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## LITERATURE REVIEW ON SELECTED POLITICAL ECONOMY ISSUES OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS

### ABSTRACT

*This article aims to explore the emerging literature concerned with the politico-economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and to present various insights and data about the ongoing processes. This literature review article: (i) provides an overview of various job retention schemes; (ii) reviews the literature on the transformation of work within the context of teleworking; and (iii) summarises the findings about the COVID-19 crisis' impact on income and gender (in)equality. While the presented literature provides well-arranged empirical insights into the COVID-19 crisis, it (mostly) fails to situate these changes in the *longue durée* of constant changes in the capitalist mode of production.*

KEY WORDS: COVID-19 crisis, state, teleworking, inequalities, neoliberalism

### Pregled literature izbranih problemov politične ekonomije krize COVID-19

#### IZVLEČEK

*Namen članka je raziskati nastajajočo literaturo o politično-ekonomskih učinkih krize COVID-19 ter predstaviti različna spoznanja in podatke o tekočih procesih. Pregledni članek ponuja: (i) pregled različnih shem ohranjanja delovnih mest; (ii) pregled literature o preoblikovanju dela v kontekstu dela na daljavo; (iii) povzetek ugotovitev o vplivu krize COVID-19 na dohodkovno neenakost in neenakost spolov. Predstavljena literatura ponuja veliko empiričnih vpogledov glede krize COVID-19, vendar teh sprememb (praviloma) ne umesti v *longue durée* nenehnih sprememb kapitalističnega produkcijskega načina.*

*KLJUČNE BESEDE: kriza COVID-19, država, delo na daljavo, neenakosti, ne-liberalizem*

## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The past two years have been marked by the COVID-19 global pandemic. The COVID-19 crisis began as a medical and health crisis, which also triggered a deep economic recession at both the national and global levels. In 2020, the World Bank (WB) predicted that the global gross domestic product (GDP) would fall by around 5.2%; the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimated this contraction to about 6–8%, while the International Monetary Fund (IMF) provided the least negative forecast – a 4.4% GDP fall (World Bank 2020; OECD 2020a; IMF 2020a). The WB even argued that COVID-19 could result in the deepest global recession in the last 150 years (World Bank 2020: 13). However, despite this initial shock, the pandemic did not result in such a negative sequence of events.

In its Global Economic Prospect for 2021, the WB forecasted that the global economy would experience 5.6% growth, which is a huge rise, although this would still be 2% lower compared to pre-COVID-19 projections (World Bank 2021). This rapid economic recovery and the specific response from the governments also prevented massive unemployment. This has been the result of never-before-seen fiscal and monetary policy measures implemented by states to prevent further and deeper recessions. However, these interventions by states have also had important political, economic and social consequences that range from labour market changes to changes in employment and work processes, while addressing and (re-)producing various types of inequalities.

The objective of this article is to synthesise the findings of the growing literature on the political, economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and to critically reflect on the research undertaken thus far while identifying certain limitations or blind spots of the presented literature. To achieve our objective, we researched the databases and publications of important international organisations (WB, IMF, International labour organisation-ILO, OECD, EU, the European Trade Union Institute-ETUI) that deal with the issue of public policies and their impact on employment, the rise of teleworking and different types of inequalities during the COVID-19 pandemic. We also used the two most widespread databases to select the most relevant articles: Web of Science and

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1. The article was written as part of the project: *The changing role of the state: state and employment policy in the context of the COVID-19 crisis (Z5-3221)*, funded by the Slovenian Research Agency.

Scopus. In our search within these two databases, we adopted criteria such as subject area (social sciences, economy, business, arts and humanities, industrial relations, business and management, social sciences interdisciplinary), language (English) and time of publication (March 2020–February 2022). We searched for every section of this review using the following keywords: 1) COVID-19 and job retention schemes; 2) COVID-19 and teleworking (and impact); 3) COVID-19 and income inequality; and 4) COVID-19 and gender inequality. We briefly scanned the abstracts so that we could identify the relevance of the articles for our literature review and included the most relevant articles that dealt with different countries/regions. Moreover, as not much time has passed since the outbreak of the pandemic, we also used the snowball method to find additional important articles and newly published important books.

After the introduction, we review the importance of various job retention schemes in preventing mass unemployment amid the COVID-19 crisis. The third section reviews the literature focusing on teleworking and potentially permanent changes. In the fourth section, we review the literature on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on income and gender inequality. The concluding section offers a critical reflection of the presented literature review from a Marxist theoretical position and points out certain limitations of the current state-of-the-art in explaining the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis.

