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Managing Unemployment under COVID-19 Conditions (States of Emergency or Crisis)

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Abstract

Rising unemployment is one of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in many countries. This, in turn, has forced policymakers to respond immediately with policy tools to minimize unemployment. The purpose of our study is to contribute to empirical knowledge by looking at activities of 40 local government units to counteract unemployment in the cross-border region on the Polish side. In doing this, our study contributes to the efforts to manage unemployment in times of COVID-19 and other crisis situations. The results show that most of the rural and rural-urban communes did not undertake diagnostic activities that would allow one to identify the economic sectors most affected by changes related to the COVID-19 pandemic, e.g., reduction in the number of employees, suspension, or liquidation of activities. According to LGUs surveyed, companies operating in rural-urban communes applied much more frequently for support for job protection in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic than companies located in rural communes.

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the crucial role of LGUs in overcoming its impacts. The empirical results of this study (in-depth interviews) indicate that policy makers should pay more attention to consolidating or strengthening the role of LGUs in national disaster management and provide them with the competencies and resources necessary to deal with emergencies (in particular, they concern strengthening cooperation and coordination with other levels of government, effective communication and sharing of good practices also in cross-border areas). It would strengthen decision support systems (DSS) in the regions.

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1. Introduction

Most economic crises can be predicted, unlike pandemics. The COVID-19 pandemic has had dramatic consequences on a global scale, both in social and humanitarian terms, but also in economic terms, and these consequences are only getting worse because of the constantly emerging outbreaks and new mutations of the virus. Data from World Health Organizations from 10 April 2022 [1] show that more than 496 million confirmed cases and more than 6 million deaths have been reported globally. In the case of confirming cases, Europe was the region most hit by COVID-19.

The consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic is a slowdown in the global economy and ongoing supply and demand shocks. The study of Skare et al. 2021 [2] shows that pandemic crises have long-lasting negative effects on the economy and especially on the tourism industry. Considering the best-case scenario, the travel tourism industry worldwide will drop on average from 2.93 percentage points to 7.82 in the total GDP contribution and Jobs in the travel tourism industry will decrease by 2.44 percentage points to 6.55. Undoubtedly, in addition to increases in unemployment in some sectors, there have been decreases in others, such as the IT and medical sectors. This, in turn, means that different countries, different regions are affected differently by unemployment and, therefore, require different policies to mitigate the effects of the pandemic and to stimulate the economy.

One of the elements of the economic slowdown has been rising unemployment. According to World Bank [3], the world unemployment rate increases from 5,37% in 2019 to 6,47% in next year. By analyzing selected world regions in the same period, the highest increase in unemployment was recorded in North America from 3,89% to 8,21% and in South Asia from 5.02% to 7.24% [4]. The highest unemployment rate was registered in Arab World in the year 2020: 11.49%. However, the biggest rebound of the stagnant economy was identified in the US unemployment aspect of from 4.4 in March 2020 to 14.7% in April 2020 [5]. Considering Europe, COVID-19 cases cause unemployment in Germany, Italy and the UK, while COVID-19 deaths cause unemployment in Italy and the UK [6].

Poland also saw its unemployment rate increase from 5.2% in 2019 to 6.2% in 2020. In the zachodniopomorskie voivodship it was 6.7% in 2019. 8.3%. The magnitude of the unemployment problem differs in scale and speed among countries, putting the governments of most countries under pressure to take action to mitigate the effects of Covid 19. Rising levels of unemployment have put the governments of most countries under pressure to implement measures to mitigate the effects of pandemic COVID-19.

The above described situation in the labor market required government intervention. Therefore, the research gap is to reveal what forms of intervention have been undertaken by Polish public authorities. The purpose of our study is to contribute to empirical knowledge by looking at activities of 40 local government units to counteract unemployment in the cross-border region on the Polish side. In doing this, our study contributes to the efforts to manage unemployment in times of COVID-19 and other crisis situations. The survey was twofold: the first stage was conducted between 22.11.2021 and 03.12.2021 through the questionnaire using the CAWI method and the second stage: an in-depth interview.

The structure of the paper is as follows. After introducing the problem of unemployment in times of COVID-19. Section two highlights the importance of local governments in countering the effects of pandemic COVID-19 on unemployment and points to actions taken in different countries. In the next section, the methodology is discussed, followed by the results and conclusions.

2. Unemployment under COVID -19 conditions - the role of the local government

The consequences of COVID-19 pandemic in increased unemployment forced most countries to implement immediate intervention measures to minimize unemployment. Undoubtedly, these tasks were not easy from today's perspective, due to various often disproportionate coexisting problems. Some sectors are easier to bring into the network, others are more difficult or even impossible. Then there is the dilemma of whether to help in the short- or long-term, and the scale of the people to be helped. And then there is the way to help, given that for many, work plays a key role in meeting social and psychological needs.

