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COVID-19 AND DIGITALISATION – SOME CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY FOR THE EUROPEAN ECONOMY⁴⁶

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***Abstract:** If we look at the EU as a human body, then all its organs (European regions) and systems (institutions and policies) need to be in good health and to function harmoniously. However, if one of the organs suffers, the well-being of the whole organism is endangered. Based on its own business survey data, the paper adds some regional perspective to the analysis of the potential impact of COVID-19 on the European economies. The authors aim at assessing the influence of the pandemic over one of the poorest and economically most vulnerable European regions (NUTS 2 level, GDP per capita level below 75% of the EU average, subject to Cohesion funding). The paper follows the hypothesis that Europe’s economy is as strong as its regions are. Smart specialisation using each region’s competitive advantage could be the delayed vaccine. Digitalisation might be the cure to inhale oxygen into the body’s infected lungs.*

***Keywords:** COVID-19, Digitalization, Smart Specialization, Regional Development, European Economy, Competitiveness.*

***JEL Codes:** M15, O33, R58*

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