

# THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON THE MEXICAN LABOR MARKET: AN ANALYSIS FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

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**ABSTRACT:** This article contributes, from a gender perspective, to the growing literature on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labor market and the different approaches of policy responses. The research is focused on the Mexican case while the analysis is carried out using data from telephone household surveys and the review of government programs. The results indicate that Mexican women are being affected in a disproportionate manner. This differentiated impact can be mainly observed in the large unemployment rates, the reduction in work hours and their larger loads of reproductive work. Based on the comparative analysis of policies, certain gaps can be identified in the actions of the Mexican government, mainly in those destined to relieve the increase of the reproductive workload at homes.

**Keywords:** Gender disparities, economic participation, reproductive work, public policy.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The measures of confinement and social distancing set out in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have proven to be effective in saving lives, but have also caused negative impacts on the operation of firms and the livelihoods of millions of workers. The International Labour Organization estimates that, during the second quarter of 2020, the equivalent to 400 jobs were lost, with the developing countries being the most affected (ILO, 2020a).

While the pandemic has had effects all over the world, the impacts have been differentiated. The pandemic has exposed the inequalities within social, political, and economic systems, affecting the health and livelihoods of the most disadvantaged groups in a disproportionate manner (United Nations, 2020). From a gender perspective, the pandemic has had a larger impact on women in comparison to men, putting at risk the advances made in the last decades.

All over the world, women receive lower incomes and have larger probabilities of occupying precarious jobs (United Nations, 2020). This situation is even more critical in those contexts where social norms impose a traditional division on gender roles. In Latin America, women tend to be mainly responsible for domestic work and other unpaid housekeeping work, which means that, on an average, women dedicate between 22 and 24 hours a week to domestic work –three times more than men (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, CEPAL by its Spanish acronym, 2020).

Domestic workloads put women in a disadvantage within the labor market. Before the pandemic, the international participation of women in the labor market was of 44% in comparison with 70% of the men's (ILO, 2020b). Likewise, women have a high participation in the informal economy, of 58% in 2018 (UN Women, 2020). Women entrepreneurs also face major barriers by the sole fact of being women. For example, just about 5.3% of women entrepreneurs use financing, in comparison with 8% of men (ILO, 2020b).

During the pandemic, four sectors were classified as highly risky in terms of their impact on employment: hospitality, real estate, businesses services, manufacturing and commerce. Globally, 41% of the total female workforce is concentrated on those sectors, in comparison with 35% of male workforce (ILO, 2020b). This situation puts women on a more vulnerable position than men against negative impacts on their livelihoods.

Even when there is growing evidence of the disproportionate effect of the pandemic on the economic security of women and their load of unpaid work, according to the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, only 11% of the total number of government measures set out globally as a response to the pandemic, address these issues (UNDP – UN Women, 2020).

This article analyzes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Mexican labor market from a gender perspective, as well as the related policy responses. The article suggests three hypothesis of analysis:

- (i) that woman have suffered a larger impact than men in terms of their participation in productive work as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- (ii) that women have suffered a larger impact than men in terms of the reproductive workload as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- and (iii) that fewer programs have implemented in Mexico with the goal of supporting the productive and reproductive work of women in comparison with those implemented all over the world.

The study of the effects of the pandemic on the job market presented in this research are mainly based on the analysis of micro-data from the Telephone Survey on COVID-19 and the Labor Market (ECOVIND-ML by its Spanish acronym) conducted by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, INEGI). The units of analysis were the population of 18 years and older that used the telephone, both land line and mobile (INEGI, 2020b). As for the policy analysis, it is based on the review of data bases and studies published by international organizations and information compiled from Mexican government agencies and those equivalent in selected countries –with emphasis on Latin America– where effective practices were identified.

The article is structured as follows: Section 2 defines the concepts of productive and reproductive work, examines how these concepts have been used in gender analysis and describes the disparities within the Mexican labor market before the pandemic. Section 3 presents the analysis of the impacts of the pandemic on the labor market, differentiating the observed effects between women and men. Section 4 analyzes the programs in support of productive and reproductive work implemented in response to the pandemic, in Mexico and in other countries. Based on the review of lessons from past economic and health crises, section 5 discusses the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender disparity in productive and reproductive work, as well as different public policy approaches. Lastly, section 6 concludes by summarizing the main impacts identified, policy gaps and gender sensitive policy options to address the impacts of the pandemic in the Mexican labor market. The limitations of the analysis and areas for future research are also discussed in this section.

## 2. GENDER DISPARITY IN THE MEXICAN LABOR MARKET

An analysis from a gender perspective allows the study of social relations between women and men and their different expressions in institutions, symbols, regulations and forms of political, economic and social organization (Ribas, 2004). From this perspective, gender is studied as a social construction that does not only assign different functions and roles to women and men, but also influences how we value the functions and roles women and men perform (Padavic, Ely and Reid, 2020). In studying the labor market in particular, a gender perspective widens the understanding of work by including not just the goods and services that are subject to a transaction in the market, but also those for personal use or subject to a non-monetary exchange (Ribas, 2004).