## **2 Saving Jobs During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

After the global financial and economic crisis of 2008, countries adopted different fiscal policies: the USA pursued a more neo-Keynesian economic policy, while the EU demanded strict austerity measures, spending cuts and the implementation of rigid fiscal rules. Moreover, although various policy instruments were adopted to save jobs during the 2008 crisis (Hijzen and Venn 2011; Hijzen and Martin 2013), the crucial idea was to save banks that were “too big to fail” and not to save jobs. This resulted in a further deregulated labour market after the 2008 crisis and the rise of non-standard types of employment (Streeck 2017; Tooze 2018). However, since the COVID-19 crisis was an exogenous shock, it also led different states to adopt similar job retention schemes (JRS).

At the beginning of March 2020, when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic and when most states began implementing more or less radical lockdowns, a justified fear emerged that a deep recession would follow, which would also result in a specific “jobs crisis” (OECD 2020b). The OECD claims that after the initial shock, “the OECD unemployment rate saw an unprecedented 3 percentage point increase to reach 8.8% – the

highest unemployment rate seen in a decade /.../"<sup>2</sup> (OECD 2021a). Similarly, in the second quarter of 2020, the employment rate in the EU decreased by 3% (Eurostat 2020a). However, in the third quarter, it increased by 1%, representing the "strongest increases observed since /.../ 1995" (Eurostat 2020b). Similar trends can also be observed in other parts of the world (OECD 2020c). This was all due to a rapid response from states that have implemented various JRS to mitigate the rise in unemployment and the consequent drop in demand. According to the data provided by the OECD, by May 2020, various JRSs "supported about 50 million jobs across the OECD, about ten times as many as during the global financial crisis" (OECD 2020c: 2).

In different countries, access to JRSs has been eased and the scale of support has grown to sustain the level of employment (for a more detailed overview, see Table 1). Dražokoupil and Müller have provided an extensive overview of various JRSs and their specificities that have been implemented by EU member states, Norway, the UK and Switzerland. They found that most states that did not have an already established JRS before the COVID-19 crisis "opted for a short-time work scheme. As a reaction to the crisis, short-time work was introduced in eleven EU countries and in the United Kingdom" (Dražokoupil and Müller 2021: 15). The framework of various JRSs in Europe has been different – the terms of subsidies, duration, eligibility, etc., vary from state to state (Szpejna and Kennedy 2020).

In the UK, the government introduced the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. By March 2021, almost 34% of employees were furloughed (more than 11 million employees), while the number of those who claimed some of the unemployment benefits increased by almost 1.5 million since March 2020 (Wielgoszewska et al. 2021; Adams-Prassl et al. 2020a). Bishop and Day (2020) argue that from April to July 2020, the Australian Job Keeper Payment saved around 700,000 jobs. Cremers (2021) estimated that from March until the end of May 2020, more than 2.5 million people were included in the wage subsidy scheme in the Netherlands. Moreover, he has found that in 2020 businesses received EUR 15 billion through the wage subsidy scheme, which is almost 2% of the GDP. Osuna and García Pérez (2021) have explored the impact of the short-time work<sup>3</sup> (STW) schemes in Spain and found that without the STW mechanisms,

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2. This was largely induced by developments in the USA and Canada. For example in the USA, in April 2020 the number of the unemployed increased by almost 16 million (OECD 2021a).
  3. Short-time work is a state-funded programme that provides subsidies for workers during economic crises due to low revenues of companies where they are employed and because this results in shorter working hours.

the COVID-19 crisis would have led to a 42% unemployment rate, while with the implementation of these measures, the rise of unemployment was very moderate. In Ireland, they implemented a special programme – first, the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) (Hick and Murphy 2021) until September 2020, and after September 2020, the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme replaced the TWSS (Gibbons 2021). Both schemes proved to be effective in saving jobs. From April until December 2020, around 300,000 people, monthly, were included in the job retention scheme.

Christl et al. (2021) explored the influence of STW and other policy measures introduced to address the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis in Germany and found that, without these measures, German households would have lost almost 5% of their market income in 2020. However, because of these specific measures, they lost only 0.8% of their market income. Ajar and Chi Dao (2021) explored the impact of STW in Germany and found that the German model of *Kurzarbeit* was crucial in cushioning the rise of unemployment; without these schemes, unemployment would have risen by an additional 3 percentage points. South Korea revised its pre-existing Employment Retention Subsidy scheme (Oh 2020; Lee 2020), as well as Japan revised its Employment Adjustment Subsidy (Tsuruga 2020). Moreover, in South Korea, “the decision to increase the Employment Retention Subsidy from 63% to 75% was taken following a tripartite declaration on the COVID-19 crisis” (OECD 2021a). Crucially, both proved to be successful in preventing massive job losses.

