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# COVID-19 and its impacts on migration – the politics-work-violence nexus

JAKUB KRZYSZTOF ADAMSKI  
UNIWERSYTET ŁÓDZKI

### Abstract

The article aims at answering three questions regarding the impact of COVID-19 on migration. Based on the assumption that what is currently relevant for analysis are the initial reactions of governments, host societies, and immigrants to the pandemic, they are the first to be analyzed. Due to their nature and interdependence, the question of how political decisions, the labor market, and the violence experienced by migrants are interrelated becomes legitimate. While answering these questions, consideration is also given to how the discussed reactions can be considered positive or negative for the migration processes. The article focuses on the territory of Europe, although for comparative purposes, the perspective of African, Asian, and South American countries is also included.

### Keywords:

[international migration](#), [immigration](#), [COVID-19](#), [politics](#), [work](#), [violence](#), [Europe](#).



## Introduction

Although the spread of COVID-19 in China was followed with interest throughout the world, one may be under the impression that its transformation into a global pandemic came as a surprise. The virus quickly took hold in developed countries, eventually also appearing in developing countries. In fact, the distinction between developed and developing countries has partially lost its importance in a situation where most countries were not prepared for a health crisis of this magnitude. The pandemic is a phenomenon that primarily threatens our health. However, due to how complex and far-reaching its implications can be, much attention is paid to the consequences concerning vastly different spheres of social life and the functioning of the state. Pursuing the goal of protecting public health, state authorities make decisions that heavily impact people’s daily lives, both those born in a given country and those who have come to it for various purposes. This paper will primarily concern the latter category, i.e., immigrants.

The coronavirus pandemic is not a specific migration problem. However, it does not change the fact that its impact, or rather, the decisions made in response to it, significantly affects the situation of migrants – not only immigrants but also people who are mobile internally. It is also difficult not to notice that it is foreigners who are in the least favorable position in the face of this health crisis. Immigrants face at least the same problems as nationals, especially with regard to different forms of exclusion. Therefore, even if the provisions of political decisions aimed at the general population are implemented, it does not mean that their consequences will be the same for everyone. For many reasons, they will be more serious for immigrants. That being said, the subject of the article is not only these consequences.

In my considerations, I want to focus on the causes. Review texts (not necessarily strictly scientific) that focus mainly on the effects of the pandemic on migrants have begun to appear (Yayboke, 2020). The problem is that now it is difficult to assess what consequences we are actually dealing with – are we only talking about what is going to happen in the short, medium, or long term? We also do not know anything about their persistence, so it is difficult to express anything other than estimative and speculative opinions about the scale of these effects. We do not have the data to determine the scope and depth of the changes that have occurred, and nor do we know what the final dynamics of the pandemic will be, e.g., whether the worst is behind us, or whether its development will resemble the dynamics of the Spanish flu (Ratha, De, Kim, Placa, Seshan, Yameogo, 2020, p.3).

However, what can be analyzed is the initial reaction of states to the pandemic, as well as the reactions of members of host societies and migrants themselves. Of course, the first reaction is that of the state authorities regarding decisions at the political level because there is no doubt that migration is largely a political phenomenon today. Only subsequently did the reactions of the locals and immigrants occur. In this sense, the responses of these two groups are a consequence (response) of the state authorities’ reaction. I perceive them not so much as a result of a more or less permanent change, but as an adaptive mechanism forced by a (relatively) sudden event, similar to a muscle contraction in response to an unexpected threat.

This initial adaptive reaction of people and institutions involved in the migration process is already something complete and given. This makes it suitable for analysis, allowing us to identify “red lights,” which symbolize problem areas where continuity and the smooth flow of migration processes are hampered.

This became apparent as a side (sometimes main) effect of the responses to the pandemic. Moreover, these first reactions let us map the systemic response to an event such as a global health crisis, in a similar fashion as the contrast given to a patient for an MRI scan helps diagnose the disease. Ultimately, we can create an analytical framework, which in the future will be filled with content as we learn more about the consequences of the coronavirus for contemporary migration processes. Many of the above-mentioned reactions are related to the politics-work-violence nexus, and the relationship between these three elements and the responses connected with them is what I will focus on.

To concretize the argumentation made so far, the considerations in the article aim at providing at least a partial answer to three closely related questions:

What reactions among participants of contemporary migration processes (states, international organizations, national and international NGOs, host societies, and migrants themselves) have been caused by the coronavirus outbreak?

What is the impact of the coronavirus outbreak on the relationship between politics, work, and violence?

To what extent does the coronavirus have a negative and positive impact on migration processes?

## 1. First reactions of governments, societies, and immigrants to the pandemic

Governments of the host countries and societies themselves have responded to the pandemic with varying degrees of intensity, albeit in the same areas and in a similar direction (although countries can be clustered in this respect). The most common reactions have been grouped into broader categories and are presented in Table 1, divided into three types: those that can be considered positive, negative, or neutral/ambiguous. Negativity and positivity should not be perceived as an assessment of these activities. The distinction is based on the evaluation of secondary and immediate responses to them. Moreover, it should be emphasized that these activities are not limited to Europe. Depending on the region and the migratory and pandemic experiences, the situation develops differently. We should start with a brief description of these reactions.

