

THE UNEVEN IMPACT OF THE
HEALTH CRISIS ON THE EURO AREA
ECONOMIES IN 2020

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BANCO DE ESPAÑA

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Abstract

The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been uneven across euro area countries. Among the factors explaining this are the intensity of the health crisis in each territory and the severity and duration of the containment measures applied to limit the spread of the virus, as well as the structural differences between the economies, and, in particular, their productive specialisation. The empirical analysis presented in this paper indicates that the variation of the economic impact of the pandemic across euro area countries is largely explained by the relative importance of the most vulnerable service industries – those involving greater face-to-face social interaction – and the capacity to implement teleworking.

Keywords: COVID-19, economic impact, productive structure, mobility restrictions.

JEL classification: E01, E32, F00.

Resumen

El impacto económico de la pandemia de COVID-19 ha sido desigual en los países de la zona del euro. Entre los factores que lo explican, estarían la intensidad de la crisis sanitaria en cada territorio y la severidad y la duración de las medidas de contención aplicadas para limitar la propagación del virus, así como las diferencias estructurales de las economías, y singularmente su especialización productiva. El análisis empírico presentado en este trabajo indica que la importancia relativa de las ramas de servicios más vulnerables —al conllevar una mayor interacción social— y la capacidad para implantar teletrabajo explican en buena parte el impacto económico diferencial de la pandemia entre los países de la zona del euro.

Palabras clave: COVID-19, impacto económico, estructura productiva, restricciones de movilidad.

Códigos JEL: E01, E32, F00.

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1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a marked economic impact globally, and one especially severe in some countries. Among the advanced economies, the economic contraction in 2020 was higher in the United Kingdom and in the euro area, where the difference between the actual change in GDP and that forecast pre-crisis was 11 pp and 8 pp, respectively, compared with an impact of around 5 pp in the United States and Japan (see Chart 1). In the euro area, the economy most affected was Spain, where the impact was higher than 12 pp. It was followed by Malta and Greece (with an impact of 11 pp), and by Portugal, France and Italy (over 9 pp of GDP). The impact was lower than 5 pp in Luxembourg, Finland and Lithuania, and practically zero in Ireland.

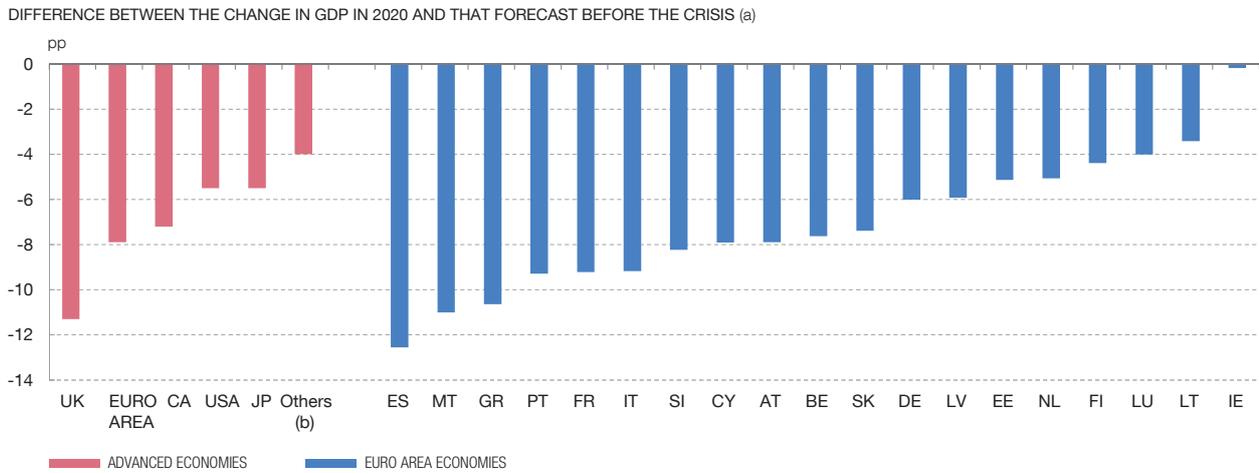
The economic consequences of COVID-19 are closely linked to the different intensity of the pandemic in each territory, and to the severity and duration of the containment measures to restrict the spread of the virus. In this respect, the response by governments was uneven; yet as the months went by there was a generalised trend towards more targeted restrictions, enabling transmission of the virus to be reduced while limiting the economic cost of lockdowns and widespread and strict closures.

The asymmetries in the impact of the crisis also reflect the structural differences of economies, and most particularly their productive specialisation. The literature available, such as Sapir (2020), notes that the economic impact of the health crisis in the European Union countries is positively related to the intensity of lockdown, to the share of tourism and to the lower quality of a country's institutional framework. The regional-level study by Meinen and Serafini (2021) for the four largest euro area economies, using the number of employees in short-time work schemes as an indicator, highlights the fact that both a region's sectoral structure and its trade links are relevant factors behind the differential economic impact during the first wave. In particular, these authors point out that regional supply chains could have been a powerful indirect channel for the propagation of the economic crisis during the first wave of the pandemic, both through international trade and the interconnections between a country's regions. The European Committee of the Regions (2020) identifies, among other factors, the fact that the regions potentially most affected are characterised by a high proportion of micro-firms and persons in self-employment, and a high concentration of employment in the riskiest sectors, in particular tourism.¹ Lastly, for Spain, Fernández Cerezo (2021) identifies mobility as the key factor for explaining the heterogeneity of provincial activity, followed by the share of total and foreign tourism.

1 The report identifies 11 characteristics of regions that may determine the sensitivity of their economic activity to the lockdown measures: (1) the proportion of employment in risk sectors, identifying as such those with a greater likelihood of incurring losses as a result of the lockdown, including the following: manufacturing, the distributive trade, hospitality, real estate activities and cultural activities; (2) the importance of tourism; (3) the significance of international trade; (4) the share of the population at risk of poverty and social exclusion; (5) the youth unemployment rate; (6) the proportion of jobs in micro-firms; (7) the proportion of self-employment; (8) the share of cross-border employment; (9) regional per capita GDP; (10) the country's level of public debt; and (11) the quality of public institutions.

Chart 1

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE ADVANCED ECONOMIES HAS BEEN SEVERE AND UNEVEN ACROSS COUNTRIES



SOURCES: European Commission, Eurostat and IMF.

- a Eurostat GDP data and the European Commission's February 2020 forecasts are used for the euro area countries. For the advanced economies, IMF WEO data for April 2021 and January 2020 are used.
- b Other advanced economies, excluding G-7 (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, United Kingdom and United States) and the euro area countries.

Against this background, this paper seeks to empirically identify the significance of the various determinants of the different economic performance of the euro area countries in 2020. In this connection, section 2 describes the pandemic and containment measures. Section 3 shows the differences in the sectoral economic impact and in countries' productive specialisation. Section 4 empirically analyses the significance of different factors in explaining the differential economic impact of the pandemic in 2020 in Europe. The paper concludes with some thoughts on certain effects of the possible persistence of the crisis.

2 The differing intensity of the health crisis and the containment measures

The economic impact of the health crisis has varied over time, conditioned by the course of the pandemic, the degree of saturation of health systems and the measures adopted to contain the spread of the virus.

From the outset, the seriousness of the health crisis evidenced considerable cross-country heterogeneity. The euro area economy was particularly affected, as was the United States and the United Kingdom (see Charts 2.1 and 2.2). As Chart 2.3 shows, the first wave was particularly severe in terms of deaths in Belgium, Italy, Spain and France. During that period, amid enormous uncertainty and facing a collapse in health systems, countries applied extreme containment measures from mid-March, locking down the population and shutting non-essential activities. The application of these measures drastically reduced infections in those countries most affected.

An indicator for measuring the severity of the restrictions applied during the pandemic is the OSI (Oxford Stringency Index), described in Hale *et al.* (2020) and available daily for the main world economies. This index draws together the intensity of nine types of non-health measures², adopting a value of zero in the absence of measures and of 100 in the most extreme case, and distinguishing between whether the measures are applied locally or nationally. One of its advantages is that it allows for a systematic and consistent international comparison. Conversely, it does not consider the size or economic significance of the region or sector to which the measures apply, which entails a loss of representativeness of the indicator, especially from summer 2020, when the restrictions became more selective. In Spain, for example, Ghirelli *et al.* (2021a) use textual analysis techniques to devise an alternative indicator of pandemic-containment measures that takes into account regional differences.

