

Women at Work in G20 countries: Policy action since 2020

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Executive summary

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on employment was initially greater for women than for men. Unlike in previous crises, sectors in which women are over-represented were hit more by job and work hour losses than those in which men prevail. This has slowed progress towards achieving the G20 Brisbane goal of reducing the gender gap in labour force participation by 25% by 2025. By early 2021, some of the lost ground has been made up, but the employment recovery is still far from complete. Policies should pay special attention to specific groups of women that risk being left behind by the recovery. These include women: with young children; who work in sectors hit hardest by the crisis; and facing physical and psychological violence and harassment.

Significant gender gaps in job quality still persist. This is especially true in terms of the gender gap in earnings, which remains substantial in most G20 countries. Women also tend to be underrepresented in jobs involving greater autonomy and social status, such as management positions, and are much more likely than men to suffer from time-related underemployment. They also carry a very unequal burden of unpaid work. The crisis has also highlighted the need to improve working conditions in essential service jobs, such as lower-skilled occupations in the health and care sectors, where women make up the majority of workers in most G20 economies.

All of the above requires some focused policy action along five main policy areas:

1. Investing in the care economy
2. Implementing employment policies that focus on women
3. Working towards universal access to social protection for all to reduce the current gender gap in social protection coverage
4. Promoting equal pay for work of equal value
5. Eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work

1. Introduction

At their Brisbane summit in 2014, G20 leaders committed to reduce the gender gap in labour force participation by 25 per cent by the year 2025 (the 25x25 target). This was followed in their Riyadh summit in 2020 by a call for a roadmap to ensure progress not only in reducing the gender gap in labour force participation but also in improving the quality of women's employment. Therefore, this annual report by the ILO and OECD reviews progress in achieving the Brisbane goal as well as recent developments in reducing gender inequality in other key labour market outcomes. It identifies key challenges for closing gender gaps in the labour market, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and promising policy initiatives. The report begins with a review of how gender gaps in labour market outcomes have evolved both prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is followed by an overview of recent key policy

developments to improve gender equality in the labour market based on the annual national employment reports provided by G20 countries and other countries invited to the G20 meetings. Areas for further policy action, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, are identified in the concluding section.

2. Recent developments in reducing gender gaps in labour market outcomes

Women have been on the front line of the COVID-19 crisis, as essential workers, researchers, innovators, media professionals, workers' and employers' representatives and political leaders. Yet, globally and across all regions and country income groups, women have been affected by employment losses to a greater extent than men. At the global level, the ILO's modelled estimates suggest that the employment loss for women was 5.0 per cent in 2020, versus 3.9 per cent for men.¹

Persistent discrimination, a heavy burden of unpaid care work on women's shoulders and a glass ceiling stubbornly in place are prolonging gender gaps in employment opportunities and job quality, as is violence and harassment in the world of work. The pandemic's impact risks reversing progress made and further entrenching these gaps, particularly for women facing disadvantage and discrimination based on multiple grounds, such as gender, ethnicity, disability and others. The COVID-19 crisis has particularly affected women in terms of managing their paid work and household responsibilities while strongly represented in frontline occupations in the health-care sector.

This section first reviews the extent to which the crisis has affected progress towards the Brisbane goal and then highlights where progress is needed to not only strengthen women's participation in paid work but also the quality of that work.

Progress in achieving the Brisbane goal

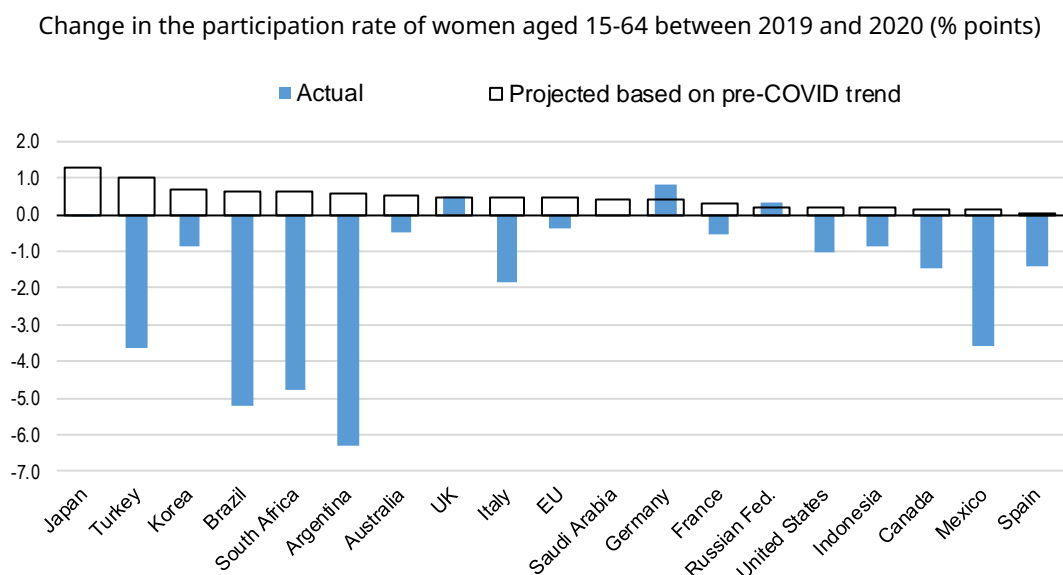
In nearly all G20 economies, the labour force participation rate of women aged 15-64 increased between 2012 and 2019.² This has helped to narrow the gender gap in participation. However, ***the COVID-19 crisis put a halt to the trend rise in women's labour force participation.*** Except in Germany, the United Kingdom and Russia, the participation rate for women fell between 2019 and 2020 in all countries where recent data are available (Figure 1). Relative to the small annual increase that would have been expected based on the

¹ ILO 2021. ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the World of Work. 7th edition (Geneva).

² See ILO and OECD (2020), *Women at Work in G20 countries: Progress and policy action since 2019*. Recent labour force data by gender is not available nationally for China.

trend rise since 2012, a substantial fall of 3 percentage points or more occurred in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa and Turkey. A small fall occurred even in Japan despite a strong trend rise previously.

Figure 1. The COVID-19 crisis halted the rise in labour force participation of women

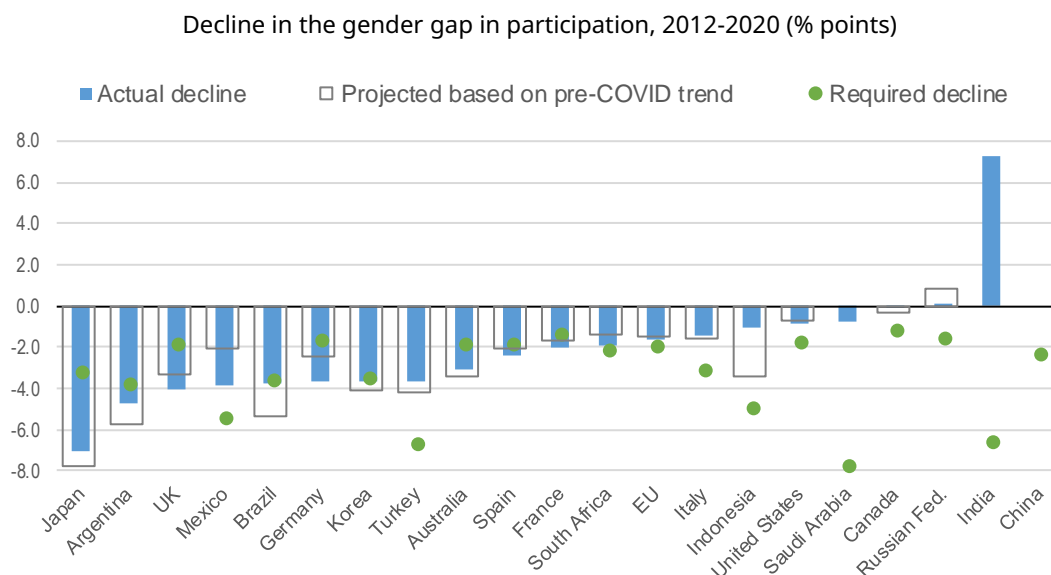


Note: The projected change is the annual trend change between 2012 and 2019. Data for 2020 were not available for China, India and Saudi Arabia.

Source: OECD calculations based on national labour force surveys.

The crisis also resulted in a fall in the participation rate of men between 2019 and 2020 in most countries. However, this was not always as great as for women in the initial stages of the crisis. Consequently, **the COVID-19 crisis has resulted in a partial reversal in many G20 countries of the progress made since 2012 in closing the gender gap in labour force participation** (Figure 2). Based on pre-pandemic trends, it is estimated that the crisis dampened progress in most countries where data for 2020 are available, notably in Brazil and Indonesia. However, this has only reversed part of the progress made in reducing the gender gap since 2012. In a few countries, particularly Mexico, South Africa and the United Kingdom, the gender gap narrowed more in 2020 than projected based on past trends but only as a result of a greater fall in men’s participation rates relative to women’s during the COVID-19 crisis. Overall, in around half of G20 economies, the decline in the gender gap since 2012 is still in line with, or better than, the decline required to meet the G20 Brisbane goal. Of the G20 economies where significantly faster progress will need to be made over the next five years to meet the Brisbane goal, there has been, nevertheless, a sizeable increase in participation by women since 2012 in Mexico and Turkey as well as in Indonesia, although the gains made have been eroded by the COVID-19 crisis. Of more concern is the situation in India where the gender gap remains wide. In Saudi Arabia, the gap remains wide, reflecting a large and persistent gender gap for non-Saudi residents who make up a large proportion of the population. For Saudi nationals, the gap has narrowed very rapidly over recent years.

Figure 2. Some rollback in 2020 of progress in reducing the gender gap in labour force participation



Note: The actual decline refers to the actual change in the gender gap for persons aged 15-64 (16-64 for the United States) between 2012 and 2020 (2019 for India and Saudi Arabia). The projected decline is based on the trend decline between 2012 and 2019. The required decline refers to the pro-rata decline required by 2020 (or 2019 for countries where 2020 data not available) to reach the target of a 25% decline by 2025. For China, no recent data are available to calculate the actual decline in the gender gap and census data for 2010 have been projected forward to 2012 to calculate the required decline in the gender gap.

Source: OECD calculations based on national labour force surveys and, for China, census data.

