

The Impact of the Pandemic on Women and How to Build Forward Differently

April 2022



Simonetta Zarrilli

Chief, Trade, Gender and Development Programme



Why and How Women Have Been Disproportionately and Differently Affected by the Pandemic

388 million women and girls will be living in extreme poverty in 2022, of which 63% in SSA and 21% in Central and Southern Asia

6 reasons may explain the gendered impact :

1. TEMPORARY EMPLOYMENT

Women are more likely to lose their jobs than men → Across the world, women represent less than 40% of total employment but make up 57% of those working on a part-time basis.

- Under the economic stress deriving from COVID-19, enterprises are inclined to first lay off workers in low-skilled, casual, seasonal and informal jobs while keeping those in high-skilled or permanent positions



2. INFORMAL EMPLOYMENT

- Over 740 million women worldwide work in the informal sector
- In many developing countries, women are either self-employed or work as contributing family workers
- Informality means that workers are not entitled to social protection → health insurance, paid sick and maternity leave, pensions and unemployment benefits
 - > the income of women working in the informal economy fell by around 60% during the first months of the pandemic



3. Female-dominated sectors

- Female-dominated sectors have been among the hardest hit by social distancing measures and travel restrictions → tourism, hospitality, retail trade
- Globally 58% of women are employed in the services sector versus 44% of men. More than 70% in LAC
- COVID-19 resulted in a decline of trade in service by about 16.5% in 2020



4. FEMALE MSMEs AND ACCESS TO CREDIT

MSMEs

- over 2/3 of employment globally
- 80-90% employment in low-income countries
- 1/3 of formal MSMEs are fully or partially owned by women

COVID

- July-Aug 2020 survey: in the LDCs, w-owned MSMEs: higher rates of lay-offs and less resources to sustain their business than m-owned MSMEs
- May 2020 survey: in Asia and Oceania: 22% of w-owned MSMEs closed, compared to 16% of m-owned businesses
- 80% of w-owned businesses with credit needs are either unserved or underserved → access to credit is of paramount importance for the survival of firms



5. UNPAID CARE WORK

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased women's unpaid care work

Time spent on unpaid care work varies by gender and region, but women perform most of it

Time spent on unpaid work (minutes per day)		
	Men	Women
Northern Africa	50	309
Middle East	64	326
Sub-Saharan Africa	87	249
Latin America	130	371
South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific	79	208
Northern America	168	263
Northern, Southern and Western Europe	138	261
Eastern Europe	147	285

- 33% of women vs 26% of men increased their time spent on unpaid care work
- Some women have been forced to leave the labor market or opt for part-time jobs

