



The importance of open borders

Edited by
Ted Urho

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Illustrations: Sebastian Dahlström
Graphic design: Maria Bussman

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European Liberal Forum EUPF
Rue d'Idalie 11-13, boîte 6, 1050 Ixelles, Brussels (BE)
info@liberalforum.eu
www.liberalforum.eu

Svenska Bildningsförbundet
Georgsgatan 27, 00101 Helsingfors (FIN)
info@bildningsforbundet.fi
www.bildningsforbundet.fi

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Foreword:

The privilege of a hassle-free border crossing

Ted Urho

Executive Manager
Think tank Agenda
Svenska
Bildningsförbundet



Being an EU-citizen is a privilege. The individual rights and freedoms we enjoy are so many and so well integrated in our daily lives, that we have started to take them for granted.

One such right is the free movement of people and goods, which is also a founding principle of the union. In the pre-pandemic world, crossing a border in the Schengen-area was very easy. So easy in fact, that most of us stopped thinking about it. It isn't until we miss something, that we realise how precious it has been to us.

This book tells the story of how Covid-19 impacted the labour market in five EU-countries. Of rotting berries in Swedish forests and of the strain on diplomatic relations between Finland and Estonia. How the service sector came to a standstill in Poland when the Ukrainians left and how show politics led to the Austrian people losing faith in their government.

In this book you will also hear the call from five European policy makers on the importance of open borders in Europe.

In Helsinki, October 2021

About the Authors



Sweden

Caspian Reh binder

Caspian Reh binder is head of Labour Market Policy at the Swedish free market think tank Timbro. He has a M.Sc. in political science from Stockholm University and has previously worked as a political advisor at the Swedish parliament.



Niels Paarup Petersen

Niels Paarup-Petersen is a Member of Parliament for the Centre Party in Sweden. He has worked on improving cross border cooperation in the Öresund Region for nearly 20 years.



Finland

Camilla Mäkinen

Camilla Mäkinen is a Doctoral Student at Hanken School of Economics. She has previously worked as Special Adviser to the Finnish Minister of Justice on economic issues.

Mats Löfström

Mats Löfström has been a member of the Finnish parliament since 2015, representing the Åland islands. He is first vice-chairman of the liberal Swedish parliamentary group and a member of the parliament's Constitutional Law Committee, Interior Committee, EU Affairs Committee, and a substitute member of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Since 2020 Löfström is also a board member and Treasurer of ELF.



Estonia

Laura Danilas

Laura Danilas has been a member of the Tartu City Council since 2017. She has a BA in aeronautical engineering from the Estonian Aviation Academy but is currently working as an advisor to the minister of social protection. She has written articles for both local and international publications and is passionate about international relations and defence policy.



Andres Sutt

Andres Sutt is Minister of Entrepreneurship and Information Technology of Estonia. He graduated from the University of Tartu in 1993 with a degree in economics and finance and has a degree in Negotiations and Leadership from Harvard Law School. He has held several positions with the Estonian Central Bank and was also the Adviser to the Executive Director of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Nordic-Baltic Constituency and Member of the Board of Directors from 2009 until 2012.





Poland

Magdalena Kaj

Magdalena M. Kaj is a political scientist by education, has worked many years in the non-governmental sector in Poland and the UK, specialising in projects on international volunteering and delivering training to youth workers on topics such as human rights, minority rights, interreligious dialogue and combating hate speech. She has been a socio-political activist for nearly 20 years.



Adam Szłapka

Adam Szłapka is a Member of Parliament and the leader of Nowoczesna, the Polish liberal party. He is the former director of the Projekt: Poland Foundation and an expert at the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland during the presidency of Bronisław Komorowski. He is a member of the Special Services Committee and Foreign Affairs Committee, President of the Group of the Future of the EU in the Sejm.

Austria

Günther Oswald

Günther Oswald works as an Economic policy advisor to the liberal Austrian party Neos and the think tank Neos Lab. Born in the Austrian state of Styria, he worked as a journalist for 20 years, primarily for the daily newspaper DER STANDARD, where he was, among other things, Managing Editor, and deputy head of Economics. Oswald studied Communication Science and Political Science at the University of Vienna.



Dominik Oberhofer

Dominik Oberhofer is the regional party leader of the liberal Neos party in the Austrian state of Tyrol. Since 2018 he has been a member of the Tyrolean Landtag, the local parliament. The hotelier also represents Neos in the Tyrolean Chamber of Commerce. The father of two sons attended the Business School of the University of Salzburg and is a partner in the 4-star Hotel Oberhofer in the Tyrolean Stubai Valley.



What is ELF?

The European Liberal Forum (ELF) is the official political foundation of the European Liberal Party, the ALDE Party. Together with 47 member organisations, we work all over Europe to bring new ideas into the political debate, to provide a platform for discussion, and to empower citizens to make their voices heard.

ELF was founded in 2007 to strengthen the liberal and democrat movement in Europe. Our work is guided by liberal ideals and a belief in the principle of freedom. We stand for a future-oriented Europe that offers opportunities for every citizen.

ELF is engaged on all political levels, from the local to the European. We bring together a diverse network of national foundations, think tanks and other experts. At the same time, we are also close to, but independent from, the ALDE Party and other Liberal actors in Europe. In this role, our forum serves as a space for an open and informed exchange of views between a wide range of different actors.

What is Svenska Bildningsförbundet (FIN)?

Svenska Bildningsförbundet (SBF) brings together the Swedish-speaking and bilingual population in Finland, promotes lively educational activities and constructive societal discussions.

SBF was founded in 1974 and promotes the understanding of the international community and the development of the European integration.

SBF organises courses, seminars, and conferences, as well as study circles and other educational activities. SBF builds networks between different interest groups that share SBF's goals. SBF's activities are divided into five fields of activities: regular educational activities and seminars; the think-tank Agenda; Liberal praktik -internship program and the Leadership Academy as well as projects conducted in cooperation with partners. All these fields operate under SBF.

Chapter 1: Sweden

Covid-19 gave us a taste of what a world with closed borders feels like, and it's not good

Caspian Reh binder



In August 2020, The Economist reported that the fruit harvest in the United Kingdom was in trouble: there were no workers. Even before Covid-19, rising incomes at home had made eastern Europeans less inclined to work in the UK, and Brexit certainly didn't make European workers feel more welcome. Then came the pandemic and added to the perils. The result: rotting fruit, high prices and soft fruit farms in despair (The Economist, 2020).

The article illustrates how reduced movement of workers can cause large costs for sectors even without travel restrictions. With restrictions, the effect is even worse. The Covid-19 pandemic has had drastic effects not

only on health, but also on the economy, trade, and migration of the countries in Europe, and movement between them.

One effect of Covid-19 has been a reduction in the movement of people – partly because of travel restrictions, and partly because of reluctance to travel during a pandemic. In a way, the Covid experience has been a trial version of a world without movement of labour. This experience has of course affected various countries and sectors differently. This chapter will focus on Sweden and more specifically the berry picking industry.

Labour migration to Sweden

Since the early 2000s, Sweden has had a fairly open border policy when it comes to migration. In 2004 and 2008, as the European Union grew with several new member states, Sweden declined to have any rules for transition, thus opening the doors for the free immigration of Europeans from the new member states. And in 2008, a new labour migration law came in place, making Sweden's labour immigration regime one of the most open among the OECD-countries. According to some scholars, even the most open (e.g., Calleman, 2015). In short, Swedish law allows anyone to get a work permit, without quotas, educational requirements, or language skills, if they have a job offer that extends for at least the minimum standard in the applicable collective agreement. A painter from India, for example, could work as a painter in Sweden provided, she was offered the minimum wage in the collective agreement for painters.

Since the liberalisation of 2008, labour immigration to Sweden has increased. Despite some instances of abuse, cheating and exploitation; most of the labour migration has been well-functioning, and the gains for society immense. In a recent study, Jonas Öhlin (2019) estimates the fiscal effect of labour immigration in one year to be 12 billion SEK (approximately 1.2 billion euros), and the GDP effect three times as large. The fiscal net effect is positive for every group, high-skilled as

well as low-skilled, even when including relatives (Voltaire & Åslund 2021; Rehbinder 2021b). Palmquist & Öhlin (2016) show that labour immigration increases the growth of companies, and Rehbinder (2021a) shows that more than 90 % of all labour immigration to Sweden is to industries with labour shortages.

Labour mobility increases GDP, trade, and tax revenue, it facilitates recruitment to occupations with labour shortages, and it lets people increase their productivity manifold by moving to countries with high productivity. The Swedish system for labour migration is, of course, not without flaws (e.g., Berg & Karlsson 2021), but the main results of the fairly open labour migration experiment has been a thorough success.

The “they took our jobs” theory

In the South Park episode “Goobacks” (season 8, episode 7) immigrants from the future come to town. As the time travellers accept work for low pay, workers in South Park become unemployed, coining the phrase: “They took our jobs!” The popular TV show is heavily satirical, but the sentiment expressed by the workers of South Park is very real. The Social Democratic prime minister of Sweden, Stefan Löfven (2018), has said: “It is unreasonable that thousands of people come to Sweden every year, doing work that unemployed in Sweden could do.” Immigrants, that is, “take our jobs”. Other people are even more straightforward: in the summer of 2021 Daniel Suhonen, head of the Social Democratic think-tank Tiden, wrote: “That ‘they come here and take our jobs’ is somewhat true ...” (Suhonen 2021).

