

# BRICS and the USA: Labor and Employment Support During and After the COVID-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

This article concerns labor and employment support policies undertaken by national governments in 2020–2022, during the global COVID-19 pandemic. It is focused on the experience of the BRICS countries but also highlights the labor and employment support policies in the USA, a country with one of the largest economies and advanced economic development. The COVID-19 outbreak has posed unprecedented challenges for all countries. The key objectives of all governments were to save human lives and prevent the spread of the infection. While the containment measures used by different countries were mostly similar, the programs and policies aiming to support workers were country-specific. The authors examine two types of labor support measures aimed at mitigation of the COVID-19 consequences: direct cash transfers to sustain workers' incomes and business support activities. The analysis reveals that the success of these measures could depend, first, on how timely they were, second, whether they were in line with the long-term objectives in labour market development and, third, on the quality of governments' collaboration with businesses and trade unions. The COVID-19 pandemic has cast a long shadow. As the BRICS countries plan to focus their labor and employment policies on high-quality jobs, human-centered development, inclusion and protection of workers' rights they should address the consequences of COVID-19 together with other challenges, such as technological transformation, climate change and demographic issues.

## Keywords

COVID-19 pandemic, COVID-19 cases labor market policies, BRICS, USA, labor force participation rate, unemployment rate.

**JEL:** J01, J08, J38.

## Introduction

The virus that causes COVID-19 was first reported in China in December 2019; in 2020 it began to spread rapidly around the world. In January 2020 the World Trade Organization expressed its concern about the new virus and on March 11, 2020 it declared that COVID-19 could be considered a global pandemic (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020a) triggering immediate reaction of national governments.

The outbreak and subsequent spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was seen as an unprecedented global challenge that required a coordinated global response. In the spirit of solidarity the leaders of the BRICS (the Federal Republic of Brazil, the Russian Federation, the Republic of India, the People's Republic of China, the Republic of South Africa) and other countries used the G20 platform for an Extraordinary Summit on 26 March 2020, at which they declared a fight against the pandemic to be their over-riding priority. The Leaders committed to do whatever it takes to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic, sparing no effort, individually and collectively, to tackle its intertwined health, social and economic impacts and safeguard people's jobs and incomes (G20, 2020).

The immediate objective was to contain the spread of the virus thus saving people's lives. Numerous countries around the world closed their borders and imposed nationwide lockdown restrictions on business organizations and individuals. Pharmaceutical companies rushed to develop vaccines against the new virus.

The outbreak of pandemic had caused a global health crisis with death rates increasing daily. The containment measures allowed many countries to prevent immediate spread of disease and provided governments with the time needed to open new hospitals, develop vaccines, better understand the situation and design plans of action to stop the COVID-19.

Unfortunately, these necessary measures had turned the health crisis into a global economic crisis, causing supply shocks, global value chain disruptions, sharp declines in the number of working hours and other problems that put at risk health, jobs and incomes of people around the world, even in the countries not initially hit by the coronavirus.

Today, three years after the outbreak, the world is still grappling with COVID-19 making serious effort to come out of the post-crisis economic recession.

Many research papers have been published on COVID-19 and its impact on the global and national development. Brodeur A., Gray D., Islam A., Bhuiyan S. (2021) offered a comprehensive review of literature on the economic impact of COVID-19; researchers have built models to assess the influence of COVID on different population groups, estimating the effects of measures undertaken by governments against the pandemic (Brotherhood L., Kircher P., Santos C., Tertilt M. (2020); Chaudhry R., Dranitsaris G., Mubashir T., Bartoszko J., Riaz S. (2020)). International organizations such as ILO, IMF, World Bank Group, OECD and others have produced periodic reports on individual countries' progress and the prospects of the anti-COVID-19 struggle; dashboards on COVID-19 pandemic and its economic consequences have

been maintained by, for example, ILO (2022), COVID-19 and the world of work data base of OECD (2022), the web page “Building a resilient recovery: Emerging stronger from the COVID-19 pandemic”.

Attention to the pandemic-related issues is not surprising as the cost of the pandemic is high. According to the UN statistics (UN, 2022) more than 6.6 million people have died of COVID -19 since its outbreak and the total number of cases exceeds 643 million. Compared with the world’s total deaths due to all causes during 2020-2022 (approximately 180 million) it can be seen that the COVID-related deaths are less than 4% of the total all-cause mortality. This rough 4% estimate shows that the efforts of the global community and national governments had been effective: they helped to block the otherwise possible disastrous scenarios. (See Table 1 further below).

Emphasizing the positive effects of the measures undertaken globally it should be noted that in different countries governments applied different policies with varying results.

Although BRICS accommodate about 40.9% of the world population, the number of COVID-19 cases in these countries has been less than 17% of the global cases and the COVID-19 related deaths have not exceeded 26% of the global amount (see Table 1). At the same time the data for the biggest economy - the USA - reveal that while its population is almost ten times smaller than that of the BRICS countries, the number of COVID-19 cases exceeds 15% of the world total (which is only about 1.5 p.p. less than in the BRICS countries) and the number of deaths is more than 16% of the world total. The difference between the BRICS totals and the USA totals can be a topic for a separate in-depth research; yet one may hypothesize that the differences in the policies applied by the BRICS countries and by the USA in their anti-COVID-19 battle played a role. Statistically, the difference between the BRICS and the United States is determined by the low rates of morbidity and mortality in China. If we compare the indicators of individual BRICS countries with those of the United States, we will see that the mortality rate in the United States almost coincides with that of Brazil. In these two countries, as noted in many studies, the presidents Trump and Bolsonaro had downplayed the danger of the virus; the restrictive measures, when adopted, were of little effect resulting in high mortality (Béland, D., Rocco, P., Segatto, C. I., & Waddan, A. (2021).

Labor market policies have become an important component of anti-COVID-19 policies in many countries, BRICS included. In 2020 under the Russia’s Chairmanship, the Ministers of Labor and Employment of the BRICS countries in their Declaration suggested that the BRICS Network of Labour Research Institutes with the assistance of international organizations (the BRICS Social Security Cooperation Framework Virtual Liaison Office) should carry out research on “Support of employment and income in the context of the COVID-19 crisis” (see BRICS (2020)). In 2021 under the Indian Chairmanship in the group, the researchers from the BRICS countries presented the results of their studies concerning the wide variety of measures taken by the BRICS governments to support employment during the COVID-pandemic period (see BRICS (2021)). These measures complemented policies aiming to encourage

economic growth, maintain health service, ensure education continuity and others. The researches explored the relevant aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic analyzing its impact on labour and employment; they also outlined labor-centered measures implemented by the BRICS governments and examined the effect they had on the labor markets.