Table 1. Overview of host country and society’s reactions regarding migrants during the pandemic

Host country	
Positive reactions	Negative reactions
Financial support to immigrants and organizations run by them or for their benefit	Concentrating immigrants (e.g., with irregular status, asylum seekers) in various overcrowded centers and camps despite the imposition of social distancing
Creating and providing information platforms and materials in languages commonly used by immigrants	Making decisions without considering the specific situation that various categories of immigrants are in – lack of differentiation of solutions
Anti-discrimination and hate speech-countering actions (e.g., campaigns) and advocacy	Politicians using the pandemic situation to reinforce anti-immigration narratives
The creation of support programs for or also benefiting immigrants	Implementing discriminatory travel rights (e.g., excluding people with specific citizenship <i>en bloc</i> )

Implementing firewalls for control authorities to prevent situations where immigrants avoid using important services (due to their irregular status and fear of deportation), e.g., healthcare facilities for COVID-19 medical assistance	Omitting from the essential services list those services that are of importance to immigrants, e.g., remittance providers, which are of relevance to developing countries where e-banking may not be accessible or popular.
Extending work or residence permits for immigrants and implementing other residence regularization forms, enabling newcomers to use essential services, e.g., health care	Closing or suspending the work of offices that are responsible for processing applications submitted by immigrants and asylum seekers (with or without limited alternative means of dealing with new cases)
Making greater use of IT technologies in the processing of applications in particularly important for cases of immigrants and asylum seekers	Upholding the existing (often precarious) status of key workers despite their increased susceptibility to infection (e.g., doctors, nurses)
Financial support for regions (mostly developing countries) affected (apart from COVID-19) by conflicts, humanitarian, and natural disasters which many refugees and economic migrants come from	Violating human rights and international law, and abusing the pandemic situation to execute ill-intended actions – pushbacks at sea, forced returns, etc., and consequently undermining the non-refoulement rule.
	Introducing unprepared solutions, e.g., internal EU border checks in the Schengen area
The sudden closure of borders, although deemed unnecessary, is not negative itself; however, the way it was done caused many difficulties for migrants and the emergence of categories such as stranded migrants	
The sectoral facilitation of legal migration is not negative, but it can be perceived as discriminatory against other categories of migrants, especially those in a more difficult situation than before the pandemic. The selectively made concessions in the form of accelerated qualification recognition procedures can be interpreted in a similar fashion.	
Host society	
Positive reactions	Negative reactions
Increased support activities of organizations working for immigrants	Discrimination and hate against the mobile population in general (both immigrants and emigrants)
Anti-discrimination actions and campaigns	Racism and xenophobia
Research and counseling aiming at neutralizing the psychological effects of the pandemic among migrants	Irresponsible media coverage reinforcing anti-immigration sentiment; fake news
Creating information platforms or publishing information materials useful to migrants during the pandemic in languages they understand	Physical and symbolic violence – perceiving immigrants as scapegoats, as well as easy targets to vent frustration, arose due to local communities' pandemic experience (e.g., job loss)
Assistance from volunteers (e.g., doctors, counselors, translators, teachers, etc.)	
Creating and distributing educational materials for immigrants	
Mass return migration to countries/regions of origin are reasonable reactions to the lack of work, the threat of border closures, lack of access to basic services in the host country, the desire to take care of the family in the country of origin, etc. It can negatively impact both the host (shortage of workers in key sectors) and origin (additional burden on the labor market and social security system) country.	
Layoffs are a natural consequence of the economy on the verge of crisis. They have a negative impact on immigrants and the local population, and they help local businesses survive.	

Source: authors' own elaboration

Most countries have introduced travel bans that apply to both external and internal mobility. However, neither the World Health Organization (WHO) nor the experts have recommended such a solution, proposing vigilance and increased control instead (Ollstein, 2020; Pillinger, 2020; World Health Organization, 2020), and research showing that travel history, even from China, does not correlate strongly with the number of infections (Migration Policy Centre, 2020). Thus, the question of the proportionality of the safety measures implemented remains valid. The answer becomes more complicated if we consider reports about pushbacks at sea and land borders (e.g., between Greece and Turkey, Malta and Libya, or Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) (International Organization for Migration, 2020e; Mixed Migration Centre, 2020b, pp.6–10; Sundberg Diez, Neidhardt, De Somer, Hahn, 2020, p.2), which casts a shadow on respecting the principle of non-refoulement.

