

FLEXICURITY MODELS AND THEIR APPLICATION IN THE WORLD

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Abstract:

The paper addresses the concept of flexicurity and the possibilities of intervention through its political components on the labour market during the COVID-19 pandemic. An argument is proposed for the role of the flexicurity model in accelerating the exit from a period of economic crisis. Being implemented separately from the perspective of the labour market, a series of aspects regarding the losses of jobs and the sudden increase of unemployment will be presented by comparing the practical solutions in European countries. In conclusion, the paper highlights the impact of the solutions adopted in Romania and will be debated the benefits of the flexicurity model in the effort to manage equilibrium in the labour market.

Keywords: *flexicurity, labour market, public policies, unemployment*

JEL classification: *J08, J21, J64*

Introduction

In the real economy, the labour market is experiencing a number of disruptions, and political decisions are made taking into account the context that produces them, at the macro level, both economically and socially, although the effects of implementation may manifest themselves at the level of companies or individuals, so that a measure or combination of measures is not always explicitly labelled "flexicurity". This leads to a lack of visibility of flexicurity measures, and in combination with the intangibility and ambiguity of the concept, we are in a situation where quite little is known about the appropriate form of flexicurity in practice, what effects would determine its implementation, and in what way could measure the impact on the labour market.

Flexicurity contributes to improving the flexibility and security of the labour market. The term "flexicurity" appeared in a Dutch debate in 1990 and aims to identify a specific combination of flexible labour markets, generous unemployment benefits and efficient employment services to help the unemployed get paid as soon as possible (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2008). Flexicurity is supposed to meet the needs of the employer and the employee simultaneously.

Based on this unanimously recognized statement, the paper will present, in the first part, the conceptual definition accepted in the literature from the perspective of its political components, as a central element of European labour market policies. The second part will present, on groups of countries, the application of flexicurity models and correlating with the labour market challenges in the context of COVID-19 will substantiate the arguments for the situation in Romania, for the moment a unitary policy, exclusively dedicated to the labour market.

Defining the problem in the literature

In the literature, the concept of flexicurity has been defined by both researchers, labour market analysts and public policy experts from several points of view, not reaching a universal definition,

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so it continues to provoke controversy and retains a character of ambiguity. It can be said that flexicurity from the perspective of its political components delimits an innovative area of application on the labour market, reflecting the European vision of sustainable development and carries, by definition, the burden of two seemingly conflicting goals, one of achieving the renewed Lisbon strategy, and another to modernize the European social model.

Flexicurity is needed to address both the socio-economic challenges of globalization and the widespread diffusion of new technologies and demographic aging, while providing a safety net for workers to help them become more flexible and "employable". As the security of workers is no longer guaranteed by the stable employment relationship, a set of policy interventions is needed to support safe transitions from one job to another and from activity to inactivity and vice versa." (Aliki Mouriki, 2009)

The Lisbon Strategy, adopted by the Lisbon European Council, aims at economic growth and employment to achieve the European Union's main strategic objective, which is to increase the competitiveness of the European economy. These objectives are met by increasing the labour force, the flexibility of the labour market, together with increasing the social protection of workers. Flexicurity policies support the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy and contribute to the modernization of the European social model.

Flexicurity through its political components, respectively the 4 directions of action:

- flexible and reliable (secure) contractual arrangements, (CFS), from the perspective of the employer and the employee, referring to the "insiders" (those who hold a job) and the "outsiders" (unemployed, and implicitly from the labour income of an organization, those who can increase the number of unemployed) proposes in order to increase flexibility at the level of employers, a modern labour legislation, new collective agreements and new forms of work organization reflected in the contractual conditions; Examples of this kind of measures: determined duration of employment contracts, reduction of working hours, reduction of work program; increasing the number of contracts with a reduced and atypical daily schedule.
- lifelong learning strategies, (LLL), induce employee flexibility (with state and / or private employers support), by acquiring new knowledge and developing skills as a basis for employability (labour market entry) or continuous adaptability, in particular to people belonging to vulnerable groups; Specific measures are: increasing the mandatory schooling period; on-the-job training (apprenticeship); formal and informal training and professional development programs.
- active (effective) labour policies (AP), aimed at facilitating the transition through unemployment and enabling firms to maintain productivity levels; (PA) can be defined as a set of economic measures applied "to improve the functioning of the labour market, which are targeted at the unemployed" or, in other words, "to improve labour market, the market position of unemployed workers". They are also aimed at keeping risk jobs and activating inactive people. In the last two decades, (PA) has generally been understood as a pillar of a broader public policy framework, aiming "to bring more people into the workforce effectively, to counteract the potentially negative effects of unemployment. (PA) belong to the category of policies that also include passive measures, such as unemployment benefits / benefits and related social assistance or health benefits. These are policies promoted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (hereinafter: OECD) and the European Commission, which are convinced that they will help reduce unemployment and boost employment of the work force.