Restrictiveness toward foreign labour has been a key part of the Swedish Social Democrats throughout their history (much has been written on this, for example Rehbinder (2019, 2020a) and Yalcin (2010) in Swedish, and Hinnfors et al. (2012), and Bucken-Knapp (2009) in English). So, in the Social Democratic Party, “they took our jobs” is canon. But how does it hold up to scrutiny?

Around 90 percent of labour migration to Sweden is directed at industries that suffer from labour shortages, while less than five percent at industries with a surplus of labour (Rehbinder 2021b). Considering this, it is impossible to support the idea that any labour migrant could “take our jobs”. This is backed up by the literature in the field. As Jennifer M. Friedberg and Jennifer Hunt (1995) write:

The popular belief that immigrants have a large adverse impact on the wages and employment opportunities of the native-born population of the receiving country is not supported by the empirical evidence [...] There is no evidence of economically significant reductions in native employment.

Their statement has not been disproven in the 25 years since the article was published. An OECD study finds no long-term effects of immigration on unemployment (Jean & Jimenes 2011) and a more recent study of immigration to European countries shows that immigration has no effect on employment levels, but that the native workforce get more qualified jobs (D’Amuri & Peri, 2014). The “Mariel Boatlift”, a mass emigration from Cuba to the US in 1980, is another example: the infected and complex academic dispute concerns whether the employment effects on native workers was very small or non-existent.

The basic reason is that immigration increases supply and demand simultaneously. We should, therefore, not expect large effects on either employment or wages. This conclusion stands theoretically as well as empirically (Smith, 2020; Rehbinder, 2018).

Sweden's Covid response

Sweden has been regarded as an outlier in its handling of Covid-19. Many of the perceived unique characteristics of Sweden’s approach in tackling Covid-19 are exaggerated: although Sweden has had a higher death rate than its Nordic neighbours, and looser restrictions than most

European countries, the actual health outcome of Sweden is that of a mainstream European country, and the restrictions are somewhat softer but not fundamentally different than other European countries.

Not even in the approach toward free movement was Sweden unique, even if it was a bit less restrictive. When many countries tried to stop immigration (and sometimes emigration) flows, Sweden held its borders open toward its neighbours, even as neighbouring countries – Norway, Denmark, Finland – closed the gates to Sweden. Sweden did however, in accordance with the Commission's recommendations, prohibit non-essential travel from the EU/EEA countries, excluding neighbouring Norway, Denmark and Finland (Government of Sweden 2021).

Borders are, however, bilateral in their composition. Sweden's emigration is Denmark's, Norway's, or Finland's immigration. It is hard to evaluate the effects of Sweden's hesitancy to restrict European immigration when the door was shut from the other side.

This brief chapter will therefore focus on the international migration of third country nationals. On March 19, 2020, the Government of Sweden decided not to allow foreign citizens to travel to Sweden. The ban was extended in several steps (Government of Sweden, 2020).

Labour immigration during Covid: The case of berry picking

Until Covid-19, approximately 20,000 work permits were issued yearly. In 2020 the number dropped by 40 percent to fewer than 14,000, compared to 23,000 the previous year. As of July 2021, the number stood at 14,000: a bounce back from 2020, but still much lower than before the pandemic (Swedish Migration Agency, 2021).

The most dramatic change was not in engineers, programmers, chefs, or cleaners. The largest drop was in berry picking. Berry picking is a big industry in Sweden: in a normal year, approximately five million kilos

of blueberries and twice that volume of lingonberries are picked and exported – i.e., not including the berries eaten in Sweden in the form of jam, juice, frozen berries or in other ways. Ninety percent of the berries are picked by guest workers from Thailand (Rehbinder 2020b).

2020 was a good berry year. Berry picking companies estimated their need for foreign workers at 7,000 people (Skoog 2020). In the early season, less than half could come. Other bioeconomy industries such as forestry were similarly hit (TT 2020).

This did not shift labour demand to the native population. Many companies tried to recruit more Swedish pickers as so-called "free pickers": you may pick berries in the forest and sell them free from all taxes, up to 12,500 SEK (approximately € 1,250) a year. Nonetheless, the Covid-19 reduction of foreign labour simply reduced the number of berries picked; the rest rotted away in the forests of Sweden. As Sylve Björkman from one of the leading berry companies, Ransäter Invest, states: "We are completely dependent on getting the Thai pickers to Sweden." (Berg, Hedström & Karlsson 2020)

Conclusion

There is no reason to believe that less international movement would lead to higher native employment. There are, however, strong reasons to believe that more international movement of labour leads to productivity gains and a stronger economy, for the natives as well as for the immigrants. Covid-19 has given us a taste of what a world with less movement of labour and people could look like, and it is not very appealing.

The Swedish berry sector is but one example, and one with a heavy exposure to world market price, high wages, and intense competition. But other sectors stand exposed as well. Many of Sweden's most productive industry companies, tech giants, and newly founded start-ups with the future ahead of them – as well as ordinary mom-and-pop

stores, restaurants, and cafés – rely on immigrant labour.

Less movement means less freedom, and as briefly shown in this chapter, less prosperity. That is a lesson emphasized by Covid-19, and one we should not forget.

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Comment:

Closing a border never solves the real problem

Niels Paarup-Petersen, MP



There are 16 kilometres of bridge and tunnel across the strait of Öresund, also known as The Sound, separating the Danish capital region of Copenhagen and the southernmost Swedish region of Skåne. But the distance has grown during the Covid-19 pandemic. Not in kilometres, but in people's minds. And in many ways, that is what really matters.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Copenhagen generally had higher levels of cases¹ than the rest of Denmark. But no limitations were imposed on movement within Denmark to or from the capital. Copenhagen also had higher levels of Covid-19 than the neighbouring region of Skåne. Limitations were however imposed on travel between Copenhagen and Skåne. Why? Because Skåne is in Sweden, another country.

One might suppose that the limits were imposed by the Swedish government to restrict Copenhageners from entering Sweden and Skåne. But it was in fact the Danish

1 <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/aa41b29149f24e20a4007a0c4e13db1d>

government which restricted travel across the border due to the high number of Covid-19 cases in Sweden, compared to Denmark.² This was true for many parts of Sweden, but in fact the opposite was true in neighbouring Skåne.

And while people in Skåne were not allowed to travel to Copenhagen, there were no restrictions on people from Copenhagen coming to Skåne.³ The hypocrisy of that did not go unnoticed in Skåne, as people lost their jobs in Denmark and simultaneously heard people speaking Danish in many malls and high streets in Skåne.

Later, the Swedish government restricted entry to the country as well.⁴ And these restrictions were not the first: since 2015 various kinds of restrictions, with negative consequences, have been in place across Öresund. The societal costs of these restrictions have been as high as 150 million euros per annum⁵ for the region during the harshest restrictions, according to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Southern Sweden. If similar restrictions were imposed on all of Europe the cost would be up to 50 billion euros for Sweden alone over ten years.⁶

The restrictions have, in addition to the economic issues, led to children with parents on both sides of the border being stopped from seeing their parents, people have lost their jobs and ambulances have been stopped at the border. Consequences that would never be accepted within a country are somehow accepted between countries. But why?

2 <https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/7429252>

3 <https://www.government.se/articles/2020/04/questions-and-answers-about-the-entry-ban-to-sweden/>

4 <https://www.schengenvisa.info.com/news/sweden-bans-travellers-from-denmark-uk-until-january-21-2021/>

5 <https://resources.mynewsdesk.com/image/upload/gfwpsqgqoplyxuinp4.pdf>

6 https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/NW_Departure_from_Schengen.pdf

The people living around the Öresund are used to have their lives, workplaces, love interests, spare time, and families on each side of the border – just as we are all used to when it comes to the border between municipalities. No one suggested closing the roads and train lines between the Swedish cities of Stockholm and Uppsala or between the Danish cities of Copenhagen and Roskilde. Not because it couldn't be done or due to epidemiological reasons: it is merely the mindset which makes national borders such easy targets.

Whilst the pandemic was the reason for minimising travel, it was not epidemiologic reasoning that led to the decision to close the border between Denmark and Sweden. It was political reasoning and the need for leading politicians to look strong and ready to act. And it is much easier to impose the negative consequences of your actions on someone who cannot vote for you.

But impairing the movement of people across borders will not just make them stop moving temporarily. If the knee-jerk response from the political system is to close borders in a crisis, then the reasonable reaction from the citizens is to stop building lives that depend on open borders.

If the people in a region such as Öresund stop having cross border lives, the knowledge-intensive industries on both sides of the border will have a harder time finding the right employees as the nearly 20,000 trans-border commuters become fewer. It will be even more difficult for families to find a good place to live and work. Young people will have fewer choices for work and education.

There is also a cultural cost of treating the other side as a threat, as someone to be held at arm's length. Negative views on the other country are increasing. Sweden is often used as a negative example in all sorts of issues in Danish politics. A visitor from the other side is more often frowned upon. I know, as an MP I get emails complaining about Danish cars in Sweden and I take part in debates with Danish politicians. The mood has changed.

As personal connections decrease, prejudice increases. The short-term political gains will deliver long-term personal, economic, and cultural losses.

The Öresund region has been used as a positive example of integration between countries for a long time. The vision was to make living and working in two neighbouring countries as easy as living in two neighbouring municipalities. But as governments have grown increasingly nationalist and inward looking, the visions have changed. Or more to the point – disappeared.

