

Navigating the post-COVID 19 terrain: state policies in a post-crisis labour market

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced a series of challenges to the function of the labour market: from shutting down whole sectors of the economy and the subsequent furloughing of staff to the rise of flexible forms of employment, and from the use of technologies in managing the new spatio-temporal realities to the psycho-economic effects of the crisis to workers.

Since the early days of the lockdowns, EU states reacted in a concentrated way, focusing on specific measures to alleviate the socio-economic impact of the pandemic for businesses and workers alike. Despite the differences in the type and extent of measures adopted across the continent, a common trajectory was the focus on financially supporting workers through policies of short-term work or the adoption of furlough schemes. These Keynesian-style approaches to macroeconomic and labour market management, appeared in staunch contrast to the neo-liberal trajectory that had been aggressively followed in the past decade in the EU.

Could this imply a new era of positive state intervention in the economy, slowly moving away from the hard-core neo-liberal principles that have dominated the public discourse since the 2009 financial crisis? Although it is still too early to predict the way the post-COVID labour market and employment relations terrain will look like, a first glimpse to the future may be gained by looking at how an EU member state plans to manage the post-lockdown working realities.

The paper will critically evaluate and discuss the new legislation introduced in Greece to address some of the issues raised during the lockdown: from the management of working time and flexible work, to the role of collective bargaining in determining labour market outcomes. Despite the semi-Keynesian intermission to labour market management, the post-COVID state seems determined to adhere to the core principles of neo-liberalism.

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