The two main functions can be described as "economic" and "social". The "Economic Function" (AP) refers to the economic performance of labour markets, such as job creation, human resource allocation, matching labour supply and demand, and overcoming structural gaps in this regard. The "social" mitigates the social consequences of poor performance in the economic and labour market and seeks to remove barriers to employment by including vulnerable, socially excluded and unemployable or hard-to-employ categories.

Three fundamental target groups target (AP):

- the unemployed,

- employed persons who are endangered by involuntary, possible loss of employment and
- inactive people who can and would like to enter the labour market, being able and dispose for work.

Therefore, the measures are aimed primarily at employment and the inclusion of the most vulnerable, excluded social groups, difficult to employ and disadvantaged in the labour market, ie groups with the lowest employment prospects and economic inclusion. In this respect, the typical target groups of the measures (PA) are women, the elderly, the young, the long-term unemployed, the low-skilled, the disabled, immigrants and others.

Structural measures (PA) are integrated into programs and projects in the form of:

- "Fighting youth unemployment and preventing long-term unemployment";
 - "A more friendly approach to employment: taxes, allowances and training systems";
 - "Development of a policy for prolonging active life";
 - "Development of skills for the new labour market in the context of lifelong learning";
 - "IT training for all citizens";
 - "Active policies in order to correlate the demand with the supply on the labour market and to prevent the lack of qualified labour force";
 - "Combating discrimination and promoting social inclusion by ensuring access to employment".
- modern social security systems and good mobility, (OSH) which include a wide coverage of social protection insurance (state or private social insurance - pensions, insurance and health care, unemployment benefits and other categories of benefits), providing adequate income support. One of the characteristics of this component is paying attention to work in combination with private and family responsibilities, such as raising children, caring for the elderly, supporting people with disabilities. It is a component that starts from a given level of employment and aims to find solutions for hiring the surplus labour force in a relatively shorter term. It acts on the cost of unemployment. Until the decrease of unemployment, it focuses on the protection of the unemployed, unemployment or insertion in the labour market, the withdrawals from the labour market of some active people, the management of the problems of the elderly. Other specific measures refer to lowering the retirement age, or early retirement without penalty.

it becomes a pillar of European social policy, an instrument of sustainable economic growth.

"A broader understanding of the concept of flexicurity, which covers almost all dimensions of labour regulation, including in the workplace, has at least two main influences, which are clearly recognized in the EU approach:

- the central role that the social partners and industrial relations can play in specifying flexicurity;
- multiplying the possible "models" of flexicurity, which can result, in principle, from the combination of very different sources of both flexibility and security." (Roberto Pedersini, 2008)

"Eamets and Paas (2007) define flexicurity as an increase in labour market mobility - job flows, labour movement, functional and occupational mobility, geographical mobility and flexible working time arrangements - with opportunities to achieve a new job and not to lose substantially in terms of income level. The last two characteristics mean that the unemployed should receive sufficient training and active support in the labour market to get a new job quickly." (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007)

In 2010, the Europe 2020 Strategy:

- set a target of 75% rate of employment in the EU
- solutions are searched for new skills and jobs
- flexicurity policies are applied for new equilibriums in the functioning of the labour market

- more emphasis is placed on job quality and working conditions.

It demonstrates that "Flexicurity is not just a concept or a theoretical model, it has mainly practical and legal implications for labour market support or regulation tools based on public or social partners." (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2012).

In 2016, the foundations of the European Pillar of Social Rights with three components are settled:

- equal opportunities and access to the labour market,
- fair working conditions,
- access to adequate and sustainable social protection, leading to a permanent intertwining of the objectives of sustainable development with the objectives of European strategies.

In 2019, the European Labour Authority will start operating, which:

- comes up with solutions to support fair mobility
- establishing the European social security number
- aims to strengthen cooperation between labour market authorities at all levels.

In 2020, Next Generation EU establishes a recovery plan for damage repair economic and social caused by the coronavirus pandemic. This will put on the foundations for a modern and more sustainable Europe, which post-COVID-19 will be greener (ecological, zero-carbon), more digital, more resilient and better suited to current and future challenges, at least as statements of intention. Thus, it can be considered appropriate a research in the direction of re-conceptualization in accordance with the disturbances of the labour market and its future.