There is a great understanding among people living cross-border lives that there may arise situations when it is necessary to take drastic steps. What I and others in the Öresund Region wish for, is merely that our governments take the trans-border movement into serious consideration and consult local and regional actors – and the neighbouring country's government – before they decide to close a border.

Countries across Europe have been limiting the movement of people and goods. Brexit has brought back border restrictions. And governments across the continent are fighting against openness and the liberal foundations of the EU. But as they do so, they also fight against the future and everyday lives of many of their own citizens – most of all, the people in the border regions. Because for us a closed border does not merely part countries, it parts our lives.

Chapter 2: Finland

Covid-19 activated Finnish legislation which had been dormant since the 1940's

Camilla Mäkinen



Almost all external border crossing points in Finland have been open to some extent throughout the pandemic, allowing for some trade and other vital traffic to flow. Defining what kind of traffic should be allowed was strenuous.

How Finland reacted to the Covid-19 pandemic

Cross-border traffic volumes at the EU's external border crossing points and internal borders collapsed in 2020. Following the previous trend, traffic volumes were still rising in the beginning of 2020. In March, the situation changed completely with the introduction of restrictions on external border traffic for public health reasons and the introduction of internal border controls. It is noteworthy, however, that almost all external border crossing points in Finland have been open throughout the

pandemic, allowing some trade and other vital traffic to flow. Thus, the significant decrease in the number of border crossings at the external border does not tell the whole truth about border crossing traffic (3.9 million in 2020 compared to 16.8 million in 2019). In internal border traffic, border crossing volumes fell to about one quarter of the 2019 volume.⁷

Finland's geographical location is quite unique within the EU, since most border crossings, as well as movement of goods, are by plane and ferry rather than by land. When the pandemic hit Finland, it was thus, in theory, easy to restrict movement over national borders. The border in northern Finland towards Sweden is commonly crossed for daily business by the people living in the region. Life on the autonomous Åland Islands is similarly intertwined with Sweden, perhaps on a more weekly basis. The ferry crossing from Estonia is commonly used by the some 20,000 Estonians who commute to Finland on a weekly or monthly basis.⁸

When Covid-19 came to Finland

The first Covid-19 case in Finland was reported on January 28, 2020, as a tourist from Wuhan fell ill while on holiday in Lapland.⁹ It took almost a month before the next case appeared. On February 26, the first case of a Finnish citizen falling ill was reported. The Finnish government considered the nation's preparations in case of an epidemic to be good.¹⁰ When the virus spread in Italy at the end of February, no special measures were imposed at the airport on the returnees.¹¹

The middle of March was a waypoint in how the Finnish authorities viewed the epidemic. On March 11, the number of infections rose drastically, showcasing that the need for tougher control measures was

7 The Finnish Border Guard

8 Statistics on logistics, years 2005-2019, *Tulli*

9 Suomen ensimmäinen koronavirustartunta varmistui *Yle News*

10 Sanna Marin 27.2.2020: Koronaan varauduttu huolellisesti *verkkouutiset.fi*

11 Koronavirus leviää Euroopassa nyt Italiasta käsin, Helsinki-Vantaalla ei ole erikoistoimenpiteitä epidemia-alueelta saapuville *Helsingin Sanomat*

apparent. The main concern at this point was the adequacy of intensive care facilities.¹² On March 12, the Foreign Ministry stated that the risk of getting infected by the coronavirus had increased worldwide. It advised against travelling abroad for any reason. The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) urged people to stay out of crowds and to travel domestically only if necessary.

The Emergency Powers Act

Due to Covid-19, Finland was in a state of emergency from 17 March to 16 June 2020 and from 1 March to 27 April 2021. On March 17, 2020, the Government invoked the Emergency Powers Act for the first time since the wars in the 1940s.¹³ External borders were closed. Passenger traffic to Finland was suspended, except for returning Finnish citizens. Finnish tourists abroad were urged to return to Finland immediately. Citizens and people living in Finland were not allowed to travel abroad. Even though the borders were closed, essential transactions were allowed across the northern and western borders. Freight traffic continued as usual.¹⁴

On March 24, the government announced its intention to isolate Finland's worst epidemic area, Uusimaa, from the rest of the country. The closure of Uusimaa took effect at midnight on March 28. Police and the Defence Forces monitored the provincial borders at checkpoints. Only traffic deemed necessary was allowed through. Restricting free movement of citizens like this was unheard of in the history of Finland, much as it was for many other countries in the world. The lockdown of Uusimaa coincided with the Easter holidays, when many travel within the country.¹⁵

12 Taistelu tuntematonta vastaan – Näin hallitus sulki Suomen seitsemässä päivässä *Yle Uutiset*

13 Pääministeri Marinin puhe eduskunnassa 17.3.2020 *Valtioneuvosto*

14 Tässä ovat kaikki hallituksen poikkeukselliset toimet koronaviruksen hillitsemiseksi – vaikuttavat lähes jokaisen kansalaisen arkeen *Helsingin Sanomat*

15 Liikkumisrajoitukset Uudellemaalle voimaan 28. maaliskuuta 2020. *Valtioneuvosto*

The ever-changing rules

From the beginning of the pandemic the Finnish travel restrictions were based on the number of infections per 100,000 inhabitants in a timespan of two weeks in each country. Throughout almost the entire pandemic the situation has been considerably worse in our closest neighbouring countries, Sweden, and Estonia, compared to Finland. Drawing the line at a relatively low incidence number naturally caused something of a diplomatic rift.

At the end of June 2020, the government decided to allow travel to those Schengen countries where the pandemic situation was good. These included countries with less than eight infections per 100,000 inhabitants within 14 days.¹⁶ On August 26, the THL introduced what they called the stop-light model, in which countries were divided into three groups: green, yellow and red.¹⁷

From September 19, 2020, the government allowed free entry from countries with fewer than 25 infections per 100,000 inhabitants in two weeks. People travelling from Sweden, Norway and Germany, examples of "green" countries, were now allowed to come to Finland. In the beginning of October, the Government went back to tightening travel recommendations. For example, Sweden returned to a "yellow" status where travel was not recommended and if arriving from Sweden you were recommended voluntary quarantine.¹⁸

During the autumn of 2020 there was some going back and forth with travel restrictions, creating uncertainty. The officials were however quick

16 Hallitus linjasi neuvottelussaan sisäraja- ja matkustusrajoituksista. *Valtioneuvosto*

17 Liikennevalomalli matkustamisen koronariskin arviointiin - Infektioaudit ja rokotukset - THL *Terveystieteen ja hyvinvoinnin laitos*

18 "Normaali kanssakäyminen Ruotsin kanssa voi alkaa" – hallitus lievensi matkustusrajoituksia, raja-arvon 25 ylittävistä maista vaaditaan negatiivinen testituloksia *Helsingin Sanomat*

to react when the situation abroad changed rapidly. In December 2020 Finland suspended flights from Britain because a new, rapidly spreading form of coronavirus had begun to infect people there.¹⁹ At the end of January 2021 the Government decided on a 30-day travel restriction to prevent the spread of coronavirus variants. Only the most necessary business travel and travel to visit relatives was allowed. Testing at all border crossing points increased.

When making the lists - who is essential?

As noted, almost all external border crossing points into Finland have been open to some extent, allowing trade and other vital traffic to flow. Determining who is considered a vital person to be allowed an exemption has caused some strain during the various phases of restrictions. One of the most public examples has been related to the labour force from the Baltic countries, who frequently commute to Finland, often to work in construction. These workers were not deemed essential. The second example that surfaced almost immediately when the restrictions were put in force were seasonal berry pickers. The vast majority of both cultivated and wild berries are picked during a quite short season by berry pickers from Thailand, Myanmar, and Ukraine. Some berry pickers were granted exemptions, enabling the berry industry to work through the season.²⁰

A rather extreme example of restricting movement of labour force can be found within the healthcare sector. Several of the doctors working on the Åland Islands, an autonomous Swedish-speaking region of Finland, commute from Sweden. In April of 2020 the Government concluded that the restrictions for Swedes at that time included medical personnel, leaving the Åland Islands with considerably fewer doctors. The Government instructed the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to ensure that the operation of Åland's Hospital was secured

in collaboration with the Åland Provincial Government. The needed doctors were sent from mainland Finland to Åland, ensuring that the staff who went had sufficient knowledge of Swedish.²¹ Åland is an autonomous region, and its only official language is Swedish, as compared to Finnish and Swedish on the Finnish mainland.

The freight traffic and ferries

Freight transport has run relatively well, but disruptions in global trade have delayed certain freight volumes. The continuity of freight traffic was ensured by the loss-making compensation instrument maintained by the National Emergency Supply Agency to secure critical sea freight. The temporary abolition of the seaway toll is seen as an important way to facilitate merchant shipping and ensure the functioning of maritime transport, as well as the competitiveness of the export industry in a changed operating environment.²²

The value of exported goods from Finland decreased by 11.9 per cent in 2020. The value of exports amounted to 57.3 billion euros. The value of imports dropped by 9.9 per cent. The value of imports of goods amounted to 59.4 billion euros.²³

Conclusions

The Finnish example of strict border control and restrictions has kept the spreading of the virus under relative control, prioritizing the health of the citizens. The long-term effect of both the pandemic itself and Finland's restrictions, on border openness, diplomatic ties, mobility and not least the economy is yet to be determined. If there is a lesson to be learned, it is that European collaboration and facilitation of labour

19 Ison-Britannian lentojen keskeytyminen. *Valtioneuvosto*

20 Ulkomaalaisten luonnonmarjanpöimijöiden turvallinen maahantulo pöimintakaudelle 2020. *TEM-UM*

21 Regeringen fastställde riktlinjer för skärpningar i villkoren för gränstrafiken mot Sverige och Norge – Ålands sjukvård tryggas. *Valtioneuvosto*

22 Huoltovarmuusneuvoston tarkastelu korona-kriisin vaikutuksista. *Huoltovarmuuskeskus*

23 *The Finnish Customs*, press release 8.2.2021

and goods between borders affect the daily life of all Europeans. The importance and significance of open borders and the mobility that comes with it is not to be underestimated or taken for granted.