Since several decades ago, gender studies have analyzed the division between productive and reproductive work, highlighting the inequalities in the sexual division of work and its repercussions in the working life of women (Beneria, 2006). Productive work is considered to be the creator of goods and services related to the market and it is placed in the public arena. This work is economically recognized and valued since it is almost always remunerated. In contrast, reproductive work is carried out to take care of the needs of the household members (Collinas, 2008).

Reproductive work involves domestic tasks such as cleaning activities, cooking, laundry and grocery shopping, on the one hand; but also social reproduction tasks such as caring for children and the elderly (Collinas, 2008; Lozares, López and Martí, 2004). Reproductive work has an economic value because, otherwise, it would be translated to the market as hiring someone to take care of the children or taking them to a nursery, taking the elderly to retirement homes, paying the laundry or hiring someone for home cleaning.

The sexual division of work is the base of the segregation of productive and reproductive work, since tasks related to productive work are considered to be masculine, while the reproductive work tasks are considered to be feminine (Daune-Richard, 2000). In Mexico, this can be seen in the results of the National Survey on the Use of Time (Encuesta Nacional del Uso del Tiempo, ENUT), since, in 2014, 70.6% of the hours dedicated to unpaid work at home were carried by women in contrast to men who only contributed 28.3 % (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2014). Aside from the aforementioned, in Mexico there are more than 9.26 million households that are led by women (INEGI, 2015), who face a harder challenge of reconciling both productive and reproductive work. Thus, the responsibility of reproductive work falls mainly on women, which conditions their work life (Beneria, 2006). By being in charge

of carrying out this unpaid extra work, they have to reconcile their professional life with the tasks at home and, in plenty of cases, also the care for their children (Torns and Recio, 2012). In addition, in Mexico, the incorporation of women into the labor market has frequently increased their workload, since men have not taken an equal responsibility on domestic tasks (Deere, 2005), just as the ENUT data shows.

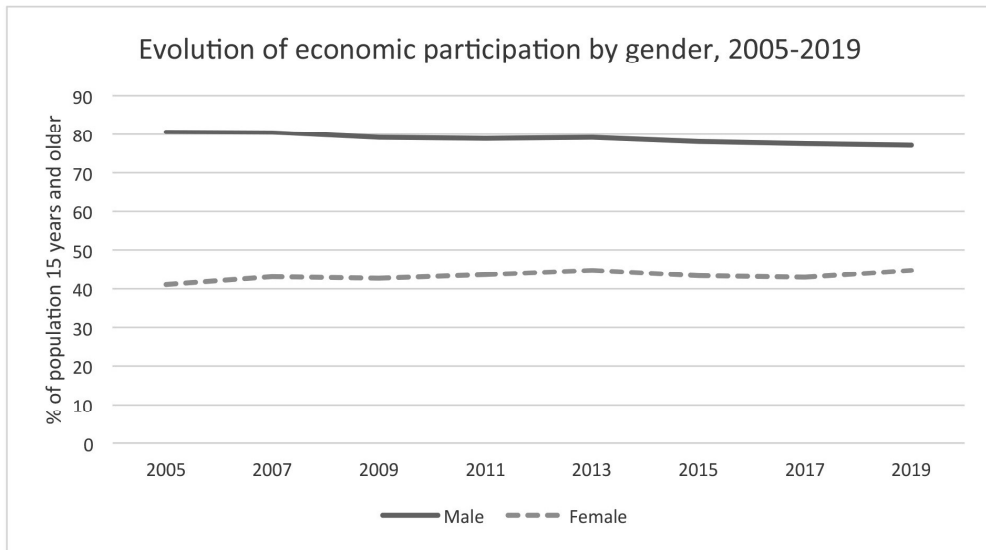
Other factors that illustrate the gender disparities in the labour market are the overrepresentation of women in less remunerated jobs, job flexibility and wages gaps. Globally, women continue to be overrepresented in low profile employment, in spite of having the same educational level (in some occasions even higher) than that of men. The subordination of women to lower ranks and salaries is explained by a distribution of job positions that prioritises the hegemonic gender roles in the sexual division of work, instead of the capacities, knowledge and skills required for the job (Buedo, 2015; Rubio, Plaza and Chervellino, 2012).

The recurrent economic crisis derived from the dominant system has forced structural adjustments that permeate the working conditions such as job flexibility. For some, job flexibility simply means adapting to the environment by reducing costs and maximizing utilities; for others, it is an adjustment that leads to precarious employment and a setback in the rights of working men and women (De la O Martínez, 2000). According to the report of the International Trade Union Confederation (2011), precarious employment is more common among women in developing countries, since they are the ones that most often find themselves in situations of informal employment or unemployment.

In Mexico, the economic participation –i.e., the percentage of the Economically Active Population (EAP)– that represents the whole of the population of 15 years and older was significantly larger for men, 77.1% in 2019, than it was for women, with 44.7% on the same year of reference. The Mexican Institute for Women (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres (2020) explains this labor market patterns in terms of the female segregation in hiring, gender wage gaps, lack of access to job promotions, as well as difficulties for accessing services, such as nurseries, and an overload of domestic work.