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women

A key issue is whether the COVID-19 crisis will have a long-lasting impact on dampening progress towards reducing gender gaps in labour force participation and worsening labour market outcomes for women more generally. While it is still too soon to give a definitive answer on this issue, some early evidence is available on how women and men have been faring in the labour market during the initial stages of the recovery from the crisis. A detailed overview of the gender impact of the rapid and steep decline in economic activity at the beginning of the pandemic was given in last year's report.³ In this section, the focus is on the impact of the economic recovery on employment, labour force participation and unemployment by gender.

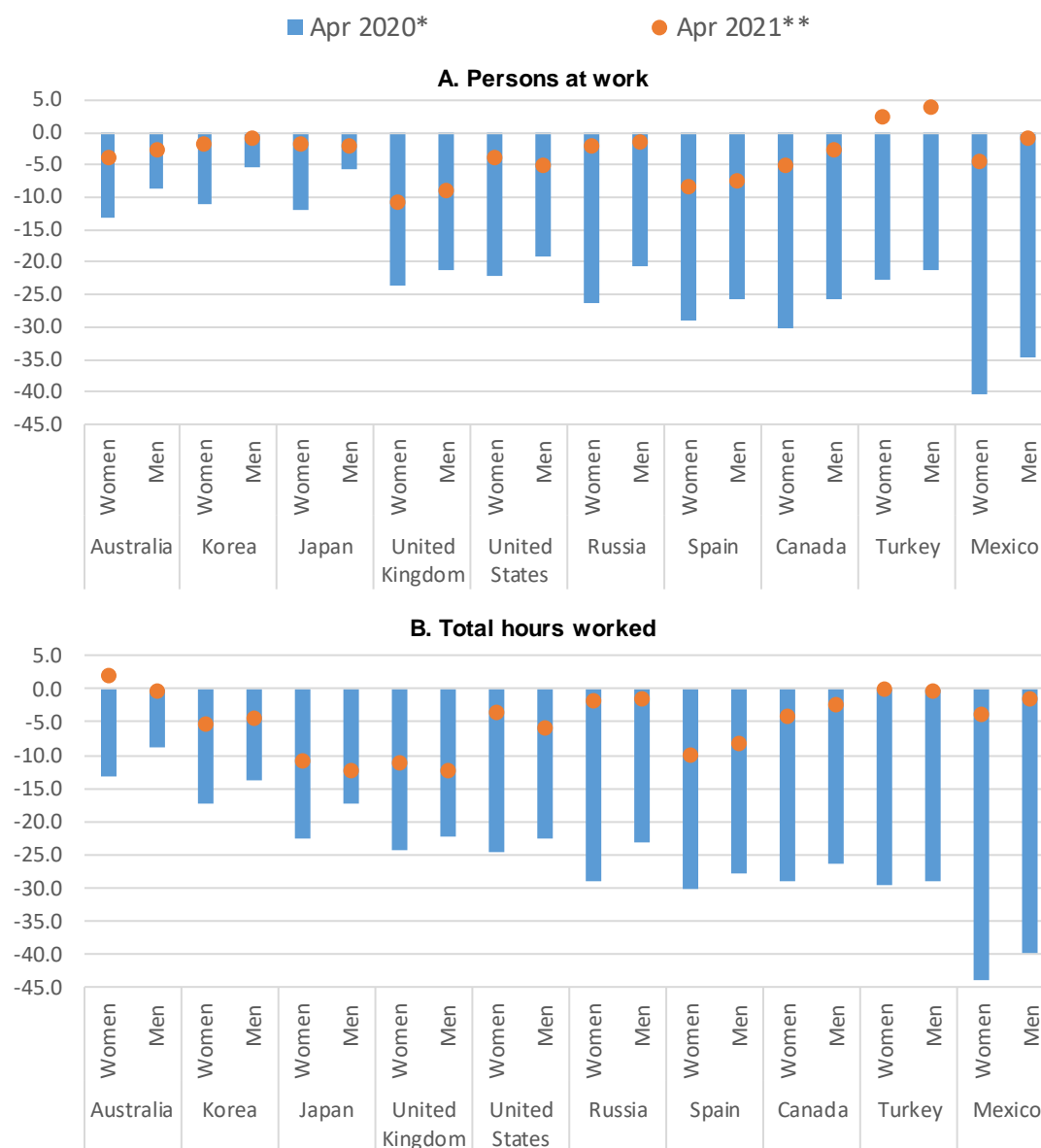
Women were disproportionately hit by job and working-time losses at the beginning of the crisis in most G20 economies for which monthly or recent quarterly data are available (Figure 3). This reflected the greater concentration of women in those sectors that were most affected by the local and national lockdowns and restrictions on social interaction that were put in place as the COVID-19 pandemic initially

³ ILO and OECD (2020), *Women at Work in G20 countries: Progress and policy action since 2019*.

spread across the world. However, as G20 economies recovered -- often fitfully -- from the trough in economic activity in the early part of 2020, ***there has been a substantial return to work that has benefited women as much as men in a number of G20 countries, but employment still remains below pre-pandemic levels in most.*** However, in the 12 months after the trough in economic activity in April 2020, there have been notable differences across G20 economies in the extent of the employment recovery and its impact on women and men linked to differences in the timing and amplitude of the second wave of infections and the restrictions taken to contain them. Nevertheless, by early 2021, the number of people at work (i.e. employed and who worked some hours) had risen substantially in all G20 countries where recent data are available, although remaining below its pre-pandemic level in most. In some countries this increase was greater for women than men. However, the gap with pre-pandemic levels remained noticeably greater in percentage terms for women than men in Canada, Mexico, Spain and the United Kingdom. This shortfall was even more substantial in the total number of hours worked in most countries. Nevertheless, the extent of the shortfall was similar for both women and men, with the notable exceptions of a greater shortfall for women in Canada, Mexico and Spain.

Figure 3. Women as well as men benefited from the return to work during the recovery

Percentage change since December 2019 (Q4 2019 for Spain and Turkey)



* Q2 2020 for Spain and Turkey.

** March 2021 for Russia and the United Kingdom; Q1 2021 for Spain and Turkey.

Note: The data refer to persons aged 15 and over (16 and over for Spain, the UK and the United States) and are seasonally adjusted. The data for Mexico for April 2020 were collected using a new survey instrument which may have affected their comparability with the data for earlier months.

Source: OECD calculations based on data from national labour force surveys.

Apart from Canada and the United States, **the rise in unemployment has remained muted throughout the COVID-19 crisis, with little difference by gender, thanks to the measures put in place to protect jobs**

(Figure 4). Substantial increases were recorded initially in Canada and the United States at the start of the crisis, but they have since declined as many of the temporarily laid-off workers were recalled to their jobs.

The decline has been more substantial for women than for men.⁴ Even in Canada and the United States, the initial rise in unemployment did not fully reflect the extent of job losses. For example, in the United States, the number of women employed fell by 11.9 million (seasonally adjusted) between March and April whereas the number of unemployed women rose by 8.5 million.

One reason for the more muted response of unemployment to the massive decline in economic activity during the COVID-19 crisis was because of **a substantial fall in labour force participation in most countries**. Many people who suffered job loss were counted as inactive rather than as unemployed since they were not actively looking or available for paid work because of additional household duties linked to confinement such as childcare and home-schooling of children or because there was little point seeking work during periods of lockdown. The result has been a substantial rise in all countries in the number of people recorded as not being in the labour force. This in turn translates into a fall in the labour force participation rate.

While some decline in the participation rate has also been a feature of previous recessions, notably during the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), the extent of the decline during the COVID-19 crisis was unprecedented, with the notable exception of Russia (Figure 4). The decline in the first few months of the COVID-19 crisis was as great for women as for men, with the exceptions of Mexico, Turkey and the United Kingdom. This was in stark contrast to the GFC where, apart from Korea, participation fell more for men than for women.

Since April 2020, there has been a partial or full recovery in participation rates for both men and women in most of the G20 countries where monthly data are available. Nevertheless, in early 2021, there was still a substantial gap with pre-pandemic levels in several countries. For women, taking into account the trend rise in their participation rates in most countries, this puts them even further behind in catching up to where they would have been in the absence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overall, women in many G20 economies were initially hit harder than men by job losses and reduced working time during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic but have since recovered some of the lost ground. Participation rates for both men and women have also risen since the trough of the crisis. However, in early 2021 they were still below their pre-pandemic levels in several countries, and this gap is even larger for women taking into account the trend rise in their participation prior to the pandemic.

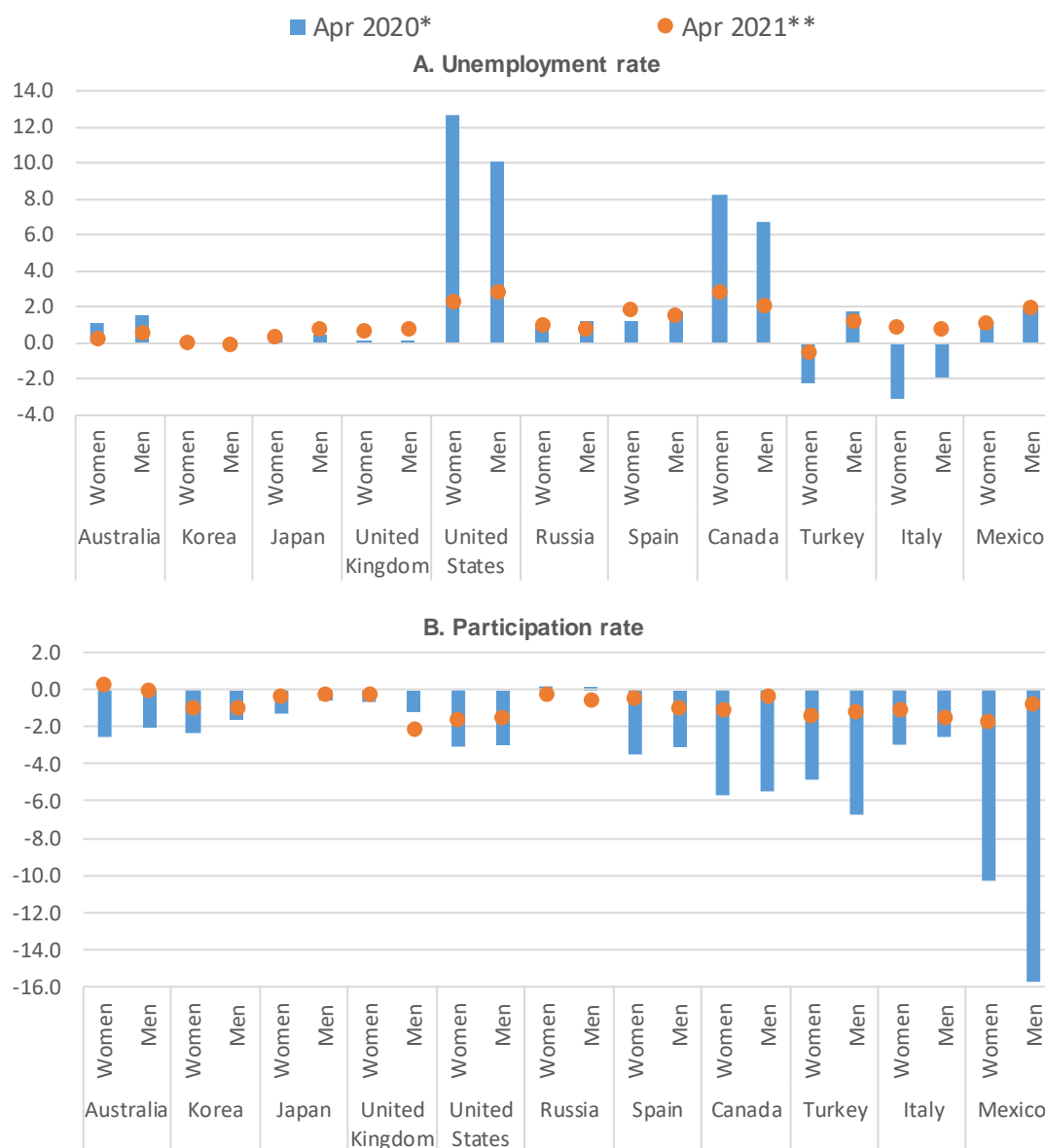
Therefore, **policies should pay renewed attention to reducing gender gaps in the labour market that were widened by the crisis and to the situation of specific groups of women that may be left behind by the recovery**. Some women with young children may have experienced a more lasting negative impact on their careers as a result of an extended time away from work. Also, women who formerly worked in

