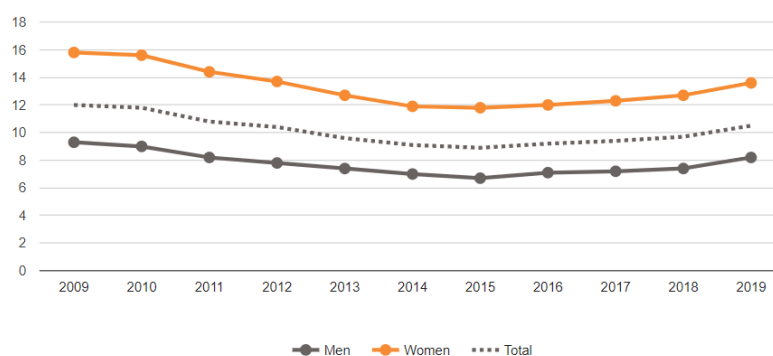# COVID 19 in Colombia

Key points

- The Coronavirus-19 (COVID-19) pandemic has had a major economic impact on women in Colombia, who represent 53.4% of the population employed in vulnerable sectors (excluding construction).

- In 2019, 79.4% of household enterprises operating in vulnerable sectors were owned by women.

- By the end of March 2020, 863,000 women and 721,000 men were no longer employed compared to March 2019.

Impacts on the labour market

In the last 10 years, on average, the unemployment rate among women has been between 5 and 6 percentage points higher than the rate among men (see figure I): the average employment rate has been 46% for women and 69% for men, a difference of 23 percentage points.

These data indicate that the Colombian labour market had unbalanced outcomes for women and men even before the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

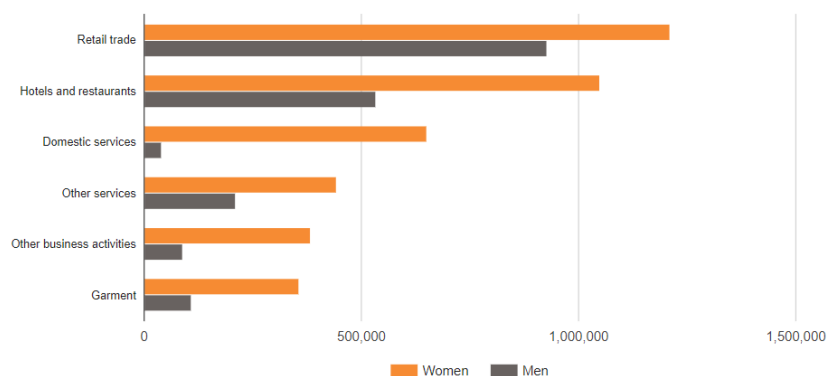**Figure I:** Unemployment rate by sex: 2009-2019 (Percentage)

Source: Government of Colombia, National Department of Statistics (DANE), national integrated household survey (GEIH), 2019 (correspondence with the National Department of Statistics on 31 August 2020).

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In cooperation with Javeriana University, the Colombian National Department of Statistics has identified 31 economic sub-sectors[1] that are considered vulnerable because they produce goods or provide services that are considered non-essential in times of economic crisis or because they cannot operate under the required social distancing mandate (for example, hairdressing shops, hotels and retail stores). In some of these sectors, including the retail trade, hotels and restaurants and paid domestic work, the majority of workers are women (see figure II).

Figure II: Number of women and men working in selected vulnerable economic sectors with high prevalence of female workers: 2019
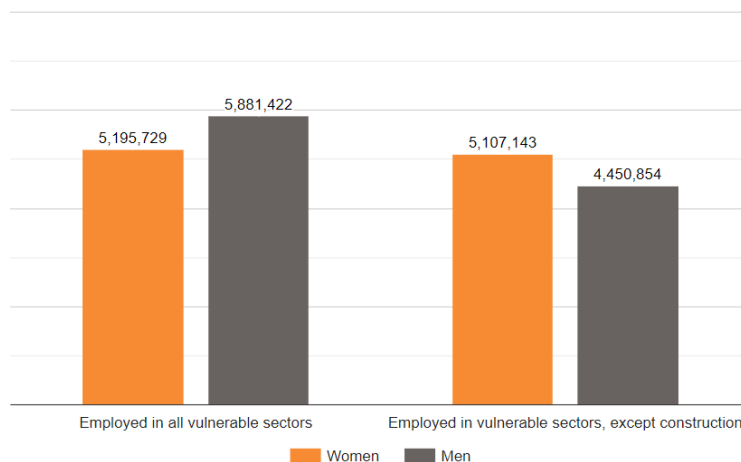

Source: Government of Colombia, National Department of Statistics (DANE), national integrated household survey (GEIH), 2019 (correspondence with the National Department of Statistics on 31 August 2020).

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In 2019, over 5 million women and close to 6 million men were employed in vulnerable sectors, corresponding to 56.3% of all employed women and 45% of all employed men. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe economic impact on women, who make up more than half (53.4%) of those employed in vulnerable sectors (excluding the construction sector, which has seen minimal interruption) (see figure III).