The present paper gives an overview of the measures used to support labor and employment during the COVID-19 pandemic, based on the research undertaken by the BRICS official bodies that was completed in 2021. Pandemic waves continued throughout 2022 but, in comparison with the previous years, they were less frequent and affected fewer people. In that year, however, the global economic situation was influenced by other factors (see OECD (2022) and IMF (2022a)), which created complex challenges requiring prompt responses from the system of labor and employment. It is important to study the countries' valuable experience of responding to such challenges and providing support to those who need it. It is also useful to compare the approaches and policies chosen by the BRICS countries with those preferred in the USA. The economy of the USA is one of the largest and it tends to present itself as a model for other countries; that is why it may be worthwhile to compare the effectiveness of the approaches used by BRICS and the USA in their anti-COVID-19 labor protection policies.

## **Methodology and data**

The desk-study is focused on analyzing the measures used in the BRICS countries to support employment and protect workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is based on a number of national and international documents, including the Declarations of BRICS Labor and Employment Ministers and documents related to BRICS international Employment Working Group meetings<sup>1</sup>. The analysis is complemented by a review of research concerning the responses to the COVID-related crises.

The main data sources include the UN data and data sets of international organizations such as ILO, OECD and the World Bank Group. National statistics from the BRICS countries was also used when available.

The qualitative comparison of policies undertaken by BRICS and the USA to support labor and employment is based on general indicators and information available in the open sources.

The assessment of the BRICS countries' prospects for labor market development and employment support in the post-COVID-19 era reflects the vision defined in the Declarations of BRICS labor and employment ministers.

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<sup>1</sup> There is no single official source of information on BRICS. Official documents are hosted by the countries that chair the BRICS in a given year. For example, India chaired in 2021 (<https://brics2021.gov.in/brics/public/uploads/docpdf/getdocu-28.pdf>), China chaired in 2022 (<http://brics2022.mfa.gov.cn/eng/dtxw/202207/P020220728590048068575.pdf>).

## Results

1. The global COVID-19 pandemic affected all countries of the world in a similar way, but responses to the situation caused by COVID-19 were country specific as the coping strategies reflected each country's conditions and its economic and social capacities: despite the global character of the challenge the "one size fits all" approach did not work. Still, the key directions of sustaining labor and employment were similar in all countries: they included direct cash transfers to people and support to businesses. The differences lay in the country-specific ways of implementing these two types of support policies.

2. The effectiveness of actions undertaken by governments depended on the countries' initial economic and social conditions. Yet, the level of a particular country's economic development did not guarantee the success of its anti-COVID-19 measures, while the concerted effort of the state, public institutions and business became a crucial factor of the effective design and application of labor and employment support measures. Another important factor of success was the link between the short-term emergency anti-COVID-19 measures and long-term labor and employment strategies of the country.

3. The prospects of the labor market and employment development policies in the BRICS countries depend on their prompt responses to global challenges such as technological and demographic changes. The BRICS countries envisage implementation of interconnected measures which will allow them to create quality jobs to all workers, encourage human-centered development and secure inclusive economic growth. To achieve these ambitious goals it will be necessary to take into account the impact of anti-pandemic emergency measures on labour markets.

## Discussion

### COVID-19 in BRICS and the World

The COVID-19 statistics available at different dashboards including the UN data show that the number of cases in BRICS countries was about 17% of the world cases and the number of fatalities was about 26% of the world fatalities. To weigh the relative effectiveness of the BRICS countries in their fight against COVID-19, and determine whether they achieved a success or suffered a failure, we looked at the USA statistics and saw that the USA, whose population is almost ten times smaller than that of the BRICS countries, had very high number of cases (about 100 million as of 2020-2022) and high fatality rate. The number of cases in the USA was close to the number of cases in all five BRICS countries and the number of fatalities reached 16.28% of the global fatalities. This comparison reveals that the BRICS countries were more successful in preventing the disease and mitigating its effects

than the USA. The higher death rate reflects the differences in the healthcare systems' capacity.

To a certain extent, this difference might also be attributed to the number of vaccines administered in BRICS countries and in the USA. In the BRICS countries the total number of administered vaccines is about 49% of the world total while in the US the number of administered vaccines is about 4.9% of the world total. The number of vaccines administered in the USA is higher than in Brazil, Russia and South Africa but the numbers of vaccines administered in India and China exceed those in the US by 4 and 6 times respectively. Although the numbers of the administered vaccines do not necessarily correspond to the numbers of vaccinated persons (one person could be vaccinated several times, another not vaccinated at all) the number of administered vaccines points to the protection capacities of a particular country. We can see that in the USA, as well as in Brazil, practically everyone had the opportunity to get two vaccine doses during 2020-2022, in Russia and India everyone could have more than one dose of vaccine, in China more than two doses while in South Africa almost half of the population had no access to vaccination at all; the other half could get only one dose of vaccine. It is thus clear that there are considerable differences between the BRICS. We may argue about the quality of the data but as was noted in the previous section of the paper, we use the official data and assume that they reveal the actual trends even if the numbers are not perfectly accurate.

**Table 1.** COVID-19 Cases, Fatalities Vaccination in the World, BRICS Countries and the USA (as of February 1, 2023)

	Per 1000 people			% of Population receiving at least 1 dose	as a percentage of the world level			
	Population (2022 estimates)	COVID-19 cases	Deaths		Population	COVID-19 cases	Deaths	% of Population receiving at least 1 dose
Brazil	215,31	171	3,24	88,96	2,70	5,5	10,2	128
Russia	144,71	150	2,68	60,28	1,81	3,2	5,7	87
India	1417,17	31,5	0,37	74,44	17,77	6,7	7,8	107
China	1425,89	3,44	0,07	92,81	17,88	0,7	1,4	134
South Africa	59,89	67,7	1,71	40,42	0,75	0,6	1,5	58
BRICS	3262,97	34,3	0,56	82,17	40,91	16,7	26,5	118
USA	338,29	303	3,28	81,67	4,24	15,3	17,2	117
World	7975,11	84,2	0,86	69,4	100	100	100	100

Source: Population: UNdata [http://data.un.org/\\_Docs/SYB/PDFs/SYB65\\_1\\_202209\\_Population.%20Surface%20Area%20and%20Density.pdf](http://data.un.org/_Docs/SYB/PDFs/SYB65_1_202209_Population.%20Surface%20Area%20and%20Density.pdf); COVID-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University, data as of 1 February, 2023. <https://gisanddata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>

According to Carlsson-Szlezak, P., Reeves, M., & Swartz, P. (2020) these are the three main channels through which coronavirus pandemic affects the economy. First,

it directly reduces consumption of goods and services; second, indirectly, through financial market shocks, it affects household wealth, savings, and consumption; third, it causes supply-side disruptions that in turn negatively impact the supply chains and demand for labour leading to increased unemployment and economic hardships. These impacts, working together, can create a vicious cycle that exacerbates the economic downturn caused by the pandemic. We note one fundamental feature of the situation with COVID-19: its impact on the labor market was largely determined by the actions of governments that introduced quarantines and other restrictive measures. At the same time, there were considerable efforts to support businesses and population.