⁴ The greater rise in unemployment in Canada and the United States reflects a different statistical treatment than other countries of workers on temporary layoff as unemployed rather than employed. For example, if North American workers on temporary layoffs were treated as employed in line with statistical practice in other countries, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in Canada in April 2020 would have been 6.1% instead of 13.1% (up just 0.7 percentage points from an adjusted 5.4% in December 2019 instead of 7.5 p.p. in unadjusted terms). In the United States, the rate would have been 3.2% instead of 14.8%. (up just 0.2 p.p. from and adjusted 3.1% in December 2019 instead of 11.2 p.p. in unadjusted terms).

sectors that were hit hardest by the crisis and where they are overrepresented, such as restaurants, hotels and cultural activities, may face difficulties in finding work because a full recovery may be delayed in these sectors. A compounding of poorer mental health and physical and psychological abuse for some women could also have long-term adverse consequences on their likelihood of returning to work in the economic recovery.

Figure 4. The rise in unemployment has been dampened by labour force exit

% point change since December 2019 (Q4 2019 for Spain)



* Q2 2020 for Spain.

** March 2021 for Russia and the United Kingdom; Q1 2021 for Spain.

Note: The data refer to persons aged 15 and over (16 and over for Spain, the UK and the United States) and are seasonally adjusted. The data for Mexico for April 2020 were collected using a new survey instrument which may have affected their comparability with the data for earlier months.

Source: OECD calculations based on data from national labour force surveys.

Developments in the gender gap in job quality

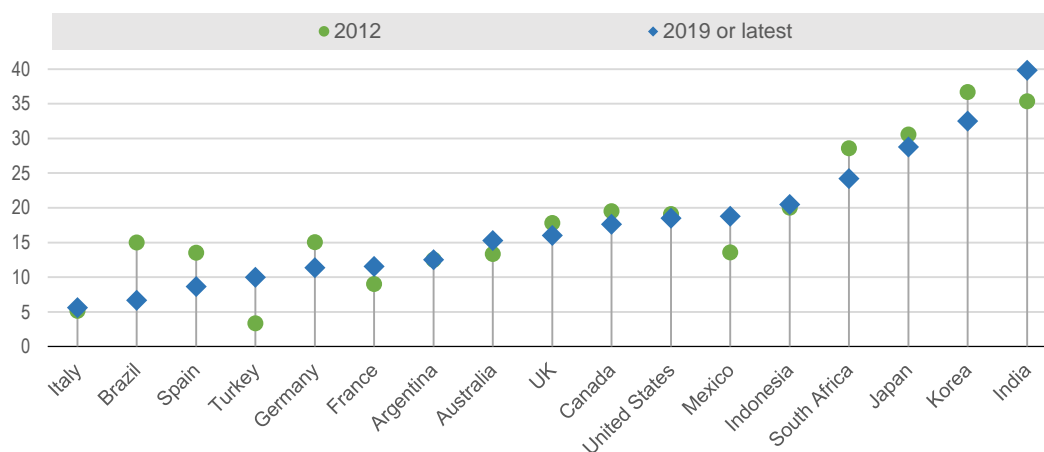
In this section, gender gaps in job quality are assessed across G20 economies. The section is organised along the three key dimensions of the G20 Job Quality Framework: i) earnings, ii) labour market security and iii) working conditions.

Earnings

On average, women continue to be paid less than men in all G20 economies when measured in terms of full-time median earnings (Figure 5). In most countries, the gender gap in earnings is even larger when adjusted for gender differences in paid work by characteristics such as the level of education. This is illustrated in Figure 6 for selected European G20 economies based on mean hourly earnings. The difference between the unadjusted and adjusted gaps is particularly striking for Turkey: in 2014, women earned slightly more overall than men but when the earnings gap is adjusted for compositional differences in paid work by level of education they are paid on average 18 per cent less. The adjusted gap corresponds to the weighted average of the gender gap in earnings at each level of education. Of the countries shown, the adjusted gap is smaller than the unadjusted gap only in the case of Germany.

Figure 5. Gender pay gaps remain substantial

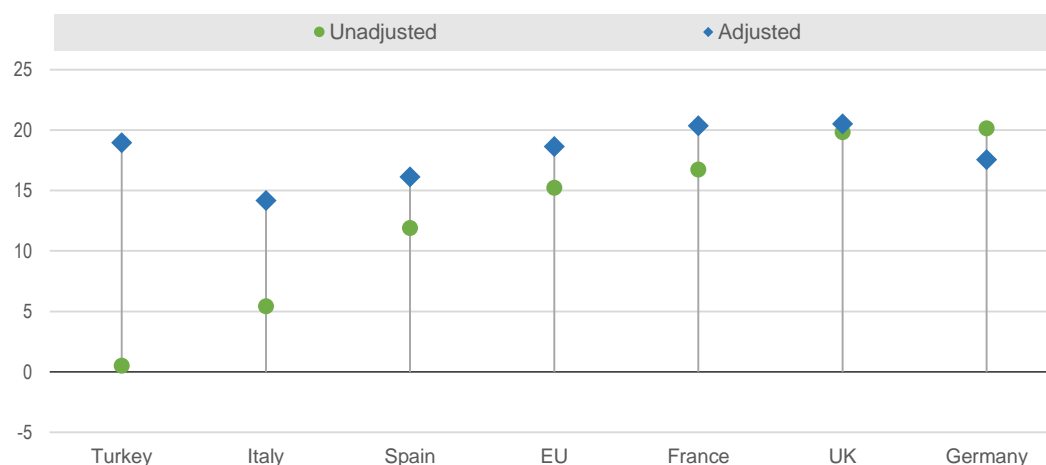
Difference in median full-time earnings between men and women as a % of the level for men, 2012 and 2019



Note: The data refer to gross (monthly or weekly) earnings of full-time wage and salary workers. The data for 2012 refer to: 2010 for France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Turkey; 2013 for South Africa; and 2014 for Korea. The data for 2019 refer to 2018 for France, Germany, India, Italy, South Africa, Spain and Turkey. Source: OECD Earnings Distribution Database; Eurostat; and national labour force surveys.

Figure 6. The gender gap in earnings is even larger when adjusted for compositional effects

Difference in mean hourly earnings between men and women as a % of the level for men, 2018



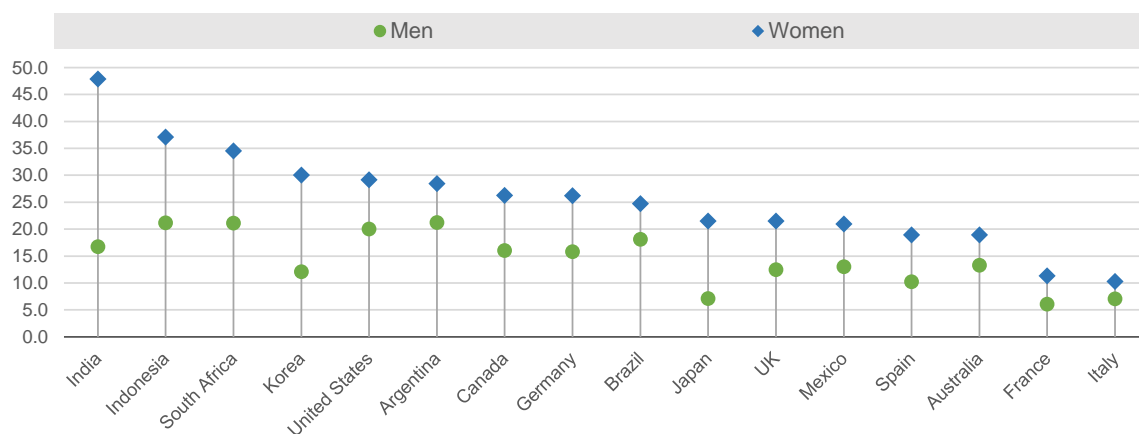
Note: The adjusted gender gap is calculated by weighting the gender difference in mean hourly earnings by broad level of education by the corresponding average of the gender shares of all employees at each level.

Source: European Structure of Earnings Survey as reported in Eurostat.

