Global challenges of gender responsive recovery and employment

Session 2: Recovery and gender equality: What are the gender responsive policy solutions to address the deepening inequalities?

Christine Hofmann, ILO Team Lead Skills for Social Inclusion

Date: 28 October 2021
Content

I. The gendered effects of the pandemic
II. The role of labour market policies to cushion the effects
III. Policy priorities to build forward fairer
IV. Country examples
I. The gendered effects of the pandemic

Globally, between 2019 and 2020, women’s employment declined by 4.2 per cent, representing a drop of 54 million jobs, while men’s employment declined by 3 per cent, or 60 million jobs. In addition, 30 million jobs have not been created – a global shortfall of 144 million jobs.
The COVID-19 crisis has disproportionately affected women – and worsened existing inequalities

Women were overrepresented in the sectors severely impacted: accommodation and food services, wholesale and retail trade; real estate, business and administrative activities, manufacturing.

Informal employment in hard-hit sectors is also higher among women, with 42 per cent of women working informally compared with 32 per cent of men.

Higher-wage jobs (more often held by men) could shift more easily to full-time telework, this has not been the case for the many women in low-wage jobs, such as retail, sales and hospitality.

The additional burden of unpaid care work during the pandemic (sickness and school closures) also fell greatly on women (4 hours, 25 minutes per day on average for a woman versus 1 hour, 23 minutes for a man, pre-pandemic), with repercussions for physical and mental health.

Women have lower access to social protection – already pre-pandemic.

Increase in violence and harassment have also made it difficult for women to keep their jobs, compared to men.
The digital divide is affecting women more severely and impeding women’s employment recovery

Covid-19 has increased the push towards digitalization of businesses, and services, including skills and employment services globally.

At household level, digital devices are often shared, and men might be given priority.

Public Employment Services have also digitalized services, and while technology can be a tool for inclusion, disparities persist.

Low digital skills can be a serious obstacle to access services for young people from vulnerable backgrounds, in particular, for young women.

Advancing social justice, promoting decent work
Inequalities in employment start in education and training

- Persistent gender disparities in TVET enrolments of women due to barriers to education and training, especially in rural and informal economies and socio-cultural and economic constraints
- Occupational choices and opportunities remain gender-biased, and low representation of women in STEM subjects
- Drop-out rates of women are higher in male-dominated training programmes, and higher during the pandemic
- Female-dominated training programmes lead more often to lower-productivity and lower-paying jobs.

Gender pay gap still stands at 19% globally – despite advances in education and training
It only shrunk by 2 percentage points over the last three decades
Biggest effect because lower wages are paid to work of equal value and due to occupational gender segregation
The COVID-19 crisis could have long-lasting effect on female employment

There is a risk of reversing gender equality gains made in recent decades and deepening existing gender inequalities in the labour market:

- Gender is a *rationing mechanism* when jobs are scarce
- Push for labour market flexibility and deregulation can lead to the *expansion in women’s precarious employment*
- When women lose jobs, their *unpaid care work usually increases*
- Women are often *left behind in sectoral recovery policies*: labour-intensive sectors supported, typically male-dominated, to the detriment of female-dominated sectors like care services.
- As a result of school closures and loss in family income, many children have faced a *higher risk of child labour*, especially young girls
II. The role of labour market policies to cushion the effects

While advanced economies focused on social protection schemes including unemployment benefits, developing countries provided income support to vulnerable workers.

Labour market policies and programmes have been critically important in assisting workers and employers to deal with redundancies, furloughs or reduced work schedules as a result of COVID-19.

Active labour market policies (ALMPs) – often delivered through Public Employment Services (PES) – were and continue to be key elements of the policy toolbox in preserving jobs and skills, facilitating employment in essential production and services, and keeping people connected to the labour market, including disadvantaged workers in the informal economy and new forms of employment.

During the pandemic, women fared considerably better in countries that took measures to prevent them from losing their jobs, in particular through employment retention benefits.
III. Policy priorities to build forward fairer for a human-centred recovery

Integrate gender concerns into national skills and employment policies and measures to maintain women in the labour force and facilitate women’s re-entry into employment.

Assess and understand women’s and men’s distinctive barriers to skills and jobs.

Macroeconomic stimulus packages need to continue boosting aggregate demand in ways that support employment retention and creation, with a specific focus on women’s employment and incomes.

Promote inclusive skills and lifelong learning in all sectors, in particular in technology-intensive fields for women, and in social and care work for men; create gender-sensitive training environments.

Strengthen gender-responsive ALMPs, including counselling, mentoring and positive role models, and recognition of prior learning (RPL).

Invest in care services.

IV. Country examples of gender-responsive policy solutions

In **Argentina and Botswana**, governments provided **wage subsidies** in return for a guarantee to avoid dismissals during a set period.

In **Colombia and Chile**, wage subsidies were applied to new hires, with greater subsidy rates for women.

Both developed and developing countries established or expanded **public employment programmes**. In **Mexico and in Kenya**, quotas were established to guarantee that women benefit from these programmes.

Colombia and Senegal have created or strengthened **support for women entrepreneurs**.

In the **Republic of Korea**, the PES worked closely with **Occupational Centres for Women** to link job search support and training with a special maternity leave allowance and childcare subsidies, plus provide **employer subsidies for retention**.
Thank you

hofmann@ilo.org