International Labour Standards Department, ILO in 2021[7] issued a recommendation highlighting a strategic approach to responding to emergencies, long-term, a phased, multi-track approach implementing coherent and comprehensive strategies to enable recovery and build resilience, emphasize, inter alia stabilizing livelihoods and income through immediate social protection and employment measures; promoting economic recovery for employment and decent work, opportunities and socio-economic reintegration; promoting sustainable employment and decent work, social protection and social inclusion, sustainable development, the creation of sustainable enterprises, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises, the transition from the informal to the formal economy, a just transition towards an environmentally sustainable economy and access to public services; conducting employment impact assessments of national recovery programs...developing the capacity of governments, including regional and local authorities, and of employers' and workers' organizations [7]. Table 1 indicates only the tool groups used in selected countries [8].

Table 1. Policy tools to minimize the effects of unemployment

Country	Policy Tolls
Australia	Unemployment Insurance Employer wage subsidy Human Capital Development General Business Support
Denmark	Employer Wage Subsidy Business lending programs General Business Support Tax relief
Germany	Employer wage subsidy Business lending programs General Business Support Tax relief
Norway	General Business Support Employer wage subsidy Unemployment Insurance Tax relief Business lending programs Human Capital Development Unemployment Benefit
Spain	Employer wage subsidy Unemployment Insurance
UK	Employer wage subsidy Local Restrictions Support Grant Human Capital Development General Business Support Business lending programs

USA	Direct cash transfer Unemployment Insurance Business lending programs Tax relief
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Source: based on [8]

The Local Government Association report (2021) [9] points to the key role of local government in tackling unemployment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and activating the local labor market. According to the American Progress Organization Report labor [10] Investing in state and local government jobs is critical to the delivery of services and economic security. Drawing on a report by the Institute of Science and Work [11], the Local Government Association said Report, it is essential that local governments work with the government at the earliest possible stage to mitigate the effects of long-term unemployment and to most effectively shape or redefine existing initiatives to support and invest in job creation.

Dutta and Fisher [12] draw attention to the enormous and direct importance of local governments in dealing with the consequences of the crisis. According to them, never has their role been so enormous, their basic functions have not been so radically expanded at such a rapid pace. The manner and speed with which these roles are assumed can condition the effectiveness of public support to protect basic welfare during a period of major social and economic change [12].

An interesting example is the United States, where the actions taken in response to COVID-19 were carried out at the state level, not the federal level [13,14]. Additionally, some actions or strategies were initiated at the city or county level, before being implemented throughout the state or later throughout the nation [15: 16]. Not to forget India, which has more than 250,000 local government units (gram panchayats), so globally, this was the largest and most expansive mobilization of local governments in response to COVID-19 [12]. The Philippine case study highlighted, among other key roles, that effective communication with the public and monitoring activities (e.g., population density, mobility) were factors that helped these local governments limit the damage caused by the pandemic [17].

Thus, the examples shown confirm the relevance of local narratives in addressing subnational issues. Another important aspect is cross-border cooperation between countries, also in terms of sharing good practice and, if possible, developing common solutions. This is even more important given that the important, pandemic has eliminated or discontinued cross-border cooperation in its broadest sense.

3. Methods and Materials

The aim of the study is to analyze the actions taken by local government units (LGU) to counteract unemployment in the cross-border region on the Polish side. In this article, the cross-border region of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is analyzed on the Polish side. The questionnaire was sent to 132 local government units of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, of which 40 participated in the survey, using the IBM SPSS program. The response rate was 30,30% (n=40 responses out of 132). The survey was carried out from 22.11.2021 to 03.12.2021. The survey used the CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) method. The survey was supplemented by in-depth interviews with both entrepreneurs and local government units, including representatives from Poland and Germany. The obtained results are not representative for the entire population of local government units of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship because 40% of whom were urban-rural communes (16 out of 55), 37.5% were rural communes (15 out of 47), 15% were districts (6 out of 18) and 7.5% were urban communes (3 out of 11). None of the 3 cities with district rights participated in the study, nor did the West Pomeranian voivodship.