Women also tend to be more clustered at the bottom of the earnings distribution than men. In all countries with data available, the incidence of low-paid work is much higher for women than for men (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Women are at higher risk of low pay

Share of workers by gender earning less than two-thirds of median earnings for all workers, 2018 (%)



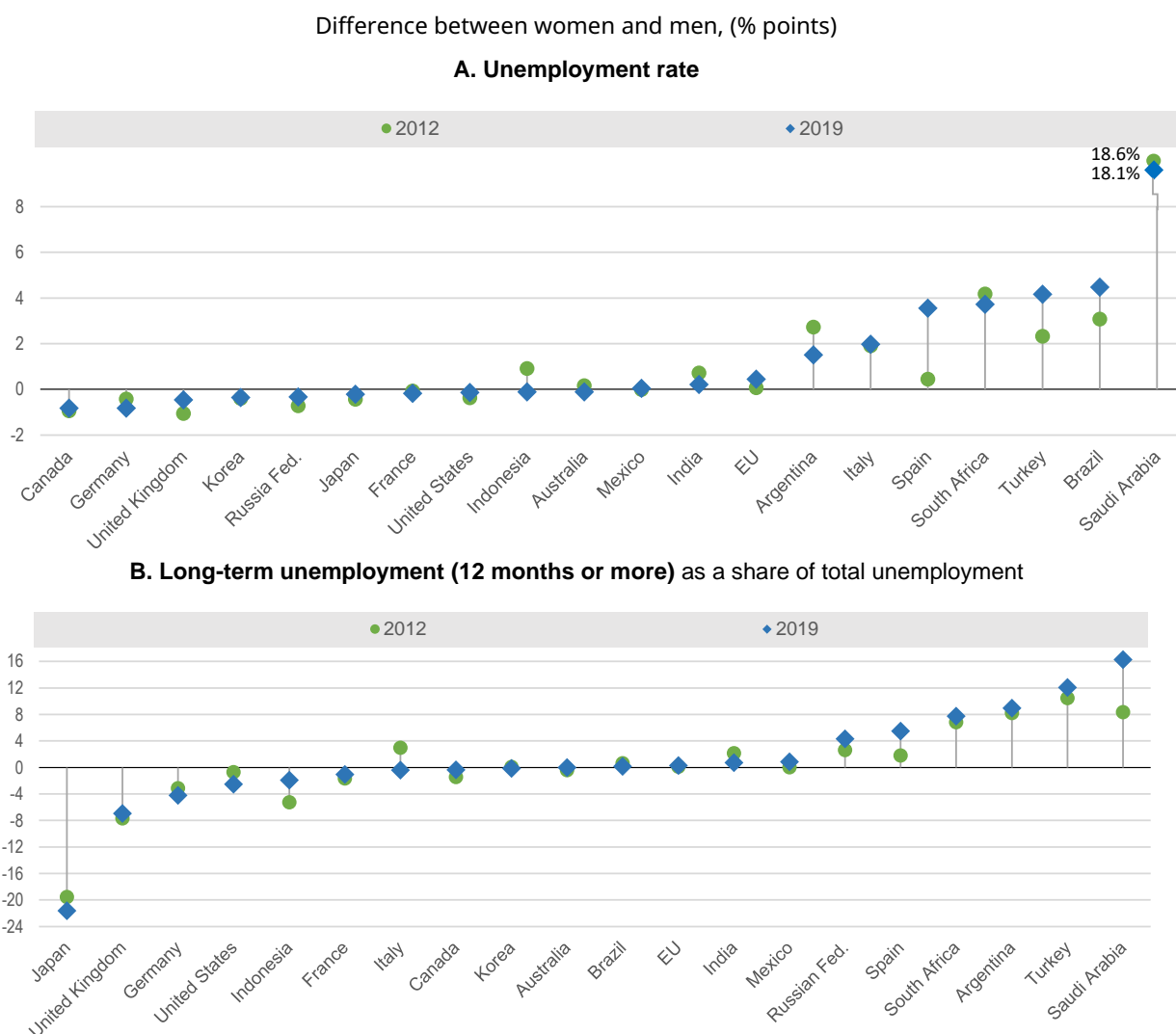
Note: The data refer to 2017 for Argentina and Indonesia, 2015 for Brazil and South Africa, and 2012 for India.

Source: OECD Earnings Distribution Database; European Structure of Earnings Survey as reported in Eurostat; and OECD estimates based on national labour force surveys for Argentina, Brazil, India, Indonesia and South Africa.

Labour market security

For around half of G20 economies, the unemployment rate for women remains higher than for men (Figure 8, Panel A). In several of these countries, the gap increased further between 2012 and 2019 along with a rise in the overall unemployment rate. More recently, the COVID-19 crisis led to an increase in the unemployment rate that was initially greater for women in several G20 economies than for men. In several of the countries where the unemployment rate is substantially higher for women than for men, women are also more likely to face long-term unemployment once unemployed than men (Figure 8, Panel B). Elsewhere the risk of long-term unemployment is similar by gender or even lower for women, most notably in Japan.

Figure 8. Gender gaps in unemployment vary across G20 economies

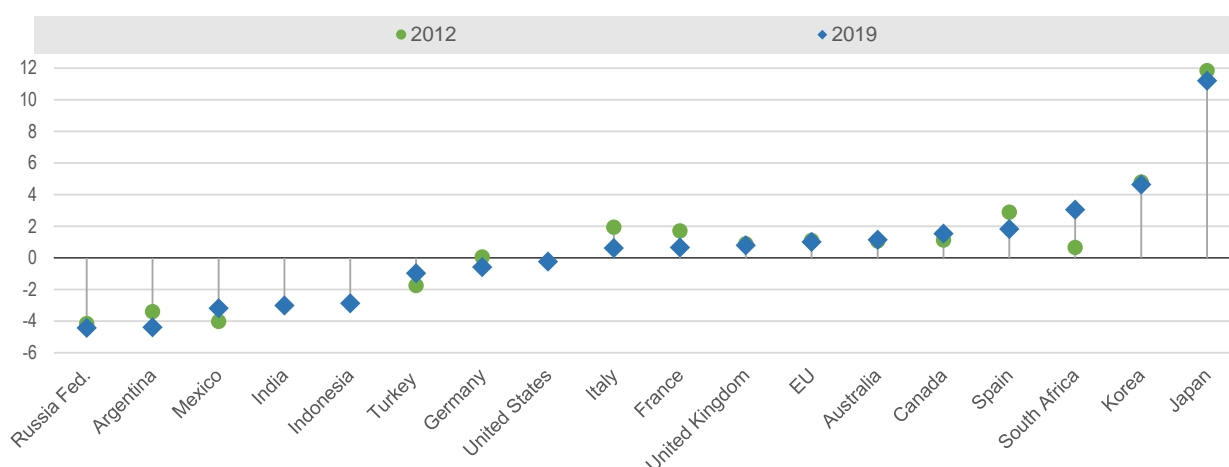


Note: The data in Panel B for 2019 refer to 2016 for Saudi Arabia.
Source: National labour force surveys.

In most G20 economies where data are available, the share of employees on temporary contracts is higher for women than for men, most notably in Japan and Korea (Figure 9). However, in the majority of countries, the gender gap narrowed between 2012 and 2019.

Figure 9. Temporary work is more common for women than men in many countries

Difference between women and men in the share of employees on temporary contracts, 2012 and 2019 (% points)



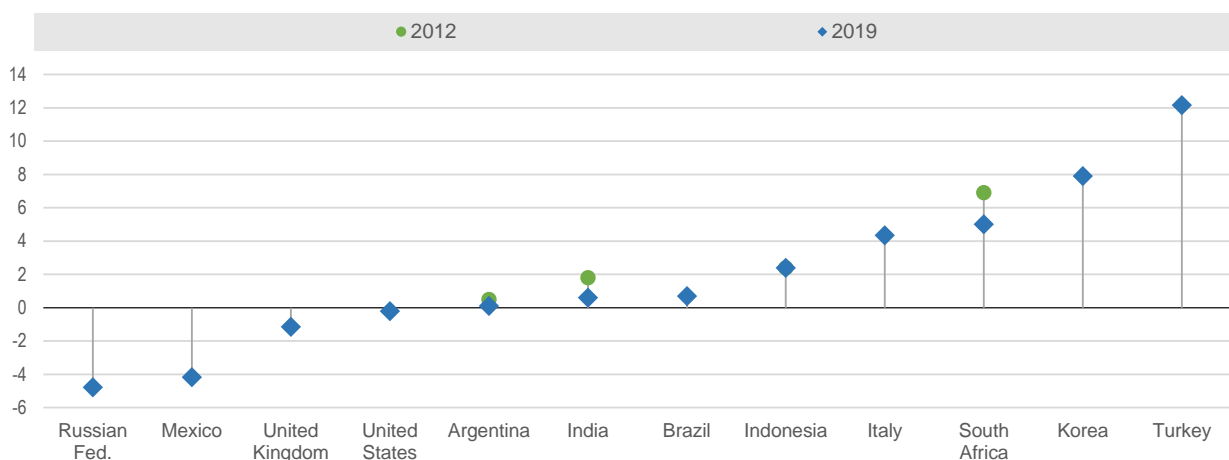
Note: The data for 2019 refer to 2017 for the United States.

Source: OECD Employment Database and ILOSTAT.

In many of the G20 emerging economies, informal employment accounts for a high proportion of the employed population. However, the gender gap in this proportion is relatively small (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Gender differences in the incidence of informal employment are generally small

Difference between women and men in the incidence of informal employment, 2012 and 2019 (% points)



Note: The data for 2012 refer to 2016 for Indonesia.

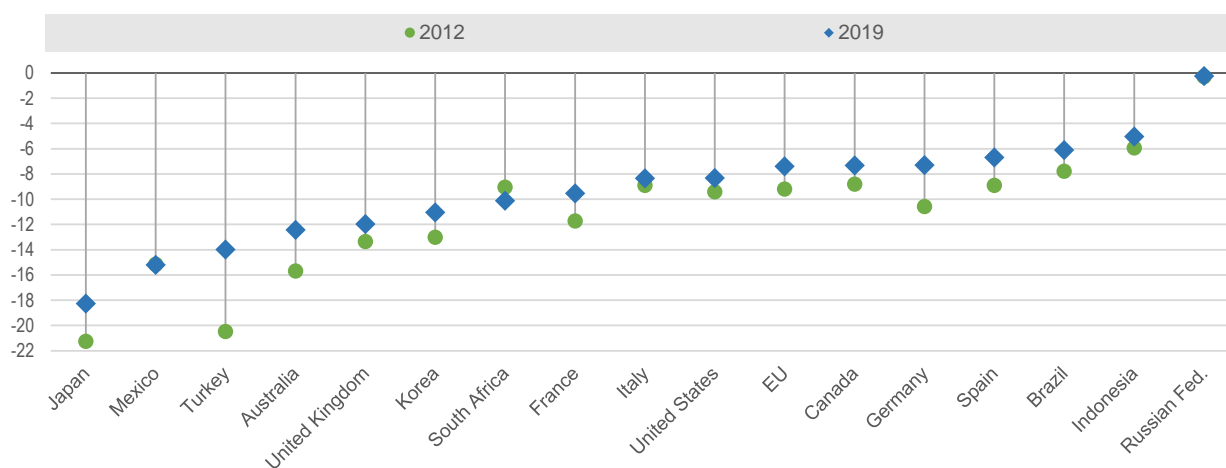
Source: ILOSTAT.

