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## Lessons Learned From The Pandemic: Impacts Of Accelerating Digitalization On Gender Equality In France

Lecciones aprendidas de la pandemia: repercusiones de la aceleración de  
la digitalización en la igualdad de género en Francia

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# Starting point of the reflections

## Inicio de las reflexiones



- Starting point: French national report I wrote for the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE <https://eige.europa.eu>) during spring-summer 2021
- Contents :
  - An overview of the socio-economic consequences of COVID on gender equality based on existing literature and six interviews with academics, politicians, trade unionists and associations
  - A description of the public policies implemented and their impact on equality
  - Lessons and perspectives
  - Recommendations
- Purpose: to compile the 27 national reports to publish a European report. Publication in progress <https://eige.europa.eu/about/projects/survey-gender-equality-and-socio-economic-consequences-covid-19>

# Data



- Open access national public surveys organised by national statistical offices. The data sets are used by researchers for further analysis and publications.
- Existing surveys: ACEMO, CAMME, COCONEL, EPICOV, TRACOV
- Existing academic and non-academic publications. In the case of France, most existing publications are based on those surveys
- Gender-blind governmental reports by France Strategie
- 6 expert interviews bringing perspectives from NGO's, Unions, Policy Makers, Academics

# Outline: COVID and accelerating digitalisation

## Resumen: COVID y la aceleración de la digitalización



1. Overview of COVID impact on gendered inequalities at work
2. Teleworking risks and opportunities
3. Replacing persons by robots and platforms: what impact of the digitalization on intersecting inequalities ?
4. Long term economic impact of the stimulus package in the digital sector
5. Conclusions and perspectives



# 1. Overview of COVID impact on gendered inequalities at work

Visión general del impacto de COVID sobre las desigualdades de género en el trabajo

# Magnifying effect of COVID

## Efecto amplificador de COVID



- The pandemic makes inequalities visible and amplifies them
- Various situations
- Socio-economic conditions increased inequalities
  - Large / small home
  - Salary loss or not
  - Option to telework or not
  - More or less care and household work and unpaid work
  - More or less uncertainty and stress
  - More or less fatigue

# The impact of gendered sectoral polarisation

## El impacto de la polarización sectorial de género



- Women are concentrated in a limited number of sectors of activity, vulnerable to the effects of the crisis
- They are over-represented in personal services, teaching, cleaning and the paramedical professions: 82% of hotel workers, 97% of home helps and housekeepers, 73% of cleaners, 76% of cashiers and shop assistants
- Over-represented in sectors where important loss of activity
  - Hotels, restaurants, shops, culture lose more than half of their activity
  - Loss of seasonal and event-related jobs
- Women in first line: Women make up 77.3% of doctors and non-medical staff in hospitals and 87.4% of staff in care facilities for the elderly.



# Back to home

## Regresar a casa



- Women are over-represented in precarious jobs:
  - 60% of fixed-term contracts
  - 70% of temporary jobs
  - 83% of part-time jobs
- Immediate impact on precarious jobs (fixed-term contracts and part-time work), which have been the adjustment variable for coping with the crisis: one in two people in precarious employment in March 2020 no longer have a job a few months later (INED COCONEL)

# Heavier consequences for women

## Consecuencias más graves para las mujeres



- More women have lost their jobs: among women in employment on 1 March 2020, only two out of three were still working two months later, compared to three out of four men (COCONEL survey).
- More financial difficulties: while purchasing power has increased slightly in 2020 (+0.4%), 41% of women under 65 say that their income has decreased since the beginning of the pandemic; 13% of single-parent families fear losing their home in the next twelve months.
- Risk of being alienated from the workplace and social isolation.
- The closure of schools and services has had a greater impact on women.
- Increased responsibility for home care and domestic work, which falls mainly on women.



# 2. Teleworking Risks and Opportunities

Riesgos y oportunidades del teletrabajo

# Teleworking from home

## Teletrabajo desde casa



- As many men as women have teleworked, but the conditions for teleworking are unequal:
- women more often had to work with children: 48% of teleworking women were confined to one or more children, compared to 37% of men.
- Women were less likely to have a room of their own, the "room of one's own" described by Virginia Woolf as a prerequisite for creation and concentration: 25% of women versus 40% of men were able to telework in a dedicated room. This gap widens even more for female managers.
- Women also admit that during this crisis they did not maintain their network and even did not speak up in meetings.

# Public services and home workload

## Servicios públicos y carga de trabajo a domicilio



- Importance of public services for women: if public services shut down, they have to take their place
- During the first lockdown, public services were closed, with the exception of hospital emergency services, minimal face-to-face schooling for the children of frontline workers, and minimal public transport, with a huge impact on women's lives.
- The maintenance of public services in subsequent confinements reduced the burden on women.

# The future of teleworking? ¿El futuro del teletrabajo?



- When resuming and moving hybrid, risk of a two speeds participation
  - The invisible spectators with less resources and flexibility
  - Those who can network and travel (and focus)
- Surveys show that men went back first to the office and women are at risk of being stuck at home with care work and professional work and invisibility
- Risk of reactivation of patriarchal norms and backlash when working from home, when working out of the home has been a marker for female emancipation.



