

## X. Social and Labour Market Policy during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Greece

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### 1. Introduction

The outbreak of COVID-19 was declared a public health emergency of international concern by the World Health Organization on 30 January 2020<sup>1</sup>. In Greece, the first COVID-19 case was confirmed on 26 February 2020. Compared to many other countries in Europe, where cases and fatalities exploded quickly, the pandemic progressed slowly in Greece. Nevertheless, and within a relatively narrow time window from the first confirmed COVID-19 case, key measures were put in place to slow the spread of the pandemic, such as school closings, closing of all nonessential workplaces, suspension of all public religious services, ban on gatherings of more than 10 people, internal and external travel restrictions and finally, a general stay-at-home order was implemented on 23 March 2020.

Greece is a particularly interesting case, since it entered the pandemic crisis just as it seemed to be finally emerging from the deep recession the country had endured since the financial crisis that had begun more than a decade earlier. After declining every year from 2008 to 2013, Greece's real gross domestic product (GDP) had been experiencing a modest growth since 2014, with an annual increase of about 2% in 2018 and 2019<sup>2</sup>. At the same time, after peaking at over 27% in 2013, the unemployment rate had slowly but consistently declined to 14.3% in March 2020, the lowest monthly rate in a decade. Even though Greece did not suffer from unexpected escalations in cases and deaths, as elsewhere, the pandemic and lockdown measures adopted as a response to it affected all aspects of everyday life and had a substantial impact on the country's economy. In-

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1 See [WHO website](#) (last accessed 2 March 2022).

2 See Betcherman/Giannakopoulos/Laliotis/Pantelaïou/Testaverde/Tzimas, *Reacting Quickly and Protecting Jobs: The Short-Term Impacts of the COVID-19 Lockdown on the Greek Labor Market*, in: Monastiriotis/Katsinas (eds.), *The Economic Impact of COVID-19 in Greece*, Hellenic Observatory Papers on Greece and South-east Europe, LSE, September 2020, p. 21.

dicative is the relevant announcement of the Hellenic Statistical Authority, according to which on a seasonally adjusted basis, the GDP declined by 1.6% in the first quarter of 2020 compared to the fourth quarter of 2019<sup>3</sup>.

In order to help employers and workers weather the economic consequences of the lockdown, the government adopted a series of social and labour market policy measures. Those measures included the suspension of employment contracts and the provision of compensations of special cause for employees, the introduction of employment support mechanisms, the stipulation of special purpose leave for working parents, the provision of financial support for self-employed persons, artists, farmers and trainees, the partial or full exemption from the obligation to pay commercial rents, as well as the extension of health care insurance and the provision of social protection for unemployed persons.

In view of the emergency character of the pandemic, the majority of the measures were firstly introduced through a fast-track legislative procedure that allowed the government to adopt emergency measures, after consultations with a team of experts consisting of medical doctors and virologists, and that were subsequently ratified by laws of the parliament<sup>4</sup> and further implemented by detailed ministerial decisions. The main beneficiaries of the economic support measures were employees, enterprises of the private sector, the self-employed and freelancers. In total, more than 800,000 enterprises with more than 1.7 million employees were eligible to receiving support measures, as well as more than 700,000 self-employed persons, freelancers and sole proprietorships, covering more than 80% of the private sector<sup>5</sup>.

Against this background, one can hardly deny that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about tectonic changes and new realities in the world of industrial relations and social protection. This paper presents the economic and social policy measures aimed at protecting the income and livelihoods of individuals affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in Greece. In doing so, the paper attempts to reveal the legal nature and reach of the measures taken during the pandemic crisis, as well to expound the changes they brought about in labour and social protection law.

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3 See [Press Release of the Hellenic Statistical Authority \(ELSTAT\)](#) of 04/06/2020 (last accessed 2 March 2022).

4 This procedure is provided for in Article 44 Paragraph 1 of the Greek Constitution.

5 See Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Finance, [Stability Programme 2020](#), April 2020, p. 12 (last accessed 2 March 2022).

## 2. Job Retention

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about enormous changes to the work landscape. From March 2020 onwards, lockdown and mandatory closure or suspension of operation of businesses led to new legislative acts that aimed at mitigating the negative impact on labour relations and to prevent the rise in unemployment. More specifically, the measures taken included the suspension of employment contracts either by law or upon the decision of the businesses, the introduction of an employment support mechanism, the provision of remote working, as well as the stipulation of a special purpose leave for parents.