Concerning the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the BRICS labor markets, first of all we need to assess the influence of lockdowns and closures on the amounts of working time. The ILO has been collecting the necessary data and built the model presented below. As it does not provide data on individual countries, we will consider the available information about country groups. At the beginning of the pandemic, in the first quarter (1Q) of 2020, the loss of the working hours in the BRICS countries was higher than in G7, but thanks to the measures undertaken by the BRICS governments the situation started to improve in the 2Q of 2020 and further on; as a result the losses of working hours in the BRICS countries were lower than those in G7. In 2Q and 3Q, the numbers of working hours in the BRICS and G7 countries leveled off and then returned to almost the pre-pandemic level.

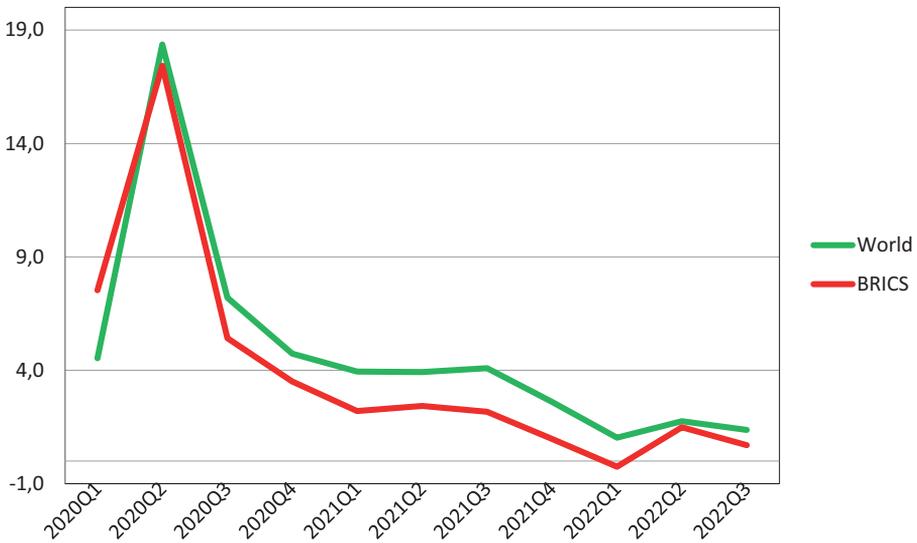
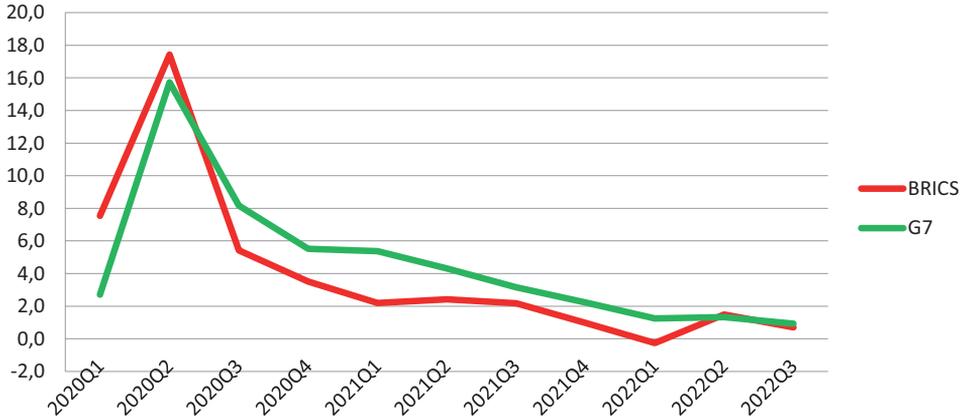
The fluctuations of the trend coincide with the so-called waves of the pandemic.

**Table 2.** Working hours lost due to the COVID-19 crisis, % to the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2019, seasonally adjusted

	World	BRICS
2020Q1	4.5	7.5
2020Q2	18.4	17.4
2020Q3	7.2	5.4
2020Q4	4.7	3.5
2021Q1	3.9	2.2
2021Q2	3.9	2.4
2021Q3	4.1	2.2
2021Q4	2.6	1.0
2022Q1	1.0	-0.3
2022Q2	1.8	1.5
2022Q3	1.4	0.7

Source: ILOSTAT, COVID-19 and labour statistics. <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/covid-19/#P> Author's calculations

Graph 1 below shows the lag between the global losses in the working hours and those in the BRICS countries.



**Graph 1.** Working hours lost due to the COVID-19 crisis, % to the 4th quarter of 2019, seasonally adjusted. *Source:* ILOSTAT, COVID-19 and labour statistics. <https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/covid-19/#P>  
 Author’s calculations

The pandemic has also affected the labor force participation rate of the BRICS countries. The drop in the labor force participation rate was most visible in 2020 compared to 2019. Further on, in 2021 and 2022, the labor force participation rate was still declining in Russia and China, while in Brazil, India and South Africa, after the 2020’s drop, the rate resumed its increase following the general trend registered in the world in 2021. In the USA, the labor force participation rate dynamics was similar to that in Russia and China, i.e. it continued its decline (see Table 3 below).