However, as it can be seen in Figure 1, in the last years there has been a slight convergence between the economic participation of women and men. The differentiated impacts of COVID-19 between genders on productive and reproductive work, as it is analyzed in section 3, threaten to setback the small advances that have been registered in the economic participation of women in recent years.

FIGURE 1. EVOLUTION OF ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION BY GENDER IN MEXICO, 2005-2019



Source: INEGI (2020a).

The tendency in income disparities is even more worrying. As it can be observed in Figure 2, although the gap between women and men that earn up to one minimal wage is narrower than the one in the economic participation, this difference has exacerbated during recent years. The proportion of women and men that earn up to one minimum wage has increased since the economic crisis of 2008/09. This tendency has also meant a setback in the slight advances in the gender wage gap observed between 2005 and 2007. The wage gap is attributed to a social phenomenon that involves determining women wages based on prejudices rather than according to their performance (Rodríguez and Castro, 2014).

FIGURE 2. WORKERS THAT EARN UP TO ONE MINIMUM WAGE BY GENDER, 2005-2019.

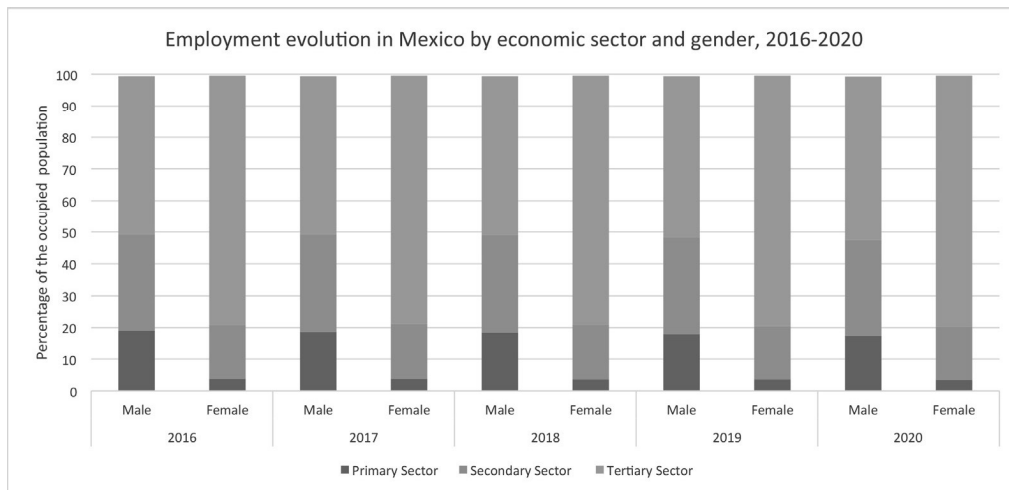


Source: INEGI (2020c).

Regarding the occupations by economic sectors, there also some significant differences. In the case of women, 79% of EAP work in the service sector (a larger percentage than the world average), while 17% work in the secondary sector (mainly manufacture) and only 4% work in the primary sector. In contrast, in the case of men, about 50.5% is employed in the tertiary sector, 30.5% in the secondary sector, and 19% in the primary sector. As it can be observed in Figure 3, there have been no changes in this distribution by economic activity and gender during recent years.

As aforementioned in the introduction, the larger participation of women in the service sector puts them in a larger risk of economic insecurity, because it is within this sector where the deepest economic impacts have been observed. Also, it is in this sector where larger rates of informality tend to be observed and, therefore, lack of access to social security services. During the first quarter of 2020, the informality rate in the hospitality sector was of 70% (INEGI, 2020c).

FIGURE 3. EMPLOYMENT EVOLUTION IN MEXICO BY ECONOMIC SECTOR AND GENDER (2016-2020)



Source: INEGI (2020a).

### 3. IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON THE LABOR MARKET

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 has had tremendous negative effects on the world economy and Mexico's has not been an exception. Lockdown and social distancing measures, as well as the restrictions of domestic and international mobility, have affected the functioning of supply chains and have had an impact on the demand of goods and services (Baldwin & Freeman, 2020). The movement restriction of workers and supplies has affected the operation of companies, while the measures of social distancing and the reduction of the population's income have shrunk the demand for most goods and services, with few exceptions, such as personal protection equipment, food, beverages and electronic appliances (United Nations Industrial Development Organization, 2020).

On the second quarter of 2020, Mexican economy registered a fall of -18.9%, in comparison with the same period of the previous year (INEGI, 2020e). This economic contraction reflects both the disruptions on firms' operations and demand reductions. According to data from INEGI (2020d), 9 out of 10 of the firms surveyed reported reductions in their incomes on the month of April, while 6 out of 10 reported technical or temporal closures and 3 out of each 10 reported shortages of supplies.



Working from home is a strategy adopted by a significant number of companies for continuing their operations, particularly by large companies (94.7%). Other strategies for facing the fall of income include: home delivery of orders, online shopping, staff layoffs and wages reductions. This last strategy is mainly relevant for large companies, among which 4 out of every 10 have reduced the wages of their workers (INEGI, 2020d).