Working conditions

Working very long hours per week is much more common for men than for women in all G20 economies, except for Russia where there is close to gender parity (Figure 11). This reflects the fact that women (especially mothers) perform more unpaid care work than men on average, leaving less time available for working very long hours (Figure 17). Since 2012, there has been a widespread decline in incidence of very long hours of work for both men and women, but generally somewhat more pronounced for men.

Figure 11. Very long working hours are more common for men than women

Difference between women and men in the share of those employed who usually 50 hours or more per week, 2012 and 2019 (% points)

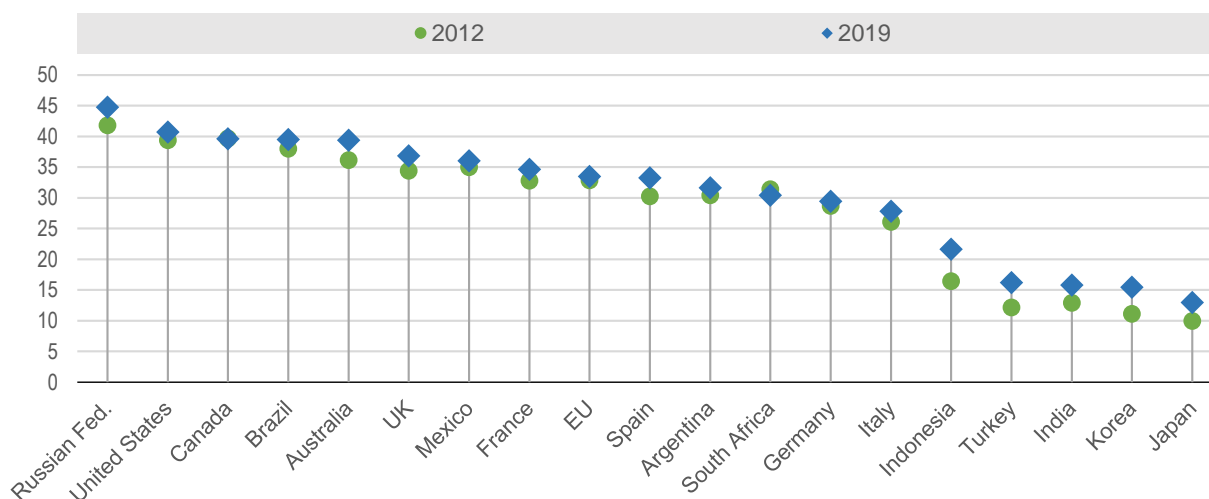


Note: The data for 2019 refer to 2017 for Indonesia.
Source: National labour force surveys.

One of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5.5) is to “ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political life”, and one of the indicators of progress is the proportion of women in managerial positions (SDG Indicator 5.5.2). Women account less than half of all managerial jobs in all G20 countries, ranging from a high of around 40% or more in Russia and the US to around 15% or less in Korea, India and Japan (Figure 12). Since 2012, their share has increased in most G20 countries, notably in Indonesia.

Figure 12. A small rise in the share of women in managerial jobs

Share of women in total employment in management occupations (ISCO-08 Group 1), 2012 and 2019 (%)



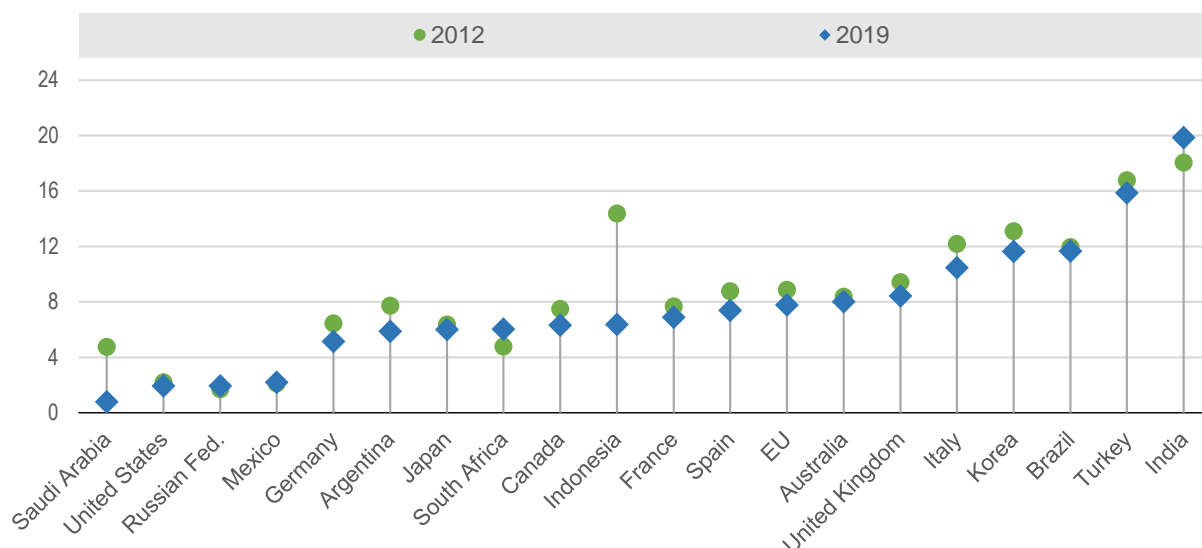
Note: The data for 2012 refers to 2013 for Mexico and 2014 for France.

Source: ILO and OECD estimates based on national household and labour force surveys

Self-employment can be another important source of employment involving both a high degree of work autonomy and working-time flexibility. However, the share of all working women who are self-employed is lower on average across G20 economies by 7½ percentage points than the share for working men (Figure 13). This gap ranges from near parity in Saudi Arabia to around 20 percentage points in India. Since 2012, some progress has been made in most G20 countries in closing the gender gap in self-employment, notably in Indonesia. It should be recognised, however, that not all forms of self-employment represent good quality employment and may include workers in informal employment or contractors who are highly dependent on one or two clients.

Figure 13. The gender gap in self-employment is narrowing slowly

Difference between men and women in the share of the self-employed in total employment, 2012 and 2019 (% points)



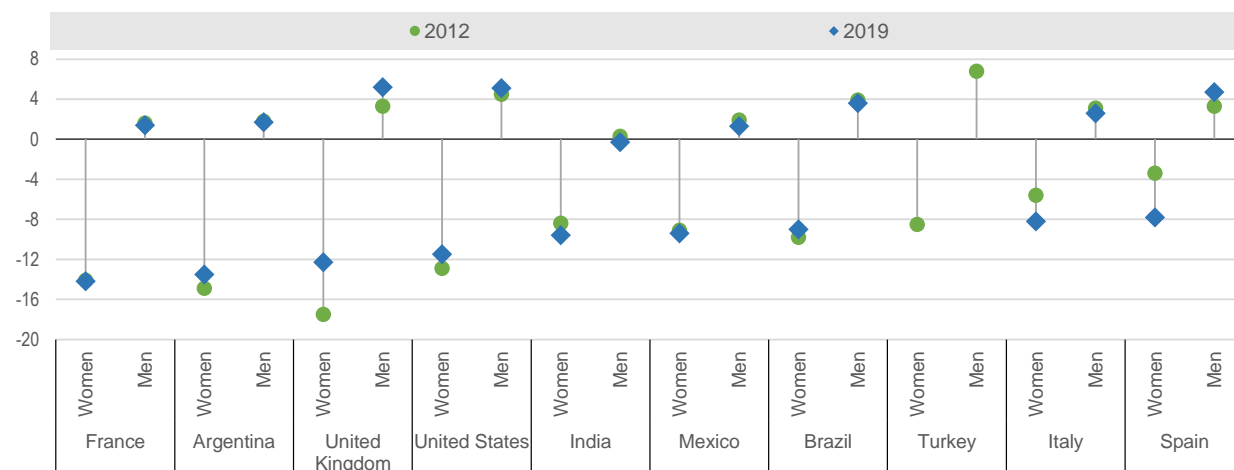
Note: The data for self-employment include own account workers. The data for Saudi Arabia refer to 2013 and 2015, respectively.

Source: ILOSTAT and OECD estimates based on national labour force surveys.

The presence of young children lowers employment rates considerably for women (Figure 14), whereas it leaves employment rates stable or even higher for men. There has been no consistent narrowing of this gap across countries since 2012.

Figure 14. The presence of young children lowers employment rates for women but not for men

Difference in employment rates for parents aged 25-54 with and without children aged less than 6, women and men, 2012 and 2019 (% points)

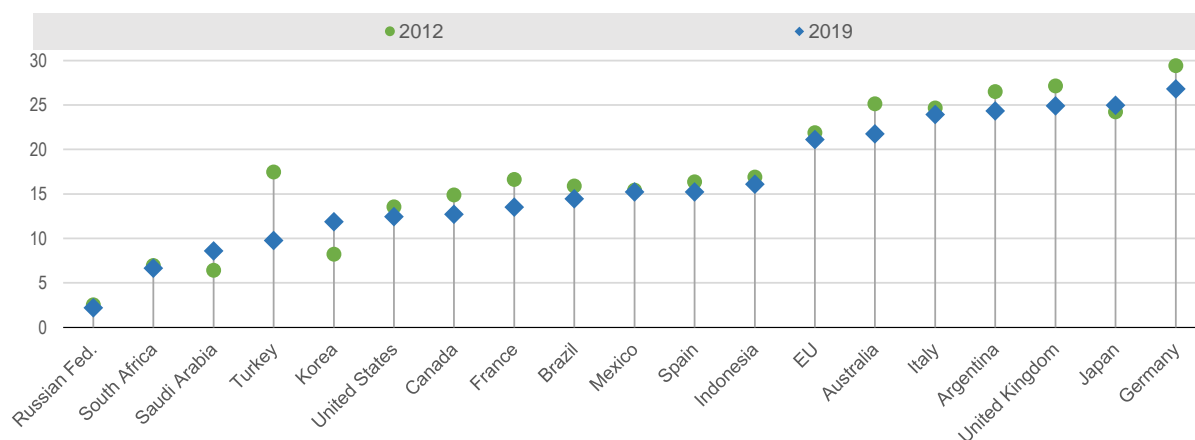


Note: The data for 2012 refer to 2011 for the United States and 2014 for Italy; and for 2019 to 2018 for India.
Source: ILOSTAT.

