



ACCELERATION OF DIGITALISATION THROUGH COVID-19: HOW IT LEADS TO A FASTER GEOGRAPHICAL SHIFT AND CHANGE OF LOCAL LABOUR COMPOSITION

The OECD stated that “COVID-19 is a tsunami on top of an undercurrent of broader economic, social and demographic shifts that were already ongoing”. It emphasizes that the pandemic thereby will especially also accelerate digitalisation and automation: “This [acceleration] puts additional pressure on regions with a relatively high share of jobs at risk of automation, which on average already have a lower-educated workforce and are less urbanised” (OECD, 2020). However, new opportunities for these regions are seen in the rapid expansion of teleworking that may shift jobs to them.

At the same time, the fast and broad spread of teleworking during Lockdowns in urban areas, with a high density of tertiary educated workers, can lead to a loss of jobs in such urban regions. During the crisis large as well as middle size companies have learned that teleworking, especially in the form of home office, is more efficient and effective than probably thought before.

The skill-demand in the tertiary sector has a wide range. While lower-skills jobs (e.g. administrative office jobs) basically are easier to be shifted geographically to regions with lower labour costs (rural areas or other countries), it may be questioned if this is also the case for higher-skills jobs. According to the OECD the highly educated workforce up until now was being concentrated in certain urban places what again attracted further high-skilled workers and thus pushed the concentration further (cluster building). Through the detected digital opportunities during the COVID-19 crisis, it is at least thinkable that institutions such as universities and companies are more motivated to decentralise also their high-skilled human resources.

Overall, the geographical shift of jobs as well as automation have been accelerated strongly by the COVID-19 crisis. Some of the just mentioned consequences are already happening others could or could not happen. Again, others were not mentioned. However, if and how COVID-19 leads to faster and / or new structural changes and transitions in economy and thus labour is to be discussed in the forum. The following questions shall lead and support the discussion among participants:

Is a scenario of a faster geographical shift of jobs and a loss of jobs due to an acceleration of digitalisation as well as automation indeed realistic and thus taking place?

- *If yes...*
 - *...why?*
 - *...which are the most impacted areas (industries, regions)? How does the impact takes place?*
 - *...who would profit and who won't?*
 - *...what does it mean for (local / international) universities and education? More internationalisation concerning own stuff but also recruiting of students?*
 - *...what does it mean for middle and large companies?*
 - *...will there may be a countertrend towards a revival of physical presence and locality as a value (local language and customs, proximity)?*
- *If no...*
 - *...are there other changes in business and / or education/research that will take place? Which are they?*
 - *...how do this other changes impact universities (research, education) and companies (business)?*