While these measures have impacted both men and women, the unequal distribution of reproductive work and the salary gaps in productive work that were discussed in section 2, have also contributed to a differentiated impact between men and women.

The temporary closing of companies and diminishing demand have had negative and differentiated impacts between men and women on employment levels, duration of working days and the workers' wages. As Table 1 shows, a year before the pandemic, the unemployment rate among women was slightly higher than that of men, while, on the month of April of 2020, when the first economic effects of the pandemic began showing, the unemployment rate of surveyed women almost doubled that of men's.

TABLE 1. UNEMPLOYMENT AND NUMBER OF HOURS WORKED BY GENDER, 1ST QUARTER 2019 – APRIL 2020

Variable	Q1 2019		April 2020	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Unemployment rate	3.5	3.3	8.3	4.3
Worked up to 14 hours	8	2.9	23.3	14

Source: INEGI (2020c, 2020f).

Large part of the personnel that has not lost their job yet has faced reductions on their working hours and wages. Since women tend to take on larger responsibilities at home (reproductive work), they are the ones that, even before the pandemic, used to occupy jobs with reduced workdays (Table 1). This situation aggravated after the pandemic, since a larger percentage of women (44.6%) than of men (4.9%) reported to have suffered a reduction on the number of their working hours. This difference was found to be statistically significant (Table 2). However, the percentage of women and men that reported to have suffered reductions on their income was quite similar (46.1% vs. 46.2%).

While women are facing large unemployment rates and reductions on their workdays, data also shows that, possibly due to the nature of their work, they have also had larger opportunities to work from home. The percentage

of women that are working from home represents more than double of the percentage of men. However, this has also increased women's workload of reproductive work. Also, a lower percentage of women than men reported to have all the necessary equipment for performing their work.

The effects of COVID-19 on independent workers, many of them informal, also have been differentiated by gender. A larger percentage of women than men have faced problems on their activities due to the pandemic, mainly related to the decrease on customers (Table 2).

TABLE 2. IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON THE LABOR MARKET BY GENDER, APRIL 2020

Variable	Female	Male	Chi-squared test (p-value)
Reduction in the number of hours worked (%)	44.6	40.9	<0.001
Self employed workers facing problems because of COVID-19	44.9	39.3	<0.001
Working from home (%)	34.7	16.6	<0.001
Has all the equipment required to work from home	67.7	73	<0.001

Source: INEGI (2020f).

On the other hand, during the pandemic, women have been particularly vulnerable since they are overrepresented among the care and cleaning workers:

- 8 out of every 10 nurses are women.
- 9.6 out of every 10 people working as carers of children, disabled people and the elderly are women.
- 9 out of every 10 people working in paid domestic work are women. 75% of them does not have any type of social security benefits.
- 6 out of every 10 people working as cleaners in formal establishments are women (INMUJERES, 2020).

As it was discussed in section 2, women dedicate more than double of their time to unpaid work. With schools closing and work from home, in which women are overrepresented, it is very likely that this situation has exacerbated (INMUJERES, 2020). As Table 3 shows, among the employees that work from home, the participation of women is statistically larger than that of men, both in caring and in domestic tasks at home.

TABLE 3. INVOLVEMENT OF EMPLOYEES WORKING FROM HOME IN REPRODUCTIVE TASKS BY GENDER, APRIL 2020

Variable	Female	Male	Chi-squared test (p-value)
Performed care tasks (% of those working from home)	34	24	<0.001
Performed housekeeping tasks (% of those working from home)	91.9	78	<0.001

Source: INEGI (2020f).

While women face larger unemployment rates, workday reductions, health risks at work and larger workloads of unpaid work, the ECOVID-ML also provides evidence of women receiving slightly more support than men during the pandemic (Table 4). However, it is likely that this difference in support received is not compensating the gaps in the labor market discussed in this article.

TABLE 4. SUPPORT RECEIVED IN THE LAST TWO WEEKS, DISTRIBUTED BY GENDER, APRIL 2020

Variable	Female	Male	Chi-squared test (p-value)
Performed care tasks (% of those working from home)	34	24	<0.001
Performed housekeeping tasks (% of those working from home)	91.9	78	<0.001

Source: INEGI (2020f).

#### 4. POLICY RESPONSES WITH A GENDER PERSPECTIVE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The gender perspective has been applied as a methodological tool for the design of public policies that aim to eliminate inequalities (Instituto Chihuahuense de la Mujer, 2009); however, in order to understand the incorporation of the gender perspective into public policy, it is first necessary to explain both concepts separately.

Public policy is defined as the state or governmental intervention in public problems (Parsons and Acevedo Aguilar, 2007). There are two dimensions in regard to public problems, the identification of the problem or undesired situation that must be modified and the action that solves the critical or undesired social situation (Aguilar Villanueva, 2010). In order to achieve the objectives

of public policy, it is necessary to implement it through action programs (Thoenig, 1999), i.e., concrete and structured governmental actions derived from public policy and backed by public resources (Aguilar Villanueva, 2010).

Historically, social problems have been addressed from a male-centered perspective, which presupposes a bias that needs to be corrected. Thus, the gender perspective enables a wider outlook, by taking into account gender differences in the design of public policies, programs and projects (SENDOTU, 2010).