In all G20 economies where data are available, the share of employed women who are working part-time is much greater than the corresponding share for men (Figure 16). In most of these countries there has been some narrowing of this gap since 2012. Of course, part-time work may be a voluntary choice, allowing for a better work-life balance. Nevertheless, in most G20 economies, the share of employed women who are working fewer hours than they would like to is greater than the corresponding share for men (Figure 16). In most of these countries there has been some narrowing of this gap since 2012, although early evidence suggest there may have been a widening during the COVID-19 crisis.

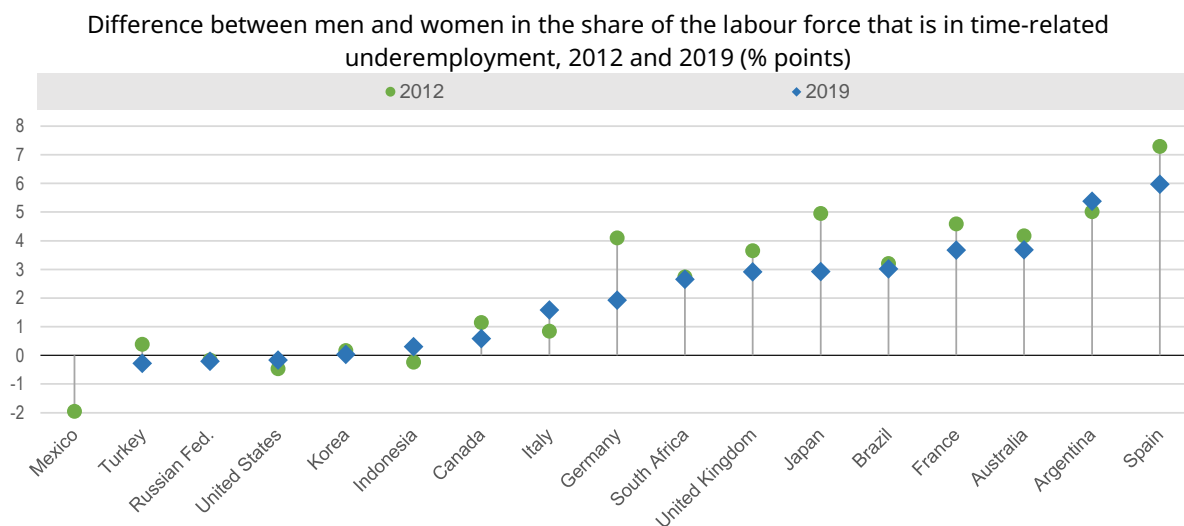
Figure 15. Women are much more likely than men to be working part-time

Difference between women and men in the employment share of part-time work, 2012 and 2019 (% points)



Note: The data for 2019 refer to 2015 for Saudi Arabia.
Source: National labour force surveys.

Figure 16. Women are more likely than men to be working fewer hours than wished



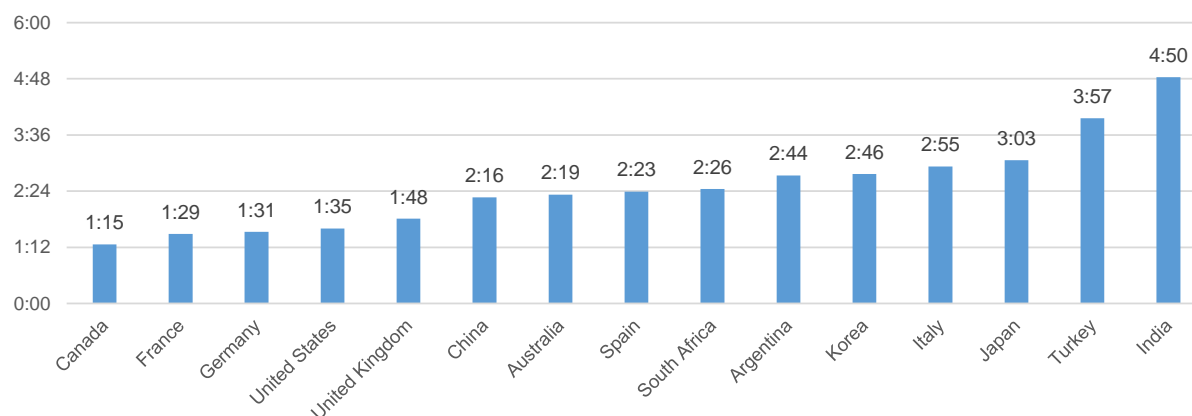
Note: The data for 2012 refer to 2015 for Korea and Indonesia; and for 2019 to 2014 for Mexico and 2016 for the Russian Federation.

Source: ILOSTAT.

In all G20 economies where comparable data are available, women spend substantially more time on average than men on unpaid work (Figure 17). Early evidence for some countries suggests that this gap may have increased during the COVID-19 crisis. This imbalance may be constraining some women from working or taking on more hours of work.

Figure 17. The total time devoted unpaid work is much greater for women than men

Difference between women and men aged 15-64 in the total daily time spent on unpaid work, latest year available (hours and minutes)



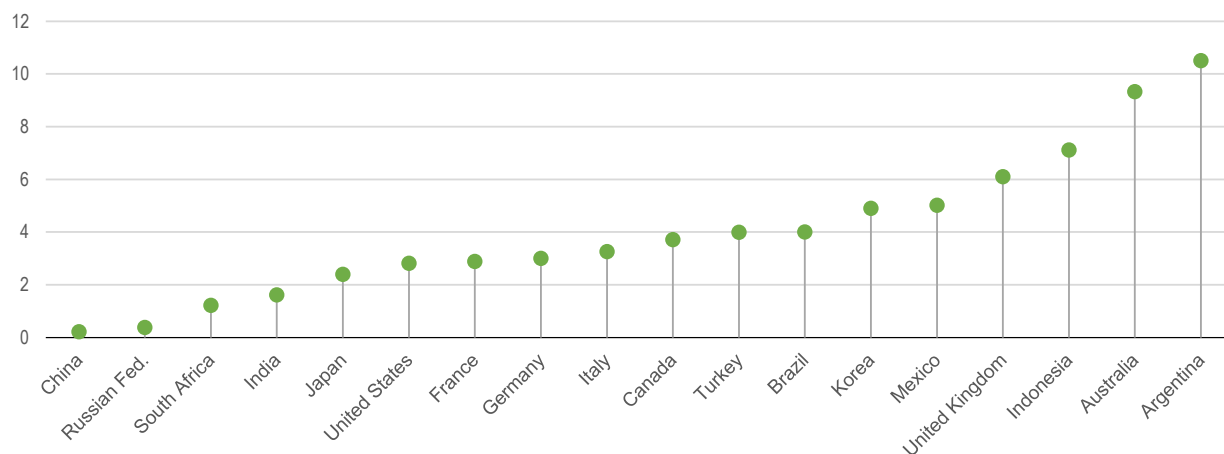
Note: The data refer to persons aged 15-59 for India and 15 and over for Australia. For each country, the year of the data is given in parenthesis: Australia (2006); Canada (2015); China (2008); France (2009/10); Germany (2012/13); India (2019); Italy (2013/14); Japan (2016); Korea (2014); South Africa (2010); Spain (2009/10); Turkey (2014/15); United Kingdom (2014/15); and United States (2018).

Source: OECD.Stat database on time use.

Finally, very short hours of work are more prevalent among employed women than employed men in all G20 countries where the data are available (Figure 18). These jobs involving short hours of work may be exposing women to lower earnings, a higher risk of poverty, few or no benefit entitlements (e.g. paid leave or health benefits), variable hours and unpredictable work schedules and limited opportunities for career development.

Figure 18. Women are more likely than men to be working in jobs with very short hours of work

Difference between women and men in the share of the employed with usual working hours of less than 15 hours per week, 2019 (% points)



Note: The data refer to 2014 for China and 2015 for Australia, Germany and Japan.
Source: ILO.

3. Policy Action⁵

This section focuses on the analysis of policy developments to advance gender equality in employment that have taken place in G20 countries over the past year. It also includes a review of the special measures that have been adopted with the explicit objective of mitigating the gender differential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic or that have benefitted women to a larger extent than men.

Measures to increase women's participation in the labour market

Following trends from previous years, many G20 countries have continued to orient their policy actions towards improving work and family balance for working parents, particularly working mothers. This is one of the main challenges facing women and men to prepare for, enter, remain and progress in the labour market as abundantly made evident by the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples of new and ongoing interventions include, for instance, **Australia**, which, between 2018 and 2020, has reached 150,077 parents and helped them to prepare for employment by the time their youngest child reached school age. The **Republic of**

⁵ This section summarizes information contained in the self-report template received from the following countries: Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, European Union, France, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom and United States.

Korea spent 94.6 billion KRW (84 million USD) on employment support services for mothers, who have suspended economic activities due to childbirth or childcare, or have never been in employment, and look for a job. A similar programme was developed in **France**, which, since 2016 has established a network of 100 early childhood care facilities for children aged 0 to 3 years of unemployed parents, who can access childcare services close to their residence through a smartphone application.

Other G20 countries have continued to resort to existing cash transfers programmes to enable working mothers to pay in part or in full for childcare fees and free up time for them to engage in paid work. For example, **Mexico**, in 2020, allocated 1,755 million MXN (86 million USD) to a cash transfer programme to support mothers of children aged 1 to 4 years who are seeking employment. Other countries had similar programmes, including **Australia, Canada, Japan, Singapore, Turkey** and the **United States** which, in 2020, spent 8.8 billion USD to provide childcare services for low-income families.

Besides making it easier for women to reconcile work and family, attracting and retaining more women in employment also requires eliminating discrimination at entry, by, for instance, removing restrictions to women's access to certain occupations. In this respect, the **Russian Federation** enforced in January 2021 a legislation reducing the number of occupations restricted to women from 456 to 100. Other strategies to remove entry barriers, include the strengthening of labour inspection systems. For instance, **Italy** has continued to strengthen the work of labour inspectors with a view to detecting gender discriminatory practices at the workplace level, including during the recruitment process.

Several G20 countries have supported employment creation for women through subsidies. For example, the **Republic of Korea** provided cash subsidies to employers that immediately reemploy mothers, whose fixed-term contract expired during the period of pregnancy, childbirth, or childcare leave. **Saudi Arabia** increased the budget allocated to a programme that provides a 20 per cent salary subsidy to employers for every woman employed. The Government of **Canada** introduced a Student Work Placement Program that provides employers with a variety of funding, including wage subsidies, to hire post-secondary students from under-represented groups including women in STEM, indigenous students, persons with disabilities and migrant students. In addition, in **Italy** over the period 2021-2022, companies will have to pay reduced social security contributions for women employees with a discount of up to 6,000 EUR (7,060 USD).