The above-mentioned travel bans were accompanied by closing or suspending the work of offices that deal with applications for refugee status, residence, or work permits. Sometimes there were total closures, leaving foreigners without alternatives in this regard. Other times, they were limited in their range, or they were supported by ICT, which enabled at least a partial handling of matters remotely (in the form of, e.g., interviews and requests submitted during teleconferences, e-mails, phone calls, e-services, meetings arranged via the Internet, or electronic document circulation) (European Asylum Support Office, 2020a, pp.13, 17–19; 2020b, pp.9–10; Scarpetta and Dumont, 2020, pp.12–14).

Controls at the internal borders of the EU Member States that belong to the Schengen area were reintroduced (although not in a coordinated manner). It should be remembered that they had not functioned in some places for decades, which caused difficulties resulting

from the unpreparedness of the authorities to conduct border controls in the face of the health crisis (Eržen, Weber, Sacchetti, 2020; Sundberg Diez et al., 2020, pp.7–8). Mobility was not stopped in its entirety, though. Some services, referred to as essential, had to be provided. As a result, there were special exemptions from the ban (as well as facilitations such as easier recognition of qualifications, simplified recruitment processes, or lower requirements), which largely concerned immigrants as the key workforce in the agricultural and manufacturing sectors, healthcare, as well as cross-border, seasonal, humanitarian aid workers, etc.; however, who is considered to be a keyworker differs between countries (European Migration Network, 2020, pp.8–13; International Organization for Migration, 2020d, pp.2–3; Scarpetta and Dumont, 2020, pp.3–5).

With regard to the question of proportionality and the intention behind the above-mentioned reactions, it should be noted that implemented travel bans were rarely total, and more often partial, based on a geographical criterion (blocking specific points of entry), travel history, citizenship, or a combination thereof. In this context, it is emphasized that, contrary to WHO recommendations, some countries (including, e.g., Malta and Italy) abused the circumstances created by the pandemic to undertake and maintain measures whose proportionality is difficult to justify (Mixed Migration Centre, 2020b, pp.9–11; Sundberg Diez et al., 2020, pp.2).

Another government reaction that is noteworthy is using the fears arising from COVID-19 to push through an anti-immigration agenda. It is characteristic of countries ruled by populists, although Greece, Malta, and Croatia (among others) have also been accused of pushbacks at sea and land, as well as abuses by the authorities and border services. It is clear that tensions are emerging along the

borders of the countries of southern and eastern Europe, which are particularly burdened with obligations under the Dublin Regulation.

Considering sectoral exemptions from the travel ban, it is worth noting that although the pandemic has highlighted and unequivocally confirmed the usefulness of migrants for host countries and societies, it does not automatically mean that their living conditions improve. Yes, recognition for the work of doctors and nurses has increased (which is by no means a common attitude!), but it did not result in entitlements or an improvement in their residence/work status. In fact, migrants predominantly work in jobs where there is an increased risk of infection (doctors, nurses, carers) and that do not allow remote work (manual workers, farmers, construction workers, and those that work in the informal economy, or who perform jobs that do not require high qualifications) (Bilger, Baumgarten, Palinkas, 2020; Belser, 2020). In addition, some countries have introduced measures to facilitate the recognition of qualifications and the employment of certain categories of employees, although this does not apply to all professions that require training and certified qualifications, which is visible in the area of medical and home care (Smith and O'Donnell, 2020).

At this point, it should only be mentioned that government reactions often do not consider the specific situation of immigrants at all, or they do not take into account the differences between categories of immigrants. This is evident when we compare economic immigrants (e.g., in key professions) with those who remain in overcrowded camps, reception centers (where you can forget about complying with sanitary recommendations), or those who had the misfortune to be in transit due to losing their job and livelihood, for example (almost overnight they turned into stranded migrants) (European Website on Integration, 2020d,j,l; Ginn and Keller, 2020; Ratha, 2020).

Another example of the lack of an appropriate response was the failure to include in the list of essential services those that are of great importance to foreigners, e.g., remittance providers, which causes far-reaching consequences among immigrants (e.g., children dropping out of school and being made to work). There are also effects in the form of a decrease in income intended for basic needs, or loss of security in countries without a developed social security system, loss of investment opportunities, etc. (Adhikari, 2020; Financing Facility for Remittances, 2020; Gravesteyn, Aneja, Cao, 2020; Mora and Rutkowski, 2020).

Governments have also reacted to the pandemic in a positive way (from a migration perspective). Compensating for the difficulties in direct access to offices responsible for processing foreigners' cases, the authorities, and the institutions themselves, have introduced technological solutions on a larger scale, allowing for the partial handling of matters remotely. Moreover, some countries have implemented more favorable measures for immigrants by regularizing immigrants and those awaiting a decision on their refugee status, and temporarily allowing foreigners to retain the right to stay and work, or granting wider rights that allow them to use basic social services such as healthcare (e.g., in Italy, Portugal, and Spain) (European Migration Network, 2020, pp.8–13; Scarpetta and Dumont, 2020, pp.14–16, 18–19; European Website on Integration, 2020f,i,m,p,q,s; Fanjul and Dempster, 2020). One of these activities is the creation of firewalls, i.e., solutions that reduce the amount of data collected about people using health care and ensuring their privacy. Thanks to this, immigrants do not have to fear deportation and can take care of their health (International Organization for Migration, 2020d, p.13).