Comment:

In case of emergency, keep your neighbours informed

The Finnish government effectively decided to shut the borders in March 2020. Very few people raised questions whether a more middle-of-the-road policy could have yielded the same results, instead of implementing a very strict border policy. This created problems for persons who, for family or work reasons, must regularly cross a national border in the same everyday way as commuting between two cities in the same country.

Mats Löfström, MP

I have understood that no advance information was offered to the Estonian government or authorities. The Swedish government learned about the Finnish plans through bilateral discussions on other matters.

The decision to introduce strict border controls, with few exceptions, was nevertheless made very quickly and with limited or no consultations with neighbouring countries. Finnish border restrictions can only be introduced to apply to foreigners.

According to the Finnish constitution,²⁴ all Finnish citizens have the right to leave and return to Finland at any time. They can of course be subject to health controls and quarantine but cannot be denied entry.

Being afraid of not being able to stop the flow of people completely, the Finnish Government asked the Transport and Communications Agency (Traficom) if they could make a strict recommendation to the passenger ferry companies that they should stop selling passenger tickets altogether, including to Finnish citizens returning home.

Battered by the economic implications from the pandemic, the shipping companies had no other option but to adhere to the recommendation. The enforcement of the recommendation created bizarre problems. During the pandemic I was contacted by one of my constituents, a man who was participating in a medical trial by a university hospital in Sweden. He was unable to book a passenger ticket to go to Sweden and pick up his medicine when he had run out of it. The medicine isn't yet approved outside of Sweden and could therefore not be sent by mail because it would count as narcotics smuggling. For the same reason, the captains of the passenger ferries had to refuse to take the medicine onboard. The man was too ill to travel by plane, which would have been allowed, and his condition deteriorated quickly without the medicine. This specific case was solved after a phone call to the head of the Transport Agency and the Minister of Transport. The man was then able to receive a waiver which allowed him to book a ferry ticket and to have his daughter drive him to the hospital in Sweden to pick up the medicine.

Border communities, often far from the capitals, were impacted much more by the restrictions than inland cities. Restrictions could have caused situations that were more dangerous than the spread of the

coronavirus itself. The Åland Islands, geographically closer to Sweden than Finland, have many people working or studying in one country and living in the other. For example, 25 percent of the doctors in the Åland hospital live in Sweden and commute to Åland. The pilots flying the ambulance helicopter do the same. When the travel ban was implemented, the pilots flying the ambulance helicopter were at first not exempt from it.²⁵ They received exemption only after active lobbying all the way to the Prime Minister's Office. It had to be explained how dangerous it would be if no pilots could cross the border and fly the ambulance helicopter.

While the pilots got an exemption, the doctors and other health care personnel didn't. If a handful of Swedish doctors hadn't stayed at the hospital for several months in a row and if doctors from the Turku hospital wouldn't have volunteered to go to Åland, the situation could have become dangerous. People have other health problems besides Covid, even during a pandemic. This fact seemed to be overlooked at the time. There are also many other critical groups who need to travel, such as workers at Swedish nuclear power plants who live in Finland.

Fortunately, these restrictions were rolled back quite quickly and replaced by more targeted restrictions. However, poor communication with limited or no prior notice continued between neighbouring countries. This was also the case when Sweden introduced their own travel restrictions with no heads-up and only a few exemptions. It led to other unbelievable examples, such as making it difficult for single moms to pick up their child from an ex-partner living on the other side of the border, without showing a negative PCR test, which costs 300 euro, every time.

The cooperation, or lack thereof, with our neighbouring countries during the pandemic resembled watching a car crash in slow motion. Trust must now be rebuilt, and lessons learned. I have three remarks to be considered for the next time we face similar challenges:

24 Ministry of Justice, Finland (finlex.fi) Finnish citizens shall not be prevented from entering Finland or deported or extradited or transferred from Finland to another country against their will.

25 Nya begränsningar i gränsövergång - Inrikesministeriet (intermin.fi)

1. Communication with neighbours.

Pick up the phone and talk with your neighbour about what you are planning to do. All countries have every right to take own sovereign decisions, but not informing each other breaks trust.

2. Coordination with partners.

Try to coordinate with your neighbour. Even if you choose different approaches, there should be room for at least some coordination. It is important to limit the most negative repercussions on people who must travel across the border for important family or work reasons.

3. Know your country.

Learn about your own country. Our countries are bigger than the capital regions. Introducing blanket bans on travel had severe implications on border regions far away from the capitals. Our ministries and authorities must learn that different parts of the country have different needs and realities. Tailor-made solutions are needed to find practical solutions without jeopardizing the nationwide strategy. Talking, involving and being open to practical suggestions from border regions would have spared many people a lot of agony during the pandemic.

Chapter 3: Estonia

Diplomatic implications caused by Covid-19

Laura Danilas



The beginning of last year was marked by the outbreak of the worldwide pandemic, forcing governments around the globe to take restrictive measures. To ensure social distancing, many countries closed their borders, issued travel bans and entered states of emergency or even full lockdowns, so that neither people nor goods could travel. As an outcome, the health crisis strongly affected our economic life and labour market. Rapidly imposed restrictions and the geographical isolation of Estonia helped to control further spread of the virus.

The importance of open borders for Estonia became apparent as a result of the two following issues: a migrating labour force and agriculture.

Estonian labour in Finland

The biggest problem for Estonia in terms of labour occurred with Finland. According to official statistics, more than 50,000 Estonian citizens live in Finland while an estimated 20,000 Estonians commute to work in

Finland.²⁶ On March 22, the Finnish government's crisis committee decided to ban work-based commuting from Estonia. The decision concerned everyone whose permanent residence was registered in Estonia, but whose place of employment was in Finland. Thus, people had to choose whether they wanted to continue working in Finland or return to Estonia.²⁷

On the one hand, the pandemic strongly affected people's mental health. Estonians who were used to working in Finland and travelling back home during weekends were forced to decide whether they would stay in Estonia or Finland, as they could no longer travel back and forth. Most Estonians working in Finland chose to make money, sacrificing their family life. Restricting labour migration made them desperate and much lonelier.²⁸ Thousands of Estonians couldn't go home, and thousands of children didn't see their parents. The Estonian Embassy had worked hard to restore migration since the start of the pandemic, but there were no tangible results due to the reluctance of Finland. Estonians were only allowed to travel to Finland and back by plane.²⁹ The situation wasn't resolved until July this year, more than a year after the pandemic started.

On the other hand, the situation also strongly affected our diplomatic relations. Estonia and Finland have had a strong relationship for years. The two countries have always supported each other, but when the pandemic struck, the Estonians didn't feel that anymore. It was one of the toughest moments in Estonian-Finnish relations in recent decades. As people from

26 <https://arileht.delfi.ee/artikkel/93719159/soomes-tootavad-eestlased-kirjeldavad-meeleheidet-mida-toorande-piiramine-on-toonud-inimesed-on-palju-uksildasemad>

27 <https://www.err.ee/1066641/soome-keelab-puhapaeva-sudaoost-pendelrande-eestist>

28 <https://arileht.delfi.ee/artikkel/93719159/soomes-tootavad-eestlased-kirjeldavad-meeleheidet-mida-toorande-piiramine-on-toonud-inimesed-on-palju-uksildasemad>

29 <https://news.err.ee/1608238632/ambassador-to-finland-labor-migration-situation-wrong-unfair-and-tragic>

Scandinavia were allowed to enter Finland, the Estonians still waited for measures to be alleviated. Kristi Raik, Director of the Estonian Foreign Policy Institute for Defence and Security, wrote that during the Covid-19 crisis, the government of Estonia's northern neighbour, Finland, based its decisions on national interest and looking after its own. In addition, she argued, Finland is likely to act in the same way in a future crisis, meaning Estonia should not get its hopes up on that front.³⁰

Many Estonians felt disappointed by Finland's actions³¹ and this situation showed us how fragile relations of even very close neighbours can become during a crisis.

Ukrainian labour in Estonia

Another important issue that emerged was one concerning the agricultural sector. As the farming season was starting, agricultural entrepreneurs became the most critical opponents of the restrictions. Ukrainians account for the largest group of labour migrants in Estonia.³² During the pandemic, they were also not allowed to travel to Estonia. But cows needed milking and agricultural work needed to be done, therefore, many Estonian businesses needed helping hands from abroad.³³ The government in office at the time of the pandemic included ministers from the Estonian far-right party EKRE, who claimed that business models depending on cheap migrant labour were outdated.³⁴ Although the European Commission encourages member states to treat seasonal workers as essential workers, who should be allowed to travel,³⁵ Estonia kept its borders closed. The pandemic was an excellent opportunity for EKRE to set the agenda for more restrictive labour migration policy. The farmers accused politicians of endangering the sustainability of domestic

agriculture and issued an open appeal to the former Estonian Minister of Rural Affairs, Arvo Aller, to alleviate the shortage of seasonal workers.³⁶

Since there were no regular flights between Ukraine and Estonia, and travel between the countries was almost impossible, a charter flight was organised by the Estonian Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce. This was done at the request of Estonian agricultural companies, who needed additional workers to be able to come to Estonia. The 170 passengers mainly included people heading to work in animal husbandry and horticulture, but also other sectors.³⁷ The flight didn't take place until July 6, whereas the Ukrainians usually come to Estonia earlier in the spring.³⁸ The situation marked the importance of cooperation between various institutions, as this flight was realized in collaboration with the Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce, the Police and Border Guard Board, the Tax and Customs Board and other authorities.