### a) *Suspension of Employment Contracts and the Compensation of Special Cause*

In Greece, lockdowns including varying degrees of restrictions were imposed during the first wave of the pandemic and were also re-imposed during the second wave. During those lockdowns, many businesses remained closed for two reasons. First, from March 2020 onwards, several business operations were suspended by law in order to avoid the spread of the coronavirus. Second, many businesses that could legally operate had to interrupt their activity due to the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their operations. It goes without saying that the interruption of business operations unavoidably led to the suspension of employment contracts in the respective businesses. In order to tackle this phenomenon, the Greek state introduced the so-called compensation of special cause, an amount of financial support which intended to substitute the employee's loss of income for the duration of the business closure.

More precisely, in the first case of businesses, whose activity was prohibited by law, employees were released from the obligation to provide work and employers were not obligated to pay their wages, since the prohibition of operation by order of a public authority constitutes a *force majeure*<sup>6</sup>. As a result, employees' employment contracts were suspended for as long as the respective business activity was prohibited by law. After the expiration of the suspension period, the employment contracts continued for the agreed

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<sup>6</sup> See Article 11 of the Act of Legislative Content of 20/03/2020 as ratified by Law 4683/2020 and Article 1 Para. 1 of Chapter A.1 of the Joint Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 12998/232 (28/3/2020).

remaining time<sup>7</sup>. Unpaid leave agreed between the employee and the employer, whose business activity was suspended by law, was automatically revoked. Employees whose contracts were suspended were entitled to the so-called compensation of special cause, which amounted to EUR 800 for a period of 45 days (i.e. EUR 534 per month) and were neither taxable nor subject to social security contributions<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, during the suspension of the employment contract, employees were entitled to social security benefits, without having to pay the respective social security contributions due<sup>9</sup>. At the same time, employers, whose business activity was suspended by order of a public authority, were not entitled to dismiss their employees<sup>10</sup>.

In the second case of businesses that were significantly affected by the pandemic, employers had the option to suspend the employment contracts, for a continued irrevocable period of 45 calendar days, of all or part of their employees who worked for them on the 21st of March 2020<sup>11</sup>. After the expiration of the suspension period, the employment contracts continued for the agreed remaining time. During the period of suspension of the employment contracts, the employer could not terminate any employment contracts. Moreover, employers who benefitted from the financial support measure were required to maintain the same number of job positions after the suspension period had ended for a period equal to that of the suspension. Nevertheless, the requirement to retain the same number of jobs did not include employees who had voluntarily left their jobs, whose contracts ended due to retirement, as well as fixed-term employees whose employment contracts expired after the end of the suspension period. Employees whose contracts were suspended upon the choice of their employers were also entitled to the same compensation of special cause, amounting to EUR 800 for a period of 45 days, under the same conditions as described above. Furthermore, the employees benefitted from full social

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7 See Article 1 Para. 3 of Chapter A.1 of the Joint Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 12998/232 (28/03/2020).

8 See Article 3 Para. 1 of Chapter A.1 of the Joint Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 12998/232 (28/03/2020).

9 See Article 3 Para. 2 of Chapter A.1 of the Joint Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 12998/232 (28/03/2020).

10 See Article 1 Para. 1 of Chapter A.2 of the Joint Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 12998/232 (28/03/2020).

11 See Article 1 Para. 5 of Chapter A.2 of the Joint Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 12998/232 (28/03/2020).

security coverage calculated on the basis of their regular wages for a period of 45 days, financed from the state budget<sup>12</sup>.

*b) The “Cooperation” Employment Support Mechanism*

As of 15 June 2020, a mechanism to support employment called “cooperation” (in Greek “synergasia”) was established in order to maintain full-time jobs in the private sector<sup>13</sup>. The duration of this mechanism was initially set from 15 June 2020 to 15 October 2020 and was subsequently extended until 30 June 2021<sup>14</sup> and finally until 31 March 2022<sup>15</sup>. The mechanism was introduced as a way for the employer to manage the reduction of business turnover, without having to lay off employees or to convert the full-time employment contracts into part-time ones.

More precisely, all businesses with either continuous or seasonal operations were eligible to join the mechanism, as long as they had recorded at least a 20% reduction in their business turnover. Once eligible to participate, businesses could unilaterally reduce the weekly working hours of their full-time employees by up to 50% with a corresponding reduction in salary, depending on businesses’ operational needs. Employees included in the mechanism continued to receive their wages from their employer for their reduced working hours and were additionally entitled to financial support provided by the state equal to 60% of their net remuneration for the hours they did not provide any work. In any case, the final amount that the employee would receive could not be lower than the minimum statutory wage, otherwise the difference had to be covered by the state.