Financial support from governments and donors is also an important and positive response to COVID-19 in the area of mobility.

It assumes several forms, e.g., some countries support local NGOs that work for immigrants' benefit (European Website on Integration, 2020n). A significant part of the financial aid is first directed to international and intergovernmental organizations and entities, such as the International Organization for Migration, which then re-distribute the funds further to specific countries and organizations. However, the effectiveness of such a model is criticized for being not transparent, slow, and, consequently, somewhat wasted in terms of its impact (European Union and African Union, 2020, International Organization for Migration, 2020g,k; Konyndyk, Saez, Worden, 2020; Laerke, 2020).

In addition to its humanitarian function, the support provided – mainly to developing countries – also acts to protect, at least partially, the potential increased mobility caused by local crises in Africa, Asia, South America, and the Middle East. It also helps to cover the loss of access to remittances, which constitute a significant part of the GDP of those countries. For example, in countries such as Tonga, Haiti, South Sudan, it is even over 30%, while in many others, e.g., in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Montenegro, Honduras, El Salvador, Nepal, and Lesotho, it is over 20% (Ratha et al., 2020, p.16, 18, 21, 25, 27). That being said, research shows that migration plans have largely remained the same in these regions (Mixed Migration Centre, 2020a). Ultimately, neither *ad hoc* nor program-driven financial assistance changes the conditions in these regions fast enough, even taking into account the long-time perspective in which economic factors determine mobility (no matter how much we criticize the basic premise of the neoclassical theory of migration and perceive mobility as a amalgam of numerous migration projects).

In response to the pandemic, but also in response to trends among the host societies, countries have also taken other positive

measures. Most of them created platforms or materials in the immigrants' native languages with information on restrictions, protective behavior, and opportunities in the use of basic public services and aid programs aimed at all residents or specifically immigrants (European Migration Network, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, pp.10–11; European Website on Integration, 2020a,b,e,g,h,k,o,u,v; International Organization for Migration, 2020j).

There are also negative, positive, and neutral/ambiguous reactions on the part of the host society, international organizations, and the immigrants themselves. The first group would include the “xenophobia virus,” renewed racist tendencies, hate speech, scapegoating, and other forms of symbolic and physical violence, examples of which are reported by think tanks and news sites. Wikipedia even has a page dedicated to this topic with hundreds of entries and sources. In this context, it is also worth emphasizing that it is not only social media that is responsible for creating fake news and unreliable information on the relationship between COVID-19 and migration, leaving room for interpretation and understatement (International Organization for Migration, 2020a,j; Wikipedia, 2020).

Positive reactions included awareness-raising campaigns (e.g., on social media) and activities that support immigrants in the host country. This was done by creating information materials and mobile applications, or through the activities of volunteers, who provide immigrants with medical advice, translations, mental health examinations, support, and counseling (International Organization for Migration, 2020f; European Website on Integration, 2020c,w).

The understandable reactions include mass return migration caused by job loss and/or the inability to subsist in the host country, the desire to return home to support the family

before borders close, etc. First, it should be emphasized that one of the reactions of local entrepreneurs was either partial layoffs (often involving immigrants) or lowering (sometimes drastically) salaries. Many countries did not offer immigrants any support mechanisms, and often, the migrants could not expect them in their country of origin upon return (Belser, 2020; European Migration Network, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020, pp.1, 4, 7; European Website on Integration, 2020r,t; International Labour Organization, 2020a-b; International Organization for Migration, 2020c). Migrants were faced with a difficult choice of staying in the country, with no or very poor prospects of earnings and finding a job, which could indirectly lead to an irregular status (and ultimately the inability to return), or return migration (International Organization for Migration, 2020b). Many chose the latter option, especially since it should not be assumed that this always meant problems and difficulties. Often, migrants returned to their home country with the savings they had planned to invest (International Organization for Migration, 2020h).

Of course, the situation differs from country to country. In the case of African, Asian, and South American countries, losing a job meant reduced remittances and returning to countries that were overburdened with challenging economic conditions, natural disasters, conflicts, and heavily impacted social security and health care systems as a result of the pandemic (International Organization for Migration, 2020i; Lang, 2020; Ratha et al., 2020, p.4–8, 16–29). Mass returns certainly did not make things easier for the country of origin, although they did help save companies in the host country. At the same time, for immigrants, it was often the only reaction that would allow them to survive.