**Table 3.** Labour force participation rate, %

	Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa	BRICS	USA	World
2019	62.6	62.2	48.1	69.1	55.3	59.8	62.2	60.5
2020	57.3	61.9	44.9	68.2	50.5	57.5	60.9	58.6
2021	58.4	61.4	45.6	68.1	52.9	57.8	60.7	59.0
2022	59.9	61.2	46.4	67.9	54.0	58.1	60.7	59.3

Source: ILOSTAT Explorer <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/>

The drop in the labor force participation rate should not be attributed solely to the COVID-19 pandemic. Population ageing and other demographic and economic factors had all been in place before the pandemic affected the labor force participation rates in the BRICS countries. Still, for the years in question, the influence of the pandemic was probably decisive. Some of those who faced difficulties in finding employment, either for a short or long time, stopped looking for jobs and dropped out of the labor force during the pandemic lockdowns. Women, youth and other population groups who have higher risk of losing their jobs in times of crises were also contributing to the decrease in the labor force participation rates during the COVID-related crisis, by temporarily dropping out of the labor force.

The trend of the BRICS countries' unemployment rate is similar to the trend of the world unemployment rate. In 2020 unemployment increased everywhere but in 2021-2022 it began to fall. The exception is South Africa where unemployment continues to rise. Both the world and BRICS countries have not so far returned to the pre-crisis levels of unemployment and the uncertain world economic situation makes any predictions about the time of possible return to the pre-COVID-19 levels rather unreliable.

**Table 4.** Unemployment rate, %

	Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa	BRICS	USA	World
2019	11.9	4.5	5.3	4.5	28.5	5.6	3.7	5.4
2020	13.7	5.6	8	5	29.2	6.9	8.1	6.6
2021	14.4	5	6	4.8	33.6	6.3	5.5	6.2
2022	13.6	4.7	5.4	4.7	33.5	6	4.1	5.9

Source: ILOSTAT Explorer <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/>

The world experience has shown that the interaction between entrepreneurs, government and trade unions in the implementation of measures to support the labor market during a pandemic gives positive results (Brandl, 2021, Kövér, 2021). Such interaction was carried out with varying degrees of intensity and success, but showed the possibility of joint action to resolve complex issues covering all spheres of public life.

## Labor and Employment Protection Measures

### Brazil

The first confirmed COVID-19 case in Brazil was reported on 26 February, 2020. Among BRICS countries, Brazil, as of 1 December, 2022 (Worldometer, 2022a), had the second highest number of COVID-19 cases and the highest number of fatalities.

To mitigate the impact of COVID-19, in 2020 the authorities announced a series of economic, employment and income support measures. Emergency measures were included in a separate (so-called 'war') 2020 budget, not bound by the provisions of Brazil's Fiscal Responsibility Law and the constitutional golden rule. (IMF, 2022b)

Informal and own-account workers were among most affected by the pandemic, while salaried workers experienced lower loss of labour income and quicker job recovery. Employment and income support policies were to a large extent focused on the most affected groups. Two programs were implemented: Emergency Employment Assistance and Emergency Employment Benefit (BEM).

Emergency Employment Assistance program was aimed at provision of cash transfers to informal and low-income workers. A R\$ 600,00 direct transfer was provided in 2020-2021 to all eligible citizens matching the following requirements: 1) over 18 years of age; 2) not formally salaried; 3) not receiving public pensions; 4) per capita family income below 1/2 minimum wage or total family income below 3 minimum wages. A total of 68 million people or 32,1% of the Brazilian population became direct beneficiaries of this program. (E. A. de Oliveira, et al. 2022)

Emergency Employment Benefit (BEM) program combined a shortened day work benefits and a furlough scheme. The participants of the program were workers who signed an agreement with employer to reduce work time or temporary suspend work contract, with income maintenance. In 2020 the maximum length of the benefit payment was up to 8 months and in 2021 it was reduced to up to 4 months.

Reposition rate was based on the definitions used for unemployment insurance (100% percent for workers receiving minimum wage to R\$ 1813,03). In case of 25% time reduction, workers received 75% of their wage plus 25% benefit (in accordance with unemployment benefit calculus). In case of 50% time reduction, workers received 50% of their wage plus 50% benefit (in accordance with unemployment benefit calculus). In case of 70% time reduction workers received 30% of their wage plus 70% benefit (in accordance with unemployment benefit calculus). Workers on zero hour contracts in 2020 received R\$ 600 from the government.

The program envisaged that participating workers could not be dismissed while in the program and that they received a provisional employment guarantee for the same period (companies were fined if they dismissed the worker during the period). It was also envisaged that for companies with gross revenue under 4.8 million the government would pay 100% of the benefit and for companies with gross revenue over 4.8 million it would pay 70% of the benefit and companies would pay 30% salary. (Brazil Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2020)

As per the available data from April 2020 to August 2021, more than 1,5 million employers had participated in the program and more than 10 million workers benefited from it. (World Bank, 2020)

The employment and income support measures undertaken by Brazilian government during the COVID-19 pandemic, included temporary income support to vulnerable households – cash transfers to informal and low-income workers (Emergency Assistance program); benefits to workers with reduced worktime - partial compensation to furloughed workers (Emergency Employment Benefits program); the 13th pension payment to retirees; expanding the Bolsa Familia program with the inclusion of over 1 million more beneficiaries; temporary tax breaks. Public banks expanded credit lines for businesses and households, with a focus on maintaining working capital (credit lines add up to 4.5 percent of GDP), and the government had backed over 1 percent of GDP in credit lines to SMEs and micro-businesses. (IMF, 2022) Most measures expired at the end of 2020, but the Emergency Aid, employment support program, and credit support to SMEs were renewed in the second quarter of 2021.

As a result of these measures, the labor force participation rate stopped falling and started to rise in 2022; conversely, the unemployment rate began to decrease in 2022 after the severe COVID-19 situation in 2020-2021.

## Russian Federation

The first COVID-19 cases in Russia were reported on January 31, 2020. The government's response to the pandemic was comprehensive, aimed at practically all groups of population. Businesses, too, were given support from the government, especially SME, self-employed (own-account) persons and individual entrepreneurs. Health workers were provided with financial support: more than 290 thousand medical and related workers received presidential incentive payments for performing particularly important work. Payments were also made to more than 400 thousand people working with the risk groups. Those who became infected while helping patients with COV.-19, could get appropriate insurance payments. Over a million people who lost their jobs after March 1, 2020 had increased unemployment benefits. The Government also extended all measures of supporting the unemployed to more than 13,000 individual entrepreneurs who were forced to close their businesses after 1 March, 2020 giving them the maximum benefit in the amount of the minimum wage. Small and medium-sized businesses from the most affected industries were supported by presidential grants. For those whose incomes fell by more than a third, banks granted deferrals on loans. Loans for paying wages were issued at zero percent. Under this program, banks made about 40 thousand loan agreements for a total amount of about 93 billion roubles. Since 1 June, 2020 the Government has launched another loan program with write-offs, provided that the company retains most of its employees.