Last year 60 percent of strawberries were not harvested due to the lack of migrant workers. This year, hopefully, the government will support rather than restrict Ukrainian labour migration, so that farmers, with the help of the Ukrainians, will be able to cope again in the field as well as in the barn.³⁹

30 <https://news.err.ee/1106419/opinion-covid-19-crisis-brought-new-realism-to-estonian-finnish-relations>

31 <https://news.err.ee/1608243546/kristi-raik-covid-showed-that-states-can-be-very-egotistical>

32 <https://www.unian.info/society/10796132-ukrainians-account-for-largest-group-of-labor-migrants-in-estonia-local-media.html>

33 <https://news.err.ee/1115193/workers-arriving-from-ukraine-to-be-tested-for-coronavirus>

34 <https://www.aripaev.ee/uudised/2020/05/16/helme-valistoojoust-see-pidu-lopeb-ara>

35 [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020XC0330\(03\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020XC0330(03))

36 <https://epkk.ee/pollumehed-maaeluminister-arvo-aller-tulge-kohe-tagasi/>

37 <https://news.err.ee/1115193/workers-arriving-from-ukraine-to-be-tested-for-coronavirus>

38 <https://arileht.delfi.ee/artikkel/90505649/fotod-ja-video-ukraina-toolised-saabusid-eestisse?>

39 <https://maaleht.delfi.ee/artikkel/93059913/teenin-kolm-neli-korda-rohkem-kui-ukrainas-3000-voortoolist-paastab-eesti-pollundust-segadust-on-siiski-silmini>

Citizenship	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	Total
Azerbaijan	1	1	1					3
Australia						1		1
Bangladesh	1				2	28		31
Egypt	1	2					1	4
Philippines	1	1	1					3
Georgia	1					1	4	6
India	1	3	4			1		9
Kazakhstan	3	1			13			17
Kyrgyzstan		3						3
Mexico	2							2
Moldova	7	29	10	6	2	8	30	92
Undefined			1		2		1	4
Nigeria			1					1
Pakistan	1	2						3
Peru							1	1
Tajikistan				1		3		4
Tunisia			1					1
Turkey		1						1
Turkmenistan							2	2
Uganda			1					1
Ukraine	252	314	376	152	225	380	359	2058

Citizenship	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	Total
Uzbekistan		2		2	3	8	5	20
Belarus	3	1	2		2	5	1	14
Russia	2	5	3	1	2	2	4	19
Total	276	365	401	162	251	437	408	2300

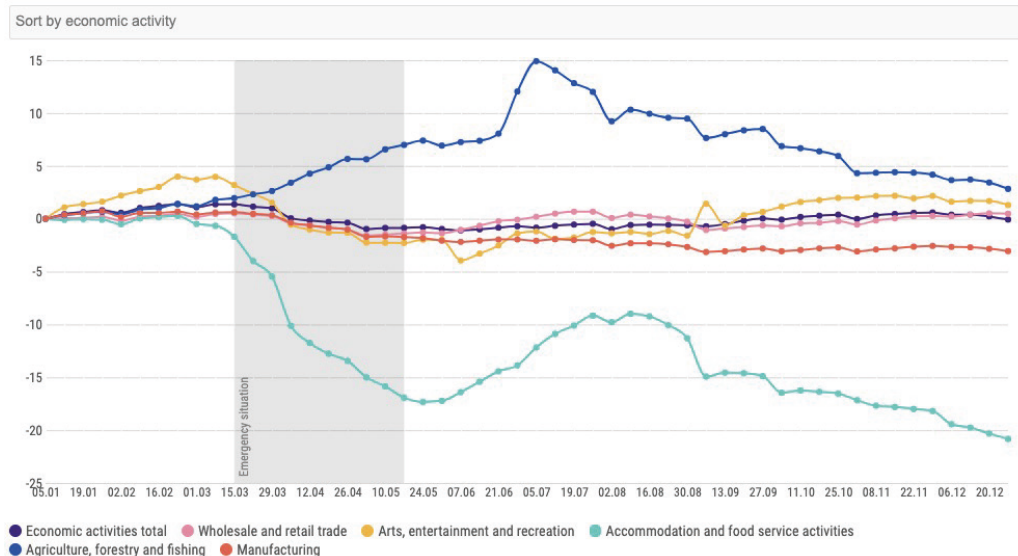
Lessons learned

The Estonian case demonstrates that while the crisis impeded labour migration in 2020, its long-term impact is lessened by the fact that the crisis did not affect all sectors similarly. Luckily, sectors where migrant labour is typical in Eastern Europe, e.g., construction, industry, or farming, were not negatively affected as shown in the graph below.

Graph 1. Decisions on registration of short-term employment by nationality if the type of employment was "seasonal."

Reference: Estonian Police and Border Guard

Relative change compared to 5 January 2020 (%)



Graph 2. Change in number of employment relationships by economic activity, 2020

Reference: Statistics Estonia, Employment Register

https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/2724351/?utm_source=showcase&utm_campaign=visualisation/2724351

The situation affirmed that open borders is a necessity for the economy of the entire European Union. We have already seen some of the consequences caused by the pandemic, but the long-term effects are yet to appear. Some sources even predict that Covid impacts could continue to be felt throughout the next decade. What is sure, however, is that Estonia is much better prepared now and will continue to draw lessons from the crisis to be even more prepared in the future.

Comment:

Looking to the future: A liberal world order can emerge after Covid-19

The Covid crisis has put the resilience of our citizens, societies, and economies to the test. It has accelerated mega-trends such as de-globalisation, digitalisation, and green transition, while amplifying the rivalry between the liberal world order and the state capitalism.

Andres Sutt, Minister of Entrepreneurship and Information Technology



It is in this context that Estonia found itself about a year and a half ago. We were all ill-equipped to handle the chaos brought by the complete standstill of goods and people. As one elderly lady wisely noted, we were under wartime conditions, just without any physical damage. Covid-19 came with an enormous strain on the medical system and a toll of human life.

A stark reminder

A complete de facto collapse of the Schengen border-less area was a stark reminder of how important the core European values of free movement of people, goods and services are. Many families in Estonia felt directly and painfully what it means when the commute

between Estonia and Finland no longer works. I'm confident, though, that with vaccines and the EU Covid certificate, people will be free to commute and travel again. We need to learn to live with the virus.

Equally, it demonstrated how critically important digital public and private services are. Estonia is well known for having a broad digital society, and it is something that helped us in the pandemic. Remote work is here to stay, and some form of distance learning is good for education, therefore ensuring high speed internet connectivity is our priority.

Estonia is open for business

With a new liberal and forward-looking government in place again, Estonia is open for business and talents are welcome. We see digitalisation, green transition, and innovation as an opportunity. The economy has already rebounded strongly, surpassing the 2019 level and the government's support measures have helped to mitigate the negative impact on hospitality business. The repositioning of global supply and value chains closer to home and an ample availability of finance, offers new opportunities to grow business in Estonia. This gives me good reason to be optimistic about the future, even though the path forward will be challenging.

Most importantly, it is our responsibility as political leaders and liberals to make sure the liberal world order emerges from the crisis stronger than when we entered it. It is our job to reinstate the rules that support inclusive globalisation for the benefit of all.

Chapter 4: Poland

Keep people moving, for everyone's benefit

Magdalena Kaj



Freedom of movement, especially the freedom of the work force to move around the continent, has always been one of most important foundations of the European Union. In the period marking Poland's presence in the EU, we benefited from this in two ways. Firstly, we were finally able to move around member states in search of the perfect place to work and live. Secondly, our country started attracting labour from abroad. The celebration of this new and pleasant circumstance of solid economic growth has been rather suddenly disrupted, due to Covid-19.

Ukrainians in the Polish labour market: facts and fiction

For the past few years, Poland has observed a rapidly growing number of labour migrants from the eastern border, who target the country as their "go-to" place.

This is especially true regarding Ukrainian citizens. According to the Centre for Foreigners, more than 265,000 Ukrainians

held valid work permits in Poland (as of May 2021).⁴⁰ These Ukrainian citizens have been granted permission to stay in the country.

Most of the Ukrainian expat population consists of people under 40 who are actively seeking better career opportunities abroad.

It's worth noting that Poland is not just a transit stop for most of the Ukrainian workers. On the contrary, they wish to settle and stay in Poland for a longer period. Data gathered by the Centre for Foreigners shows that around 80% of Ukrainians hold temporary residence permits,⁴¹ which allows them to live and work in Poland for a period of no more than three years. The main reason for applying for a permit is related to having a job in Poland – this applies to roughly 73% of the applications.