The USA introduced a specific programme, which is actually not a JRS, but it had the same intention – to prevent massive job losses. In March 2020, the government adopted the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), which provided companies with no more than 500 employees with low-interest loans to be able to pay their employees, even if they did not actually work because of lockdowns. Between April and June 2020, the PPP provided companies with more than USD 500 billion (around 2.5% of the GDP). The second round of loans, from December 2020 until May 2021, was stricter and had additional criteria for eligibility – companies had to show a loss in revenue compared to 2019 by at least 25%, and the PPP was limited to companies with no more than 300 employees (Bartik et al. 2020; Hubbard and Strain 2020). Crucially, this loan was “converted into a subsidy if employment and compensation levels were maintained” (OECD 2021a). In the case of the USA, there are conflicting claims regarding the PPP; certain authors argue that it had an important impact in preserving jobs (Faulkender et al. 2021), while others claim that its impact was rather small (Bartik et al. 2020).

**Table 1.: An overview of adopted job retention schemes in selected countries.**

Country	Name of the JRS	Type	Author(s) / Organisation(s)
UK	Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme	Short-time work scheme	Adams-Prassl et al. (2020a); Wielgoszewska et al. (2021)
Australia	Jobkeeper Payment	Wage subsidy	Bishop and Day (2020)
Netherlands	Temporary Emergency Measure Bridging Employment	Wage subsidy	Cremers (2021)
Spain	Expediente de regulación temporal de empleo	Short-time work scheme	Osuna and García Pérez (2021)
Germany	Kurzarbeit	Short-time work scheme	Christl et al. (2021); Aiyar and Chi Dao (2021)
USA	Paycheck Protection Program	Loan/wage subsidy (special programme)	Bartik et al. (2020); Hubbard and Strain (2020); Faulkender et al. (2021)
South Korea	Employment retention subsidy	Short-time work scheme	Oh (2020); Lee (2020)
Japan	Employment Adjustment Subsidy	Short-time work scheme	Tsuruga (2020)
Latin America and the Caribbean	overview	/	ECLAC/ILO (2021)
Ireland	Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme; Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme	wage subsidy	Gibbons (2021); Hick and Murphy (2021)
OECD member states	overview of different JRSs of OECD member states	/	OECD (2021a)
EU, UK, Norway, Switzerland	overview of different JRSs	/	Drahokoupil and Müller (2021)

From the existing data and research, we can say that the most effective policies were those that already existed before the pandemic, and governments only adjusted them to new circumstances or those that were implemented quickly without hesitation in the early weeks of the pandemic (OECD 2021a). This quick and suitable response also saved more money in the long run; namely, if these policies had not been adopted, the massive unemployment and the money spent for different social protection programmes, if the recession got worse, would have caused much larger social, economic and fiscal problems for governments.

### **3 Teleworking During the COVID-19 Crisis**

Another crucial aspect of the political economy of the COVID-19 crisis was radical was the radical disruption in the working process. The process of ICT development in the last 30 years has already transformed the individual and collective labour process. However, the new reality of social distancing amid lockdowns has led to the rise of teleworking as a new normality (Brynjolfsson et al. 2020). Sostero et al. claim that the broad use of teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemics "can be considered a large-scale natural experiment in work organisation; an improvised and ad-hoc response at the level of states and organisations to a rare circumstance" (Sostero et al. 2020: 53).

The Eurofound (2020: 31–34) study found that almost 40% of employees began working from home at the beginning of the pandemic, while only 20% were working from home prior. Moreover, those who regularly worked from home before the COVID-19 crisis represented almost half of those who were also currently working from home. In Finland, almost 60% of employees were working from home; in Belgium, more than 50% worked from home; and in Croatia, Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Hungary, there were around 20% (Eurofound 2020; ILO 2021a). An OECD (2021b) survey found that during 2020 in Australia, France and the UK 47% of all employees worked from home and that even in Japan, which did not implement a lockdown in the first wave of the pandemic, the share of employees that worked from home rose from 10% to 28% between December 2019 and the end of May 2020.

Belot et al. (2020) carried out a comparative cross-national survey in the USA, Japan, South Korea, the UK, Italy and China. They gathered data about teleworking during April 2020 and found that almost 40% of all employees had to telework amid the COVID-19 crisis. There was a significant rise in teleworking in all sectors. In China, the data is fascinating – namely, more than 60% of Chinese employees have reported teleworking, despite strong industrial and manufacturing sectors in the country.

Clear trends are showing that the share of teleworking is directly influenced by the degree of lockdowns and the public health situation in respective states (Eurofound 2020). In Slovenia, for example, the share of people working from home all the time or some of the days during a week was the highest in December 2020, when the lockdowns were very harsh, and the virus was spreading very quickly – almost 25% (SORS 2021). However, there was a clear change because many more people were going to work during the second wave than during the first (Breznik and Lužar 2021).

Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garcés (2020) argue that in Spain, large companies (domestic or multinational) introduced teleworking more frequently than smaller ones. It was a sort of contingency for an external shock that required a radical reorganisation of the working process. Adams-Prassl et al. (2020b) examined teleworking potentials and realities in the UK and USA and found that there are important differences between and within sectors and occupations. The most significant rise in teleworking was present in those sectors and occupations where there had also been high numbers of employees working from home, even prior to the pandemic. Dingel and Neiman (2020) explored the share of jobs that could be done from home in the USA and found that around 37% of jobs in the USA could be done entirely from home, with important differences across cities and sectors.

Barrero et al. (2021: 30) have researched the impact of teleworking in the USA and they project that “American workers will supply about 20 percent of full workdays from home in the post-pandemic economy, four times the pre-COVID level”. Moreover, they claimed that many workers would even prefer lower payments if they had the option to work from home. Similarly, Amankwah-Amoah et al. (2021) argued that the COVID-19 crisis has been the “great accelerator” regarding the use of technology and digitalisation. They also posit that the role of governments should be to promote “routine and long-term usage of home working and teleworking [that] may reduce traffic congestion and pollution, and make for more efficient working”.

The increase in teleworking has also encouraged researchers to analyse the impact of teleworking on people’s quality of life.<sup>4</sup> A study carried out in 16 cities in Europe, North America and the Middle East on more than 3 million people who were working from home found that the length of the working day incre-

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4. Athanasiadou and Theriou (2021) provided a systematic literature review on the impacts of teleworking by analysing 40 articles in the period 2000-2020 and found that the prevalent conclusion was that teleworking was linked to higher work-life balance. However, the up to date research of teleworking during the COVID-19 crisis suggests the exact opposite.



used by almost 50 minutes (DeFilippis et al. 2020). Gascoigne (2020) found that homework can lead to increased productivity through the intensification of work. Wang et al. (2021) conducted a study on the effectiveness of teleworking during the first months of the pandemic in China. They found that “working at home means more interruptions from family, which may negatively influence work effectiveness” (Wang et al. 2021: 28).

In the UK, Chung et al. concluded that the “blurred boundaries between work and home remain the most common negative outcome of home working /.../” (Chung et al. 2020: 15). Similar conclusions have been reached by different authors who have examined the impact of teleworking in different national contexts (see Tavares et al. 2020; Irawanto et al. 2021; Lonska et al. 2021; Tomohiro 2021; Wang et al. 2021). The second main finding seems to be that teleworking within the context of the pandemic also led to greater stress (Irawanto et al. 2021; Kapoor et al. 2021; Tomohiro 2021; Wang et al. 2021; Camacho and Barrios 2022).

In Table 2, we summarise the key findings of the reviewed literature.

**Table 2.: A list of authors and their findings regarding the impact(s) of teleworking during the COVID-19 crisis.**

Author(s)	Country/ region	Positive / Negative impact(s) of teleworking
Gascoigne (2020)	UK	Intensification of work
Chung et al. (2020)	UK	Blurred boundaries between work and private life
Tavares et al. (2020)	Portugal	Negative impact on work-life balance; a weaker sense of connectedness with other employees; problems with support infrastructure
Sostero et al. (2020)	overview (Europe)	Blurred boundaries between work and private life
Wang et al. (2021)	China	Blurred boundaries; ineffective communication, loneliness; higher job autonomy (flexibility of working time)
Lonska et al. (2021)	Latvia	Negative impact on work-life balance
Tomohiro (2021)	Japan	Blurred boundaries between work and private life
Irawanto et al. (2021)	Indonesia	Negative impact on work-life balance; negative effect on work stress because of work overload
Delfino and van der Kolk (2021)	Italy	More stress, important modifications in employee autonomy, weaker sense of connectedness with other employees
Kapoor et al. (2021)	India	More stress, blurred boundaries between work and private life; the negative impact of stress on well-being is partially mediated by teleworking
Camacho and Barrios (2022)	Colombia	Technostress due to too much work

Working from home was a specific answer to the pandemic lockdowns and was a tool to prevent job and earning losses. In this sense, teleworking proved to be very efficient and, together with different JRSs, prevented a deeper economic crisis and rise of unemployment, although important differences exist in teleworkability potentials between sectors. Moreover, important changes occurred in assessing the impacts of teleworking; as demonstrated before the crisis, it was associated mostly with a better work-life balance. However, due to the specific situation of the pandemic, teleworking is today, in different parts of the world, associated with blurred boundaries between work and private life. In this sense, state policies will have to address these problems, especially with the rising individualisation and alienation of workers when working from home.