These measures concerned not only small and medium-sized businesses, but also large companies from the affected industries. An important step was the recapitalization of regional guarantee and microfinance organizations, which helped

to expand SME assistance programs at the regional level. The Government exempted individual entrepreneurs and some of small and medium-sized businesses from rent payments for state and municipal property, saving them about 7 billion rubles. For those who rented private real estate, they set requirements for the conditions of deferral. Some entrepreneurs found themselves in an even more difficult situation when they were issued penalties for early termination of lease agreements. To resolve this issue, business-protecting amendments were promptly made to the legislation; according to these, small and medium-sized businesses from the affected industries could unilaterally terminate the contract without penalties if the landlord did not agree to reduce or soften the terms of the lease.

The so called system-forming enterprises certainly required special attention. They are Russia's largest employers providing jobs for more than 6 million people, whose activities have an impact on a quarter of the Russian economy. Therefore, the government constantly monitored the financial condition of such enterprises and used a whole set of measures to support them. About 139 billion roubles were allocated to the program of concessional lending to cover their working capital needs.

The adopted measures were intended to reduce business costs as much as possible and prevent financial collapse of all types of businesses and households' failures. The government announced a moratorium on almost all inspections, extending it to medium-sized companies and non-profit organizations. The necessary checks were moved to a remote format and this practice is likely to be continued. The payment of 5 thousand rubles for each child under the age of seven helped families survive, as it provided them with a certain income. This money reached the parents of almost 13 million children, or more than 90 percent of the total number of recipients. Moreover, payments were made to the parents of another 544 thousand children, comprising those who had not received the lump-sum payments in the summer of 2020 and those whose children were born after July 1 2020. From 1 June, 2020, a monthly payment was introduced for children of 3-7 years of age. The benefit accrued starting from 1 January, 2020; in June, citizens received benefits for six months of 2020. The payments targeted families with an average per capita income below the subsistence level. Initially, the sum of the benefit equaled the amount of half of the children's regional subsistence level; it covered 4 million 750 thousand children. For this payment, the budget allocated almost 213 billion roubles.

Russia's National Plan for Economic Recovery (Government of the Russian Federation, 2020) was first adopted in April 2020 and later updated several times in response to changing dynamics of the pandemic. Under the plan, the government provides direct payments to families with children, but most of government support takes the form of tax breaks, subsidies, relaxing administrative regulations, subsidized preferential loans and other indirect measures. The government channeled funds to 15 sectors that suffered most during the pandemic. These funds helped protect 6.7 million jobs, including 5.3 million in small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which were more exposed to the risks associated with the pandemic. The Russian stimulus package amounted to 4–4.5% of GDP in 2020.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, special effort was made to ensure the rights of workers working remotely. Such format was widespread during the lockdown period. Although the Russian Labor Code originally had provisions concerning remote employment, the reality of the pandemic required new rules for remote work. Amendments to the Labor Code of the Russian Federation concerning the regulation of remote work and temporary transfer of an employee to remote work on the initiative of the employer in exceptional cases were adopted by Federal Law<sup>2</sup> (dated December 8, 2020, No. 407-FZ) and came into force on 1 January, 2021.

This law extended the possibilities of organizing remote work. Remote work now is to be stipulated in the employment contract or an agreement added to the employment contract and can be performed on either a permanent or temporary basis (continuously for 6 months or periodically, when remote work alternates with work at a stationary workplace). Only for the period of exceptional cases and circumstances (natural or man-made disasters, industrial accidents, fires, floods, earthquakes, epidemics or other exceptional cases that endanger the life or normal living conditions of the entire population or part of the population) remote work can be temporarily performed in accordance with local legislation and a regulatory act adopted by the employer. At the end of this period, the employer is obliged to provide the employee with the previous work specified in the employment contract, and the employee is obliged to start performing it. Interaction between the remote employee and employer can be carried out by exchanging electronic documents using an electronic signature or in another form defined in the collective agreement and employment contract.

Other measures were also taken to protect the rights and incomes of employees. Unemployment benefits and the minimum amount of temporary disability benefits were increased, which made it possible to support the workers (mainly young people) who had little insurance experience and low earnings. Since 1 January, 2021, the temporary provision on the calculation of disability benefits has been transformed into a permanent one by Federal Law No. 255-FZ of 29.12.2006 "On Compulsory social Insurance in case of temporary disability and in connection with maternity"<sup>3</sup>. (Russian Federal Law, 2006)

The measures taken in 2020-2021 made it possible to prevent a sharp drop in the incomes of the population caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and helped to support families with children.

The Government had provided support to businesses, primarily small and medium-sized enterprises.

At first, the support measures were envisaged for comparatively short periods of time, but in some cases the periods were extended. The small and medium-sized

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<sup>2</sup> Russian Federal Law (2020) December 8, 2020, No. 407-FZ <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202012080047>

<sup>3</sup> Russian Federal Law (2006) December 29, 2006, No. 255-FZ [http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons\\_doc\\_LAW\\_64871/](http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_64871/)

businesses in the most affected industries were able to delay the payment of taxes and insurance contributions to state extra-budgetary funds for the periods of I-II quarters of 2020. Later it was decided to completely write off taxes and insurance contributions due in the second quarter of 2020 for all sole proprietors and SME organizations from the affected industries.

Small and medium-sized firms in the affected industries were given direct gratuitous subsidies to pay salaries at the rate of 12,130 rubles per employee per month. Social insurance payments were reduced from 30% to 15% for all SMEs, in cases when payments to employees exceeded the minimum wage, which was a significant relief of the overall tax burden on entrepreneurs.

Preferential lending programs were introduced for SMEs, large companies from affected industries and system-forming organizations (according to estimates, the total amount of loans subsidized under these programmes was 1.4 trillion rubles by the end of August 2022).

The SMEs in affected industries renting the federal property were exempt from paying rent for 2020. Decisions have been made regarding commercial leases to support landlords who provided rental benefits.

All these measures made it possible to prevent an explosive increase in poverty as a result of the pandemic. The measures that were taken had a significant impact on the preservation of employment and development of entrepreneurship even in the difficult pandemic time. In total, there were more than 4.5 million facts of state support over 2020-2021 in the amount of about 600 billion rubles.