The reactions of the governments, societies, and immigrants described above are generalized categories. The responses of the NGOs themselves have largely been omitted, as they either fall into the general category of positive reactions or they focus on making myriad recommendations to governments. It is not difficult to see that not all the reactions apply equally to all countries. They correspond to the known division into migration from the South to the North and from the East to the West. In fact, when reviewing the literature on the subject, it is hard to avoid the impression that there are two narratives about migration during a pandemic. One relates to developed countries, the other to developing countries. At the same time, each of them covers many stories, usually differentiated by specific categories of inequality and difficulties that migrants experience. Based on the considerations above, it can be seen that these stories create a nexus of political solutions, problems of the labor market, and violence, which should be discussed in more detail.

## **2. The politics-work-violence nexus – the systemic impact of the pandemic on migration**

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed how immigrants are woven into the fabric of modern societies. All the inequalities, disadvantages, and difficulties resulting from the migration status, which in itself may be diversified, introducing further dimensions of exclusion, have become clearly visible. The reactions of governments, societies, and migrants to the coronavirus that is currently devastating the world, and the resulting change in living conditions, are focused around three broad problem areas: politics, work, and violence. Their interdependence and entanglement are the subject of further considerations.

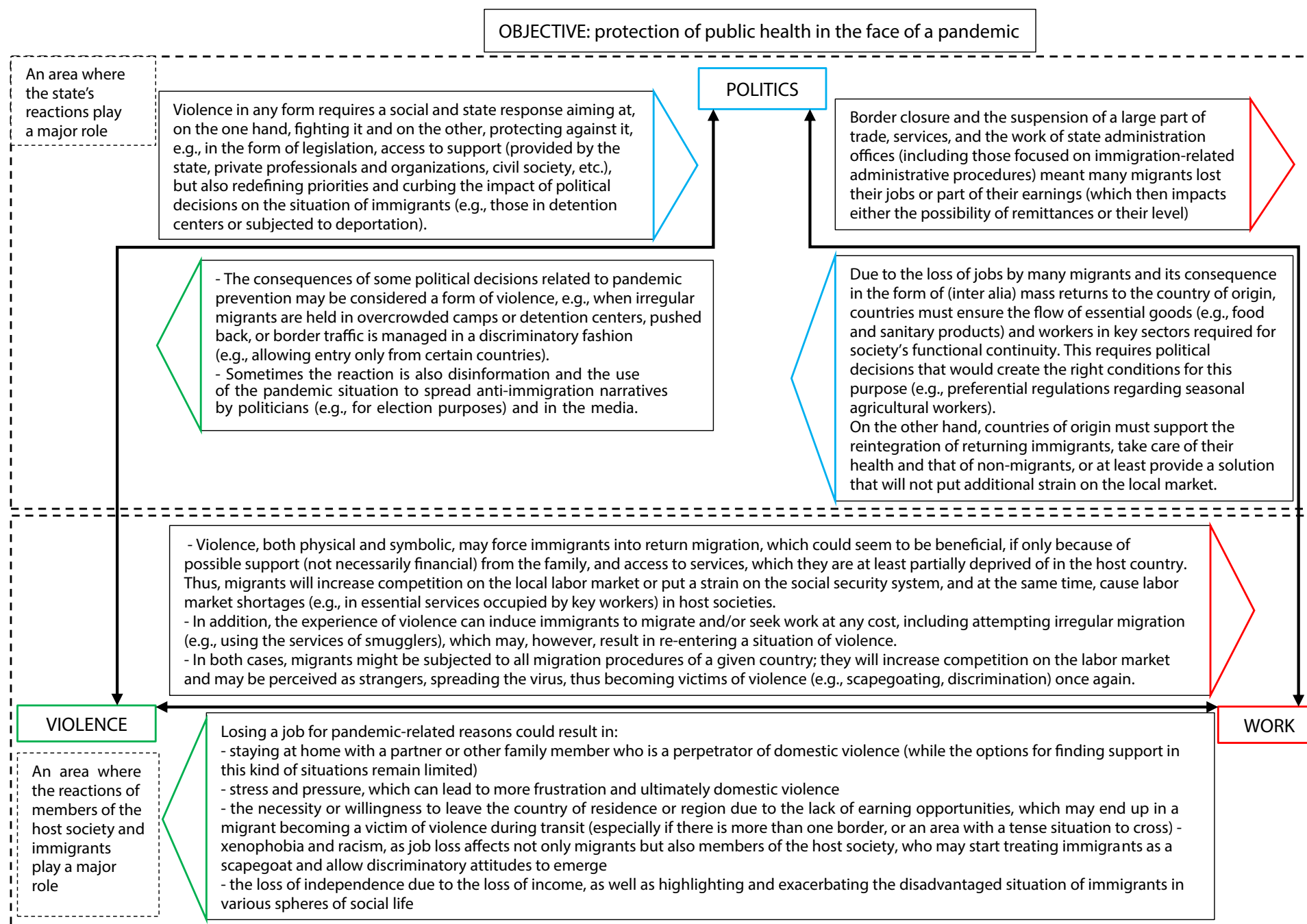
In order to avoid misunderstandings, the concept of work, politics, and violence used in the paper should be explained. Work is understood here as any mental or physical effort made to earn money, regardless of whether it is undertaken in the official or unofficial labor market of the country/countries concerned, or whether it is full-time, part-time, or gig. Politics is defined in two ways. First, it is the activities undertaken by the legislative and executive authorities and their subordinate institutions and organizations. Second, it is the effects of those activities, whether in the form of legal acts and documents, or activities undertaken based on them to realize their implicit and explicit goals. Violence is perceived here in three ways: physical, symbolic, and systemic. In the first case, it refers to any assault that causes or aims to cause harm to health, but also situations in which people's freedom of movement and self-determination are restricted by coercion (whether legal or not) or the use of force. In the second case, it is associated with violence that aims to offend and humiliate a person or to ascribe to him or her qualities in such a way as to evoke a negative attitude towards him or her among other people (thus, this is a different meaning from that of Pierre Bourdieu). Ultimately, it is also possible to speak of systemic (structural) violence, which results from the lower social position of a given group of people (e.g., immigrants). It is embedded in the formation of the social, economic, cultural, and legal structure of a country – although this formation was not necessarily intentional in the sense that it was contrived to diminish the social position of, e.g., immigrants.