#### 4.1 THE MEXICAN RESPONSE

In Mexico, in 2019, with the arrival of the new Federal Administration, emblematic social programs from former administrations, such as *PROSPERA* and the *Seguro Popular*, were substituted by a new generation of programs, transfers unconditional cash transfers targeted at vulnerable groups such as the elderly, disabled people, indigenous populations and students (Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social, 2020).

On April 23, 2020, Mexico's Federal Government decreed to postpone actions and public spending for facing the crisis generated by the COVID-19, with the exception of 32 priority programs, which are part of the new generation of programs. It is noteworthy that 19 out of the 38 priority programs are related to economic stimulus and social development. Among these, only one—the Support Program for the Welfare, of Working Mothers' Children—seems to have been created with a gender perspective. It is targeted at “single mothers, fathers or tutors that work, seek employment or study and do not have access to children care” (Secretaría del Bienestar, 2019), which makes the economic implications of reproductive work visible.

Aside from maintaining priority programs, the decree of April 23, 2020 allocated three million pesos in loans to small businesses facing the negative effects of the pandemic (*Diario Oficial de la Federación*, 2020). The amounts ranged from 25 thousand pesos per business or person, with the repayment starting three months after the loans had been granted, on a timeframe of 3 years. Eligible beneficiaries also include independent working people and people performing domestic work. The latter may indicate a design with a gender perspective since 90% of domestic workers are women (INMUJERES, 2018), many of whom find themselves without an income due to the lockdown situation.

Moreover, an interesting proposal aimed towards the economic recovery of women is the “She Makes History” initiative (“Ella Hace Historia”) that was launched by the federal government on July 2020. This is a digital program for strengthening the capacities of women entrepreneurs as a response to the the pandemic (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2020). However, according to

the recommendations of CONEVAL (2020), a more adequate alternative for supporting men and women micro-entrepreneurs was the National Financing Program for Micro-Entrepreneurs and Rural Women (PRONAFIM) which was active until 2019 and used to provide microfinance services in favorable conditions for the creation and productivity of micro-enterprises.

At the sub-national level, governments also implemented additional actions for facing the crisis (Comisión Nacional de Mejora Regulatoria, 2020). In ten states, there were programs of economic stimulus and social assistance targeted at women. These ten programs were related to subsidized credits, one with an extension on credit payments and one with direct cash-transfer (Laboratorio Nacional de Políticas Públicas, 2020).

#### 4.2 INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Countries around the world have responded in different ways to the pandemic. While developing countries, such as Mexico, have opted for a moderate response, concerned of keeping a sustainable fiscal balance, developed countries have opted for more aggressive approaches, increasing public debt. For example, in March, the United States Senate approved the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) which represents an expenditure of 2.3 trillion dollars, close to 11% of the country's gross domestic product. This recovery package includes budget increases on: unemployment benefits; food security for the most vulnerable in society; business credits, including small and medium sized; an increase in health expenditure; transfers to state and local governments; and international aid (International Monetary Fund, 2020).

Table 5 shows examples of government programs in different countries in response to the pandemic. The revision of programs is focused on those that have a direct effect on the participation of women in productive and reproductive activities and which were created or modified as a result of the impacts caused by the pandemic. Four categories were identified among these government programs: (i) business incentives, support for entrepreneurial activities and for formal employees; (ii) support for workers in sectors considered as "essential", therefore, exposed to a higher risk of virus contagion; (iii) support for independent workers, including informal workers; and (iv) relief support for the increase in the reproductive workload.

Although financial stimulus for established businesses and start-ups are some of the most commonly adopted economic interventions, few examples were identified of these measures targeted at women. Exceptions include: the case of Costa Rica, where interest rates were reduced for priority groups; the case of Canada, where resources for supporting women entrepreneurs were increased; and the case of Morocco, where an electronic platform was created

for the commercialization of products from women agricultural cooperatives and the government eased the certification of apparel workshops led by women to produce face masks.

Regarding programs that offer support for workers with greater contagion risks, interventions identified include temporal and permanent increases to their salaries, exceptional bonuses and paid leaves for vulnerable workers. These type of interventions were found in Germany, Argentina, Canada and Iceland. In India, the government designed a subsidized life insurance scheme for health care workers, both working in the public system and self-employed. In addition, in El Salvador, the government granted a paid leave license for vulnerable workers.

Support for independent workers mainly include loans, such as the Mexican case discussed in section 4.1, and subsidies in the form of transfers/cash transfers. Examples of this last type of intervention were identified in Peru, Canada, South Korea, Iceland and United Kingdom. In Ecuador and Peru, transfers/cash transfers have also been delivered, targeting farmers and other rural households.

Finally, relief programs addressing the increase in reproductive work due to the closing of schools and the work from home include: financial support; changes in legislation to allow employees to apply for additional leave days for taking care of family members; authorizing care services to continue operating for the children of essential workers; and social media campaigns for raising awareness on the fair workload division of reproductive work.