Furthermore, over the past two years, the Government halved the number of control measures against enterprises and entrepreneurs and introduced a moratorium on both scheduled and unscheduled inspections from 10 March, 2022 till the end of the year. It applies to all Russian companies, not only to small and medium-sized businesses as it was during the pandemic, except, of course, when it comes to the safety of life and health of people. Another, recently adopted, measure was a decree on a three-year moratorium on inspections of IT companies. Russian IT companies are exempt from scheduled inspections conducted by state and municipal control organizations for three years. (Decree as of 24 of March 2022 , №448)

It is important to note that short-term emergency pandemic recovery measures co-exist with the long-term strategic goals for 2030 as stated in the June 2020 Presidential decree. These goals fall into five major categories: 1) protecting the population, health, and welfare of people; 2) opportunities for self-realization and talent development; 3) comfortable and safe living environment; 4) efficient work, and successful entrepreneurship; and 5) digital transformation. Many of these objectives have remained unchanged since 2018, when the long-term goals for 2024 were set by the president (President of the Russian Federation, 2018). The 2024 goals are to be achieved through 13 "National Projects", i.e. a series of ambitious programs, run until 2024 with approximately US\$350 billion in overall planned funding.

In fact the development and implementation of the anti-COVID-19 measures to protect labor market in Russia contributed to the implementation of the long-term

national development objectives and such interconnection increased the effectiveness of the emergency measures.

## India

The first case of COVID-19 was reported in Kerala in January, 2020. (Andrews, M. A., et al., 2020) India has the highest number of registered COVID-19 cases among the BRICS countries and the second after Brazil number of fatalities. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic Indian Government had provided fiscal stimulus and income support to population and businesses.

As India's economy is characterized by the high level of informality, significant support was given to street vendors. Prime Minister Street Vendor's Atma Nirbhar Nidhi Scheme (Government of India, 2020) was launched on June 01, 2020 to grant working capital loans to Street Vendors, vending in urban areas, to resume their businesses, which were hurt adversely due to COVID-19 induced lockdown.

Government of India credited 12% of employer's and 12% of employee's share of contributions to the Employees' Provident Fund Organization (EPFO) (Ministry of Labor and Employment, Government of India, 2022a) for two years for the establishments having up to 100 employees, with 90% of such employees earning less than Rs. 15000. This helped in protecting employment in EPFO registered establishments in the post COVID-19 period.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, this fund extended multiple levels of benefits to both employers and employees and provided non-refundable advances of 75% of outstanding balance or 3 months wages to EPFO members – 5.3 million benefited, Rs. 135.87 billion were disbursed.

Aatmanirbhar Bharat Rojgar Yojana (Government of India, 2022b) has been launched in October, 2020 as part of Atmanirbhar Bharat package 3.0 to incentivize employers for creation of new employment along with social security benefits and restoration of lost employment during COVID-19 pandemic. This scheme, implemented through the EPFO, seeks to reduce the financial burden on the employers and encourage them to hire more workers. The terminal date for registration of beneficiaries had been extended from 30.06.2021 to 31.03.2022.

The Indian government launched the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan (GKRA) for 125 days on 20 June, 2020 to boost employment and livelihood opportunities for returnee migrant workers and similarly affected persons including youth in rural areas, in 116 selected districts across 6 States of India.

The unemployment benefit under the Atal Beemit Vyakti Kalyan Yojana, implemented by the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC), had been enhanced to 50% from 25% of the average wage, payable up to 90 days, along with easing the eligibility conditions to claim the benefit. ESIC introduced easier terms for employers of depositing Employees' State Insurance Corporation contributions for Feb-June, 2020.

Government encouraged various projects involving substantial investment and public expenditure on the schemes like Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana, Deendayal Antodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission and others.

Government increased Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGS) wage to Rs. 202 a day from Rs. 182 to benefit nearly 136.2 million families.

Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) is being implemented by the Government inter alia, for facilitating self-employment. With PMMY collateral, free loans up to Rs. 1 million, are extended to micro/small business enterprises and to individuals to enable them to set up a business or expand their business activities.

In addition, Reserve Bank of India and Government of India introduced measures to inject liquidity in the economy to sustain the market and raise the level of employment.

The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) implemented a special program for the fresh skilling (Short Term Training) and upskilling (Recognition of Prior Learning) of the returnee migrant workers impacted by COVID-19 under its flagship scheme Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) to support the GKRA. This special programme has covered 116 districts of 6 state. MSDE supported by District Administration had undertaken skill mapping of the returnee migrants and identified the beneficiaries for the training under PMKVY.

The flagship programs of the Government such as Make in India, Digital India, Smart City Mission, Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation, Housing for All and Industrial corridors and Production-Linked Incentive Scheme aim to generate productive and sustainable employment opportunities. (Ministry of Labour & Employment. 2022)

The Government also paid attention to Technology for Ease of living and Doing Business. E-Shram Portal, Shram-suvidha Portal, NCS Portal were created to support nation-wide labour surveys. To introduce listed measures Wage Code, IR Code, Code on OSH, and Code on Social Security were adjusted.

To ensure food security for vulnerable and migrant workers 0,5 kg of free food grains per month per person were provided and approximately 80 million migrant workers were covered.

The government promoted the "One Nation One Ration Card" Scheme enabling migrant workers and their families to access PDS benefits from any fair price shop in the country (Economic Survey, 2020-21).

Direct Cash Transfer Support was also provided. As a result, 420 million individuals, including 200 million female account holders were given ex-gratia of Rs. 500 per month during April-June 2020, and cash transfer of Rs. 1000 was provided to 30 million widows and disabled beneficiaries amounting to Rs. 28.14 Billion.

Livelihood Assistance and Employment Generation programs included MGNREGS that provided significant enhancement in budgetary allocation made to meet additional demand. MGNREGS Wage Rate was revised in April 2020 to benefit

nearly 130 million families. In FY 2021-22, over 80.7 million individuals were provided with work.

The Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyan (PM-GKRA) was launched in the migrant districts of six states to create jobs for the returning migrants through building public infrastructure. PM-GKRA generated 508 million person-days of employment as of July 2021 with a total expenditure of INR 393 billion.

The Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana provided financial assistance to registered construction workers from Welfare Fund. 31 states/UTs provided cash benefits, ranging from INR 1000 to INR 6000 per month to around 20 million construction workers – Rs. 49.74 billion was disbursed.

The anti-COVID-19 pandemic measures once again proved the importance of social security to workers and the need to protect migrants and other vulnerable and disadvantaged groups of population. While India continues to focus on Atmanirbharta (general self-sufficiency) COVID-19 revealed the necessity to move towards formalizing the informal workers.