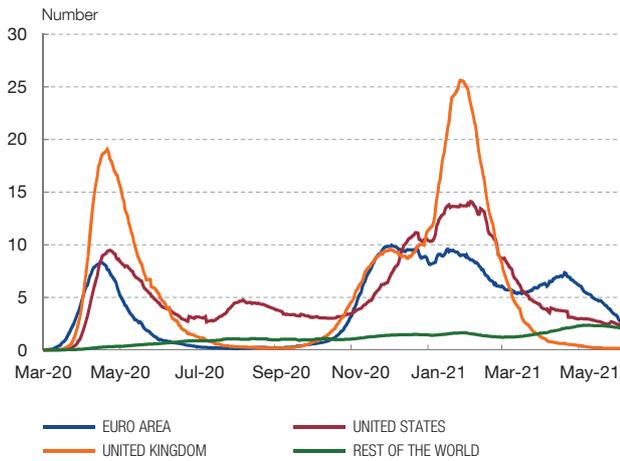
An alternative indicator is the degree of mobility of the population, constructed by Google (with sub-indices based on destination) or Apple (with sub-indices based on the means of transport used). This information includes not only the loss in mobility stemming from the restrictions imposed, but also that arising owing to individuals' more cautious behaviour out of fear of contagion. Indeed, the loss in mobility owing to voluntary social distancing has also been emphasised in light of its economic impact in certain papers such as IMF (2020) or Ghirelli *et al.* (2021a). One drawback of this mobility indicator is the absence of data prior to the health crisis, which prevents adjustment for the seasonal effects on mobility, which are especially noticeable during festive and holiday periods. This is the case, for example, of the Christmas period, when the fall in mobility coincided with an increase in restrictions during the second or third wave in many countries.

2 Specifically, school closures (C1), workplace closures (C2), the cancellation of public events (C3), restrictions on public gatherings (C4), closures of public transport (C5), stay-at-home requirements (C6), restrictions on internal movements (C7), international travel controls (C8), and public information campaigns (H1). The index is constructed as a simple mean of the value assigned to the nine sub-indices. The indicators, except C8, take into account whether the measure is specific or applied broadly nationwide. An alternative indicator is the CEPS-PERISCOPE Index by Gross *et al.* (2021), based on the information of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). According to the authors, this index shows a correlation of 80%-90% with the OSI both in levels and in changes.

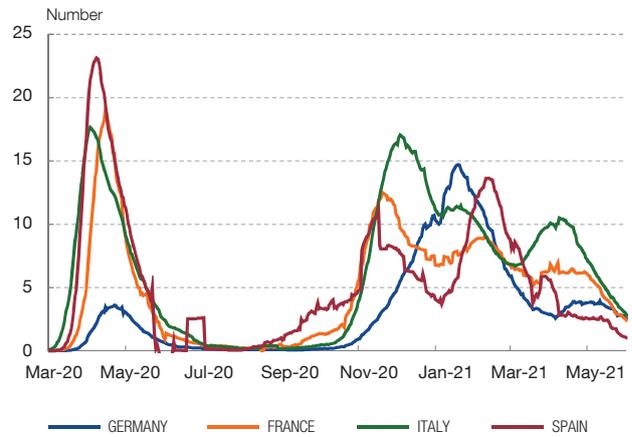
Chart 2

THE INTENSITY OF THE HEALTH CRISIS

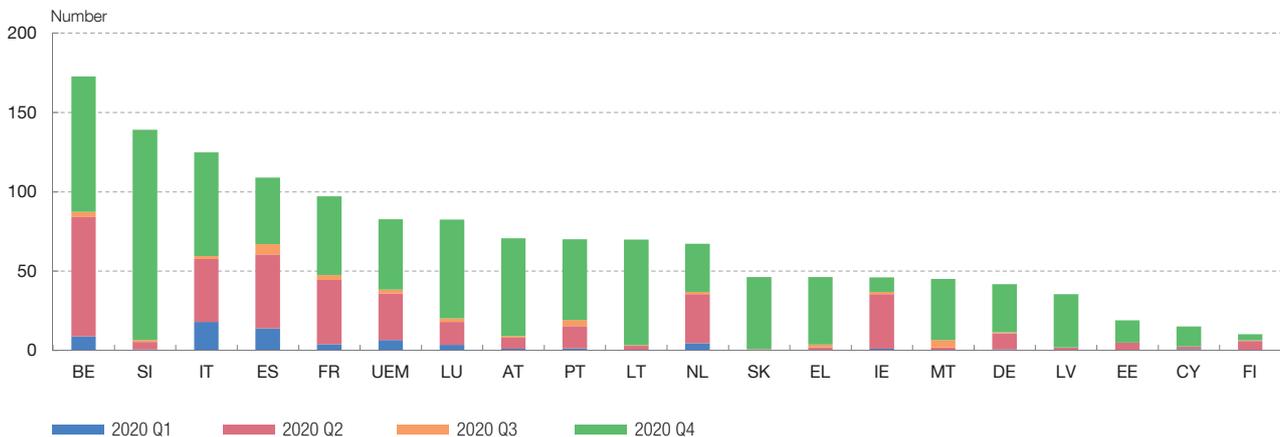
1 CUMULATIVE COVID-19 DEATHS IN 14-DAY WINDOWS
Per 100,000 inhabitants



2 CUMULATIVE COVID-19 DEATHS IN 14-DAY WINDOWS
Per 100,000 inhabitants



3 CUMULATIVE DEATHS IN 2020 OWING TO COVID-19 (a)
Per 100,000 inhabitants



SOURCES: European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center and own calculations.

a The ECDC data are weekly, meaning the weeks straddling different quarters are placed in that quarter covering most days in the week.

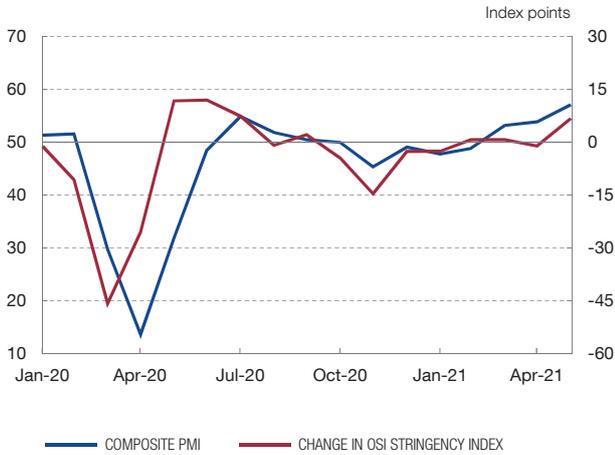
During the first wave, the tightening of the OSI indicator and the loss in mobility was sharp and abrupt, peaking in April in the euro area countries (see Charts 3.1 and 3.2).³ Adding to the collapse in demand prompted by the lockdown, the loss of jobs and uncertainty were the reduction in supply and the interruption of certain supply chains as a result of the mandatory temporary shutdown in many productive activities globally. Moreover, these effects were heightened by the global nature of the shock and the high degree of integration of economies. It is estimated that the decline in activity at the height of the lockdown was around 20% across the euro area economy [see Banco de España (2020)].

³ The severity and mobility indicators for the euro area constructed as an average of the national indicators weighted by 2019 GDP.

