.6 thousand. This number began to grow as restrictions were lifted (Kugiel, 2021). In 2021, 199,900 cases of illegal border crossings were recorded (increase of 58% compared to 2020). In 2022, around 330,000 irregular border crossings were detected at EU's external border, according to preliminary calculations. This is the highest number since 2016 and an increase of 64% from the previous year. After the pandemic-induced low in 2020, this was the second year in a row with a steep rise in the number of irregular entries (Frontex, 2023).

5.3. Impact of migration flows on the labor market in Europe during the COVID-19 pandemic

The pandemic caused socio-economic problems that affected communities, companies and organizations around the world, affecting financial markets and the global economy. Reducing migration has negatively affected the economies of the host countries, especially those sectors that exploit the mobility of people. Countries with a high proportion of migrants faced labor shortages in sectors such as healthcare (e.g., 33% of doctors in the UK are foreigners), agriculture (in Italy 11% of workers are migrants) and services (18% of those employed in Germany) (Kugiel, 2021).

In 2020, 189.1 million people aged 20 to 64 were employed in the EU internal market. 4.6 percent of all employed people were from outside the EU (8.6 million).

The employment rate in the EU among the working-age population was higher in 2020 for EU citizens (73.3%) than for non-EU citizens (57.6%). Many non-EU nationals are “essential workers”. In 2020, non-EU nationals were over-represented in some sectors of the economy, such as: accommodation and food services (employment of non-EU nationals was 11.4% vs. 3.8% of EU nationals), office administration and support activities (7.1% vs. 3.7%), household work (6.5% vs. 0.7%) and construction (8.6% compared to 6.4%). In terms of occupations, non-EU nationals were over-represented in the following occupational groups: cleaners and helpers (non-EU nationals employed 11% vs. 3.1% of EU nationals), personal service workers (9% vs. 4.2%), personal care workers (5.1% vs. 2.9%), construction workers (5.8% vs. 3.6%), auxiliary workers in mining, construction, industry and transport (5.6% vs. 2.4%) (European Commission, 2023). The functioning of these sectors was particularly threatened during the period of greatest restrictions on people’s mobility.

The global health and economic crisis that began in 2020 put an end to a decade of progress for migrants in the labor market. In a study conducted by OECD, in Q2 2020, on average across the 28 countries considered (including European countries, Canada, United States), employment (as a proportion of the working age population) fell relative to the same quarter of the year before by 3.3 percentage points for the foreign-born and 2.3 percentage points for the natives. Declines (for both migrants and natives) were generally smaller in European countries than in Canada and US, because they relied heavily on job retention schemes. Nevertheless, migrants saw large drops in employment in some European countries as well. In Spain, e.g., where migrants are particularly overrepresented in temporary jobs, their employment fell by more than 8 percentage points—against a drop of just over 3 percentage points for the native-born. In Italy, the considerable use of job retention schemes (and a ban on layoffs) did not prevent employment of foreign-born from falling 4 percentage points, against 1 percentage point for natives (OECD, 2021).

In general, in the EU, in the year of the beginning of the pandemic, i.e. 2020, we can observe an increase in unemployment among people with citizenship of a non-EU country (Figure 5.3). However, when it comes to the level of employment, there is a noticeable decrease in 2020 compared to previous years (Figure 5.4).

Part of the overexposure of migrants to the crisis is explained by their higher concentration in sectors hit harder by the crisis, such as domestic services and hospitality. In the EU, immigrants account for more than a quarter of employment in the hospitality industry (OECD, 2020). The number of migrants in the EU employed in hospitality dropped by nearly 15% between 2019 and 2020, compared with 12.5% for the native-born (OECD, 2021). Besides their sectoral concentration, migrants face a number of additional vulnerabilities in the labour market. They

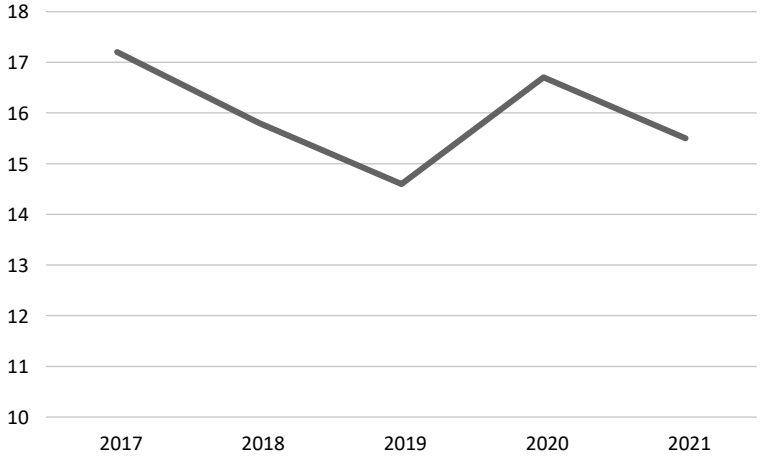


Figure 5.3. Unemployment rate in the EU among non-EU citizens (%)

Source: based on (Eurostat, 2023c).