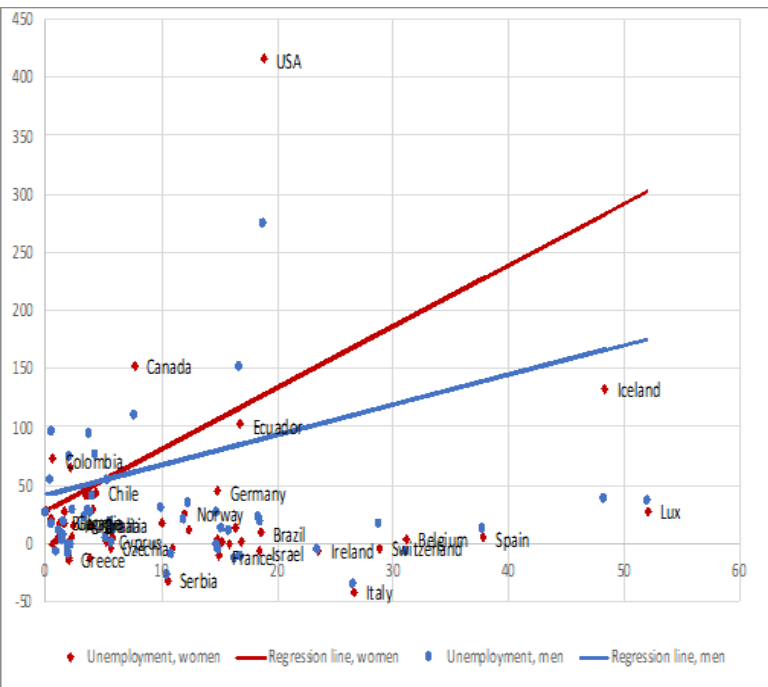


6. GENDER-BASED AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

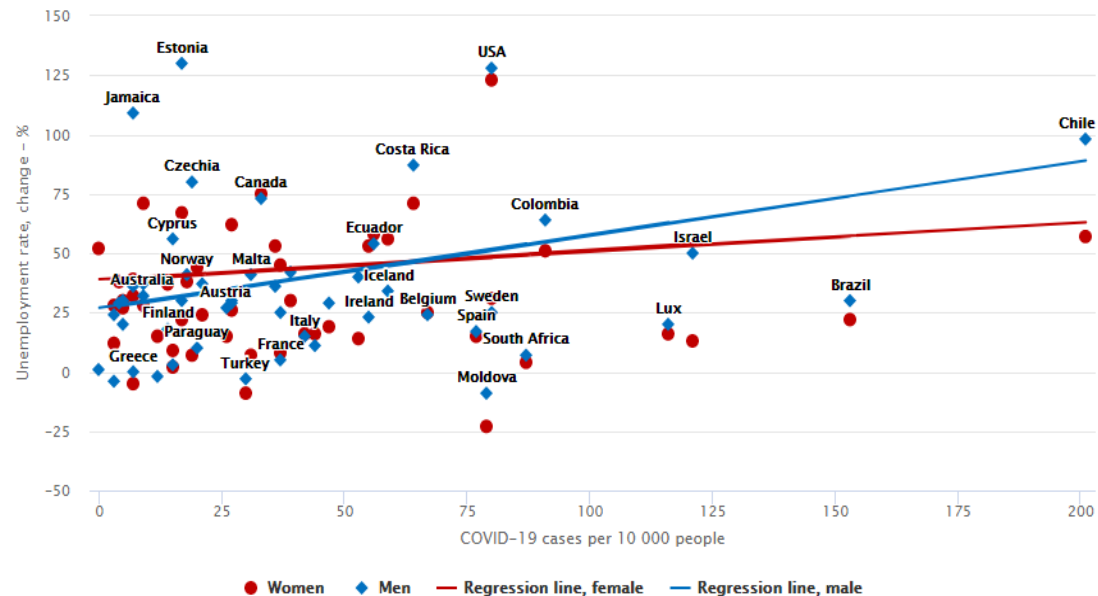
- Lockdown and isolation policies, coupled with the financial stress that families and individuals are experiencing, exacerbate domestic violence
- 30 to 50% surge in domestic violence cases
- GBV has an economic cost; it is estimated that it costs countries between 1,2% and 3,7% of GDP in terms of losses in productivity
- During emergency situations other forms of GBV tend to proliferate



The effects of the pandemic are not gender neutral – regressing unemployment versus Covid-19 prevalence