The legal framework did not explicitly determine whether the reduction of the working time might take place through the reduction of working hours per day or through the reduction of entire working days, in other

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12 See Article 2 Para. 2 of Chapter A.2 of the Joint Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 12998/232 (28/03/2020).

13 See Article 31 of Law 4690/2020. This system resembles the “short-time work” arrangement adopted in Germany in the context of COVID-19, see: Becker, *The Community Steps Up: Changing Responsibilities in Germany*, MPI Soc Working Paper 7/2020, p. 25. The framework for the implementation of the employment support mechanism “cooperation” was further defined by the Joint Ministerial Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 23103/478 (14/06/2020).

14 See Article 105 of Law 4790/2021.

15 See Joint Ministerial Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 108743/2021 (30/12/2021).

words through the introduction of a job rotation system. Hence, both options were left available to the employer to decide. At the same time, it was provided that employers were not allowed to terminate the employment contracts of employees participating in this mechanism and, in case they did, such terminations were considered null and void.

Moreover, from 15 June 2020 to 30 June 2020, 40% of the social security contributions corresponding to the working hours during which the employee did not provide work were paid by the employer, while the remaining 60% were covered from the state budget, as well as 100% of the workers' contributions. From 1 July 2020 onwards, the social security contributions in full were paid at a rate of 100% from the state budget. On the other hand, the employer still had to pay his share of the social security contributions in accordance with the employees' reduced working hours.

### *c) Teleworking*

Remote work has been widely used as a tool to combat the spread of the coronavirus and through subsequent extensions, the possibility of teleworking was extended until 31 May 2021<sup>16</sup>. More precisely, the employer could unilaterally decide that the work performed by the employee at the place of work shall be carried out remotely. Moreover, employees belonging to vulnerable groups could request to work remotely and the employer had to accept the request, under the condition that the work could be performed at a distance. In case distance work was not applicable due to the nature of the work provided, the employer had to take measures in order to ensure that employees belonging to vulnerable groups did not come into contact with the public during their working schedule.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, vulnerable groups were defined as people with severe heart diseases, persons with severe lung diseases, people with unregulated diabetes, cancer patients undergoing active chemotherapy or radiotherapy or immunotherapy, transplant patients under active immunosuppression therapy receiving two or more drugs, persons over

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16 See Article 4 Para. 2 of the Act of Legislative Content of 11/03/2020 as ratified by Law 4682/2020, Article 235 of Law 4727/2020 and Joint Decisions of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 40000/1269 (02/10/2020), No. 20788/610 (30/05/2020), No. 26308/768 (01/07/2020), No. 30742/1002 (30/07/2020), No. 36124/1194 (15/09/2020), No. 48690/1476 (26/11/2020), No. 52241/1567 (18/12/2020), No. 3813/102 (27/01/2021), No. 4012/111 (27/01/2021) and No. 23182/2021 (27/04/2021).

65 years of age with persistent hypertension, chronic respiratory diseases, chronic cardiovascular diseases, chronic end-stage renal failure, as well as women who were pregnant<sup>17</sup>. Overall, the list of vulnerable groups was not closed, since it was periodically updated in order to include persons who were more exposed to the dangers of the coronavirus due to their pre-existing health conditions.

According to empirical studies conducted in order to depict the situation of the Greek labour market, teleworking has been the most widespread measure implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic both in the public and private sector. More specifically, eight out of ten companies in Greece declared that they made a shift to teleworking during the pandemic and 79.17% of the employees responded that they had implemented the home office model<sup>18</sup>. At the same time, the legal framework regulating teleworking that existed before the COVID-19 pandemic stipulated that the employer bears the costs that occur as a result of remote work, i.e. the cost of the equipment used by the employee, unless it is agreed differently<sup>19</sup>. Nevertheless, this provision has not been adhered to during the coronavirus crisis, as employers were not even covering a minimum of the costs related to distance working.