We thus redefine, Flexicurity as a direct and explicit public policy consisting of all the rules, institutions and procedures that are meant to adjust, from the perspective of public authority, the important macroeconomic balance in the real economy, between labour supply and demand, meaning the equilibrium of labour market, by controlling the trajectories of the unemployment, the rate of employment and the level of work income with all relevant implications at both macroeconomic and macrosocial level in a single labour market (national, regional or global).

From the perspective of labour market policies, especially flexicurity, as we have redefined it, as a mix of policies, it is essential to understand which specific types of interventions are most effective in improving labour market performance. In the second part of the paper we will observe and compare, the traditionally wide range of active and passive policies but in the process, we conclude the results obtained from the simple operation of active / passive policies do not provide any concrete guidance on the cause-and-effect ratio in the labour market implementation, on the impact of application or on prioritizing types of expenditure / investment. these policies.

The purpose of the mix is to take over the functions and objectives of the useful measures in a new regulatory framework, so that the effects of the application are synergistic and not contrary.

The brief comparison of flexicurity models

EU Member States have often encountered imbalances in the labour market and this makes labour markets difficult to adapt to change and productivity is slowing down. Below are detailed groups of countries with common characteristics and can implement the appropriate flexicurity model. Together with these, we have introduced information on unemployment during the crisis created by the COVID-19 virus pandemic, in order to be able to analyse the measures adopted in some of the EU countries.

The Nordic Group (Denmark, the Netherlands, Finland, Sweden) is characterized by high flexibility and high security, the labour market is flexible, protection system for the unemployed, active training measures, flexibility and mobility for employers and employees. Gives an important role to lifelong learning policies.

During the crisis created by COVID-19, for Danish companies, which are facing large declines in demand, employees can be sent home, and the government will cover 75% of salary (maximum DKK 30,000, approximately EUR 4,000), if the company promises not to dismiss any worker for economic reasons. Companies will also have to cover the remaining 25% to ensure that employees can keep their full salary. For hourly paid workers (without notice period), the compensation rate is 90% (maximum EUR 3500).

The measures applied in Finland during the COVID-19 crisis are the following:

- As of April 1, dismissed employees are entitled to unemployment benefits, even if they are employed in commercial activities or studies.
- Temporary recognition of entrepreneurs and self-employed workers as beneficiaries of unemployment benefits.
- Elimination of the waiting period for unemployment benefits.
- Increase in parental benefits, social assistance and unemployment insurance (EUR 3 billion).

The Liberal / Anglo-Saxon Group (Ireland) is characterized by high flexibility but low security. The labour market is flexible, with wages at the level of the minimum wage regulated by law, deficient human capital, instability, high rates of obtaining secondary education.

In Ireland, a payment is available for all employees and the self-employed who have lost their jobs due to the recession of economic activity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic at a flat rate of EUR 350 per week. "In terms of priorities for the future job, the survey found that lifelong learning is a high priority for 49% of people in organizations, with career transitions and flexible start / arrival times reaching 38%, respectively 33%. Reduced working hours were classified as a high priority with only 10% and only 8% answered that a compressed working week is a high priority. " (Farrelly, Roisín, 2020)

Continental Corporatist Group (France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Luxembourg, Slovenia) is distinguished by low flexibility and high security, high income and protection system for the unemployed. Labour market flexibility measures, vocational training measures are active.

In Austria during the crisis created by COVID-19, the unemployed will receive unemployment benefits in the amount of the previous unemployment benefit and will maintain protection for placement in the previous occupation and an income similar to the previous one. Unemployment benefits are relatively low in Austria, at 55% of last net income. Due to the crisis, it is difficult to find a job quickly, and the unemployed are at risk of poverty.

In Belgium, a special unemployment system has been adopted, which consists of a transition from temporary unemployment due to force majeure to regular economic unemployment and will be applicable until 31 December 2020. Workers in temporary unemployment will receive an advance of EUR 1450 during the processing of their file. The worker receives 70% of his average capped remuneration (before 65%), with € 5.63 / day of unemployment.

Companies in France, in sectors that have suffered a sharp decline in activity, continue to benefit from partial unemployment coverage of 100% by the state.

Germany partially provides job retention benefits, through unemployment insurance institutions, to workers and / or enterprises affected by a reduction in activity which results in a reduction in working hours, loss of turnover and / or temporary closure.