Diagram 1 presents the general arrangement of the relations between these three areas. Reading it, one must remember that COVID-19 is a health crisis, and the primary goal is to protect human health. This is the

responsibility of governments and supranational organizations, which suggests that the sphere of politics is the starting point here. The reactions of these entities affect both the area of violence and the labor market, and therefore, their impact can be considered in each of these directions. The elements inside the area defined by the two-way arrows describe the successive reactions from politics to violence to work and back to politics. Items placed outside this area represent the relationships going in the opposite direction. It is worth noting that the reactions of society (including migrants) and governments are not of equal importance in each of the discussed thematic areas. For this reason, the dashed lines mark those activities that are dominated by either the state or society.

Migrant women from developing countries and stranded migrants can be regarded as archetypal categories of immigrants trapped in the focal point of the nexus. Examining both reaction sequences should be done, bearing this in mind. Starting with the (total or partial) closure of borders, restrictions on internal mobility, and access to services, many migrants lost the possibility to earn money during seasonal work, commuting to work, or simply doing it. As mentioned, migrants often carry out jobs that are not suitable for home office or other forms of remote work (e.g., door-to-door sales, manual or face-to-face work). What is more, their earnings are often a delicate and thin line that separates not only the migrants but also their family members in the country of origin from poverty, hunger, dropping out of school, etc. (Gravesteyn et al., 2020; International Organization for Migration, 2020i, p.3). Inaccessible or expensive services include remittance providers (Mora and Rutkowski, 2020). While the majority of the EU Member States have made it possible to process cases using ICT (regardless of whether

Diagram 1. Pandemic-related reactions and their impact on immigration – politics-work-violence nexus



access to these solutions is actually possible), this may not be a common situation in the countries of South America, Africa, or parts of Asia. In such cases, it may be impossible or challenging to receive or renew work and residence permits, or to be granted international protection. We should also remember that falling into an irregularity may, later on, translate into future entry bans. Ultimately, migrants must decide whether to return (assuming they have the option) or to wait without guarantee of regaining their job and earnings.

Border closures and the loss/limitation of earning opportunities trigger feedback reactions. Some migrants, especially those who have come to a given country with their entire family, may choose to stay and comply with sanitary recommendations (or at least isolation). Both NGOs and GOs point out that since the beginning of the pandemic, the number of acts of domestic violence, the victims of which are primarily immigrant women, has increased. The pandemic could either exacerbate an existing problem in families or cause it, especially considering how tiring it may be to constantly spend time in a limited space with other people in a situation of economic pressure and psychological tension, with a disrupted access to help, e.g., a hotline for victims (Cone, 2020; United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2020, pp.2–3).

Violence against immigrant women is a particularly important issue referred to as a “shadow pandemic,” which deserves a more detailed discussion. Besides the frequent experience of intimate partner violence (Cone, 2020), women are vulnerable to many other threats. For immigrant women, especially from developing countries, a steady income at their disposal empowers them, raising their level of independence and social status, and it helps them avoid exploitation, harassment, and abuse. During the pandemic, women are prone to losing their jobs as their jobs require

lower qualifications (sometimes below their actual qualifications) or do not require them at all. Ultimately this leads them to a situation of subordination in which they become susceptible to abuse (International Organization for Migration, 2020i, pp.1, 3; Okoro and Prettitore, 2020; Smith and O’Donnell, 2020). The difficult economic situation and the experienced symbolic and physical violence may eventually lead to attempts at further migration or return migration. There are many reports of violence, abuse, and harassment of women in transit, especially since during the pandemic, migrants often use the services of smugglers (as a side effect of travel bans), who take advantage of the plight, exceptional vulnerability, and desperation of migrants. Smuggling often turns into human trafficking, or people end up being abandoned somewhere along the way without any means of sustenance or way to go any further or go back (Cone, 2020; United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2020, p.5). In the context of developing countries, it should also be mentioned that the economic difficulties caused by the pandemic have caused families to force young women into marriage to improve their situation (Cone, 2020).