## **4 COVID-19 and inequality**

All these important changes due to the COVID-19 crisis and lockdowns – the various JRS and the radical transformation of the labour process through technology and working from home – have had an important impact on existing economic and social inequalities. In this review, we focus on two dimensions: income inequality and gender inequality.

### **4.1 Income inequality**

Furceri et al. (2020), examining pandemics and epidemics in the last 20 years and their influence on inequality, found that they always led to increases in the Gini coefficient and to raising “income shares accruing to the higher deciles of the income distribution, and lowered the employment-to-population ratio for those with basic education compared to those with higher education”. These scenarios have also been examined for the COVID-19 pandemic. Palomino, Rodriguez and Sebastian (2020) have examined various scenarios within the context of lockdowns (different length and scope) and have found that during the COVID-19 pandemic, inequality will rise as well: “Decomposing overall wage inequality in Europe, we find that lockdown and social distance measures produce a double process of divergence: both inequality within and between countries increase”.

Darvas found that the difference between the job losses of the richer and better educated and the poorer low-educated workers correlates with the recession in 2020, which suggests that “the depth of the economic recession is related to the increase in within-country income inequality in 2020” (Darvas, 2021: 21). Oscar (2021) found that COVID-19 had an important impact on wage inequality, since the most affected sectors were low-wage and labour-intensive sectors. Therefore,

COVID-19 has in certain countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Lithuania and Luxembourg) led to an increase in wage inequality. Christl et al. (2022) researched income distribution within Austria and found that “the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is regressive, affecting low-income households more significantly than high-income households” (Christl et al. 2022: 14).

Almeida et al. (2021) researched the impact of COVID-19 on income at the EU level and found that, throughout 2020, the disposable income of households “would fall by 9.3% due to the COVID-19 crisis without discretionary fiscal policy measures, and by 4.3% with policy intervention”. Crucially, they claimed that the COVID-19 crisis would have a much larger impact on poorer households, thus reproducing income inequalities of the past (Almeida et al. 2021: 429).

Brewer and Tassova showed that “UK households, on average, sustained income losses in net income of 6.9%. Earned income fell by a substantial 12.6% of the baseline net income. But policies protected household incomes to a substantial degree” (Brewer and Tassova 2021: 456). Piyapromdee and Spittal (2020: 825) showed that in the first months of the pandemic in the UK, “[l]ower-income households experience the largest proportionate income reduction”. Brewer and Gardiner (2020) explored the influence of COVID-19 on the income of households in the UK and found that certain important changes have taken place. Namely, new social and employment protection schemes managed to soften the blow, but pre-COVID-19 low-income families were much likelier to take on new debt or borrow money from families and friends: “This /.../ suggests that the crisis is having more marked negative effects on the living standards – considered broadly – of lower-income working-age families than of higher-income families” (Brewer and Gardiner 2020: 197).

Dasgupta et al. (2021: 339) argued that, in India, the effect of COVID-19 will be persistent, especially regarding poverty and income inequalities. Brum and de Rosa (2021) found that in Uruguay, the poverty rate grew from 8.5% to 11.8%. Qian and Fan (2020: 4) showed that, in China, those with better education lost less income than those with lower education levels. Those people with the lowest income had “more than twice as likely as those from the highest-income families to have a zero income /.../”.

Although most of the articles found that there was an increase in income inequality, there are also authors who argue the exact opposite. One of the most interesting articles was published by Clark et al. (2021). They investigated the trends of income inequality during the COVID-19 pandemic in Germany, France, Italy and Spain between January 2020 and January 2021. They found that there was a fall in “relative inequality” in these countries. They concluded that “inequality mostly increased from January to May 2020 before dropping

back below its pre-COVID level in September 2020" (Clark et al. 2021: 17). Similarly, Li et al. (2021: 19) claimed that "Australia experienced a rapid drop in income inequality, reducing the Gini coefficient /.../ income from 0.33 to 0.31". Moreover, similar conclusions were found in the case of South Africa (Chitiga-Mabugu et al. 2021: 92).

Regarding income inequality, as we can see, there are no conclusive findings. Certain authors and studies suggest that there was a decline in income inequality in specific cases, while most studies suggest the opposite. In this context, some of the implemented policies certainly helped reduce, or at least sustain, pre-pandemic levels of income inequality. More research will be needed in the future to better explain what really happened during the COVID-19 pandemic regarding income inequality.