#### *d) Special Purpose Leave for Working Parents*

During the pandemic a special purpose leave was introduced for working parents who cared for their minor children at home during school lockdowns. The parents who could benefit were those whose children were enrolled in nurseries and day care centres, were attending compulsory education or special schools or special education facilities, regardless of age, as well as working parents of persons with disabilities who, regardless of age, were eligible for open care services<sup>20</sup>. For as long as the above educational units remained closed in order to limit the spread of coronavirus, working parents had the right to take a special purpose leave of at least three days, provided that they used one day of their regular leave for every three days of the special purpose leave. Hence, the special purpose leave was a special

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17 See Joint Ministerial Decisions No. 8030/2020 (18/03/2020), No. 431/9188 (11/05/2020), No. 346/9011 (14/05/2020).

18 See [SEPE official website](#) (in Greek, last accessed 2 March 2022).

19 See Article 5 Para. 3 of Law 3846/2010.

20 See Article 4 Para. 3 of the Act of Legislative Content of 11/03/2020 as ratified by Law 4682/2020.

three-day leave scheme followed by the granting of one day of regular annual leave and was cyclically repeated every four days, for as long as employees were entitled to annual leave.

The special purpose leave could at first be obtained until 10 April 2020, provided that at least one parent worked in the private sector as an employee, even if the other parent was self-employed. In case both parents were employed by the same or different employers, they had to declare to their employer(s) which one of them would make use of the leave or, respectively, the periods of leave that were to be used by each of them.<sup>21</sup> In case one parent was a private sector employee and the other a public servant, the public servant had to declare to the private sector employer that he or she had not used the special purpose leave in order for the private sector employee to be able to make use of it.<sup>22</sup>

In any case, in order to be eligible for the special purpose leave, an employee had to meet the legal requirements for taking at least six days of regular annual leave for six-day work and five days for five-day work. If those requirements were not met, the employee was entitled to the special purpose leave in proportion to the number of days of regular leave to which he or she was entitled.<sup>23</sup> With regard to the financing of the special purpose leave, two-thirds were granted with remuneration by the employer, and one-third was subsidised by the regular budget, whereas, for employees of the public sector the three days of special purpose leave were covered by the employer.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, it was stipulated that the special purpose leave was to be granted under the abovementioned conditions for the entire period of the suspension of the operation of care or education units, without any other time limit or the need to issue a new regulation to this effect<sup>25</sup>.

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21 See Article 4 para 3 of the Act of Legislative Content of 11.03.2020 as ratified by Law 4682/2020.

22 See Article 4 para 3 of the Act of Legislative Content of 11.03.2020 as ratified by Law 4682/2020.

23 See Article 4 para 3 of the Act of Legislative Content of 11.03.2020 as ratified by Law 4682/2020.

24 See Article 4 para 3 of the Act of Legislative Content of 11.03.2020 as ratified by Law 4682/2020.

25 See Article 1 of Joint Ministerial Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 17787/520 (10/05/2020).



### 3. *Supporting the Economy*

In order to counter the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Greek economy as a whole, measures were taken that included the provision of financial support for self-employed persons, the introduction of compensation of special cause for artists, the deferral of social contribution payments, the partial or full exemption from the obligation to pay commercial rents, as well as actions to support farmers and trainees.

#### a) *Financial Support for Self-Employed Persons*

During the pandemic, targeted relief measures for self-employed persons were also introduced. Initially, the Greek state provided training vouchers of EUR 600 for the distance training of self-employed professionals, such as lawyers, doctors, engineers, architects, economists, accountants and researchers. Those vouchers were intended as income replacement, were conditional upon training attendance and financed by the European Structural and Investment Fund. As of May 2020, self-employed persons, freelancers and individual businesses with up to 20 employees affected by the coronavirus became eligible for a special allowance of EUR 800 on a 45 days basis (i.e. EUR 534 per month)<sup>26</sup>. This special allowance was tax-free, unseizable in the hands of the state or third parties, not subject to any deduction, levy or charge and could not be calculated among the income that defines the eligibility for social security or welfare benefits.

#### b) *Compensation of Special Cause for Artists*

Given that cultural activities, such as theatrical plays, cultural events and concerts were restricted during the pandemic either due to the lockdown or due to the measures to prevent overcrowding, a special purpose compensation was also introduced for artists. More precisely, artists, creators and professionals of art and culture who were registered in a special electronic platform of the information system “*ergani*” of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs before 20 October 2020 could benefit from a

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26 See Article 8 of the Act of Legislative Content of 20/03/2020 as ratified by Law 4683/2020 and Joint Ministerial Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 39162/2020 (16/04/2020).

compensation of special cause of EUR 534 per month, with full insurance coverage provided for the months of September and October 2020<sup>27</sup>. The prerequisites to receive the compensation were that the artists did not have an employment contract during the above subsidised period and did not receive a regular unemployment subsidy from the Employment Agency of Labour (OAED) for the above period of time. The provision of the compensation of special cause to artists was further extended under the same preconditions to the months of November and December 2020, to January until July 2021<sup>28</sup>, as well as to January 2022<sup>29</sup>.