The Mediterranean Group (Portugal, Italy, Greece, Malta, Romania) is based on economic growth based on tourism, agriculture, construction. It is represented by a reduced flexibility and at the same time by a reduced security. Unemployment is relatively high and employment is low. Despite the rigidity, the percentage of temporary employment is the highest.

During the current crisis in Italy, companies that are not eligible for the job retention scheme in the event of a reduction in activity or a reduction in working hours receive salary compensation (EUR 600 / month). It is equal to 80% of the hourly wage.

In Romania, a wage subsidy is granted for workers in temporary (technical) unemployment. The government will cover up to 75% of wages, but does not exceed 75% of the national gross average salary of employed workers, but who cannot work in companies that have had to suspend activities due to restrictions imposed by the government and in companies whose turnover business was reduced by at least 25% due to the pandemic (as evidenced by a certificate issued by the government).

Portugal has also taken action in the current context for unemployed workers:

- Automatic extension of unemployment benefits and all benefits guaranteeing minimum subsistence levels to be completed in the coming months.
- Support for employment, especially for the new unemployed - includes employment and internship support programs, along with programs for strategic sectors and target groups.
- Vocational training - based on training and retraining programs: reviewing and consolidating responses to the qualification and retraining program for the unemployed

The Baltic Group (Estonia, Latvia, Spain) is characterized by low security. Also, incomes and employment are low in these countries.

For the unemployed in Estonia, the unemployment insurance fund will cover 70% of workers income for two months. The gross amount to be paid per employee per month is EUR 1,000. The unemployment insurance fund and the employer will pay all labour taxes on wages and benefits. The benefit is calculated on the basis of the employee's gross salaries for the last 12 months, plus the remuneration paid by the employer to the employee, which is not less than EUR 150 gross.

In Spain, the amount of unemployment benefit for people who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 period is 70% of its contribution base and a maximum of the minimum inter-professional wage. The subsidy is compatible with other salaries if the minimum inter-professional wage is not exceeded.

The Group of Eastern European Countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Cyprus, Slovakia) is characterized by lower and medium flexibility and average levels of taxation. There is a small share of temporary and part-time jobs in the labour market. Total spending on social protection and active labour market policies tends to be low. It is distinguished by reduced mobility and reduced participation in lifelong learning schemes.

The Czech Republic provides specific job protection packages, which include measures such as: short-term work, short-term unemployment benefits, income compensation for workers who have lost their jobs.

In Hungary, short-term social protection measures are applied during the COVID-19 period, such as extending eligibility for unemployment benefits, cash transfers to meet basic needs.

It is estimated that in Slovakia around 70% of all employees who lose their jobs due to COVID-19 will be eligible for unemployment benefits. The duration of the unemployment benefit was extended by one month, in cases where it would have expired during the crisis situation. Employees receive 80% of the average salary if their employer had to close the business due to the current crisis.

Regardless of the purpose and conjuncture of the application, the following can be found as common and defining features of flexicurity:

- The possibility of making employment contracts more flexible, thus avoiding the withdrawal from the labour market of certain categories of people, respectively of the elderly or those with a low level of qualification, respectively of several vulnerable categories
- Improving lifelong learning, so that competent and well-trained people lead to their own development, that of employers and, finally, to the growth of the economy
- Active policies that induce a more flexible labour market and contribute to labour mobility
- Modernization of social protection systems in order to maintain the balance between the personal and professional life of employees and to evolve towards a permanent and generalized state of well-being on the population.

The purpose of each component of flexicurity converges with the European Pillar of Social Rights, namely:

- (1) equal opportunities and access to the labour market,
- (2) fair working conditions,
- (3) access to adequate and sustainable social protection.

In order to achieve these goals, it can be considered that lifelong learning strategies (LLL) are those that ensure the continuous adaptability and employability of workers, especially the most vulnerable. We further address this component to highlight that it can play an important role in overcoming an economic crisis.

One can refer, first of all, to the global financial crisis of 2008, starting from the analysis of the data from 2007.

The following variables will be used in comparing flexicurity models:

- Lifelong learning (LLL)
- Training

For the training variable, in table no. 1 is the percentage of respondents who have participated in training courses during the last 12 months, including on-the-job training. And for lifelong learning is the percentage of the population aged 25 to 64 who participate in education and training in the four weeks before the survey - this is the numerator. The denominator consists of the total population of the same age group, except for those who did not answer the question on "participation in education and training". The information collected relates to all types of education or training, whether or not relevant to the respondent's current or possible job.