Another phenomenon that has been exacerbated by the loss of earning potential due to political decisions on restricting international and national mobility is the aforementioned “xenophobia virus.” Apart from the obvious difficulties for both immigrants and the local population, it was the former group that became the scapegoat. Viewed as the source of the virus, a redundant and unwanted element that takes away jobs and is a burden to the social security system, immigrants are subject to frequent symbolic and physical attacks, sometimes with tragic consequences (European Network Against Racism, 2020).

Ultimately, any form of violence is a problem that requires state intervention. Merely

advocating and organizing campaigns calling for an end to discrimination with the question *COVID 19 does not discriminate, why do you?* (International Organization for Migration, 2020f), is unfortunately not enough, especially when even law enforcement authorities are not without fault (Mixed Migration Centre, 2020b, p.10). Therefore, governments must not only strive to create an appropriate legal framework to protect victims, but they must also ensure that this right is consistently enforced, and immigrants have access to support.

Looking at these relations from the other side, political decisions have been made *ad hoc* without much thought or consideration for the specific situation of immigrants. As a result, immigrants have experienced various forms of violence. One such example is the introduction of restrictions and health recommendations while confining migrants to overcrowded reception centers, refugee centers and camps, detention centers, etc., from which they could not leave, even though it was impossible to maintain adequate sanitary conditions, and where the provision of the most needed products was limited. Stranded migrants who, despite their willingness to leave the country, did not manage to cross the border and found themselves, to a certain degree, in a social and administrative vacuum, faced a similar problem (European Website on Integration, 2020d,j; International Organization for Migration, 2020b, pp.1–3; Sundberg Diez et al., 2020, pp.1–4). Apart from that, it should be remembered that the reactions of states resulted in even more serious problems, such as pushbacks at sea and on land, or being subjected to forced quarantine in conditions that limited the freedom of individuals (e.g., keeping immigrants on ferries) (Mixed Migration Centre, 2020b).

The problem of discrimination, racism, hate speech, and, at the same time, the lack of access to basic social services and the desire

to support the family were, for many migrants, the motivations to try to return to their country of origin. This poses difficulties of two kinds. First, the outflow of migrants is only partially beneficial to the host country. It indeed relieves the local economy and health care system, and it allows companies to survive, but on the other hand, most migrants work in key sectors (e.g., agriculture) and provide essential services (e.g., work in hospitals, care for the elderly). This means that people who are needed to prevent a shortage of essential goods and services often leave, so they will have to be convinced to return later. Secondly, immigrants returning to their country of origin bring their savings with them (at least in the European context), and they can join the local labor market. The issue is that there is not necessarily a demand for them, especially in times of a pandemic. Rather, this situation puts an additional burden on the economy and health services, which are usually at a lower level than in the host countries. Even if migrants return, there is no guarantee that they will not experience discrimination. They are still seen as sources of the virus and scapegoats, and they are subject to verbal and physical attacks (International Labour Organization, 2020a; International Organization for Migration, 2020b, p.3; 2020k, pp.1–4). Of course, during the transit itself, the situations described earlier may arise.

Ultimately, bringing in or retaining immigrant workers (e.g., by creating favorable formal conditions for their stay) in the country is the responsibility of and challenge for the government, as shortages in professions exist even without an outflow of immigrants. They can achieve this by facilitating the recognition of qualifications, facilitating the regularization of residence, providing more favorable conditions in the labor market, enabling employment, or even providing direct transport for workers (Dempster, 2020; Fanjul and

Dempster, 2020). On the other hand, it is the responsibility of the countries of origin to support the reintegration process and to fully utilize the potential of returnees, especially considering that their economies have lost a large share of their income (International Labour Organization, 2020a).

Concluding, politics, work, and violence are closely related. At the moment, it is difficult to imagine another event that could show us so bluntly how deeply immigrants are integrated into the structure of modern societies and how migration is of fundamental importance for both the receiving and sending countries.

### Conclusions:

At the beginning of this article, I formulated three questions that I wanted to provide at least a partial answer to by analyzing the initial responses of governments, host societies, and migrants themselves to the pandemic. They can be answered as follows:

1. Reactions were impulsive and reckless, often ignoring the plight of immigrants and showing nationalism rather than humanitarianism in health protection. This was corrected over time, as things were made easier for certain categories of migrants, although it is hard to avoid the impression that they, too, were dictated mainly by national interests. In fact, there are two different experiences of pandemic migration. One is represented by mobility in developed countries, where problems mainly revolve around economic issues and inadequate healthcare capacity. The second relates to developing countries, where the pandemic appears to be another disaster that they are not prepared for. It should also be emphasized that the situation varies between countries. The best reactions can be observed in the countries of southern Europe, which are strongly demographically and economically dependent

on immigration. The most negative and disproportionate responses occur in the countries most affected by the influx of refugees, i.e., in eastern or south-eastern Europe, as well as in South American, African, and Asian countries, especially where social tensions are already severe.