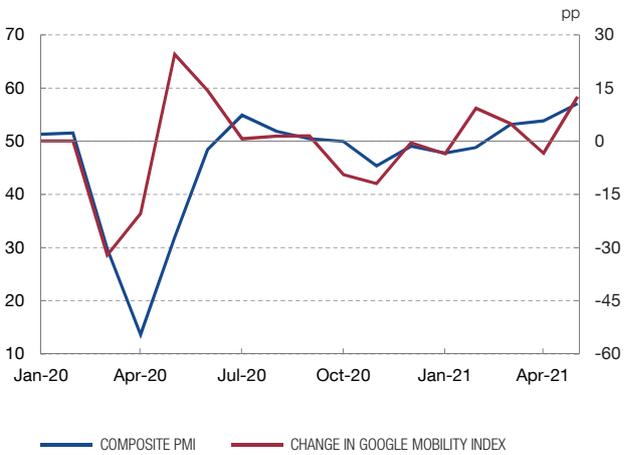
Chart 3

SEVERITY OF THE CRISIS AND THE CONTAINMENT MEASURES IN THE EURO AREA

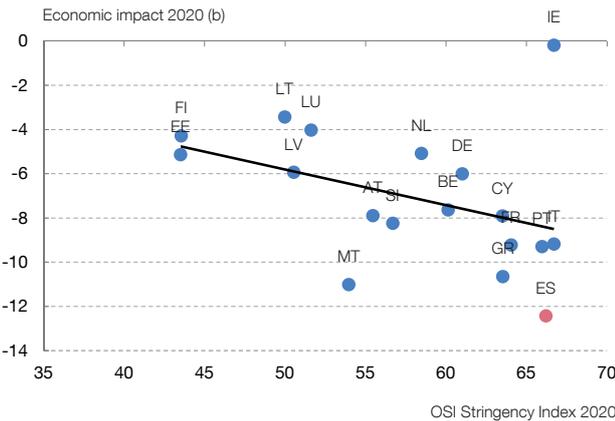
1 EURO AREA ACTIVITY AND SEVERITY OF CONTAINMENT MEASURES



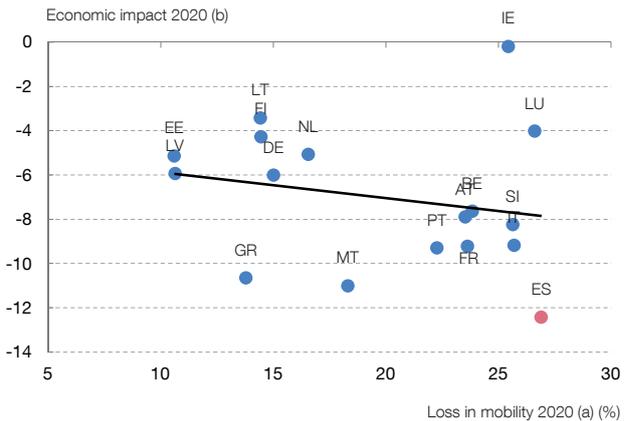
2 EURO AREA ACTIVITY AND MOBILITY



3 STRINGENCY INDEX AND ECONOMIC IMPACT



4 LOSS IN MOBILITY AND ECONOMIC IMPACT



SOURCES: European Commission, Google Mobility Report, Markit, Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker and own calculations.

- a The Google index measures the loss in mobility relative to a pre-COVID reference period. Consideration is given to an average of mobility indices at "food centres and pharmacies", "leisure facilities and shops" and "workplaces". The indicator for the euro area is constructed as a GDP-weighted average of countries' available data.
- b Difference between GDP growth in 2020 and that forecast before the pandemic according to the European Commission's February 2020 forecasts. In percentage points.

From May, with the epidemiological situation under greater control, a gradual withdrawal of restrictions began, whose start, pace and duration differed from country to country [see Demircuc-Kunt *et al.* (2020) and Franks *et al.* (2020)]. In any event, most countries maintained restrictions on activities entailing a greater risk of contagion, while developing a containment strategy underpinned by the strengthening of health measures and the carrying out of diagnostic tests, tracing and selective confinement.

These measures did not prevent the emergence of outbreaks of the virus in different European countries towards the end of the summer, which ultimately triggered second and third waves during the autumn and winter. These new waves were generally acute and severe, with higher mortality even than in the first wave in some countries, exacerbated by the greater social interaction of the Christmas period, by the cold⁴ and by the proliferation of new, more contagious strains.

The restrictions on economic and social activity were tightened. But experience, a greater understanding of how the virus spreads and the better information available about the real incidence of COVID-19 all enabled a more targeted restrictive-measures approach to be adopted, with lower economic and social costs, and supported too by a stronger situation on the preventive-health front. Instead of widespread closures and lockdowns, measures aimed at the regions with a greater incidence of the virus or at high-risk activities were implemented. Hence, perimeter closures were set up in high-incidence areas; capacity and opening hours were limited for shops, restaurants and leisure centres; the size of gatherings of non-family members was limited; in some countries curfews were introduced; and there were also restrictions on cross-border mobility. Some national and regional authorities even temporarily shut down hospitality-related activity, restaurants and leisure facilities, non-essential retail establishments and schools. The more targeted nature of these measures prevented shocks to productive processes from proving as serious as those seen during the total lockdown in the first wave. Global value chains were not so affected, and trade and manufacturing activity sustained sound growth globally during the second half of 2020.

At the same time, the economy showed greater resilience in the second and successive waves of the virus thanks to ongoing learning and adaptation by individuals to the situation of contagion risk and restrictions. Thus, for example, heightened technological diffusion allowed for a considerable increase in e-commerce and other digital services and in remote working. As the data in Alfonso *et al.* (2021) show, for example, the growth of e-commerce was sharper in countries with more stringent lockdown measures.

As from the summer, the tightening in the stringency indicators had a lesser impact on economic activity (see Charts 3.1 and 3.2). Along with the more targeted nature of the containment measures, headway in the digitalisation of the economy, especially regarding remote working and e-commerce, provided for greater activity without the need for people to move.

Taking 2020 as a whole, a positive relationship is seen between the seriousness of the economic crisis and the greater duration and intensity of the containment measures (both through the OSI stringency indicator and mobility; see Chart 3.3). Using the average value of these indicators in 2020, the economic impact of the health crisis can be seen to be

4 Ghirelli *et al.* (2021b), using US data, estimate that a 20°C reduction in temperatures between summer and winter would increase the effective reproduction number (R_t) by 0.35.

higher in those countries with more severe containment measures – owing to their greater duration or intensity – or with more considerable losses in terms of mobility. The correlation stands at around 30% with annual data. This association is not uniform throughout the crisis, with the correlation being greater in the early quarters.⁵

⁵ In particular, using quarterly data on the year-on-year change in GDP for the EU countries plus the United Kingdom, the correlation is around 50% in the first two quarters, both for the mobility indicator and the stringency indicator. If the quarter-on-quarter rate of GDP and the stringency index are used, cross-country correlation is higher in the first quarter (45%), while in the case of mobility correlation is high in the first three quarters, at around 50%.

3 Productive structure as a factor of vulnerability in the face of the health crisis

A second significant factor in the heterogeneity of the economic impact of the health crisis is productive specialisation. As Table 1 shows, the share of market services in France, Italy and Spain is greater than in the euro area as a whole, although different patterns of specialisation can be seen in each of these countries. France stands out in the information and communications and professional, scientific and auxiliary activities sectors, where the possibility of teleworking is greater. Conversely, Italy and, above all, Spain evidence a greater share in the sectors encompassing retail, transport and hospitality, and artistic, recreational and other services activities. On the contrary, industrial activity (especially the manufacture of vehicles and of machinery and equipment) has a significantly greater presence in Germany than in the other three main economies.

Chart 4.1, which shows the change in gross value added (GVA) in 2020 compared with 2019, reveals that both the market services sector, which accounts for almost 55% of the total in the euro area economy, and industry contracted strongly in the year as a whole, by around 8% (albeit with a very different performance pattern over the course of the year).

In services, the performance was uneven. The sectors most affected were retail trade, transport and hospitality (which account for 19% of the euro area economy), and artistic activities, leisure and other personal services (whose economic share is much smaller, at somewhat over 3%).⁶ As Chart 4.2 shows, the loss in activity in these sectors was 13% and 18%, respectively, in 2020 in the euro area.