## 4.2 Gender inequality

In its wage inequality report, the ILO states that, because of the "the disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on women and the significant risks of further increasing existing inequalities to their detriment, wage policies are also an essential means of limiting the effects of the crisis on the gender pay gap" (ILO 2021b: 171). Within this context, one of the most researched areas regarding the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 is the field of gender inequality.

Alon et al. (2020) explain that in "normal" recessions, male employment is likelier to be affected and men are likelier to lose their jobs. However, the COVID-19 crisis had an impact on industries with a higher number of female employees. Moreover, because of the lockdowns closed schools and daycares, COVID-19 had a huge impact on employed mothers. Similar findings were presented in a review article by Brodeur et al. (2021). Kikuchi et al. analysed labour market changes in Japan within the context of the pandemic of COVID-19 and found that although "both males' and females' employment declined since February 2020, the decline is larger for females" (Kikuchi et al. 2021: 4). This was also the case in Austria (Christl et al. 2022), Israel (Kristal and Yaish 2020) and the USA (Tüzemen and Tran 2020). Dang and Nguyen (2021) carried out research that included South Korea, Japan, Italy, China, the UK and the four largest states in the USA (Texas, New York, Florida and California) and concluded that their results "suggest that women are more likely to permanently lose their job than men, and they expect their own labor income to fall more in the future than men do /.../" (Dang and Nguyen 2021: 6).

Štebe and Vovk (2021) found that the COVID-19 had an important impact on the well-being of women in Slovenia, especially due to more "precarious employment and the stronger demand for family care".

An empirical study of Germany, the USA and Singapore has demonstrated that COVID-19 has had a more substantial influence on female than male employment: women were likelier to work from home, work part-time or even become unemployed than men, mostly due to their more precarious position before the pandemic. Women were likelier to become unemployed in Germany or Singapore and in the USA, they were likelier to work from home or to work part-time. This study also found that gender roles have been changing due to the pandemic: in the case that women lost their jobs, they were trapped in a traditional gender attitude, while when men lost their jobs, this led to a redefinition of gender roles in relation to housework and childcare (Reichelt et al. 2021).

Adams-Prassl et al. (2020c) examined three cases – Germany, the UK and the USA – and found that in Germany employees were not affected by the crisis as much as in the USA and the UK because of the well-established short-time work scheme. The second important finding is that if one was able to perform their work from home, it also meant a higher probability that one would not lose their job, while those on temporary contracts, less educated and women were likelier to become unemployed. Fodor et al. (2021) analysed the hours spent on housework and childcare work of both men and women in Hungary and found that “men indeed claimed that they were doing 35% more childcare work than before the pandemic (just like women, in fact)”. However, since women did much more childcare work before the pandemic, this also meant that “women devoted a significantly larger number of hours to children than before and much more compared to men” (Fodor et al. 2021: 105).

Deshpande analysed the situation in the first five months of the pandemic in India and found that “the gender gap in average hours spent on domestic work hours *decreased* in the first month of the lockdown” (Deshpande 2021: 77). Things changed by the end of 2020, when women spent much more time on housework than before the pandemic, while the level of men’s housework decreased below the pre-pandemic level (Deshpande 2021). Costoya et al. (2021) analysed gender inequality and housework in Argentina in the first year of the pandemic and found that changes in hours of paid labour were crucial. Where men worked fewer hours, there “was an increase in the time spent in housework activities by men during lockdown relative to their partners, compared to the gap existing before the lockdown” (Costoya et al. 2021: 8). Conversely, as they pointed out, “a reduction in women’s hours of paid work during the lockdown meant an increase in the within-couple gender gap” (Costoya et al. 2021: 8). However, Cuesta and Pico (2020) analysed the gender implications of poverty in Colombia during the COVID-19 pandemic and concluded that there were no special gender implications regarding women’s employment and poverty (Cuesta and Pico 2020: 1580).

Moreover, Feng and Savani researched 286 full-time employees and dual-career parents in the USA who had to work from home since the beginning of the pandemic and asked them to self-evaluate their work productivity before and during the COVID-19 crisis. They found that there was a gender gap in self-perceived productivity and job satisfaction (Feng and Savani 2020). However, if men had to work from home, they were also involved in childcare and housework, much more than they had been before (Collins et al. 2020).

If, during the last few decades, reducing gender inequality has been among the top policy priorities in the world, during the pandemic, the traditional gender inequalities have been mostly reinforced (for an extensive overview of the key findings, see Table 3).