Cash transfer/transfers targeted at households with children or adults with special needs were identified in Argentina, Barbados, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, South Korea, Chile, Iceland and Italy. Additionally, in Brazil and India, there were economic support specifically targeted at women. For example, in Brazil, temporary cash transfer/transfers (3 months) have been adopted, granting the double of the stipulated amount to female headed households.

Regarding support for taking time off work, South Korea increased the flexibility of the legislation on leave days and reduced workdays for family care, while the New Zealand government has subsidized paid absences. In Germany, Costa Rica and United Kingdom there were measures for keeping child care services for the children of essential workers in operation. Also, in Peru, a safety and care network was established for the elderly and disabled people. Media campaigns for raising awareness on gender disparity in reproductive work were identified in Ecuador and El Salvador.

TABLE 5. SELECTED GOVERNMENT COVID-19 RESPONSE PROGRAMS

Country	Businesses, Entrepreneurship and Formal employment	Risk at Work	Independent Workers	Reproductive Work Overload
<b>Latin America</b>				
Argentina	Programa de Recuperación Productiva (REPRO, Productive Recovery Program) for complementing part of the monthly salary of business workers whose sales income had been diminished	Bonuses (cash transfers) for health workers	Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia (Emergency Family Income) which consists of a non-contributive monetary loan, of an exceptional type, destined to vulnerable groups, including the unemployed, people that work in the informal economy and paid domestic workers.	Extraordinary bonus for beneficiaries of Asignación Universal por Hijo (AUH), Universal Assignment per Child and the Asignación Universal por Embarazo (AUE, Universal Assignment for Pregnancy). Cash transfers for vulnerable groups, including workers in informal economy and domestic service workers.
Barbados				Programa de Supervivencia (Survival Program): Exceptional transfers and extension of regular transfers for benefitted families.
Bolivia		Legislation for reducing workdays and granting paid absences for vulnerable workers, including pregnant women.		“Bono Familiar” (Family Bonus) Program: Exceptional transfers for beneficiary families, Paid absences for people with children of 5 years old and younger.
Brazil	Subsidies for workers with short workdays of up to 60% of the income of days in which they are not working.		Exceptional transfers for informal workers and micro-entrepreneurs.	Basic income for three months for helping low income families during the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional payment (double) for women that are heads of their households.

Country	Businesses, Entrepreneurship and Formal employment	Risk at Work	Independent Workers	Reproductive Work Overload
Chile	Cash transfer for the unemployed (limited to 2 million people)			Programa Subsidio Único Familiar (Sole Family Subsidy Program). Cash transfer and access to health services for homes with children and disabled people. License period extension for parents from 30 to 90 days.
Colombia				Extraordinary transfers through the conditioned transfer programs “Familias en Acción” (Families in Action) y “Jóvenes en acción” (Youth in Action).
Costa Rica	Interest reduction for loans to priority groups including young people, the elderly, Native Americans, African Americans, farmers, etc.			Continuity of childcare services operations.
Ecuador			Exceptional cash transfers during two months for families affiliated to the Seguro Social Campesino (Farmer Social Security) on the regime of Unpaid Work.	Social media campaigns for raising awareness on the fair distribution of home chores.
El Salvador		30 day paid leave for vulnerable workers, including people of 60 years and older, pregnant women or with pre-existing conditions.		Exceptional cash transfers for 75% of homes. Social media campaigns for raising awareness on the fair distribution of home chores.



Country	Businesses, Entrepreneurship and Formal employment	Risk at Work	Independent Workers	Reproductive Work Overload
Peru			Independent bonus. Income transfer for informal workers, including domestic workers. JUNTOS (Together), a conditioned transfer program with primarily rural coverage.	Bono Familiar Universal (Universal Family Bonus). Cash transfer for vulnerable homes. Network for caring for the elderly and the disabled.
Venezuela	Exceptional cash transfers for any private sector worker that has been affected by distancing measures.		Exceptional transfers for informal workers that have been affected by lockdown measures.	
<b>Rest of the world</b>				
Germany	Support plan for businesses that had to reduce their workdays, financing up to 60% of net salary losses caused by workday reduction.	Bonus payments in occupations (dominated by women) such as retailer commerce and nursing as compensation for extraordinary work during the crisis.		Workers with children receive 67% of their salaries in comparison with 60% of those without children. Childcare services for children of essential workers have been kept in operation. Expansion of childcare benefits for low income homes.
Burkina Faso			Solidarity fund for benefiting people that work in the informal sector with women as a priority. Cash transfers of up to 26 weeks for independent workers whose activities were affected due to the pandemic.	

Country	Businesses, Entrepreneurship and Formal employment	Risk at Work	Independent Workers	Reproductive Work Overload
Canada	Expansion of financial resources for the “Women Entrepreneurship Strategy”, diverse support (training, mentorships) for women entrepreneurs.	Temporary increase of salaries to low income essential workers.		Cash transfers of up to 26 weeks for workers that cannot continue their activities due to their responsibilities for children or other family members.
South Korea			Cash transfers for independent workers.	“Childcare coupons” cash transfers for homes with children of 7 years and younger. Passing of a law for 10 or more days a year for caring for families. “Family Care Leave” Program. Days off and workday reduction for family care.
Spain	Lines of credit and endorsement for businesses that belong to the tourism sector and related activities promoted by the National Credit Institute provided in the Real Decreto Ley (Royal Law Decree) 8/2020.			Approval of the royal law decree on the Ingreso Mínimo Vital (IMV, Vital Minimum Income) in homes in extreme poverty.