### *c) Deferral of Social Contribution Payments*

Social security contributions for the period of employment of February, March and April 2020 that were receivable until 31 March 2020, 30 April 2020 and 31 May 2020, respectively, were deferred at first until 30 September 2020, 31 October 2020 and 30 November 2020, respectively<sup>30</sup>, and finally until 30 April 2021<sup>31</sup>. The same legal framework clarified that the social security contributions deferred are the contributions of the employee and the employer, for all insurance branches (main insurance, health care, supplementary insurance, lump-sum benefit), except for contributions towards voluntary insurance.

Moreover, the deadline for the payment of social security contributions for self-employed persons and freelancers for the employment periods of February, March, April and May 2020, as well as any instalments of debt

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27 See Article 20 of Law 4722/2020 and Joint Ministerial Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 43110/1078 (21/10/2020).

28 See Joint Ministerial Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 1638/45 (18/01/2021).

29 See Joint Ministerial Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 109435/2021 (31/12/2021).

30 See Article 1 of Joint Ministerial Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs 13226/325 (26/03/2020), Article 1 of Joint Ministerial Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs 18044/575 (30/05/2020) and Article 1 of Joint Ministerial Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs 16484/499 (09/05/2020).

31 See Article 1 of Joint Ministerial Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 37618/1492 (30/09/2020).

from supplementary settlement of insurance contributions of previous years were extended until 30 April 2021<sup>32</sup>.

*d) Exemption from the Obligation to Pay Commercial Rents*

Tenants of commercial leases for the establishment of businesses whose operations have been suspended or temporarily prohibited for preventive or repressive reasons related to the COVID-19 pandemic, were exempted from the obligation to pay 40% of the total rent for the months of March, April, May and June 2020<sup>33</sup>. Furthermore, tenants of commercial leases for the establishment of businesses which have been drastically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, were exempted from the obligation to pay 40% of the total rent for the months of April and May 2020, notwithstanding the existing provisions on leases. Similarly, tenants of commercial leases for the establishment of businesses that have been financially affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, were exempted from the obligation to pay 40% of the total rent for the months of June, July, August and September 2020, notwithstanding the existing provisions on leases. Moreover, tenants of commercial leases for the establishment of businesses which were located in a regional unit that was classified for at least fourteen days in the month of October 2020 at an epidemiological level of “very high” danger, and whose operations have been suspended or temporarily prohibited for preventive or repressive reasons related to COVID-19 or which were economically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, were exempted from the obligation to pay 40% of the total rent for the month of October 2020, notwithstanding the existing provisions on leases. Finally, tenants of commercial leases for the establishment of businesses whose operations have been suspended or temporarily prohibited for preventive or repressive reasons related to COVID-19 or which are economically affected by the epidemic of COVID-19 were exempted from the obligation to pay the total rent also for the months of January, February, March and April 2021.<sup>34</sup>

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32 See Article 1 of Joint Ministerial Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 37620/1493 (30/09/2020).

33 See Joint Ministerial Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 1228/2020 (14 and 16/10/2020).

34 See Article 44 of Law 4797/2021.

*e) Other Measures*

A special measure of support for farmers in sectors hit particularly hard by the effects of COVID-19 was adopted<sup>35</sup>. The aim of the measure was to ensure the continuation of the farmers' activity especially in the olive oil sector, which has been severely affected by the pandemic. Beneficiaries of the assistance were the main occupational farmers based on the Register of Farmers and Agricultural Holdings until the end of submission of their tax return for the year 2020 (income for the year 2019), who were in legal possession of eligible land.

Furthermore, trainees who had an active trainee contract on 11 March 2020 were granted a special allowance of EUR 700, plus the costs of their full basic social security coverage was granted for the period from 11 March 2020 until 18 May 2020, when vocational training institutes resumed their operations<sup>36</sup>.