Table 1|:

Average value (%) of variables by group of countries (2007)

Variables	Denmark, Finland, Sweden	Ireland, Cyprus, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia	France, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Luxembourg	Netherlands, UK	Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, Malta	Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia
Lifelong Learning (LLL)	28.6%	7.3%	8.2%	19.3%	4.2%	7.3%
Training	43.3%	23.2%	25.2%	38.0%	15.0%	21.4%

Source: authors processing according to the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007

The group of countries with the highest values of the variables consists of Denmark, Finland and Sweden, which represents the Nordic Flexicurity Model. In these countries the average of lifelong learning and training are 28.6% and 43.3%. In Denmark, job rotation gives employees working for any private company the opportunity to take long-term training leave, while their job is held by a substitute (ideally unemployed). And in the Netherlands, there are local centres for increasing labour mobility initiated by, among others, employers who have recruited employees with disabilities who have been absent from work due to a long-term illness. If the employer cannot provide a job for an employee when returning to work within the company, the employer is obliged to help find a job with another employer. Groups of Member States with certain deficiencies will take steps to improve the characteristics of the labour market, to deal with difficult situations. The group of countries with a high level of job security, but in a rigid labour market, will take measures to make the labour market more flexible. And, for the group of countries with a high level of labour market flexibility, measures will be needed for the protection and safety of workers.

A qualitative analysis of the application of the LLL is carried out by Eurofound through its surveys on working conditions. The survey applied in all European countries measures working conditions, problems, risks, areas of progress, in order to contribute to the development of EU policy aimed at improving the quality of jobs.

Records from the last report published based on the 2015 survey, in which 44,000 workers (employed and self-employed) were involved are mentioned in table no. 2. The questions in the questionnaire which were the basis of the research were intended to obtain information on employment status, work organization, learning and training, duration and organization of working time, physical and psychosocial risk factors, health and safety, work-life balance. professional and personal life, employee participation, earnings and financial security work and health.

Table 2:

Proportion of workers in the EU28 (%)

		Proportion of workers in the EU28 (%)		
		2005	2010	2015
Training	Training paid for or offered by the employer in the last 12 months (or paid for alone if self-employed)	26	34	38
	On-the-job training in the last 12 months	26	32	34

Source: authors processing according to the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2017

The data represented in the table show that the percentage of training paid or offered by the employer in the last 12 months (or paid by himself if he works on his own account) increased from 26% in 2005 to 38% in 2015. On-the-job training in the last 12 months it has also increased from 26% to 34% in the same year. However, training is appreciated by workers for the benefits they have at work. It is observed that by any chosen method, training is necessary for the integration of employees, rapid learning of new tasks, accumulation of skills and provides security to the employee.

Eurofound will publish the first results of the survey conducted in 2019 on working conditions in 2021.

The following figure (figure no. 1) shows the training provided by the employer, with the highest percentage in Finland, then in the Czech Republic, Ireland, the Netherlands, and the lowest percentage is in Greece. And the training not received but required of the employer has a high percentage in Denmark and a low percentage in Slovakia.

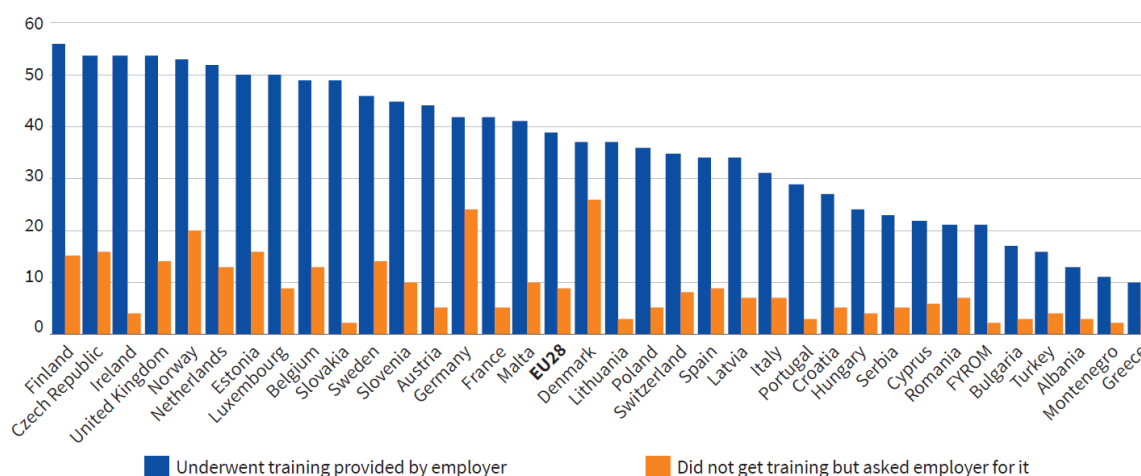


Figure 1 - Access to training provided by the employer, by country (% of employees)