4. Research Findings

The results obtained show that only 15% of participants, i.e., 6 LGU (table 2), took steps to identify the economic sectors most affected by changes related to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as participants employees, suspension, or

liquidation of activities. Based on their knowledge, LGUs indicated the following industries most affected by changes related to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as reduction in employees, suspension or liquidation of activities according to the PKD classification: Section I - Activities related to accommodation and catering services (50% of respondents' indications); Section R - Activities related to culture, entertainment and recreation (47% of respondents' indications) and Section S - Other service activities (25% of respondents' indications). Interestingly, as many as 57% of LGUs indicated that enterprises operating in each LGU applied for support for job protection in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, e.g., under the Anti-Crisis Shield.

According to LGU respondents, before the pandemic, the following "standard" tools to reduce unemployment were the following "standard" tools to reduce unemployment, such as: i) public works and intervention work programs (62%); ii) organizing socially useful work (60%) or iii) organizing internships (57%). The least used tool by LGUs to reduce unemployment was loans to entrepreneurs to create new jobs, which were participants' 10% of the LGUs surveyed. LGUs proposed a reduction to limit the reduction of employment during a pandemic, in particular such forms of support / assistance as: i) protection of employees against Covid-19 infection in the workplace (42%); ii) temporary reduction / suspension / release from obligations, COVID-19 taxes, social security rates, certain payments such as rent, communal fees (35%) or iii) subsidies and tax reliefs for the private sector (18%). The least frequently proposed form of support by LGUs was subsidized loans from public funds for enterprises to meet urgent capital and investment needs, which was provided by only 3% of the surveyed LGUs. LGU sources of financing the above-mentioned forms of support are national aid funds (from the state budget) for 38% of respondents, and own funds for 30%.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

	N	MIN	MAX	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance
				Statistic	Std. Error		
Type of LGU (JST)	40	1	5	2.10	.214	1.355	1.836
Diagnostic activities carried out to identify the economic sectors most affected by changes related to the COVID-19 pandemic (IBG).	40	0	1	.15	.057	.362	.131
Industries hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic: Section A - Agriculture, Forestry, Hunting, and Fishing (BSA)	40	0	1	.03	.025	.158	.025
Industries hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic: Section F - Construction (BSF)	40	0	1	.13	.053	.335	.112
Industries hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic: Section G - Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles, including motorcycles (BSG)	40	0	1	.13	.053	.335	.112
Industries hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic: Section H - Transport and storage (BSH)	40	0	1	.10	.048	.304	.092
Industries hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic: Section I - Accommodation and Food Service Activities (BSI)	40	0	1	.50	.080	.506	.256
Industries hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic: Section J - Information and Communication (BSJ)	40	0	1	.03	.025	.158	.025
Industries hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic: Section P, Education (BSP).	40	0	1	.13	.053	.335	.112
Industries hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic: Section Q - Healthcare and Social Work (BSQ)	40	0	1	.05	.035	.221	.049
Industries hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic: Section R - Arts, entertainment, and recreation (BSR)	40	0	1	.47	.080	.506	.256
Industries hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic: Section S - Other service activities (BSS)	40	0	1	.25	.069	.439	.192
Have the enterprises operating in the LGU applied for support for the protection of jobs in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, e.g., the anti-Crisis Shield? (WSP)	40	0	1	.57	.079	.501	.251
"Standard" Unemployment Reduction Tools (Pre-pandemic): Public Works and Intervention Works Programs (PRP)	40	0	1	.62	.078	.490	.240
"Standard" Unemployment Reduction Tools" (prepandemic): Organizing community work (OPS)	40	0	1	.60	.078	.496	.246