As a result of the measures to support labour market and employment, the labor force participation rate resumed its growth in 2021-2022 after the COVID-induced drop in 2020; conversely, the unemployment rate started falling after the 2020's significant increase, almost reaching the pre-COVID-19 level in 2022.

## China

A pneumonia outbreak in Wuhan (China) was registered in December 2019. (WHO, 2020b) Early in January 2020, Chinese authorities determined that it was caused by a novel coronavirus COVID-19. The government promoted "Zero Tolerance" policy against COVID-19 and imposed strict containment measures (Shangguan, Wang, 2022).

The COVID-19 short term impact on China's economy and labor market was severe. At an early stage of the epidemic the number of new jobs declined dramatically, and the pressure on total employment was high. The risk of unemployment became particularly acute. The rural-to-urban migrant workers and university graduates were among the employment groups which suffered most. Wholesale and retail, accommodation, catering and tourism were among the most affected sectors.

The government introduced a combination of policies to mitigate the consequences of the pandemic. Active financial policy was combined with securing employment and promoting consumption; prudent and moderately easy monetary policy helped maintain exports activities.

Active financial policy aimed to reduce the deficit-to-GDP ratio which rose from 2.8% in 2019 to 3.6% in 2020 and 3.2% in 2021. The fiscal revenues of the government at all levels declined by 2.6 trillion yuan in 2020 and 1.1 trillion yuan in 2021. (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2022) The government expanded procurement programmes and introduced consumption vouchers with consumption subsidies. In early 2020, the government had cut wages four times and reformed interest rates. Credit expansion and targeted support policies assured the survival of small enterprises in rural areas.

Firms were receiving assistance, export credit insurance and increasing export credit support.

To maintain employment and encourage enterprises to create more jobs a set of measures was implemented, including:

- support to workers wishing to start their own businesses;
- promoting flexible employment and new forms of employment;
- promoting the employment of university graduates;
- employment assistance to those having difficulty finding jobs;
- employment assistance to people out of poverty;
- strengthening public employment services;
- active prevention of unemployment risks.

All these measures resulted in the revival of economic growth and employment. Economic growth had gradually recovered since the second quarter of 2020, with the annual GDP reaching 101.6 trillion Yuan (\$14.7 trillion), an increase of 2.3%. (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2021) In 2021, China's GDP totaled 114.4 trillion Yuan (\$17.7 trillion), with the nominal GDP growth of 12.8% and real GDP growth of 8.1%. (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2022)

Innovation-driven development continues to gather steam, with the digital economy accounting for 38.6 % of GDP in 2020 and over 40 % in 2021.

Visible success was achieved in poverty alleviation. In 2020, 98.99 million rural residents were lifted out of poverty, and the per capita income of rural households grew by over 6.9% nationwide (Shu, D., 2022).

Yet, the labor force participation rate continues to decrease in China even though the unemployment rate began to fall. These effects could be attributed to the very strict anti-COVID-19 policies imposed by China.

## South Africa

South Africa reported its first confirmed COVID-19 case on March 5, 2020. (The National Institute for Communicable Diseases, 2020) Soon after the pandemic had hit the country, the government of South Africa designed and implemented a well-coordinated COVID-19 response framework. (South African Government, 2022a) To cushion the COVID-19 impact, it introduced social relief and economic support package, which included monetary policy and regulatory tools to manage the desired positive impact on the economy together with direct social benefits to citizens. The monetary policy included measures that were aimed at supporting the businesses and labor market:

- lowering interest rates;
- short-term loans, revolving credit facilities and bank guarantees by Industrial Funding Package to provide firms with liquidity;
- Loan guarantees for small business (less than R300 million turnover);
- Tax relief and deferrals, including Employment Tax Incentive, Skills Development Levy;
- Wage Protection through Temporary Employer/ Employee Relief scheme;

- Regulatory exemptions, e.g. Competition Act exemptions for sectors like Tourism and Retail Property;
- Funding to small businesses, including spaza shops and other businesses in the informal economy.

Direct social benefits to citizens included measures like:

- Increased amounts for those already receiving social grants from Government, e.g. Child grant for children from vulnerable and qualifying families, old-age grant for pensioners with no other source of income, disability grant etc.;
- Introduction of COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress grant: a new grant providing adults with R350 per month to cushion them from the adverse effects of the lock down. The following criteria were to be met in order to be eligible: a person must be over 18 years old; unemployed; not receiving any income or grant; not qualify for or be receiving unemployment insurance; not receiving any student financial aid from the government; and not living in government funded accommodation.

On 26 March 2020 the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF), an entity of the Department of Employment and Labour, established the Covid-19 Temporary Employer-Employee Relief Scheme (Covid-19 TERS) (Ministry of Labor and Employment, South Africa, 2020).

The Scheme was primarily formed to save jobs and ease the financial burden on businesses but most importantly, on their vulnerable workers.

COVID-19 TERS became one of the most effective monetary government interventions as it constituted 29% of the 41% stimulus package successfully disbursed by 31 March 2021. As of end of March, 2022 the UIF has disbursed R64 billion to 5,7 million workers, surpassing initial budget by R24 billion. It should be noted that a prerequisite for the successful result was a tripartite collaboration of the government with trade unions and businesses. (South African Government, 2022b)

All these interventions aimed to assist businesses that ceased operation in keeping afloat, help unemployed individuals and those who were employed but unable to work under lockdown. While implementing these measures, the government made several amendments and corrections, such as:

- Amendments to the TERS, which had been focused on UIF-registered businesses and workers and excluded informal workers and needed to be extended to the workers not registered for UIF. (Department of Employment and Labor, South Africa, 2021)
- Amendments to Social Relief of Distress grant as it had previously excluded unemployed mothers receiving Child grant, and further amendment to this grant extending its time frame.

The National Income Dynamics Study – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (NIDS-CRAM) estimates that the Social Relief of Distress grant intervention reached about 12% of South African adults who had government social grant for unemployment in 2020;

this percentage would have increased with extended group of people and extended time frame. (NIDS CRAM, 2020)

Government policies resulted in the revival of labor force participation growth. However, the rate of unemployment in South Africa remains high, which is determined by several factors, including the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and, to a large extent, slow economic growth and generally unfavourable economic situation.

## USA

The first case of COVID-19 in the US was reported on January 20, 2020. (Worldometer, 2022b) Since then, there have been 101,760,149 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 1,112,970 confirmed COVID-19 related deaths (as of December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022). Despite wide vaccination efforts that covered around 80% of the US population (CDC, 2022), COVID-19 remains an acute concern for the government.