*4. Social Protection*

*a) Extension of Health Care Insurance*

The insurance eligibility for health care benefits in kind was retroactively extended for the period from 1 March 2020 to 28 February 2021 for insured persons under the unified social security institution (e-EFKA), their family members, as well as for unemployed persons<sup>37</sup>. More specifically, for the year 2020, health care insurance coverage was extended from 1 March 2020 to 31 December 2020 for the self-employed who were insured on 28 February 2020<sup>38</sup>. The extension was enacted with the exception of any contrary provision and, in any case, only until 31 December 2020. The above extension was valid retroactively from 1 July 2020. In addition, the insurance coverage for health care benefits in kind was extended for the period from 1 March 2020 to 28 February 2021 without the precondition of having accumulated the required insurance period for certain groups of

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35 See Ministerial Decision of the Minister of Agriculture No. 2850/2020 (23/10/2020).

36 See Joint Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Education No. 16/154871 (17/11/2020).

37 See Articles 29, 30 and 31 of Law 4722/2020.

38 See Article 31 of Law 4722/2020.

persons, such as certain categories of employees, farmers, persons working on shipyards, unemployed persons and their family members<sup>39</sup>.

#### *b) Social Protection for Unemployed Persons*

In order to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on unemployed persons, the range of social protection measures applicable to them was amplified. First, the duration of the regular unemployment benefit that expired or would expire within the first quarter of the year 2020 was extended for two months from the expiration date<sup>40</sup>. Soon after, it was stipulated that beneficiaries whose regular unemployment benefits expired within May, September, October, November or December 2020 and who had not benefited from the abovementioned extension, could benefit of an extension of a duration of two months<sup>41</sup>. The same provision was repeated for regular unemployment benefits that expired within the first three months of the year 2021, and finally the duration of regular unemployment benefits receipt expiring in April 2021 was extended for one month<sup>42</sup>. Second, long-term unemployed persons who were registered as unemployed but not eligible to any unemployment benefit and had acquired the status of long-term unemployed either on 1 April 2019 or on 1 March 2020 were granted a one-time financial assistance of EUR 400<sup>43</sup>.

### *5. Outlook*

The spread of COVID-19 revealed that in order to combat a pandemic it does not suffice to adopt measures that prevent the spread of the virus, such as lockdowns, self-isolation and social distancing measures.

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39 See Article 29 of Law 4722/2020.

40 Article 7 Para. 1 of the Act of Legislative Content of 20/03/2020 as ratified by Law 4683/2020.

41 See Article 1 of Joint Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 24760/550 (22/06/2020) and Article 1 of Joint Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 47166/1180 (16/11/2020).

42 See Article 1 of Joint Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 8534/279 (26/02/2021) and Article 1 of Joint Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 23930/2598 (27/04/2021).

43 See Article 1 of Joint Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 15687/282 (16/04/2020) and Article 1 of Joint Decision of the Ministers of Finance and of Labour and Social Affairs No. 48222/1215 (25/11/2020).

Those measures have to be accompanied by supplementing measures that enhance and support the national health care system, foster the economy, shield labour relations and guarantee the provision of social protection. As has been shown in this paper, in Greece a new legal framework has been put into place in order to deal with the extraordinary circumstances of the coronavirus crisis. While scattered at first, this framework has been continually renewed and reinforced, with the aim to retain jobs and workers' social security rights. Nevertheless, it is doubtful whether the provisional enforcement of emergency measures was able to provide a safety net for all groups of affected persons with regards to their working and social security status.

Moreover, regarding the making of the measures, the majority of them were first introduced through a fast-track legislative procedure that allowed the government to adopt emergency measures, after consultations with a team of experts consisting of medical doctors and virologists, without thorough prior consultation with the parliament or social partners. Those measures were then ratified by laws passed through the legislative procedure. Even though a flexible and fast response of the executive to an emergency situation is desirable, the exclusion of social partners and affected groups of individuals continued further in all the stages of the drafting of the measures. Given, however, that the measures started as provisional and temporary but have been so far, in many cases, applicable for a period of two years, it is crucial to reconsider the role of social partners in the drafting of the respective labour and social protection law regulations.

At the same time, the fight against the pandemic also brought about some positive developments that need to be highlighted. First, in order to prevent direct in-person contact, e-governance and digitalisation of many processes have been developed in several sectors of the Greek public administration. This has to be welcomed as a very positive step towards a citizen-friendly administration that is effective and accessible regardless of one's residence. Second, the concept of decentralised and remote work could be a useful tool also in the aftermath of the pandemic crisis in order to facilitate the working conditions of employees and to eventually help them achieve a positive work-life balance.