The growing number of workers coming to Poland from Ukraine has resulted in the fact that the Polish labour market is heavily dependent on the Ukrainian workforce. More so, as the Ukrainian labour force is not only taking jobs in the service sector, most stereotypically in the role of cleaners, service staff or drivers, but also successfully competing with Poles and being hired by international corporations, financial institutions, and IT companies. The migrating labour force arriving in Poland from the eastern border is usually well-educated and well trained, speaking more languages than their average Polish counterparts. Most Ukrainians are also fluent both in Ukrainian and Russian, as their mother tongues and English, which is taught in school, while also mastering Polish during their stay here.

Forecasts related to the changing landscape of the labour market in the United Kingdom, after Brexit comes into full effect, predict that a

⁴⁰ Prawie pół miliona obcokrajowców w Polsce z ważnymi zezwoleniami na pobyt, money.pl, May 14th, 2021

⁴¹ Information posted on the Centre for Foreigners webpage: <https://udsc.gov.pl/obywatele-ukrainy-w-polsce-250-tys-waznych-kart-pobytu/>

significant number of Poles who relocated there will return to Poland. The UK reported around 650,000 workers losing their jobs because of the pandemic.⁴² When we add the new situation of the UK no longer being part of the European Union, the uncertainty will urge many Poles to come back. This will most definitely bring more competitiveness to the labour market, especially within the youngest group of workers. As it is also mainly the youngest generation of Ukrainians who are looking for better work opportunities in Poland, it is not clearly foreseeable which effect it will have on the unemployment rate in Poland.

Impact of the pandemic on the labour market in Poland

As the pandemic broke out and hit Poland in full effect around March 2020, it was impossible to say much about it: how long it would last, how dangerous the situation was or what could or couldn't be done. On a day-to-day basis, companies had to either make hard decisions or be obliged to shut down their offices indefinitely and send their employees home, advising them to swiftly switch to remote working mode.

Working from home was one of the biggest trends of 2020, having equally both advocates and opponents. Now, nearly a year and a half into the global pandemic, working from home or hybrid working models (combining working from home and from the office) are here to stay. Saying this, we must understand that hybrid working model has become a worldwide trend and employees see benefits of flexible working model. Obviously, this also applies to Polish labour market. In the annual Work Trend Index, a global survey carried out by Microsoft, 73% of employees want to keep flexible remote working options.⁴³

However, not all jobs can be handled from the comfort of one's own room or sofa. The sectors which were harmed the most were the

ones who offer various services to customers: restaurants, private transportation, office cleaning, cinemas, theatres, and beauty services. Their operations were abruptly stopped, without warning or information on when the business would be able to re-open. As mentioned before, the Polish labour market, especially the services sectors, has shifted towards utilizing foreign labour, depending heavily on Ukrainian workers.

Once the pandemic hit with full force, it was the service sector and its employees who were impacted the most, and not in a positive way. We can all recall the images of big cities being completely empty, with everyone staying at home, full of uncertainty of what was to come. And one began to wonder about the foreign labour force, working predominantly in the shut-down sectors, most probably employed on contracts without social benefits or health insurance. What were they going to do? Were they going to leave Poland and go back to their homelands, or would they decide to weather the crisis and hope the situation would return to what we used to call "normal"?

There are still images of people crying at borders crossing between Poland and Ukraine. Ukrainians working in Poland were trying to go back to their families, as they had lost their jobs in a split second and were hurrying to reach their destination before the borders closed. The question arises: Has Poland experienced an exodus of Ukrainian workers?

According to the available data, this is not really the case. In January 2020, prior to the pandemic, there were some 1.27 million Ukrainians in Poland.⁴⁴ March and April of 2020, the first two months of the lockdown, brought uncertainty as to what would happen next. With many workplaces shut down until further notice, the number of Ukrainian workers did decrease to 1.17 million in March 2020 and 1.1

⁴² Wplyw-pandemii-covid-19-na-rynek-pracy-w-polsce, optihuman.com, April 2021

⁴³ Information posted on Microsoft webpage: <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/hybrid-work>

⁴⁴ M. Chtopaś, Ilu Ukraińców jest w Polsce? Ilu wyjechało w pandemii? Mamy wiarygodne dane, Newsweek Polska, January 27th, 2021

million in April 2020. According to a rough estimate, only 15% of the Ukrainian population in Poland decided to return to their homeland. And again, starting from May 2020, the number either remained steady or slowly rose to end up with 1.3 million Ukrainians living and working in Poland.

Even though the numbers remain impressive, the sector which suffered the most from the absence of seasonal workers was agriculture. Yet again, this part of the economy is heavily reliant on foreign workforce, predominantly from Ukraine and Belarus. On average, about 59,000 Ukrainians come to Poland during the summer to harvest fruits and vegetables.⁴⁵ It has been calculated that there was a shortage of around 50,000 seasonal workers in the summer of 2020. Since this kind of job, due to conditions and salaries, is no longer attractive to Polish workers (who prefer to pick fruit and berries in Western Europe and earn more money in euros) and because the demand for workforce couldn't be satisfied, there has been a significant increase in prices.

Regardless of whether the borders are open or closed, the Ukrainians are staying in Poland

The initial weeks and months of the Covid-19 pandemic brought uncertainty as to what would happen next and how the economy will be impacted in the short and long-term. Even though we still haven't fully left the pandemic behind, we can conclude that Poland remains an attractive destination for workers especially from Ukraine. And it seems that the attraction is mutual, as the Polish market is not sustainable enough to perform and deliver at the expected level without the help of migrant workers.

There is no question that Covid-19 has suspended the freedom of movement for a period and the consequences are still being felt.

However, with the help and support of the Ukrainian workforce, the Polish labour market has remained at a relatively stable level. Thus, the Ukrainians showed their value to economy. For them, it was necessary to answer a crucial question: do we leave now, without knowing when we will be able to return, or do we stay and keep our jobs in Poland?

It seems the majority chose the latter. Let's hope this was the one and only time that we were faced with such a choice.

⁴⁵ K. Pruszkiewicz, Jak tak dalej pójdzie, nie będzie co jeść. Na polach i w sadach nie ma komu pracować, Newsweek Polska, May 8th, 2020

Comment:

Poland needs Ukrainians, and vice versa

Adam Szłapka, MP

The Polish population is ageing at an ever-increasing rate. Despite the benefits resulting from membership in the European Union – open borders, free movement of goods and people – the Polish economy needs a positive migration balance. Given the political unrest beyond the eastern borders of the country, and due to the general tendency of people to migrate from eastern European countries to the west, this migration is a natural occurrence and does not seem likely to disappear in the coming years. Therefore, the Polish legislators face a challenge of adapting the laws in such a way as to encourage migrants from outside the EU countries to reside legally and permanently in the country, to take up employment here, and – finally – to ensure migrants' safety, stability, and acceptance by Polish citizens.

The phenomenon in question concerns Ukrainian citizens. It is worth quoting in this context a report by the Stefan Batory Foundation, which states that Poland, which is struggling with deficiencies in the labour market, needs Ukrainian migration, while

Ukraine needs migration to Poland to limit the negative effects of the economic and social crisis caused by the Russian aggression and the incomplete transformation. The report says:

*Both sides should appreciate the importance of this migration wave and try to maximize the gains from it. Despite cultural and linguistic proximity, Ukrainian citizens need assistance in integrating in Poland, including legal or language assistance, clear rules of residence and employment, and possibilities of family reunion. Without this assistance, they often fall prey to dishonest intermediaries, and their human capital is exploited. Undoubtedly, a key role is played by the public debate, in which the message driven by negative historical stereotypes should be reduced.*⁴⁶

Three paths of action

Actions taken to adapt national law in this area should be based on three pillars.

The first is the simplification of migration, **the reduction of bureaucracy** to the minimum necessary, and a kind of opening of borders to the East.

The second is **the adaptation of the state and local governments to the needs of migrants**, i.e., all initiatives increasing the presence of languages of the main groups of migrants in the public sphere, including in public offices, as well as the adaptation of education to the teaching of children from Ukrainian families, etc.

The third is **the education of Poles**, thanks to which it will be possible to reduce acts of aggression and hatred on national and cultural grounds,

46 <https://www.batory.org.pl/upload/files/Programy%20operacyjne/Forum%20Idei/Najnowsza%20migracja%20z%20Ukrainy.pdf>

which currently seem to be on the rise and to support the building of an open society.

The efforts of the first pillar should enable free movement of labour with minimum formalities for citizens of selected non-EU countries. This can be achieved by the liberalization of visa policies or by the extension of the maximum period of permissible employment based on declarations.

Second-pillar measures should lead to a situation in which short and medium-term circular migration will result in the permanent settlement of migrants on the territory of the Republic of Poland. According to Eurostat, in 2019, more than half (55 percent) of the first-time residence permits issued in EU countries to non-EU nationals for the purpose of taking up employment concerned Ukrainian citizens. As many as 83.6 percent of Ukrainians working legally in the EU work in Poland.

Therefore, it is crucial to promote legal employment, including the social and health insurance system of migrants.

The necessity of education and housing

In the largest cities and border regions, emphasis should be placed on the ability to speak Ukrainian and Russian in all institutions of the state administration and local governments. In the long term, culture and education should also become accessible to persons who do not yet speak Polish to an extent that would allow them to benefit from the aforementioned. It should be in the interest of local governments to enable migrants to settle in their territories, which in turn may necessitate the development of new housing solutions.

The activities of the third pillar include broadly understood education in schools, but also the media and the public space in general. It should be emphasized that educational and social campaigns should include not

only the youngest but also the adults.⁴⁷ Activities in this area should be efficiently organized in cooperation with NGOs that focus on specific national minorities and migrant groups.