How to organise the new normal in order to save the benefits and reduce the risks?

¿Cómo organizar la nueva normalidad para salvar los beneficios y reducir los riesgos?

- Benefits:
  - Easier international collaboration with better tools
  - Flexibility and opportunities to be more inclusive when less resources or family duties
- Details are very important: timing, working environment, career stage, disciplinary fields, experimental or theoretical activities, research and teaching, etc. have their own challenges.
- Need for better equipped homes if work from home, or specific places

# 3. Replacing persons by robots and platforms: what impact of digitalization on intersecting inequalities ?

Sustitución de personas por robots y plataformas: ¿qué impacto tiene la digitalización en la intersección de desigualdades?



Uncertain economic perspectives  
for women at work



## Perspectivas económicas inciertas para las mujeres trabajadoras

- The pandemic has accelerated the transformation of some sectors that are likely to suffer significant job losses due to digitalisation, particularly in the service sector where women are very numerous.
- Some economists' scenarios predict between 46,000 and 87,000 additional job losses by 2028, the majority of which will be women, without taking into account the impact of the health crisis and the surge in e-commerce.

# Many women sent back home?

## ¿Muchas mujeres devueltas a casa?



- In the case of cashiers and many women in contact with the public, they are also facing the destruction of their jobs due to the acceleration of the digital transition.
- According to the Women's Foundation, the Ile-de-France Employment Observatory indicates a 26.6% drop in "cashier" job offers between January 2020 and January 2021.
- This is also the case for cleaning companies, which are largely impacted by the reduction in economic activity, particularly due to the closure of offices and the massive development of teleworking. In Île-de-France, the number of "cleaning" job offers published between January 2020 and January 2021 fell by almost 10%.

# Impacts on intersecting inequalities

## Impacto en las desigualdades



- Destruction of female cashier and service jobs
- Replaced by precarious male jobs in delivery and security
- Exclusion of underprivileged groups with poor access to digital tools
- Availability of platform services unevenly distributed across the territories: available when profitable (compared to public services available everywhere)
- Also accelerating digitalisation of public services: exclusion of special or complicated cases and groups with poor digital access or digital literacy



# 4. Long term economic impact of the stimulus package in the digital sector

Impacto económico a largo plazo del paquete de estímulo en el sector digital

# Conflicting post covid public policies

## Políticas públicas post covidéo contradictorias



- For gender equality: In May 2021, the Rixain law to accelerate economic and professional equality between women and men was passed in Parliament: introduction of quotas in the management bodies of companies, equality index in higher education, reserved places in crèches for single-parent families, etc. Some lessons from the COVID crisis have been learned.
- But also laws or projects against equality or blind to equality issues:
  - Research programming law that makes early careers more precarious
  - Reform of the senior civil service
  - Pension reform
  - Reform of unemployment insurance

# Gender blind stimulus packages

## Medidas de estímulo sin perspectiva de género



- While women have been numerous in essential jobs such as nurses, cashiers, teachers, service jobs and home care, they are currently the forgotten ones in the recovery plans, which focus on the energy transition and digital sectors where jobs are predominantly male.

# Gender blind investment

## Inversión sin perspectiva de género



- Support plans to compensate for losses incurred during the pandemic.
  - The Women's Foundation has calculated that of the 35 billion allocated to sectoral support plans, only 7 billion euros will be invested in women's employment.
  - Extremely large sums have been allocated to predominantly male industries, which account for a small proportion of salaried employment: car industry, aeronautics, building and public works sector.
- The investment plan is designed to invest in the future and is part of the European Green Deal. Presented in September 2020
  - 100 billion (of which '40 billion from the EU), which has three main strands: ecology, competitiveness and cohesion. Should benefit everyone, in reality it benefits mainly men.
  - The plan is totally blind to gender issues and never mentions gender equality.
  - The plan will clearly benefit more men than women, due to the targeting of sectors where female employment is very low.



# 5. Conclusions and perspectives

5. Conclusiones y perspectivas



# What comes next?

## ¿Qué viene después?



- No return to the previous organisation, new normal still under progress
- Towards a hybrid organisation
- Opportunities: flexibility, easier personal organisation
- But also risks: being trapped, being invisible, not having proper childcare and services, increased unpaid work
- Blurred boundaries between public and private, work and personal space
- Digitalisation impacts teleworkers but also the whole structure of the job market, the investment priorities, and the availability of services

# Serious risks of backlash

## Graves riesgos de reacción



- Huge investment in sectors where women are absent
- No reward for the former female heroes, they are back to invisibility and underpaid jobs
- Digitalisation puts at risk many women's jobs
- If reduction of public services, it will impact women first
- Possible return of patriarchal norms with women at home

# Recommendations

## Recomendaciones



- Support public services
- Invest in health and education to balance the “green” and digital stimulus packages
- Regulate teleworking and digitalization