April 2020

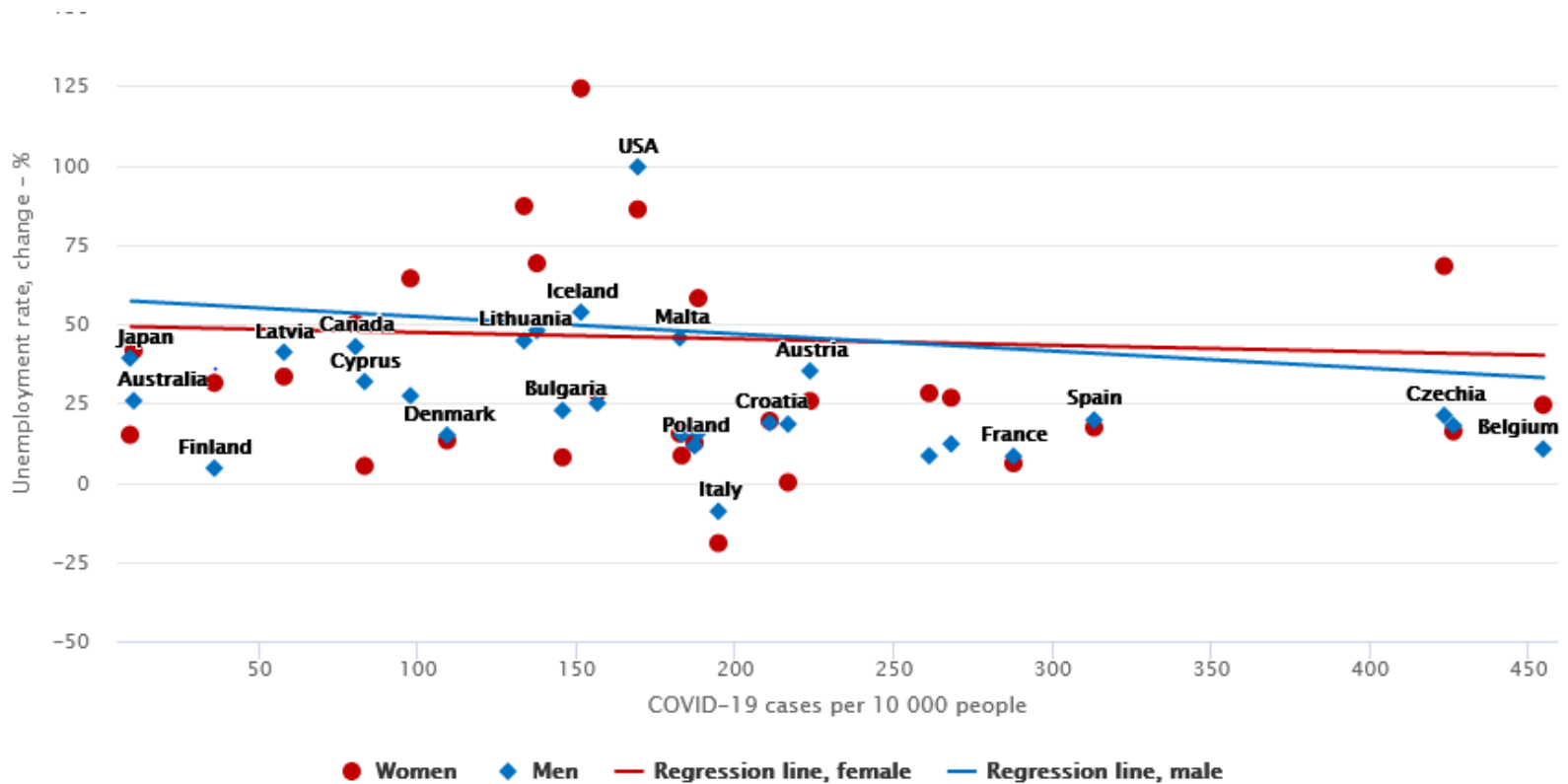


August 2020

Y-axis: y-y unemployment growth
X-axis: Covid-19 prevalence per 100M

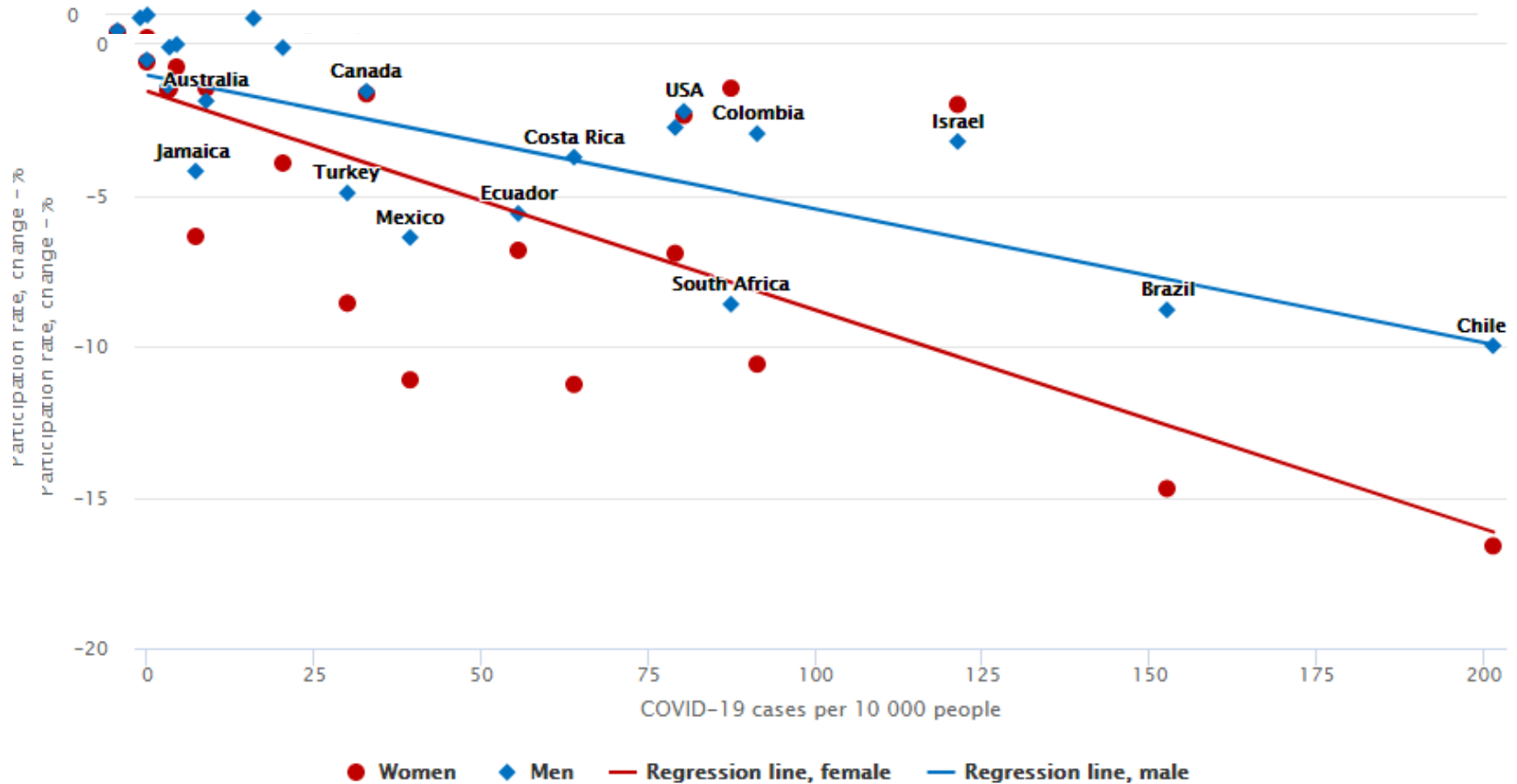


Female and male unemployment versus COVID-19 prevalence



November 2020

Female and male LFP versus COVID-19 prevalence, August 2020





Recovery

The post-pandemic recovery had been divergent even before the war:

rich and some emerging economies returning to pre-pandemic output

poorer countries experiencing bigger growth shortfalls

The impact of the pandemic continues over time

- In developing countries: women's underperformance in the labor market recoveries is expected to lag men's through 2023
- In developed countries: women are projected to outperform men in the recovery

Countries' responses

Most national economic response measures have not targeted women explicitly, however, women may have benefitted from:

- **Cash transfers and emergency food distribution** → poor households and specific categories: day labourers, domestic workers, workers in the informal sector, including street vendors
- **Measures targeting MSMEs** → tax relief, deferred tax returns, interest-free loans and subsidies
- **Measures targeting the tourism sector** → emergency cash transfer to workers, cash for work and cash for reskilling, training, wage subsidies, facilitated credit
- **Measures targeting the textile and garments sector** → interest-free loans and tax holiday to factories, wage subsidies, training

Number of measures by region

Region	All Measures	Gender Sensitive	Unpaid care	Violence against women	Women's economic security
Africa	842	270	14	112	144
Americas	1,265	455	50	227	178
Asia	1,220	360	35	197	128
Europe	1,360	419	113	247	59
Oceania	281	101	14	70	17
Total	4,968	1,605	226	853	526

By July 2021, 55% of gender-sensitive measures remained ongoing

How to build forward differently through trade

- Ex-ante and ex-post gender assessments of trade reforms
- Strengthen data collection
- Formulate gender- responsive trade policies
- Overall policy coherence



Thank you for your attention

<https://UNCTAD.org/gender>

gender@un.org

<https://twitter.com/unctadgender>



UNITED NATIONS
UNCTAD