There is no doubt that all activities at the national level should be designed and implemented in the spirit of respect for European values and the basic principles of the EU. Poland needs to change its strategy and legislation on the admission of migrants, considering the community context and the network of global dependencies that shapes the EU.

47 The majority of Poles still believe that the government should limit the number of foreigners working in Poland. https://cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2020/K_005_20.PDF

Chapter 5: Austria

Provincial solutions to a global problem

Günther Oswald



1. The overestimation of nation-states

At the beginning of the pandemic in Austria, the greatest possible misjudgement was made. In comparison to the new coronavirus, influenza was the "priority topic", said Health Minister Rudolf Anschober⁴⁸ at the end of January 2020 on the side-lines of a government meeting. He had only been sworn in a few weeks earlier and is part of the first Green ministerial team in the history of Austria.

The misjudgement is indicative of the first phase of the pandemic. The drama was massively underestimated, not only by the Austrian minister. As was later learned from secret Brussels documents, at a meeting on January 31, 2020, the European health ministers refused to let the EU Commission help them with the procurement of protective masks, test kits, and ventilators. All states let Brussels know that they were adequately prepared – including Austria.⁴⁹

The Commissioner for Crisis Management, Janez Lenarčič, could not offer more than his help,

⁴⁸ <https://www.diepresse.com/5760389/turkis-grun-uberlegt-grippe-impfpflicht-fur-gesundheitsberufe>

⁴⁹ <https://www.diepresse.com/5795063/corona-lehnten-regierungen-eu-hilfe-ab>

as he was unprepared to manage a crisis like the pandemic. That is what the member states wanted in the Lisbon Treaty. Health policy is largely a national competence – and nationalistic approaches would continue to shape pandemic management in Austria in the coming months.

The Italians were the first to suffer. After a rapid increase in the number of infections in the northern Italian region of Lombardy, there was a lack of protective equipment and testing facilities, and many doctors became infected. The first offers of help did not come from neighbouring EU countries such as Austria, but Russia, China, and Cuba. This gave the impression that the European Union had some internal difficulties in tackling the crisis. By now it was clear, "that not only Italy is insufficiently prepared, but the other EU states are just as unprepared," stated Commissioner Lenarčič.⁵⁰

Learning: In the event of a pandemic, better coordination between Brussels and the nation-states is needed. This was later also confirmed when the vaccine was procured.

2. A Tyrolean village becomes world-famous

In Austria, one name stands out when it comes to one's own overestimation and the provincial view of a global problem: Ischgl. The small Tyrolean community on the border with Switzerland ensured wide spreading of the virus – to Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Germany, and other European countries. Above all, the Après-Ski-Bar Kitzloch gained international fame. The fact that Ischgl became the first coronavirus hotspot in Austria is not surprising, as it is a classic tourist community with thousands of new ski vacationers arriving and departing every week.

However, the way domestic politicians dealt with the outbreak was characteristic. After the first infections of guests, Icelandic authorities

⁵⁰ <https://www.addendum.org/coronavirus/eu-reaktion>

classified Ischgl as a high-risk area. The Austrian authorities and the hotels in which the infected were staying were also informed on March 3, 2020.⁵¹

A policy geared towards international cooperation and solidarity could therefore quickly have prevented worse things from happening. But the opposite happened. In Austria no-one reacted to the information at first, the ski and bar operations continued until ten days later a raid-like quarantine was imposed over the entire region, which led to a panic departure of thousands of foreign guests and a presumed further spread of the virus. How exactly this chaos came about has also been the subject of judicial investigations.⁵²

Learning: If the information from foreign authorities had been taken seriously, numerous clusters could have been prevented.

3. Foreclosure

As of the second week of March, Austria, like its neighbours, switched to foreclosure mode. Entry bans, landing bans, travel warnings with the highest security level dominated the headlines. The first lockdown took place on March 16. All shops that weren't necessary for basic supplies had to close. The economic consequences associated with this were hardly an issue at this stage.

There was no longer any sign of a "strong and joint approach" by the EU partners, which Health Minister Anschober had sworn only a few weeks earlier. In mid-March, Austria complained that protective equipment that had been ordered and paid for in Germany was being held at the border because of export controls by its German neighbours.⁵³ The delivery was

only released after several days and diplomatic interventions. A few days later, the European Commission issued an authorization requirement for deliveries of medical protective equipment to third countries.⁵⁴

Massive problems arose on the Austro-Hungarian border on March 17-18. Hungary only allowed its citizens and truck transport to enter the country. But since many Romanians and Bulgarians wanted to travel to their home countries via Hungary, there were traffic jams that lasted for kilometres. The mood was irritable, but an escalation was eventually prevented by the establishment of a "humanitarian corridor" for Romanian and Bulgarian citizens. The fight against the virus thus became a competition between states. Everyone wanted to lock up faster than their neighbours and isolate themselves even more.

Learning: Panic is never a good advisor, uncoordinated action leads to problems elsewhere, which in turn reinforces national egoisms.

4. There is a lack of manpower

It quickly became clear how short-term the foreclosure policy was. Austria's care sector is to a considerable extent dependent on foreign workers. In particular, the 24-hour care at home cannot be maintained without the around 60,000 nurses – mostly women – from Romania, Slovakia and Croatia.⁵⁵ Austrians are almost not at all represented in this trade.

To prevent the collapse of home care, special solutions had to be found quickly. At the end of March, nurses were flown in from Timisoara

51 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000117797518/tiroler-hotel-wusste-schon-frueher-als-bisher-von-infizierten-isländern>

52 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000128692535/justizministerium-entscheidet-ueber-weiteres-vorgehen-in-causa-ischgl>

53 <https://www.diepresse.com/5781352/lkw-mit-corona-schutzmasken-steckt-an-der-grenze-fest?from=rss>

54 https://www.wifo.ac.at/news/versorgungengpaesse_bei_medizinischer_schutzausruestung#:~:text=Die%20damit%20verbundenen%20innereurop%C3%A4ischen%20Handelsbeschr%C3%A4nkungen,Zeit%20von%20sechs%20Wochen%20limitiert

55 <https://www.wienerzeitung.at/nachrichten/politik/oesterreich/2054341-Vier-von-fuenf-Pflegerinnen-aus-Rumaenien-und-der-Slowakei.html>

(Romania) and Sofia (Bulgaria) on a first charter flight.⁵⁶ Austria subsequently concluded agreements with Hungary and Romania to transport nurses into the country on special trains from May onwards. Only slowly did the realisation gain acceptance that it is not the nationality of the people that is relevant, but the security concepts.

There was also a rapid shortage of labour in agriculture. Since there were no harvest workers or butchers, the harvest could not be fully brought in and meat could not be processed, which resulted in a shortage of supplies.⁵⁷ At least the adverse conditions under which harvest workers sometimes work became apparent.

Learning: The labour markets in the European Union are far too interwoven to allow uncoordinated border closings to be carried out.

5. Save tourism, especially the domestic one

From the middle of April, it dawned on Austrian politicians that it would look bleak for domestic tourism when all neighbouring countries rely on isolation and closed borders. Tourism plays a bigger role in Austria than in many other countries. It contributes around 7.3 percent to the gross domestic product (GDP), while at least 220,000 employees work in the tourism industry.⁵⁸

The minister responsible, Elisabeth Köstinger, took the nationalist path here too. On the one hand, Austrians were urged to go on holiday domestically, if possible; on the other hand, they wanted to conclude bilateral agreements with some selected neighbouring countries such

as Germany to attract foreign tourists to the country.⁵⁹ For their part, the Germans tried to encourage their citizens to take vacations in Germany. As if it would make an epidemiological difference whether a person from Munich would vacation in the German city of Hamburg or in the Austrian state of Carinthia.

A sense of flag-waving made itself felt on other fronts in late April and early May – at a time when the coronavirus situation had already eased significantly. Commuters in Salzburg reported that despite valid papers, they were arbitrarily prevented by German police officers from crossing the border and had to make detours of up to 150 kilometres.⁶⁰ Conversely, the Bavarians complained about problems for German trucks on the border with Austria.⁶¹

Such taunts would recur regularly in the following months. Slovenia announced on May 18 that it would reopen its borders to neighbouring countries but withdrew two days later because Austria continued to adhere to quarantine regulations for Slovenes.⁶²

After Austria finally reopened for tourism at the end of May, a veritable opening competition also began in neighbouring countries. Only a few days later, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Slovenia followed suit and permitted travel again. A month and a half earlier, it was a matter of locking up faster than the others, but now everyone wanted to unlock faster than the neighbours.

Learning: Despite the pandemic, the basic values of the EU should not be thrown overboard. The protection of national economic sectors has a

56 <https://noe.orf.at/stories/3041648/>

57 https://www.wifo.ac.at/jart/prj3/wifo/resources/person_dokument/person_dokument.jart?publikationsid=67134&mime_type=application/pdf

58 <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000122221805/wintertourismus-die-richtigen-zahlen-bitte>

59 <https://www.diepresse.com/5802055/bald-offene-grenze-fur-deutsche-urlauber>

60 <https://salzburg.orf.at/stories/3044808/>

61 <https://www.merkur.de/politik/csu-markus-soeder-parteitag-bayern-sebastian-kurz-leitantrag-ticker-muenchen-kritik-gruene-zr-13772247.html>

62 <https://www.merkur.de/politik/csu-markus-soeder-parteitag-bayern-sebastian-kurz-leitantrag-ticker-muenchen-kritik-gruene-zr-13772247.html>

positive effect at most in the short term but leads to a loss of prosperity for everyone in the medium term.

