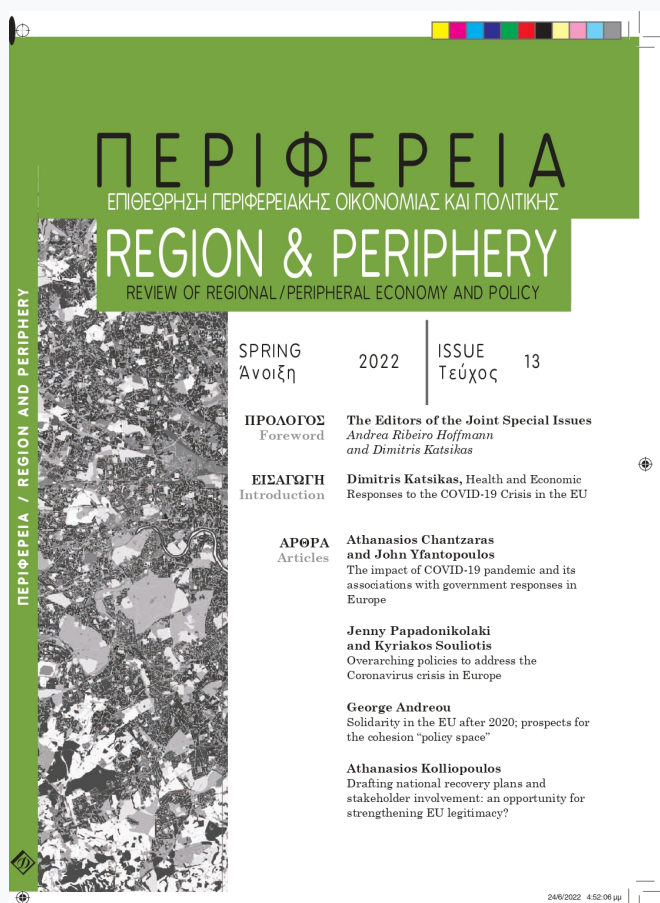


## Περιφέρεια | Regional Integration: Politics, Economics, Governance

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Περιφέρεια | Region & Periphery - Regional Health and Economic Responses to the COVID Crisis in the EU and Latin America



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The COVID-19 pandemic constitutes a major health and economic challenge for the entire world. Major crises typically leave their imprint on global and/or regional cooperation. Often, the institutions of cooperation are strengthened in their wake, with the aim of addressing the causes that led to them. During the pandemic international cooperative initiatives were launched in both the health and economic fronts. Thus, for example COVAX, the World Health Organization (WHO)-sponsored cooperative initiative was launched to ensure access to vaccines for the world's poorest countries. On the economic front, central banks in several countries facilitated access to dollars in the international currency market, mitigating exchange rate pressures in the early stages of the pandemic.

On the other hand, crises do not always beget more cooperation. During the pandemic we have witnessed individual states resorting to 'egoistic' policy responses, from attempts to secure medical equipment at the expense of the other countries to conflicts over the production and distribution of vaccines. The issue of vaccines, in particular, is crucial from both a medical and economic perspective. As long as large parts of the population in the world remain without access to vaccines the efforts to eradicate the virus will be undermined. Similarly, the recovery of the global economy will be slower and unbalanced if restrictive measures continue to disrupt economic activity due to lack of access to vaccines. The production and distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines to every person across the globe, irrespective of their economic capacity, in a timely manner, is necessary to win conclusively the fight against the pandemic. The protection of global public health against COVID-19 is a global public good, whose provision depends on the active cooperation of states, international and regional organizations, civil society and pharmaceutical companies around the world.

In Europe, the reaction to the pandemic has raised hopes that the mistakes of the previous crises will not be repeated. Following a few weeks of disputes and delays, the European Union's (EU) response to the pandemic became gradually more coordinated and efficient. The climax of this enhanced cooperation was reached in July 2020, when EU member states were able to agree on the Next Generation EU (NGEU), a plan to support member states in the battle against the pandemic, but mostly to help their economies recover after the crisis, while taking into account EU's principal policy objectives, the green and digital transformations. The NGEU, combined with the prompt, strong and continuous response of the European Central Bank (ECB), an array of other EU-coordinated

measures designed to deliver considerable financial support, and the new EU budget, sent a strong signal of solidarity. Having said that, obstacles and failures continued to inhibit cooperation and to delay the implementation of the policies agreed, at great humanitarian and economic cost. From the drawn-out NGEU negotiations to overcome the objections of certain member states over rule of law conditionalities, to failures of coordination over vaccines' procurement, which at certain points in time raised the prospect of "vaccine nationalism", regional cooperation has been constantly challenged and needs to be supported.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, regional bodies that have mandates and instruments to respond to health and economic crises include the Common Market of the Southern Cone (MERCOSUR), the Andean Community, the Pacific Alliance, the Central American Integration System (SICA), the Community of Caribbean Countries (CARICOM), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the Organization of American States (OAS), and the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), that serves as the Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization (WHO). However, the proliferation of regional institutions and political polarization during the last decade has fragmented the region, and several organizations are now paralyzed or lost member-states. Despite some initiatives and collaboration with third countries and COVAX, most responses took place at the national or sub-national level, and the role of regional organizations was marginal.

The scientific journals *Revista Contexto Internacional*, published by the Institute of International Relations (IRI) at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio), Brazil and *Region/ Periphery* published by the Research Centre for Economic Policy, Governance and Development (EKOPDA) at the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA), Greece, issued a joint call in May 2021 for the submission of original research articles on the theme of: "Regional Health and Economic Responses to the COVID Crisis in the EU and Latin America". The purpose of the call was to attract submissions that investigate the handling of the COVID-19 crisis at a regional level focusing on the EU and Latin America. Articles focusing on the EU were submitted to *Region/ Periphery*, and articles focused on Latin America were submitted to *Revista Contexto Internacional*.

The call was an initiative of the EU Jean Monnet Network Project "Crisis Management-Equity-Democracy for Europe and Latin America", in which IRI/PUC-Rio and EKOPDA/NKUA are partners. The project promotes the comparative study of crises and crises management as well as its socio-economic and democratic implications in Europe and Latin America departing from the

premise that these regions can both learn from their respective experiences on crisis response and the distributive and democratic implications at national and regional levels, as well as from the role of regional hegemons, especially in times of political polarization and increasing nationalism. The project allows the exchange of information and experiences between Europe and Latin America, but also the opening of a bi-regional dialogue on the social and macroeconomic policies and crisis management, providing additional content to the Strategic Alliance the Summits EU-CELAC are supposed to build.

As co-editors we are happy to launch the two Special Issues in July and August 2022. The issues cover a wide array of topics related to the policy and institutional reactions to the pandemic in the EU and in Latin America. In the 21st century, crises of different kinds occur with increasing frequency, affecting not only individual countries, but also entire regions and the world as a whole. In this context, these special issues contribute to a growing literature on the impact of crises on regional cooperation and integration. Their concurrent publication in a comparative format, adds a new and -we believe- valuable perspective to the ongoing analysis.

As a final note, we would like to thank the authors for their contributions and the editors of the two journals who agreed to participate in this innovative endeavor.

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