A number of G20 countries have strengthened the capacity of public employment services to facilitate women's employment opportunities through vocational training and internship opportunities. Some G20 countries have directed their efforts towards women in vulnerable economic situations (e.g. **Brazil, France, and United Kingdom**), others have specifically helped migrant women (e.g. **Canada** and **Germany**) to gain access to employment. While **Spain** has focused on halving the current gender gap in long-term unemployment through orientation and counselling, **Turkey** has partnered with the ILO to improve its capacity to design gender responsive employment policies and to produce studies to evaluate the impact of recent labour law changes on women's employment.

Encouraging developments are also evident in the area of women's entrepreneurship in terms of increased financing channelled to support women's businesses. For instance, in 2020, the **United States** have allocated more than 100 million USD to women inventors, researchers and scientist to help them bring their discoveries to the attention of the business world. In **Italy**, a fund with 40 million EUR (47 million USD) was

created to foster women's business ventures in high-technology sectors. Other G20 countries strengthened awareness raising campaigns to promote women's entrepreneurship. For example, **Germany** has continued to promote female entrepreneurship through a network of 200 successful female entrepreneurs who share (pro-bono) their professional experiences in events organized in schools and universities. **Turkey** started an EU-funded project to support women's cooperatives, through trainings, research and awareness raising campaigns.

As reported in previous years, a common feature that has emerged in several G20 countries is reporting on the achievement of numerical targets. Data collected in 2020 showed progress in **Australia**, the **Republic of Korea** and in **Japan** where large employers (301 or more employees) had a 99.2 per cent compliance rate with the formulation of gender equality action plans. Given the success of this initiative, as of April 1st 2022, firms with 101 or more employees will also have to comply with the same regulation.

Measures to improve the quality of women's earnings

G20 countries continue to take initiatives to improve the quality of women's earnings with a focus on promoting women in STEM studies and occupations, which offer better paid employment opportunities. In line with this, the **United States** has continued to encourage women to pursue studies in STEM fields, including in aerospace, and help women candidates to find an appropriate internship programme at the end of their studies. Data for 2019 show that 43 per cent of higher education internship and fellowship positions in STEM went to women candidates, an increase of 3.8 percentage points compared to 2018. **China** and **Singapore** have also scaled up efforts to tackle gender segregation in STEM education and STEM occupations, while **Australia** has promoted women's entrepreneurship in STEM sectors.

Much of the difference in pay between women and men remains unexplained by factors such as education, hours worked, sector of employment or the size of the company.⁶ To tackle this, a growing number of G20 countries have passed national legislation which prohibits unequal pay for equal work, or for work of equal value, and some others have taken steps to promote pay transparency and reporting. For example, **Spain** has recently approved a new legislation on equal pay for work of equal value that will enter into force in April 2021, which mandates all companies to have a remuneration registry and obliges those with 50 or more employees to apply an equality plan and carry out a pay audit. **Canada** also passed a new pay equity legislation that has entered into force in January 2021 and requires federally-regulated private and public sector employers with 10 or more employees to establish and regularly update a pay equity plan. At the same time, **Germany** allocated, between 2020 and 2023, one million EUR (1.2 million USD) to awareness raising campaigns to inform and advise companies on measures to achieve equal pay for work of equal value. In **France**, the Gender Equality Index was introduced in 2018 to monitor the progress of companies with 250 employees or more towards reducing the gender pay gap. Since 2020 the coverage of the Gender Equality Index has been expanded to also cover enterprises with 50 employees or more.

⁶ ILO 2018. Global Wage Report 2018/19: What Lies behind Gender Pay Gaps (Geneva).

A number of G20 countries have also undertaken measures to strengthen their minimum wages, which contribute to reducing the gender pay gap at the bottom of the wage distribution given women's overrepresentation in the lower half of the wage scale. For instance, the Government of **Japan** has taken steps to raise the minimum wage to a national weighted-average of 1,000 JPY (9.2 USD) per hour. To achieve this objective, in 2020, the weighted average minimum wage was set at 902 JPY (8.3 USD). Likewise, **Mexico** has increased the minimum wage by 15 per cent with respect to 2020 and **Germany**, between 2015 and 2021, has increased the statutory minimum wage by 1 EUR (1.2 USD) per hour bringing the gross minimum wage at 9.5 EUR (11.3 USD) per hour. Germany's labour market data show that the 2015 general statutory minimum wage reform has benefitted women disproportionately, as about 60 per cent of the 4 million workers earning less than 8.5 EUR (10.1 USD) per hour in 2014 were women.

Furthermore, measures to promote equal representation of women in higher-ranked position and in sectors and occupations where they are under-represented are also helpful in improving the level of women's earnings, thus reducing the gender pay gap. In 2020, some G20 countries have introduced new legislation to ensure gender parity in decision making bodies both in the public and in the private sector. For instance, **Australia** committed to a new gender diversity target: by 2025, 50 per cent of government board positions should be held by women. **France** recently mandated that 40 per cent of positions on the boards of directors should go to women also in private companies with more than 250 employees. Moreover, in France, according to the Gender Equality Index, at least four of the top ten positions in a company with more than 50 employees should be held by women. Several G20 countries have reported on the results achieved on women's representation in high-ranked positions, following the adoption of proactive measures. Most notably, **Germany** has managed to increase women's participation in supervisory boards of listed companies and of co-determined companies (i.e. with more than 2,000 employees) by 14 percentage points in five years, achieving 35.2 per cent in 2020, which is 5 percentage points above the original requirement. Beyond the introduction of quotas, G20 countries are increasingly addressing the gender gap in the share of women in decision making positions through non-binding voluntary targets. In particular, in 2021, **Canada** will start the *50-30 Challenge*, which encourages participating organizations to achieve gender parity on boards ("50%") and to have a 30 per cent representation from Indigenous, racialized persons, persons living with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQ2+ community.

Measures to improve women's labour market security

Challenges related to labour market duality between employees with open-ended contracts and those on fixed-term contracts or other non-standard contractual arrangements remain evident with women being more likely to hold the latter type of contracts. To change the current situation, as of April 1st 2021, the Government of **Japan** has extended to SMEs the application of a legislation for solving unreasonable treatment gaps, including differences in pay, between regular and non-regular employees, who include a high proportion of women.

Informal employment is prejudicial to workers' employment and income security. This is particularly so for women, who are concentrated in unpaid family labour, domestic work, homework and own account work. Some G20 countries have put in place measures facilitating the transition of women employees to formal

employment. For example, **Turkey** has incentivized registration and strengthened labour inspection inspectorates to reduce informality among women working in domestic work.

Other G20 members have extended anti-discrimination provisions to enhance women's attachment to employment. For example, the Government of **Japan** amended the Equal Employment Opportunity Act and the Child Care and Family Leave law that now prohibit employers from giving disadvantageous treatment to workers who filed a complaint for harassment based on pregnancy status, or requested childcare leave. Transportation costs can also be another factor that could prevent women to remain in employment. To ensure that women can reach their workplace, in 2020, **Saudi Arabia** provided financial support towards transportation costs for women working in the private sector whose monthly wages are below 8,000 SAR (2,133 USD).

Measures to improve working conditions

Over the past years, many G20 countries have introduced policy measures to improve the availability of care leave provisions. The COVID-19 pandemic and the associated closures of school and childcare facilities has prompted some countries to accelerate change and increase the duration of paternity leave provisions on a permanent basis. In particular, **France**, starting July 1, 2021, will double the duration of paternity leave to 28 days, with 7 compulsory days to be taken at the birth of the child. The employer will continue to cover the three first days of birth leave, while the remaining 25 days will be compensated by social security up to a maximum of 3,428 EUR (4,085 USD). **Spain** also reformed paternity leave legislation and, from January 2021, fathers are entitled to 16 weeks leave, aligning paternity leave to maternity leave. Of these 16 weeks of paternity leave, 6 weeks are compulsory and have to be taken right after the birth or adoption. The earning replacement is 100 % up to a ceiling of 4,070 EUR (4,850 USD) monthly. Likewise, from July 1st 2020, the **Netherlands** increased paternity leave from 1 week to 6 weeks, the estimated government spending amounting to 160 million EUR (191 million USD) per year to cover around 130,000 fathers. In addition, as of January 1st 2021, **Italy** also extended the obligatory paternity leave to 10 days, which are fully paid by social security at 100 per cent of previous earnings without limit.

In the course of 2020, some G20 countries also reformed parental leave schemes. For example, the **United States** introduced a new parental leave schemes for public employees employed by the federal government, who are now entitled to 12 weeks of paid parental leave following the birth, adoption or fostering of a child. In addition, the **Republic of Korea** raised the upper limit of the parental leave benefits for single-parents to 2.5 million KRW (2,215 USD) payable in the first three months when wage replacement stands at 100 per cent. On a similar note, as of January 1st, 2021, the **Government of Japan** has enforced a new provision allowing regular and non-regular employees who raise children or care for other family members to take childcare or caregiver leave by the hour. Previously, this type of leave could only be taken for a full or half-day, and employees working less than four hours a day were not eligible.

Several G20 countries are also taking initiatives to eliminate violence and harassment at work. **Canada, France, Italy, Spain, South Africa** and others have engaged or are engaging in national ratification processes with a view to ratifying the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019, (No. 190), which

Argentina ratified in early 2021. At the **European Union** level, the European Commission adopted, on January 22, 2020, a proposal for a Council Decision to enable Member States to take forward processes of ratification of Convention No. 190. In addition, as of April 1st 2022, the **Government of Japan** will extend the obligation to take measures to prevent power harassment (abuse of authority) at work to all small and medium enterprises (SMEs). However, Turkey has taken a step backwards by withdrawing from the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No. 210).

Furthermore, other countries focused on workplace initiatives to protect women's health. For example, in 2020, the **Russian Federation** has piloted a programme to improve reproductive health of women working in SMEs, which absorb about 40 per cent of all employed women. The programme included check-ups and medical examinations at the firm-level, as well as information campaigns for occupational disease prevention.

