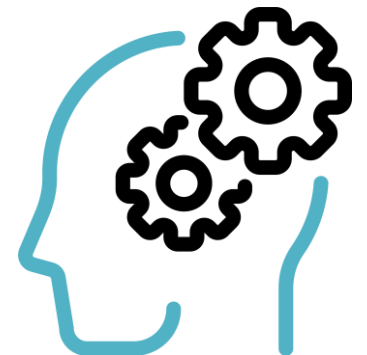


# Post-pandemic work in education, healthcare and logistics in Poland

Jacek Burski,

Uniwersytet Wrocławski

[jacek.burski@uwr.edu.pl](mailto:jacek.burski@uwr.edu.pl)



# The future of work - technology, digitalisation, gig economy and others

- The impact of technological change, including the automation of production and services, digitalisation and the development of online platforms ('platformisation') that mediate employment (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2016; Frey & Osborne, 2017);
- The erosion of the standard employment relationship in a 'gig economy' (Crouch, 2019);
- The elimination of routine, repetitive, algorithmic physical and mental work (Adamczyk & Surdykowska, 2018, p. 472);
- Work in cognitive capitalism/surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 2020).

# The future of work and the COVID-19 pandemic

- The pandemic crisis fostered a deepening of social inequalities at work (Rothwell & Crabtree, 2021, Eurofound & EC, 2021);
- Deepening precarity (Bambra et al., 2021);
- The perpetuation of inequalities between workers whose work can be done remotely (according to Eurofound's estimates, around 37% of salaried workers in the European Union) and those who have to do it exclusively stationary (Eurofound & EC, 2021; Śledziwska & Włoch, 2021, p. 241);
- Reinforcing trends related to the development of new digital technologies in the world of work;
- The innovative potential of the pandemic for work organisation, which can be both emancipatory and reveal new areas of control over workers;
- The pandemic fostered, in its initial phase, labour mobilisation.

# COV-WORK Research

- COV-WORK research design:
  - CATI;
  - BNI;
  - Expert interviews;
  - Discourse analysis;
  - **FGI – 14 Focus group interviews with:**
    - Doctors and nurses (healthcare);
    - Teachers (education);
    - Couriers, platform couriers, logistic centers' workers (logistic)
    - Nurses, nursing home staff, physiotherapists (social care)
  - **Question: future of the branch and particular profession**

# Healthcare

- Exacerbation of problems in access to health care services and care.
- Perception that nothing will change in terms of workload.
- Risk of staff shortages, especially for nurses.
- In the case of doctors, the belief was expressed that in the future there will be further marketisation of health care and the subordination of career-building mechanisms to the logic of profit maximisation.
- Professionalization of the nursing profession.
- The appearance of Ukrainian doctors or nurses could be a relief for the overburdened system, but the problem could be the level of education and the ability to adapt to the requirements present in Polish health care.
- Further development of telemedicine as an area that has gained importance in the last two years as part of the health care delivery system.
- In the case of health care, interviewees were aware of the protests organised in recent years, but in both the doctors' and nurses' groups, opinions about them had negative overtones

# Social care

- A return to the way of doing one's job, its conditions, organisation or responsibilities from the pre-pandemic period.
- The issue of the current and expected future shortage of workers (e.g. due to the decreasing interest of young people to work in the profession).
- The impact of the war in Ukraine: increasing the number of people interested in working in social care industry, while creating competition with workers from Poland.
- The impact of technology on labour management in social care homes (SupraCare programme).
- The process of deinstitutionalization. Among the solutions identified by our interviewees were family social homes, assisted living facilities and the introduction of assisted living.
- In the case of social care home workers, unlike in the case of health care, no voices negating protests emerged in the focus groups.

# Logistic

- The worse the conditions, the more negative the forecasts.
- Technology as such was not problematised by interviewees and functioned as a taken for granted context for the work being done.
- Couriers noted that drones, as the flagship of new technologies in the delivery industry, would have a limited role due to the dense nature of urban development and varied parcel sizes.
- The impact of the war in Ukraine: it was noted that a potentially large number of new job applicants would have entered the Polish market.
- In addition, expectation of relocation of logistics centres from Ukraine and Russia to Poland due to the sanctions.
- FGIs were conducted with various professional groups and the shape of collective labour relations within each category's relationship with employers varied extremely: from the activities of traditional trade union centres (logistic centres) to a complete lack of representation (platform couriers).
- In the statements of couriers (both platform and parcel couriers), the issue of potential mobilisation was considered in the context of the need to regulate the relationship between workers and the platforms.
- Parcel couriers were even more sceptical of trade union organisation and emphasised the individualised nature of the relationship with the employer.
- For logistics centres, the situation was more pro-union.

# Education

- Technological changes introduced on a very large scale during the pandemic period were seen as a threat to the teacher's role in the teaching process.
- Teachers seemed convinced that the changes associated with the increasingly widespread introduction of technology into the teaching process could not be reversed.
- Nevertheless stressed that the teacher-student relationship could not be fully replaced by the introduction of teaching by or through the computer.
- However, some of the interviewees indicated that computer support and remote teaching could have a positive impact on the ability to provide information and verify progress..
- Contextualising in relation to the division between private and public schools (the former better prepared for change) and social inequalities (the rich in a privileged position)
- Expected continued teacher shortages, making the sector similar to the rest of the public sector.
- Impact of war in Ukraine: emergence of more Ukrainian students, increased wage pressure on authorities.
- Assessment of mobilisation: impact of the experience of the failed 2019 strike - mainly negative, but with the exception of trade unionists themselves



# Conclusions

- The more precarious the job (in terms of aspects such as form of contract, workload, remuneration), the more often the responses centred around the prospects (or rather the lack thereof) for a change in conditions at a particular workplace.
- The pandemic crisis is, as expected, often seen as a mediating factor, reinforcing pre-existing trends. This is particularly true for the problems of labour shortages in the industries surveyed, which were already observed before March 2020.
- The pandemic crisis overlaps, in the respondents' opinions, with other types of crises, most notably the refugee crisis triggered by Russia's aggression against Ukraine.
- The pandemic has made some of the groups surveyed (e.g. couriers, logistics centre workers or DPS workers) aware of their social importance, which may translate into their propensity for collective mobilisation.
- The persistence of mobilisation potential in groups previously active in this field.
- The emphasis on technological innovation in the pandemic is only partially reflected in the public consciousness of those surveyed.
- The pandemic accelerated the process of 'taming' new technologies and acquiring the competence to use them (Sledziowska & Italian, 2021).
- Due to the rapidly changing situation and the emergence of further crisis phenomena, the long-term impact of the pandemic on working conditions is often minimised in the popular consciousness.