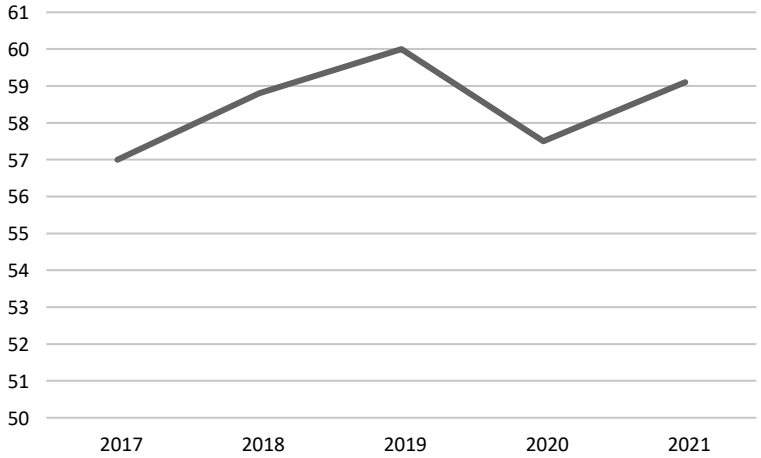


Figure 5.4. Employment rate in the EU among non-EU citizens (%)

Source: based on (Eurostat, 2023a).

are overrepresented among employees with temporary contracts and low wages and typically have fewer networks to rely upon in times of economic downturn. (OECD, 2020, 2021).

Most of the decline in employment at the beginning of the pandemic translated into an increase in inactivity for both migrants and the native-born. This

is largely due to the fact that workers were discouraged from searching for new opportunities due to sanitary restrictions and the general fall in economic activity as measures to contain the spread of the virus were introduced in all countries (OECD, 2021).

Another potential consequence of migrants' limited employment opportunities for sending countries was a decline in the value of remittances to developing countries. However, globally there was no collapse in the value of remittances to developing countries—they fell in 2020 by only 1.6%, to USD 540 billion. An example is a slight decrease in transfers from Ukrainian labor migrants working in Poland. This was due to the gradual opening of economies and the economic rebound in the world in the second half of the year (Kugiel, 2021).

Conclusions

In the globalized world and in the face of the growing world population, an intensification of migration movements should be expected. Migration processes can no longer be treated as a state of emergency that will reach saturation and then migration absorption will return to equilibrium (Kałabunowska, 2020). The European Union should support the opening of legal migration channels. Making legal migration more difficult for people in developing countries will encourage more people to attempt irregular migration. In addition, attention should be paid to the issue of global cooperation in the field of public health. Health systems in less developed countries, where many infectious diseases are likely to be present, should be an area of particular interest. It is therefore necessary to pursue an effective immigration policy tailored to the needs of the labor market of EU Member States in conjunction with development policy. During the pandemic, it was possible to observe how much some sectors of the economy are dependent on workers from other countries. It should be noted that the possibilities to determine the impact of restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic on migration flows are limited, as the timeliness and frequency of data collection are not sufficient to provide adequate information on this subject. However, from the analysis, it can be concluded that restrictions on migration to Europe contributed to reducing the influx of migrants to EU countries, which was reflected in the situation on the labor market. Increasing labor shortages in critical sectors leads to a slowdown in the post-pandemic recovery of economies. The lifting of pandemic restrictions in 2021 made it possible to partially resume travel. Labor markets have recovered surprisingly rapidly, as vaccination levels have risen markedly and mobility has normalised. Domestic and external demand have started to recover as consumer and business confidence has improved, and contact-intensive services have started

adapting to the “new normal” making the activity less sensitive to lingering containment measures and social distancing (Ando et al., 2022). More recently, labor market conditions have improved remarkably rapidly compared to previous economic cycles, with the EU low unemployment rate and labor force participation and employment rates also at record highs in some countries. In the future, it is necessary to analyse to what extent the European labor market is dependent on migration flows. It is important to conduct constant analyses of the economy’s resilience in the event of disturbances in population flows resulting from various types of crises.

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