Relevant emergency policy measures adopted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated crisis

In an attempt to respond to and recover from the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, all G20 governments have launched a wide range of related tax, financial, business, and social measures. As of September 2020, emergency fiscal measures taken in the world were accounting for about 11 per cent of global GDP or USD 9.6 trillion.⁷ Most of these measures are gender neutral, even though the pandemic has affected women disproportionately compared to men. However, some G20 countries have specifically adopted measures to improve women's access to social protection or help them cope with additional care needs, or have introduced measures targeting particular sectors in which women are disproportionately represented. The following sections provide a synthetic description of these measures.

Social protection support

China has extended the coverage of unemployment insurance with the specific aim to increasing the share of women benefitting from it. **Spain** has provided a permanent minimum income schemes for households at risk of poverty and social exclusion, including those with victims of gender-based violence, trafficking and sexual exploitation. The **United States** provided one-time means-tested payments to all households to up to 1,200 USD per adult and 500 USD per child under 17 years old. In addition, at the end of 2020, the **United States** also provided Economic Impact Payments of up to 3,400 USD for a family of four.

⁷ ILO 2020. ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the World of Work. Sixth Edition (Geneva).

Care needs related support

The majority of G20 countries converged in adopting additional wide-ranging measures to mitigate the care crisis derived from the pandemic, and the associated closure of schools and all types of care facilities and services catering for persons in need. Most countries have provided pandemic income support, subsidies and parental allowances to workers with care responsibilities (e.g. **Australia, China, Germany, Japan, Republic of Korea, and United States**), and supported company-led babysitter programmes (e.g. **Japan**). **Australia** provided a four-month (April-July 2020) Early Childhood Education and Care Relief Package to protect the viability of the early childhood education sector, whilst providing free childcare to Australian families.

In terms of services, the **United States** have strengthened efforts to provide childcare services for low-income families whose members are in employment or in education. Likewise, the **Russian Federation** increased investments in childcare and educational facilities. **Australia** provided a special pandemic leave for all employees unable to attend work as a result of COVID-19, **France** established a special paid leave for one of the two parents when childcare facilities remained closed and the **Republic of Korea** promoted an emergency family care leave subsidy programme. The **United States** enabled certain public employers and private employers with less than 500 employees to provide employees with paid sick leave or expanded family and medical leave for specified reasons related to COVID-19. The **United Kingdom** promoted the care allowance to provide at least 35 hours of care to a severely disabled person in receipt of a qualifying disability benefit. In addition, the **United Kingdom** introduced regulations to ensure that individuals do not lose out on entitlement to parental pay because of any reduction in actual earnings during the duration of the scheme. They enabled workers who are furloughed to use pre-pandemic earnings for the purposes of calculating entitlement to family-related statutory pay.

Support for workers in frontline services and telework

Many countries have also taken additional or emergency measures to improve the working conditions, including safety, of frontline workers. In particular, many G20 countries (e.g. **France, Germany, Spain, Turkey and the United Kingdom**) have revised and updated their Occupational Safety and Health national plans through new relevant protocols and guidelines (e.g. cleaning procedures, orientation regarding the use of personal protection equipment, contact tracing of COVID-19 cases and social distancing rules). For health and care workers, the majority of whom are women, many governments have increased their compensation through allowances and additional remuneration either on a permanent (e.g. **France**) or temporary basis (e.g. **Japan, Russian Federation, and South Africa**). This is a first step to recognize the essential role of all health workers in responding to the pandemic. Other G20 countries supported health workers and their families with free internet services and education on human rights' violations against nurses or COVID related personnel (**Republic of Korea**). **China** has recognized work injury insurance benefits to medical workers and related personnel who contract the virus or die from the COVID-19 in the performance of their duties. In addition, **China** has recently started (October 2020) a 3-year training programme to upskill 5 million health workers every year, including 2 million long-term care workers, while **Australia** awarded paid pandemic leave for health workers in long-term care.

With teleworking arrangements being encouraged in all G20 countries to contain the spread of the virus, interesting programmes for supporting digitalization have been promoted. **Germany**, for instance, offered digital counselling and online courses to migrant mothers with work permit, while **Italy** offered vocational digital training to women and men home workers. **Italy** also established a fund for digital training specifically addressed to women. **Spain** and **Japan** promoted programmes to support the digitalization of SMEs enterprises and **Singapore** provided skills to manage the pandemic. The **Russian Federation** digitalized the social assistance system. Meanwhile, more countries have taken measures to regulate teleworking through legal frameworks that guarantee the recognition and fulfilment of labour rights and benefits (e.g. **Mexico**, the **Russian Federation** and **France**).

Some countries have also focused on sectors or categories of workers that are highly feminized and have been adversely affected by COVID-19. For instance, **Brazil** has invested in tourism, **Spain** has included domestic workers in their scheme on unemployment benefits while **Italy** has incentivised the transition of informal agricultural and domestic workers to the formal economy by introducing a reduced registration fee of 500 EUR (587 USD). **Spain** and **Italy** have also provided temporary subsidies for workers with temporary contracts (many youth and women) as well as for the self-employed. The **Russian Federation** has introduced a wage increase for teachers. Funds for SMEs employing large numbers of women and self-employed women have been allocated to support women's entrepreneurship in **Italy** and **Saudi Arabia**.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Women in several G20 economies were hit harder than men by job losses and reduced working time during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, but have since recovered some of the lost ground. Participation rates for both men and women have started rising again since the trough of the crisis in April 2020. However, in early 2021 they were still below their pre-pandemic levels in most countries. This gap is even larger for women if the trend rise in their participation prior to the pandemic is taken into account. Specific groups of women that risk being left behind by the recovery require special attention. These include women in the following situations: with young children; previously worked in sectors hit hardest by the crisis; in poor mental health; and facing physical and psychological violence and harassment.

Significant gender gaps in employment quality persist. Across all G20 economies, job quality in several dimensions is poorer for women than men on average. This is especially true in terms of the gender gap in earnings, which remains substantial in most G20 countries. The picture is more mixed across countries for labour market security as well as for working conditions. Women tend to be underrepresented in jobs involving greater autonomy and social status, such as management positions, and are much more likely than men to suffer from time-related underemployment. They also carry a very unequal burden of unpaid work. The crisis has also highlighted the need to improve working conditions in essential service jobs, such as the health and care sectors, where women make up the majority of workers in most G20 economies.

In 2020, G20 countries continued to act on multiple and interrelated fronts to enhance both the participation of women in the labour force and the quality of their work. It is remarkable that in the midst of the COVID-

19 pandemic, several G20 countries scaled up their efforts in the context of the unprecedented support measures. A number of them introduced more generous care leave entitlements; have sought to improve the quality of women's earnings through the adoption of pay transparency measures or upward adjustments of minimum wages in real terms; made it mandatory to have more women in top positions; and taken measures to prevent and address work-related gender based violence and harassment.

However, despite the growing evidence that women, especially working mothers of young children, have been disproportionately hit by the pandemic, most of the emergency measures introduced in response to the socio economic impact of the COVID-19 have been gender neutral. In instances in which this was not the case, measures have often been short-term and largely inadequate to reverse the widening of the gender gaps in employment and quality of work.

For this reason, the current situation calls for more and better tailored policy efforts to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the Brisbane target and better job quality for women.

To this end, the G20 may wish to give priority attention to the following areas as they develop their recovery strategies:

Investing in the care economy. Health and social work sectors are important generators of jobs especially for women, contribute to the resilience of economies and societies and enable workers with family responsibilities to work outside home. Several studies have forecasted the additional direct and indirect jobs that would be generated, especially for women, if more investments were to be channelled to the care sectors.⁸ Investments should aim at improving the physical infrastructure and chronic understaffing of these sectors, and also the working conditions of care workers. Investing in the care economy also means investing in care leave policies (e.g. maternity, paternity and parental leave), which help working parents to combine paid work and family responsibilities, while encouraging a more even division of work at home. Expanding the coverage of care leave policies to all women and men is crucial for promoting equality of opportunity and treatment in employment and occupation, thus ensuring a gender transformative recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

Implementing employment policies that focus on women. Governments need to pro-actively counterbalance the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on women. Policies should promote the recovery of hard-

⁸ ILO, *Care Work and Care Jobs for the Future of Decent Work*, 2018; OECD, 'Workforce and safety in long-term care during the COVID-19 pandemic', OECD COVID-19 Policy Briefs, June 2020. <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/workforce-and-safety-in-long-term-care-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-43fc5d50/>; ILO, 'The COVID-19 Response: Getting Gender Equality Right for a Better Future for Women at Work', 2020; IMF, 'Blog: Public Investment for the Recovery', 2020; World Bank, *Better Jobs and Brighter Futures: Investing in Childcare to Build Human Capital*, 2020; UN WOMEN, 'COVID-19 and the Care Economy: Immediate Action and Structural Transformation for a Gender-Responsive Recovery', UN Women Policy Briefs, 2020; WHO, *Working for Health and Growth: Investing in the Health Workforce. Report of the High-Level Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth.*, 2016; Eurofound, 'Public Services - Long-Term Care Workforce: Employment and Working Conditions', 2020.

hit sectors that also employ large numbers of women, along with measures that help close women's skill gaps and contribute to remove legal and other types of barriers to entry.

Working towards universal access to comprehensive and adequate social protection for all to reduce the current gender gap in social protection coverage. Indeed, women's coverage of social security schemes is considerably lower than men's in a number of G20 economies because of where women work, the conditions under which they work and their role in reproduction. Achieving universal access would entail combining well-designed tax-financed benefits with social insurance, as to ensure that girls and boys, women and men, enjoy adequate social protection throughout their lives.

Promoting equal pay for work of equal value. This crisis has brought to the fore the undervaluation of work performed by care workers and the need to redress it. Addressing this issue through a combination of measures and close interactions with social partners would help to improve the quality of care services and would have a significant impact on reducing the gender pay gap, given the large numbers of women employed in the care economy. With women representing 40 per cent of total wage employment globally, but 47 per cent of those earning at or below the minimum wage level, adequate minimum wages would have a huge impact on women's economic autonomy. Considering the "lighthouse" effect that minimum wages have for wage formation in the informal economy, also informal women workers would benefit from it.⁹ Joining the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC) would be a concrete step to advance in this area.

Eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work. Domestic violence and work-related gender-based violence and harassment have worsened with the pandemic, further undermining women's ability to engage in paid employment.¹⁰ The ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) provides a clear and useful framework to tackle violence and harassment in the world of work that ranges from prevention to protection, reparation and remedies and awareness-raising.

⁹ ILO 2021. *Global Wage Report 2020–21: Wages and Minimum Wages in the Time of COVID-19 (Geneva)*.

¹⁰ ILO 2020. *The COVID-19 response: Getting gender equality right for a better future for women at work (Geneva)*.