The decline in activity in retail trade, transport and hospitality was particularly severe in Spain (close to 25%) where, moreover, the share of this activity is almost 5 pp greater than in the euro area. Within this sector it is worth highlighting accommodation and food services, which jointly represent 3% of euro area GVA, and which saw their sales fall across the euro area by 53% and 35%, respectively (see Chart 5.1). In countries where tourism is more significant, such as Italy and Spain, the share of this sector rises to 4% and 6% of GVA, respectively, with Spain experiencing a decline in turnover of 64% in the case of accommodation and of 48% in that of food services. As to the transport sector, there has been a notable decline in air transport sales, which exceeded 50% in the euro area and rose to 60% in Italy and 57% in Spain, although their share in the economy as a whole is very small. Land transport and storage activities, which concentrate most of the value added in the transport sector, underwent turnover cuts of between 8% and 11%, which were consistently higher in Spain's case. Finally, the most significant impact on the distributive sector was once more observed in Spain, where its economic share is also greater, with a 13% fall in the case of wholesale sales.

In the case of artistic activities, leisure and other personal services, the contraction was more acute – at close to 25% – in France and Spain (see Chart 4.2).

⁶ The services comprising this sector are very heterogeneous and include sporting activities, computer repairs, various personal services and services provided by domestic staff.

Table 1

ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF THE EURO AREA AND ITS MAIN ECONOMIES

Share of each sector, as a percentage of 2019 nominal GVA (a)

Sectors	Euro area	Germany	France	Italy	Spain
Primary	1.7	0.8	1.8	2.1	2.9
Industry except construction	19.3	24.3	13.5	19.6	16.1
Manufacturing	16.3	21.2	11.0	16.6	12.3
Food, beverages and tobacco	1.9	1.5	2.0	1.9	2.3
Textiles, apparel, leather and footwear	0.6	0.3	0.2	1.6	0.8
Wood, cork, paper and printing	0.8	0.8	0.5	1.0	0.7
Coke and refined petroleum products	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.3
Chemicals	1.4	1.5	1.0	0.8	0.8
Pharmaceutical products	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.6	0.7
Rubber, plastic and other non-metallic mineral products	1.3	1.6	0.9	1.5	1.1
Basic metals and metal products, except machinery and equipment	2.1	2.7	1.3	2.7	1.7
Computer, electronic, optical and electrical equipment	1.7	2.9	0.9	1.2	0.6
Machinery and equipment, n.e.c.	2.2	3.5	0.6	2.4	0.7
Motor vehicles, trailers and semi-trailers	1.9	4.6	0.6	1.0	1.1
Other transport equipment	0.5	0.5	0.9	0.5	0.4
Furniture, other manufactures and repair of machinery and equipment	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.0
Energy	3.0	3.1	2.5	3.0	3.8
Construction	5.3	5.4	5.8	4.3	6.4
Market services	54.8	50.8	57.0	57.6	56.5
Wholesale and retail trade, transport and hospitality	19.0	16.1	17.7	21.5	23.5
<i>Wholesale and retail trade, of which:</i>	<i>11.0</i>	<i>10.0</i>	<i>10.2</i>	<i>11.8</i>	<i>12.6</i>
Wholesale trade (b)	5.4	4.9	4.6	5.5	5.9
Retail trade (b)	4.2	3.4	4.2	5.2	5.2
<i>Transport and storage, of which:</i>	<i>4.8</i>	<i>4.4</i>	<i>4.6</i>	<i>5.6</i>	<i>4.7</i>
Land and pipeline transport	2.1	1.7	2.2	2.8	2.1
Air transport	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.3
Storage and auxiliary transport activities	1.8	1.7	1.5	2.1	1.8
Accommodation and food services	3.1	1.7	2.9	4.0	6.2
Information and communications	5.0	4.9	5.4	3.7	3.8
Financial and insurance activities	4.5	3.8	4.0	4.9	3.8
Real estate activities	11.3	10.5	12.9	13.5	11.5

SOURCES: Eurostat and own calculations.**a** In some cases, the latest available figure is for 2018/2017.**b** Except motor vehicles and motorcycles.

Table 1

ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF THE EURO AREA AND ITS MAIN ECONOMIES (cont'd)

Share of each sector, as a percentage of 2019 nominal GVA (a)

Sectors	Euro area	Germany	France	Italy	Spain
Professional, scientific and auxiliary activities	11.7	11.6	14.2	10.0	9.1
<i>Professional and scientific activities, of which:</i>	6.7	6.5	8.3	6.5	4.9
Legal, accounting, consultancy and business management activities	3.5	3.2	3.9	3.2	2.1
Architectural and engineering activities; technical testing and analysis	1.3	1.4	1.6	1.1	1.1
Advertising and market research	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.6
<i>Administrative activities and auxiliary services, of which:</i>	5.0	5.1	5.9	3.5	4.2
Rental activities	1.3	1.6	1.7	0.6	0.8
Employment-related activities	1.3	1.0	1.9	0.8	0.6
Travel agencies and tour operators	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.3
Artistic and leisure activities, and other personal services	3.4	3.8	2.8	4.0	4.8
Artistic and leisure activities	1.4	1.4	1.5	1.1	2.1
Other personal services	1.7	2.2	1.3	1.8	1.9
Non-market services	18.9	18.7	21.9	16.4	18.0
Memorandum item:					
Most vulnerable services sectors: accommodation and hospitality, and artistic and leisure activities and other personal services	6.1	5.3	5.6	6.9	10.2
Most vulnerable services sectors (including wholesale and retail trade)	17.1	15.3	15.8	18.7	22.8

SOURCES: Eurostat and own calculations.

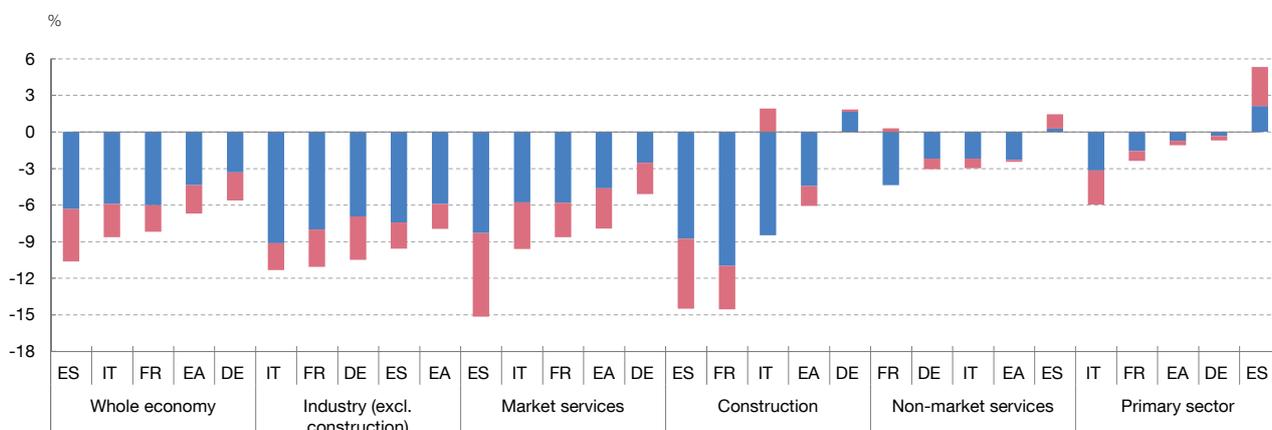
a In some cases, the latest available figure is for 2018/2017.

The third services sector most affected was professional, scientific, technical and auxiliary activities and, in this case too, Spain showed a sharper decline (14%) in GVA. The travel agencies and tour operators sector, whose economic share is similar to that of air transport, underwent an even bigger fall. Notable among the activities in the former services sector evidencing greater value added are those relating to employment, where turnover fell by 14%, and legal, accounting, consultancy and business management services, whose billings fell by 2% (declining by almost 10% in Spain), as Chart 5.2 shows.