Figure III: Number of women and men employed in vulnerable economic sectors (including and excluding construction): 2019
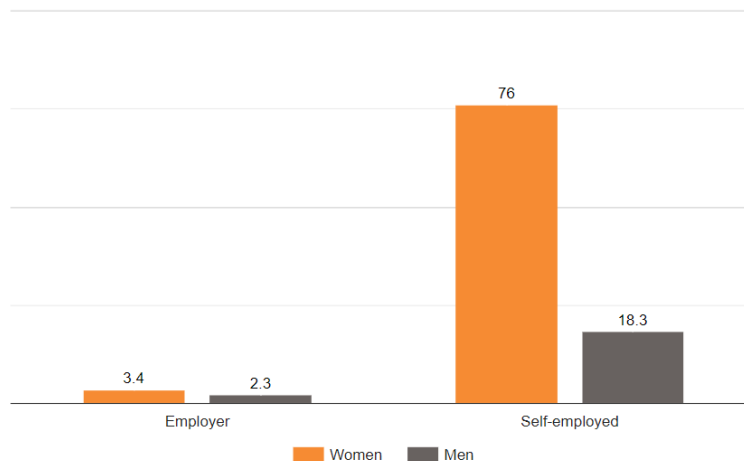

Source: Government of Colombia, National Department of Statistics (DANE), national integrated household survey (GEIH), 2019 (correspondence with the National Department of Statistics on 31 August 2020).

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Hairdressing and other beauty-related businesses are considered to be part of the vulnerable economic sector — they were forced to close first, at the onset of the pandemic, and will reopen last. In 2019, there were 261,678 household enterprises in vulnerable economic sectors, 79.4% of which were owned by women, most of them self-employed (76%) (see figure IV).

Figure IV: Ownership of household enterprises by sex: 2019 (Percentage)

Source: Government of Colombia, National Department of Statistics (DANE), national integrated household survey (GEIH), 2019 (correspondence with the National Department of Statistics on 31 August 2020).

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In the economically vulnerable sector, most household enterprises operate informally: 42% by delivery service, 33,9% from inside a home, 23,6% in premises and 0,3% in an uncovered site. In the same way, 78% do not have a tax registration identification and 88% do not have trade registration identification. For these reasons, many individuals in this sector may not easily be able to benefit from Government assistance provided during the pandemic.

As indicated in the first labour market report issued after the lockdown,[2] by 31 March 2020, 10 days after the lockdown, 863,000 women and 721,000 men were no longer employed (compared to March 2019).

Simultaneously, there was an increase in the economically inactive population of 1 million women and 0.7 million men (compared to March 2019). Most newly inactive women reported household chores as their main activity, compared to 42% of newly inactive men.
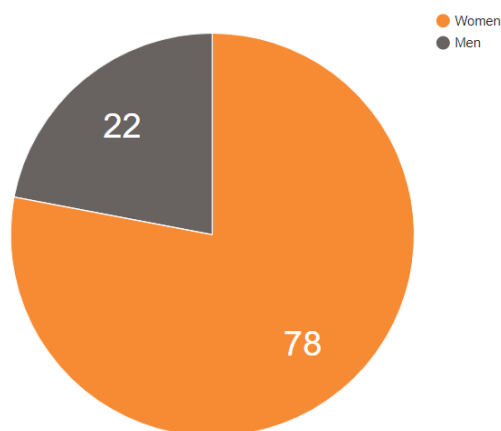
Impacts of increased care burden

In Colombia, approximately 30 million people take care of other people in their homes, by cooking, cleaning, helping them to bathe or dress and providing general care. Inside the household, 78% of unpaid care and domestic work is done by women (see figure V).

The unequal distribution of unpaid care work inside the household decreases the time women have for study, paid work, self-care, rest and leisure.

In addition, women in nuclear households with children spend 10 hours per day on unpaid work, twice as much time as women in households without children. During the pandemic, the work burden of women with children has increased due to the temporary closure of schools and day-care centres, as well as the unavailability of paid domestic workers and paid care services.

Figure V: Distribution of unpaid care work between women and men in hours per year: 2016-2017 (Percentage)

Source: Government of Colombia, National Department of Statistics (DANE), national time-use survey (ENUT 2016 - 2017) (https://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/pobreza-y-condiciones-de-vida/encuesta-nacional-del-uso-del-tiempo-enut).

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About the data

Definitions

- Employment/unemployment rate: **Provides information on the proportion of women and men in the labour force in Colombia (aged 12 and above in urban areas and 10 and above in rural areas) who were employed/unemployed during the reference period.**

- Unpaid work: **Includes activities not included in the System of National Accounts (SNA), including the provision of unpaid domestic and caregiving services for the household and family members, as well as volunteer work for other households, the community or organizations.**

Footnotes

1. Government of Colombia, National Department of Statistics (DANE) database .

2. Government of Colombia, National Department of Statistics (DANE), Labour Market, statistics (January—March 2020) .