**Table 3.: A list of authors and their findings regarding gender (in)equality during the COVID-19 crisis.**

Author(s)	Country	Gender (in)equality and COVID-19
Alon et al. (2020)	USA	Women are more severely affected by job losses, while in addition the closure of day-cars also affected working mothers; fathers became included in childcare, which can lead to changes in housework and childcare
Adams-Prassl et al. (2020c)	Germany, UK, USA	Women have experienced a larger drop in employment in the USA, UK and Germany than men; less educated more likely to lose their jobs; the situation in Germany was somewhat better than in the USA and UK
Sevilla and Smith (2020)	UK	Women did more childcare than men during lockdown; also, women that had worked from home did more childcare than men who lost their job or were on furlough; however, it is evident, that a more equal allocation of childcare is present due to the COVID-19, especially in families where men lost their jobs or were on furlough
Cuesta and Pico (2020)	Colombia	No significant differences between men and women concerning the effect of the pandemic and state policy interventions on poverty
Kristal and Yaish (2020)	Israel	More women lost their jobs than men, which induced the income gap
Collins et al. (2020)	USA	Mothers with young children reduced their working hours much more than fathers; the gender gap in working hours grew from 20 to 50%
Feng and Savani (2020)	USA	Lower productivity and lower job satisfaction were reported by women due to the pandemic

Fodor et al. (2021)	Hungary	Men increased their share of childcare as much as women; however, since women were doing much more childcare work than men before the pandemic, women's contribution to childcare grew much more in absolute dimensions than men's; gender inequality increased the most among the most educated women
Deshpande (2021)	India	Lower gender gap regarding employment probability because of the lower probability of men being employed; after the first wave women did more housework than before the pandemics, while men spent less time on housework than before
Štebe and Vovk (2021)	Slovenia	Drop in employment and rise in absences from work for women that are larger than those for men; the negative impact of flexible employment was much more evenly shared between men and women
Costoya et al. (2021)	Argentina	The time spent for men and women on housework depended on the fact who worked less; women did much more childcare work and housework if they lost their job
Kikuchi et al. (2021)	Japan	Women's employment declined more than men's employment
Dang and Nguyen (2021)	South Korea, Japan, Italy, China, UK, Texas, New York, Florida, California	Women were more likely to become unemployed than men; women expect their income to decrease more than men do; one of the main reasons for this is the larger portion of women working in the service industry
Reichelt et al. (2021)	Germany, USA, Singapore	More likely that women would become unemployed than men in Germany and Singapore, in the USA women more likely to reduce working hours or to work from home; when women became unemployed and their partner remained employed it led to strengthening traditional gender roles; when men became unemployed it is associated with more egalitarian view on gender roles
Christl et al. (2022)	Austria	Bigger loss of income for women

The pandemic has clearly had a negative impact on gender equality. Women were likelier to lose their job or to work from home, while they also carried a much larger burden in childcare and housework. An analysis of different parts of the world suggests that this is a widespread phenomenon. The reviewed literature clearly points to the necessity of politically addressing long, persisting trends.

## 5 Critical Reflection of Presented Literature and Concluding Remarks

Because of various implemented policies aimed at mitigating the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, we are seeing important changes in our everyday lives. The presented literature provides crucial empirical insights for understanding the broader changes in the existing modality of the capitalist mode of production. The temporal and spatial limitations of the article are apparent – the article does not and cannot exhaust the entire amount of literature that has been published regarding the political, economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. However, we can reflect on certain blind spots in the presented approaches.

First, it is clear that, in comparison to the crisis of 2008, the world has taken a different approach in addressing the economic and social aspects of the COVID-19 crisis. This is best represented by the widespread JRSs and their significant impact. The widespread use of JRS shows that a more Keynesian approach is being adopted. The goal of governments was to save jobs and not (exclusively) big companies. However, the data suggest that there are clear differences between different countries in their possibility of adopting larger programmes to stimulate their economies because of their different financial situations, the scale of public debt and the “confidence” of financial markets (Makin and Layton 2021). Therefore, the position of the country within the capitalist world system, the type of capitalism and welfare regime in the respective country and the level of economic development should be considered when explaining the exact institutional and financial possibilities and limitations when implementing specific JRS.

Moreover, since these JRSs were financed through deficit spending, certain authors claim that this could already mean a radical break with neoliberalism (Rodrik 2020; Tooze 2021). In this sense, the question that arises is: Was the implementation of JRSs a result of altered class power relations? If we examine union density as a proxy for the bargaining power of working classes, then we can see that in the OECD countries, the numbers are still going down (OECD 2022), meaning that organised labour is not becoming stronger. Hence, one must be careful when proclaiming such paradigmatic shifts, because problems might occur when the financial markets begin pushing for fiscal consolidation. In this sense, the neo-Keynesian answer would be to increase various taxes for the wealthiest to repay public debt. Will this happen, or will governments introduce fiscal austerity that will again – as after the crisis of 2008 – affect the poorest in our societies? Therefore, the question that arises is whether this will be a one-time neo-Keynesian answer within the broader history of the defeat of the working classes?