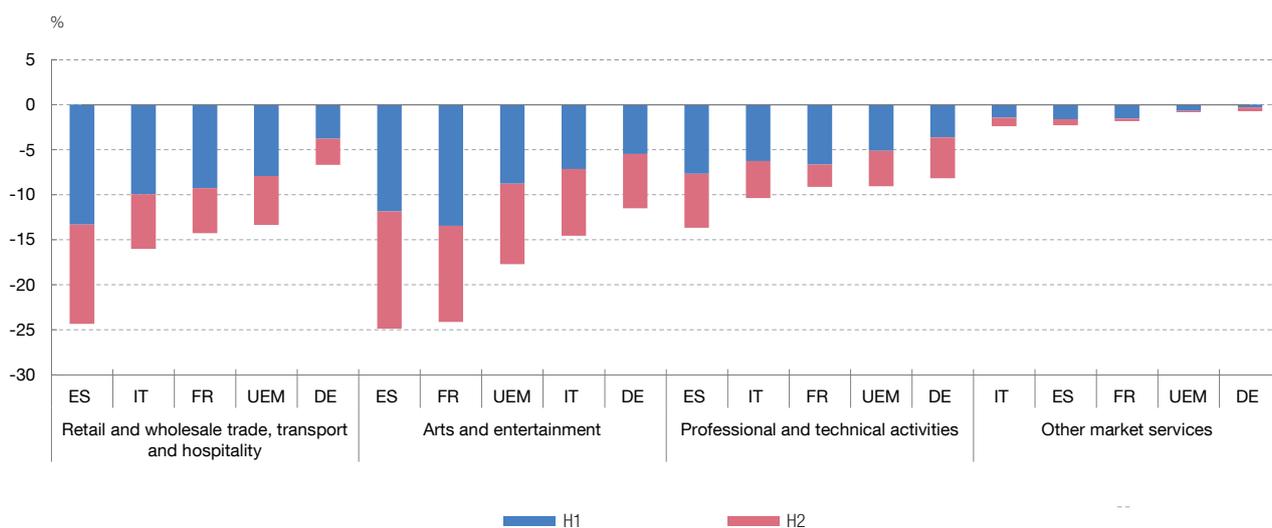
The impact of the crisis on manufacturing output in the euro area reflects in particular the collapse of international trade in the first half of the year and its effect on the largest economies. The decline in manufacturing GVA in 2020 in the four biggest economies oscillated between 9% in Spain and 11% in Italy (see Chart 4.1). The contraction in the euro area was lower, at 8%, and can be explained by the 15% increase in GVA

Chart 4
GROSS VALUE ADDED, BY SECTOR, IN 2020
 Annual average rate

1 GVA, BY SECTOR



2 GVA, BY MARKET SERVICES SECTORS



SOURCES: Eurostat and own calculations.

in Irish manufacturing, underpinned by the external sector and its specialisation in the pharmaceutical and technological sectors (and also by the relatively moderate declines – of 4% in 2020 as a whole – in the other euro area countries).

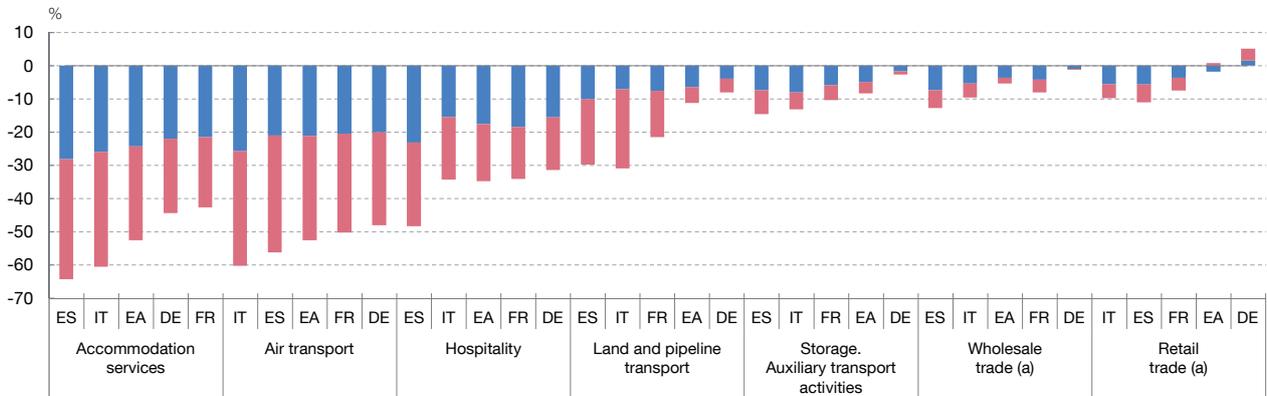
According to the industrial production data, the sector most affected was motor vehicle manufacture, where productive activity declined by 23%. This industry is the biggest in Germany, with a share in GVA of close to 5%, while it does not exceed 2% in the euro area; accordingly, its contribution in Germany to the decline in manufacturing output was much

Chart 5

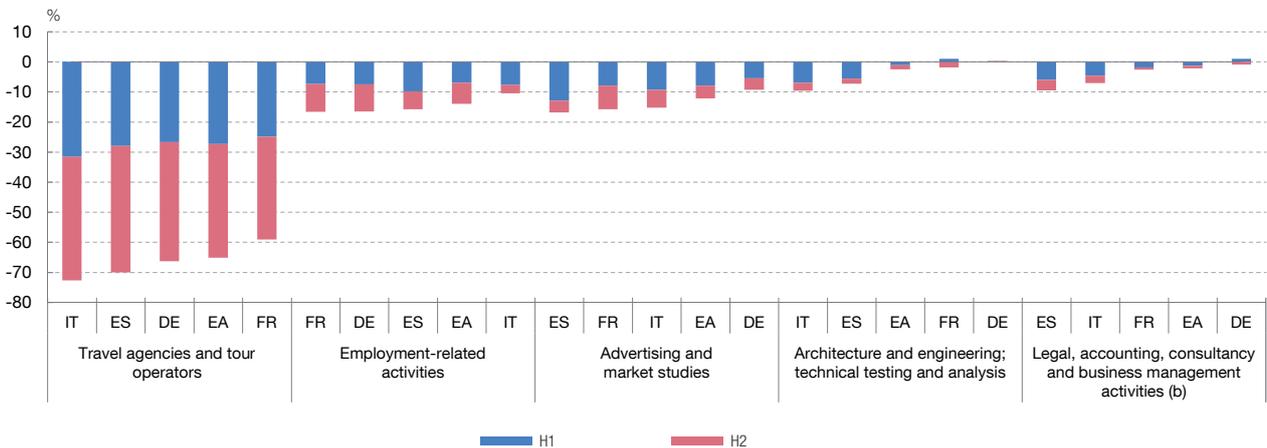
TURNOVER IN SPECIFIC MARKET SERVICES

Rate of change in 2020

1 WHOLESALE AND RETAIL TRADE, TRANSPORT AND HOSPITALITY



2 PROFESSIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL ACTIVITIES, AND ADMINISTRATIVE AND AUXILIARY ACTIVITIES



SOURCES: Eurostat and own calculations.

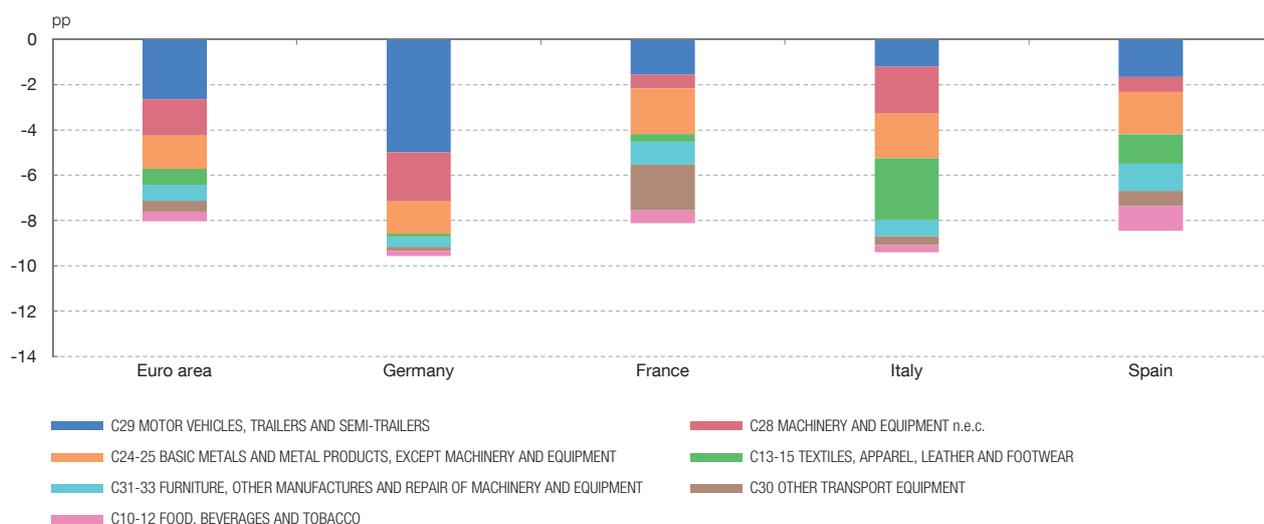
a Except motor vehicles and motorcycles.

