

Social dialogue in defence of vulnerable groups in post-Covid-19 labour markets (VS/2021/0196)

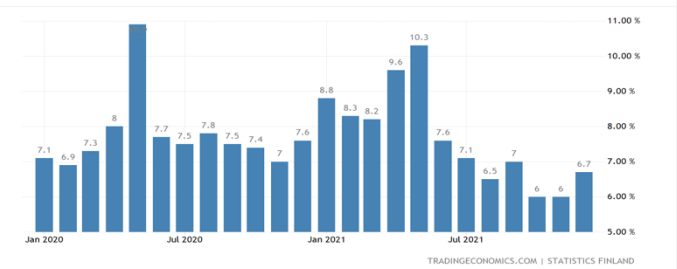


Finland

COVID-19 labour market developments

- Unprecedented **unemployment** and **furloughs** due to mobility restrictions and reduced customer flows.
- The downward trend in **trade union membership rates worsened**, with the exception of an increase in public service trade union membership during Covid-19.
- Unemployment fund membership increased during the pandemic, including non-trade union-affiliated funds.
- The power structure of industrial relations in Finland remained unchanged.

Finland's unemployment rate as a percentage (%) of the labour force Jan 2020 – Dec 2021



COVID-19 and vulnerable groups

- **Migrant workers** were vulnerable due to crowded living conditions, increasing infection risks.
- **Migrant** labourers and **immigrants** faced vulnerability due to limited knowledge about their rights and inadequate access to health information in their native language.
- The **elderly** were vulnerable due to their age, making them more susceptible to severe illness.
- Individuals with **lower socio-economic status**, those on **temporary contracts**, and workers in the **private service sector** were vulnerable.
- Particularly affected: Employees in catering, hospitality, tourism, and events.
- **Platform and self-employed workers** faced economic risks because they lacked social security coverage prior to the pandemic.

Social dialogue in defence of vulnerable groups

- **The Covid-19 package** included policies related to unemployment benefits, lay-off schemes and support for businesses **to protect** laid-off workers, the unemployed, and workers at risk of being unemployed.
- **Temporary eligibility to unemployment benefit** for the self-employed.
- **Health and safety measures** at workplaces to protect frontline workers, workers with underlying diseases, and risk groups.

Policy relevance

- **Social dialogue proved efficient** in designing, negotiating, and implementing policies during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Pre-existing, well-established structures** for industrial relations and social dialogue were strengthened.
- **Tensions arose between stakeholders** depending on whether they were engaged in peak-level negotiations or not.
- **The structures of social dialogue** are vital in establishing the resilience of society and protecting the vulnerable groups.
- **Decline in union density, but also the varying power resources among trade unions representing different employment sectors (e.g., public vs. private)** may pose a challenge to protecting citizens from social vulnerability and adverse effects of unemployment.

Further information

Project details: <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/projects/social-dialogue-defence-vulnerable-groups/about>. Contact: University of Helsinki (Minna van Gerven minna.vangerven@helsinki.fi).



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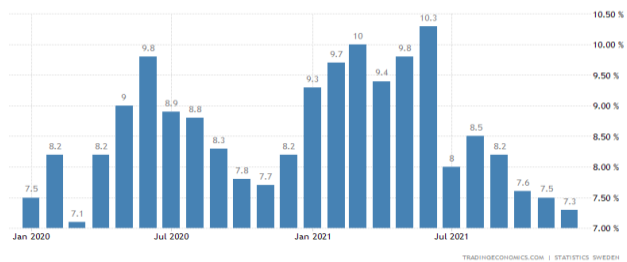


Sweden

COVID-19 labour market developments

- Rise in **unemployment** and **furloughs**, particularly in the service sector, due to restrictions and reduced customer flows.
- The pandemic temporarily reversed the decline in **trade union membership rates**. Correspondingly, unemployment fund membership increased as well.
- Positive effect on the **organisational rate of Swedish employers** due to the short-time work schemes, which required collective bargaining.
- Sweden's industrial relations **power structure** remained unchanged, but the rate of the social dialogue intensified temporarily.

Sweden's unemployment rate as a percentage (%) of the labour force Jan 2020 – Dec 2021



COVID-19 and vulnerable groups

- **Low-income households** (often with migration backgrounds) due to crowded living conditions and inability to avoid public transport.
- The **elderly**, being more susceptible to severe illness, became a **severe issue in Sweden** when the virus started spreading to elderly care homes.
- **Care sector employees** working overtime, being relocated to other hospitals, cancelling their annual summer leave, and putting together their own protective gear.
- Individuals with **lower socio-economic status**, those on **temporary or insecure contracts**, and workers in the **private service sector** – especially catering, hospitality, tourism, and events employees.
- **Small businesses** facing economic instability.
- **Platform and self-employed workers** facing economic risks due to lack of social security coverage.
- **Blue-collar workers** and **frontline workers** unable to work from home.

Social dialogue in defence of vulnerable groups

- **Short-time work schemes**
- Business support to protect laid-off employees and the company's economic stability.
- **Strengthened social insurance schemes**: increased unemployment benefits, changes in eligibility criteria and qualification periods for unemployment and sickness benefits.
- **Covid-19-related social insurance**: carer's allowances, allowance for risk groups, pregnancy allowance due to increased risk of Covid-19.
- More accessible **vocational education and training**.
- Providing **accessible and accurate information** about the disease, safety recommendations, and social insurance and employment rights.

Policy relevance

- **Social dialogue proved efficient** in designing, negotiating, and implementing Covid-19 policies.
- **Pre-existing, well-established** industrial relations and social dialogue **structures** mitigated the labour market impact of the pandemic.
- **Tensions arose between employers and employees** in heavily impacted sectors such as the care sector.
- Existing industrial relations can counter the work of other civil society organisations as a form of **insider-outsider dilemma** since established actors are given political opportunities and space more frequently.
- **Social dialogue structures** are vital in establishing the resilience of society and protecting vulnerable groups.

Further information

Project details: <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/projects/social-dialogue-defence-vulnerable-groups/about>. Contact: Swedish Institute for Social Research (SOFI) (Rense Nieuwenhuis, rense.nieuwenhuis@sofi.su.se).