Country	Businesses, Entrepreneurship and Formal employment	Risk at Work	Independent Workers	Reproductive Work Overload
India		Creation of life insurance schemes in collaboration with the private sector. "Insurance Scheme for Health Workers Fighting COVID-19". A life insurance addressed for healthcare workers that also covers public and private sector workers, as well as workers in self-employment schemes. Insurance premium covered by the government.	Expansion of credit programs that do not require collateral targeted at low income women.	Creation of a temporary subsidy targeted at women. Three month cash transfers, conditioned to opening a bank account.
Iceland		Salary increase to "front-line" healthcare workers.	Cash transfers equivalent to up to 80% of their 2019 monthly income.	Program extension for all families with children of 18 years or younger. Cash transfers for homes with children. The amount of the transference depends on the family income.
Italy	Postponement of credit payments.			Workers with children care responsibilities may access permissions at work or, in case they cannot perform work remotely, they can access a grant for hiring housekeeping services.

Country	Businesses, Entrepreneurship and Formal employment	Risk at Work	Independent Workers	Reproductive Work Overload
Morocco	Creation of a digital platform for the commercialization of farming products from women cooperatives. Facilitate the certification of cooperatives for face mask production (100% of which belong to women).			
New Zealand	“COVID-19- Support for Employers” Program which subsidizes the salary of workers for businesses that meet certain criteria.		“COVID-19 Income Relief Payment” Program which grants up to 12 weeks of payments for subsistence in case their current employment was lost (salaried or independent).	Paid absence by the State for workers that cannot carry out their duties because of health reasons or for caring for other people.
United Kingdom			Inclusion of independent workers as beneficiaries of cash transfers from the “Universal Credit”, a monthly cash transfer.	Childcare services have continued operating for the children of essential workers.

Source: Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo (Interamerican Development Bank, 2020); Chacaltua, J. (2020); CONAMER (2020); Government of Canada (2020); Government of Iceland (2020); Ministry of Economy and Finances of South Korea (2020); Institute of Official Credit, Government of Spain (Instituto de Crédito Oficial, Gobierno de España, 2020); International Labour Organization (2020b); IZA Institute of Labor Economics (2020); Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India (2020); Organization for the Cooperation and Economic Development (2020a); Ministry of Social Development, New Zealand Government (2020); International Labour Organization (2020); OCDE (2020b); Secretaría de Economía (Mexican Ministry of Economy, 2020); United Nations (2020); UNDP – UN Women (2020).

## 5. DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of micro-data from the ECOVID-ML, the first hypothesis of this article is confirmed: *women have suffered a greater impact than men in their participation in productive work as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic*. Particularly, larger impacts were identified for women in unemployment and the reduction of their workday, both of which accentuated the existing gender disparities. However, it was also found that women have had larger opportunities for continuing productive work from home. This can be mainly explained because women are overrepresented in economic sectors, such as education, that have been able to continue their operations remotely.

Among those that continue their productive work from home, the proportion of employees that do not have the necessary equipment to carry out their tasks is larger for women than for men. This deficiency can have different implications, from increasing the number of necessary hours to conduct their work, affecting the quality of their work, and even having some repercussions in their health (for example, skeletal muscle disorders) (Office for National Statistics, 2020).

Similar impacts on productive work have been observed in previous economic crisis. After the economic crisis of 2008/09, 65% of the people that lost their job in the textile and apparel industry in Nicaragua were women (Espino and Sanchís, 2009). During the Asian financial crisis of 1997/98, women were also disproportionately affected in losing their jobs because they tended to occupy more precarious job positions than that of men, mainly in the export-oriented industries (Gálvez and Rodríguez, 2011; Ghosh, 2011).

Lessons from previous economic crises in Latin America and Asia have shown as well that the negative effects in the economic participation of women usually are experienced in the short term, while the effects in the quality of the available work usually last longer (Montaño & Milosavljevic, 2010; Walby, 2009). Given the limited capacity of social protection systems in developing countries, the fewer employment opportunities tend to translate in larger job precariousness.

Previous health crises also provide evidence that impacts on the economic security of women usually last longer than of the impacts on their male counterparts. During the Ebola epidemic, the economic activity of men returned to pre-crisis levels shortly after the prevention measures were suppressed, while the effects on the economic activities carried out by women lasted longer (United Nations, 2020). Gálvez and Rodríguez (2013) arrived to similar conclusions based on the revision of the effects of economic crisis during the last hundred years: female employment takes longer to recover than that of

men's. The researchers explain this phenomenon in terms of public policies and social norms that favor male participation in productive activities.

The disparities in the distribution of reproductive work among men and women indicate that, as a result of the lockdown measures, including the closing of schools, care services for children and the ill, the load of reproductive work has increased for women (ILO, 2020b; United Nations, 2020). The analysis of the micro-data of the ECOVID-ML allowed the confirmation of the second hypothesis: *women have gone through a greater impact than men in the load of reproductive work as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic*. Among those people that find themselves working from home, the participation of women is greater than that of men's both in caring for other people than in domestic tasks.