Source: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2017

Although training builds new knowledge and increases employee and employer benefits, workers who need training may not always receive it. On-the-job training can increase employment in the future by increasing the level of skills and education. The International Labour Organization estimates that global unemployment would be 192 million people in 2018, which would still recover

from the crisis of 2008. The labour market participation rate has fallen and even stagnated in some regions, without returning at the pre-crisis level.

The second economic crisis is the one triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, whose dimensions and characteristics are not known exactly, but about which a whole literature has developed rapidly. There is still uncertainty about the impact of the epidemic on human health and life, there are uncertainties about what the economies will look like after leaving the state of emergency and alert on physical health and of course the unpredictability of the situation makes many of the consequences of "stopping" the economies could be purely speculative, but the existence of immediate effects on firms, labour and the labour market have led to immediate action by governments that need to be studied, analysed.

Without going into significant detail, given the scope of the work, it can be seen that the epidemic caused by coronavirus is a major shock to the European economy, especially the labour market, and the main purpose of the measures is to protect lives and living standards. The Emergency Risk Mitigation Support Tool (SURE) was launched in April 2020 to help keeping jobs and help vulnerable families. The pandemic highlighted even more aggressively the disruption caused by technologies in the labour market by increasing digitalization and digitization, new types of work (remote work, telework), new work tools (computers, telephones, automatic machines), and, for many, the new environment of work (internet) making new skills necessary, implicitly new education and training programs, both vocational and academic, and new methods of training. The European Commission's proposals in the field of education and training policies aim to make systems more modern, more attractive, more flexible and more appropriate for the digital and green economy.

Another problem accentuated by the current economic crisis refers to the access of young people to the labour market, to the difficulty of finding a job for the first time. In April 2020, youth unemployment in the EU was 15.4%, although in recent years there has been a decline in the unemployment rate, even the number of NEET young people, it is still twice as high as among the other age groups. Europe's response to this challenge has been "A Bridge to Jobs for the Next Generation", a package of measures to support youth employment that includes, in the short term, incentives for employment and business start-ups and, in the medium term, capacity building, networks of young entrepreneurs and inter-enterprise training centres. Approximately 22 billion euros are allocated for this purpose.

The future will be able to demonstrate, by analysing the statistical data we will have starting with 2021 that with education and training systems, more agile forms of LLL, focused on students, young people will be better prepared for their first job, and adults will be more likely to advance in their careers, change careers or extend their working life.

Aspects of flexicurity in Romania in the current context

In Romania, there are measures of labour market policies specific to flexicurity, so we proceeded in the analysis by analogy with the countries that have implemented integrated measures. The level of labour market imbalance in Romania can be observed in the unemployment situation in recent years, as shown in figure no. 2.