b For Italy, simple mean of the rates of changes for legal, accounting, consultancy and business management activities.

greater, making it the sector that most contributed to the fall-off in the German economy in 2020 (see Chart 6). In the cases of France and Italy, the sectors that most contributed to the decline in industry were, respectively, transport equipment (mainly aeronautical construction) and textiles. The two countries are relatively more specialised in these sectors (see Table 1) and experienced declines of around 25%. Finally, regarding the fall in industrial production in Spain, the relative contributions of the food industry, with a comparatively higher share in Spain, and of the furniture, other manufactures and machinery and equipment repair sector were noteworthy. Both sectors underwent sharper declines in Spain than in the other three main euro area economies.

Chart 6

CONTRIBUTIONS, BY SECTOR, TO THE CHANGE IN THE INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION INDEX IN 2020 (a)



SOURCES: Eurostat and own calculations.

a Calculation based on annual IPI (average of the monthly index).

The behaviour of construction has been especially uneven. The fall in activity in this sector compared with 2019 stood at around 15% in France⁷ and Spain. In Germany, by contrast, activity rose with quarter-on-quarter increases in the first and fourth quarters, against the background of favourable weather.

⁷ The decline in construction activity in France in the first half of 2020 might be related to the incentives arising from the country's temporary employment adjustment scheme. From 1 March to 1 June, the "partial unemployment" scheme covered 84% of net wages and all social security contributions corresponding to the workers included in it. Initially, the construction sector used this scheme intensively, with applications for 60% of its employees in March, second only behind the hospitality sector (73%).

4 Quantifying the determinants of the differential economic impact of the pandemic

To assess the various contributions of the factors discussed in explaining the differences in the economic impact of the crisis, a cross-section regression has been estimated for the European Union countries⁸ plus the United Kingdom, following the approach by Sapir (2020). The dependent variable is the difference between the decline in GDP in 2020 and the pre-pandemic growth forecast (see Chart 1). As with Sapir (2020), the European Commission's winter forecasts published on 13 February 2020 are used, when the coronavirus was still considered only as a downside risk to the economic scenario then envisaged.

Among the determinants, consideration is first given to the intensity and duration of the health crisis and the containment measures applied. In this respect, a variable dubbed mobility, which measures the annual average value of the Google mobility indicator,⁹ is used as an alternative. As seen in the second section, this indicator is more closely related to the course of activity, as it includes voluntary social distancing elements and, as from the second half of the year, the more selective nature of the restrictions, too. A variable labelled severity is also considered, reflecting the average value of the OSI stringency index, along with the variable COVID, which captures cumulative COVID-related deaths in 2020 expressed per 100,000 inhabitants in order to adjust for the different sizes of the countries.

Secondly, in approaching the differences in productive structure, the variable sectors, which captures the weight of the sectors most vulnerable to the health crisis, is considered. As discussed in the previous section, the sectors most affected were artistic activities, leisure and other services, and those of the distributive trade, transport and hospitality, which contributed more than 3 pp to the 7.4% decline in euro area GVA. In particular, regard was had to the share in the economy-wide total of the nominal GVA of the accommodation and food services (I), artistic activities and leisure (R), and other personal services (S) sectors, including their carryover effect on the other sectors, with the latter calculated on the basis of the latest global input-output tables for 2013 [WIOD; see Prades and Tello (2020)]. Taking the euro area countries, a clear positive relationship can be observed between the seriousness of the crisis and the share of these sectors in the economy as a whole (see Chart 7.1). Further, the variable teleworking is included, which captures the number of employees who began teleworking as a result of the pandemic, according to the Eurofound survey (2020).¹⁰ This variable captures each country's ability to set teleworking in place, not only in terms of the capacity of and access to digital infrastructures, but also of the productive structure, insofar as many productive processes and services cannot be undertaken remotely.

8 Ireland is excluded, since its GDP is affected by factors not directly related to productive activity, but to the effects of globalisation (e.g. many large multinationals are tax-domiciled there). In the specifications with the mobility variable, Cyprus is excluded owing to non-availability of data. The cut-off date for the database is 9 March 2021; subsequent revisions are not included.

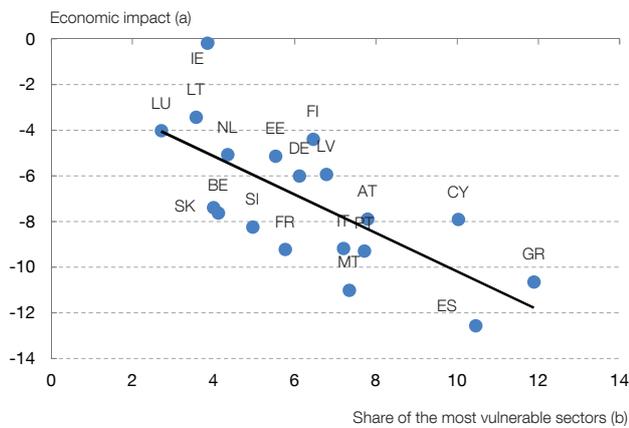
9 A mobility index average is considered for "food centres and pharmacies", "leisure and retail outlets" and "workplaces". Alternatively, the average added to these three by the "transit stations" mobility index has been used, which scarcely affects the results of the estimates.

10 The Labour Market Survey, with data for April 2020, is used for the United Kingdom.

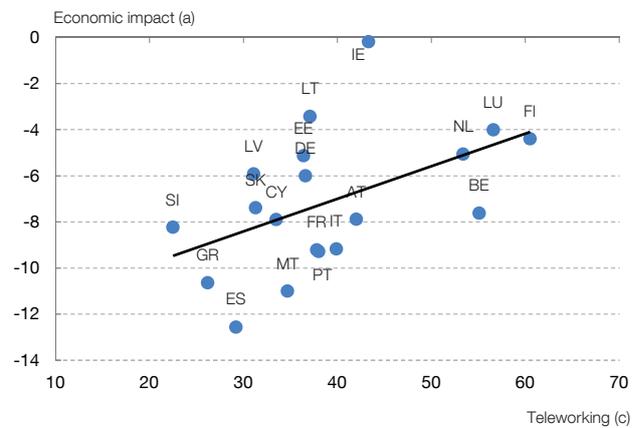
Chart 7

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO CERTAIN STRUCTURAL FACTORS

1 SHARE OF THE MOST VULNERABLE SECTORS



2 TELEWORKING



SOURCES: European Commission, Eurofound and Eurostat.

- a Difference between GDP growth in 2020 and that forecast prior to the pandemic according to the European Commission's February 2020 forecasts. In percentage points.
- b Share of nominal GVA of the sectors accommodation and hospitality (I), artistic and leisure activities (R), and other personal services (S) in the whole economy, including their carryover effects on the other sectors, with the latter calculated on the basis of the global input-output tables available for 2013. As a percentage.
- c Numbers employed who began to telework as a result of the pandemic, according to a Eurofound survey.

The results of this initial synthetic specification are set out in the first three columns of Table 2, alternatively considering the three measures of intensity of the health crisis: severity, COVID and mobility.¹¹ As can be seen, the variables are significant,¹² and the size of the coefficient of the sectors variable is affected by which variable is chosen to measure the severity of the health crisis. This coefficient is higher when the COVID variable is used and notably lower when mobility is chosen. An intermediate result is obtained by using the severity variable; but, in this case, the fit of the equation worsens notably.