2. The outbreak of the pandemic caused nervous reactions that exacerbated existing inequalities. As a result, the situation of people in refugee camps, for example, has become even more dramatic, the social and professional position of women has collapsed, countries that are experiencing economic difficulties and struggling with other crises have gained additional “worry,” the situation of people with irregular status has improved only in a few cases, and communities that are dependent on remittances have now become dependent on humanitarian aid that arrives with a delay. COVID-19 has also deepened tensions between local and immigrant populations, exacerbating xenophobic and racist tendencies. Of course, it is not difficult to see how governments’ initial reactions affected the national economy, leading to social tensions due to uncertainty and frustration. One can also see how reckless or ill-intended actions resulted in immigrants experiencing violence. They found themselves in a difficult situation and often decided to take dangerous steps to have a chance of getting a job and earning money.

The answer to the last question (i.e., the extent to which coronavirus has a negative or positive impact on migration processes) is a difficult one because it depends largely on how long the measures adopted in immediate response to the pandemic will be maintained. On the one hand, we can observe cases of very positive reactions, such as regularizing the status of immigrants, thanks to which they

gain access to, e.g., health care, modernizing the processing of applications submitted by migrants (e.g., using ICT), and facilitating the recognition of employees’ qualifications in key professional groups, allowing migrants to participate in the labor market to a greater extent. On the other hand, we have also seen negative measures that make it difficult for foreigners to apply for international protection. Of course, there are more reactions, both positive and negative, but not all of them are new (e.g., financial support for developing countries, volunteering, support from international organizations), and not all of them will sustain their strength in the long term (e.g., xenophobic behavior, restrictions on access to offices). Commentators emphasize the dangers of introducing and maintaining disproportionate immigration policies, as makeshift solutions tend to persist.

Looking from the perspective of development studies, it is also difficult to draw clear conclusions. Certainly, both pessimists and optimists will find arguments to support their views on the relationship of migration and development, and the pendulum that Hein de Haas wrote about will once again be set in motion (de Haas). It cannot be ruled out that migrants’ countries of origin will gain bargaining power in negotiations with developed countries on the permissible population flows, because they have a valuable resource, such as potential health care workers, agricultural sector workers, and members of other key professions (Dempster, 2020). Indeed, the pandemic has exposed all the imperfections of migration management systems and the fragility of the existing systemic *status quo* of global migration flows. This will have to change in the near future, especially in the context of uncertainty resulting from the changeable dynamics of the pandemic. 🗨️

**Jakub Krzysztof Adamski** – adiunkt, doktor nauk społecznych w dyscyplinie nauk socjologicznych oraz magister prawa, zatrudniony w Katedrze Metod i Technik Badań Społecznych UŁ, członek Rady Programowej Centrum Studiów Migracyjnych UŁ. Do jego zainteresowań badawczych należą m.in.: migracje międzynarodowe, procesy adaptacji imigrantów, polityka integracyjna, problematyka nastawienia przedstawicieli społeczeństw przyjmujących do imigrantów, metody badań ilościowych, socjologia prawa.

#### Afiliacja:

Katedra Metod i Technik Badań Społecznych, Instytut Socjologii, Wydział Ekonomiczno-Socjologiczny, Uniwersytet Łódzki; Centrum Studiów Migracyjnych Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego  
Adres e-mail: jakub.adamski@eksoc.uni.lodz.pl

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## **COVID-19 i jego wpływ na migracje – splot relacji polityki-pracy-przemocy**

### **Abstrakt**

Celem artykułu jest udzielenie odpowiedzi na trzy pytania dotyczące wpływu COVID-19 na migrację. Wychodząc z założenia, że tym co nadaje się obecnie do analizy są początkowe reakcje rządów, społeczeństw przyjmujących i imigrantów na pojawienie się pandemii, to właśnie one podlegają analizie w pierwszej kolejności. Ze względu na ich charakter i wzajemne powiązania zasadne staje się pytanie o to jak powiązane są ze sobą decyzje polityczne, rynek pracy oraz doświadczana przez migrantów przemoc. Udzielając odpowiedzi pod rozwagę zostaje poddane również to w jakim stopniu omawiane reakcje można uznać za mające pozytywne lub negatywne znaczenie dla procesów migracyjnych. Artykuł koncentruje się na obszarze Europy, chociaż dla celów porównawczych perspektywa państw afrykańskich, azjatyckich i południowoamerykańskich również została uwzględniona.

**Słowa kluczowe:** migracje międzynarodowe, imigracja, COVID-19, polityka, praca, przemoc, Europa.