The experience of previous crises shows that the load of reproductive work for women usually increases both in the mid and in the long term as a consequence of reductions in household income (Gálvez and Rodríguez, 2011; Montaña & Milosavljevic, 2010; Walby, 2009). Sometimes, coupled with an increase in their participation in productive work (Gálvez and Rodríguez, 2011). It is expected that the impacts of the current health and economic crisis will be even greater than those observed in previous crises, considering the effects of lockdown measures and the interactions between productive and reproductive work.

The review of programs in response to the pandemic, in Mexico as well as in other countries, allows us to confirm the third research hypothesis: *fewer programs have implemented in Mexico with the goal of supporting the productive and reproductive work of women in comparison with those implemented all over the world*. From the international revision we identified programs addressing both productive and reproductive work. Initiatives that address productive work include financial support to businesses, formal and informal workers. Some of these initiatives have focused on those workers exposed to larger contagion risks during the pandemic.

Different approaches were identified among the initiatives that address reproductive work, including: awareness campaigns, financial support and legislation changes for increasing the flexibility of the regulations on care leaves. It is important to emphasize that the target population of these measures are both men and women, since this type of design not only contributes to balance the loads of reproductive work, but also promotes changes in gender norms (Kaplan & Piras, 2019).

In the case of Mexico, the main policy gaps were identified in three areas: (i) initiatives targeted at rural women, (ii) initiatives protecting workers in

high risk sectors, and (iii) interventions for relieving the increase in the load of reproductive work. Long term strategies for improving work conditions in the health sector and other essential services, as well as for strengthening the infrastructure and coverage of childcare services, will increase the resilience of both the State and households to face future crises. Evaluation of childcare programs in both developing and developed countries provide evidence of positive effects of the increase of quality, availability and accessibility of these services on the economic participation of women (Mateo and Rodriguez, 2016). Particularly for Mexico, Mateo and Rodriguez (2016) found impacts on the reduction of time dedicated to care work, as well as an increase in the probability of women having a job and increases in the number of hours devoted to productive work.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the analysis presented in this article, it was identified that women have suffered a greater impact than men on their participation in productive work as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. The data analyzed also allowed us to identify differences in the distribution of reproductive work between men and women.

From the review of policy responses to the pandemic, it was identified that a fewer programs for supporting the productive and reproductive work of women have been implemented in Mexico, in comparison with those implemented internationally. The policies delivered by the Mexican federal government targeted at women in response to the SARS-CoV-2 virus crisis have included mostly loans and cash transfers. However, a reduced number of strategies have addressed the increase of the reproductive workload. Additionally, a significant gap identified, in Mexico as well as internationally, were policies targeted at women in rural contexts. The resources and strategies are mainly focused on urban areas.

The review of international experiences discussed in this article show examples of strategies that could be adopted for a better response to the disproportionate impacts, direct and indirect, caused by COVID-19 on women. In terms of social policy, the adoption of “universal basic income” type cash transfers has been one of the main achievements during the pandemic, promoted by several international and academic organizations (Devereux et al., 2020). This type of responses was identified in countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Peru and the United Kingdom. These programs have the objective of leveling up the income of the poorest households –however, with the exception of the

Brazilian case, these responses do not incorporate gender disparities in their design. The cases of South Korea and New Zealand also show examples of approaches for making the workday more flexible in response to the increase in the gender gap in the loads of reproductive work.

Ideally, these short term responses should be accompanied by long term strategies that reduce gender discrimination in the labor market. In this sense, strategies include strengthening the compliance of job regulations, the strengthening of childcare services, the promotion of awareness campaigns for work rights, as well as increasing in the transparency of the information regarding the salaries paid by firms (Kaplan & Piras, 2019).

### 6.1 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH AREAS

One of the main limitations of this research is the use of data that came from a telephone household survey which, may be biased in terms of the socioeconomic status of the sampled population –however, the adoption of cell phones in the country is high in the urban and the rural context as well, representing 86.5 million people (75.1%) of the population of six years or older (Federal Institute of Telecommunications, Instituto Federal de Telecomunicaciones, 2020).

Likewise, the size of the sample is smaller than the one usually used in household surveys, which is why the disintegration of data by gender with national representation is limited. The availability of larger data sets, and at lower granularity in the future, will help to gain a better understanding of the impacts of the pandemic in gender disparity in the labor market. In turn, this evidence will be crucial for the design of policies with gender perspectives.

The impacts of the pandemic between women are also heterogeneous. A larger availability of data in the future, such as the results of surveys conducted during the pandemic, retrospective studies and policy evaluations will contribute to a better understanding on how the livelihoods of different groups of women have been affected during the pandemic. This includes differentiations by economic status, geographical context (rural / urban) and ethnic origin.

The revision of initiatives of the civil organizations and informal support networks is another topic that future research can tackle to examine to what extent these initiatives were responding to policy gaps, as well as studying potential synergies.



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