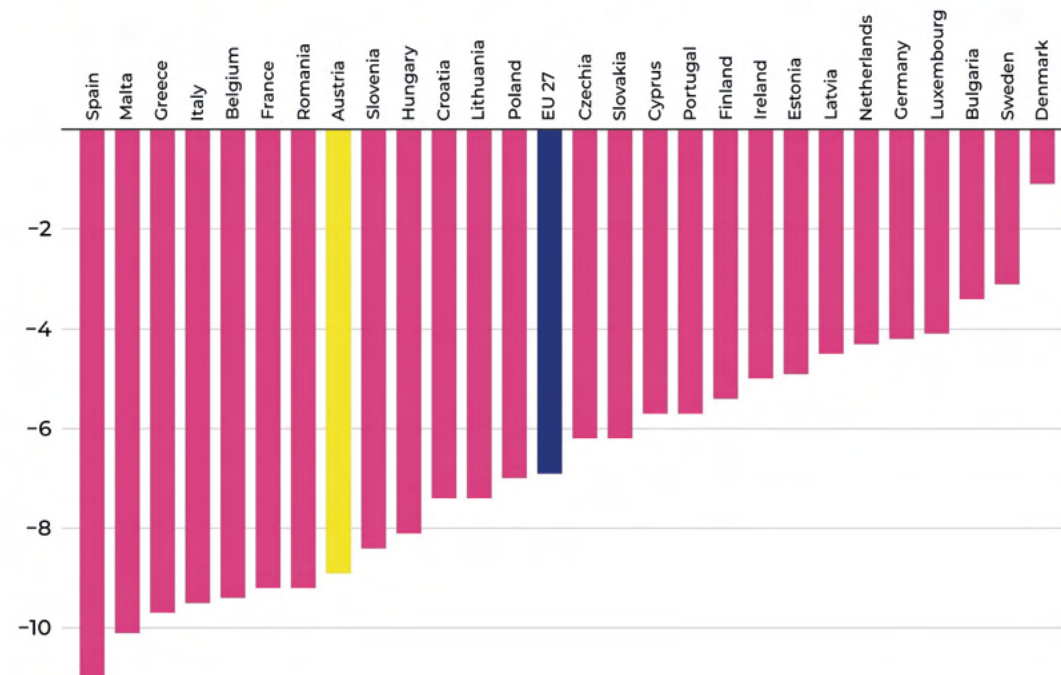
Summary

Austria relied on show politics from the start of the coronavirus crisis. Border closings and openings took place in an uncoordinated manner, with no consideration for the neighbours. This led to tit-for-tat responses, while economic implications were not given sufficient consideration. As a result, not only the trust of the European partners suffered but also the own people. In hardly any other country did the government's confidence levels fall so sharply during the pandemic.⁶³ The economic slump in Austria, at well over six percent of economic output (GDP), was also worse than in northern European countries, because of which the budget deficit was larger than the EU average or compared to those countries that got through the pandemic comparatively well.

Compared to other continents, Europe has shown that cooperation in the event of a crisis does not always have top priority and that there was a lack of consistency in crisis management.

General government deficit

Percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), 2020



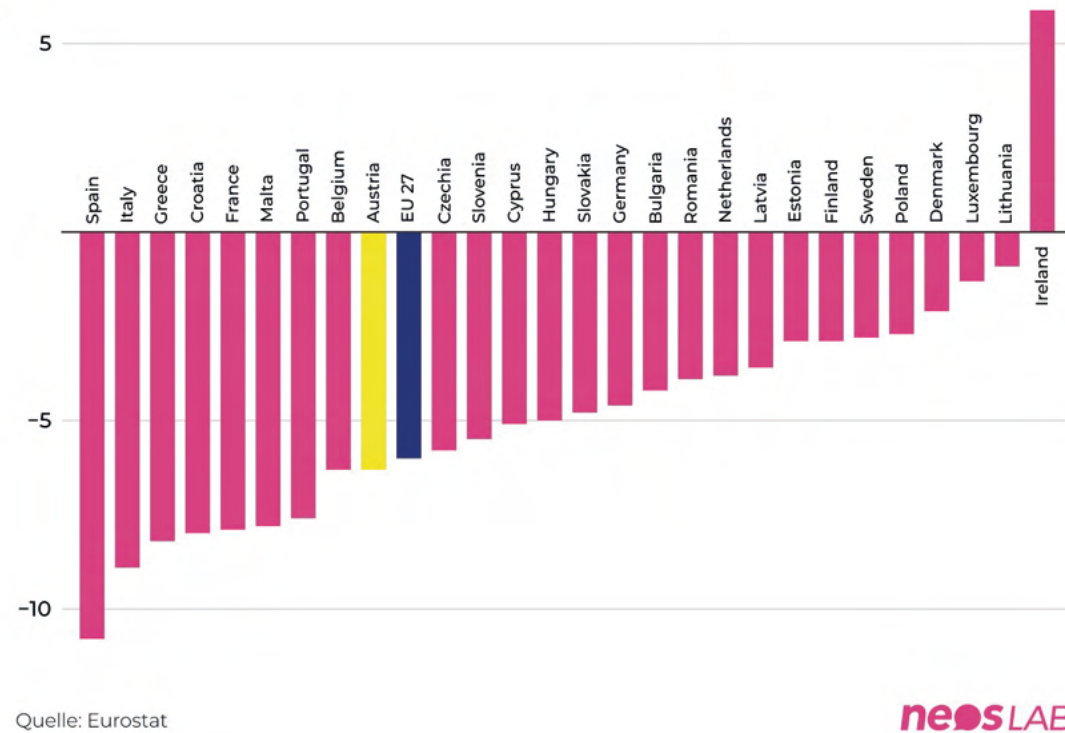
Quelle: Eurostat

neOSLAB

⁶³ <https://orf.at/stories/3166153/>

Real GDP growth rate 2020

Chain linked volumes, percentage change on previous period



Comment:

Cooperation instead of political staging

For the federal state of Tyrol, in the west of Austria and the heart of Central Europe, open borders are of particular importance for geographical, cultural, and economic reasons. Geographically Tyrol borders to Germany in the north and to Italy in the south, culturally the German-speaking minority in Italy belonged to the County of Tyrol for a long time and economically Tyrol is one of the regions with the biggest tourism sector in Europe. From the first year of the pandemic, three lessons can be learned from a Tyrolean perspective:

Dominik Oberhofer,
Member of the
Tyrolean Landtag



Firstly: Borders must not be misused to stage "security"

During the first wave of COVID-19, the entire state of Tyrol was placed in quarantine, an event probably unique in all of Europe. This meant that the citizens of the country were not allowed to leave their municipal area,⁶⁴ which led to a wide range of problems, for example, if a community did not have a local grocery store. From one day to the next, people had problems getting food. There were many reasons for this drastic restriction, but the consequences of the Ischgl scandal, where

⁶⁴ <https://orf.at/stories/3158458/>

there was a massive outbreak in February, certainly played a central role. An entire state was quarantined to protect the rest of the population.

Even after the quarantine was lifted, the political staging continued. The Minister of Defence and the regional governor used military vehicles when visiting the border with Italy and South Tyrol, which at the time was secured by the military.⁶⁵ As a result, the issue was politically unnecessarily charged, and the population was massively insecure.

Secondly: We must fill the European regions (Euregio) with life

The establishment of transnational regions for cross-border cooperation is one of the best ideas we've had since the destructive wars of the 20th century. Tyrol forms a common region with South Tyrol and Trentino – two Italian regions that were part of the Habsburg Empire under the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. We are already seeing good cooperation between the emergency services in Tyrol, South Tyrol and Trentino. There is a uniform avalanche service; in the event of a sports accident, the injured are taken to the nearest hospital, regardless of the country in which the accident occurred.

We help each other during natural disasters, but we close the borders during a pandemic. That can't happen again. Particularly in exceptional situations such as a pandemic, cross-border information and coordination must be expanded, and aid made possible.

Thirdly: We need better mechanisms at the EU level under which conditions nation-states close their borders and how these are coordinated

Tyrol's social connections with Bavaria, the southernmost federal state

of Germany, are very strong. Many businesses in Tyrol generate more sales in Bavaria than in Austria, which is also reflected in the employee structure of the companies. The second lockdown, which closed the borders with Italy and Germany, led to massive problems for cross-border commuters and families with roots in several countries. Anyone who lives in the German border town of Rosenheim and works in the Austrian town of Kufstein was unable to look after family members at home in Germany for weeks.

All three points show that border closings have massive effects. These continue to have an effect even after the measures have been lifted, as the example of Kufstein shows: The Austrian education system stipulates that two swimming badges must be obtained in physical education lessons. Since the border town does not have a swimming pool, the children learned to do so in the nearby German town of Rosenheim, which has one. This was no longer possible due to the border closings.

⁶⁵ <https://www.dolomitenstadt.at/2020/05/21/neos-kritik-am-truppenbesuch-von-ministerin-tanner/>

The importance of open borders

When Covid-19 hit in March of 2020, we abruptly learned what a closed off world feels like. In Europe, the free movement of goods and people came to a complete standstill, as nation-states closed their borders in an attempt to control the spread of the virus.

For the labour market, it was a disaster.



Ten authors from five countries have contributed to this book.

Five experts tell the story of how the labour markets of Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Poland and Austria were affected.

Five European policymakers make the case for why society needs open borders to thrive.



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