Second, regarding the introduction of teleworking, the literature correctly identifies important and even radical ruptures and transformations. We claim that teleworking should be understood within the context of the development of productive forces as well as of the transformation of relations of production that are inherent to capitalism. In this sense, COVID-19 was not the sole reason for and did not exclusively contribute to the rise of teleworking, but it was certainly a catalyst for the quick and massive rise of teleworking. As Mirowski (2013) noted, in capitalism, no crisis goes to waste.

Most of the articles reviewed clearly point out that this process of working from home leads to more stress and blurred boundaries between private and professional life. Manokha even argued that teleworking “contributes to /.../ to the development of a ‘24/7 employee’ or a ‘just-in-time employee’, who is available, reachable and observable at any time” (Manokha 2020: 285). However, within the context of the capitalist mode of production, one important topic is missing. Capitalism is based on constant changes in the labour process, as well as technology, to reduce production costs and keep profit shares as high as possible. In this sense, working from home and using new information and communications technologies (ICTs) in the long run will change the business model of companies – teleworking will be much cheaper than having people working together at a shared place. Moreover, teleworking not only leads to greater stress and alienation but also can have an important effect on the inability of workers to organise – one becomes completely alienated from his/her colleagues and it becomes impossible to form any sort of class solidarity. However, it seems that the authors only consider these transformations within the scope of empirical findings or whether they are good or bad within moral categories without reflection of the context within which they are taking place. Hence, more attention should be given to the explanation of the new digital leap forward during the COVID-19 crisis within the framework of the constant development of productive forces in capitalism and within the framework of altered class power relations while certainly building on the existing empirical foundations that the presented literature provides.

Third, the question of income inequality is one of the most important ones in relation to the economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The conclusions of different authors are not coherent; it seems that the predicted rise in income inequality was mitigated very much by the introduction of JRSs and other social programmes. Here again, one can see the possible strong role that the state can play in addressing these contradictions. Nevertheless, one must ask the question of whether these analyses are too narrow?

Namely, even in countries where there is relatively low income inequality, wealth inequality is much larger (see Roberts 2020). More importantly,

Goodman (2022) showed that the wealth of billionaires rose only in 2020 by USD 3.9 trillion. The Oxfam report, named "Inequality Kills", states clearly that the "wealth of the 10 richest men has doubled, while the /.../ 99% of humanity are worse off, because of COVID-19" (Oxfam 2022: 17). Therefore, if we know that the wealthiest became much richer during the pandemic, it becomes clear that the research on income inequality should be combined with the research on wealth inequality to get a full picture of the ongoing changes.

Fourth, the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on gender inequality has been addressed by a variety of authors and they mostly agree that gender inequalities have been reproduced or even sharpened during the COVID-19 crisis. If we know that gender inequality and the exploitation of women in the workplace and at home are the cornerstones of capitalism (see Federici 2012; 2021), we should not be surprised that most of the analyses conclude that the pandemic has only worsened the position of women in our societies.

Throughout the long history of feminist struggles for equality, even though one of the main radical interventions of feminism was that 'the personal is political', too many times "the state has sought to redress inequalities between men and women, this has always been centred around formal equality initiatives in the workplace, which have left the private realm largely undisturbed. As a result, socially reproductive work remains unevenly distributed in the home, even where women are also engaged in paid work" (Gordon-Bouvier 2021: 216). Therefore, deeper analysis is needed of the specific ways in which the reproduction of gender inequalities are connected with the specific policy responses implemented in specific countries. More attention should be devoted to analysing specific age and occupational differences between women, while intersectionality (connecting the gender, class, race/nationality perspectives) should also be taken more into account when examining the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on gender inequality. If it is true that a new modality of capitalism is being established – although, as explained above, we must still wait to be able to make such conclusions – then it will be necessary to analyse the specific reproduction of gender inequalities within the new context of the capitalist regime of accumulation and mode of regulation.

Cotula (2021) argues that we should not disregard the structural changes that are evolving today because of attempts to limit the scope of the economic and social aspects of the crisis. Within this framework, the presented literature provides important empirical findings. However, it mostly fails to reflect on the power relations between classes and the transformed logic of the reproduction of capitalist accumulation. If it is true that in capitalism, "all that is solid melts into air" (Marx and Engels 2004), then it is crucial to examine the COVID-19 crisis within the context of the constant crisis tendencies and class-specific resolutions

of those within the capitalist mode of production. This is where space opens up for further empirical as well as broader theoretical research on the political-economic changes and impacts of the COVID-19 crisis.

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