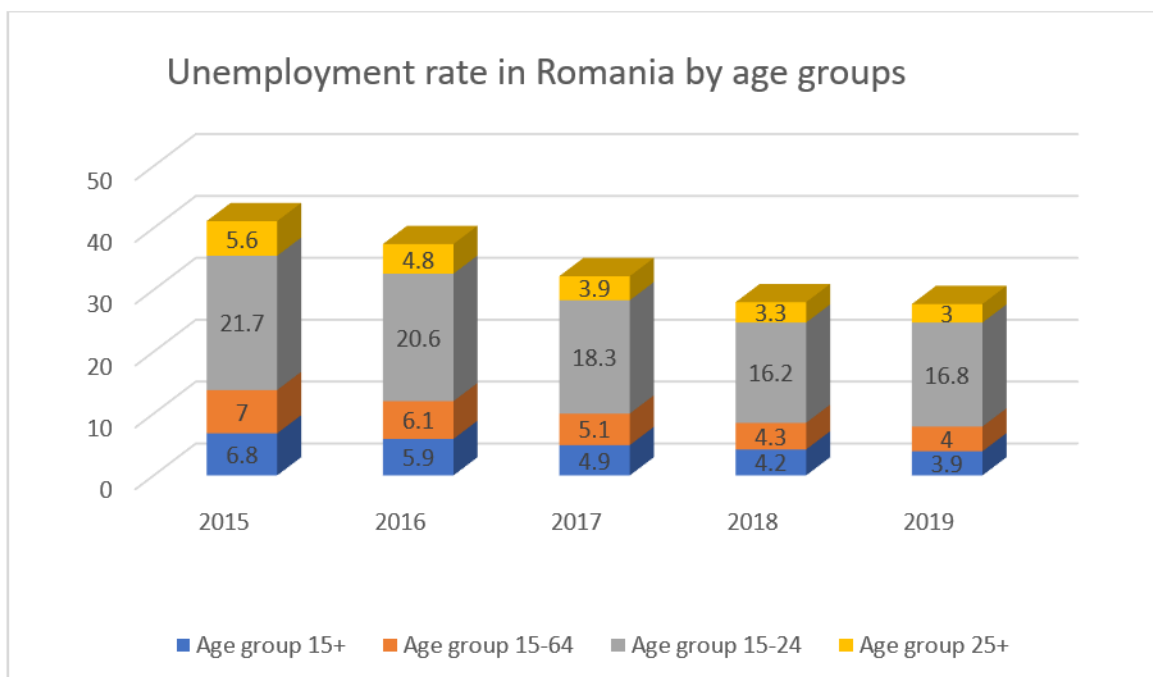


Figure 2 - Unemployment rate in Romania by age groups

Source: authors processing according to Eurostat

A high level of unemployment shows a structural imbalance of the labour market in these years to which is added a short-term unemployment specific to 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

For a faithful reflection of the phenomena manifested in the labour market in the context created by the COVID-19 pandemic, the data provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MMPS) can be used in daily communiqués as processed in the graph in figure 3.

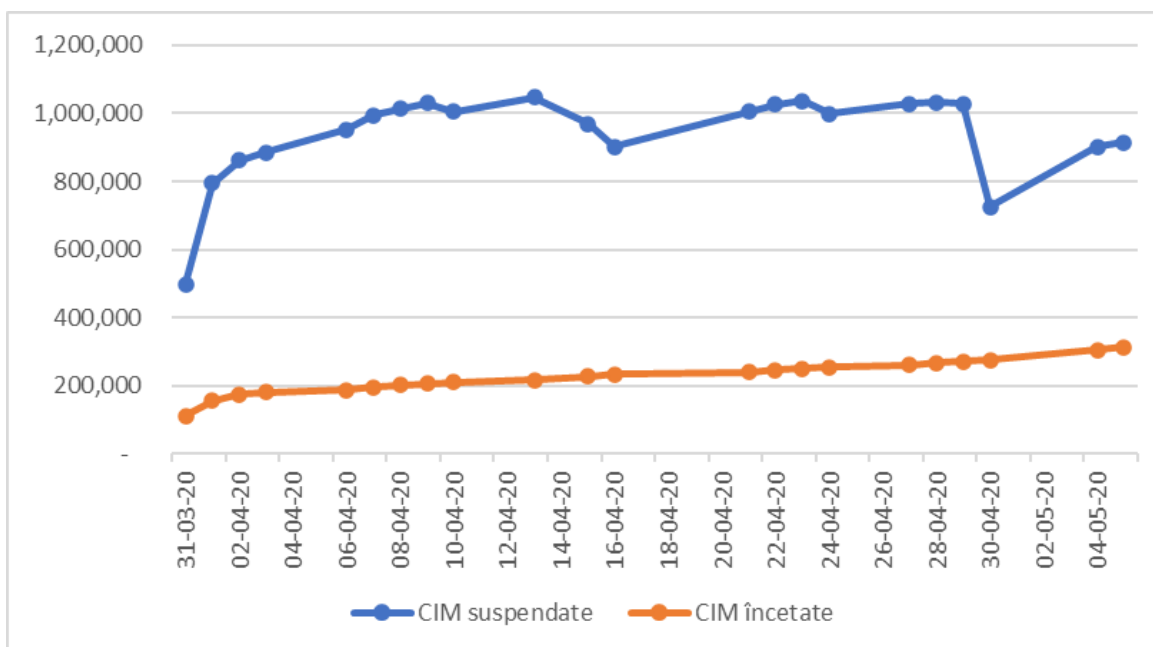


Figure 3 - The daily situation of employment contracts after the establishment of the state of emergency

Source: Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, author processing

The figure shows a rapid doubling of the number of individual employment contracts suspended in the first decade of April, followed by small variations around 1 million. Employment terminated contracts during the same period follow an upward trend, almost tripling.