Chart 8 depicts the contribution of the factors to the economic impact of the pandemic in 2020, in differences compared with the euro area and according to the specifications that measure the intensity of the health crisis with the variables COVID and mobility [columns (2) and (3) of Table 2]. As can be seen, for Spain and Greece, their productive structure has been a key factor in the economic impact of the crisis, which is proving greater in Spain, moreover, owing to the very incidence of the pandemic. The contribution of productive specialisation has also been relevant in the differential impact in other countries, such as Portugal, Austria, Cyprus and, to a lesser extent, Italy. The intensity of the health crisis has contributed significantly to the economic impact of the pandemic having been greater in Spain, France, Italy and Slovenia. A health-crisis contribution higher than the euro area average has also

11 When the three variables are included together, only that of mobility is significant.

12 With the severity index as a measure of the intensity of the crisis, the teleworking variable is not significant.

Table 2

DETERMINANTS OF THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE HEALTH CRISIS (a)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Variables								
Sectors	-0.495**	-0.673***	-0.353***	-0.372***	-0.352***	-0.359***	-0.345***	-0.340***
Teleworking	0.0153	0.0662**	0.0845***	0.0867***	0.0781**	0.0722***	0.0849***	0.0860***
Severity	-0.298***							
COVID		-0.0426***						
Mobility			0.315***	0.319***	0.312***	0.310***	0.312***	0.317***
SMEs				0.0121				
Governance					0.0381			
Openness						0.0134		
Fiscal (debt)							-0.0011	
Fiscal (measures)								0.0521
Constant	12.81*	-2.849*	-2.567**	-2.733*	-2.674**	-2.535**	-2.611**	-3.004**
# OBS	27	27	26	26	26	26	26	26
R2	0.650	0.735	0.923	0.923	0.924	0.928	0.923	0.925

SOURCE: Own calculations.

a Estimation (weighted by GDP) for the European Union countries plus the United Kingdom, excluding Ireland and, when estimating with the mobility variable, Cyprus. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. The Sectors variable is the share of the sectors most affected by the pandemic in total GVA: accommodation and hospitality, artistic, entertainment and recreational activities, and other personal services. Year 2019, except the United Kingdom (2018). *Teleworking* is the percentage of those employed who began to telework in 2020 as a result of the pandemic, according to the Eurofound (2020) survey. *COVID* reflects deaths owing to COVID-19 in 2020, expressed per 100,000 inhabitants. *Severity* captures the average value of the Oxford stringency index in 2020. *Mobility* is the change in mobility compared with the weeks prior to the crisis, as an average of mobility at grocery and pharmacy stores, shops and leisure facilities, and workplaces, drawn from the Google mobility report. *SMEs* is the percentage of those employed in firms with fewer than 10 employees (2017). *Governance* is the sum of the six dimensions of the World Bank indicator (voice and accountability, political stability and lack of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law and control of corruption). *Openness* is the share of goods exports in GDP, based on the National Accounts for 2019. The variable *Fiscal (Debt)* is public debt (2019) and *Fiscal (Measures)* is the volume of discretionary fiscal measures deployed during the health crisis, as a percentage of GDP, according to the IMF's Fiscal Monitor.

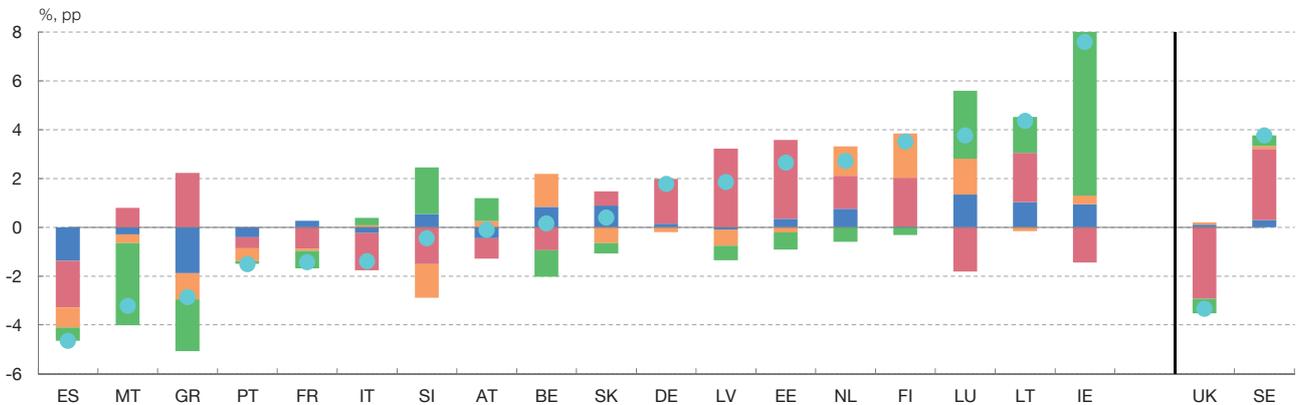
been experienced in Belgium and, in terms of mobility, Luxembourg, but this was more than offset by the positive contributions (relative to this average) of the productive structure and teleworking. Conversely, the relative contribution of teleworking was negative in the three countries most affected by their productive structure (Spain, Greece and Cyprus), partly as a consequence of the correlation between both variables (since the sectors most affected by the health crisis offer fewer possibilities of teleworking), as well as in Malta, Slovenia, Slovakia and Latvia.

In any event, in some countries it is not possible to capture a significant part of the differential impact with this simple approach. This is the case, among the countries most impacted, of Malta and, when the mobility variable is used, of Greece, Portugal and France, mainly when the COVID variable is used. The closure of public services during the first half of the year [see Cancé *et al.* (2021)] may have played a significant role in the case of France. Conversely, the specifications used do not manage to explain more than a relatively minor part of the better performance, relative to the euro area as a whole, of Lithuania and Ireland, with this latter country affected by the factors mentioned in footnote 8.

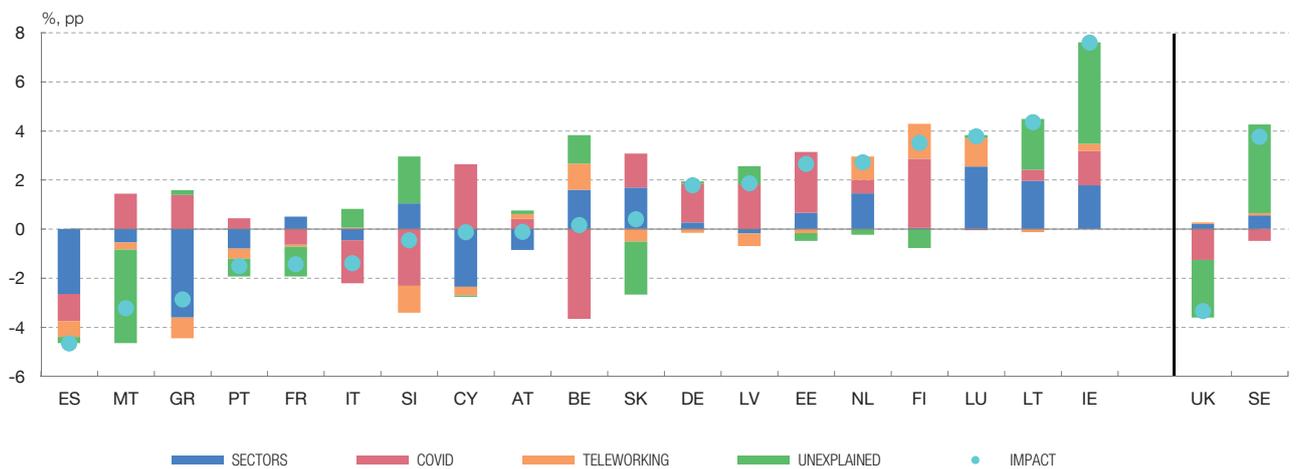
Chart 8

DIFFERENTIAL ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC RELATIVE TO THE EURO AREA AS A WHOLE. CONTRIBUTIONS OF DIFFERENT EXPLANATORY FACTORS

1 WITH LOSS IN MOBILITY AS A MEASURE OF INTENSITY OF THE HEALTH CRISIS



2 WITH DEATHS AS A MEASURE OF INTENSITY OF THE HEALTH CRISIS



SOURCE: Own calculations.