'Standard' unemployment reduction tools (before the pandemic): organizing internships (OST)	40	0	1	.57	.079	.501	.251
"Standard" Unemployment Reduction Tools (Prepandemic): loans for entrepreneurs to create new jobs (PPR) .	40	0	1	.10	.048	.304	.092
'Standard' unemployment reduction tools (before the pandemic): subsidizing employment (SUZ) .	40	0	1	.13	.053	.335	.112
'Standard' unemployment reduction tools (before the pandemic): subsidies for starting a business (DPD)	40	0	1	.15	.057	.362	.131
"Standard" Unemployment Reduction Tools (Prepandemic): measures to promote the employment of disabled people (NIE)	40	0	1	.15	.057	.362	.131
'Standard' unemployment reduction tools (before the pandemic): career counseling and information (ZAW)	40	0	1	.15	.057	.362	.131
Forms of support / assistance activities proposed to enterprises to limit employment reduction during the pandemic: subsidies and tax reliefs for the private sector (ULP) .	40	0	1	.18	.061	.385	.148
Forms of support / assistance activities proposed to enterprises to limit employment reduction during the pandemic: subsidized public loans to enterprises to meet urgent capital and investment needs (SUB) .	40	0	1	.03	.025	.158	.025
Forms of support / assistance activities proposed to enterprises to limit employment reduction during the pandemic: Aid in the form of grants or repayable assistance under operational programs (POM) .	40	0	1	.10	.048	.304	.092
Forms of support / assistance activities proposed to enterprises to limit employment reduction during the pandemic: wage subsidies and social security contributions (DOP)	40	0	1	.10	.048	.304	.092
Forms of support / assistance activities proposed to enterprises in order to limit employment reduction during the pandemic: temporary reduction / suspension / release from obligations (e.g., taxes, social security rates, certain payments such as rent, communal fees) (ZWO)	40	0	1	.35	.076	.483	.233
Forms of support / assistance activities proposed to companies to limit job reduction during the pandemic: protecting workers from being infected with Covid-19 in the workplace (PRA) .	40	0	1	.42	.079	.501	.251
Forms of support / assistance activities proposed to enterprises COVID-19 limit employment reduction during the pandemic: in the case of cultural projects financed or cofinanced from public funds, resignation from recovering these expenditures if, due to the pandemic, these projects have not been implemented (KUL) .	40	0	1	.10	.048	.304	.092
Forms of support / assistance activities proposed to enterprises to limit employment reduction during the pandemic: Crisis Support for the Healthcare Sector (KRY)	40	0	1	.15	.057	.362	.131
Sources of financing of the forms of support mentioned above: national aid funds (from the state budget) (RO)	40	0	1	.38	.078	.490	.240
Sources of financing of the above-mentioned forms of support: subsidies from earmarked funds (e.g., the Guaranteed Employee Benefits Fund, the Tourist Guarantee Fund) (FUN)	40	0	1	.13	.053	.335	.112
Sources of financing of the above-mentioned forms of support: EU emergency aid for Member States' liquidity for small businesses and the healthcare sector and the most deprived (PUE) .	40	0	1	.03	.025	.158	.025
Sources of financing of the above-mentioned forms of support: from the funds of the Operational Programs (POP) .	40	0	1	.08	.042	.267	.071
Sources of financing of the above-mentioned forms of support: from the Government Fund for Local Investments (RFI)	40	0	1	.03	.025	.158	.025
Sources of financing of the above-mentioned forms of support: own funds (WA)	40	0	1	.30	.073	.464	.215
Have the institutions / departments / organizational units of LGUs dealing with providing aid proven successful in their operation? (INS)	40	0	2	.68	.083	.526	.276
Forms of support / assistance activities offered to employees of enterprises: financial support for people who lose their jobs or are self-employed (SAM) .	40	0	1	.15	.057	.362	.131
Forms of support / assistance activities offered to employees of enterprises: assistance for people in need of care (OPI)	40	0	1	.20	.064	.405	.164

Forms of support / assistance activities offered to employees of enterprises: an additional care allowance, allowing parents to stay at home with their children without losing income (DZA).	40	0	1	.15	.057	.362	.131
Forms of support / assistance activities offered to employees of enterprises: psychological support provided by appropriate specialists remotely or by phone (PSY)	40	0	1	.13	.053	.335	.112
Sources of financing of the above-mentioned forms of support: national aid funds (from the state budget) (KPO)	40	0	1	.38	.078	.490	.240
Sources of financing of the above-mentioned forms of support: subsidies from earmarked funds (e.g., the Guaranteed Employee Benefits Fund, the Tourist Guarantee Fund) (GWA)	40	0	1	.05	.035	.221	.049
Sources for financing of the above-mentioned forms of support: z Operational Program funds (OPE).	40	0	1	.08	.042	.267	.071
Sources of financing of the above-mentioned forms of support: z Governmental Fund for Local Investments (FIL)	40	0	1	.03	.025	.158	.025
Sources of financing of the above-mentioned forms of support: own funds (FUW)	40	0	1	.25	.069	.439	.192
Institutions / organizations with which the LGU cooperated in reducing unemployment: the Regional Chamber of Commerce (RIG).	40	0	1	.03	.025	.158	.025
Institutions / organizations with which the LGU cooperated in reducing unemployment: Voivodeship Labor Office (WUP)	40	0	1	.13	.053	.335	.112
Institutions / organizations with which the LGU cooperated in reducing unemployment: District Labor Office (PUP)	40	0	1	.68	.075	.474	.225
Have the indicated institutions / departments / organizational units proven successful in their operation? (SPR)	40	0	2	.75	.106	.670	.449
Do you know the so-called good practices in combating unemployment applied abroad in partner communes / cities? (DOB)	40	0	1	.18	.061	.385	.148
Did LGUs exchange good practices in this respect with foreign partner communes / cities, etc.? (PRA)	40	0	1	.10	.048	.304	.092
Valid N (COVID-19)	40						

Source: own study using the IBM SPSS version 26 program.