Most experts agree in the US, the response to COVID-19 was insufficient in the most crucial time at the beginning of the pandemic; many of them argue that the weak response was caused by the historic neglect and underfunded state and local public health systems. (Weber L., et al., 2020) Some link the results of the first years of the pandemic to “social murder”, as it describes the lack of political attention to social determinants and inequities that exacerbated the pandemic. (Abbasi K., 2021) Scholars discuss the ethical side of the US response to the pandemic, assessing the effectiveness of their utilitarian. (Herron T., Manuel T., 2022)

The COVID-19 public health crisis and the resulting economic crisis have created a variety of challenges for families across the country, changing the way US citizens live and work.

The Paycheck Protection Program, part of the ongoing Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, also known as the CARES Act (March 27, 2020) is providing essential assistance for small businesses, as it covers their liquidity needs enabling them to pay up to eight weeks of payroll costs, including benefits, and meet the rental, utilities and mortgage interest payments. This program authorizes up to \$659 billion toward job retention and certain other expenses.

One of the latest efforts to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in the US was the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (March 11, 2021), also known as the COVID-19 Stimulus Package or American Rescue Plan, a US\$1.9 trillion economic stimulus bill that aims to speed up the recovery from the economic and health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing recession. (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2021).

A report made after the six months of implementation of the plan states that over 3 million jobs have been created since the American Rescue Plan was signed into law, with job creation averaging more than 765,000 over the last three months.

The American Rescue Plan includes several programs aimed at mitigating the impact of COVID-19 by providing support to families and workers, small businesses, state, local and tribal governments and industry. Programs that support the labor market include the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) program that

provides support for businesses and premium pay for essential workers, along with other assistance.

The American Rescue Plan resulted in the waiver of some federal taxes on unemployment benefits for those who lost work due to the COVID-19 crisis, as well as provision of direct relief payments by The Treasury Department, the Bureau of the Fiscal Service, and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to the qualifying individuals.

Studies, however, show that most of the primary responses to the COVID-19 pandemic were only short-term, while the economic and labour crises triggered by the pandemic are taking much longer to overcome. (W. Bartik, et al., 2020) The American pandemic-caused recession is unique owing to its special feature: it targets mostly low-wage services and retail sectors of the economy, and the young, less educated, and non-white workers who have lost work. Women, too, were disproportionately affected by the economic crises caused by COVID-19. (Groschen, 2020)

The hospitality industry was among those that suffered most, being, at the same time, one of the largest employers. In 2019, hospitality industry provided 9.5 million jobs, accounting for 2.9% GDP. (National Travel and Tourism Office, 2020) The unemployment rate in the sector peaked in 2020 with 39.3% and has been on the steady decline since. However, one of the recent studies found that economically and statistically significant declines in employment and the number of small businesses operating in the hospitality industry are associated with prior business closure policies. (Huang A., et al., 2020)

The new National COVID-19 Preparedness Plan (May 2022) (The White House, 2022) designed by the Biden administration puts a keen focus on preventing further pandemic-caused economic and educational shutdowns. Safety of the workers and continuous economic growth are seen as major priorities.

Using such indicators as labor force participation rate and unemployment rate when assessing the results of the USA policies to mitigate the labor market consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, we see that labor force participation rate has not returned to the pre-COVID-19 levels; in a similar way, after the steep rise in 2020 the unemployment rate started decreasing but is still higher than in the pre-pandemic 2019.

## **Conclusion**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a global impact on both developed and developing countries. It exposed weaknesses in healthcare systems and prompted governments to take extreme measures to save lives. The rapid development of vaccines and containment measures have led to a decrease in the number of deaths, making it one of the most successful anti-pandemic efforts.

The pandemic has also forced governments to provide support to populations and workers, especially in vulnerable groups. This labour market support led to a quick decrease in unemployment rates, which had risen significantly in 2020. Government support helped maintain labor force participation and opened up opportunities for further labor market development.

Governments adopted policies to mitigate the negative impacts of the pandemic caused by business lockdowns and border closures, primarily by providing cash benefits to workers in need. These efforts were complemented by programs to formalize the labor market and support labor mobility. Many alarmist forecasts did not come true and the labor market recovered rather quickly.

The labor market formalization and labor mobility remain the topics under discussion for the BRICS ministers of labor and employment and different actions are being proposed and agreed upon during BRICS annual ministerial meetings.

The effect of the policies undertaken by the governments was enhanced through the tripartite cooperation with trade unions and businesses.

Benefits provision and business support were complemented by a wide variety of monetary and economic measures. This variety of measures reflected the complex character of the situation faced by the labor markets all over the world.

It is always difficult to estimate the social effect of the undertaken measures; at the same time it is evident that both in BRICS countries and in the US the actions undertaken by the government had positive effect, although in some places the effect was probably lower than was needed or anticipated.

The effectiveness of anti-pandemic measures depends not only on the proper timing of their implementation but also on the alignment of these measures with the countries' long-term strategies and long-term strategic objectives in the area of labor market development. As we could see from the brief overview of governmental policies undertaken in the BRICS countries, the policies related to and complementing their long-term strategic goals were relatively more effective. We cannot make such a conclusion about the USA: the lack of long-term policy integration may have been a reason why one of the most economically developed countries found itself in the worst situation in comparison with the rest of the world.

At the same time, the labor markets of the BRICS countries and the United States, as well as other developed countries, need to find solutions to issues caused by serious structural changes. Coronavirus has become a catalyst for many changes, including those in the labor market. (Vyas, L., 2022). Some areas of employment, e.g. telecommuting or hybrid employment, have expanded significantly. The very concepts of personal and working time are now changing. There appeared demand for new skills and new education. The answers to these challenges are yet to be found.

The BRICS countries' objectives for the post COVID-19 era were outlined in the Declaration of the Eighth BRICS Labour and Employment Ministers' Meeting on July 14th, 2022 (because of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions it was a virtual meeting hosted by China). (BRICS, 2022) BRICS are planning to address labour and employment challenges of the post-COVID-19 era through green transformation, green recovery and inclusive development. They aim to provide employment services, support those affected by unemployment, and strive to achieve equitable transformation. The BRICS countries plan to focus their effort on skills development, promote remote and hybrid learning, integrate skills development policies with employment policies,

and strengthen social dialogue to protect workers' rights. They aim to promote quality work for all using human-centered approaches, through the joint efforts of the government, trade unions, and employers' organizations. The BRICS countries plan to achieve a human-centered recovery for stronger, healthier, and sustainable global development.

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