Other variables considered, but which have not proven significant, are in columns (4) to (8) of Table 2, using mobility as a measure of intensity of the health crisis. Specifically, the SME variable seeks to reflect the greater vulnerability to the crisis of economies with a higher share of SMEs in terms of employment.¹³ In addition, a fiscal variable is also considered, enabling a possible explanatory role to be given to the different fiscal impulse deployed by countries [see Cuadro et al (2020)]. Use is made of discretionary fiscal measures as an indicator, in addition to the role of the automatic stabilisers, these being drawn from the January 2021 IMF Fiscal Monitor. Alternatively, the 2019 level of public debt is included (as a proxy of the fiscal space available to deploy a forceful fiscal response), but it does not prove

¹³ However, this variable takes the expected sign (though it is not significant either) in the specifications that use the OSI as a measure of the intensity of the health crisis.

significant either, in line with the findings of Sapir (2020). The absence of significance might be associated with the effectiveness of the ECB's stimulus measures and their contribution to increasing countries' fiscal space to act in the face of the health crisis. The variable openness is also considered; it captures the share in GDP of goods exports. Conceivably, a higher value for this variable would result in a greater impact of the disruptions to the global value chains and of the fall in trade flows in the first half of the year. However, trade and manufacturing resilience during the second and successive waves has meant that trade openness has played a positive role in this period, offsetting the decline in services activity. The annual approach of the exercise considered does not allow these differentiated effects over the course of the year to be captured. Lastly, consideration is also given to the variable governance, constructed as an average of the World Bank indicators, whose correlation with the per capita GDP level is high.¹⁴

Although the definition of some of these variables is not directly transferable to a quarterly analysis, as a robustness exercise, the table in Annex 1 sets out the results of the estimate with quarterly data, following the same specification as Fernández Cerezo (2021) for the Spanish provinces. The quarterly analysis confirms the significance of the variables. The finding as to the importance of the severity of the crisis and sectoral structure in explaining the different economic impact of the health crisis in the European countries holds. According to the contribution of the variables to R², mobility would be the factor that most contributes (32%).

Annex 2 presents an extension of the empirical analysis to see to what extent the factors considered in this paper would help explain the growth differential between the euro area countries and the United States. For this purpose, the specification shown in column 3 of Table 2 is estimated, expressing all variables in differences with the United States. In this estimation, the coefficients of the mobility variables, the share of the most vulnerable service branches and teleworking are hardly affected. It is the value and statistical significance of the constant that allows us to interpret that the factors considered are not sufficient to explain the greater economic impact of the pandemic in the euro area. While in column 3 of Table 2 the constant reflects a common negative impact in the 26 European countries considered, in the specification in annex 2, in differences vis-à-vis the United States, the constant shows a larger differential impact in the European countries that cannot be justified by the variables considered. Diakonova and Del Río (2021) discuss some explanatory factors.

14 Additionally, demographic variables (population density – conventional and of inhabited areas –) and variables of living conditions (percentage of population resident in flats and overcrowding rate) have been used. Irrespective of the measure of intensity of the health crisis used, none of these additional variables proved significant, except that of the percentage of the population resident in flats, albeit with a sign opposite to that expected.

5 Concluding remarks

The COVID-19 health crisis has particularly punished economic activity in the services sectors that entail most social interaction and, therefore, the economies most dependent on them, as the evidence set out in this paper shows.

These economies are likely to undergo more lasting effects and face a slower and more uncertain recovery. The economic impact on the most vulnerable services sectors has been harsher and persistent, with heavy declines during the second and successive waves. And no normalisation will be discernible until substantial inroads are made in the vaccination rollout globally (see Chart 9). Conversely, productive activity in manufacturing picked up swiftly as from the summer, benefiting from milder and targeted restrictions, and from the improvement in external goods trade. In early 2021, much of manufacturing activity had recovered, while the aggregate comprising the distributive trade, transport and hospitality posted losses in activity of over 13% relative to its pre-crisis level in the euro area. Such losses amounted to 24% in the case of leisure, culture and other personal services.

These latter sectors are particularly labour-intensive. Their share in terms of activity accounts for between 20-30% of GDP in the euro area countries; however, they concentrate between 30-40% of total employment. Moreover, employment in these sectors is more geared to a younger, female and less skilled population [see European Commission (2020)]; and that makes economic policy intervention all the more necessary in order to mitigate the social impact of the pandemic.

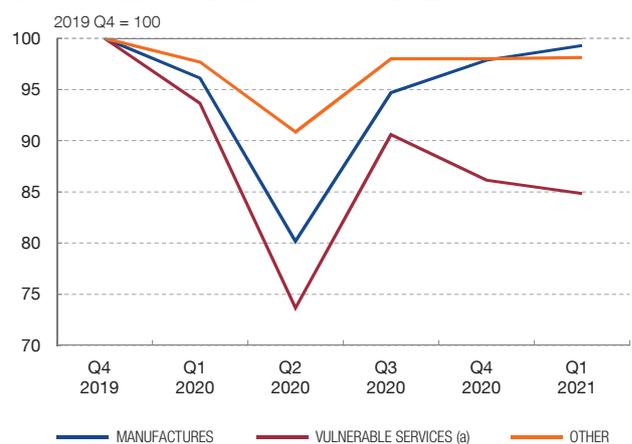
Chart 9

CROSS-COUNTRY AND SECTORAL DIVERGENCES

1 CHANGE IN GVA IN 2020 AND CONTRIBUTIONS, BY SECTOR



2 PATH OF THE EURO AREA SECTORS MOST AFFECTED



SOURCES: Eurostat and own calculations.

a Wholesale and retail trade, transport and hospitality (G-I), and artistic and leisure activities and other services (R-U).

b Primary sector (A), energy (B, D and E), construction (F), other market services [information and communications (J), financial and insurance activities (K), real estate activities (L) and professional, scientific and auxiliary activities (M-N)] and non-market services (O-Q).

Lastly, some sectors will foreseeably witness a structural decline in demand (e.g. as a result of more extensive teleworking). Accordingly, the measures needed should not only provide for recovery, but also for the transformation and reallocation of the labour factor and of capital.

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Annex 1 Robustness exercise using quarterly data

Table A.1

REGRESSION WITH QUARTERLY FIXED EFFECTS (a)

Variables	[Year-on-year change in GDP]		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Sectors	-0.574***	-0.772***	-0.780***
Teleworking	0.0504**	0.0428*	0.0721***
Severity	-0.112***		
COVID		-0.0575***	
Mobility			0.241***
Dummy Q1	0.65	1.85	2.126*
Dummy Q2	-6.992***	-10.09***	-5.775***
Dummy Q3	-1.890***	-3.354***	-3.049***
Constant	4.193**	2.211	2.565*
# OBS	108	108	104
# Countries	27	27	26
R2	0.77	0.78	0.84
Contribution to R2 (%)			
Sectors	9.56	12.53	12.86
Health crisis	27.21	3.97	32.27

SOURCE: Own calculations.

a Pool estimation not weighted by nominal GDP. The asterisk denotes confidence levels (*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$).

Annex 2 Estimation in differences with the United States

Table A.2

DETERMINANTS OF THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE HEALTH CRISIS. REGRESSION IN DIFFERENCES WITH THE UNITED STATES (a)

Variables	
Sectors	-0.356***
Teleworking	0.0846***
Mobility	0.315***
Constant	-1.890***
# OBS	26
# Countries	26
R2	0.92

SOURCE: Own calculations.

a Estimation similar to that in column (3) of Table 2, with all the variables in differences with the United States. See footnote to Table 2.

Chart A.2

DIFFERENTIAL ECONOMIC IMPACT COMPARED WITH THE UNITED STATES

Contributions



SOURCE: Own calculations.

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