The unemployment situation is a direct effect of the administrative measures imposed by the emergency situation generated by the pandemic, and the treatment must be correlated with the unemployment structure.

Unemployment among young people can exist along with a high demand for work. Labour market policies can facilitate the integration of the unemployed and other jobseekers into the labour market. Such policies and programs are designed specifically for specific target groups, such as young people, the elderly, people with disabilities.

The situation presented requires an increased adaptability of youth policies in order to positively influence the balance of the labour market. Better flexibility of young people's participation in the labour market through employment offered by employers can be achieved through education and training, new skills being acquired both formally and informally. Lifelong learning policies will contribute to this, with the advantage that they can also benefit older active people and even those over retirement who have the capacity to work. For these categories, by using LLL, employers can consider temporary employment. Given these, there is flexibility in the labour market but it is important that employees do not lack safety at work. We can focus on maintaining the balance between labour market flexibility and employee security in the workplace, which in the current situation can be a real solution to overcoming the created crisis.

Social protection maintains its role of providing security for workers and motivating them when it comes to their income. "Flexicurity is a social protection for the flexible workforce understood as an alternative to pure flexibility, but not at the cost of relaxing employment protection for normal employees" (Keller and Seifert, 2004). This means many benefits for workers, such as: flexible employment contracts, active and efficient labour market policies, lifelong learning strategies and modern social protection systems. The following aspects are known about social protection in Romania.

Table 3 - Social protection in Romania (2017)

Population in at least one of the following categories	Children	Mothers with newborns	People with severe disabilities	Unemployed people	Elderly people	Vulnerable groups
95.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %	23.0 %	100.0 %	82.6 %

Source: ILO (International Labour Office), 2017

- The proportion of the population in at least one category is calculated from the total population that receives benefits for at least one of the situations presented (contributory or non-contributory benefit) or that actively contributes to at least one social security system.
- The proportion of children receiving social protection is calculated as follows: the ratio between children / households receiving child benefits and the total number of children / households with children.
- The proportion of women giving birth to maternity benefits is as follows: the ratio of women receiving maternity benefits to women giving birth in the same year (estimated on the basis of age-specific fertility rates published in the UN National Population Outlook or the number of births live corrected by the share of twin births and triplets).
- Proportion of people with disabilities receiving benefits: the ratio of people receiving disability benefits to people with severe disabilities. The latter is calculated as a product of the prevalence of disability ratios (published for each group of countries by the World Health Organization) and the population of each country.
- Proportion of unemployed people receiving benefits: the ratio between the beneficiaries of unemployment benefits and the number of unemployed.
- Proportion of older people receiving a pension: the ratio of people over the legal retirement age who receive an old-age pension (including contributory and non-contributory) to people over the legal retirement age.

- Proportion of vulnerable people receiving benefits: the ratio between social assistance beneficiaries and the total number of vulnerable people. The latter are calculated by deducting from the total population all persons of working age who contribute to a social security system or who receive contributory benefits and all persons over retirement age who receive contributory benefits.

There is a high level of social protection, the percentage of the population that benefits from any type of benefit being quite high. Workers who have lost their jobs receive unemployment benefits, but the percentage of those who receive them is quite small. Social security systems can be important tools for preventing, improving and reducing poverty.

Conclusions

Implementing a flexicurity model in each of the 27 EU member states is an ideal strategy for a stable economy and recovery from an economic crisis. As labour markets become more flexible, social protection systems will need to adapt to provide support for safe transitions between employment and unemployment.

The economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 virus pandemic is manifested by the losses of jobs and high unemployment. One of the most radical changes for many people during COVID-19 was the shift to telework, thanks to the introduction of quarantine and safety measures. However, in the long run, there will be consequences for working from home because the work-life balance will be affected. During both an economic crisis, both the employer and the employee suffer. Learning strategies can be implemented during and after the crisis to enrich workers' knowledge and skills. Online learning has grown in recent years, and with the help of technology, information is available and easy to access.

In this context, social protection systems can be a solution for many workers, especially for those in the vulnerable segments of the workforce, the long-term unemployed and workers with fewer financial opportunities. Employees could benefit from safety and health measures at work, as they are already facing the stress caused by the pandemic.

Implementing a flexicurity model would be the solution that reduces the effects of the crisis and will allow job creation and a high level of employment. And ultimately these measures will lead to a way out of the crisis and to sustainable economic growth.

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