According to 89.3% of the LGUs surveyed, institutions / departments / organizational units of LGUs dealing with providing aid / distributing aid have proved themselves in their operation. According to 20% of respondents, the most popular forms of support / assistance activities offered to employees by LGUs were assistance for people requiring care and, according to 15% of respondents, additional care allowance, enabling parents to stay at home with children without losing income, and financial support for people losing their jobs or self-employed which were financed mainly from national aid funds (from the state budget) by 38% of the respondents and from their own funds by 25% of the respondents. 68% of the LGUs surveyed cooperated with the District Labor Offices in reducing unemployment, and 13% of the surveyed with the Voivodeship Labor Office. According to 75% of the LGUs surveyed, the institutions mentioned above have proven themselves to be successful.

Unfortunately, only 18% of the respondents know the so-called good practices in decreasing unemployment applied abroad in the partner communes / cities, and only 10% of the surveyed LGUs exchanged good practices in decreasing unemployment with foreign partner communes / cities, etc. The results of the in-depth interview indicate that in terms of cross-border cooperation, it is important to establish a timely and transparent dialogue with all stakeholders. It was shown that there are many interfaces between the different areas. These have already been identified and need to be continuously updated in the future. The lesson we can learn from this crisis is that we must never again be so unprepared, which means that we need to know our neighbor and his culture, we need to be interested in what the other side is doing for its own society and for the society of its neighbor in the cross-border region, and we need to know the administrative processes of the neighboring country. Only in this way can we effectively combat such situations should they arise in the future. The type of LGU is statistically significantly correlated with whether enterprises operating in each LGU apply for support for job protection in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, e.g., the anti-crisis shield (see Table 3).

Table 3. Correlations coefficient (rho Spearman)



	P	WS	OS	PPR	SUZ	DPD	NIE	DOP	POP	SAM	GW
		T	A								
T JS		.348	.315	.527*	.597*	.664*	.579*	.426*	.335	.579*	.362
	C *	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	I	.028	.048	.000	.000	.000	.000	.006	.035	.000	.022
	N	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40

Source: own study using the IBM SPSS version 26 program.

That is, enterprises operating in rural communes applied for support for job protection less frequently in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic than those operating in rural-urban or urban communes. The type of local government unit is also statistically significantly correlated with the "standard" tools used by LGUs to reduce the phenomenon of unemployment, such as: i) programs for public works and intervention works; ii) organizing community work; iii) subsidizing employment; iv) business subsidies; or v) measures to promote the employment of disabled people. Moreover, there was also a statistically significant correlation between the type of LGUs and the form of support / assistance measures offered to enterprises in order to limit employment reductions during a pandemic, i.e., wage subsidies and social security contributions; sources of financing the forms of support: from the funds of the Operational Programs; a form of support / assistance activities offered to employees of enterprises: financial support for people who lose their jobs or the self-employed, or sources of financing of the above-mentioned forms of employee support: subsidies from special purpose funds (e.g. the Guaranteed Employee Benefits Fund, the Tourist Guarantee Fund. The results of the in-depth interview indicate that the local government unit played a huge role in counteracting the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and helped to get through the pandemic period relatively smoothly.

5. Conclusions

Most of the rural and rural-urban communes did not undertake diagnostic activities that would allow to identify the economic sectors most affected by changes related to the COVID-19 pandemic, e.g., reduction in the number of employees, suspension, or liquidation of activities. According to LGUs surveyed, companies operating in rural-urban communes applied much more frequently for support for job protection in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic than companies located in rural communes. In rural communes, their financial departments or the Treasurer dealt with helping enterprises, as opposed to urban-rural communes, where, in addition to the financial department, also the tax and fees department was involved in helping entrepreneurs. Urban-rural communes, urban communes, and districts were more satisfied with the work of the above-mentioned institutions / organizations providing aid to entrepreneurs than rural communes. LGUs do not know and have not exchanged good practices in the field of job protection in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic with other domestic or foreign LGUs.

The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the crucial role of local government units in overcoming its effects. The empirical findings of this study (in-depth interviews) indicate that policy makers should pay more attention to grounding or improving the role of LGUs in national disaster management and provide them with the competencies and resources necessary to deal with emergencies. There is a need to strengthen cooperation and coordination with other levels of government. Communication with the public and the possibility to adapt actions to the local situation seem to be a necessity.

There is a need to coordinate cross-border cooperation with local government units under crisis conditions, in particular, the sharing of good practices in crisis mitigation. The lesson from the Covid -19 pandemic shows that there is a clear gap in this area.

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